

## ***Labrousse, the Annales School, and Histoire sans Frontières\****

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The concept of an economic and social crisis towards the end of the Ancien Régime, has been a long-standing one. Its origins lie with George Lefebvre's *Les Paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution Française* of 1924.<sup>1</sup> Later it acquired a novel statistical authority with the writing of Ernest Labrousse's two books of 1933 and 1944.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the crisis of 1789, seen by Labrousse as the culmination of preceding trends, was presented in and after 1945 in a wider and longer time frame of *histoire globale* and in a statistical sense of *histoire sérielle*: what came in later years to be characterised as the hallmarks of the *Annales* school. The school acquired its great post-war reputation with the magisterial doctoral works of Chaunu, Goubert, Le Roy Ladurie and others who did their research under the direction of Labrousse at the *École des Hautes Études*. These ambitious topics, Chaunu's dealing with the trade of Seville, others with rural regions over a long time period, enabled perspectives in the serial form first launched by

\* This paper is an exploration of the historiographical questions behind issues discussed in a paper, "La crise économique de la fin de l'Ancien Régime" in J.P. Poussou, (ed.), *L'économie française du xviii au xx siècle: perspectives nationales et internationales*, (Paris 2000), pp. 581-601. I am indebted to Prof. Poussou for comments on an earlier draft.

<sup>1</sup>For a hostile account see H. L. Root, "The case against George Lefebvre's peasant revolution", *History Workshop Journal*, no 28 (1989), pp. 88-102, and for a more measured view, P.M. Jones, "George Lefebvre and the peasant revolution fifty years on", *French Historical Studies*, vol 16, no. 3 (Spring, 1990), pp. 645-663. See also Peter McPhee, "The French revolution, peasants, and capitalists", *American Historical Review*, vol. 94, no. 5 (Dec. 1989), pp. 1265-1280.

<sup>2</sup> *Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenus en France au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris, 1933); *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'Ancien Régime et au début de la Révolution*, (Paris, 1944).

Labrousse. Chaunu remarked later that "the entire French historical school is labroussien".<sup>3</sup>

Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, the founders in 1929 of the journal *Annales* were distinctive figures, with interests which, while reacting against political history, were eclectic and innovatory. Labrousse on the other hand was not a historian by training, and came to his post-1945 chair at the *École des Hautes Études* as successor to Bloch, without having grown up in a milieu of historical studies. The major intellectual influences on him had been those of the inter war years.<sup>4</sup> Economically he saw, as many in that period did, under-consumption as a barrier to economic development.<sup>5</sup> His outlook, directed originally towards writing a thesis in the law faculty in Paris, stemmed from several rather well-defined premises: the quantitative theory of money, the study of prices as a measure of long-term trends, and the far-reaching influence of Simiand's interest in cycles. His interest in cycles, however, was not profound; there is, for instance, no mention of the name Kondratieff in his book of 1933.<sup>6</sup> The dominance of the Labroussian concept of trends was to be heightened by Fernand Braudel's post-1945 entry into the *École des Hautes Études* at the encouragement of Febvre, who had been supervisor of his doctoral thesis on the Mediterranean. Braudel, a student of the sixteenth century, both extended the interest to earlier centuries than Labrousse's eighteenth century and had a bolder and simpler view than Labrousse of cycles in history. In his wide-ranging and unorthodox background, he had already in his researches in the 1930s in the archives in Simancas in Spain established close relations ("des relations solides") with Earl J. Hamilton, then studying Spanish price history and the author of famous, if now somewhat forgotten, works on the price revolution in Spain.<sup>7</sup> Braudel's theoretical insights were set out in detail in an article in

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Perrot, "Préface: l'oeuvre au présent" introduction to new edition of *La crise de l'économie française*, (Paris, 1990), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Perrot, *préface*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> L.M. Cullen, "History, economic crises, and revolution: understanding eighteenth-century France", *Economic History Review*, vol. 46, no. 4 (Nov., 1993), pp. 635-6,

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Louis Escudier, "Kondratieff et l'histoire économique française ou la rencontre inachevée": *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations (Annales, ESC)*, vol. 48, no. 2 (March-April 1993), pp. 359-381.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Braudel, "Les origines intellectuelles de Fernand Braudel: un témoignage", *Annales ECS*, vol. 47, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1992), p. 240.

*Annales* in 1958, and at much greater length in a long study written with Spooner in volume four of the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*.<sup>8</sup> Labrousse was the great supervisor of students' research in the 1950s, and from the same period onwards Braudel began to make his sweeping generalisations, repeating them in numerous writings and in many visits and lectures abroad. However, while the economic framework used by both men could be adopted by students and others, notably in studies of individual regions, or of ports, it had limited, if any, relevance for other topics. Hence, the range of studies, in a sense remaining true to the fertile vision of Febvre, was in reality heterogeneous even as, and indeed especially because, the number of students grew.

For this very reason, the *Annales* group is less a school than it has been assumed to be. Its origins were varied: Febvre and Bloch as founder fathers, Labrousse the father figure of *histoire sérielle*, and Braudel a *vulgarisateur* on many themes but adding no new area of personal in-depth research to his great - and regional - doctorate on the sixteenth-century Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> The true or original characteristic of the *Annales* world was not a Labroussian - or Braudelian - analysis, the so-called *histoire sérielle*, of the background trends (which could not embrace all topics) but a concentration on the study of issues affecting groups more than individuals, especially the wide range of topics which, in the 1960s, came to be identified as aspects of the study of *mentalités* (the title of the Journal itself had been expanded in 1946 to add the words *économies, sociétés, civilisations*). A content analysis of the journal defies easy generalisation, though it would also show that, while specifically economic articles contracted, an increasing variety of cultural themes appeared as the years went by. Moreover the *Annales* school, if it is indeed such, appeared a more coherent or single-minded entity abroad

<sup>8</sup> Fernand Braudel, "Histoire et sciences sociales: la longue durée", *Annales ESC*, vol. 13 (1958), pp. 725-731; Braudel and F. Spooner, "Prices in Europe from 1450 to 1750", in E.E. Rich and C.H. Wilson, eds., *Cambridge economic history of Europe*, vol. 4, *The economy of expanding Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 378-486.

<sup>9</sup> Olwyn Hufton noted that Braudel's later work came from secondary sources, and stressing his grandiloquent style, also observed that "he can get lost in his own rhetoric", "Fernand Braudel", *Past and Present*, no. 112 (Aug. 1986), pp.209, 212. On the flabbiness of his writing, see Crouzet's comments (note 10).

than it did in France; the group and broad cultural themes launched were the source of inspiration for the launch of what was to prove the likewise highly successful *Past and Present* in 1958. Supporters of the agenda of Braudel and Labrousse, if numerous in the *Annales* circle, were a minority among historians working in France. Both Labrousse and Braudel had limited, if any, impact in history teaching and research elsewhere in France, and the school was a subject of limited, if muted, criticism a long time before the devastating comments on the eclectic and loose thinking of Braudel's *Civilisation and capitalism*, made in 1990 by François Crouzet.<sup>10</sup>

Because the content of the work favoured by the school was, despite subscription to the language of Labrousse and Braudel, varied, the view expressed a decade ago by two leading members of a later generation of the *Annales* circle that "only in the course of the 1970s did talk begin of a disjointed history (*histoire éclatée*) or in a more openly critical or ironic fashion of a history "in smithereens" (*en miettes*)".<sup>11</sup> overstates the crisis within the school. Once one looked beyond the generalisations of Labrousse or the ambitions of Braudel, its work had arguably always been "en miettes". Moreover, the problem facing history by the 1970s was neither specifically an *Annales* one, nor a French one. Historical study everywhere had narrowed in the sense that politics and individuals had increasingly been left out of much historical study, as Lawrence Stone noted in his famous article in *Past and Present* on narrative history.<sup>12</sup> In England the economic history of the 1950s had much in common with Lewis Namier's contemporaneous approach to English political history (its intellectual origins can be traced to much the same inter-war years). Namier had eschewed political ideas for the study of political men in the context of family and self-interest rather than principles. English economic history similarly, in contrast to an older approach, was dismissive of

<sup>10</sup> F. Crouzet, "When the Mediterranean looked to England", in Crouzet, *Britain ascendant Comparative Studies in Franco-British Economic History*, (Cambridge and Paris 1990), pp. 105-126.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Lepetit et Jacques Revel, "L'expérimentation contre l'arbitraire", *Annales ESC*, vol 47, no 1 (Jan. Feb., 1992), p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> L. Stone, "The revival of narrative : reflections on a new old history", *Past and Present*, no. 85 (Nov. 1979), pp. 3-24.

politics and political thought.<sup>13</sup> By the 1980s it was seen in a reflective book by Donald Coleman as being in grave crisis.<sup>14</sup>

The challenge to overall coherence in history in the 1960s and 1970s sprang from an emerging boom in participation in higher education, and a consequent explosive growth in the number of historians and graduate students. The *Annales* school, Namier's political approach, and the narrow range of interests central to study of economic history in England could not provide a lasting agenda for work, and inevitably would be challenged either in their central premises or by new areas of research not envisaged in the smaller and less imaginative scholarly communities of the past. The real success of the *Annales* school - its effective role as a school - was less the complacent, overconfident and arrogant outlook of Braudel and Labrousse than that, while the school centred its studies on group rather than individual responses in history, it harnessed collaborators not so much to commonly accepted theoretical tenets as to more pragmatic but defined areas of study: it also sought links with historians elsewhere, and in a comparative approach, looked at the same phenomena in other lands (at least in the sense of publishing a wide range of studies for regions outside France). What attracted hostility abroad was not its general work but a handful of economic themes, those expressed by Labrousse and in more extreme form by the great *vulgarisateur* Braudel. In an article in the *Journal of Economic History* as early as 1945 David Landes had expressed his misgivings.<sup>15</sup> The article had stirred up little interest at the time, but was recalled in writing when the *Annales* school came to be a subject of much comment internally and externally around 1990. Alfred Cobban, a formidable English historian of eighteenth-century France had expressed scepticism in the 1960s. By the 1970s, Steven Kaplan, an American historian of the grain trade and Paris food supply, showed his immunity to the allurements of the Labroussian framework. An English historian more recently has harshly said that the framework has collapsed:

<sup>13</sup>L.M. Cullen, "Reminiscences and reflections of fifty years in history," in Pat Hudson (ed.), *Living Economic and Social History*, (Glasgow 2001), pp. 52-53.

<sup>14</sup>D.C. Coleman, *History and the Economic Past* (1987).

<sup>15</sup>Landes, "The statistical study of French crises", *Journal of Economic History*, Nov., 1950, pp. 195-211, quoted in David R. Weir, "La crise économique et les origines de la Révolution française", *Annales ESC*, vol 46, no. 4 (July-Aug. 1991), p. 939.

"little remains of the socio-economic framework in which the work of the students of Ernest Labrousse was pursued in the 1950s and 1960s".<sup>16</sup>

An irony of the story is that, at the very time the intellectual framework for history was made rigid by Braudel, the work of the Centre de Recherches Historiques of the École des Hautes Études, which he directed, became more varied. A new generation gradually moved beyond Labrousse-type work. This is most striking in the case of François Furet (himself, like Braudel before him, to rise finally to the position of president of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme), who had been a student of Labrousse's and later worked in the École des Hautes Études on quantitative-type projects.<sup>17</sup> Furet, of course, increasingly, combatively and controversially was drawn into the intellectual background to the Revolution, which is what he will be remembered for more than for his liberation, as such, from Labroussean and Braudelian premises. A still later generation were to be concerned more explicitly with finding a new flexibility, notably Bernard Lepetit who at the time of his premature and tragic death in 1996 was committed to the defining for the Centre de Recherches Historiques of a less deterministic framework and a fresher range of theme.

A review of French history, raises two questions. The first is the necessary *aggiornamento* of social and economic history, a challenge broached in an issue of *Annales* in 1989,<sup>18</sup> in a later conference, and finally in the collection of its papers which appeared in 1995 edited by Lepetit.<sup>19</sup> The second question is the place of Braudel and Labrousse in the changing emphasis in history. The proposed *aggiornamento* - the first question - was not in fact as large a change as meets the eye at first sight. The exercise has been as interesting for what is left out as for what is left in. It simply

<sup>16</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, "Une autre histoire sociale: note critique", *Annales ESC*, vol. 53, no. 2 (March-April 1998), p. 385.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Scott Christofferson, "François Furet between history and journalism 1958-1965", *French history*, vol. 15, no. 4, (Dec. 2001), pp. 432-437.

<sup>18</sup> "Histoire et sciences sociales: un tournant critique", vol. 44, no. 6 (Nov. Dec. 1989). An editorial on the subject had already appeared in the preceding year: "Histoire et sciences sociales: un tournant critique", vol. 43, no. 2 (March-April 1988), pp. 291-293. André Burguière, "De la compréhension en histoire", *Annales ESC*, vol. 45, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1990), pp. 123-136, is a further article on the theme.

<sup>19</sup> B. Lepetit, *Formes de l'expérience: une autre histoire sociale*

reflects the current and recent interests of members of the school and does not really create a new agenda. The abiding weakness in economics and analysis of the framework of the economy is still evident; a programme for the study of economic issues does not appear. Politics, which is now stressed, is political culture more than politics. It contains no clear discussion of how far the study of politics would proceed and, in effect, it merely proposes the study of *mentalités* in an area which had been almost entirely neglected. In 1997, taking up the refrain, Alain Guery referred to the “the near-absence [of the state] up to those years of crisis, in the review founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre” and the “ignoring of the state by *Annales*”.<sup>20</sup> However, his article, which is little more than a commentary on the state in history, offers little evidence of a way forward. Remarkably, it has no reference to the fiscal demands by the state, and their consequences, whether short-term or long-term. Thus, with some concepts (which had by no means been universally adopted) abandoned and some gaps filled in, study is the same as it was in the 1980s or preceding decades. It is, however, arguably closer to Febvre’s perspective of the years before Labrousse and Braudel became the dominant influence in the rhetoric of the school and in the journal.

That leads us on to the second question: what is the place of Labrousse and Braudel in the wake of the *aggiornamento* of 1989 and 1995. Grenier, writing in 1996, could refer to the “exhaustion of the paradigm associated with serial history [*l’histoire sérielle*], and the growing difficulties of the history of *mentalités*”.<sup>21</sup> However, four years earlier in response to the criticism by a Russian scholar of abandoning their former approach, Lepetit and Revel responded that “it is not a question of a game or of the abandonment of the project for a global history, but rather of a reformation of this project”. They went on to say that “the accumulation of results can no longer remain a simple procedure which is content with the juxtaposition of data and with arithmetical addition or averages”.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Alain Guery, “L’histoire, la crise et l’état”, *Annales ESC*, vol. 52, no. 2 (March-April 1997), pp. 250, 254.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Yves Grenier, “Bernard Lepetit (1948-1996)”, *Annales ESC*, vol. 51, no. 3 (May-June, 1996), p. 520

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Lepetit and Jacques Revel, “L’expérimentation contre l’arbitre”, pp. 264-5.

This does not quite reject the Labroussian concept: it merely implies that there is more to study than the data and figures of *histoire sérielle*. Sharp criticism of Labrousse does not occur within the journal (the article on him in the 1989 issue is merely philosophic in tone). In an article in *Annales* in 1991 David R. Weir, while emphasising that his view differed from this analysis, still, like Labrousse, saw France in economic crisis. The problem simply lay, he argued, in the international context, not in the domestic one. However, there is no evidence of the Anglo-French treaty of 1786 having the widespread economic effects attributed by Weir to it (and incidentally he seemed to overlook the fact that for Labrousse himself, the treaty had been a factor in creating the under-consumption problems of the late 1780s).<sup>23</sup> The only seriously analytical criticism is to be found elsewhere: the introduction to Perrot's new edition of Labrousse's *La Crise*. Moreover, there are few pages in later years in *Annales*, either on Labrousse or on what might replace his economic views. Nor do the issues have much place in the pages of the *Journal of French History* or in *French History*. Weir's article in 1991, however refreshingly, had put an emphasis on financial crisis, and also seems to have been the basis for another American historian, Thomas M. Luckett, looking at the issue in the *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* in 1996 (it may be symptomatic of the lack of insight in economic matters that no such articles came from within the *Annales* group itself).<sup>24</sup> However, useful though Luckett's paper is (and with the merit rare in French study of venturing into business papers to study financial issues), it merely collects details identifying crises in a chronological sense, and seems to lack any sense of a real economic dynamic. What all this means, in effect, is that there is a void in economic history: the abandonment of Labroussian concepts has not been followed by any clear sense of direction as to how the economy progressed, or its constituent parts functioned in economic and financial terms.

Labrousse's writing, especially in *La crise de l'économie française*, is of a growing crisis. His under-consumption theory relied heavily on his

<sup>23</sup> David R. Weir, "La crise économique...", pp. 938, 940, 942, 943.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas M. Luckett, "Crises financières dans la France du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, vol. 43, no. 2 (April-June, 1996), pp. 266-292.

wage data and on the concept of wages, though rising, falling behind prices and rents. His conclusions have seemed to find loose confirmation in the concept of a crisis from the 1760s, based on quite distinct sources, in Luthy's *La banque protestante*.<sup>25</sup> Of course, not all evidence supports Labrousse's argument, François Crouzet for instance in a seminal article many years ago stressed the rapid growth of French foreign trade in the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Jean-Pierre Poussou more recently noted that wages in Bordeaux were much higher than the figures used by Labrousse<sup>27</sup> - a vital observation because of the importance falling real wages assumed in Labrousse's presentation. The *Crise* also rested essentially on rather unsatisfactory evidence, the subjective *états* of the *sousdélégués* in the *intendances*. In addition, recent work on the secular trend in physical stature of French men prior to the outbreak of the Revolution indicates that the nutritional crisis was rather mild by European standards, that is to say, the decline in height in France after mid-century was by no means more significant than in other parts of Europe.<sup>28</sup>

His case was also coloured by his theories about cycles in activity, which consisted of short-term cycles (six complete cycles of an average duration of six years between 1734 and 1789<sup>29</sup>), and the longer-term cycles, the so-called Simiand cycles (an upward or A phase and a downward or B phase). Labrousse was in a quandary because the A and B phases - held to have a combined duration of 50 years by the late nineteenth century, and not statistically distinguishable in the eighteenth century - posed problems for his cyclical approach. The real problem was that 1789 did not fit into the nadir point of a well-defined downward phase. Hence, faced with poor definition of long cycles in the eighteenth

<sup>25</sup> H. Luthy, *La banque protestante en France de l'édit de Nantes jusqu'à la Révolution* (Paris 1959-61).

<sup>26</sup> F. Crouzet, 'Angleterre et France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: essai d'analyse comparée de deux croissances économiques', *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, vol. 21, no 2 (1966). It also appeared in translation in R.M. Hartwell, *The Causes of the Industrial Revolution* (London 1967).

<sup>27</sup> J.P. Poussou, *Bordeaux et le sud-ouest au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1983), pp. 320-334.

<sup>28</sup> John Komlos, in collaboration with Michel Hau and Nicolas Bourguinat, 'An Anthropometric History of Early-Modern France, 1666-1766,' *European Review of Economic History* (2003), 7, pp. 159-189.

<sup>29</sup> Labrousse, *Esquisse*, p. 156.

century (but an unshakeable confidence in their existence), and the widely accepted belief in the 1930s in the post-1789 cyclical pattern, he proposed an intercycle. In the midst of several pages of remarkably loose writing, he pronounced in very imprecise words that

It is a question here of a short movement called intercyclical [*intercyclique*]. Time is necessary for a pattern to define itself in face of prolonged frictions, especially in an economy of the old type,.... But there can be perceived, towards the end of the economy of the old type, a backward movement of unknown dimensions, "an "intercycle" of some fifteen years, standing between the "cycle" and the "long term", a sort of accident resulting from the stabilisation of 1726.<sup>30</sup>

The structural unity of Labrousse's broad argument relies on his case for cycles: its weakness lies also, in part, in the fact that his structure is very much an intellectual construct, created by simple postulates and reinforced by what to the reader is a very striking and almost incantatory repetition through his work of certain key phrases and concepts. At the end of 1989, in the preface to a bicentenary edition of *Crise de l'économie française*, J.C. Perrot made the most pertinent French comment on Labrousse, observing that "The crisis rests on the notion of an "abnormal" intercycle covering the years 1778-1791" and that "eighteenth-century society was unaware of the intercycle, and without doubt the notion itself is obscure".<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the general import of the writing is weak, even before we come to the crucial question of whether it is borne out by the empirical evidence.

<sup>30</sup> "On a affaire ici à un mouvement plus court, dit intercyclique. Il faut du temps à la solidarité pour s'affirmer, surtout dans l'économie de l'ancien type, aux frottements prolongés... Mais voilà maintenant qu'on aperçoit, vers la fin de l'économie de l'ancien type, un recul d'une quinzaine d'années, c'est-à-dire de dimensions inconnues, intermédiaire entre le "cycle" et la "longue durée", "un intercycle", sorte d'accident depuis la stabilisation de 1726". Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 620.. The 1726 stabilisation refers to the currency reform in that year which gave France currency stability up to the time of the Revolution. Labrousse seems to be suggesting that, if there had not been a currency reform in 1726 in a more natural economy, the problem he was struggling with (i.e. the failure of the economy to conform to the cyclical pattern he argued for), would not have presented itself. There is here not simply evidence of Labrousse's lack of grasp of currency matters but an effort, not for the only time, to dismiss inconvenient evidence.

<sup>31</sup> J.C. Perrot, *Préface*, pp. 6,28.

At that stage the Labroussian view of the eighteenth century begins to collapse. Labrousse's later work, *La Crise économique*, was dominated by wine more than any other product, and by the concept of a crisis in wine in both foreign trade and home consumption. The reasons for this emphasis were, in part, the attraction, for a proponent of the under-consumption theory, of static wine prices in the 1780s in contrast to rises in rents and in grain.<sup>32</sup> Seeing wine as characterised by glut, it was almost automatic for him to proceed to assert that surpluses in wine were distilled; perversely Labrousse argued that brandy both eased and aggravated the situation in wine: "as a product which can act as a substitute, alcohol tended at the end of the period to worsen by its exceptional advance the crisis in peasant income".<sup>33</sup> The belief that distillation was essentially a response to wine surplus and that a rise in distillation reflected conditions of surplus and agricultural crisis is one of the underlying themes of the book. If distillation exists, it already proves that there was a tendency to surplus; if brandy prices fall, that proves that the crisis was worsening because wine producers, unable to sell their goods, moved into brandy production. The brandy trade was thus in Labrousse's view one of the great measures of agricultural crisis, and where as, in Bordeaux's immediate hinterland, brandy distillation did not grow, the reason is attributed by Labrousse to a shortage of wood as fuel.<sup>34</sup>

The realities of economic activity were much more complex than Labrousse assumed. First, he assumed that where indices of production were lacking, exports could be used.<sup>35</sup> He tied himself in knots over the rise in exports in 1778-82 which contradicted the evidence of the *états*.<sup>36</sup> He concluded in some rather desperate argumentation that exports in

<sup>32</sup> Labrousse, *Esquisse*, p. 641; Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 624

<sup>33</sup> "Produit substituable, l'acool tend donc, en fin de période, à aggraver par ses progrès exceptionnels la crise des revenus paysans". Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 607.

<sup>34</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 346.

<sup>35</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 257. "Une certaine corrélation unit en effet, autrefois comme aujourd'hui, la production et la vente, qu'il s'agisse de vente à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur... On peut ainsi chercher à apprécier - du moins l'orientation et très approximativement - le mouvement des quantités récoltées d'après le mouvement des quantités exportées."

<sup>36</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, pp. 304-6. The rise in exports on neutral vessels to foreign countries. Coastal shipments, necessarily on French vessels, were on the other hand very seriously dislocated.

war-time were not the same as in peace-time: costs had risen. The perversity already noted of trying to have an argument both ways broke through again. He went on to argue that exports seemed high because in the pre-war peak they were already low.<sup>37</sup> External under-consumption was also summoned up to compound internal under-consumption.<sup>38</sup> For Labrousse, the subtle world of credit mechanisms did not exist. The falling prices from 1779 are, however, easily explained by the rise in interest rates at home and abroad in the course of a major war. The quite devastating commercial failures in Bordeaux in 1780 are also a major factor. Not conveniently for Labrousse's argument, the exchanges, except in the credit crisis of 1778-9, held up well during the war.

Labrousse's exposition depended heavily on the assumption that, after the 1760s, the wine trade was chronically depressed. He ignores both specialisation and changes in quality.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the assumption of depression depends on the export trade statistics. However, not only does Labrousse exaggerate the fall by attaching too much importance to the quite exceptional peak in the remarkable boom of the 1760s but he ignores the fact that the statistics do not take into account the coastal trade in wine (and *a fortiori* the inland trade). Statistics of the coastwise traffic in wine do not exist. However, the tonnage of vessels in the coastal traffic of Bordeaux, which must have consisted in large measure of wine shipments, rose over most of the century, and held its own in the 1780s.<sup>40</sup> It would seem likely, on balance, that both the north of France and the Paris wine trade grew, and that by the 1760s a more integrated market economy had emerged. Moreover within the radius of 300-400 kilometres of Paris

<sup>37</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 306. : "La guerre apparait ainsi, malgré le maintien ou meme le progrès des quantités vendues à l'étranger, comme un facteur de baisse".

<sup>38</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 308.

<sup>39</sup> Districts producing high-quality wines escaped from the problems of other wine producers. This was notably the case of the Médoc (see Charles Higounet, *La seigneurie et le Vignoble de Château Latour: histoire d'un grand cru du Médoc (XIV-XX siècle* (Bordeaux 1974), pp. 223; R. Pijassou, *Un grand vignoble de qualité: le Médoc*, (Paris 1980), vol. 1, pp. 536-43, 602-3, 616-21). The same was true also for Burgundy and for Champagne. While the quantities were relatively small in the aggregate production of wine, they were not altogether insignificant; especially once production is measured in values rather than quantities.

<sup>40</sup> P. Butel, *Les négociants bordelais, l'Europe et les îles au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris 1974), p. 17.

marginal wine production (i.e. wine production beyond the perimeter of the capital which enjoyed a real transport and personal advantage in supplying the *ginguettes* on its fringes so graphically described by Marcel Lachiver),<sup>41</sup> was to some extent replaced by wine from further afield.

In the case of brandy, an important commodity for Labrousse as apparently independent confirmation of the picture he draws, the export statistics are not, in fact, very helpful. They do not support the picture of instability of production, which in Labrousse's view increased whenever a wine surplus existed, or which, when external markets were cut off in war, in turn caused wine prices to fall. The latter phenomenon seems to be supported in his account by an isolated contemporary assertion from Provence by a *sousdélégué* in 1779.<sup>42</sup> Some rise in brandy exports in the 1780s – which Labrousse concedes – is taken as a proof of the crisis in wine, as brandy “serves as both a market for wine and a rival”.<sup>43</sup>

A further weakness of Labrousse's work is that he did not take into account sufficiently increased regional and intra-regional specialisation in the eighteenth century. There was in consequence, even in the south-west, a complex mosaic of districts side-by-side in some of which the vine spread and in others of which it receded in favour of cereal and pastoral farming. Within the Paris hinterland agriculture produced more grain and livestock, while much of the Paris region's own wine production, marginal in its economics once one moved beyond the capital's fringe, must have declined to the benefit of wine producers further afield. Labrousse himself grudgingly recognised the shift from wine to cereals, but, in further pursuit of a perverse line of assertion, built it into his procrustean model in which wine was not only in

<sup>41</sup> Marcel Lachiver, *Vins vignes et vigneronns : histoire du vignoble français*. (Paris 1988), pp. 351-3

<sup>42</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 301. Labrousse made very sweeping claims for the fall in brandy distillation in 1779, suggesting that it was even more severe than the fall in wine sales (*Crise de l'économie*, p.291). It is a complicated matter, and he makes no allowance either for the inland trade or for a switch from coastal to overland trade in crisis years. With high prices in the inland brandy trade, the export trade contracted in 1778 in the manner of 1772 and the inland trade soared through 1778 and 1779. In November 1778 one merchant on the Charente made a comment of “our trade is in a more flourishing state than for some years past”. Hine archives (In the possession of Messrs Hine, Jarnac), Delamain letter book, 1778-81, Delamain to Falk & Lovelace, 7 Nov. 1778.

<sup>43</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 346.

overproduction, but even diversification away from the vine simply transferred the problem of surplus to cereals.<sup>43</sup> Livestock trade is left out of account altogether in his account, for the simple reason that it was left out of account in the *sousdélégués* reports.<sup>45</sup> With its large stake in exports the wine trade through the merchant and proprietor lobbies was a powerful vested interest which made itself heard. By contrast cereals and livestock had no real voice, and in the case of cereals, in particular, the legislative weight favoured the consumer rather than the producer. Nor was the brandy trade - no mean lobby itself in 1782-4 with the Comte de Chabot and the Duc de la Rochefoucauld carrying its voice to Paris - simply one in which wine surpluses were distilled in crisis conditions. Indeed, quite the reverse was the case. The trade had moved progressively to increased specialisation; on balance it was a source of wealth for those who engaged in it, and its lobbying in 1782-4 was both insistent and successful.<sup>46</sup>

Brandy, after the outset of the eighteenth century, was not - if in fact it ever had been - a case of simple distillation of surplus, but an increasingly specialised activity. Thus, parts of the Loire valley remained wedded to the brandy trade, in part because of proximity to Paris, and as late as 1825 produced an excellent brandy.<sup>47</sup> The district of Cognac was, of course, the most striking example of specialisation in brandy production. There was a shortage of skilled distillery workers in Bordeaux, despite its huge hinterland: distillers migrated from Cognac both to

<sup>43</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 623.

<sup>44</sup> Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, p. 68.

<sup>45</sup> L.M. Cullen, *The brandy trade under the Ancien Régime: regional specialisation in the Charente*, (Cambridge 1998), pp. 56-62.

<sup>46</sup> Alain Huetz de Lemps, "Les eaux de vie et liqueurs en France vers 1825 d'après Cavolet", in A. Huetz de Lemps and P. Roudié, *Eaux de vie et spiritueux*, (Paris 1985), pp. 332-3.

<sup>47</sup> Thus in 1778 Richard Hennessy in Bordeaux with orders for spirits "three fifths" in hand wrote to his friend Saule in Cognac: "pray see and find me a proper person for my stills etc" (Hennessy archives, Cognac, Richard Hennessy to John Saule, 5 Dec. 1778). Significantly, he already had a Saintonge man in his employment. The rate of remuneration was 30 sols a day. Saule however offered 35 sols to a man named Pelluchon, though Hennessy did not want to go beyond 30 sols plus 'logging (sic), wines, fire and candle light" (Hennessy archives, Hennessy, 29 Dec. 1778). Distillers also moved abroad to the new brandy producing regions in Spain (Archives départementales de la Charente, Angoulême 5C5, Memoire dated Jarnac 20 June 1782, forwarded under cover of letter of Comte de Jarnac on same day to the Intendant in La Rochelle).

Bordeaux and also overseas.<sup>48</sup> In the more remote and hilly regions of Bordeaux's hinterland, where brandy production had once been evident, it declined in favour of pastoral and tillage farming. Within the one district, Armagnac, where a brandy of repute emerged, the brandy area was a compact one on the poorer ground.<sup>49</sup>

Labrousse reflects the tendency, indeed he is one of the authors of it, to see an essentially static rural society. Any dynamism in society is excluded, and a passive pattern of rural activity underlay an unchanging rural structure in which chronic surplus would eventually promote an even greater crisis. The purchasing power of wages fell, he argued, by a quarter over the century.<sup>50</sup> Impoverishment increased in the 1780s with chronic surplus in wine; incomes moved downwards in a spiral;<sup>51</sup> and with the beauty of a mathematical model, the Revolution took off in a converging pattern of the trough of a long-term fall in real incomes and of the peak of short-term cyclical and seasonal grain prices.<sup>52</sup> In this way, in terms of a rather simple Marxist conception of production patterns and social relationships, a growing crisis came to a head, and in the end determined revolution.

It is, on the whole, wrong to relate the events of the 1780s to some worsening economic situation which sank in an inevitable process to a nadir point in 1788 and 1789. It was simply France's misfortune that its political and fiscal crisis, which, in contrast to the economic situation, was progressive, coincided in 1788 and 1789 with remarkably bad weather and drastic crop failure. Labrousse, in comparing the crises of 1770 and 1789 thought the latter the more serious. It is, however, not clear that it was, though admittedly grain prices were somewhat higher on the latter occasion. Faced with the abruptness of the rise in prices in 1789,<sup>53</sup> which might suggest that it was just an old-fashioned crisis, Labrousse proceeded to do two things. First, he heightened the impact of the crisis by arguing that the commercial treaty

<sup>48</sup> Serge Lérat, "Introduction à la connaissance du vignoble d'Armagnac", in A. Huetz de Lempis and P. Roudié, *Eaux de vie et spiritueux*, (Paris 1985), pp. 122-3.

<sup>49</sup> *Esquisse*, p. 608.

<sup>50</sup> Labrousse, *Esquisse*, pp. 616-618.

<sup>51</sup> Labrousse, *Esquisse*, p. 618.

<sup>52</sup> Labrousse, *Esquisse*, pp. 154, 156.

<sup>53</sup> Labrousse, *Esquisse*, pp. 640, 641.

with England produced the collapse of the French textile industry.<sup>54</sup> Second, his emphasis on the crisis in wine was insistent. This, more implicitly than explicitly, involved a contrast between wine prices in the 1780s and from 1765 to 1771. Depending how one chooses the base year for the decade, prices did not rise at all in the 1780s or rose modestly from trough to peak.

Of course, one can find serious preceding rural crises in 1709, 1740-41, 1748-52 or to a lesser extent in the early 1780s. However, the poverty of rural and provincial-town France may be exaggerated, as I think Olwyn Hufton's excellent work tends to exaggerate it, by not stressing the extent to which the evidence bunches in particular years of crisis rather than occurs evenly through time.<sup>55</sup> The major crises, in response to the vagaries of weather patterns, reflect either simultaneous failure of grain harvest and vintage or successive failure. It has also to be remembered that the cultivation of the vine in most of France was climatically hazardous - its yield varied much more than that of grain, for instance<sup>56</sup> - and that explains why economic crisis in vine regions had a rhythm and character which in no way coincided with that in cereal districts. The most complex occurrence was in the late 1760s and early 1770s. In early 1769 in the aftermath of three bad vintages, the last quite disastrous, it was the southwest that the British ambassador picked on to illustrate the depth of the economic crisis:

The poverty in that part of France among the lower class of people is very great, and must there, and in all other places where the same degree of poverty prevails, prove a check to the commerce of this kingdom.

The effects of this recession in purchasing power were felt far afield according to Harcourt, and the sale of Rouen stuffs had been in decline for 18 months.<sup>57</sup> One result of the crisis in government credit was a rise

<sup>55</sup> O. H. Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974); Hufton, *Bayeux in the late eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1967).

<sup>56</sup> M Lachiver, *Vin, vigne et vigneron en region parisienne du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Pontoise, 1982), p. 133.

<sup>57</sup> Public Record Office(PRO), London, State Papers, France, S.P. 78, vol. 278, Harcourt, Paris, 10 April 1769.

in delay in payment for Irish beef delivered to the French navy to 12 months: it was this circumstance which had prompted Harcourt to comment on social conditions in the south-west. Bad harvests and indifferent vintages occurred in a widespread fashion in 1769 and 1770 across the economy. A bad harvest in 1771 helped to perpetuate poor social conditions, even if the peak of social unrest in northern France passed in 1771. In south-west France the added complication of a disastrous vintage seemed to bring back the calamitous situation of 1769. A letter to the British embassy from Dunkirk in February 1772 noted that "the lower class of people in this country are certainly at this time in a state of misery which was never known before".<sup>58</sup> That this was a comment on the general situation, not merely on French Flanders, is borne out in the comments of the Irish merchant John Saule, two months later in La Rochelle: "were you to see some of the poor peasants here crying out misery, it would make your heart ache".<sup>59</sup> A resident of La Rochelle and Cognac variously from 1768 to 1788 and a voluminous letter writer, his comment is the sole reference to poverty in the huge mass of brandy records for the second half of the century. Even Arthur Young, writing on the eve of and during the crisis of 1789, can be seen as a source for a more nuanced and less pessimistic view of French social conditions: though a connoisseur of Irish social conditions, only once, passing through Peyrac, was he prompted to draw a parallel with Irish poverty.<sup>60</sup>

The contrast in wine (and brandy) prices between the 1760s and the 1780s is significant. Wine prices rose sharply in the 1760s, in part because the 1760s was a decade of remarkable boom in wine (and also in brandy): there was no comparable international boom in wine in the 1780s and foreign demand was less strong than in the 1760s. This is reflected in the foreign exchanges in which the French livre was remarkably resilient in the 1760s, whereas its upturns were fewer and weaker in the 1780s. The rise in wine prices in the 1760s had been compounded on either side of the poor weather at the end of the decade by vintages of catastrophic

<sup>58</sup> S.P. 78, vol. 284, ff. 120-122, Frazer, Dunkirk, 20 Feb. 1772.

<sup>59</sup> Hennessy archives, Cognac, John Saule, La Rochelle, 30 April 1772, to Richard Hennessy.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur Young, *Tours in France and Italy during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789*, (London 1915), p.25.

proportions in 1768 and 1771. Comparatively poor conditions in 1766, and 1767 had already had mixed results for the agricultural economy of the south-west of France. The 1768 vintage was disastrous along the Charente, preceded in August by "the heaviest rain and hail ever remembered here". The Charente rose 7 feet in an hour, entire villages were swept away, both the grapes and the plants were ruined.<sup>61</sup>

Thus the movement of wine and brandy prices in the 1780s was not in itself as indifferent as Labrousse suggested, as the trend in the 1760s reflected successively the greatest boom in the century, and poor vintages of which 1768 and 1771 in particular were something of a freak. Neither comparable foreign demand nor, before 1788, equally freakish weather pertained in the 1780s. Less favourable external demand factors in the 1780s accounts in part for the somewhat less favourable foreign exchanges, though the deficit in the government finances and accumulated public indebtedness played a part as well. However, while it is important to recognise that a crisis of Labroussian proportions did not exist in the 1780s, we must be careful not to go to the other extreme and present a picture of unqualified growth. The international conjuncture, more particularly in transatlantic trade, was less favourable for agricultural products, and this is reflected in a less assured profile of the French foreign exchanges. Wine and brandy were more readily available from other sources in the 1780s, and American surplus was now a larger element in supplying food to the West Indies. The export of foodstuffs from France does not, I believe, quite match the continuing rise in imports of colonial products in the 1780s. However, this problem was not peculiar to France; it was a characteristic of agriculture everywhere, and its consequences can be found in other economies. For instance, Irish exports of beef both to the French and the English West Indies, a key commodity in the Ancien Régime colonial equation of demand and supply, fell heavily in the 1780s and in contrast to a rosier picture in other sectors of the agricultural economy, the Irish livestock industry was slow to shake off depression. There is a complex international situation in the 1780s because the world

<sup>61</sup> Delamain archives, Jarnac. Delamain letter book 1767-8, Delamain to Thomas Murphy, 20 August 1768; to Derham, 23 Aug. 1768.

economy had changed, and it is foolish to attempt, as Labrousse did, to look at local issues in an exclusively national light.

Labrousse's concept of crisis at first sight looks plausible because other historians, from different evidence, and not sharing his intellectual approach, speak of crisis. Thus, Luthy was under the impression that France entered a period of decline in the 1760s,<sup>62</sup> and that conclusion has been re-echoed in many works. This is, in fact, a surprising conclusion because it does not accord with evidence on the ground and still less with the evidence of the colonial trade not only in Bordeaux but in other French ports as well. Indeed, apart from a long but general reference to the importance of the colonial trade at the end of the Ancien Régime, Luthy's awareness of the maritime trade of France was almost non-existent, and at times with his Genevan perspective, he seems to treat France almost as a landlocked country. Indeed, the colonial trade was dismissed as a proof of the weakness of French foreign trade at large<sup>63</sup>. He never displayed awareness of the significance of the fact that Paris itself was an inland city and that the country's foreign trade was based either on ports or on inland centres closer to the land frontier than Paris. Quite the reverse, he explicitly assumed that after mid-century "Paris is the exchange market where all the growing monetary circulation of the ports and of the industrial towns both among themselves and with foreign countries tends to concentrate".<sup>64</sup> A sense of crisis was not uncommon in the 1760s or 1770s in England, Ireland or America. In fact, it was, if anything, more widespread in the 1760s in England than in France. There is more unease implied in the French ambassadors' letters from London than in the British dispatches from Paris.<sup>65</sup> Moreover the credit crises of 1763-4, and 1769-1772 were international ones, the later one greatly influenced by a belief that, despite current difficulties, wealth from the east would ultimately keep financiers and merchants, beset by domestic problems, afloat. The crisis in both East India companies was made more perplexing because their only recourse was to two states already carrying

<sup>62</sup> One chapter in Luthy is even entitled "Vers la crise du siècle de Louis XV", and the term "le déclin du siècle de Louis XV" crops up from time to time.

<sup>63</sup> Luthy, *La banque protestante*, vol. 2, p.596.

<sup>64</sup> Luthy, *La banque protestante*, vol. 2, p.345.

<sup>65</sup> This conclusion is based on an examination of the Correspondence Politique Angleterre, Archives des affaires étrangères, Paris, and of the State Papers, France, PRO, London.

the increased burden of debt created by the Seven Years War. The unease lay less in crisis than in the novelty of some of its aspects. To these poorly comprehended problems, the necessary responses were made more difficult by a combination of lack of clear solutions, and by sharp political conflicts on quite distinct issues. The sense of crisis was more real than the actual crisis. Even in France, technically bankrupt in 1770, the deficit had peaked at the end of the decade. While in 1770 expenditure exceeded income by 70 million francs, in 1774 with reductions the expenditure excess had been reduced to 17 million livres.<sup>66</sup> These figures, retailed by the British ambassador in Paris, reflect the official perception in Paris, and would tend to support the modern argument that the French finances were under some degree of control again in the early 1770s.<sup>67</sup>

In fact, some of the underlying issues in the tussle in Paris may not be aspects of crisis at all but of strength. The banking system had become more coherent in the 1760s: the use of inland bills was widening. Longer bills emerge in inland trade only if discount of them was more readily available. If there were more discount facilities, that meant that there were more bankers or financiers and more of the competition that economic theory holds to be good for us. The struggle over the French East India Company was a struggle between three different financial interests: two banking groups revolving around Laborde and Necker respectively and a third a group of mercantile and banking interests, less axed on Paris than the two metropolitan banking interests. Choiseul, who had ties with the mercantile interest and who also favoured a more brutal bankruptcy of the Company, represented an alliance with a mercantile interest who wanted to turn its resources into a purely commercial discount bank. These financiers and Choiseul were losers in a complex power struggle over four years.<sup>68</sup> This interest lost again in

<sup>66</sup> PRO, London, S.P. 78, vol. 295, f. 230.

<sup>67</sup> E.N. White, "Was there a solution to the Ancien Régime's financial dilemma?", *Journal of Economic History*, vol. xlix, no. 3, Sept. 1989, pp. 545-568.

<sup>68</sup> See L.M. Cullen, "Luthy's *La banque protestante*: a reassessment", *Bulletin du Centre des Espaces Atlantiques*, nouvelle série, no. 5 (1990), pp. 231-263. There are very numerous proof reading errors in this paper, and in a few instances the omission of words makes sentences incomprehensible. See also Cullen, "Irish businessman and French courtier: the career of Thomas Sutton, comte de Clonard, c.1722-1782, in John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (eds.), *The Early-Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge 2000), pp. 86-104.

a renewed power struggle within the *caisse d'escompte* which the reformer Turgot finally established in 1776.

While the credit crisis in 1770 added to the political crisis of the day, it did not reflect a corresponding weakening of the economy itself. The exchanges held up well—except in 1773. The changing pattern in inland remitting to Paris in the 1760s also pointed to a new and fundamental strengthening of the underlying economic structure of the country. Nor is there any evidence of a serious deterioration (making some allowance however, for some shift in the terms of French foreign trade) in the economic position in the 1780s.

Tight credit in the later stages of the war (1780-82) and a recession in the aftermath of a weak and short-lived post-war boom, are the main factors in the low commodity prices at the outset of the decade. The rise in exports of brandy from Cognac in the 1780s does not in any sense reflect a surplus of wine. Even the rapid growth of brandy production in Sète was part of a marked secular trend from mid-century in which the greater part of a rising total wine production was rather consistently channelled into distillation. Indeed the growth of Sète exports, while it may have had repercussions on brandy sellers elsewhere, is not really consistent with the Labroussian thesis at all. The combination of a rising trade in wine to the Toulouse region and of a growing switch in a rising total output from wine to brandy should, in fact, have resulted in an increase in the aggregate purchasing power of what had hitherto been one of the most disadvantaged regions of France. The response was a perfectly rational and advantageous one to the situation of a region whose wine prices were among the lowest in France.<sup>69</sup>

In the war years between 1779 and 1782 the weaker price trends had not been good for brandy distillers in the south-west, and prices sank to the lowest levels for twenty years. Conditions were made somewhat more unhelpful still in 1781 and 1782 by the successive abundant vintages of 1780 and 1781.<sup>70</sup> Prices on the Charente in 1783 (in the wake of the bad

<sup>69</sup> Georges Freche, *Toulouse et la région midi-pyrénées au siècle des lumières (vers 1670-1789)*, (Paris 1970), pp. 726-8.

<sup>70</sup> Archives départementales de La Charente, Angouleme, 5C6, La Rochelle, 5 May 1784, letter to Monsieur de Revversau.

vintage of 1782) rose sharply from the 1780 and 1781 trough, and another poor vintage in 1783 reinforced the trend. There was a pronounced upturn in late 1783 and in 1784 and prices were high. The specialist distillers in the port of Bordeaux itself, benefiting from the regularity of sailings from Ireland, profited in particular in 1782-4 from the poor harvests there, which drove people from whiskey to brandy. Indeed a pinnacle of expectations was probably reached at the outset of 1785, judging by Hennessy's rash investment (with other and much younger merchants) in a dining club in the Lormont hills.<sup>71</sup> Late 1785 and 1786 were bad, in part because of poorer external conditions. The trade then moved to hectic boom in 1787 and while brandy prices eased in the course of 1788, they picked up again late in the year. In fact a poor vintage and a harsh winter created a famine in brandy in 1789 and prices reached extraordinary levels, not much below the level of 1709. All this was not very evident to Labrousse, whose price perspective was overcoloured by the high wine prices of 1767-1772 and the quite exceptional prices of 1777 and 1778 (his own index was higher for 1778 than for 1771).<sup>72</sup> In consequence he saw prices in the 1780s as low. In fact, if we ignore these peak prices, the Labroussian concept of surplus is not reflected, even in his own price index for wine; there were two periods of sharp price rises (1783 and 1784, 1787 and 1788), both following intervening troughs (1781 and 1782, and 1785 and 1786). The troughs, moreover, merit comment. The first one was prolonged because of the war and post-war recession;<sup>73</sup> the second one was short-lived. This pattern is also mirrored in the exchanges on London: a post-war rise failed to maintain its momentum beyond September 1783, a downturn bottomed out in mid-1785 and there was an upward movement in 1787. Evidence of an unprecedented exchange situation began to emerge only in and after June 1789, in other words in the depths of political crisis.

The economic crisis of 1788-9 did not grow out of the conditions of the 1780s at all, and it is no way anticipated in the voluminous surviving

<sup>71</sup> Hennessy archives, Cognac, letters from Richard Hennessy, Bordeaux, to John Saule, Cognac, 1785.

<sup>72</sup> Labrousse, *Esquisse*, p. 275

<sup>73</sup> Labrousse recognised the existence of price recovery in 1783, but deployed every possible argument to minimise its significance. Labrousse, *Crise de l'économie*, pp. 326, 350, 355.

correspondence of merchants for the preceding years. Indeed the crisis brings back thoughts of 1768(-69) and of 1771(-72), which occurred at the end of the *anni mirabiles* of the 1760s. A poor grain harvest and vintage alike in 1788 provided the origins of the economic crisis of 1789. This crisis was sharpened by the singular weather of the winter of 1788 and spring of 1789 which first halted inland traffic on road and river alike, and then kept them impassible as melting snow produced flooding. With a remarkably cold summer in 1789 grain harvests proved poor again. Perhaps, too, not enough thought has been given to the mere singularity of the weather in late 1788 and early 1789 which in a succession of snow, ice-blocked rivers and catastrophic thaw created havoc for months and which, from the daily evidence of their letters, created in mens' minds an overwhelming sense of foreboding, which acquired a momentum of its own as an apparent physical parallel to the all too palpable political crisis.

Should wine surplus have been a feature, it should, on Labroussian principles, have flown into the brandy trade. However brandy production expanded only within the specialist regions, and in response to market demand. The only support for the Labroussian thesis is brandy distilling in Bordeaux itself. However, that trade is ruled out by Labrousse, and its production, in any event, rested on an increasingly heterogeneous supply drawn in from all parts and from abroad, and largely on rectification for the trade by Irish distillers in the port: half the final contents consisted of redistillate, compared with one fifth in the Cognac region. Over the century the conversion of wine into brandy in the Bordeaux hinterland had actually receded.

The character of the eighteenth-century brandy trade, therefore, reflected robust development both within the economy and within brandy itself as marginal producers and regions declined relative to more specialised producers and districts. Hence, the trade admitted of increased sophistication, either by way of a better-quality product or by innovation in organisation through making a low-grade brandy by more industrial methods. In districts close to the Loire, in Armagnac, and above all in Cognac, the former response was the one adopted. In Languedoc, less conveniently placed for markets in the north of France, the response took the form of producing an inferior brandy, heavily rectified by

specialist distillers in central points rather than throughout the region. Hence, the distilling centres like Béziers in Languedoc (like the distilling activity of the port of Bordeaux itself) represented, not a peasant response to surplus but a mercantile and specialised recognition of distant opportunity. Indeed, they created the local brandy trade, or in the case of Bordeaux, prevented the local trade from entirely disappearing.

The story of brandy is one of steady growth in an inland trade to the north of France, and especially to Paris, and of an increasingly fluctuating external commerce. The existence of the Paris trade was already evident in the letter books of the 1720s. It was by then a substantial market, supplied at that time in the main by distillation in the hinterland of the Loire. The growth in the Paris market, first signalled with certainty in the fall in brandy exports from Nantes, was soon reflected in depressed export levels from the *généralité* of La Rochelle : exports fell sharply in 1736 and 1737, 1739-1741, 1748 and 1750-52. Along the Charente prices in 1739-42 had doubled compared with the low levels of preceding years. They trebled between 1748 and 1752. Yet exports from the Charente region (i.e. from the *généralité* of La Rochelle) were chronically depressed in the years 1746-1754 with nadir points in 1748 and 1750-52. It is not surprising that the letters exchanged between Philippe Augier, the head of the longest-established Cognac house in the export trade, and Crommelin de Villette in Paris between 1747 and 1751 reveal discontent and thoughts of leaving Cognac.<sup>74</sup> By 1753-4 the business of Martell, long the major export house, was at a low level. In this context the run of high exports from 1756 to 1765 emerges less as a resumption of the high exports of the pre-1739 period than as a period of abnormal conditions abroad, in which both war and novel demands for spirits provided an exceptional and temporary boost to foreign demand. The house of Martell, its fortunes greatly impaired in the early 1750s, recovered ground, but found itself in competition in the 1760s with a little knot of new export houses which sprouted in La Rochelle, Tonnay-Charente and Cognac to take advantage of the opportunities.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Augier archives, Cognac. (now under the care of Messrs Martell, Cognac).

<sup>75</sup> The pattern in the 1760s is analysed in L.M. Cullen, "Le réseau commercial du négoce du cognac dans les années 1760" in François Crouzet, (ed.), *Le négoce international xiii-xx siècle*, (Paris 1989), pp. 153-168.

As the inland trade grew over the second quarter of the century it spread south beyond Aigre to Angoulême and Jarnac. In the process it was also transferred from the hands of the small jobbers of Aigre fulfilling commissions from Chatellereault and Orleans into the hands of reputable merchants commissioned directly by Paris houses. In Angoulême it is easy to identify the presence of a substantial business group, absent in preceding decades, from the 1760s onwards, and to trace the emergence of Angoulême as a business centre for the region. The bill sales of the Cognac exporting houses had shifted decidedly from a La Rochelle to an Angoulême axis in the second half of the century. The merchants in Cognac itself (as opposed to lesser centres on its fringe) did not sell brandy to Angoulême houses to any extent, but their sale of bills on Paris to Angoulême reflected the prominence of a new Angoulême remitting liaison with Paris as La Rochelle waned.

A further sign of the increasing sophistication of the inland market is a change in the nature of the product carried overland. Increasingly, it was spirit, i.e. rectified or fortified brandy. The first evidence that this was happening occurred when the tax administration in Cognac in 1742 visited the premises of some or all of the merchants in the region, and spirit was seized and confiscated.<sup>76</sup> This was done on the authority of an obscure edict of 1687 which had provided in a narrow context for progressive taxation on brandy of varying strengths. On instructions from Paris the point was not insisted on.<sup>77</sup> As a result, brandy from within the region continued to pay single (in French *simple*) duties: spirit or rectified brandy was given a *congé gratuit*, either for removal within the region or for dispatch to Paris. As the overland trade grew, dispatch overland to Paris in the form of spirit rather than brandy greatly increased. As a result of this, and apparently through the lobbying of the town of La Rochelle, which found its coastal trade losing favour to the overland

<sup>76</sup> Archives départementales de la Charente, 5C5, mémoire and covering letter of Comte de Jarnac, 20 June 1782 ; also copy of letter of Comte de Jarnac to Régisseur des aides of same date.

<sup>77</sup> See Archives départementales de la Charente, Angoulême, 5C5, letters from collector, Martin, Cognac, 25 Nov. 1742 and from Farmers General, Paris 10 Dec., quoted in "Mémoire ou observations pour prouver qu'un règlement de force sur les eaux de vie... serait destructif de tout commerce...".

route, an edict of 1771 applied the terms of the 1687 edict to brandy coming overland to Paris.

Taxation on brandy arriving in Paris was now heavier, but it did not, of course, directly affect production within Cognac. Spirit moved within the region at the old rates, and even exports paid the *traité de charente* and other duties on shipment either overseas or to the *provinces dites étrangères* as single spirits and not as spirit. Hence it remained, in effect, undertaxed. It is not surprising that, when pressure to increase taxation in wartime mounted, brandy found itself the object of litigation by the farmers of the Aides in 1781, with the result that under an edict of 29 May 1782 a three-tier taxation of brandy was unambiguously applied to all brandy in the provinces subject to Aides. This led to considerable representations to the court from Cognac. The representations proved successful on their main point. Exports both of brandy and spirit from Charente would not be subject to double or treble rates of duty. However, spirits destined for the regions of France in which aides were levied would be subject to duty on movement within or out of the province. The massive lobbying both of the *contrôleur général* and of the *intendant* in La Rochelle, which paid dividends in 1782, was extended in 1784 to seek a reduction in the existing export duties (*the traité de Charente*). The sharp recession in exports in 1782 and 1783 and the evidence of brandy exports from other regions of Europe combined to give weight to the new representations. As a result the region not only profited from a concession on double and triple taxation of exports but the *traité de Charente* was reduced to one third of its former level in 1784 as a support to the region's exports. While this benefited the external trade, it did not relieve the inland trade. The growing inland trade was burdened with rising taxes in Paris from 1771 and, more generally, from 1781 as inland taxation of brandy became more realistic. As Parisians were paying more for their wine from 1784 as their *guingettes* came under fiscal assault, as Lachiver has shown,<sup>78</sup> so also had the indispensable daily brandy tipple of so many Parisians risen sharply in price. It is not surprising that Parisians were very cross in 1788, and only the obsession with the bread supply

<sup>78</sup> M. Lachiver, *Vins vignes et vignerons : histoire du vignoble français*, pp. 353-5.

has prevented historians from appreciating how complex were the Parisian's economic grievances by 1789. Nor is it surprising that some brandy merchants were in almost as revolutionary a fervour as the Paris consumer. James Delamain in Jarnac with a large Paris trade spoke of the tyranny of the *régie des aides* in the spring of 1789, and was even driven to writing to Necker: he offered a sharp contrast with those complacent merchants a few miles away in Cognac whose reliance was wholly on the export trade.

The strength of the Paris market had been dramatically reflected in the decline in brandy exports to overseas destinations in the late 1760s and 1770s. Not only did the years 1768-1772 witness a repeat of what had happened in 1748-1752, but La Rochelle's recorded exports sank to their nadir point for the century in 1772. It was less the scale of the failure than the upsurge in Paris demand which accounted for this, and it was not failure of the vintage on its own but reduced supply combined with the strength of the Paris market, prepared to pay high prices, which accounted for brandy soaring to 255 livres per *barrique* by the spring of 1772: the highest level in the Ancien Régime. In La Rochelle the Chambre de Commerce in 1784 attributed the decline in exports overseas both to competition from Sète and from Spain and to various local disadvantages<sup>79</sup> but, if the claim of falling shipments was well-founded (and it was, in fact, a temporary phenomenon), it was more a consequence of war between 1778 and 1782 which drove trade from the dangerous coastal route to the overland route. This is, in fact, confirmed from the performance of coastal shipments in the 1780s, which in the early 1780s already exceeded the level suggested by the Chamber for earlier years, and soared to enormous levels in 1785 and 1786. These were years of hectic business in the coastal trade: houses with coastal commissions were buying further inland than usual. Delamain, far inland in Jarnac, in 1787 made one of his rare references to the traffic when he referred to "many who have commissions for the coast of France"<sup>80</sup> Even with a

<sup>79</sup> Archives départementales de La Charente, Angoulême, 5C6, Représentations de la Chambre de Commerce de La Rochelle, 13 February 1784.

<sup>80</sup> Hine archives, Jarnac: Delamain no. 1 letter book, 1787-9, to Thos. Cullen & Co., Ostend, 8 December 1787.

phenomenal expansion in exports of brandy to Britain from the port of Charente in 1787, no less than 29,583 *barrisques* of brandy, largely destined for the northern coasts of France, paid the *octrois* in La Rochelle in 1787.

Significantly from the early 1780s merchants had fallen into a new practice of carrying significant stocks in anticipation of demand. This reflected a novel degree of competition, and the evidence of exports from the Charente itself, combined with the *octrois* for the coastal centre of La Rochelle itself, show that in the 1780s French domestic traffic did not yield to the foreign trade in the reciprocating fashion of the past. A sustained level of demand from all three sources, overseas trade, coastal and inland routes, was inevitably reflected in the prices. Not only did they recover from the low levels of 1779-1781, but they rose sharply in 1782 and 1783, and held up firmly over the 1780s. Only in late 1785 and early 1786 did prices again fall as low as the admittedly low prices of 1781 and early 1782. They rose sharply again in 1787. They eased somewhat in 1788 but recovered with brisk buying, first reported in late August and early September, for Paris.<sup>81</sup> The much more disastrous vintage of 1789 after a winter which decimated vines in France illustrated the importance of the Paris market, and it was Paris custom which carried prices to their dizzy level of 1790.

The changes in the trade, especially through the rise of domestic demand in the north of France, were reflected in a new relationship in prices between Cognac, and the ports of La Rochelle and Bordeaux. Inferior though brandy around La Rochelle itself was, the price there in the 1720s was 3 to 11 *livres* higher than in Cognac. It was that differential that provided the impetus for Cognac merchants to take the conduct of the foreign trade into their own hands with Tonnay-Charente emerging as the outlet for the export trade. Bordeaux prices were higher than La Rochelle prices and higher again than Charente /Cognac prices. However, by the mid-1760s the gap between Cognac and Bordeaux prices had all but disappeared. The relationship was also soon to be reversed in a startling manner. It was less the bad vintages in themselves than the poor

<sup>81</sup> Hine archives, Delamain no. 1 letter book 1787-9, Delamain to Brown & Webster, Knaresborough 25 August 1788 ; and to Jos. Merat, Orleans 13 Sept. 1788.

vintages combined with soaring Paris demand for brandy which sent prices sky-high. In December 1768 prices peaked at 200 to 203 in Cognac for the Cognac barrel compared with 155 and 160 livres in Bordeaux. Of course, the reversal was at its most dramatic in 1768-9 because of the cloud burst which had destroyed so much of the vintage on the Charente. More significantly, however, throughout the 1770s the reversal of fortune persisted. Expressed in Bordeaux equivalents, Cognac prices were equal to, or above, Bordeaux prices, and at times significantly above them.

Thus, a complete revolution had taken place in prices. The sharp reversal in 1768-1772 was attributed by contemporaries to climatic factors, but this was not the real reason. The reversal persisted in most years though it was only in isolated years that it could approach the level of the years 1768-1772. Even in the least favourable periods for Cognac in relative prices (for instance early 1784), the differential in favour of Bordeaux was small compared with the past. There was also a clear local and transient explanation for it. The bad grain harvests in Ireland in 1782 and 1783, with their adverse consequences for whiskey distilling, had sent Irish demand for brandy soaring. Many of the transient customers came from the smuggling interest: with no regular ties with Cognac they chose to go to Bordeaux, and the specialist distilling interest in Bordeaux, largely Irish itself, was the beneficiary of this temporary custom.

The fact that the established relationship between Cognac and Bordeaux prices had been reversed reflected much improved domestic transport conditions. Overland trade had become more regular, more reliable (in terms of a decline in malpractices) and more competitive. Transport capacity had also grown. In contrast to transport costs almost doubling in three months, when an alarming shortage in brandy was anticipated in the autumn of 1725,<sup>82</sup> they rose only by 25 per cent in the period of hectic Paris buying in 1788, and only by 50 per cent in the following spring, despite the concentrated demand when the snows melted. Coastal shipping also had increased in amount. Despite a better-regulated overland trade, coastal shipments were large in the 1780s and

<sup>82</sup> Augier archives, Cognac. Letter book 1724-6, Augier to Guérinct, Charente 8 September 1725.

could rise quite sharply in individual years. These developments tend to be overlooked. The letter books of the exporters show how the inland market frequently affected their foreign operations adversely, and reveal an alternating cycle of optimism and pessimism. The export interest, moreover, was a powerful lobby, long-established, compact, concentrated on a mere half dozen houses, and with direct access to the noblemen of the region and the urban interests. As a lobby they were also more visible and much louder, and historians, like contemporaries, are more likely to hear and see them. The deep gloom in La Rochelle at the end of the 1760s, with its Canadian trade behind it, the port's own overseas trade in brandy already almost gone, and its coastal trade temporarily annihilated by a switch to spirit sent overland and an invasion of the coastal region by inland buyers in the wake of universal shortage, tends to overstate the internal crisis. In fact the rise in taxation of spirit arriving overland in Paris in 1771 seems to have been achieved through lobbying by the La Rochelle interest.

The port had already long lost the business in bills of exchange originating in the active brandy trade of the interior which it had formerly held. The changing circumstances of the region reflect a wider opportunity of marketing bills to advantage. A number had always been negotiated in Paris. However, corresponding to La Rochelle's gradual decline, a rising proportion was negotiated in Bordeaux. Bordeaux was particularly prominent from the 1750s to the 1770s. In the case of the largest Cognac house, Martell, the arrangement was for all practical purposes institutionalised with a member of the family settling there. This corresponded to the pace of growth of Bordeaux as the focal centre of French foreign trade at that time. A significant feature of the business in the 1770s to 1780s was that local bills on Paris, financed out of the disposal there of paper on London, no longer relied heavily on erratic local custom, but had a regular outlet in Angoulême. What this signified was that there was a larger, steadier and more diversified demand for paper on Paris. Indeed, it reached its Ancien Régime perfection in the 1780s. It also laid the basis of a structure which held up well even during the difficult years of the Revolution and Directory. The brandy houses' bills on London were the prime paper of the English trade, and in Paris were much in

demand. One of the fundamental weaknesses of Luthy's book is that he did not study the inland exchanges, which merit virtually a sole passing reference to their importance.<sup>83</sup> One of the consequences of not doing so was that the implications of two major exchange centres in France and the growth of the Bordeaux exchange go unappreciated. He did not see how the whole system worked, how the two courses of exchange (or three if Lyons is included) operated on a day-to-day basis and how the centralisation on Paris lay not in the mass of paper but simply in the highly variable arbitraging element in a vast turnover of payments.<sup>84</sup> The actual movements through Paris could be quite small. This was already reflected in the sale of a growing amount of Cognac paper on northern Europe in Bordeaux in the 1750s and 1760s. Moreover, much of the huge surplus through Bordeaux financed France's trade without touching Paris at all, often through transactions in Madrid, Amsterdam or London.

Paris itself was a surprisingly small capital for a country of 27 million people. The actual inland trade to Paris except within a circumference of 400 kilometres was comparatively small (and within this circumference foreign trade transactions were, after the early eighteenth century, handled through Paris). There are really two elements in the inland exchanges: one a supply of credit in Paris originating in domestic trade, the other originating in the negotiation in Paris of foreign bills drawn by exporters in the provinces. The fact that a large market zone, crudely measured by the region operating under its foreign exchange umbrella, grew around Paris suggests that inland trade within this region intensified over the century. Not only was Paris a source of demand for grain, but its intake of pastoral products was large and varied. In such conditions it seems likely that production within the region must have been rearranged over the century: more grain and pastoral products were produced within the region, and wine and brandy were supplemented with or replaced by wine and brandy from farther afield. Nor was this realignment uncommon

<sup>83</sup> Luthy, *La banque protestante*, vol. 2, pp. 32-3.

<sup>84</sup> For a general description of the inland exchanges, see L.M. Cullen, "The Huguenots from the perspective of the merchant networks of western Europe (1680-1790): the example of the brandy trade", in *Dublin colloquium on the Huguenot refuge in Ireland 1685-1985*, ed. C.E. Caldicot, H. Gough and J.P. Pittion (Dublin, 1986), pp. 146-7; Cullen, *The brandy trade...*, pp. 49-53.

in France at large (paralleling a similar pattern of emerging specialisation in brandy). Something similar happened in the Toulouse region: the vine receded in a large hinterland, and wine was drawn in from the hitherto largely underdeveloped region of the Bas-Languedoc.<sup>85</sup> Districts on the fringe of Paris, Argenteuil more than any other, produced a growing quantity in the course of the century, but beyond that fringe of the capital, production declined.<sup>86</sup> As the Paris region's consumption grew more rapidly than that of other regions,<sup>87</sup> some of the production in its outer hinterland appears to have been replaced by increased quantities from further afield. While the districts around Lyons sent wine to that city, the Beaujolais, closer to the Loire, was already oriented towards Paris<sup>88</sup> and as J.P. Poussou has noted, competition from such wine had become a reality in the Paris region.<sup>89</sup> In the brandy trade the main thrust to expansion seems progressively to have shifted from the export market in the smaller aggregate production of the early decades to the inland market in the larger aggregate volume of business in the closing decades of the century.

The provinces beyond the radius of 300-400 kilometres of Paris did not generate enough bills on the capital out of domestic trade to meet both the needs of tax officials and local importers and the arbitrating requirements of the system. Hence the prime paper on foreign centres in seasonally and annually varying amounts was resold in Paris. The inland exchange on bills moved in tandem with the foreign rates. When Paris ran into deficit on its foreign accounts, the Paris exchange became more unfavourable than the Bordeaux one: that made the sale or resale in Paris of bills drawn from the south-west on foreign centres more attractive than their disposal in Bordeaux. The consequence then was that the larger sales of such bills in Paris financed an increased drawing

<sup>85</sup> Georges Freche, *Toulouse et la région midi-Pyrénées au siècle des lumières (vers 1670-1789)*, pp. 724-8.

<sup>86</sup> M. Lachiver, *Vin, vigne et vigneron en région parisienne du XVIIIe au XIXe siècle* (pp. 38-9, 143, 181, 188, 203, 206, 208).

<sup>87</sup> M. Lachiver, *Vins vignes et vigneron: histoire du vignoble français*, p. 337.

<sup>88</sup> Georges Durand, *Vin, vigne et vigneron en Lyonnais et Beaujolais (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, (Paris 1979), pp. 128-9.

<sup>89</sup> J.P. Poussou, "Le dynamisme de l'économie française sous Louis XVI", in *Revue économique*, vol 40, no 6, p. 970.

of inland bills on Paris, and the discount on the sale of such paper grew. This would cancel out much of the profit to be gained in bill sales in Paris, and the system was arbitrated by some increase in bill sales in Paris and some increase in the availability of inland bills. The increased disposal in Paris of foreign bills and in Bordeaux of inland bills was thus translated into an easing in the Paris rate of exchange relative to the Bordeaux rate, and into some rise in the loss on inland paper.

In the first half of the century, the inland exchange did not work smoothly. From the 1760s the system worked efficiently, and its smooth operation was enhanced by the 1780s. If a larger volume of bills of exchange could be negotiated with ease and with a loss of no more than 1/2 per cent per usance, it meant that there was a firmer demand than in the past for paper on Paris. Given the fact that the Paris exchange on foreign centres weakened somewhat in the 1780s and that Paris demand for foreign paper on that account did not taper off, the maintenance of a stable inland bill market on Paris seems to suggest a surprisingly strong provincial economic situation at least in the south west. Of course, as the effects of the harvests of 1788 and 1789 were quickly seen in falling demand, it was easy for Labrousse, attached to an under-consumption theory, to argue that the crisis of these years simply compounded existing difficulties. The success of the commercial treaty of 1786 in providing a market for imports could be seized on as a factor supporting the idea of the fragility of the French economy, though it might be objected in response that rising imports implied both a demand for goods and a capacity to pay for them. Indeed, as J.P. Poussou has recently pointed out, French trade including both its colonial trade and the English trade peaked in the early years of the Revolution.<sup>90</sup>

One consequence of the changing inland situation was the growth of new "banking" houses in Paris responding to the needs of particular regions and trades. They do not appear in Luthy. But, of course, a large number of houses is essential for the growth of cheap banking services, and, as in London, a larger number of houses created a strong and diversified market. The rivalry between different houses in Paris, while

<sup>90</sup> J.P. Poussou, "Le dynamisme de l'économie...", pp. 972-3, 978-9.

confused because of the conflicts of interest that both the plight of the state and of the East Company occasioned, implied a wider range of competing interests, and that made for a much more elastic system. The circumstances of one provincial merchant expanding his business speculatively and imprudently in the 1780s are instructive. He operated through four houses in Paris. This was the consequence of the ease of transferring a large number of bills on London to Paris, and of a much stronger market in the provinces for paper on Paris than in earlier decades. The conflicts of interest in Paris, either in the late 1760s or yet again in 1776, in the diversion of the new Caisse d'Escompte under Necker's influence as, in effect, *contrôleur général* from a rediscount role to a state role were not, of themselves, uncommon: there was a not altogether dissimilar conflict in the 1760s in Scotland, and over a longer period in Ireland.<sup>21</sup>

An irony of the situation was that the remitting system was improving in the very periods - the 1760s and 1780s - in which the public finances worsened but, of course, this reflected reality. France, even rural France, was becoming a richer country not, as Luthy might appear to suggest a poorer country in the 1760s or as Labrousse suggested for the 1780s. The operation of the remitting system in the 1780s is consistent with some rise in the intake into provincial districts of goods purchased in other provinces: the corresponding rise in the demand for inland paper compensated for relatively static tax revenues in steadying the course of inland exchange and in keeping the actual discount in the provinces on inland paper on Paris modest and predictable. The contrast between the disorder in the public finances and the smoothly working inland remitting of money in the 1760s and even more so in the 1780s comes ultimately as no surprise. The essential irony of *ancien régime* France as of Tokugawa Japan was, through an imperfect taxing system, a poor government in a rich country. There was no ongoing economic crisis through the 1780s, and while there was a food crisis in 1789 and 1790 the demographic profile remained the normal one of an excess of births

<sup>21</sup> L.M. Cullen, "The Scottish exchange on London, 1673-1778", in S.J. Connolly, R.A. Houston, and R.J. Morris (eds.), *Conflict, Identity and Economic Development in Ireland and Scotland, 1600-1939*, (Preston 1995), pp. 29-44.

over deaths: as Professor Poussou has noted, the natural increase of the population in the 1780s peaked in the three years 1787, 1788 and 1789.<sup>92</sup> In the last analysis in 1789 we are far-removed both from the crisis postulated by Labrousse, and from the old-style demographic crises of the *ancien régime*.

In a sense the macroeconomic weaknesses in Labrousse still feature in post-Labroussian study in the *Annales* approach. Braudel, intellectually the weaker of the two men who provided the economic perspectives of the post-1945 work of the *Annales* school, even more than Labrousse, has slipped into the background in France though perhaps not in the United States.<sup>93</sup> Macro-economic history itself has not progressed: there remains a void on the pedestals on which Braudel and Labrousse once stood. And while two American historians in the last decade have written very useful papers touching on French financial crises, economic analysis itself does not appear on the agenda of the school. It is remarkable that, in the writing on either side of 1990, there has been almost no mention of Luthy, whose work had been more universally accepted than either Labrousse or Braudel's economic ideas had been, and had never attracted the misgivings, muted in France, vocal elsewhere, that Labrousse and Braudel had.<sup>94</sup> French historical scholarship is a rich mosaic: the review sections of French journals provide a striking testimony to the range, diversity and ingenuity of current writing. Within this writing, there is a huge amount of excellent work on ports, trade, public finances, the East India Company and other topics. Historiographically, however, in a form of scholarly division of labour, it has stood in isolation from work on regions and the rural world, which has been almost a monopoly of the *Annales* milieu and which has also been the basis for most generalisations (apart from Luthy's) on economic society at large. It has, for this reason, seemed

<sup>92</sup> J.P. Poussou, "Le dynamisme de l'économie...", pp. 967-8. On the food crisis, see also the comments in M. Marion, *Histoire financière de la France depuis 1715*, vol. 1, 1715-89, pp. 429-430, 429n.

<sup>93</sup> For a recent very sympathetic account of Braudel, see W.H. McNeill, 'Fernand Braudel', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 73 (March, 2001), pp. 133-146.

<sup>94</sup> See Cullen, "Luthy's La banque protestante...", pp. 229-263.

less than the sum of its often very formidable parts, because it has ventured little into questions of credit, inland remitting, money flows, and only into some of the issues revolving around the monetary relationships between state and private economy. These questions are, in one sense, but a minor or specialised part of French history. In another sense, they have a vital integrative role. As a result of the inadequacy or abandonment of the facile generalisations by Labrousse and Luthy, an economic framework linking together rural regions and market centres, detailed study of the functioning of credit agents, and the complex and shifting relationship between three poles of financial activity, Paris, Bordeaux and Lyons, has still to be worked out.

Luthy's ideas which saw the funds of Paris bankers as dominant in the provinces ( a judgement which has not been borne out by work on individual ports) need a hard look. The division between financiers and bankers, a facile argument by Luthy on virtually no evidence, was crippling, and put the finances of the state in a ghetto outside a dynamic economy ( the role of which both affected and was affected by the public finances). The activity of the banker and financier Laborde, if nothing else, contradicted that generalisation (though Laborde scarcely merits mention in Luthy). Laborde was also a member of one of the significant mercantile interests from Bayonne, La Rochelle, and Saint Malo which were active in the economics and politics of the 1760s.<sup>95</sup> That raises, too, the question of the place of Choiseul in both economic events and in wider changes of the 1760s, a topic which is not so much a lacuna in the *Annales* approach as in French historiography at large.

The studies of the grain trade and Paris food supply by the American historian, Steven Kaplan, are an example, all too rare, of an analysis of economic events closely linked to local and national politics. The emphasis on political culture in the new agenda of *Annales* may hold out little promise beyond *mentalité*-type study in the field of politics. A limited agenda in political studies and the absence of exploration of the macroeconomic aspects of history, are interrelated. In Guery's article the state is an abstraction, and there

<sup>95</sup> See Cullen, "Irish businessman...", pp. 92., 98.

seems little or no awareness of how, and the manifold ways in which, the state interacted with society at large. It also ignores the existence of a large and growing literature on the fiscal history of the French state, though that literature, too, is severely confined to fiscal and budgetary matters pursued within a too well-defined historiographical framework.<sup>66</sup> The state itself was at all times only one of several sources of demand on resources; its evolution was in many ways dynamic, and its fiscal appetite furthered the progress of the monetary or banking infrastructure of society. As revenues had to be transferred to Paris, the needs of provincial revenue collectors for credit instruments to remit funds enhanced the inland remitting of money and enabled local businessmen to sell their bills on Paris at favourable or stable rates. In other words their requirements benefited the economy at large as well as the businessmen who transacted business on an interregional basis. In turn, in Paris, a host of financial intermediaries overlapped in an interdependent fashion (as the life cycle of individual bills of exchange shows when their history is pursued through the records of provincial firms, and Paris firms and banks) and the money market fluctuated in a sensitive response to several factors, of which the state's financial needs were but one: like the inland exchange, which was intimately connected to its operation, the Paris money market, too, functioned more efficiently as time went by. A tightening of credit in 1787 was sharply worsened late in the year by an unexpected political factor, fear of war with England over the Dutch crisis. Other events added, though with a real lag in time, to crisis. The foreign exchanges themselves were more or less stable in 1788, and the inland bill market - despite tightened credit - also functioned efficiently. Singular weather, poor harvests in 1788 and 1789, high-profile public failure to gain consensus on fiscal reform, and a deeply felt popular resentment of all fiscal charges, were themselves events of the time, not happenings whose occurrence has

<sup>66</sup> For a very useful survey of recent literature, see R. Bonney, "What's new about the new French fiscal history", *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 70 (1998), pp. 639-667. See also F. Crouzet, *La grande inflation: la monnaie en France de Louis XVI à Napoleon*, (Paris 1993).

a predetermined past history. As was almost invariably the case, the simultaneous or near -simultaneous occurrence of several factors was necessary to turn serious difficulties into real crisis: even then the unprecedented weather conditions of December 1788 and January 1789 themselves served to add to the brooding sense of general crisis. If one follows the drift of research - the argument by a number of modern scholars that the effects of harvest failure in 1769 were more serious economically than in the late 1780s, and the separate argument by others that finances had been brought under a degree of control in the early 1770s - it seems clearer that, by comparison crisis, in the late 1780s was not an economic one in the Labrousian style, nor of itself a wider economic one brought on by deepening monetary problems, but one created by political paralysis or stalemate. In that sense it was, at heart, a political crisis and a political crisis made a political revolution, limited or more sweeping, inevitable.

For long years simplistic emphasis on regions by the *Annales* writers left a large number of historians deaf to wider economic perspectives (quite apart from universal acceptance of Luthy's naive perception of a financial *tabula rasa* in the provinces, except for investments by Paris capitalists). As late as 1974, Goubert wrote in sweeping terms which make it much easier to understand why French historiography achieved so little on the macroeconomic front :

The time of bold principles, arguments and hypotheses was exciting and rewarding, and talents of very different stamp performed with ease. It is time now to get down to serious things, that is, the multidisciplinary analysis (free of a *priori* conviction) of the sole reality, whether in France, Europe or perhaps even the world: the region. Afterwards one can philosophise.<sup>97</sup>

Even a book as good as Tarrade's excellent study of colonial trade, saw things in terms of a dual economy in which the two dimensions

<sup>97</sup> Goubert, "Sociétés rurales françaises du xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle: paysanneries contrastées, quelques problèmes" in *Conjonctures économiques, structures sociales: hommage à E. Labrousse*, (Paris 1974), p. 385.

progressed “ in parallel but independently of each other”.<sup>98</sup> If some aspects are not to be studied within a reformed agenda of *Annales* work – which is perfectly legitimate – at the least their importance and their pursuit by others needs recognition right across the board. All economic, social and cultural history is necessarily isolated from other areas of history, and is itself usually pursued in individual channels, as a means of simplifying research. But, for that very reason, the wider context needs constantly to be borne in mind, and if the work is not done by the École des Hautes Études – as, given its scale, it cannot be – the findings of work conducted elsewhere or by others cannot be ignored. The *Annales* concept of interdisciplinary (or “pluridisciplinary”) work is, in fact, far removed from a *histoire sans frontières*.

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<sup>98</sup> J. Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial de la France à la fin de l’Ancien Régime*, vol. 2, (Paris 1972), p. 778.

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