Disaster and Discourse: Reactions to the 1906 Courrières Colliery Mine Disaster

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Disaster and Discourse: Reactions to the 1906 Courrières Colliery Mine Disaster

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in the Department of History from The College of William and Mary

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INTRODUCTION
I. Significance

On March 10, 1906, 1,099 people died in a French coalmine. Known as the Courrières Colliery Mine Disaster, it was at the time the world’s largest mining accident, and it remains to this day the worst industrial catastrophe ever to have occurred in Europe. The disaster spawned the largest strike wave in France’s history up to that point, a massive governmental crackdown on labor organizations, the first worldwide charity movement for an industrial disaster, and major safety reforms throughout France. And yet, it has been almost entirely forgotten in the main body of academic literature on the history of France and Modern Europe. There is not one mention of Courrières in Alexander Sedgwick’s The Third French Republic: 1870-1914, James Joll’s Europe Since 1870, Robert Gildea’s Children of the Revolution: The French: 1799-1914, The Oxford History of Modern Europe, or The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Europe: 1870 to the Present. There is not even a scholarly monograph available on the subject.

Scholarship on the history of disasters and relief is similarly lacking with respect to industrial catastrophes. Of the quality works currently available, such as Jean-Christophe Rufin’s Le piège: quand l’aide humanitaire remplace la guerre, Marian Moser Jones’ The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal, and the edited volume Solidarité et assurance: les sociétés européennes face aux catastrophes (17e-21e s.), most endeavor to only describe the social and cultural effects that natural disasters had on European societies. Some works on international disaster relief, such as Randolph Kent’s Anatomy of Disaster Relief: the International Network in Action, do not even mention industrial disasters before the mid-twentieth century. Wars came and went, but the possibility of an industrial catastrophe in the nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries was almost constant, be it a mining explosion, a factory fire, a chemical leak, water contamination, a train derailment, etc. The subject should not remain neglected in academic literature.

II. Background.

Social structures, from an ecological perspective, are based on ordering and preserving the world through a series of interactive social processes. Group customs, relationships, and attachments all facilitate the development of a functional community with a prescribed set of implicit behavioral cues for survival, adaption, and achievement.¹ Social reactions to events that happen within a community are not simply random, but are part of an anticipatory behavioral system of social learning through prior experience.

Dealing with a disaster is part of that experience. Long ago, people witnessed how natural disasters could powerfully produce ecological breakdowns in their existing social systems, that social order can quickly become social chaos.² Traditions of magic, folklore, healing, superstitions, mysticism, organized religions, elements of architecture, and even social classes were all reactions to the experiences of survival, of preventing or mitigating the effects of natural disasters.³ By the modern period in Europe, nations, religious institutions, and local communities were forming and funding organizations such as hospitals, famine relief and social welfare

¹ James G. Kelly, Becoming Ecological: An Expedition into Community Psychology. (London: Oxford University
³ Historian William McNeill, one of the founding scholars of environmental history, has argued that the rise of Christianity in Europe can be linked to the widespread frequency of epidemics in Europe, in that the promise of a rewarding afterlife was especially palpable to people suffering from the ravages of hunger and disease in the Holy Roman Empire during those years. He has also posited that the caste system in India served as a type of social quarantine, a way higher castes prevented themselves from coming into contact with lower caste members, who were more likely to carry diseases as a result of the constrains placed on their styles of living and working. See William McNeill. Plagues and Peoples. (New York: Anchor, 2010), 149-150, 110-111.
societies, church groups, etc. in order to aid people suffering from natural calamities.

But what happened when a large-scale industrial catastrophe occurred? How did people react to it? To ascertain the answer before the disaster at Courrières is difficult. Industrial companies were paramount to local, regional, and national economic wellbeing during the nineteenth century, so any interruptions in their normal functions meant that economic and legal hardship was spread across many people. In an attempt to mitigate their risk of liability and compensation during such disruptions, states and industrial companies started enforcing better safety practices across the nineteenth century, which in turn lowered the frequency of workers’ deaths while on the job, particularly in coalmines and on railroads. Because of this, Europe had not witnessed severe, large-scale industrial catastrophes by the early twentieth century. That the worst one in
its history would happen then was altogether surprising.

III. Aims and Argument

In writing this thesis, I have had two major objectives. The first was to fill in the shortage of academic information on the catastrophe at Courrières by providing rich, detailed descriptions of what actually happened during and after the disaster. To do this, I begin each chapter with a narrative depiction that serves as a bridge to the chapter’s thematic focus. The emphases and arguments of each chapter are then constructed along the lines of my second aim in writing the thesis: to deconstruct public reactions to the disaster. My arguments examine reactions to Courrières on multiple levels, concentrically. Every chapter is constructed so that it is progressively larger in its focus than the one before it.

In chapter one, I explore French coalminers’ reactions to Courrières. I begin with a description of their initial reactions to the disaster, and follow this with an analysis of how the historical experiences of work in coalmines influenced their responses. I conduct this particular analysis in three interconnected ways. First, I overview the major social changes in miners’ lives before Courrières. Then, I provide a historical assessment of coalminers’ propensity towards violent protests and strikes. Finally, I reinterpret the issue of safety to coalminers’ lives and identities. As a result, I am able to historically contextualize the motivations behind miners’ reactions to Courrières.

In chapter two, I focus on how the state responded to Courrières and its subsequent strikes. I begin by identifying some of the major historical actors involved in crafting and affecting the state’s reaction. After this, I consider the main national and international issues that the government of France was facing in 1906. Once these contexts are established, I review the
state’s initial response and then explain how and why the government subsequently reversed its approach to Courrières and its ensuing strikes. I end the chapter by clarifying and expounding upon the ways in which the state fundamentally altered the trajectory of the labor movement in France in ways that historians have neglected to notice.

In chapter three, I focus specifically on the construction of international reactions to Courrières, particularly those in the form of diplomacy and charity. I first discuss the historical, organizational, and ideological roots of international disaster relief. Then, I elucidate the diplomatic situation in Europe at the time of the disaster. After all of this, I show how charity to victims at Courrières was constructed and conveyed among different social spheres in Europe, specifically the working classes, politicians, and social elites.

My central argument is that differing social backgrounds brought about differing reactions to the disaster at Courrières. The combination of often competing motivations inherent in these different social circumstances created crucial changes in the nature of labor movements in France and produced the first major international construction of organized relief for an industrial disaster. Therefore, I believe my thesis will demonstrate Courrières’ importance to French social and labor history, and its significant place in the history of disaster relief in Modern Europe.
CHAPTER I

Mining Memory: Coalminers’ Reactions to Courrières

COURRIÈRES, MARCH 10th, 1906

François Colomer did not know he was going to witness the world’s worst mining disaster when he descended into the pits of the Compagnie des mines de Courrières at 6:00 a.m. on the chilly, damp morning of March 10, 1906. The dawn shift change involved some 1,400 coal miners descending as far as 1,100 feet into the earth by either walking to their working stations or riding to them inside cramped, horse-drawn buggies. Both methods of transportation usually made getting to mine locations long and tedious. About half an hour after arriving at fosse 3, François reached his working spot in the St. Barbe veine. According to his written account of the disaster, which was presented at l’École des maîtres mineurs de Douai, at about 7:00 a.m., a loud crashing sound echoed throughout the mine. The airflow around François violently shifted directions, swiftly extinguishing the oil-wick lamps that guided his work. A few minutes later, the sound of another quaking rumble convinced him that a major accident had occurred somewhere in the mine. But before he could react, thick dust rapidly blew into his work area. The charred air smelled like a dynamite blast. Alone in complete darkness, François felt his way

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1 Up to that point, Courrières was the largest mining explosion in the world. The total number of casualties was not surpassed until April of 1942, when an explosion at Benxihu Colliery in China killed 1549 people. See B. S. Dhillon "Global Mine Accidents." in Mine Safety: A Modern Approach (Springer Science & Business Media: 2010), 59-71.

2 “,” La Croix, March 12, 1906. 1.


6 Mines were divided into fosses, pits that provided access to bowettes, the principal meeting points of shafts from which smaller branches were entered. Veines were the principal seams in mines from which coal was extracted. Workers would typically get to their working points by entering the mine through the pits. See Jaurës, Jean, Virginie Debrabant, Karine Sprimont, and André Dubuc, comps. La catastrophe des mines de Courrières récits et témoignages, 107.
to the entrance of Saint Barbe to see is if he could evacuate. An advancing thick fog of smothering gas greeted him upon his arrival, having already asphyxiated one man who lay dead within it.

A couple of miles away in the Adélaïde veine, César Danglot was already at work assembling timber support beams when he heard and felt “the sound of thunder rolling in.”7 In his vivid recollection of the events in his memoirs, César writes that after the shaking subsided, he and his teammates travelled toward the rail lines in bowette 326, where horse-drawn buggies usually left miners for their day’s work. When the group reached it, they encountered very heavy vapor, splintered timber beams, and fractured rocks. Frightened coal miners from further down the shaft had also arrived at the spot. They revealed to César and his fellow workers that because of the pueux,8 the horses could no longer steadily walk. Within the panic and confusion, César saw his uncle sitting upright by the rail line with his back turned to the group. When César shook his shoulder, his uncle fell over dead. His nauseating dread only intensified upon spotting another man lying on his stomach with part of his face severed from his facial bones. With the gas encroaching upon them in darkness, he realized there were few options for survival.

François and César did live through their ordeals. François escaped the coalmine along with about 300 other coalminers later that day. César miraculously emerged twenty days later with twelve others. But their experiences only reveal a small portion of the larger damage caused by the catastrophe. On the surface, the loud noises that both François and César recounted hearing inside the mine had begun pouring almost simultaneously from pits 2, 3, and 4 with dense thickets of smoke.9 The coverings of pits 2 and 4 literally blew off, aboveground cages which descended directly into mine shafts were forcefully thrust upwards and entangled in their pulleys,

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7 Ibid. 106.
8 Meaning “bad gas.” This is a common French expression for carbon monoxide.
9 Charles Emile Heurteau, La catastrophe de Courrières. 6-7.
two entrances into pit 3 became wholly blocked by a mangled mesh of steel, wood, and rock, and part of pit 2 was engulfed in flames.\textsuperscript{10}

Chaos and casualties were extensive. According to a journalist writing for \textit{La Lanterne}, a popular anticlerical daily French newspaper, minutes after the explosions, “a half dozen miners emerged [from pits 4 and 11]. They were hysterical.”\textsuperscript{11} A reporter for the Georges Clemenceau-founded newspaper \textit{La Justice} stated that one broken cage was found full of the mashed remains of workers and one man who, barely alive, was trying to hold his shattered skull together.\textsuperscript{12} Articles in both \textit{La Lanterne} and \textit{L’Aurore}, a liberal socialist-leaning newspaper, included an account of one coalminer who witnessed a fellow worker completely mutilated by a steel net that flew from a pit before a mine cart “launched like a rocket” out of it.\textsuperscript{13} \textit{La Lanterne} published an interview with a miner who described the violent loss of life: “There are two [miners] that were near me [in the mine]. I saw a young boy, not a man, whose arm was ripped off. And what of the others? All dead.”\textsuperscript{14} In a meeting with company and government officials, a weeping father told the group that he had crawled out of the mine carrying his young nephew on his back after he helplessly watched his fifteen-year-old son suffocate to death.\textsuperscript{15}

Rescue operations began quickly. Once alarms were raised, \textit{gendarmes} and doctors from both Lens and Liévin started arriving at the affected mining sites.\textsuperscript{16} In the meantime, Courrières miners and engineers tried to provide immediate assistance. A group of 40 would-be rescuers re-entered part of the coalmine, but became trapped themselves after a roof collapse.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{La Croix}, a


\textsuperscript{12} “La catastrophe de Courrières,” \textit{La Justice}, March 12, 1906, 4.

\textsuperscript{13} “La catastrophe de Courrières,” \textit{La Aurore}, March 12, 1906, 1.


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 1.; “The Courrières Disaster,” \textit{Marlborough Express}, April 25, 1906, 1.


\textsuperscript{17} “The Courrières Disaster,” \textit{Marlborough Express}, April 25, 1906, 1.
right wing Catholic daily publication, re-counted that a 17-year-old rescuer was revived at the scene after almost suffocating: “His face still bears the traces of harsh friction.”

M. Léon, the chief mining engineer of the Pas-de-Calais, and his assistants came from Lille later in the day and descended into passable entrances in order to ascertain the extent of the damage and formulate a rescue plan. Their conclusions were grave. According to W.N. Atkinson, an British mine inspector, and Henry Cunyngham, the Assistant Undersecretary of State in Britain, “At that time [evening of March 11] the opinion was firmly held by the engineers that no person was alive in the mine.” During this period, recently elected French President Armand Fallières received a telegram confirming the wide extent and seriousness of the disaster, and sent Major Keraudran, one of his aides-de-camp, along with the outgoing Minister of the Interior Fernard Dubief and the Minster of Public Works Armand Gauthier to Courrières by train. They arrived the next day and began to oversee and report on the status of rescue operations.

However, efforts to handle the flow of information to the public were already muddled. At 8:00 p.m. on March 11, a telegram transmitted from Courrières to Paris indicated that rescue efforts had ceased because all of the galleries at the mines had fallen in, but another message from Paris to the United States on that same day stated that rescue efforts were still ongoing. The London Times reported that 1,100 men had already died, The New York Times speculated that the number was closer to 1,404, and La Croix claimed that 1,200 coalminers were dead. Such was the sheer amount of misinformation that the Prefect of the Pas-de-Calais sent a telegram to

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19 WN Atkinson and H. Cunyngham, Report to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department on the disaster which occurred at Courrières Mine, Pas de Calais, France, 7-8.
Fernard Dubief declaring his frustration at “the prevailing confusion and grief, which made it impossible…to obtain precise information.”

As word spread following the explosions, large crowds of distraught family members, friends, and curious onlookers clustered together at the entrances to the mining areas. *La Croix* described the scene: “At the entrance[s] of buildings, the imposing gendarmes bar the way. Standing before them are anxious, distressed, wide eyes filled with tears that do not leave the ravaged faces; Hundreds of men, women, children [are] waiting; a muffled sob cuts through the silence. At 9:00 p.m., gusts of icy wind mixed with heavy rain [start]; all of these poor people were still there, shivering but without a complaint.” Jules Cerf, who learned that he had lost his two sons and two nephews that day, had not left the crowd “since Saturday morning…where he still has hope, contrary to all human hope, like all his other misfortunate companions.”

In order to alleviate the growing number of people joining the crowds, Commander Cacheux, who was placed in charge of the gendarmes at Courrières, decided to allow groups of twenty people into the brick buildings where bodies were being taken and literally “reassembled.” Shoes, broken lamps, hats, and “boiled” leather were placed at the feet of victims to aid in the process of identifying them. One correspondent wrote of the sight:

Lying on the pavement was a jumble of horribly charred remains. Many bodies were blackened and unrecognizable…With every trip, distraught women quickly come in to look over the remains of the shapeless victims. Sometimes one…recognizes a decapitated head or body that still had some identifiable feature and starts wrenching cries. She has

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23 See Figure I.
25 Ibid 1.
recognized the face of her husband… The *gendarmes*, anxious themselves, must exclude the unfortunate who gradually lose their minds."

When Dubief was taken to one of the makeshift mortuaries while touring the faculties, “he could not remain there [even for] a few moments as he had been greatly affected by the sight that met at his eyes.”

Horror and grief transformed into anger in the following days. Henri Bourdon meticulously recorded his and others’ experiences in the Pas-de-Calais in the days after the disaster. He wrote

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30 Ibid, 2.
down the following eulogy given by Émile Basly,31 the mayor of Lens and a well-known champion of trade unionism, at a mass funeral held in the snow-covered32 town of Billy-Montigny, a little over three miles from Courrières:

For the past twenty years, I have never ceased [not] to proclaim to the property-owning bourgeoisie that the miner is an outcast, and that his existence is in perpetual danger; he uses his strength in depressing and painful labor. For twenty years on the platform of the House, I demanded laws protecting labor, some guarantees for these men’s existence which death threatens everyday.

What we obtained, [we had to] almost tear off by force. It took a lot of nerve to say the miner has a privileged status. Yes, he is privileged; he does not die like everyone else, surrounded by family, with supreme consolations such as loving kisses from his wife, from his mother, from his weeping children. He dies burnt, charred, crushed, shredded. He dies in a hole under a block of rock, under the wheels of a [mining] cart, or under any of the great technological machines that science has only put into the service of capital. He disappears, forever, unrecognizable, and his remains will sometimes, like today at Méricourt, [be placed] within an immense anonymous pit with the rest of the unfortunate who have groaned with him, who died the same miserable death.33

By March 14, coalminers at Ostricourt, Dourges, Liévin, and Corvin were on strike.34 Over 26,000 more mining workers throughout the Pas-de-Calais joined the protests three days later.35 Crowds numbering well into the thousands blocked entrances to mine yards across northern France.36 The gendarmes commonly encountered gunshots, smashed windows, thrown rocks, and random bouts of chaos while trying to control or dispel these early demonstrations.37 Company officials were inundated with grievances and demands from labor organizations representing coalminers, including calls for safety changes, wage increases, pension increases,

32 *La Laterne* reported 20 cm. of snow had fallen throughout the region. See “La catastrophe de Courrières”, *La Laterne*, March 15, 1906, 1.
37 Ibid, 6. See Figure II.
additional nondiscrimination clauses in hiring procedures, housing renovations, lower required working hours, and increases in financial assistance to widows. By the end of March, well over 80,000 coal workers, more than half of France’s coalmining work force, were idle or on strike.

Indeed, the strikes that occurred around Courrières marked the largest wave of strike activity in France up to that point in its history. In total, at least 437,800 people participated in some 1,354 reported strikes that were held throughout 1906, almost all of which occurred immediately after Courrières. Both of these numbers, as Figure III on page 14 and Section I in the Appendices illustrate, had never been recorded in France until 1906. 124,647 total working days

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were lost due to strike activity in 1906, compared to the 90,132 days lost in 1902.\textsuperscript{42} As Figure IV shows, it was not until 1920 that the number of working days lost in 1906 was outmatched. In terms of population, on average, there were 31,700 active strikers in the French coal mining industry per 100,000 people in 1906, which is significantly higher than the number of mining strikers averaged from 1890 to 1914, as displayed in Figure VI.\textsuperscript{43} In fact, the number of strikes per 100,000 people almost doubled in 1906 when compared to earlier strikes in France.

\textit{Figure III: Number of strikers in France 1865-1906}\textsuperscript{44}


\textsuperscript{44} Adapted from Ibid. 360-361.
Figure IV: Number of working days lost per strike

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>1906</th>
<th>1890-1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>31,700</td>
<td>13,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure V: Average number of strikers per 100,000 people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Strikes per 100,000 people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure VI: Average number of strikes per 100,000 people

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45 Adapted from Gaston V. Rimlinger "International differences in the strike propensity of coal miners: Experience in four countries." 395.
47 Adapted from Ibid. 106.
It would not be unreasonable for one to conclude that Basly’s passionate eulogy and the widespread, aggressive nature of coalminers’ protests together indicate a strong reaction to the disaster itself. The horrific, heart-wrenching accounts that saturated news coverage of Courrières from both conservative and leftist newspapers could easily have moved the coalminer out of his mine and onto the picket line. The catastrophe may have been the final straw in coalminers’ toleration of a working life characterized by company negligence and increasingly unsafe working conditions.

But this view is not entirely correct. Coalmining was actually becoming safer in France, and before the disaster, Courrières had been a prime example of this trend. Just a year before the catastrophe, the Compagnie de Courrières was awarded first prize for the “excellence of their working and general arrangements” at an international mining exhibition held in Arras. It was well-earned. Since opening coalmining pits between 1849 and 1852, the Courrières Company experienced consistent declines in the number of deaths and injuries incurred by its workers while on the job. Its annual rate of employee deaths from roof collapses, the most common cause of death and injuries in coalmines worldwide, shrank from an average of 0.76 deaths per 1,000 workers per year between 1870 and 1879 to 0.15 deaths per 1,000 workers per year

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48 WN Atkinson and H. Cunyngham, Report to His Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Home Department on the disaster which occurred at Courrières Mine, Pas de Calais, France. 14.
49 There is some discrepancy in the sources on the date that Courrières was founded. Le Croix reported that the first pit opened in 1849, with most others completed by 1852. See “La catastrophe de Courrières”, Le Croix, March 13th, 1906. 3. Atkinson and Cunyngham note that the company started producing coal in 1851, but in their official report on the disaster, they ascribe the date 1852 to the legal formation of the company. It is possible, however, that the company was in the process of gaining financial independence from 1849 to 1852 while still employing workers and producing coal. See W.N. Atkinson and H. Cunyngham. Report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the methods of preventing falls of roof adopted at the Courrières Collieries, by four of His Majesty’s Mining Inspectors, British Home Office. 3. and WN Atkinson and H. Cunyngham, Report to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department on the disaster which occurred at Courrières Mine, Pas de Calais, France 4.
50 Mining companies and engineer reports usually included in this calculation roof slides, which happened when only part of the mining roof collapsed or became displaced.
between 1890 and 1899.\textsuperscript{51} Comparatively, the average annual death rate from roof falls per 1,000 workers in the United Kingdom during the years 1895 to 1900 was 0.78.\textsuperscript{52} In Prussia, that number was 1.22, and in Illinois, the average annual death rate from roof falls actually increased from 1.10 in 1895 to 1.34 in 1899.\textsuperscript{53}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/State</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Average death rate per 1,000 workers from roof collapse</th>
<th>Number of workers employed underground (1898)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1894-1898</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>105,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>1895-1900</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prussia</td>
<td>1894-1899</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>279,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>1895-1899</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>33,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1894-1899</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>232,088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure VII: Comparative safety statistics in coal mines*

Moreover, the British government had a keen interest in Courrières and French coalmining safety standards. A British report on the techniques used to prevent roof collapses in mines at Courrières concluded that, “We could not help being impressed by many excellent arrangements for the safety and welfare of the workmen, both at Courrières and Lens.”\textsuperscript{54} That same report was also featured in a *London Times* article covering the discussion of timbering in coalmines at a meeting of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Institute of Mining Engineers.\textsuperscript{55} Additionally, in 1905, an annual report to the House of Parliament found that “France is now almost entirely free from explosions from fire-damp.”\textsuperscript{56} The worst accident in 1899 was the fall of

\textsuperscript{51} Robert G. Neville, "The Courrières colliery disaster, 1906." 34.
\textsuperscript{52} W.N. Atkinson and H. Cunnygham, *Report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the methods of preventing falls of roof adopted at the Courrières Collieries, by four of His Majesty’s Mining Inspectors*, 10.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. 25-26. Pennsylvania anthracite and bituminous coal mines had a larger death rate, at 2.33 and 1.84, respectively. See Ibid. 26.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. 13.
\textsuperscript{55} “Timbering In Coal Mines,” *London Times*, June 6, 1901. 3.
\textsuperscript{56} “Fire damp” was a term used to describe an underground mining area that had become oversaturated. Too much saturation causes a high degree of humidity that can make coal easily combustible, especially around the open-flame lamps that miners still used to illuminate their working areas. In France, dry coal dust was not thought to cause
a cage down a shaft owing to the breakage of the winding rope.” 57 Courrières was not a death trap, and coalminers in France rarely died inside the ground as a burnt jumble of flesh and bones.

It could be argued here, quite justifiably, that Courrières’ excellent safety reputation only heightened the fear and grievances that coalminers held against their employers across France, but this interpretation also needs to be placed in historical context. Something else was clearly influencing miners’ reactions outside the disaster itself, and it was historically based. After all, any reaction to an event is based on what came before it. Therefore, it is important to understand what the roots of French coalminers’ grievances were, how they grew from their experiences of work and protest. A better understanding as to why coalminers reacted to Courrières in the ways that they did can be attained as a result.

In order to fully explore these lines of inquiry, it is important to first assess some of the major social changes in the lives of French coalminers before the Courrières disaster. Within the contexts of these changes, the discussion can be oriented towards the historical trajectory of miners’ protests, which historians have oversimplified. The importance of safety to miners’ individual abilities to protect themselves from disaster, which many historians have also overlooked, can then be fully appreciated within these larger historical frameworks. As will be seen, French coalminers’ reactions to Courrières went beyond fear or grief.

Coalmining in France largely originated from locally oriented rural peasant activities. Many people who resided in the forest-depleted Massif Central had dug coal pits since the Middle Ages, and those living near rivers such as the Loire and Meuse had taken advantage of the visible explosions, and though both French and English reports did not conclusively find that an ignition by coal dust was the cause of the catastrophe at Courrières, the quick and expansive nature of the damage indicates that it very likely played a major role in it.

coal outcrops that lay along them for about as long a time.\textsuperscript{58} Coal was a valuable commodity to these communities. Given the seasonality of early trade and many regions’ poor accessibility, coal viably compensated for the unreliability of crop yields and supplies well into the eighteenth century. One parish priest, describing the work opportunities for peasants in Saint-Parthem in 1771, wrote, “With the exception of a very small business in oak planks, or in coal, there is not another resource which is going to…endure hunger.”\textsuperscript{59} In his seminal study of deindustrialization at Decazeville, historian Donald Reid rightly notes that coal mining “prevented some people from dying of hunger…and played a role in the lives of everyone.”\textsuperscript{60} Early on, coal was not just a peasant profession; it was a resource for survival.

A large degree of economic autonomy derived from these early forms of mining coal. Until the intrusion of industry into their everyday life, rural peasants throughout France largely mined in family groups. They dug rudimentary pits, cut into visible coal seams on their own property, or entered into what Reid refers to as a ‘share crop’ mining system with a neighbor.\textsuperscript{61} They could sell their coal independently to ambitious local or regional entrepreneurs, to their seigneur, or to people in other regions. For example, it was not uncommon for peasants living by the banks of the Rhône to trade with miners in order to have the necessary fuel to heat dried chestnuts, make lime, boil cocoons, and distil wine.\textsuperscript{62} In fact, Achille Baron estimated that at least eighty small


\textsuperscript{59} Louis Lempereur, \textit{Etat du diocese de Rodez en 1771}. (Rodez: Imprimerie Louis Loup, 1906), 615. While priests may have exaggerated their reports in order to receive larger funds from the Church, the fact that only mining and wood working are mentioned here is telling.

\textsuperscript{60} Donald Reid, \textit{The Miners of Decazeville: A Genealogy of Deindustrialization}. (Harvard University Press, 1985), 10.

\textsuperscript{61} Lewis argues that these traditional methods had not significantly diverged from those techniques employed during the Middle Ages, even by the eighteenth century. See Gwynne Lewis, \textit{The Advent of Modern Capitalism in France 1770-1840: The Contribution of Pierre-Francois Tubeuf}. (Oxford, UK : Claredon Press, 1993), 33.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. 213.
rural mines dotted mountainsides throughout the Alès and Uzès dioceses in the 1760s. Peasants need not have mined for a set quota, but only for a self-determined amount that could sustain them and their families in their living arrangements. In that way, they could ward off financial or natural disaster.

Following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire, widespread death, dearth, destruction, and disease fundamentally altered the coalminers’ way of life. Generally, miners had to travel further from their homes to find work, and they became much more economically reliant on coal companies, which were more firmly established after a new mining law in 1810 ended several years of legal ambiguity over the ownership and profits earned from coalmining. Housing was universally poor and working times long. Well into the mid-nineteenth century, miners in Nivernais were reduced to occupying small, temporarily built huts made of wood and mud near company facilities. At Saint-Etienne, miners similarly resided in poorly constructed shacks. In Carmaux, a region characterized by less industrial development and stronger agricultural production, coalminers completed eight-hour shifts before returning to their farms in the evening or morning. In the Loire Valley, an industrial area with coal companies that had been in operation since the mid-eighteenth century, coalminers worked fourteen-hour shifts and

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63 Achille Bardon. *L’exploitation du bassin houiller d’Alais sous l’ancien régime.* (Clavel et Chastanier, 1898), 57-58.
64 The law validated concessions by giving them a special status not governed by Article 55-A of the Napoleonic Civil Code. It redefined the issuance of a concession as a formal acknowledgement of new property, one not necessarily synonymous with that of the land surface. Therefore, while landholders owned the property on their land, and were entitled to a fee if a concessionaire mined under their property, they were not legally entitled to ownership over the mine or over what was extracted from it. That became the property of the concessionaire. At the same time, newer concessions could only be approved if the concessionaire was able, in technical and monetary terms, to operate the mine. This basically ensured that coalmining companies were no longer operated by nobles who wanted a ‘status’ business, which had proved problematic over the course of the eighteenth century. See Ernest Lamé Fleury, *Texte annoté de la loi du 21 avril 1810 concernant les mines, les minières, les tourbières, les carrières, et les usines minéralurgiques*, (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1907). Articles 1-3, 5, 7, and 14.
66 Ibid. 41.
usually did not engage in agricultural activity after work.\textsuperscript{68} As such, independent and locally-based strategies of survival were subsumed under larger company ownership as industrialization progressed.

This pattern was reinforced by substantial increases in the availability of company-owned housing projects near company work sites. Because the well-known “nomadisme” of miners was not considered an ideal way to meet the massive market demands for coal, many coal companies began to construct mining towns, also known as corons, in the early nineteenth century. By 1870, the Anzin Company housed well over 70 percent of its workforce in about 2,500 houses near working sites.\textsuperscript{69} At the start of the twentieth century, some 700 houses for workers had been built at Courrières.\textsuperscript{70} In northern France alone, 47,000 houses for coalminers were fully constructed before World War I.\textsuperscript{71}

At first, the benefits for miners to live in corons seemed to outweigh the potential downsides. Coal companies at Le Creusot and Anzin were reportedly spending one franc on miners’ social services in corons for every ten francs they paid out in workers’ wages at the end of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{72} They built and supported schools, stores, and hospitals for workers and their families.\textsuperscript{73} In the départements of the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais, coal companies even sponsored recreational activities such as choral societies, shooting clubs, and philharmonic orchestras.\textsuperscript{74}

But behind these attractive amenities lay the fact that by placing their workforces on company-owned land in company-constructed housing projects, coal companies had an

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{68} Ibid. 86.
\bibitem{69} Diana Cooper-Richet, \textit{Le peuple de la nuit: mines et mineurs en France.} (Perrin, 2002), 42-43.
\bibitem{70} Ibid. 44.
\bibitem{71} Specifically, 34,000 in the Pas-de-Calais and 13,000 in le Nord. See Ibid.44.
\bibitem{72} Ibid. 583.
\bibitem{74} Michael Stephen Smith. \textit{The emergence of modern business enterprise in France, 1800-1930.} (Harvard University Press, 2006), 309.
\end{thebibliography}
unparalleled capacity to control and perpetuate their labor forces. Administrators at the Anzin Company actively encouraged workers to reproduce and made working in the mines a family affair. The company director bragged in a letter written around 1890 to the prefect of the Nord: “It is not rare to run across three generations [of families] working in the same [coal] chamber. The old use their experience to help the young; the work is done that much better.” Until it was illegal to do so in 1892, Anzin regularly employed women and children as coalminers and hired adolescent males at younger ages than other industrial companies in France. Access to mining work sites was restricted only to coalminers’ work times and every laborer signed a contract that imposed heavy penalties if they slowed up production processes. Until 1892, unemployed coalminers had to present a livret signed by their previous employer to a prospective employer in order to gain work. Additionally, after large strikes in 1899 and 1900, which transpired at the height of political tensions in Paris, new punitive rules at Le Creusot, a Catholic-oriented coal and steel company, were issued for workers, which included the following list of fineable offences:

unwarranted absences…insubordination, lack of respect for or disobedience towards superiors, injurious or obscene inscriptions on the plant or equipment, refusal to do work as ordered, bad will or negligence in doing work, leaving one’s post, insults or threats towards other workers, harmful or inappropriate comments to personnel, visitors, or

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77 Michael Stephen Smith. The emergence of modern business enterprise in France, 1800-1930. (Harvard University Press, 2006), 307. Indeed, one can see the corons and restriction on miners’ mobility as a way for coal company’s to prevent the movement of their workforce to rival companies.
78 On top of the Dreyfus Affair, republicans in the National Assembly feared a coup from the right, which forced their political strategies to the far-left, essentially marking a type of radical republicanism. This change was which was helped by the fact that Alexandre Millerand, the first socialist to join a bourgeois government in 1885, had become head of the Ministry of Commerce and Labor 1899 under René Waldeck-Rousseau. Unionists, syndicalists, and labor leaders seemed enthusiastic about the prospects of gaining political favors from within the government despite their differing ideological stances. This put company owners on the political defensive and spurred further strike activity throughout France. See Gerald Friedman. Reigniting the labor movement: restoring means to ends in a democratic labor movement. (Routledge, 2007), 21, and Leslie Derfler, The Dreyfus Affair. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 29-31.
management, drunkenness in the shop, bringing alcoholic beverages on the shop floor, bringing merchandise to sell in the shop, stealing from other workers or from the plant, making objects for personal use in the plant, willful damage or sabotage, divulging a company secret, bringing outsiders into the plant, entering or leaving by climbing over fences, breaking the security rules…  

A manager at the Compagnie de la Grand’Combe blatantly lamented in a letter to a company administrator that, “What we lack at present…is complete surveillance of workers’ behavior.”  

It is no coincidence that miners began to hold more fatalistic views of their lives during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One writer, describing the plight of a young coalminer in northern France, argued in 1901, “Oh yes, gentlemen, the son of a miner is necessarily a miner and still remains one, not as you think for love of the trade, but necessarily, indispensably, by fate. What else can a miner be if not a miner himself?” According to the author, the coalminer cannot emancipate himself from fate:

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79 Ibid. 308.
80 Ibid.101-102.
81 Figure VIII. Black and white photograph of newly built houses in Bully-les-Mines, a coron in France, taken circa 1898. No title. Available from: [https://medihal.archives-ouvertes.fr/medihal-00921493].
And...as soon as possible, the son of the miner, to add as much as possible to the [income] of the family, descends into the mines and once he has entered how do you think he can leave? What other trade can he learn? What possibility exists for freeing himself from the tutelage which weighs on him like fate? None; That is why the son of the miner becomes a miner as his son will become one day.  

The significant evolution from rural peasant-controlled coalmining traditions to paternalistically driven company practices meant that coalminers constructed their worldviews from foundations of significant social and economic constraint by the end of the nineteenth century. These limitations not only restricted the degree of control they had over their working life, but how they could exercise that control outside of the coalmining pit. If fate now brought them into their occupation, if it prevented a full sense of individual power over their own livelihoods, then perhaps any positive change, any increase in control, however slight, could only happen in the form of a collective group action. If work was prison, it was natural to attempt to escape it.  

It should not be surprising, then, that coalminers vigorously participated in many French labor movements before Courrières. In fact, they were commonly the largest group that partook in and/or initiated strikes. As Figure IX shows, the average rate of mining and quarry workers’ participation in strikes from 1890 to 1914 was well over two times that of the average rate in the profession nearest to them, the chemical production industry. Michelle Perrot, in her outstanding analyses of workers movements in France, found that from 1871 to 1890, 71 percent of all strikes in the mining industry were spontaneous and violent. For example, a miners’ strike at

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83 Ibid. 112.
84 Several miners’ newspapers from 1883 to 1890 took the notion of imprisonment in their title: Le Forçat (The Convict), Le cri du Forçat (The Convict’s Cry), and La Revanche du Forçat (The Convict’s Revenge). See Michelle Perrot. “The Three Ages of Industrial Discipline” in Merriman, John M., ed. Consciousness and class experience in nineteenth-century Europe. (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979), 160.
85 There are also similarities here with characteristics of women and young people’s strikes. According to Perrot, 71 and 80 percent of women and young people’s strikes, respectively, were sudden. Note how these two groups were
Decazeville in 1867 marked the beginning of a sudden escalation of coalmining protests throughout France.\textsuperscript{87} At that strike, coalminers and townspeople killed the locally despised assistant mining director, Jules Watrin, by clubbing him and throwing him from a window in a building near the mining pit.\textsuperscript{88}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Strikers per 100,000 people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mining/Quarrying</td>
<td>13,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals</td>
<td>5,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smelting</td>
<td>4,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalworking</td>
<td>1,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather-hides</td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing-paper</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textiles-garments</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food processing</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure IX: Industry Strike Rates in France, 1890-1914*\textsuperscript{89}

In an attempt to explain coal miners’ propensity to strike during the nineteenth century, many historians have argued that it was their historical isolation from the rest of French society and their social similarity to each other which made them so apt to protest. In 1954, historians Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel posited that the social cohesiveness of a large isolated mass of workers, in addition to the nature of their work—that is, how much of their identity was derived from it—largely determined the degree to which industrial workers would start and/or participate also socially constrained by French social systems. See Michelle Perrot. *Workers on strike: France 1871-1890.* (Yale University Press, 1987), 13-14.


\textsuperscript{89} Adapted from Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968*. 119.
in strikes. In their view, the more similar and distinct the group, the greater the likelihood would be that they would protest. More recently, Ian McKay has provided another similar interpretation: “Centrality, not just isolation, was the key [to strike activity].” For McKay, acts of protest in the mining industry were spurred by the necessity of the miner to his employer. After all, if coalminers were isolated, then the job of mining coal could not be accomplished when they went on strike. To McKay, this gave them exceptional bargaining power.

But these arguments do not reflect the reality of coalminers’ lives. It is fairly obvious that they were not actually isolated from the rest of French society. The widespread news reports and protests surrounding Courrières clearly could not have happened in isolation. Even years earlier in Carmaux, coalminers were very much aware of the economic and political implications of changes in their profession and those of other industries. One vocal coalminer visibly demonstrated this in 1892 by asking a group gathered at a town meeting, “What will it mean to have Carmaux’s glassworks at Albi? [It means] The triumph of the radical party over the socialist party.” Furthermore, coalminers were always inextricably linked to transportation systems in France, in particular the railroads, the same industry that poet-turned-politician Alphonse de Lamartine argued eliminated “the savage instincts born of isolation and misery.” French historian Alexander Sedgwick also makes the point that the mechanization of industry after 1870 “caused considerable dislocation within the working class…as they developed

92 If anything, coal miners risked economic and social isolation by going on strike because when doing so, they were also forgoing the very pay that kept them and their families fed and living.
93 See citation in Joan Wallach Scott. The glassworkers of Carmaux: French craftsmen and political action in a nineteenth-century city. 160.
political self-consciousness, workers set out to improve their position in French society.\textsuperscript{95}

Coalminers knew what was happening outside of their corons.

But while Sedgwick is correct in his historical assessment, he and other historians such as Clark Kerr and Charles Tilly are wrong in their sole focus on the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{96}

Coalminers had an obvious inclination to protest their dissatisfactions with any type of employer well before it, and it consistently revolved around the issue of control. In 1692, for example, when the Duchess d’Uzès attempted to capitalize on a concession granted to her father before 1667 by sending a group led by a concessionnaire,\textsuperscript{97} M. Courtinade, to Aubin to ensure that no coal was mined there without her explicit authorization, her employees were summarily harassed, M. Courtinade was decapitated, and his contorted, bloodied head was hung on a tree as a warning to future meddlesome outsiders.\textsuperscript{98}

Pierre François Tubeuf, one of the few self-proclaimed bourgeois to receive a mining concession,\textsuperscript{99} also met resistance from locals during the eighteenth century. In 1763, coalminers wrecked company equipment in Aubin. Lebeuf was forced to flee the region while avoiding the sticks and stones chucked at him by men who pursued him for an hour and a half. Perhaps the more damming things thrown his way were shouts of “robber!” and “Englishman!”\textsuperscript{100} When the

\textsuperscript{95} Alexander Sedgwick. \textit{The Third French Republic, 1870-1914.} (Crowell, 1968), 35.

\textsuperscript{96} Charles Tilly’s work on labor movements, particularly his quantitative analyses, within the mining industry is impressive and his contributions to labor history are incredibly important, but his focus on the nineteenth century does not provide much context as to why, beyond the events themselves, miners were so often participating in and starting strikes.

\textsuperscript{97} A concessionnaire, in the most basic sense, was a person who was charged with ensuring that a concession, a state document that gave a person permission to own or gain profit from something, was carried out in a region. In mining regions, this meant the troublesome task of preventing or stopping locally-owned mines or miners who mined coal on their own property from shipping their coal to other sources not approved by the holder of the concession.


\textsuperscript{99} Concessions almost exclusively went to members of the noblesse de robe, and Tubeuf probably would not have received a concession had it not been for the sympathy and support of both Henri Léonard Jean Baptiste Bertin, the then Finance Minister in France, and members of the royal court, with whom Tubeuf thoroughly aquatinted himself, had not intervened. See Gwynne Lewis, \textit{The Advent of Modern Capitalism in France 1770-1840: The Contribution of Pierre-François Tubeuf.} (Claredon Press, Oxford, UK., 1993), 22-25.

\textsuperscript{100} Donald Reid. \textit{The Miners of Decazeville: A Genealogy of Deindustrialization.} 11.
state sent in garrisons of troops to quell uprisings following the arrest of two clandestine coal transporters in the same area in 1769, a new coal company’s mining installations were destroyed and the house of its director was burnt to rubble.\textsuperscript{101} The trepidation that company men experienced when opening mines in local areas within France is well stated in a letter written in 1783 by Alexandre Charles Besson, one of the first graduates from the \textit{Ecole de Mines}:

It is distinctly possible that I will get myself clubbed in a \textit{pays perdu}\textsuperscript{102} without paths or known roads, neither understanding the language nor able to make myself understood and having little money and therefore being deprived of the most important means of aid should something happen.\textsuperscript{103}

The language barrier and the notion of ‘lost country’ both imply that peasant communities were not just resisting outsiders because they viewed them with suspicion, not simply because they thought outsiders were taking away their profits, but because they consciously perceived them as attempting to fundamentally gain control over their way of life, to change their strategies for staving off hunger and death, of preventing disaster. That sparked outrage long before the nineteenth century.

In fact, coalminers’ resistance to industrialization placed them at the forefront of political arguments between the sovereignty of the national government and the supremacy of the rights of private property before and during the French Revolution. In 1782, the Provincial Assembly in Haute-Guyenne, in advocating on behalf of peasant coalminers in Decazeville, argued that the state should abrogate the rights of concessionaires in favor of those who mined coal on their own property.\textsuperscript{104} During the French Revolution, a compromise in the National Assembly resulted in the passage of the Law of July 28, 1791, which stipulated that while coalmines were “at the

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. 11.
\textsuperscript{102} Here, the characterization of lost country for rural area implies both isolation and lost potential. \textit{Pays perdu} means “lost country” in French.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. 12.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. 13.
disposal of the nation,” private landowners, not the noblesse, would be given first preference when obtaining concessions to operate coalmines and/or profit from them.\textsuperscript{105}

It cannot be the case, then, that coalminers lacked a political awareness that extended beyond their isolated towns before the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{106} It was crucial to their attempts to maintain some control over their lifestyles. Protest was traditional by that point, and would become independent of those organized by labor organizations later in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{107} Coalminers’ participation in protests during the eighteenth century reflected political and social sensibilities over issues of control that continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century.

This long-view interpretation of coalminers’ strike propensity is more fully supported by theories of strike formation and worker aggression in the fields of economics, sociology and psychology. Each of these disciplines argues to one degree or another that the availability and familiarity of information to people provides fuel for igniting strike activity. Within these theoretical frameworks, isolation limits, it does not propel, the formation of worker movements because it prevents information between groups from being compared and analyzed over time.

This argument has been promulgated in theoretical models of behavioral economics developed by John Nash, John Hicks, and Frederik Zeuthen. Specifically, all three economists assert that information about an opposing party implicitly drives how and to what degree strike activity develops.\textsuperscript{108} John Hicks stated this clearly in the early 1930s: “adequate knowledge will


\textsuperscript{106} Though these areas were often hard to travel to and from, the fact that people still did do so gives sufficient reason to question the degree to which peasant communities were isolated.

\textsuperscript{107} Michelle Perrot estimates that since their inception, labor unions played no part in 71 percent of all strikes in France during the nineteenth century. See Michelle Perrot, Workers on Strike, 1871-1890. 31.

always make a settlement possible." In recent years, these theoretical foundations have evolved into joint-cost perspectives and private information models of strike formation. The joint-cost perspective "suggests that strikes tend to occur more frequently when events increase uncertainty and divergent expectations." The private information model asserts that strikes occur in order to decrease the asymmetry of information available to the parties involved. It is only through the bargaining process during strikes that this information is spread to both parties. Again, both views rely implicitly on the availability of information to key players.

Information is also the key to the sociological model of workers’ inclinations to strike. Carol Connell and Samuel Cohen have crafted three hypotheses relative to French coalminers that rely exclusively on information availability:

1.) Coalminers may generally fail to strike because they lack information of potentially favorably environmental changes.

2.) Strikes in other workplaces provide information that such change has occurred.

3.) Strikes produce imitative striking, because the historical information carried in the stimuli strike induces workers to become aware of their own strategic opportunities.

From a sociological view, strikes are essentially formed and coordinated types of information processing, wherein the chronicity of strike occurrence is developed by the input of information from workers’ grievances or other strikes over time, and where the success of former strikes establishes the collective self-efficacy of the group that keeps their aggression directed towards a source of agitation, effectively forming the behavioral output which results.

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Psychologists have confirmed what economists and sociologists have shown. Group behaviors are exercises in types of social learning. This is detailed by Social Cognition Theory, as psychologist Susan Fiske summarizes: “Social cognition reflects the importance of humans as adaptive social beings, evolved to focus on other people, to *imitate* behavior, *discern* intent, *cooperate* together, and *learn* symbol systems.” Social learning is adapting by exposure and reaction. It is dependent on the outcome of a behavior relative to the person’s appraisal of its success after completing it. Alfred Bandura, the field’s pioneer researcher and theorist, makes explicit the significance of cognition in behavioral action within a given environment: “Much human behavior is regulated by forethought embodying cognized goals, and personal goal setting is influenced by self-appraisal of capabilities. The stronger their self-perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goals people set for themselves.” Put very simply, social action begets social reaction, and the pattern of reaction is reliant not only on what information is available to the parties involved, but how that information is perceived and processed individually and collectively.

But there is a danger of misinterpretation here. Social Cognition Theory implies that organized labor protests happen mainly because individuals within the group feel that such protests will succeed, and that success is predicated on their appraisals of concurrent and previous social conditions and social movements. It does not necessarily specify that such behaviors must have succeeded in the past in order for the behavior to reoccur. In fact, economic historian Gerald Friedman wrongly argues that “a revolutionary labor movement flourished in France because strikes…succeeded” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many

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strikes did not succeed, and Friedman’s view neglects the 46% failure rate of partial coalmining strikes from 1890 to 1899, and the 33% failure rate in 1904.\textsuperscript{116} It also ignores the more than two-thirds of metalworker strikes that failed from 1913 to 1914.\textsuperscript{117} In light of this, Samuel Cohen reasons that, “If anything, it was more advantageous to be a loser rather than a winner” in the coalmining industry because “workers’ willingness to engage in a desperate struggle…may communicate a posture of bona fide militancy that may induce future managers to make more generous concessions.”\textsuperscript{118} The mass walk-offs which resulted from Courrières, in other words, may not have had a downside for workers, regardless of whether they expected the strike to succeed or not. They still appeared engaged in a larger historical narrative of miners’ subjugation before money-hungry, neglectful capitalists, of fighting fate and gaining greater control over their lives in the process.

These theories collectively elucidate the quick development and proliferation of often-violent strikes in the French coalmining industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of which Courrières would be considered an example, and they are indeed supported by historical evidence around the time of the disaster at Courrières. In their statistical analysis of strike activity in the French coal mining industry from 1890 to 1935, Conell and Cohn found that mining strikes overwhelmingly triggered other strikes, with one of their models suggesting that a stimulus from one strike could produce over seven imitated strikes elsewhere in France during the pre-World War I period in France.\textsuperscript{119} Indeed, the large proliferation of strike responses to Courrières implies that at some level, strikes were being seen and imitated by others. Michelle

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid. 92.
\textsuperscript{119} Carol Conell and Samuel Cohn. "Learning from other people's actions: environmental variation and diffusion in French coal mining strikes, 1890-1935." 389, 398-401.
Perrot argues that emotionally-based responses also fed spontaneity and imitation in strike formation by the late nineteenth century: “It [the defensive strike] flares up as a kind of shocked emotional response, in which the how—manner and tone—counts for as much as the why of the ostensible grievance…which unleashes a whole series of accumulated resentments.”

It is not difficult to discern how shock and horror witnessed at Courrières, which was spread throughout France by media sources literally hours after the disaster, could have initiated an emotional response that brought up other grievances from coal miners.

Even with all of this, though, a crucial facet of coalminers’ later propensity to strike which ties their responses to Courrières to past protests has not yet been fully appreciated in the literature, and that is the fundamental issue of safety to their sense of control over their work. The violent strike in October of 1867 in Decazeville provides a good example. Though the goal of that strike was to earn an increase in pay after two wage reductions that year, its genesis, the event which sparked coalminers to move from the mine to the picket line, came when the director of the company ordered a locked iron grill placed in front of the entrance to a pit in order to prevent workers from arriving or leaving late. The move violated standard safety practices, and a short time later, coalminers tore the grill down. Later, they won a major victory as a result of their demonstrations: the company rescinded the wage reductions, the company director resigned, and a state mining engineer took control of the mine for the purposes of restoring order and ensuring worker safety. The state prosecutor of the case made clear that “if the grill had not been installed… the workers very likely would not have protested the wage reductions.”

120 Michelle Perrot, Workers on strike: France 1871-1890. 16-17.
121 Donald Reid, “The role of mine safety in the development of working-class consciousness and organization: The case of the Aubin Coal Basin, 1867-1914.” 102.
122 Ibid. 102.
123 Ibid. 102.
It might be argued here that the issue of safety was used only as a means by which strikers could successfully negotiate for wage increases. Actually, this was an argument made during the strikes surrounding Courrières. According to *La Croix*, in a negotiation meeting with company and labor representatives four days after the disaster, “Representatives of companies, referring to Arras Conventions and the 1902 arbitration, declare that nothing in the current situation of the coal industry justifies immediate [increases in] wages, but only in the presence of [the] painful events that have just occurred and in order to ensure the public peace.” This transpired only after the disaster had occurred. The presence of a legitimate safety issue preceded, it did not become apparent during or as a result of wage negotiations. At Decazeville in 1867, safety concerns were apparent before parties negotiated wage increases. The issue of safety provided the opportunity and the justification for a change in compensation, but if safety problems were only a negotiating tool, if they were solely a ruse to earn more money, then the issue would likely have been factored into key players’ overall negotiating platform after negotiations began, not before.

Comparatively, the relationship between safety and coalminers’ wages was evident even earlier in Britain. In an 1831 published address, William Scott attempted to describe candidly the conditions of coalminers in Northumberland and Durham: “The poor man who breaks stones upon the highways is generally able to earn more money with much less labour, and without any risk of life or limb, than the Slave-driven Pitman gets for encountering all the dangers and toils inseparable from his employment.” A couple of years later, a member of Parliament from

125 Given the camaraderie that miners felt towards each other while at work (see footnote 133 and page 36), it does not seem likely that a coalminer would purposefully subject themselves and their fellow workers to the threat of injury and death by purposefully causing and/or allowing a safety issue to develop in order to jumpstart wage negotiations.
126 William Scott, *An Earnest Address and Urgent Appeal to the People of England in Behalf of the Oppressed and Suffering Pitman, of the Counties of Northumberland and Durham, with a Glance at a Few of The Grievances of*
Finsbury, an area of Middlesex north of London, maintained the following in regards miners’ rationale for striking: “There was no question of the wages involved [in the strike]. It was a question of personal safety of the men.”¹²⁷

Likewise, French coalminers’ grievances often did legitimately revolve around issues of safety. In 1883, the prefect of Villefranche-de Rouergue wrote, “The workers complain that the state engineers’ visits are much too rare.”¹²⁸ By 1890, worker-elected délégués de la sécurité¹²⁹ were placed at active coalmine sites in France after the legislature passed a bill introduced by Émile Basly, the same man who gave the impassioned eulogy at Courrières, and Jean Jaurès, a legislator and founder of the Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) in 1905.¹³⁰ Wage increases did not chiefly influence the bill or the legal function of safety delegates. The positions were created by law to “report all points related to worker safety” during mine inspections and to provide coalminers with their own representation in safety matters, which, apart from labor negotiations, was the only legally-mandated representation that French coalminers had at the time.¹³¹

When historical changes in the lives of miners are considered along with this, it is possible to understand why safety amplified miners’ responses to the Courrières disaster. As they lost the degrees of control they held over their lives over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth

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¹²⁸ In French, mining safety delegates.

¹²⁹ See Ibid. 214.


¹³¹ Given the already established precedent of coalminers’ participation in political debates, the fact that the issue of safety would gain prominence among them in the nineteenth century is a telling indication of the increasing importance of safety to coalminers. See Ibid. 214.
centuries, as their families transformed from peasants to workers, safety became the one issue over which miners could successfully exercise control within the mines. Many felt that it made everyone who entered into the ground an equal. César Danglot made this point in his reflections on Courrières: “Engineers, foremen, and laborers, they all give a friendly hello when they are about to arrive. When one is buried 300 meters underground and fraternity is required, he considers others as comrades and as mutual supporters.” Safety was a real issue for French coalminers, and like past protests related to issues of coalminers’ control over their livelihoods, it often went hand-in-hand with their participation in strike activity.

In conclusion, with all of these contexts considered, it is clear that French coalminers’ reactions to Courrières extended beyond the disaster itself to the issue of control that they held over their lives. While it is undeniable that other issues such as fears of retribution for not participating in strikes or memories of the Commune played roles in determining whether or not a coalminer could or would strike after Courrières, on a family and individual level, the genesis of their reaction was historically rooted. Many coalminers’ descendants had used coal as a strategy of survival for avoiding the effects of hunger and poverty. Their lives depended on coalmining, and when their control over it was threatened, they took to protest. But as miners became increasingly constrained in their capacity to live their lives in the ways they saw fit, as they lost the ability to individually negotiate how much money they made, where they worked, whom they worked for, and what profession they entered, coalminers’ dependence on their safety became a battleground of control with coal companies. Those battles were fought with collective action, with organized protests honed by habitual historical actions over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because Courrières so obviously and profoundly

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signified that their safety was threatened, coalminers responded with the same quickness and ferocity that characterized their historical participation in strikes. It characteristically justified the revelation of other long-held grievances, and not just for themselves. By then, many believed that fate had brought their family into their circumstances. If they could not fully escape it, then maybe, if they could somehow prevent another catastrophe like Courrières, with all of its ramifications for their families, perhaps their pasts, their fate, and the fate of their children, could be improved. Maybe they could finally transcend their limitations.
PARIS, MARCH 13, 1906

At 2:10 p.m. on March 13, 1906, Paul Doumer, President of France’s National Assembly, walked up to the wooden rostrum perched before his fellow deputies during a two-hour meeting in its inner main chambers.

1 The following is a transcript of his speech:

Gentlemen,

The terrible disaster of Courrières mine, which only throws confusion into the coal basin of northern France, touched the heart the whole country.

Its representatives cannot but deeply feel the pity and common pain, and in association with the misfortunate state of so many families, make this immense private mourning a national mourning.

We are in the presence of one of the most appalling calamities that ever befell the world of work; the horrible plague that has already [caused] so much harm to the workers of mines, and that science thought it had mastered, [has] mowed down, in one day, hundreds of human lives.

We respectfully salute these unfortunate victims, obscure and brave soldiers of the struggle that man supports to grasp nature’s strengths and wealth; heroes whose hard work is the key, the very basis of this modern civilization.

They died in their daily work, resolutely and courageously accepting its rude weariness and perils; they died with duty and honor.

I am sure to be the interpreter of the unanimous members of the House, by sending their families and their friends the expression of our painful sympathy.2

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2 Ibid.1; Note how Doumer connects Courrières to a type of natural disaster: the plague.
Immediately following the applause, Julien Goujon, another legislator, made a motion for the Assembly to adopt the following resolution:

The House, deeply moved by the catastrophe that meets the grieving working population of the Courrières mines, [gives] her address expressing her very deep and sympathetic sentiments and hopes that a general movement of solidarity will respond effectively to help the families of victims.\(^3\)

The measure passed unanimously with a vote of 534.\(^4\)

But hope, sympathy, and solidarity did not fill the thoughts of everyone in Paris. In an editorial for *Gil Blas*, a newspaper known for its support of mining workforces and the artists who portrayed them,\(^5\) Eugène Destez provided another commentary:

I still see in my eyes the atrocious scenes that took place before me at gates before the Sallaunines pits. I saw in those terrible hours of those last two nights that I was in an atmosphere of anxiety that gripped the entire population, that weighed on both darkness and terrible unease.

And in spite of myself, I asked this question: Who bears the legal responsibility for this carnage? – Whose widows and orphans, whose numbers figure well into certainly several thousand, are entitled to [deal with] broken lives, not to mention material damages, as the law and the insurance companies have paid blood money to package?\(^6\)

It was a question that many in Paris were pondering as well. Albert Thomas, a reporter writing for *L’Humanité*, a socialist newspaper, considered, “We wonder with anxiety if once again the bitter desire for capitalist profit had not neglected essential precautions….if it was the greed of shareholders for dividends to which the Courrières proletarians were sacrificed.”\(^7\) He went on to imply that the Courrières Company had been negligent, citing a miner safety delegate


\(^5\) *Gil Blas* published from 1884 to 1885 a serialized format Zola’s *Germinal* before its full publication. See Émile Zola, *Germinal*. trans. by Peter Collier. (Oxford University Press, 1998), xiv.


\(^7\) “La catastrophe de Courrières,” *La Humanité*. March 14, 1906, 1.
report published a little over a week before the disaster that described “a stuffiness that prevailed in many veins…” 8 Thomas claimed that, “In all the villages where I went, I have heard similar statements. We knew that for several days, the mine was bad.” 9 These rumors led multiple newspapers to conclude quickly that the source of the disaster was “a gas explosion likely caused by a fire that had existed for a few days at Pit 3.” 10

The workers section of the Socialist party in Paris, however, had another interpretation of what had caused the disaster: “This is not [caused by] carbon monoxide or firedamp, this is [caused by] capital.” 11 A representative for the political party hoped that the day would come “when the company is not the master of its mines, and there are no more accidents to dread.” 12 With many similar opinions running rampant throughout the Paris media, Albert Thomas was able to reach a conclusion of his own: “Yes, here is a capitalist crime.” 13

In the meantime, rescue operations at the site of the disaster were being reformulated. Multiple journalists communicated on March 12 that rescue work was suspended indefinitely in order to accommodate a private meeting of the chief engineers overseeing the operations. At that closed-door meeting, a majority of the engineers decided to take fresh, aboveground air that was being blown by ventilation fans into pits 2 and 3 and divert it into pit 4 in order to facilitate the safer exploration of pits 4 through 11. 14 But, there was concern among some present that doing so would force bad air into pit 3, essentially killing any possible survivors left there. 15 Both the New York Times and the London Times reported that survivors had been banging on pipes in pit

8 Thomas is referring here to a specific report on a fire that ignited in Pit 3 about a week before the disaster. See Ibid. 1.
12 Ibid. 1.
13 “La catastrophe de Courrières”, La Humanité March 14, 1906, 2.
14 Charles Emile Heurteau, La catastrophe de Courrières (Paris : H. Dunod et E. Pinat,1906), 40
15 W.N. Atkinson and H. Cunyngham, Report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the methods of preventing falls of roof adopted at the Courrières Collieries, by four of His Majesty’s Mining Inspectors. 10.
3, but that the noises had subsided during the evening of March 11th. Rescue workers ultimately went through with the plan, and though the decision was later deemed the correct and necessary one to make in the official report on the disaster, the continuing secretion of information about slow, seemingly half-hearted rescue efforts at Courrières to the news media did not help stem the growing tide of public discontent in the north. At one point, a group of women shouted at rescue workers, “If you gave us your pants and tools then we would’ve [actually] saved our husbands and sons!”

Meanwhile, the loss of life was becoming all the more apparent. Méricourt, a small coron a few miles outside of Courrières, was particularly affected. One correspondent for the fairly conservative daily newspaper La Journal des débats politiques et littéraires wrote, “I declare that during the entire night not one man has returned. In some workers’ houses, one counts four or five deaths.” M. Villant, the priest of the snow-smothered town, described the predicaments of some families: “he quotes us the case of a woman who lost seven people and was left with nine orphans, another loses three brothers, five step-brothers, and four nephews. M. Elin watches his four sons and son-in-law [all] disappear.” In many areas like Lens, victims’ houses were “marked with a black cross and a sprig of boxwood tied with a ribbon.” In all, 1,099 coalminers—1056 Frenchmen and 43 Belgians—never returned to their homes in some 29 different coron on March 11. As one journalist concluded, “There was death on every door.”

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17 W.N. Atkinson and H. Cunyngham, Report to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department on the Disaster which occurred at Courrières Mine, Pas de Calais, France, on March 10th, 1906. 10.
19 See Appendices Section II.
21 Ibid. 4.
23 Charles Emile Heurteau, La catastrophe de Courrières, 47.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Méricourt</td>
<td>404</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Montigny-en-Gohelle</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athues</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Neuville-Vitasse</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avion</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Neuvireuil</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bailleul-sur Berthoult</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Noyelles-sous-Lens</td>
<td>102</td>
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<td>Beaurains</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Oppy</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Billy-Montigny</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>Rouvry</td>
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<td>Bourges</td>
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<td>Sailly-la-Bourse</td>
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<td>Farbus</td>
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<td>Saint-Laurent-Blangy</td>
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<td>Willerval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loison-sous-Lens</td>
<td>22</td>
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Figure X: Geographic Spread of Deaths

With all of these incidents occurring, in some cases simultaneously, the fear of upheaval in the north was very real. *La Lanterne* reported that “a certain [public] anxiety…is somewhat disturbing authorities.”

Four days after the disaster, before the ensuing strikes had even begun, Émile Basly, who himself represented a French coalminers’ union, was chairing an emergency meeting with company directors and union officials at the behest of the newly appointed Minister of the Interior, Georges Clemenceau, in order “to review with delegates the claims of trade unions.” After five hours of deliberations, the meeting was postponed until a new date could be set for a larger conference between labor delegates and company officials in the Pas-de-Calais. It was clear by their actions that they expected strikes to inevitably develop.

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25 Adapted from Charles Emile Heurteau, *La catastrophe de Courrières*, 47.
28 Ibid. 1.
Immediately following the meeting, Basly travelled by overnight train to Paris, where he met with the state administrators on the Mining Commission and dined with key political figures of the National Assembly. Then, following a 14-hour opening session of the Chamber of Deputies, Basly mounted a podium and announced that he had since learned that strikes at Ostricourt and Dourges had commenced. According to a summation of the events by Henri Bourdon, Basly warned the Chamber that strikes “will spread if the government is not careful,” affirming before the room, “I believe that at present it is the duty of the Government to do everything dependent on it to avoid a strike that would cause misery among workers and have a severe impact on this country’s affairs, as at this time, not one hectoliter of coal [is] on mine grounds.”

How did the state react to this? How did it navigate its way through the disaster and its ensuing strikes? What was the government’s response to strikers’ demands? To answer these questions, it is first important to examine the general political situation in which French government found itself before Courrières in addition to the nature of the government’s historical relationship with coal companies and unions. The multiple approaches that France employed during the disaster and its subsequent strikes can be more easily followed and understood because of this. Crucially, what will be revealed is that the state’s reaction to the disaster fundamentally altered the trajectory of the labor movement in France in ways that historians have not yet appreciated.

To begin with, the disaster and the labor upheaval following it came at a chaotic and tense period in the history of French statecraft. A year prior to March of 1906, France was at the brink of war with Germany over the sovereignty of Morocco. In early 1905, the French government

29 Ibid. 4. The mining grounds, written in French as carreaux des mines, literally translates as “mining tiles.” It refers to the ground on which company coal facilities were placed. Basly is essentially stating that coal production in the north was coming to a halt in the wake of the disaster and strikes.
ordered troops and artillery to its borders with Germany. But behind closed doors, top French
officials were worried that France’s military would be the weaker of the two nations if battle did
break out. The French Prime Minister, Maurice Rouvier, bluntly said as much at a contentious
cabinet meeting in June of 1905: “Now, are we in a position to fight a war? Evidently not! Our
forts in the east are in need of refurbishment, our armaments likewise…Morale is bad in the
army.”

Negotiations seemed the only viable alternative to armed conflict, for the situation was
dire enough for Rouvier to worry that if negotiations did not ease tensions, “Our military
condition and the condition of the country would lead us to defeat and to the Commune.”

When the Courrières disaster happened, the French government was preparing for renewed talks with
German representatives at an international conference in Algeciras, Spain.

During that same period of time, the effects of the Dreyfus affair were still ricocheting
throughout France. The Law of December 9, 1905 established a legal basis for the separation of
church and state, and despite a favorable response from a majority of French bishops, the
Vatican denounced the legislation by calling it a “spoliation” in the papal encyclical *Vehementer
Nos,* published in February of 1906. Skirmishes between Catholics and anti-clericals
unsurprisingly persisted as France began its inventory of church assets, with one riot in early
1906 resulting in the death of a police officer in Brittany. At another incident in southern
France, 100 devout Catholics, mostly women, avoided authorities by barricading themselves in
the local parish church for four days.

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32 Leslie Derfler, *The Dreyfus Affair.* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 60.
To make matters more complicated, the explosion at Courrières came when the French government was in the midst of an internal political transition. Armand Fallières had been elected as President of the French Republic in January, and with mounting pressure from political groups such as the pro-clerical Action libérale populaire (ALP) party, along with slower than expected movement in negotiations with Germany, the Rouvier ministry collapsed on March 7th. Two days after the disaster at Courrières, Ferdinand Sarrien, a moderate leftist, ascended to the ministry and appointed Georges Clemenceau as the Minister of the Interior. Clemenceau was immediately tasked to join Fernand Dubief in Lens and to take over state operations from there. Courrières therefore presented a new challenge to a new government already in the midst of significant challenges.

Clemenceau appeared to be, from a worker’s standpoint, the ideal state actor to handle the crisis. In the 1880s, Clemenceau had written an article titled “The Right to Strike,” wherein he vehemently protested the exploitation of labor and class in French coalmines:

The state gives to some sleek, well-to-do bourgeois immense coalfields below ground. These fine fellows turn to men less well-dressed than themselves, but who are men all the same, men with the same wants, the same feelings, the same capacity for enjoyment and suffering, and say: ‘We grant to you subsistence; sink us some pits in the earth; go below and bring us up coal, which we will sell at a good price’… Economists argue, to begin with, that the state has no right to interfere in the relations between miners and mine-owners. The mine-owner is at home on his own property… But no sooner does a strike happen, that the state, which five minutes ago had no right to interfere, is called

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35 The ALP was essentially a Catholic political party and thought Rouvier’s ministry was ineffectual in handling and listening to pro-clerical arguments and demonstrations.
37 His appointment to the Ministry of the Interior had come as a surprise, as Clemenceau had steadfastly refused every governmental position that he had been offered beforehand. See John Hampden Jackson, *Clemenceau and the Third Republic*. (Hodder & Stoughton limited, 1946), 133.
39 Clemenceau is referring here to the concession system, which, while very different from that of the eighteenth century, nevertheless enabled descendants of the nobility to hold on to coal company properties. Many families who held a concession before the French Revolution still held that concession after the Napoleonic Empire. See Marcel Gillet. *Les charbonnages du Nord de la France au XIXe siècle*. (Vol. 8. Mouton, 1973), 465-467.
upon to bring in horse, foot, and artillery on the side of the coal-owners. Then the miners have no rights left.40

Following the release of a state-commissioned report in 1885 describing the subpar living and working conditions of coalminers at Anzin, Clemenceau argued in the Chamber of Deputies that the Anzin Company’s role in suppressing strikes was like that of “an Orleanist company against the republic…to prove to all the miners of the Nord that the Republic is powerless to protect them.”41 Such was Clemenceau’s resultant clout among labor leaders that Basly reacted to his ascendancy to the ministry in 1906 by affirming that he had “full confidence in his friend Clemenceau, recalling the latter’s report on the Anzin strike in 1885.”42

Clemenceau’s past advocacy of workers’ rights did seem to impact his initial approach to Courrières within his new capacity as the man in charge of practically keeping peace within France. After travelling to Arras by train, Clemenceau arrived at Lens in a car with his brother, Albert, and a well-known French journalist, Georges Labruyère, on March 19. After a short meeting with Basly, he announced his intention to a group of labor representatives, including Pierre Monatte, a founder of the Confédération générale du travail (CGT), to send only small numbers of troops to the north, whose presence would ideally go “unnoticed” and would be in the region solely to help the local police and to protect workers and company facilities from rioters.43

The need for troops seemed unavoidable by that point. Clemenceau and other labor leaders were aware that over 46,000 mining workers were already on strike, and as those numbers

40 Henry Mayers Hyndman, Clemenceau, the Man and His Time. (FA Stokes, 1919), 193-194.
43 Ibid. 72.
continued to rise, so too did the threat of violence.\textsuperscript{44} During the nights, groups of renegade strikers had taken to hunting and harassing coalminers who were still continuing to work, commonly referring to them as \textit{rouffions, brosses-blanches, blanches-oreilles, or bras cassés}.\textsuperscript{45} A reporter for \textit{La Croix} described one scene: “Numerous bands of strikers were circulating around, some with red flags [on their head] and [sounding] bugles.”\textsuperscript{46} Even labor representatives were concerned about tensions escalating out of their own control. Delegates for labor unions had continued to hold back-to-back emergency meetings as strikes spread to Lens, Liévin, and Carvin while Basly was in Paris, to the point that the intensification of those protests was even “surprising union officials.”\textsuperscript{47}

After the meeting, Clemenceau proceeded down the street to address strikers gathered in the town center, who welcomed his presence with shouts of, “Long live the strike!”\textsuperscript{48} In his off-the-cuff address, however, Clemenceau took a much more state-minded stance:

\begin{quote}
The Government of the Republic intends to enforce the law for all. The law is the law; under a democratic government, everyone must bow to her and obey her. Ministers and the President of the Republic are subject to the laws as ordinary citizens…If you have the freedom to strike, there is also the freedom to work, as respectable as [it is] valuable…Respect the freedom of others. Try to persuade with reason; do not influence them with violence. Do not use force. Prove to the French country that you deserve the confidence we place in you and you deserve the liberty you are given.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

He gave something to practically everyone in this politically neutral oration, and it clearly reflects his role as that of sympathetic mediator rather than a sharp-tongued legislator.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{44} Robert G. Neville "The Courrières colliery disaster, 1906." 43.
\textsuperscript{46} “Les Grèves,” \textit{La Croix}, March 20, 1906, 2.
\textsuperscript{47} Henri Bourdon. \textit{Billy-Montigny au coeur de la catastrophe minière de 1906}. 72.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. 77.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. 77-78.
\textsuperscript{50} Clemenceau had a reputation for helping initiate changes in ministries, such that an opinion writer in the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} attested upon the announcement of his appointment: “He [Clemenceau] is just as young in mind and body as he was thirty years ago, when he overthrew, one after the another, conservative, and even republican, ministries. We are now going to see the practical work of the indefatigable critic and will see the demolisher..."
But for all of his caution and his good relations with labor leaders, Clemenceau’s approach did not go unchallenged. In the March 19 meeting, the deputy mayor of Liévin, Léon Plouvier, pointedly argued with Clemenceau that any troop presence would only further agitate strikers: “If there are no soldiers, there will be no disturbances.” Clemenceau quickly replied, “You will not see bayonets… we [the state] will enforce the freedom to work with the same energy that we bring to enforce the right to strike. They are equal rights.” Not convinced, Benedict Broutchoux, an influential anarchist who had previously opposed the old miners’ union that Basly had controlled in 1902, claimed that Clemenceau’s plans amounted to a political ploy: construct something instead of tearing something down.” See “Light on French Cabinet,” Chicago Daily Tribune, March 18, 1906, B1.


Henri Bourdon. Billy-Montigny au coeur de la catastrophe minière de 1906. 78.

Ibid. 77.
“We’ll see if he keeps his word.” An editor for *Le Temps* had similar, albeit more positive thoughts on Clemenceau’s actions: “The future will tell us if Clemenceau’s confidence is well-justified or if he is not too optimistic.” Everyone got their answer five days later when crowds of coalminers “finally disillusioned, cried ‘Down with Clemenceau!’” whilst they marched in the streets of cities and villages throughout northern France.

Still, given the history of coalminers’ militancy and pressure from Paris to “use all means to ensure order” in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, Clemenceau’s reluctance to deploy troops to Courrières was unusual. Cohen points out, quite correctly, that “the government usually responded to coal strikes with full military protection for the mines” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was in the economic interest of the government to protect its mining infrastructure and the populations who worked in it. Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly support this claim, noting that, “Strike data suggest that the government’s main preoccupation in labor relations was the preservation of public order, rather than the strangulation of working-class political movements.” In this context, the use of few troops was actually more risky from the state’s economic point of view.

If Clemenceau’s hesitancy with his use of troops was atypical, if even a reflection of a worker-friendly attitude, then why did many labor leaders find his approach objectionable? The answer is quite simple: many administrators of labor organizations had an almost pathological

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54 Ibid. 76; Jean-Claude Rabier, and Hubert Cukrowicz. La remonte: le bassin minier du Nord-Pas de Calais, entre passé et avenir. (Presses Univ. Septentrion, 2002), 85.
57 Henri Bourdon. *Billy-Montigny au coeur de la catastrophe minière de 1906*. 69.
60 It should also be noted that at this point, troops in France would not have been stretched thin if they were needed at Courrières given that negotiations with Germany were already underway.
mistrust of the government, regardless of who was representing it. This in large part stemmed from the past tribulations that many of them had experienced first-hand during and after the Paris Commune of 1871, which represented a major setback for France’s labor movement. In the state’s attempt to regain control of Paris, and also seek revenge on those who had brought about the event, 100,000 workers were temporarily left unemployed, labor organizations were legally abolished, 20,000 people died inside the city, more than 40,000 others were arrested, and by 1875, military courts had sentenced 10,000 people, many of whom were prominent labor organizers, to death. The national government had heavy oversight of union reorganization, which in turn affected the degree to which labor groups could associate with each other. Conservatives in the National Assembly drafted the Dufaure Bill, which imposed severe penalties on anyone who assisted with any “international association…that seeks to incite work

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61 The Paris Commune was a type of revolutionary socialist government that ruled Paris between March and May of 1871. Following the collapse of the Second Empire, the French became embroiled in war with Prussia, who bombarded Paris with a four-month siege. It was during this time that revolutionary radicals were essentially able to gain control of Paris in the form of the National Guard, who defended and governed the city, but then had to face an embarrassed national government of France, and the French Army. Administration and policies of the Commune government were based on socialist principles and included policies such as the separation of church and state, the return of workmen’s tools used during the siege to workmen, and the right of employees to take over companies that had been deserted by their original owners. For reference, see Gluckstein, Donny. *The Paris Commune: A revolution in democracy.* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014.)


63 There were multiple types of labor organizations in France, so it may be helpful here to summarize them. The labor union is synonymous with trade union, though some early European and American sources may use trade union to refer to a profession-specific organization and labor union to refer to an organization that invites all types of workers into its membership. This thesis treats them as synonyms. The more often quoted definition of a trade union comes from Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who write that, “A trade union… is a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives.” A trade union could have a specific trade as the focus of the organization, such as the London Tailors’ Union or the Union of Silk Merchants in Paris, and it could also be a general worker organization, such as the CGT. Trade unions were could be tied to political parties, such as the SFIO in France. See Panday Sinha, Rajendra Narain, Indu Bala Sinha, and Seema Priyadarshini Shekhar. *Industrial Relations, Trade Unions, and Labour Legislation.* (Pearson, 2013), 1. and Madeleine Rebérioux, “Les tendances hostiles à l’Etat dans la SFIO (1905-1914),” *Le mouvement social* (1968): 21-37.
stoppages, to abolish property rights, the family, [and/or] religion.”

In fact, it was only in 1884 that French trade unions were legally recognized by the French State.

Because of this, the ideology of many trade unionists during the 1890s developed from a mentalité that was anti-parliamentarian and augmented by the belief that to build class-consciousness was to do so through class struggle. In other words, by 1906, the philosophies at root in anarcho-syndicalism were already reflected in the behaviors of labor organizations.

According to social historian Val Rogin Lorwin, anarcho-syndicalists, like many Marxists and socialists, “saw the government as merely an agency of the ruling class, a tool of the employers.” Victor Griffuelhes, who became the general secretary of the anarcho-syndicalist-led Confédération générale du travail (CGT) in 1900, would later argue following the strikes of 1906 that the group’s ideology was “not determined by any formulas or theoretical [political] aspirations…It has consisted simply of a series of daily efforts, attached to the efforts of the day before not by rigorous continuity but only by the environment and state of mind of the working class.”

For anarcho-syndicalists, direct action was the preferred methodology of expressing the working class “state of mind.” In a published pamphlet on direct action, Émile Pouget, who would serve as vice secretary of the CGT from 1901 to 1908, wrote:

65 Ibid. 62.
66 Anarcho-syndicalism is also used interchangeably with revolutionary syndicalism and syndicalism in the literature.
67 Marx and Engles were major influences in the push towards anti-parliamentarianism and the gradual emergence of internalization in trade unions. See this discussion in Chapter 3, page 81.
68 Crucial here is that many radicals in labor organization were distrustful even of governmental socialists, which Clemenceau represented, because, “the socialists were no better than the rest; perhaps worse. Claiming to represent labor, they diverted workers from the real issues, and dropped their cause after they had arrived through their votes.” It’s not difficult, in this context to see why Clemenceau would have been viewed with suspicion. See Val Rogin Lorwin, The French labor movement. (Harvard University Press, 1954), 30-31.
“Direct Action means that the working class is reclaiming the ideals of freedom and autonomy instead of folding under the principle of authority. Now, thanks to the principle of authority, the pivot of the modern world, of which democracy is the last expression of humanity, chained by a thousand ties—both moral and material—is castrated of any possibility of will and initiative.”

In another pamphlet published in 1905, Pouget made explicit the ways in which anarcho-syndicalists pressured government officials with outside force:

“If improvement they demand is a matter of government action, the unions pursue their aims by mass pressures on the public authorities, not by trying to get favorably minded deputies into parliament…their means are varied, but always following the principle of direct action…Depending on the situation, they use the strike, sabotage, the boycott, the union label.”

Anarcho-syndicalism was a radical ideology led by radicals who proposed radical worker actions. It was skeptical of the state on an ideological level.

In the face of this resistance, Clemenceau and other political leaders employed another method to mitigate the effects of the disaster at Courrières on workers. This approach addressed a more emotional and humanitarian part of the situation at the time: victims’ families. The

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73 Until it united with the Bourse du Travail (BT) in 1902, the CGT was led by moderates. But because Paris unions comprised more than half of the representation at CGT congresses, and because those unions were usually loyal to Allemanists, a more radical section of the socialist party, the CGT gradually became more radical in its leadership in the early years of the twentieth century. As such, when the CGT and BT merged together in reaction to the Millerand Affair, the new CGT was directed largely by a coalition of anarchists and revolutionary socialists. The Millerand Affair occurred when the socialist Alexandre Millerand joined the same ministry as Gaston de Galifet, who many dubbed ‘the butcher of the Commune.’ That Millerand had accepted the position of Ministry of Commerce without his party’s permission and would be setting with an infamous figure like Galifet amounted to what syndicalists and even some socialists saw as an insult to the memory to those who had died in the Commune. See Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers*, 140-144 and Stephen Eric Bronner. *Socialism Unbound: Principles, Practices, and Prospects*. (Columbia University Press, 2013), 69-70. for this discussion.
Comité central de secours aux familles des victimes de la catastrophe de Courrières, a national committee formed over a series of specific orders from Clemenceau on March 21, 24, and 27, officially oversaw the organization and disbursement of relief aid to victims’ families. The person charged with chairing the committee was none other than Emilie Loubet, the former president of France who had a favorable reputation in the north and had previously chosen Clemenceau to act as an arbitrator between coal companies and workers during major strikes at Carmaux in 1895.

The Committee acted as a type of political tool. It opened multiple subscription lists in several newspapers, banks, schools, etc. Monies raised from all of these subscription lists in France and abroad fed back into the Committee for eventual distribution. The state was therefore able to exploit this in its public announcements. In the Comité central de secours aux familles des victimes de la catastrophe de Courrières’s report on its activities, the group expressed tremendous gratitude that a “noble emulation pushed all classes of society to repair as far as possible the physical consequences of disaster...The disaster had...at least the effect of... a national movement of solidarity, of human solidarity.” While human sympathy and interest undoubtedly played some role in the organization and operation of the committee, it is also clear that the need to appear sympathetic and engaged, to seem united in mitigating the suffering incurred at Courrières, had the political benefit, especially with the Moroccan Crisis and Dreyfus Affair looming in the political background, of practically showing that the French government was interested in the welfare of its citizens, of de-escalating challenging situations. It at very

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74 The Central Committee for the Relief of the Families of Victims of the Courrières Catastrophe.
77 Comité central de secours aux familles des victimes de la catastrophe de Courrières (10 mars 1906), Compte rendu des opérations du comité. 5, 8.
least did so better than sending troops into the north.

This argument gains some credence on the fact that the government of France usually did not pre-occupy itself with this type of humanitarian work. While *listes de souscriptions* were not uncommon, the use of them by the state as a means of maintaining centrality over the construction of industrial disaster relief was unique at Courrières. Typically, local municipalities or state-level organizations opened a subscription list in order to raise money for some public project. For example, a subscription list was opened to raise funds to pay for the erection of a statue of the French commander Beaurepaire in 1884. Another one was used to support the construction of the Pasteur Institute, a hospital specializing in rabies treatments. The first mention of a national subscription list for a man-made disaster occurs in 1887, when a fire gutted the *Opéra Comique* building in Paris during a performance of *Mignon*, killing 60 and injuring 43. The national government, however, had no major role in collecting those funds. That was left up to insurance companies and the city of Paris. It did, however, open national subscription lists to raise money for victims of an earthquake in the south of France in 1887 and to rebuild areas following a hurricane which ravaged the French Caribbean colony of Martinique in 1892, but these were not industrial disasters. Courrières was exclusive in the history of the French state’s interest in industrial disaster relief.

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78 The ‘tradition’ of the subscription list didn’t even originate from the state. It likely parallels much earlier medieval church briefs, which were issued by the Pope calling on churches to raise funds for a given project, such as to repair a damaged building or to pay the ransoms of Christian captives in the Holy Land. Although it’s unclear when it came into use in France, it is clear that the subscription was in use by the state in the nineteenth century. See Wayne Neely, *The Great Hurricane of 1780: The Story of the Greatest and Deadliest Hurricane of the Caribbean and the Americas*. (iUniverse, 2012), 215.

79 “Partie non officielle,” *Journal officiel de la République française. Lois et décrets*. March 26, 1884. 1649, 1653.


Despite this, the government’s humanitarian effort did not do much to assuage the unrest in northern France, as the miraculous emergence of 13 survivors from inside the mines at Courrières on March 30 moved public anger to new proportions. By early April, parades of strikers were marching in streets carrying red flags and proclaiming, “Vive la révolution!”

Infuriated local women vocally slurred the engineers overseeing the rescue efforts: “They wanted to save the mines before saving men!” On March 31, crowds stormed gates at Billy-Montigny, with some people climbing on roofs and bridges during demonstrations. In Lens, hoards of protesters “besieged the town” for eight hours. Crowds of about 2,000 strikers jeered at miners still at work at Liévin, a coalminer in Hénin-Liétard was shot at twice while returning to his home after work, and another coalminer, a 22 year old, was blinded and almost killed when a gun was fired at him at point-blank range in Dourges. The Chicago Daily Tribune summarized the mayhem: “The rioters…destroyed everything they could get there hands on, including railway and telegraph lines, looted shops, and burned houses.”

Strikes then began spilling over into Belgium and simultaneously started flaring up in St. Etienne, Epernay, Touloune, and Paris. Perhaps by imitation or as a show of mutual support, metallurgy and steel workers, spinsters and seamstresses, chemical employees and electricians, sewer workers and postal workers all joined strikes in cities and towns across France in late March and early April. In the north, the houses of workers who still refused to strike were ransacked, their family members were kidnapped, and some were even murdered. A member of the French army, Lieutenant Lautour, was wounded in a skirmish with protesters in Lens, and

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83 Robert G. Neville, "The Courrières colliery disaster, 1906." 44.
85 Ibid. 1.
86 Ibid. 1.
87 Ibid. 1.
89 “La grève des mineurs”, La Croix. April, 16, 1906, 2.
90 Ibid. 2.
later died in a local hospital.\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Le Gaulois} went as far as to declare: “A revolution is in progress.”\textsuperscript{92}

![Figure XII: Strikers in Lens\textsuperscript{93}]

At this point, Clemenceau’s hand was basically forced. Either out of the pressing urgency of the situation, mounting political stress, a sense of personal betrayal from labor organizers, or a combination of all three, Clemenceau executed a dramatic reversal of his previous low troop level policy. He practically flooded the northern coalfields with French infantrymen to the point that there was one French soldier for every two strikers in northern France alone.\textsuperscript{94} 95,000 soldiers were stationed in the Pas-de-Calais by May.\textsuperscript{95} 20,000 of those troops surrounded the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{91} “Les grèves minières,” \textit{Journal des débats politiques et littéraire}, April 20, 1906. 1,4.
  \item \textsuperscript{92} “Les grèves révolutionnaires,” \textit{La Galo). April 20, 1906, 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{93} Postcard titled “Les Grèves du Nord-Congres du 10 Avril 1906- M. Basly rendant compte aux Grévistes de la decision de Congres” circa April, 1906. Available from [http://amismericourt.blogspot.com/2010_03_01_archive.html].
  \item \textsuperscript{94} Gerald Friedman. \textit{State-making and labor movements: France and the United States, 1876-1914}. 201.
\end{itemize}
When the CGT attempted to organize its May Day strike in Paris, which laid claim to 29 percent of all strikers during April, Clemenceau called up 34,000 troops to the city and ordered the arrest of many of the strikes’ core leaders. Suspicious of a union-media conspiracy, Clemenceau also directed the search of both the CGT’s headquarters in Paris and La Croix. It was the first time since the July Monarchy that a labor confrontation had pitted the government against labor leaders in such a dramatic fashion. In political circles, Clemenceau was suitably dubbed, “France’s Premier Cop.”

The experience clearly had a lasting impact on Clemenceau’s approach to state intervention. When he succeeded Sarrien as Prime Minister in October, one of Clemenceau’s very first acts was the creation of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, which, as he laid out in its inaugural announcement, would be responsible for “coordinating all the multiplying efforts to prepare, to facilitate, [and] to progressively recognize the many complex solutions to social problems aggravated by the lifeless state of the working masses and that state of mind that is too often the result.” Clemenceau never again hesitated to employ heavy governmental interventions in strikes. In 1908, he ordered the use of force on violent protesters at strikes in Draveil-Villeneuve-Saint Georges, which resulted in the deaths of six strikers by soldiers and police. Robert Nye, a labor historian, rightly notes, “The vigor of the government’s response to labor manifestations, on the grounds of illegality or threats to public order, increased from

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100 Robert G. Neville, "The Courrières colliery disaster, 1906." 41.
1906 to 1908.”

Courrières launched the state’s aggressive approach to future labor movements. France’s tiger was now on the prowl.

And yet, it was Clemenceau’s reversal of tactics that may have allowed labor leaders to gain more from their negotiations with coalmine owners than they otherwise would have. The CGT was already organizing for a general strike across France in May, which it had dubbed May Day, for the right to an eight-hour day, so the events at Courrières meant that leaders had to reformulate their plans in order to capitalize on the disaster. At early meetings in the days following the catastrophe, a joint group of labor officials crafted, under heavy internal scrutiny and debate, a basic outline of eight demands:

1. Set a base salary for all mining companies.
2. Increase the salary for coalminers by 15%.
3. Create a fairer and more equitable distribution of work relative to wages, and nondiscrimination policies with regard to workers’ religions, political ideologies, union affiliations, and places of residence.
4. Change company safety practices and allow greater oversight of working locations by miner safety delegates.
5. Create policies that ensure that salaries do not decrease under the set minimum wage for a working day.
6. Develop key parameters for minimum wage increases throughout the year.
7. Maintain pensions and residential rights for pensioners and widows.
8. Increase salaries for day and evening workers at coalmines.

Those demands stayed relatively the same throughout the duration of strikes. However, coalmine owners continually resisted these demands during the early meetings. Arguing that salaries could only be increased when the price of coal was higher, they agreed to temporarily increase wages by 10 percent and to consider further increases, nondiscriminatory policies, and

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104 “The Tiger” was a nickname given to Clemenceau in the late 1870s because of his aggressive style of debate in the National Assembly. See David W. Del Testa, *Government Leaders, Military Rulers and Political Activists* (Routledge, 2014), 39.

105 Note too how safety issues were intertwined with wage issues. Bourdon, Henri. *Billy-Montigny au coeur de la catastrophe minière de 1906: 1099 morts.* 70.
safety practices in January of 1908. Labor leaders rejected the proposals, and voted repeatedly in March and April to continue strikes and to buy bread and supplies for strikers. This put more pressure on company negotiators in an environment where troop levels were low, meaning that the threat that strikes would be forcibly disbanded was small.

Figure XIII: Coalminer strikers in Liévin

It was not until company officials became the target of strikers’ violence that there was forward movement in the negotiations, and by that time, companies’ and unions’ demands and expectations were already well known. There was little left to hide from the bargaining table. The only thing needed was the motivation to stay in negotiations, and that came soon enough. The *château* of the director of coal operations in Lens, Élie Reumaux, who led early discussions

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108 Fig. XIII. Black and white photograph (no title) of strikers in Liévin. Available from [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Catastrophe_de_Courrières_-_Les_mineurs_en_grève.jpg].
for companies in the *Pas-de-Calais*, was vandalized and looted on April 24.\textsuperscript{109} A week before that, strikers had used dynamite to blow up a railway line near Billy-Montigny, partially shutting off coal supplies to and from the area.\textsuperscript{110} It is probably no coincidence, then, that on May 1, with May Day threatening to only exaggerate the unrest, company officials and strike leaders entered into a two-day-long meeting in order to reach a compromise.

It is also probably not by chance that this occurred while brigades of troops were pouring into the north under the command of Eugène Étienne, the Minister of War. Company operators did not feel safe. If anything, the presence of the French army only brought the revolutionary atmosphere into reality. On April 30, one official told a reporter for *Le Journal*, “The revolutionary fervor that is being made from [such] hateful grudges is generating its success from the most frightful disasters.”\textsuperscript{111} Similarly, the presence of troops, who began arresting labor leaders of violent protests upon their arrival, did not provide any comfort to labor organizations. Additionally, a reporter for *L'Aurore* noted, “Some [strikers]…seem to want to go back to work…This continuation of unemployment has increased the pain felt by the lack of [income being generated from work].”\textsuperscript{112} With heightened hardship burdening the strikers themselves, it was also in the interest of labor organizations to resolve the situation once and for all. As the *Annual Register of World Events* in 1906 noted, “These threats [of revolution] set up an unprecedented panic, which was intensified by the measures taken by the government to prevent it.”\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} Bourdon, Henri. *Billy-Montigny au coeur de la catastrophe minière de 1906 : 1099 morts*. 104.
\textsuperscript{111} “Échappes a la catastrophe”, *Le Journal*, March 31, 1906 1.
\textsuperscript{112} “L’agitation ouvrière”, *L’Aurore*, April 25, 1906. 1.
\textsuperscript{113} *The Annual Register: A review of public events at home and abroad for the year 1906*, ed. Edmund Burke, (London: Longmans, Green, and co., 1907), 271.
On May 2, after two full nights of negotiations, labor organizers, state mediators, and company bosses reached a compromise and strikes in the north of France officially began to wind down, almost entirely without violence.\textsuperscript{114} The compromise package responded to nearly every one of the original demands that labor leaders put forth two days after Courrières, and included a moderate wage increase, the immediate forbiddance of religious, political, and union discrimination in employment practices and housing policies, assurances of changes to safety practices, and greater oversight by miner safety delegates at every coal company in France.\textsuperscript{115} On a national level, mining codes were reformed to prohibit the use of open flame lamps, to improve ventilation in mines, and to employ safer uses of explosives in coalmines and rock quarries.\textsuperscript{116}

Likewise, the aims and makeup of labor organizations were fundamentally altered as a result of state’s actions during the strikes surrounding Courrières. While the original intent of the May Day strike—the conquering of the eight-hour day\textsuperscript{117} for all French workers—failed, the road to it was made substantially more viable. At the urging of the left following the reduction of strike activity, the National Assembly passed the Law of July 13, 1906, which officially made Sunday a legal day of rest for all French workers.\textsuperscript{118} The CGT, now facing a state minister who would not hesitate in his use of force against unions, reorganized its philosophy and formally asserted it in the Charter of Amiens in October of 1906. The resolution stated quite plainly and deliberately that, “The affiliates composing the General Confederation of Labor must keep themselves separate from all schools of political thought…The convention…asks him [the member] not to

\textsuperscript{114}“Chez les mineurs”, \textit{L’Aurore} May, 3,1906. 3.  
\textsuperscript{115}Ibid. 3.  
\textsuperscript{116}Charles Emile Heurteau, \textit{La catastrophe de Courrières}, 128-135.  
\textsuperscript{117}The Law of January 5\textsuperscript{th} 1906 had set the maximum number of hours that a coal miner could work to nine, and laid out a plan to decrease by thirty minutes every two years. By 1910, miners were legally required to work no more than eight hours per day in France. See, \textit{Sessional papers}. Inventory control record 1, Volume 15 Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons, 64.  
\textsuperscript{118}Christoph Hermann, \textit{Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time}. (Routledge, 2014), 113.
bring up in the union the [political] opinions he holds.” The organization no longer had any interest in working with or even having an associations with the French government. According to labor and social historian Darrow Schechter, “Despite the many crises which the CGT was to undergo, the ideas of the Charter of Amiens remained the guiding principles of the movement.”

And yet, historians have either completely overlooked or downplayed the impact of Courrières on the state’s relation to labor and the labor movement in France. The disaster is only mentioned once in one of the seminal works of French labor history, Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly’s *Strikes in France, 1830-1968*, which merely cites it as a “trigger” to the 1906 strike wave. In Bernard Moss’s equally important work, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers*, Moss writes that, “On May Day [1906] it [the CGT] announced that henceforth no one would work more than eight hours, but only 100,000 people in Paris and isolated groups in the provinces walked off the job,” though, as Section I in the Appendices shows, more than 400,000 people participated in the strike movement in 1906, and the bulk of that movement took place between the months of March and May. The reason there were not many strikers in May, which seems to be the number that Moss uses, is because strikes were already being settled on May 2. French historian Alexander Sedgwick absolutely misses Courrières in *The Third French Republic: 1870-1914*, instead generalizing that “the waves of strikes that occurred in the 1890s and early 1900s…caused the government to respond

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with equal militancy to repress the strikes.”" Courrières is nowhere to be found in Val Regin Lorwin’s crucial book, *The French Labor Movement*, and is absent even in more recent scholarship on labor in France, such as Tony Judt’s *Marxism and the French left: Studies on Labour and Politics in France, 1830-1981*. In fact, one has to go to scholarship on the German labor movement in order to read a description of Courrières’ impact on France: “This mass slaughter [at Courrières] touches off one of the largest of all strike waves, as French proletarians conquered the eight hour day.”"124

There are therefore several misconceptions in these scholarly works that need to be addressed. Shorter and Lilly wrongly conclude that the 1906 labor movement “was the first strike led from and dominated from Paris.”"125 As this chapter makes plainly obvious, Paris did not dominate the strike wave of 1906; the entire movement was shaped by and from what was happening in the north. Substantial portions of labor negotiations happened in the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais. The discovery of 13 survivors at Courrières in April heightened the degree of unrest in those areas and spread it to other locations like Paris. Sedgwick’s assumption that the French government “responded with equal militancy to repress the strikes in the 1900’s,” is a major oversimplification. Clemenceau did not originally approach the labor movement in 1906 with militancy. It was only after the situation in the north became deadly and violent that he intervened with heavy force, and it was his experience in dealing with the strikes that sprung from reactions to the disaster at Courrières which made him so apt to employ it later as Prime Minister.

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124 Of course, the eight hour day was not conquered in 1906, but the road to it, as explained on page, was made all the more possible. Richard W Reichard. *From the petition to the strike: a history of strikes in Germany, 1869-1914*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 272.
With respect to labor unionism, Val Lorwin and Judt gloss over the origins of the Charter of Amiens. Judt claims that it was “published in the very year [1906] that its strategy was proven hopeless.”126 The CGT’s situation in 1906 was not nearly as dire as Judt makes it out to be. As has already been shown, it did gain important concessions and legislative achievements during the summer, successes that were directly related to the negotiating stances that the CGT, along with other labor organizations, had crafted in their initial responses to Courrières. Val Lorwin correctly points out that the foundation of the *Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière* (SFIO) around a doctrine of Marxist principles in 1905 put stress on the CGT to create its own, but he neglects to connect the CGT’s experiences with the protests surrounding Courrières to the Charter of Amiens. Obviously, the CGT could have adopted a resolution of its governing philosophies at its meetings in 1905 or early 1906. What set, if not confirmed, the need for a unified charter of ideological principles of political neutrality in 1906 was labor leaders’ involvement in a major governmental crackdown on their organizations from late March to early May of 1906. Further, it should be noted that the CGT’s actual decline in influence came in 1909, when, after a series of failed attempts at nation-wide strikes in 1908, the staunchly ideological leader of the CGT, Victor Griffuelhes, was replaced by the more pragmatic Louis Johaux, who advocated for “action…that is less rhetorical and romantic and more rewarding in results.”127 The transition of leadership, Clemenceau’s continued hard-lined approach to labor, and the oncoming of World War I meant that those results never came fully to fruition.

In conclusion, the French government’s reaction to Courrières and its ensuing strikes had drastic consequences on the labor movement in France. While the disaster came about while

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France was dealing with significant issues ranging from the Dreyfus Affair domestically, to the threat of war with Germany internationally, it was the catastrophe at Courrières which amounted to the first test of state leadership for the person who would lead France through World War I: Georges Clemenceau. Initially, his approach to the disaster confirmed his sympathy towards industrial workers for which he had ardently championed throughout his political career. He brought in small amounts of troops and formed a central committee to aid families of victims of the disaster at Courrières, a move unprecedented in France’s approach to disaster relief. But as resistance from labor organizations and violence approached and exceeded unparalleled levels, Clemenceau took state action to new levels, pouring troops into the north to stomp out the movement. It was a complete reversal of his initial approach, but it became the one method which he would use time and time again as Prime Minister. This progression of state intervention inadvertently produced a tremendous sense of urgency amongst labor and company leaders which benefitted negotiations for labor unions, and ultimately gave workers’ wage increases, improved safety standards, new nondiscrimination policies, and a foreseeable path to the eight-hour day. Philosophies of labor organizations were re-examined as a result of these experiences. Despite historians’ oversight of all of this, the state’s reactions to Courrières transformed the labor movement and its approach to it.
CHAPTER 3
Global Giving: International Reactions to Courrières

ROME, June 8, 1906

On a brisk June summer day, fully flowered Gainsborough hats, immaculate Victorian
dresses, and sleek tailored suits dotted the streets of Rome as horse-drawn coaches made their
way through its curving cobblestone streets to the Grand Hotel Plaza. They were not ordinary
coaches. Those that churned by the elaborate front facade of the hotel were covered from yoke to
spoke in flowers. The Battle of the Flowers was in full swing. Flowers had long been associated
with national identity: the violet of Napoleon, the thistle of Scotland, the shamrock of Ireland,
the fleur-de-lis of France, the blue corn-flower of Germany, the rose of Great Britain, the daisy
of Italy.1 But at this cultural cavalcade, all the flowers of Europe were on display. The winning
coach of the parade, driven by the Prince of Solofra, Italy, had its harnesses and wheels hidden
beneath hundreds of blossoms of white and red roses. The first prize was just as impressive: a
silver epergne given by the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III. Beyond being an outlet for
expensive attire and upper class hobnobbing, however, the event served, and was justified, with
another purpose: to raise money for the victims of a recent eruption at Mount Vesuvius and the
mining disaster at Courrières.2

2 “The Battle of the Flowers in Rome in Aid of the Sufferers at Vesuvius and Courrières: The First Prize Coach of
Months earlier, Germany had also responded to the disaster at Courrières. Two days after rescue efforts had feverishly commenced, a French telegraph asking nearby coal companies for rescue assistance was answered by the Hibernia Salvage Corps in Westphalia, near Essen, which sent twenty-five rescuers with sophisticated rescue apparatuses to Courrières. In the international coalmining community, Westphalian coal companies were known for the quality of their rescue gear, and their workers also had the advantage of superior rescue training at a mining

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academy in nearby Bochum. According to a wire received by the Chicago Daily Tribune, “It is believed, [the Westphalians] were sent at the express desire of Emperor William.”

Their arrival was well received. The International Arbitration League heralded the move in their monthly publication, the Arbitrator: “The last time the Germans entered France it was to destroy life; this time it was to save it.” A news report for La Lanterne compared Paris firefighters, who had since joined rescue operations, to the German rescue workers: “While the Parisian firefighters are equipped with malfunctioning rescue gear that is too large to allow them access to the galleries, the Germans have done wonders. Admirably commanded by an experienced team leader, wearing perfect rescue gear and provided with strong lanterns, they go rummaging in the nooks and crannies of the galleries.” The Westphalian rescuers succeeded in maneuvering their way deep inside the mine and consequently recovered over 200 bodies, many of which were already in a state of decomposition due to the heavy humidity inside the coalmine. Before the rescuers left for Germany some days later, the local stationmaster delayed their train’s departure time to accommodate the many men and women lined up along the edge of tracks waving white handkerchiefs and hats at the men. When the rescuers boarded the train and sped by the crowds, some were shouting, “Long live the German rescuers!”

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7 “Peace Heroes Decorated,” The Arbitrator, April 1906, 2.
9 “Germany to Aid Sufferers”, Chicago Daily Tribune, March 13, 1906, 7.
11 Ibid 1.
This series of events only constituted a small portion of the massive amounts of international acts crafted to assist in disaster relief at Courrières, with a particular focus of assistance being victims’ families. Money and gifts, including clothing and offers to financially sponsor orphans, came pouring into the offices of the Comité central de secours aux familles des victimes de la catastrophe de Courrières from Britain, Spain, Turkey, Holland, Romania, Switzerland, New Zealand, Australia, Egypt, Tunisia, Korea, Germany, Spain, Greece, Denmark, Russia, Serbia, Italy, and the United States. Across the English Channel, symphonies and matinées were quickly organized to raise money for victims’ families. An outdoor charity concert featuring Russian and French romance songs performed by local singers was held in Los Angeles in early April. Organizations the world over donated to the French government’s subscription lists,

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including the Manchester Co-operative Wholesale Society, the “The Awakening of the East” Masonic Lodge in Vietnam, The German Society for Peace, and the Association of Ligurian Journalists of Genoa, Italy. King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra of Britain, Prince Albert I of Monaco, Princess Marina Petrovna of Russia, and President Fallières of France all donated to the French relief cause. And though he did not contribute any money to relief efforts, President Theodore Roosevelt telegraphed a message of condolence to Paris expressing “the sincere sympathy of the government and the people of the United States.” In all, 7,560,851.63 francs were raised for victims’ families by the end of the year, a record amount raised for an industrial disaster in Europe.

What was motivating the large amount of international attention given to victims’ families, then? Why did both kings and workers give money to them? What truly necessitated international responses beyond natural sympathy? Answers to these questions arise on multiple social and cultural levels, and point to the fact that people of different social positions were giving for different reasons. In order to demonstrate this thoroughly, an analysis of the relationship between disaster relief and notions of international humanity and solidarity must first be attempted. Then, the diplomatic situation in Europe, particularly in Great Britain and Germany, can be assessed. Finally, the effects and fears of the growing labor movement in Europe can be placed into an international context. All of this will establish that international reactions to Courrières were motivated by different social concerns which yielded the same

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result: the formation of the largest international charity movement for an industrial disaster before World War I. Courrières was a new milestone in the history of disaster relief.

Historians and sociologists have typically approached the study of disaster relief, especially its international development, from a post-World War I perspective. Jonathan Bergman argues in his dissertation on the structure of relief efforts to hurricanes in the United States, “It is in the critical years of the 1930’s that disaster relief assumed a very modern shape and style prefiguring the look and direction of our current, complex disaster relief universe.” Peter MacAlister-Smith makes similar claims about Europe. He writes in the book *International Humanitarian Assistance: Disaster Relief Actions in International Law and Organizations* that the Committee for the Relief of Belgium, formed in October of 1914, was “an organization without precedent in international relations,” and that it “set important and lasting precedents for the conception and organization of subsequent large-scale humanitarian assistance operations.” Emergency management analyst Damon Coppola, in a student textbook on international management of disaster relief, presumes that “Modern disaster management, in terms of the emergence of global standards and organized efforts to address preparedness, mitigation, and response activities for a wide range of disasters, did not begin to emerge until the mid-20th century.”

What these historians overlook is that national and international disaster relief emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from ideologies and practices that

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21 The CRB was originally named the American Committee for the Relief of Belgium because it was originally an American organization. Herbert Hoover commissioned it. See Elena Danielson, "Commission for Relief in Belgium.'* The United States in the First World War: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London: Garland, 1995) 154-9.


stemmed from eighteenth century, if not before. Disaster relief is simply not a new invention. Its potentially complex, international reach was made very evident in a United States Congressional Charter approved on January 5th, 1905, which gave the Red Cross the authority “to continue and carry on a system of national and international relief in time of peace and apply the same in mitigating the suffering caused by pestilence, famine, fire, floods, and other great national calamities.”

State-based disaster relief operations—those critical to the development of later international disaster relief efforts—developed during the eighteenth-century. Tax rebates and direct financial compensation in cases of natural disasters were not uncommon in the Ancien Régime following the emergence of republicanism, and despite political tensions, intendants in some cases coordinated relief efforts with local church authorities. In 1784, Louis XVI even allocated three million livres for French citizens “who had suffered the most” from natural disasters.

Compensation and natural disaster prevention policies were also widely employed in Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, and the Habsburg territories beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Early warning systems for flooding were used by villages

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25 The notion of the republican duties of the government to help citizens dealing with natural disasters culminated in The Law of Prairial 10, 1797 (May 10), which granted 3 million francs for natural disaster relief, made clear the moral duty of the state to assist sufferers: “the law discussed in this moment belongs to a kind of republican institutional character that one would wish to find in all the fruits of our legislation.” See René Favier and Umr Larhra. “From solidarity to individual compensation: assistance mechanisms faced with the emergence of liberalism in France during the 18th century.” in René Favier, and Christian Pfister. ed. Solidarité et Assurance: Les Sociétés Européennes Face aux Catastrophes (17e-21e s.). (CNRS MSH-Alpes, 2007): 79.
27 Ibid. 76.
throughout the Swiss Mountain valley of upper Engadin in the 1780s. Following a massive rockslide in Goldau in 1806, which destroyed nearly two hundred households, Napoleon appointed Andreas Merian, from Basel, as the “Landammann of Switzerland” to invite the governments of 19 cantons to organize charity campaigns with local authorities, churches, and private philanthropic organizations on behalf of victims of the disaster. The entire Swiss confederation participated in the aid campaign. As such, complex interregional and nationwide constructions of disaster relief emerged in Europe long before the early twentieth century.

In addition, natural disaster relief started having an international reach during the early nineteenth century. The British and Irish Ladies’ Society for the Promotion of the Welfare of the Female Peasantry in Ireland, a completely secular organization, was regularly putting the aristocracy and middle classes in Ireland and Great Britain in contact with each other in order to increase support for impoverished and starving people in both areas beginning in 1822. During the Great Irish Famine, which utterly devastated Irish communities between 1845 and 1852, the British military raised money in far away places throughout the British Empire, like Calcutta, India, for sufferers. Money was also transmitted through religious philanthropic organizations

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29 The system was state and community-based. When a flood was coming, church bells were rung while local men and police reinforced river embankments and safeguarded local grain stores while women drove cattle to higher ground. Afterwards, governmental funds were then used to rebuild bridges and roads. Ibid. 24.

30 Bureaucrat of the land of Switzerland.

31 These were basically sovereign states within Switzerland.


34 Ireland was under British rule for part of this period, and later became semi-independent. They were culturally distinct though, and the organization was still active during Ireland’s transition to a semi-independent state.


like the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers, which even secured donations from a Native American tribe from Oklahoma.\textsuperscript{37}

By the mid-nineteenth century, conceptualizations of charity and disaster relief extended beyond natural disasters. In 1863, an international conference of sixteen countries, most of them from Europe, met in Geneva and agreed to international humanitarian standards that promised neutrality to medical workers in wartime and guaranteed, on paper at least, the impartial treatment of wounded and sick soldiers in conflict.\textsuperscript{38} This was preceded by an influential pamphlet, \textit{Un Souvenir de Solferino}, written by Henri Dunant, the eventual founder of the Red Cross and a deeply religious Protestant, which expressed Dunant’s desire that all the countries of Europe would form permanent relief societies to care for wounded soldiers.\textsuperscript{39} In his treatise, Dunant supported his reasoning on the grounds that there existed a \textit{humanité} common to all mankind.\textsuperscript{40}

Dunant was drawing on an idea that had been articulated during the French Enlightenment, and it was this same idea that emerged as a powerful motivator of charity and disaster relief across Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jean-Jacques Rousseau had written quite prolifically about the notion of a shared humanity of all human beings during the eighteenth century. As French ethnologist and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss summarizes, Rousseau’s ideas were built upon the premise that a natural pity, a type of primitive empathy, arose from an “identification with another [person] who is not just a parent, a relative, a

\textsuperscript{37} Christine Kinealy. \textit{This Great Calamity: The Great Irish Famine: The Irish Famine 1845-52.} (Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1994), 115.
\textsuperscript{38} Marian Moser Jones. \textit{The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal.} (JHU Press, 2012), 30.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. 34.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. 34.
compatriot, but a man, any man of the moment, and more: some living being, from the moment he is alive.”41

Rousseau maintained that because of this, humankind had shared rights of being. He conveys this argument in relation to wartime in his well-known 1762 Du contract social:

War then, is not a relation between man and man, but a relation between State and State…The aim of war being the destruction of the hostile state, we have a right to slay its defenders so long as they have arms in their hands; but as soon as they lay them down and surrender, ceasing to be enemies or instruments of the enemy, they become again simply men, and no one has any further right over their lives.42

Individual rights to Rousseau were governed not just by an affiliation or identity—that is, taking on the distinctive qualities of a soldier or citoyen—but also through the basic act of living: “To renounce one’s liberty is to renounce one’s essence as a human being, the rights and also the duties of humanity.”43

But this notion of a common humanity was not circumscribed to France. It spread to other regions. In Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, published some thirty years later in 1797, Immanuel Kant, expanded on Rousseau’s intellectual foundation, attempting to prove that humanity was a common end in and of itself:

In regard to the contingent (meritorious) duty towards oneself, it is not enough that the action does not conflict in our person as end in itself; it must also harmonize with it. Now in humanity there are predispositions to greater perfection, which belong to ends of nature in regard to the humanity in our subject; to neglect these would be able to subsist with the preservation of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the furthering of this end.”44

43 Ibid. 159 Rousseau seems to distinguish between authority and rights. Authority is governed by a relationship of artificially constructed power. Rights are innately expressed as a function of being in that relationship: solider to state, worker to boss, person to personhood, etc.
Kant’s basic argument here is that humanity existed for the purpose of existence. It was not a construct of means by which to further the characteristics of, or alter the nature of one’s existence. It was purposefully un-purposeful, and given meaning only through the expression of “the idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law.” Humanity was natural, it was common, and it was and could be commonly expressed in social law.

The revolutionary rights of personal liberty gave way to the rights of nationhood and work during the nineteenth century, transforming intellectual beliefs in the universal rights of man into a new struggle to achieve them. Lynn Hunt, in her exemplary work, Inventing Human Rights: A History, writes that “over the course of the nineteenth century, nationalism overtook both sides of the revolutionary debates.” The rise and fall of Napoleon’s European empire had given disgruntled political craftsmen everywhere something to rebel against, and when combined with proliferating printing presses, reappraisals of religion, and linguistic variation, the concept of the nation as a distinct entity of pride was thinkable.

As a result, international responses to disasters also became a way to combine nationalism with humanity. This was particularly evident in Great Britain. As cultural historian Sabine Clemm rightly notes, “The question of Englishness, of nationhood and national character” became “a core concern” of weekly publications like the Charles Dickens-edited Household Wars. In the aftermath of a large earthquake that ravaged cities throughout Sicily in late 1857, British newspapers organized subscription lists for victims of the disaster. During this time,

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45 Ibid. 49
47 There are multiple historical, political, economic, and social postulations for the development of nationalism. But in general, these arguments fall into two camps: the modernist perspective, which argues that modern social and economic structures were needed for nationalism to occur, and the primordialist perspective, which argues that nationalism was an expression of the human evolutionary tendency to organize into groups based on the place of birth and sentiments towards it. See Chapter 13 in Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar, eds. The SAGE handbook of nations and nationalism. (Sage, 2006), 157-169.
48 Sabine Clemm. Dickens, journalism, and nationhood: mapping the world in Household words. (Routledge, 2008)
*Household Wars* took the opportunity to admonish the Bourbon government and extol the superiority of British charity: “The English, with their subscriptions, were [figuratively] on the ground in a month or two. We may estimate by these facts the comparative energy of the Englishman to the Neapolitan authorities.”49 Similarly, a report from the *London Illustrated News* directly confronted the Bourbon government’s inadequate approach to the disaster: “humanity shudders almost as much at the recollection of the sufferings which might have been prevented [with better state aid].”50 It was no secret that governments in Europe despised the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.51 Great Britain and France had even cut off diplomatic relations with Naples in the 1850s.52 Nationalistic newspapers added to that discord, and as this example demonstrates, humanity and relief could be connected with nationalism.53

There was another important change in Europe that would impact international disaster relief aid given to Courrières, and that was the intellectual consequences of labor internationalism in Europe. As a reaction to nationalism, intellectual beliefs in the struggle of the industrial worker took on an international focus. Maxime Leroy, a French labor reformer, claimed in 1913 that the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* was not a French text, but “an international charter of liberty, a universal document to be used for the salvation of all peoples.”54 It was to this common notion of liberty and salvation which early nineteenth century socialists like Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Henri de Saint-Simon fervently aspired following the first bouts of labor unrest in industrial communities in France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Poland during the 1830s. In fact,

52 Ibid. 265.
53 Ibid. 265.
labor leaders attempted to form international workers’ associations as early as 1839. This trajectory gained movement in 1848, when George Julian Harney, an influential leader of the newly formed Society of Fraternal Democrats in Britain, proclaimed, “Do not the workers of all nations have the same reasons for complaint and the same causes of distress? Have they not, therefore, the same just cause?” As a result, by the late nineteenth century, multiple international organizations were formed: the First International in 1864, the Second International in 1889, the International Trade Union Congress in 1868, and numerous International Trade Secretariats from 1890 to 1910. If nationalism implied being attached to the nation, to its ideals, its creeds, and its society, then labor internationalism was based on the mutuality of similarly desired worker ideals, creeds, and societies.

Inherent tensions were practically evident between nationalists and labor internationalists. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were the chief articulators of it. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx writes, “In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat independently of all nationality.” Engels likewise thought that internationalism, in contrast to nationalism, was by its very nature an “establishment of harmonious … cooperation between peoples, without which the rule of the proletariat is impossible.” To both of them, nationalism permitted elite social classes to use capitalism to suppress the working class. The ruling classes fixed their own agenda; they set the tone for citizenship, and could thereby bend its characteristics to their benefit. It was only with proletarians, the working classes, uniting together across national

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56 Ibid. 17.
57 Ibid. 22-23, 44.
borders that true emancipation from their conditions, the true fulfillment of their revolutionary ideals, could be sought.⁶⁰

The expression of a common mutuality among groups of people was articulated throughout the nineteenth century by refashioning and politicizing an old term: solidarity. Before then, solidarity had other meanings. Sixteenth century French lawyers used *solidarité* to refer to the common responsibilities of parties to incur a portion of debt from that of a collective group.⁶¹ It was even employed as legalistic terminology in the *Encyclopédie* of 1751 and in Napoleon’s *Code Civil* in 1804.⁶²

By 1840, though, just one year after the aforementioned attempt by labor leaders to organize an international workers’ group, the French philosopher and economist Pierre Leroux reinterpreted the meaning of *solidarité*. In his publication of *De l’humanité*, a work written to advocate a new type of Christianity, Leroux criticized the moral conditions of society:

> I hear the evil which reigns over human society because the essence of human nature has been violated, because the principle of unity of the human race, through time and space, and the mutual solidarity of all men, has not been well understood nor effectively enforced.

Leroux saw the traditional Christian notion of charity, of *fraternité*, as being fundamentally unable to fulfill the larger philosophical and political ideals of social responsibility that he believed came out of the French Revolution. *De l’humanité*, as much as it is a philosophical work, is also theological. Therefore, Leroux adapted the legalistic meaning of *solidarité* to a socio-religious context. By the 1850s, European socialists and labor leaders were using solidarity

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⁶⁰ Indeed, Marx saw the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 as an example of the possibilities of international resolve. French and Prussian ruling classes, who were fresh off of warring against each other, united to “crush the revolutionary government”. If ruling classes could do it, so too could the working classes. For more on this, see Allen Gilbert, “Marx,” 348-349.


interchangeably with concepts of fraternity, justice, and philanthropy while Jewish and Christian leaders were simultaneously using it to redefine their religious identities in an international context. As Lisa Moses Leff brilliantly summarizes, “Solidarity implied order, hierarchy, and religiosity; at the same time, it implied fraternity, equality, and connectedness between segments of society.”

It was the ideas of humanity and solidarity, expressed by different social groups within the context of nationalism and the internationalization of work, which directly impacted the aid given to victims at Courrières. One of the largest and most diverse groups to support victims at Courrières was working classes. British dentists, a Berlin chef, French construction workers, German firemen, British, Russian, and Belgian coalminers, and Italian bakers all gave money to support the relief efforts for victims’ families at Courrières. In Manchester, England alone, businesses and families, such as Thorp and Sons, Limited, Barlow and Jones Limited, and T.H. Rigby and Company gave money to a local relief fund organized by the mayor, which was then sent to the Comité central de secours aux familles des victimes de la catastrophe de Courrières. The Amalgamated Association of Cotton Spinners in Manchester also gave donations to the fund.

The variety of working-class professions that appeared on subscription lists was possible because working classes in multiple countries saw giving as an opportunity to display solidarity with the French working class, to tangibly demonstrate their support in the face of capitalist

64 "Listes de souscriptions," Journal Officiel de la Republique francaise March 29, 1906. 2369.
neglect. In the April edition of the monthly *Labour Record*, published in London, the editor wrote the following opinion on Courrières:

> Every workman’s heart has gone out towards France during the dark days of the past month. In the whole history of labour there has been no more tragic and heartrending calamity than that which has befallen the workers in the Courrières pits. Some twelve hundred bread-winners—fathers and brothers—have fallen victims to what looks like inattention on the part of a mining company which is rich beyond the dreams of avarice.  

Notice the implicit socialistic expression of the Courrières disaster in terms of its effects on workers. There is no mention of sympathy to the state, and there is definitely no love lost towards the company. The intent of the letter was to advocate support to a specific group: French workers.

Similarly, in a letter to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, C.W. Macara, vice president of the International Congress of Master Spinners’ and Manufacturers’ Associations, wrote:

> At the end of 1903, when the English cotton trade was face to face with a crisis which threatened to paralyze Lanchashire’s greatest industry, it was from France that the first offer of help and support was received, and at the mass meeting of masters and operatives which was held in December of that year, Monsieur Casimir Berger, the vice president of the French Master Cotton Spinners’ Federation, was present to show that the offer would take practical form…The people of Lanchashire in cases of genuine distress have never been appealed to in vain, and they now have an opportunity not only of demonstrating this anew but of demonstrating their practical bond of friendship.  

Many news reports conveyed a comparable type of socialistic and charitable focus on the part of working-class donors. An article in the *Manchester Guardian* contained the following: “Mr J. Gerrard, Chief Inspector of Mines in the Manchester district, in seconding the motion [for aid], said…it was most appropriate, he thought, that a mining society like theirs should express

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profound sympathy with the bereaved, and with the engineers who were battling…to save life.”

A *London Times* journalist similarly wrote in March, “But in any case the disaster is one of almost unprecedented magnitude, and cannot but come home to people in a country like ours, in which so large a proportion of the population is engaged in coalmining.”

Another report in the *London Times* on the proceedings at an annual meeting of Social Democratic Federation stated, “At the suggestion of Mr. H. Quelch (London), an expression of sympathy was sent to the miners at Courrières, Mr. Quelch remarking that nothing could be more easily traced to the operations of capitalists than that disaster.” These statements all point to the fact that giving among the working classes in Great Britain was influenced not just by sympathy, but because the working class could demonstrate their support, be it social, economic, or political, to fellow members of the working class, by donating money to locally organized relief funds. They could show solidarity with them.

This pattern of giving was not unique to Great Britain. In Australia, the Lord Mayor of Sydney set up a fund to organize relief efforts. *The Sydney Morning Herald* expressed its support for it: “We in South Wales know from our own experience how heavily the death of the bread-winning miner presses upon the widow and orphans…the sympathy that means practical help is the sympathy that honors humanity.”

Dr. Ernest Richard, a professor at Columbia University, wrote in 1906 in an article titled “The Solidarity of Nations,” about the German outpouring of charity to the disaster: “It is true, instantaneous financial aid came from all classes in all parts of Germany, the German Peace Societies taking the lead in collecting funds, the great mining syndicates sending several hundred thousand francs, the miners collecting among themselves
250,000 francs for the stricken families of their fellow laborers.” The fact that much of organization of relief efforts in countries was done along the lines of socialist-leaning entities, labor groups, and peace societies, and that such acts were justified as an expression of a common sympathy of shared experience, again implies that much of the monies being funneled into relief funds were a demonstration of mutual support, of international working class solidarity.

On the other side of the social spectrum, kings, queens, princes, princesses, and governmental officials were giving to France’s relief committee for more nationalistic and diplomatic reasons. In the House of Commons, Sir Campbell-Bannerman asked that a dispatch be telegraphed to Paris “to express to the French Government the deep concern of His Majesty’s Ministers at the terrible disaster in the Courrières colliery and their sympathy with the survivors.” A message given to President Fallières from Edward Corwall, chairman of the London County Council, affirmed, “The people of London desire to approach you in this moment of great calamity which has fallen upon France.” In a letter of thanks sent as a reply to donations from Britain, Émile Loubet, chairman of the Comité central de secours aux familles des victimes de la catastrophe de Courrières, wrote the following to the British Ambassador in Paris: “Their [donors’] amount and their variety have eloquently testified not only to a noble sentiment of pity for the survivors of the disaster, but also to the interest and friendship which the British nation bears to all things French.”

There are few mentions of workers or even victims of the disaster in these statements. In fact, The Manchester Guardian noted on March 14 that the Trade Union Labour group of the House of Commons had to actually issue “an appeal to members of the House to show their sympathy

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74 “Colliery Disaster in France,” London Times, March 12, 1906. 5.
76 Ibid. 5.
with the sufferers by the French mining disaster by contributing to a fund for the relief of the
consequent distress” before monies were even donated by House members. 77 The emphasis in
these types of communications on the French state and the friendships of nations implies that
some diplomatic motive was present, that state actors were justifying their responses not because
they identified specifically with workers, and not because they wanted to show solidarity with
them.

The diplomatic situation in Europe at the time lends some credence to this argument. In April
of 1904, a series of agreements known as the entente cordiale between France and Great Britain
resolved longstanding conflicts between the two nations: the British received control over Egypt,
France acquired Morocco, and both agreed to support each other if their rights to these respective
countries were called into question.78 The country that decided to question them was Germany. In
fact, part of the German government’s goal during the Moroccan Crisis was to drive a wedge in
the entente cordiale between Britain and France, to fracture that alliance based on Germany’s
insistence on an open door policy in the region, which would have theoretically benefitted the
British government.79 In the heat of the diplomatic flare-up almost a year later, Friederich von
Holstein, who advised William III, worried that “a German retreat in the face of Anglo-French
resistance would in no way be conducive to bringing about better German-English relations, but
would on the contrary give the English, the French, and the rest of the world practical proof that
one gets most from Germany by treating her badly.”80 The result of the aggressive German stance

78 Jonathan Mercer, Reputation and international politics. (Cornell University Press, 2010). 76.
was, according to historian John Lowe, “a humiliating climb down at Algeciras in March 1906.”

The catastrophe at Courrières therefore provided a pragmatic diplomatic opportunity for Great Britain to reassert its commitment to entente in the face of a new French administration and for Germany to preserve its reputation among its citizenry. James Herbert Thewlis, Lord Mayor of Manchester, explicitly mentions this with respect to Britain in his appeal to the public for aid to Courrières: “The recent development of the entente cordiale has been a very happy augury, and has interested the bulk of our citizens. The opportunity is now presented giving the practical evidence of that good feeling, and I rely confidently upon the people of Manchester to respond to the appeal which I now make.”

In the British capital some days later, the Lord Mayor of London, the French Ambassador to Great Britain, and several members of the staff at the French embassy were all in attendance at a performance given at the Alhambra Theatre to raise money for victims’ families at Courrières. The presence of French and British officials hardly seems a coincidence. The consistent assertions of a British-French friendship in many government officials’ responses to the disaster, coupled with the fact that these responses were communicated or affirmed through diplomats, indicates that Great Britain was making diplomatic use of Courrières.

But perhaps the greater use of diplomacy with Courrières came from Germany. The Herald of Peace and International Arbitration, a pacifist monthly newspaper, directly cited the Moroccan issue in its April publication: “German and French statesmen, who are disturbed about the Moroccan frontier, might learn something from Courrières. It is a far nobler thing to encourage

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81 Essentially, Germany found little support in the international community and was unable to receive any of acceptance of its major demands that it had set at the beginning of the crisis, instead having to accept a face-saving compromise. John Lowe. The Great Powers, Imperialism and the German Problem 1865-1925. 168.
such an entente as that between the workers in the presence of a common danger than to quarrel about a foreign country.”\textsuperscript{84} German officials shared those feelings. As deals were being finalized over Morocco, the German Chancellor, Prince Bernhard Heinrich Karl Martin von Bülow, specified in a speech summarized by the Times that he “was satisfied with the results achieved, and hoped that they would lead to relations of peace and amity between France and Germany such as…had just been inaugurated by the human efforts of the Westphalian miners at Courrières.”\textsuperscript{85}

He was not alone. According to the Chicago Daily Tribune, many German newspapers urged donations on the grounds that it was “a good occasion to show that political differences do not count in the face of a great calamity.”\textsuperscript{86} Specifically, the Tageblatt, a newspaper owned by socialist trade unions, encouraged Germans that “humanity be put above patriotism.”\textsuperscript{87} The emphasis on peace and humanity went all the way up to the Kaiser, who, when awarding the Westphalian miners medals of honor,\textsuperscript{88} stated, “You have shown that beyond the frontiers there is something that binds peoples together, of whatever race they may be, and that is neighborly love.”\textsuperscript{89} Again, humanity was nationally oriented.

It cannot be ignored that the Germans were positioning themselves as coming to the aid of the French. That amounted to a type of nationalistic virtue in the face of their diplomatic losses over Morocco. The German government wanted to gain something from the situation. Ernest Richard thought that with respect to “the assistance lent by the Germans to the French in this case…it is as if the Germans gained the greatest victory in their history, a victory not one by an

\textsuperscript{84} “Peace Heroes Decorated” The Arbitrator, April 1906, 2.
\textsuperscript{86} “Germany to Aid Sufferers”, Chicago Daily Tribune, March 13, 1906. 7.
\textsuperscript{87} “Germany to Aid Sufferers,” Chicago Daily Tribune, March 13, 1906. 7.
\textsuperscript{88} They were later also given the French cross of the Legion of Honor.
immense army with sword and cannon, but by a single squad of twenty-one laborers, who claimed all the qualities so often claimed as a monopoly of the military hero."90 One nationalist liberal in Germany, according to Richard, said in an interview with the Prussian newspaper Diet:

Whosoever has been under the necessity of assisting at such a catastrophe...knows that...it requires more courage to undertake the work of rescue than to face an enemy in open battle...If these heroes of peace should return from their peaceful work decorated with an Iron Cross, it would be but proper. For such work of peace, we have, unfortunately, no special distinction.91

The placement of the rescuer alongside the heroics of the soldier is telling, especially in the context of the Moroccan Crisis. If Germany could not win in war or negotiation, then perhaps it could win, perhaps it could maintain its nationalistic pride, in gestures of peace and humanity.

Indeed, nationalism clearly played a role in the international reactions to Courrières. Christian Pfister rightly notes that historically, “members of the elite indeed took advantage of disasters to initiate conjunctures of national excitement.”92 Similar attitudes can be seen in this case as well. In Great Britain, calls for aid by government and labor leaders often extolled the virtues of a specific area’s people, of their national or regional identity. When the Lord Mayor of Manchester called on his constituents to display their “friendship” with France, or when Macara praised the people of Lancashire for having “never been appealed to in vain,” they were also motivationally describing that region’s identity.93 In other words, they were providing people in those regions an opportunity to showcase their Englishness, Lancashire-ness, or Manchester-ness.

It should also be noted that another aspect of international relations undoubtedly influenced national responses to the disaster, particularly in Britain, and that was capitalism. Diplomats and

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91 Ibid. 111.
politicians were involved in promoting capitalist projects that would benefit their own country’s economy. The Lord Mayor of Manchester predicated the need to raise aid for victims’ families “in view of our approaching visit from members of the Corporation of Lyons to our city.” 94 Official demonstrations of support to the French economy were beneficial to the British economy.

But for social elites, fears of the growing social unrest in Europe, though not explicit in any public announcements, probably had an impact on their choice to give money to relief funds. The proliferation of labor organizations, particularly trade unions, across national borders had only intensified the transmission and interpretation of labor ideologies across Europe, be they revolutionary, reformist, anarchist, syndicalist, socialist, etc. The primacy of political action was ubiquitous among them. A resolution at the First International Congress in Zurich in 1893 held that membership was granted to “all Trade Unions” and “also those Socialist Parties and Organizations which recognize the organization of workers of political action.” 95 In the pronouncement, political action meant “that the working class organizations seek, in as far as possible, to use or conquer political rights and the machinery of legislation for the furthering of the interests of the proletariat and the conquest of political power.” 96 Political action, then, could also be revolutionary. Jules Guesde, an influential French Socialist with an anarchistic streak, said as much at a French Socialist Congress in Limoges in 1906: “Political action is necessarily revolutionary.” 97

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96 Ibid. 49.
The strike was a well-known demonstration of political action in 1906. Strikes intensified in Italy that year after a fairly quiescent period since 1903. 1,300 strikes occurred in industries and 300 in agriculture in 1906, leading historian Charles Bertrand to write, “the high rate of involvement in strike activity seemed to demonstrate the revolutionary feeling among the workers.” A report from the Board of Trade in Britain, which kept records of strike activity for the country, recorded that 217,773 people were affected by strikes in the United Kingdom in 1906, a substantial increase when compared to the 93,503 people who were affected by strike activity in 1905. Though multiple factors undoubtedly influenced the development of strike activity beyond Courrières, such as the Russian Revolution in 1905, or the formation nationally-based organizations like the Confederazione Generale de Lavoro (CGL) in late 1906, overall, as Figure XVI indicates, 1906 marked a European-wide increase in labor unrest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of strikes</th>
<th>Number of working people affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>355</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>93,503</td>
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<td><strong>Great Britain</strong></td>
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<td>11,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>32,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td><strong>Sweden</strong></td>
<td><strong>277</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,612</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>73,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>110,931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1906</strong></td>
<td><strong>Austria</strong></td>
<td><strong>1083</strong></td>
<td><strong>166,786</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>158,500 (^1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>154,527 (^2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

\(^98\) In fact, an account of strike activity to earn some political and economic gain can be traced back as far as 1152 BCE, when authorities under Pharaoh Ramses III increased the wages of the artisans of the Royal Necropolis at Deir el-Medina after a mass walk-off. See W.F. Edgerton, "The strikes in Ramses III's Twenty-ninth year", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 10 (1951): 151.


Wide unrest very likely brought out fears of social turmoil and revolutionary violence among European elites. As European historian Robert Goldstein notes, “In studying European history during the 1815-1914 period, one repeatedly runs across references to the fear of revolution.” That was certainly the case in 1906. Increases in the number of police and citizen volunteer patrols in Bologna, Italy, during the May Day strike of 1906 were interpreted by the Italian newspaper *La Squilla* as “amounting to a civil war by young members of the wealthier classes, who, alongside policemen and *carabinieri* used the general strike as a pretext for venting their anger on harmless workers.” The week before that, *The Chicago Daily Tribune* published an article titled, “France on Brink of a Revolution.”

Demonstrating humanity through charity provided a socially and historically acceptable avenue by which elites could quell the lower classes discontent towards them, a way for them to express their humanity. Even before the early twentieth century, as Rachel Fuchs notes, “Private charity was the elite’s primary tool for shaping the lifestyle and morals of the lower classes.” In fact, two goals of the British and Irish Ladies Society were “to excite a sense of virtue and

---

1 | 1906 | Italy | 1600 | - |
---|---|---|---|---|
1 | Figure XVI: Strikes in Europe, 1904-1906 | 101 |
| | 1: estimate from source. Only includes number of strikers and not the overall number of working people affected, specifically workers who did not participate in strikes but were unable to work during them. | |
| | 2: Only includes number of strikers | |

103 The Italian military police.
piety” among the poor, and “to promote the industry and improvement of the poor in any way which local circumstances appear to require.”107 In his book *Black Country Élites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area, 1830-1900*, Richard Trainor argues that charity societies “reduced points of conflict between middle class and working people” because the act of charity socially demonstrated “the concern of the upper orders for social problems.”108 Even in popular literature at the time, the rags to riches Monsieur Madeleine in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* and the haughty banker Mr. Bulstrode in George Elliott’s *Middlemarch* both had charitable endowments at local hospitals that feed their ambitions for social acceptance and respectability.109 Social elites needed to seem interested in the care of others.110 When put into the context of labor unrest, expressing social respectability and charity for the misfortunate may have been seen among elites as a way to stave off revolution, to keep their sense of humanity.111

In conclusion, international reactions to Courrières marked a new milestone in the history of disaster relief. The catastrophe at Courrières was a truly global event. The wide proliferation and significant organizational capacities of state and regional governments, labor groups, newspapers, banks, private charities, churches, businesses, etc. that were honed over the course of the nineteenth century enabled a large number of donors to give to the *Comité central de secours aux familles des victimes de la catastrophe de Courrières*.112 The over seven million francs contributed to the committee was more than the total public and private funds that were

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110 By 1919, the English social and political elite’s interest in charity, as verified through local and state housing campaigns, was, according to historian John Benson, a “major weapon in its propaganda battle to stave off revolution.” See Ibid. 72.
111 The names of those giving to the relief effort were often published in newspapers. The Manchester Guardian regularly published a list of subscriptions. See “Manchester Relief Fund,” *Manchester Guardian*, March 16, 1906, 1.
112 It should be noted here too that this committee effectively acted as a temporary organization that centralized and oversaw the disbursement of donations to victims from national and international donors.
raised during the entirety of the Irish famine, more than France had publicly raised in 1892 for victims of hurricanes in Martinique, more than the aid raised for the Opéra Comique fire, and more money in one year than the 9,000,000 francs that France raised over a two year period to provide relief to Martinique following the volcanic eruption of Mount Pelée, which killed over 30,000 people in 1904.¹¹³

However, the remarkable quantity of money given to victims’ families at Courrières did not mean its sources had universal reasons for giving. One of the truly fascinating aspects of international reactions to Courrières is just how different the motivations of giving were among different groups and classes of people. For the working classes and labor organizations, giving amounted to a show of sympathetic solidarity with the workers and coalminers of France. To nationalists in Great Britain and Germany, it was a chance to drum up patriotic pride along the lines of humanity whilst taking advantage of the diplomatic opportunities that the event afforded. For social elites, it was part of a tradition of using charity to prevent social disaster. The principles of humanity and solidarity that evolved over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were used by these groups for their own purposes. That said, other factors probably impacted the reasons so many different types of people and organizations gave to relief efforts at Courrières, such as feelings of religious obligation or Francophilia.

On a more somber note, what the international reactions to Courrières demonstrate is that the horrendous bloodshed and violence that engulfed Europe less than a decade later need not have occurred. In a hauntingly, downright prophetic argument, Ernest Richard, in his discussion of the disaster at Courrières, wrote the following in 1906:

How many names might be given recalling unspeakable misery, but at the same time landmarks of human solidarity, testimonials of human sympathy that does not know the differences of race, nationality, or class, sources of hope for those who believe in the possibility of lasting international friendship...At the same time, the great peace worker does not fail to point out the incongruity of this universal pity with the cruelty shown by these same people, who, under the conditions of war, will not only rejoice over, but will be instrumental in bringing about, a much more terrible disaster than the one about which they are now mourning, and in killing not 100 or 1,000 or 100,000 men.\textsuperscript{114}

In retrospect, international reactions to Courrières, the motivational dynamics which governed them, were a reflection of what was, what could be, and what was to come in Europe.

\textsuperscript{114} Ernst Richard. "The Solidarity of Nations, as Shown by the Peace Heroes of Courrières." 109.
CONCLUSION

Today, tall, rectangular black pillars of stone stand alongside a flat, gray gravel path. Thickets of grass and thorny briers loom behind them. The earth’s unusually dark underbelly peeks through the barren soil. This is a place that once witnessed the world’s largest industrial disaster, and all the pain, fear, anger, and sorrow that came with it. On each stone is the engraved name of victims of Courrières mining disaster. It is one of the few things left of the Compagnie des mines de Courrières, which shut down its last mining pit in 1990.¹ It is a memorial for an important historical event that has almost escaped historical memory.

² Fig. XVII. Photograph, “Mémorial de la catastrophe minière de Courrières.” Available from: [http://chlinfernal.centerblog.net/6568934-le-chemin-des-rescapes]
I wrote this thesis to demonstrate the importance of the disaster at Courrières to the history of France and Europe. It is the first detailed work on the subject, and it makes important contributions to historical scholarship. By taking a concentric approach to reactions at Courrières, I was able to show that people’s responses to the disaster were formed from a mingling of their previous experiences and often competing motivations. Different social backgrounds begot different social reactions. These responses together produced the largest labor movement that France had ever seen up to that point in its history and the most significant international disaster relief effort for an industrial catastrophe before World War I.

In chapter one, I argued that French coalminers’ responses to Courrières were rooted in their historical experience of work and protest. Coalmining was originally based on the independent capacity of a rural peasant to ward off disaster, to prevent hunger and impoverishment. Because of this, early on, coalminers vigorously resisted industrial intrusion into their control over their mining practices to the point that these acts became habitual and duplicable. But after enduring the ravages of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire, coalminers entered into the employ of paternalistic companies who held the goal of perpetually controlling their employees, of transforming the peasant coalminer into the industrial worker. Because of this, the issue of safety to coalminer’s lives gained greater importance as they lost perceived self-control over other aspects of their way of life. When issues of safety became apparent, coalminers continued the tradition of violent protest that had been the practice of their descendants. When the disaster at Courrières happened, coalminers’ survival and sustenance meant protest and protection to them. And, it prevented their children from suffering a doomed fate.

Historians’ understandings of French coalminers were in need of correction. Analyses of historical data and evidence from psychology, sociology, and economics, revealed that
coalminers did not protest because they were isolated from the rest of society, but because they had gained a wealth of information about it and their own conditions from it. Furthermore, safety was as important to late nineteenth century coalminers’ participation in strikes as was wage increases, and the two often went hand-in-hand.

In chapter two, I purposefully broadened my perspective to encompass the state’s reaction to Courrières, and found that the government’s response fundamentally altered its future approaches to labor movements and the attitudes of labor organizations towards the state in ways historians have not yet perceived. Clemenceau’s initial attitude to the strike wave of 1906 was one of leniency and sympathy. The formation of the Comité central de secours aux familles des victimes de la catastrophe de Courrières was new in the French government’s approach to industrial disasters, and Clemenceau’s policy of low troop levels represented a break from past state practices. But when protest bordered on revolution, Clemenceau’s fierce shift in his policy resulted in a government intervention that had not been seen since the Paris Commune, and he never again hesitated to use state militancy to quell strike activity.

Moreover, the evolution of Clemenceau’s tactics allowed labor leaders to gain important concessions from company owners, which paved the way for later legislative and policy achievements. The government crackdown in northern France also affirmed the need for a formal ideological endorsement of political neutrality in the Confédération générale du travail (CGT).

Without the disaster, Clemenceau might have approached labor movements differently, labor leaders might not have had enough momentum to carry out later May Day strikes, and legislators might not have felt pressured to institute safety and labor reforms. The state’s role in disaster relief may have been different, and Clemenceau, the man who would lead France during the
harrowing years of World War I, would not have been faced with such a tough test of his leadership.

In chapter three, I viewed reactions to the disaster from the widest possible angle: internationally. These responses represent a landmark in the history of disaster relief. Though disaster relief historians tend to focus solely on the late post World War I period, international disaster relief came from practices and intellectual traditions developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The international groundwork for the organizational capacities to handle international relief efforts was already established by the time of the events at Courrières.

Additionally, the historical development of the notions of solidarity and common humanity allowed multiple segments of society to use those ideas for charitable giving. Working class people gave to Courrières because it was a way to tangibly demonstrate their support to French working class families. For Europe’s political elite, the disaster offered an opportunity to develop better diplomatic positions and initiate nationalistic pride on their home fronts. Among the upper classes, disaster and labor unrest motivated their use of charity as a way of staving off further social upheaval. Collectively, these acts resulted in a complex intellectual, social, economic, and diplomatic response to an industrial disaster on an international level that was historically unprecedented.

But, it is important to note in closing that Courrières also had a wider cultural impact. It inspired the critically acclaimed 1931 film *Kameradschaft*, which loosely recounts the story of the German rescuers coming to the aid of the French rescuers. The motion picture was a critical hit in the United States, and earned the National Board of Review’s award for Best Foreign Film

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of 1932, the equivalent of an Academy Award for Best Foreign Feature Film at the time.\textsuperscript{4} Courrières has been featured in mining safety presentations sponsored the Centers for Disease and Control (CDC) and in reviews of international mining safety standards at the Mine, Safety and Health Administration (MSHA).\textsuperscript{5} At an international mining forum in 2004, it was even labeled “a milestone” in the wider development of safety practices that prevent mining explosions.\textsuperscript{6}

Amos Funkenstein writes that, “without memory of the past there is no history.”\textsuperscript{7} The past is precipitated from the presence of memory. History interprets it. But the absence of an event from memory skews historical interpretations of other events. A history of misconception can result. This thesis has indicated Courrières’ significance to the study of history. It has shown that this event should be remembered. It should hold an important place in the study of the past, and our appreciation of it.


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid. ix.


## APPENDICES

### I. Mining strikes in France 1830-1906

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Strikes</th>
<th>Number of Strikers</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Strikes</th>
<th>Number of Strikers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1830</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>1861</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>1834</td>
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<td>1862</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>19</td>
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</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1865</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>1866</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1869</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>1870</td>
<td>116</td>
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<tr>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>1871</td>
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<td>1844</td>
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<td>1872</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>1873</td>
<td>44</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>1874</td>
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<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>1848</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>1876</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1849</td>
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<td>1877</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>38,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>190</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>68,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1882</td>
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<td>65,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>181</td>
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<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1884</td>
<td>112</td>
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<td>1885</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>Number of Strikers</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Number of Strikes</td>
<td>Number of Strikers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>195</td>
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<td>366</td>
<td>68,500</td>
</tr>
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<td>194</td>
<td>38,100</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>81,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>51,500</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>177,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>89,100</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>215,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>119,400</td>
<td>1901</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>108,900</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>571</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>49,700</td>
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NOTES:

Years 1852-1859 data adapted from the *Statistique Annuelle*, (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1890). 137-139.

II. General Statistics on Compensation for Victims’ Families at Courrières

A. Distribution of Company Compensation for Victims’ Families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of compensation</th>
<th>Number receiving compensation</th>
<th>Total amount paid out by company</th>
<th>Average amount given (based on annual 1450 fr. workman wage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Widows with one child</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>73,080</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widows with two children</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>50,242</td>
<td>652.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widows with three children</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>89,320</td>
<td>797.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widows with four children</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>125,280</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphans</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8,700</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent relative</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>68,440</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
Chart adapted from WN Atkinson and H. Cunyngham, *Report to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department on the disaster which occurred at Courrières Mine, Pas de Calais, France, on March 10th, 1906*. 7.
Data also adapted from Charles Emile Heurteau, *La catastrophe de Courrières* 16-28.

III. General Statistics on Coal Workers and Production in The Pas-de-Calais and the Nord

A. 1904 Shift Allocation of Workers at Courrières

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pit</th>
<th>Morning Shift</th>
<th>Evening Shift</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>212</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4,11</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,12</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6,14</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>260</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
B. 1904 Gender and Age of workers in the Pas de Calais

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 16</td>
<td>6203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>4775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 or older</td>
<td>59272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female*</td>
<td>2636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67614</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Women were employed in above ground positions.

C. 1904 General Statistics of Coal mines in the Pas de Calais

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of operating concessions</th>
<th>19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Coal Output</td>
<td>15,800,000 tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Coal Output per Worker</td>
<td>225 tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average thickness of Coal Seems Worked</td>
<td>3 feet, 4 inches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Historical Coal Production in the Pas de Calais and Nord by Company 1865-1912 (Top three coal producers for each cluster are bolded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>1865-1869 Avg.*</th>
<th>1890-1894 Avg.*</th>
<th>1908-1912 Avg.*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anzin</td>
<td>1,390</td>
<td>2,855</td>
<td>3369</td>
</tr>
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* per 1,000 tons of coal

NOTES:

A. Table adapted from WN Atkinson and H. Cunyngham, *Report to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department on the disaster which occurred at Courrieres Mine, Pas de Calais, France, on March 10th, 1906*. 5.

B. Data adapted from WN Atkinson and H. Cunyngham, *Report to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department on the disaster which occurred at Courrieres Mine, Pas de Calais, France, on March 10th, 1906*. 4.

C. Data adapted from WN Atkinson and Cunyngham, H., *Report to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department on the disaster which occurred at Courrieres Mine, Pas de Calais, France, on March 10th, 1906*. 4-5.

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5. *Board of Trade Labour Gazette*, Volume 16, Great Britain Board of Trade, 1908.


21. Journal officiel de la République française. Lois et décrets


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