

The Rural Economy of Eighteenth Century France: Some Current Approaches

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The Rural Economy of Eighteenth Century France: Some Current Approaches and Problems

Three very different books* all in their way contribute a great deal towards a new understanding of the rural economy of eighteenth century France. Michel Morineau's is a rare attempt to see the eighteenth century in a wide national and chronological perspective and therefore represents a significant departure from the regional monograph which is the usual format for rural studies. The study of the tithes inspired by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Joseph Goy concerns an apparently narrow subject but in fact renews our perspective on the place of the eighteenth century in French economic history. Finally, Olwen Hufton's study of the poor in eighteenth century France penetrates behind the statistics of the first two studies and does much to create a sense of the living reality for millions of ordinary Frenchmen on the eve of the Revolution. Taken together, these studies show that it is no longer possible to claim confidently that the eighteenth century witnessed something unique in French history or that by 1789, a sort of economic breakthrough had been made. The eighteenth century is much more akin to its predecessors with their grim cycles of food shortages, epidemics and disorders than to the post-revolutionary nineteenth century.

Until M. Morineau's work began to appear, most historians felt that by 1750 at the latest, some sort of threshold had been crossed in terms of economic and demographic development.¹ Demographic historians were

1 The seminal article which has dominated the field is J. Meuvret, "Les crises des subsistances et la démographie de la France d'Ancien Régime", *Population*, I(1946), pp. 643-50 and reprinted in his *Etudes d'histoire économique*, Cahiers des Annales No. 32, (Paris, 1971), pp. 271-78. General statements about economic and demographic growth can be found in, *inter alia*, P. Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis* (Paris, 1960), pp. 59-65; P. Goubert, "Historical Demography and the Reinterpretation of Early Modern French History: A Research Review," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, i (1970), pp. 37-48; R. Mandrou, *La France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1967), pp. 124-30.

* Michel Morineau, *Les Faux-Semblants d'un démarrage économique: agriculture et démographie en France au XVIIIe siècle*, Cahiers des Annales No. 30 (Paris, 1971).

Joseph Goy and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (eds.): *Les Fluctuations du produit de la dime. Conjoncture décimale et dominiale de la fin du Moyen Age au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris — La Haye, 1972).

Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974).

able to show that Frenchmen no longer succumbed to catastrophic demographic crises which followed upon harvest failures, with their dizzying mortality rates as adults and children stared, as women suffered from temporary sterility due to undernourishment² and as marriages dropped because couples could no longer afford to set up a household. After the terrible winter of 1709 death rates first of children then of adults began to fall and for the first time in generations, births consistently began to outnumber deaths.³ While the country still remained open to temporary food shortages and local harvest failures, few people starved and certainly not in the numbers they had under Louis XIV. The food riot, so characteristic of popular disorders in the eighteenth century, was possible in a country where everyone knew food was in fact available and where people were used to a regular and improved diet. It was not possible in the seventeenth when everyone knew the grain was not to be had. During the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI, Frenchmen had, in Labrousse's famous phrase, conquered life.

The reasons for this demographic upswing have always been somewhat mysterious and no one has been willing to single out one major factor. The incalculable effects of the more bureaucratic organisation of armies and war and the disappearance of plague after 1720 probably had some minor effect. It is doubtful whether much can be assigned to medical improvements since the few major technical innovations such as smallpox vaccine were not widely diffused and new ways of deploying medical personnel were, on the whole, imaginative but ineffective.⁴ We can probably dismiss any theories relating to better child care, since, despite Rousseauian propaganda, wet-nursing, organised on an out-work basis, remained so popular and so murderous that it amounted to a kind of legalized infanticide.⁵ Almost by a process of elimination, we are left with explanations based upon the food supply and these too

2 And not as was once thought, to temporary birth control. Cf. E. LeRoy Ladurie, "L'Aménorrhée de famine (XVIIe - XXe . . . siècles), *Annales E. S. C.*, xxiv (1969), pp. 1589-1601.

3 J. Dupacquier, "Sur la population française au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle", *Revue historique* ccxxxix (1968), pp. 43-79.

4 K. F. Helleiner, "The Population of Europe from the Black Death to the Eve of the Vital Revolution" in E. E. Rich and C. H. Wilson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (Cambridge, 1967), iv, pp. 59-61, 71-86. J.-P. Goubert, *Maladies et médecins Bretagne, 1770-90* (Paris, 1974), pp. 127-81. Fr. Lebrun, *Les hommes et la mort en Anjou aux 17e et 18e siècles* (Paris, 1971), pp. 199-260.

5 M. Garden, *Lyon et les lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1970), pp. 116-40. P. Galliano, "La mortalité infantile (indigènes et nourrissons) dans la banlieue Sud de Paris à la fin du XVIIIe siècle (1774-1794)", *Annales de démographie historique*, (1966), pp. 139-77. Alain Bideau, "L'Envoi des jeunes enfants en nourrice. L'exemple d'une petite ville: Thoisse-en-Dombes, 1740-1840", in J. Dupacquier (ed.), *Hommage à Marcel Reinhard. Sur la population française au XVIIIe et au XIXe siècles* (Paris, 1973), pp. 49-58.

are largely conjectural. Improvements in the grain marketing mechanism and in the climate have been suggested but we know little about the former and we must be prudent about the latter. Land transport costs made a national market impossible and climate did not drastically change in the eighteenth century.⁶

However reasonable explanations for an improved food supply based upon the grain trade and climate may be, the most likely explanation appears to lie in the area of rising yield ratios in grain. Several years ago, B. H. Slicher Van Bath tried to show that French seed yield ratios advanced in the early modern period to an impressive 6.0-8.9:1, wheat making the transition before 1500, oats, before 1650, rye after 1700 and barley after 1800. After 1500, the average ratio for all grains was 6.3:1.⁷ Yet there are problems with Slicher Van Bath's argument. His sample is remarkably small, there was no marked transition coinciding with demographic growth in the eighteenth and the more detailed findings of regional studies are ambiguous. While yield ratios may have improved in Languedoc there was no change in Burgundy, Brittany, and the Auvergne.⁸ Yet, the population in these latter two "backward" regions also grew.

Until Morineau's systematic study of yield ratios then, the evidence has been far from satisfactory.⁹ And, in a sense, Morineau has simply compounded the problem of the relationship between food supply and demographic growth. He argues in brief, that there were no dramatic changes in cereal productivity during the eighteenth century. His method is ingeniously simple. By taking the harvests yields for the year 1840, an average year for cereals in the nineteenth century, and comparing them with published and unpublished material available for the eighteenth century and earlier, he concludes that yields were remarkably stable over a long period of time. Indeed, in the region around

6 On markets: L. Tilly, "The Grain Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, ii (1971), p. 38. C.-E. Labrousse, *Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenus en France au XVIIIe siècle* 2 vols., (Paris, 1933), i, pp. 122-32. On climate: F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme* (Paris, 1967), pp. 32-34. P. Goubert, "Révolution démographique au XVIIIe siècle?", in C.-E. Labrousse and F. Braudel (eds.), *Histoire économique et sociale de la France* 4 vols., (Paris, 1970-), ii, pp. 63-64. But cf. also E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Histoire du climat depuis l'an mil* (Paris, 1967).

7 "The Yields of Different Crops (Mainly cereals) in Relation to the Seed c. 810-1820," *Acta Historiae Neerlandica*, ii (1967), pp. 26-106.

8 E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* 2 vols., (Paris, 1966), I, pp. 168-70, 221-25. P. de Saint-Jacob, *Les Paysans de la Bourgogne du Nord au siècle dernier de L'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1960), pp. 151-54, 403-04. J. Meyer, *La noblesse bretonne au XVIIIe siècle* 2 vols., (Paris, 1966), I, p. 502. A. Poitrineau, *La vie rurale en Basse-Auvergne au XVIIIe siècle, 1726-1789* 2 vols., (Aurillac, 1965), i, p. 313, 304, 275-77.

9 Morineau, *Les Faux-Semblants*, pp. 7-87. A shortened version was first published as "Y a-t-il eu une révolution agricole en France au XVIIIe siècle?", *Revue historique*, cclxxxvi (1968), pp. 299-326.

Cambrai, yields did not substantially change between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Morineau's sources do not permit him such a long comparison for any other region, but where the evidence is available, the picture is one of long-term continuity. There was, therefore, no agricultural revolution in the eighteenth century which would explain the demographic revolution.

It is possible to make a case that Morineau's criteria are too narrow and that productivity in certain areas did increase even if cereal yields remained stationary. In general terms, this was achieved through the diversification and specialization of regional economies. The slow retreat of viticulture from northern regions and its concentration in particular regions south of the Loire is one example of agriculture moving in a more commercial, more economically rational direction.¹⁰ So too is the gradual conversion of the plains of Normandy to dairy and meat production in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — a conversion which could only be possible because other near-by regions produced a marketable surplus in cereals.¹¹ Even the coastal regions of reputedly backward Brittany managed to convert from rye and buckwheat cultivation to more profitable wheat in the same period.¹² Not all conversions of course were so directly related to the market economy. In some regions, the cultivation of textile crops such as flax and hemp were as much connected to the demands of royal fiscality as they were to commercial pressures.¹³ Yet M. Morineau perhaps denigrates too much such conversions as the transition to buckwheat in central Brittany in the sixteenth century, and to potatoes in Lorraine and maize in the Midi in the eighteenth. They may have been introduced to retrieve a deteriorating economic situation but they were productivity changes nonetheless since they all increased the amount of food available to a local population working with the same amount of land and technology.

There are also a few exceptions to the rule that seed yield ratios moved within fixed limits. The slow adoption of "Flemish" methods in the French Low Countries, which involved a suppression of extensive cattle raising, the

10 L. Dermigny, "De la Révolution à la Révolution" in Ph. Wolff (ed.), *Histoire du Languedoc* (Toulouse, 1967), pp. 397-401.

11 J.-P. Bardet, "Laborieux par nécessité. L'économie normande du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle", in M. De Bouard (ed.), *Histoire de la Normandie* (Toulouse, 1970), pp. 301-02.

12 Meyer, *La noblesse bretonne*, i, p. 451.

13 Fr. Dornic, *L'Industrie textile dans le Maine et ses débouchés internationaux, 1650-1815* (Le Mans, 1955), pp. 34-36.

abandonment of fallow fields and the planting of leguminous crops, evidently led to both a rise in yields and in overall production. Similar developments have been recorded in parts of Normandy and the Ile-de-France.¹⁴

Yet Morineau is still essentially correct in his argument. Even if we do not know the exact proportions of changing land use and thus the extent of the cultivation of new crops, Ancien Régime agriculture was still heavily, even overly dependent, on cereals. Furthermore, the areas where a full conversion to modern crop rotations took place were still in a painfully small minority on the eve of the Revolution. Yield ratios may be an excessively narrow criterion, but they go to the heart of the problem. Very little that was unprecedented took place in eighteenth century agriculture.

The problem of explaining demographic growth still remains and we logically have to explain it disarmed in the face of evidence which concludes that no explanation is sufficient. Morineau has tried to solve this problem with characteristic flair by denying that any significant demographic changes took place.¹⁵ Traditionally, historians have accepted that the French population grew by about 30 percent between 1700 and 1789, not very much by modern European standards but certainly an improvement on the nearly stationary position of the seventeenth century. Morineau's quarrel with this notion is that while contemporary figures for the end of the century are accurate, the intendants' reports which form the basis of the estimates of *circa* 1700 grossly underestimate the number of Louis XIV's subjects. How much is hard to say but a separate study by Morineau of the généralité of Moulins tends to confirm this argument as do a number of recent studies.¹⁶ Furthermore, since the population growth which did take place was achieved before 1750 and since there were no productivity changes during the century, the country had reached by 1789 a kind of malthusian balance between numbers and the productive capacity of the agricultural system. Industry had never been able to absorb all available labour and with textiles, the dominant

14 G. Lefebvre, *Les paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française* (Bari, 1959), pp. 214-15. L. Trenard, "La crise révolutionnaire dans les Pays-bas français. Etat des recherches", *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, No. 216 (1974), p. 301. Bardet, "L'économie normande", p. 302. J. Jacquart and M. François, "Au temps des lumières (v. 1690- v. 1770)" in M. Mollat (ed.), *Histoire de l'Ile-de-France et de Paris* (Toulouse, 1971), p. 325.

15 "La disjuncture du XVIIIe siècle français: économie et démographie" in *Les Faux-Semblants*, pp. 288-337.

16 "Note sur le peuplement de la généralité de Moulins" in *Hommage à M. Reinhard*, pp. 475-503. P. Chaunu, "Réflexions sur la démographie normande", in *ibid.*, pp. 97-117. G. Frêche, "La population de la région toulousaine sous l'Ancien Régime", in *ibid.*, pp. 251-70. J. Dupacquier, "Croissance démographique régionale dans le bassin parisien au XVIIIe siècle" in *ibid.*, pp. 231-50. Lebrun, *Les hommes et la mort*, pp. 150-56. Y. Blayo and L. Henry, "Données démographiques sur la Bretagne et l'Anjou, 1740 à 1829", *Annales de démographie historique*, (1967), pp. 91-171.

rural industry, in a profound crisis after 1770, the country was becoming relatively overpopulated. Put another way, the century witnessed a gradual pauperisation of the common people.

C'est donc bien à une pauperisation généralisée de la France, accélérée par l'accroissement de la population, que l'on assistait dans ce pays qui avait connu une première moitié de siècle économiquement satisfaisante, . . . la seconde tourant à la catastrophe au sortir de la bénéficiante stabilité démographique . . . La France était prise dans un engrenage conduisant à son appauvrissement . . . ¹⁷

Historiographically, we have returned to a sophisticated version of Michelet, a vision of the Ancien Régime rural economy in which a slow population growth was purchased at the expense of a progressive deterioration in the living standards of ordinary Frenchmen.

The declining standard of living argument is extremely difficult to prove as Morineau found when he turned his attention to a detailed study of popular budgets during the eighteenth century.¹⁸ His evidence forces one to conclude that while a slight deterioration may have taken place, it is just as likely that incomes and expenditures remained stable, as did the high proportion of income devoted to bread, from the 1690's to the 1830's. This is where the study of the tithe returns can be most helpful in measuring production changes.¹⁹ For productivity is not production and the latter could increase by new assarts while the former could remain stationary or even, if the newly cultivated soil was less fertile, appear to fall. This is why one must be very skeptical of M. Morineau's assertions that Languedoc and Lorraine were in economic decline because yields were falling. Despite problems inherent in using the tithe records for this purpose, problems relating to the stability of the percentage tithed, the consistency of the surface tithed over time and the nature of the products tithed, most authors participating in the collection feel they have surmounted these problems. We can therefore use these figures to evaluate the pauperisation thesis. Le Roy Ladurie and Goy in their summary of results estimate that between the end of the seventeenth century and the end of the eighteenth, overall production, as opposed to productivity rose by between 25 and 40 percent.²⁰ Since population growth in the same period probably did not exceed 20 percent,²¹ *per capita* incomes must have risen.

17 *Les Faux-Semblants*, p. 331.

18 "Budgets populaires en France au XVIIIe siècle", *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, (1972), pp. 203-37, 449-81.

19 Goy and Le Roy Ladurie, *Les fluctuations . . . de la dime*.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

21 L. Henry, "The Population of France in the Eighteenth Century" in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversly (eds.), *Population in History* (London, 1969), p. 441. A figure to be preferred to the usual one of 30-32 percent, (Dupacquier, "Sur la population française", p. 56) on account of the works cited in n. 16.

But figures at the national level do not mean much in this sort of inquiry. By comparing regional production growth with some of the best available studies of regional population growth, it is evident that some regions fared better than others.

	Population Growth	Production Growth
	_____ %	_____ %
Paris Region	32	>30, <50
Cambrésis	50	66.6
Alsace	150	19
Toulousain	31	20
Provence	18	15
Bas-Languedoc/Provence	18/50	30
Auvergne	27	19

In general, the northern plains appear to have witnessed a slight increase in *per capita* income while the greater part of the south saw a diminution of incomes as population exceeded resources. Yet the geographical distribution of apparent pauperisation should give us pause. During the period, the south saw an extension of the amount of land devoted to viticulture and maize. Since we do not know the extent of the spread of either, we do not know whether *per capita* incomes decreased. In addition, decrees in the mid-1760s exempted all newly cleared areas from the tithe and taxes for twenty years and while this incentive does not appear to have been as successful in the south as in the north,²² the tithe records inevitably would not reflect any changes in production due to the clearings. After the 1760s, production must have been higher than the tithe records indicate. On the whole then, Morineau's pauperisation thesis is premature and we must reserve judgement on it until more studies are available to complete our dossier.

This is an unexpected conclusion particularly in the light of Olwen Hufton's moving and horrifying study of the poor in eighteenth century France. Her entire book is testimony to the argument

“that it was fully possible for relative emancipation from famine and plague to produce a greater number of poor than ever before . . . (that) the most striking consequence of population movement was the broadening of the

22 H. Sée, “La mise en valeur des terres incultes. Défrichements et dessèchements à la fin de l’Ancien Régime”, *Revue d’histoire économique et sociale*, x (1923), pp. 62-81.

base of the social pyramid perhaps more than ever before, a proliferation of people who experienced increasing difficulties in providing themselves with the bare necessities of existence.”²³

Dr. Hufton’s thesis is that the “economy of makeshifts” of poor families could only be sustained through employment. Catholic charitable institutions originally created to cope with different problems, were failing financially as demand on their resources increased. The same reason explains government failures to supplement the Church as ministers lurched from one increasingly repressive policy to another and rationalized their own inadequacies by fostering the myth of ecclesiastical ineptitude and corruption. Thus, the family economy veered on collapse and, although Dr. Hufton does not directly say so, presumably its components which she details so well, became progressively unravelled. Thus, saving for future marriage became more difficult, migration in search of employment or mendicity for a simple hand-out more of a necessity, seizures from village usurers more likely, petty crime more of a temptation, and so on. Society faced a deepening crisis of impoverishment as the Revolution approached.

Dr. Hufton does not use statistical methods for much more than background material, preferring instead to approach the issues through dramatic case histories. While one can easily criticize this — perhaps too easily, given the built-in biases in the statistical sources — there is little doubt that the problem of social survival was becoming more acute especially after 1770. Her own researches and some other studies illustrate quantitatively how seriously the society of the common people was disintegrating. A large proportion of men imprisoned in *dépôts de mendicité* were not itinerant beggars but unemployed farmhands and rural artisans.²⁴ Illegitimacy rates in the towns mounted as servant girls, uprooted from their villages, sought some sort of solace for their loneliness in the towns.²⁵ From almost every part of the country, there are reports of an increasing number of abandoned children in the 1780s.²⁶ Criminal statistics usually do not signify too much since most crimes depended less on police work than upon the willingness of an injured party to complain to an undermanned and poorly paid *maréchaussée*. Smug-

23 Hufton, *The Poor*, p. 238-40.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 320-21. A. Lottin, “Naissances illégitimes et filles mères à Lille au XVIIIe siècle”, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, ii (1970), pp. 278-322. J. Meyer, “Le siècle de l’Intendance (1688-1789)” in J. Delumeau (ed.), *Histoire de Bretagne* (Toulouse, 1969), p. 337, 340.

26 Hufton, *The Poor*, pp. 338-49. A. Molinier, “Enfants trouvés, enfants abandonnés et enfants illégitimes en Languedoc au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles” in *Hommage à M. Reinhard*, pp. 445-73. Cl. Delasselle, “Les Enfants abandonnés à Paris au XVIIIe siècle”, *Annales. E.S.C.*, xxx (1975), pp. 187-218.

gling and banditry, however, came directly under police purview and the sources indicate that these crimes were becoming more serious. The number of arrests for salt smuggling along the border of Brittany, Maine and Anjou co-relates almost exactly with the difficult harvest years of the 1770s and 1780s.²⁷ Bands of brigands either became larger or more numerous in the Finistère, the Orléanais and the Forez.²⁸ In effect, the legal forms of official society were coming into conflict with the poor's need to survive. At the same time, as the numbers of poor rose, the wandering beggar became less an object of traditional Catholic charity and more an object of fear and loathing. Finally, health conditions appear to have deteriorated, as epidemics became more serious than they had been since the 1740s. The outbreak of dysentery in 1779 in western France had no precedent, at least in terms of mortality rates, in the eighteenth century.²⁹ Other diseases played an important role in slowing France's demographic growth after 1770, reducing her, as J.-P. Peter put it, "à stagner aux frontières de la survie."³⁰

How are we to explain these signs of increasing misery when the pressure of population on resources is not an adequate explanation valid for all regions in equal measure? To understand this question, one must enter into the myriad complexities of regional social structures but, at the risk of caricature, it seems fair to say that the crisis of the latter Ancien Régime rural economy was in large part due to a terribly unequal distribution of wealth, one which was becoming more unequal as time passed. The reasons for this vary from region to region. Contrary to a still tenacious myth, the northern half of France from Poitou, the Orléanais, Burgundy and the Ile-de-France to the northern plains, inherited a structure of landholding from previous centuries in which ever larger holdings came to occupy the land while an increasing number of smaller units shared a diminishing proportion of the arable. This process of simultaneous remembrement and morcellement was far from finished in the eighteenth century and a number of excellent village studies document the increasing vulnerability of smaller holdings to the onslaught of the larger farmers, the gros marchands - laboureurs and other coqs du village as well as the urban bourgeoisie and the nobility.³¹ Western France was

27 Yves Durand, "La contrebande du sel au XVIIIe siècle aux frontières de Bretagne, du Maine et de l'Anjou", *Histoire sociale — Social History*, viii (1974), pp. 227-69.

28 Hufton, *The Poor*, pp. 266-83.

29 Fr. Lebrun, "Une grande épidémie en France au XVIIIe siècle: la dysenterie de 1779", in *Hommage à M. Reinhard*, pp. 403-15.

30 "Les mots et les objets de maladie. Remarques sur les épidémies et la médecine dans la société française de la fin du XVIIIe siècle", *Revue historique*, ccxvii (1971), p. 32.

31 G. Bouchard, *Le village immobile. Sennely-en-Sologne au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1972), pp. 129-35. A. Soboul, "Concentration agraire en pays de grande culture: Puiseux-Pontoise (S.-et-O.) et la propriété Thomassin", in his *Paysans, Sans-culottes et Jacobins* (Paris, n.d.), pp. 99-120. P. de Saint-Jacob, "Le mouvement de la propriété dans un village bourguignon à la fin de l'Ancien Régime", *Annales de Bourgogne*, (1948), pp. 47-52.

spared this kind of pressure but the rye and buckwheat economy of the interior had reached a crisis point of its own. The slight population increase of mid-century could not be supported without further land clearings and these were not extensive enough because rural society on its own did not have the capital to keep the land open and almost none came from the wealthy proprietary class. Viticulture probably kept many families alive in the south upon their pitifully small holdings until the crisis of overproduction and low prices of the 1770s and 1780s forced many under.³² Rural industry, which traditionally played such an important role in keeping the poor alive, had become the principal source of income in many villages. Yet with the textile slump of the 1780s, unemployment soared in Normandy and indebtedness in the Ardèche and the Gard became so serious as to precipitate mass unrest and rebellions against the merchant usurers.³³

Looked at another way, most people did not have enough land upon which to survive. It has been estimated that somewhere between one-half and nine-tenths of the peasantry depending on the region did not have holdings adequate to feed a family. It has also been estimated that roughly 8 percent of the population controlled 50 percent or more of the agrarian wealth of the country.³⁴ And this gap could only increase as inheritances divided a smaller patrimony, as food became more expensive and as proprietors fortunate to produce a surplus, benefited from rising prices to increase their incomes. Tenants were particularly hard pressed as rent rises exceeded grain price rises, rent-income ratios fell, arrears mounted and the turnover of farmers rose.³⁵ A continuing pauperism process after 1770 is very likely, due partly to a failure of economic performance and partly to the structure of landed society.

An emphasis on the failures of rural social organisation should not in any way detract from the value of studies on production. If Morineau tends to confuse production with productivity in outlining his pauperisation thesis, he has nonetheless proved that an agricultural revolution in cereals and perhaps

32 C.-E. Labrousse, *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'Ancien Régime et au début de la Révolution* (Paris, 1944), *passim*.

33 M. Bouloiseau, "Aspects sociaux de la crise cotonnière dans les campagnes rouennaises en 1788-89", in *Actes du 82e congrès des sociétés savantes (Caen-Rouen, 1956)* (Paris, 1956), pp. 403-28. G. Lewis, "The White Terror in the Department of the Gard", *Past and Present*, No. 58 (1973), pp. 122-23. M. Sonenscher, "La révolte des masques armés de 1783 en Vivarais", in *Vivarais et Languedoc, 44e congrès de la Fédération historique Langue doc méditerranéen (Privais, 1971)* (1972), p. 247-63.

34 P. Goubert, "Le paysan et la terre: seigneurie, tenure et exploitation", in *Histoire économique et sociale*, p. 147. C.-E. Labrousse, "Aperçu de la répartition sociale de l'expansion agricole," in *ibid.*, p. 477.

35 Labrousse, *Esquisse*, ii. pp. 439-40. R. Forster, *The Nobility of Toulouse in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1960), p. 60. R. Forster, *The House of Saulx-Tavanes. Versailles and Burgundy, 1700-1830* (Baltimore, 1971), pp. 80-86.

even a demographic revolution did not take place. The eighteenth century represented perhaps only the bare beginning of unique developments in French agrarian history. If, as this author suspects, much of the growth which did take place was due to land clearings and swamp drainings, then the eighteenth century is quite comparable to other periods of expansion like the 11 - 12th centuries and the 15th - 16th whose prosperity was built upon a similar basis. Indeed, the tithe records indicate that in the long perspective, the eighteenth century was an era of recovery and recuperation and may only have barely exceeded a level of population and wealth the kingdom had attained in the mid-sixteenth century.³⁶ Yet we should beware of falling into a dismal fatalism about the possibilities of the old agrarian system. Technical under-development aside, there were structural reasons why the old system floated within fixed limits of expansion and contraction. Robert Forster has argued that one of the major explanations was the failure of the landed classes to invest enough or, even any, of their profits into their estates or to allow their farmers enough income for them to experiment with agricultural improvements.³⁷ Resources were consistently drained from the land. The reasons for insufficient investment are not clear but one of them may relate to the retention in France of the notion that income from a private estate should be used to finance a public career. Certainly, the poor return on capital of most offices in the state bureaucracy made it extremely difficult for most officials to survive on salaries, gages, epices and so on. Office-holding then operated as a kind of indirect tax on the tenantry and the modernisation of the royal bureaucracy was an essential concomitant to agricultural progress. When, during his travels in Champagne, Arthur Young met a haggard and pre-maturely aged peasant woman, he attributed her misery to government.³⁸ His remark was perhaps not so naive as it appears to be at first sight.

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36 Goy and Le Roy Ladurie, *Les fluctuations . . . de la dîme*, pp. 367-74.

37 R. Forster, "Obstacles to Agricultural Growth in Eighteenth Century France", *American Historical Review*, lxxv (1970), pp. 1600-15.

38 A. Young, *Travels in France During the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789* J. Kaplow (ed.), (New York, 1969), p. 144.