



Specialized Crisis: The Paris Commune of 1871

Chair: August Sengupta '24

Rapporteur: Eva Tutin '24

Dear Delegates,

My name is August, a senior at Concord Academy, and I will be your chair for this year's specialized crisis on the Paris Commune of 1871. I've been involved in Model UN since 9th grade, and I co-head CA's Model UN Club. Outside of MUN, I like to draw and cook. We also have Eva Tutin, a senior, as our Rapporteur. We're beyond excited to create a fun and engaging experience for you all!

As you prepare for the discussion, we challenge you to think about the difficulties of transforming political theory into real policy. Many of your characters have lofty ideals on how to shake traditions that have been held for centuries, but class divides and social patterns have inertia, and political movements have a way of evolving on their own. You will also be making policy in a nation devastated by war, and the negative effects of conflict and militarism cannot, and should not, be ignored.

There may be limited information about your position available online, so I encourage you to find what you can and use your imagination when crafting your character's story and goals. Additionally, we will refer to specific locations in Paris in this guide and in committee, so try to familiarize yourself with the maps we provide (see below).

Writing a position paper is not required, but if you'd like to be considered for awards, please email your position paper to the chair by **March 29th**.

Please email us with any questions. I know some basic French and may be able to provide a rough overview of any French sources you may find—no promises, though!

See you in March,

August Sengupta '24, Chair, ca900071280@ConcordAcademy.org

Eva Tutin '24, Rapporteur, Eva.Tutin@ConcordAcademy.org

Start of the Commune

In 1870, France was on the brink of collapse, and its people were becoming desperate. A regime change from monarchy to republic caused political chaos, and the Franco-Prussian war led to enemy troops marching to Paris. The Prussians laid siege to the city, which was already flooded by refugees who had fled from the Prussian advance. Those trapped in Paris suffered from starvation, alcoholism, and disease, but some civilians were able to escape to other provinces.

In January of 1871, the Prussian military broke through the final defenses around Paris. The next month, the French government held legislative and presidential elections while the Prussian military marched through the capital. To the dismay of Paris' left-leaning majority, monarchist factions gained control of the legislature, and conservative Adolphe Thiers was elected as President of the Third French Republic.¹ Like royalty centuries before, he and his government fled to Versailles and implemented economic policies favoring the upper class. They left middle and working class Parisians to fend for themselves.

When commerce halted due to the siege, many Parisians joined the Paris National Guard to have a stable income. This caused the National Guard to develop a leftist slant, particularly in working class districts, known as Arrondissements. During the Prussian invasion, members of the Guard created a political organization known as the Central Committee, made up of workers, trade union members, shop owners, artists, and intellectuals. Noticing signs of radicalization, Thiers led French government troops to suppress the radicals in the Guard. In response, the Guard set up cannons in working class areas such as Belville and most notably, Montmartre, refusing to let government troops use their own cannons against them. National Guardsmen set up barricades and took control over government buildings, including the City Hall. After pushing back Thiers' troops and electing a 60-member Council, the Guard officially established the Commune of Paris on March 26th, 1871.² They called themselves Communards. Two days later, Council members and other Communards decided to meet in the Hotel de Ville to debate the Commune's future. You are here, deciding how to turn utopia into reality.

The Franco-Prussian War

In July of 1870, Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismark provoked the French government into declaring war against Prussia. To the surprise of the French and the international community, the

¹ <https://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-276/lecture-2>

² <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1185&context=classracecorporatpower>

Prussians quickly defeated French forces. This effectively destroyed France's prestigious military reputation; a decisive and symbolic defeat at Sedan further signaled a loss of French power. As if to confirm this, after the siege of Paris, Prussian forces occupied nearly a third of France. On January 18th, 1871, the Prussians celebrated the King of Prussia as the German Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles. Nine days later, the French and Prussian governments signed an armistice.³ The final peace treaty between the nations required France to pay 5 billion gold francs to Prussia, allow a Prussian march through Paris, and secede the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Prussia. These conditions dealt a blow to France's economy, but also to its pride and the morale of Parisians who survived the siege. The Prussians held their victory parade in Paris shortly before the Commune's official establishment in March. They faced little resistance.⁴ For our committee, Prussian troops will still be stationed right outside the city.

French Politics in the 19th Century

France underwent multiple regime changes throughout the 19th century. By 1871, the politics born from these regime changes were still relevant. Many Communards were influenced by Jacobinism, or beliefs from violent radicals of the French Revolution emphasizing direct democracy and secularism.⁵ In contrast, as a result of the failures of revolts in France, there were French conservatives who believed that a strong monarchy, church, and nobility were necessary for a functioning society.⁶

Before the Franco-Prussian War, France was ruled by Napoleon III as the Second French Empire. While the Empire permitted debate between political parties, ranging from republicans to monarchists, it heavily restricted suffrage, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly. After the French defeat at Sedan in 1870, Napoleon III went into exile in England. Mass demonstrations from Parisians prompted French parliamentary elites to proclaim a republic on September 4th, 1870. After the regime change, some French citizens were drawn to a monarchist strain of Catholicism, which promised a sense of stability amidst political turmoil. For similar reasons, others were drawn to moderate liberalism. However, on a nationwide scale, support for socialism was limited.⁷

³ <https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/revue/understanding-franco-prussian-war-0>

⁴ <https://www.sjsu.edu/people/mary.pickering/courses/HIS240/s6/Sowerwine0001.pdf>

⁵ <http://tinyurl.com/2ccjhyae>

⁶ <https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/worldhistory/chapter/chapter-4-the-politics-of-the-nineteenth-century/>

⁷ https://papers.ssrn.com/Sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID1458722_code1325460.pdf?abstractid=1452236

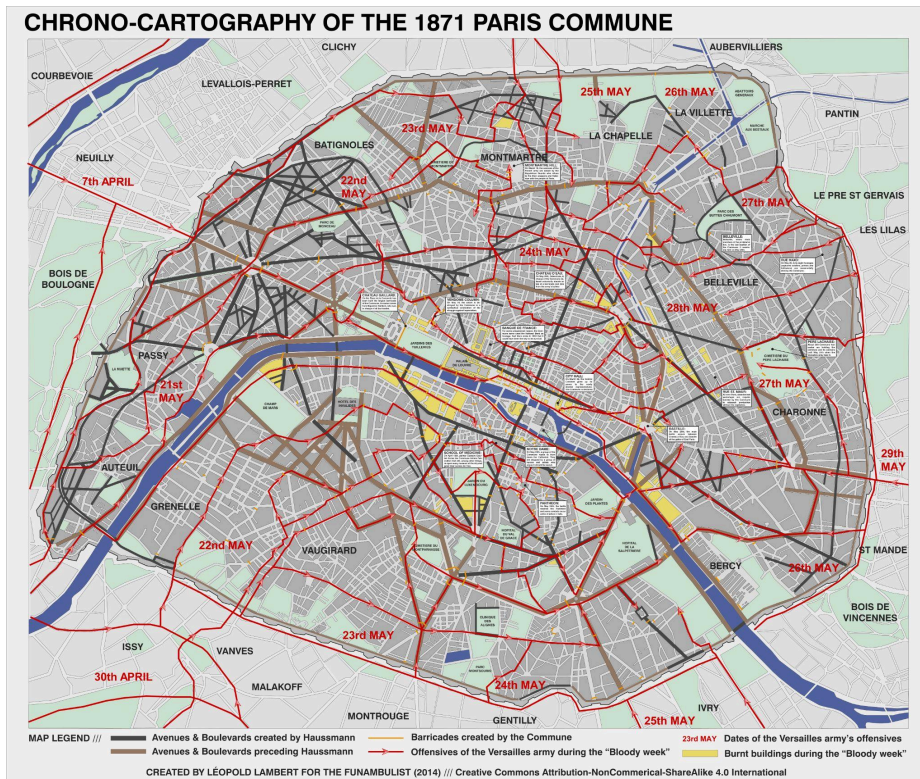
The Rise of Socialism

Socialism had gained prominence in Europe by the time of the Commune. Workers in newly industrialized countries were overworked, faced dangerous conditions, and received little pay. This caused some to argue that the capitalist economic system needed radical reform, advocating for a democratically controlled economy and the abolition of most privately owned land and property. Anarchism, the belief in the abolition of the state to create a moneyless society where land and factories are owned by workers, also grew. These ideologies had many similarities. One prominent thinker who influenced many Communards was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a socialist with anarchist tendencies who advocated against property used to extract wealth from others.

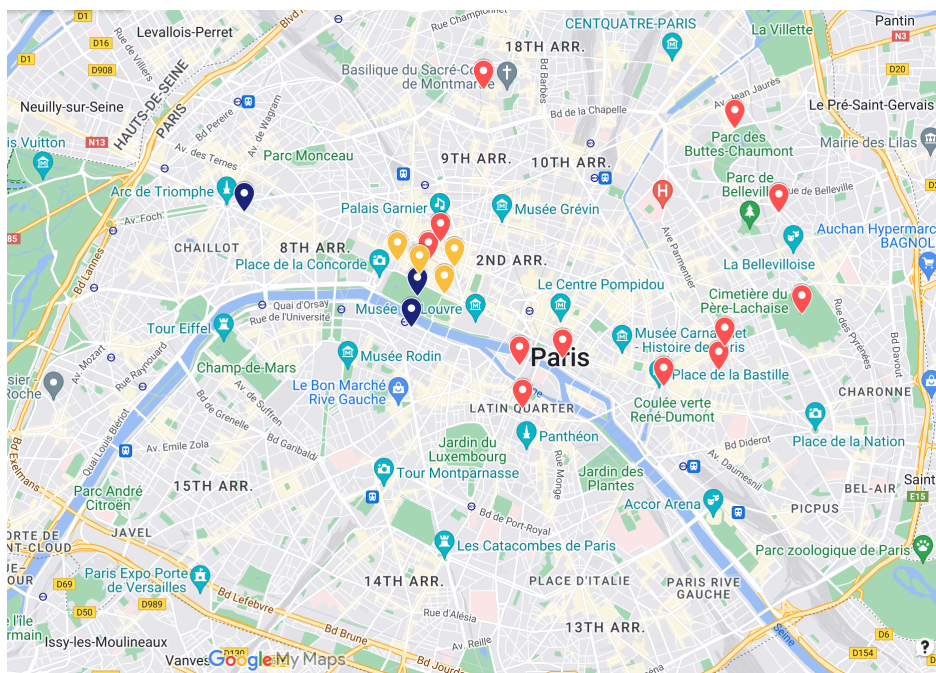
In 1848, political theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifesto*, which quickly spread throughout Western Europe. Despite the name, Marxists at the time considered themselves socialists and influenced the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), a leftist organization formed in 1864. The IWA became a driving force behind socialist movements, establishing sections in various parts of Europe. Many Communards have ties with this organization.⁸

⁸ <https://brians.wsu.edu/2016/10/12/introduction-to-19th-century-socialism/>

Maps of the Commune



Important Locations in the Commune, March 1871. Red indicates Commune-controlled locations. Yellow indicates prominent barricades. Blue indicates non-Commune controlled but potentially relevant locations.



Committee Positions

Jules Vallès: The founder of *Le Cri du Peuple*, one of France's leading socialist newspapers. He became a popular novelist and political journalist, writing books and collaborating with other prominent French news outlets. Vallès was elected to the Council from the 15th Arrondissement.

Louise Michel: A feminist anarchist scholar, teacher, and poet from Montmartre. She opened a progressive school in Paris and joined the National Guard during the siege. When forming the Commune, she expressed militant tendencies, supporting class warfare over parliamentary reform.

Auguste Blanqui: A socialist political theorist and elected to the Council. His writings influenced French students and workers, who called themselves Blanquists, some of whom are in this committee. He was active in many French insurrectionary movements. *Note: While Blanqui was imprisoned before the Commune's start, he will not be imprisoned at the start of this committee.*

Jaroslaw Dabrowski: A Polish noble and former Russian military officer. His involvement with Polish independence activism caused him to flee to Paris. Dabrowski served as an officer in the National Guard and was elected to the Council. He is one of few Communards with professional military experience.

Charles Delescluze: An activist involved in revolts in France before the Commune, serving nearly eleven years in prison for his revolutionary activities. He helped organize elections for the Commune and was elected to the Council from the 11th and 19th Arrondissements.

Gustave Paul Cluseret: A soldier who served as an officer in the French Army and Union Army during the American Civil War. Before the Commune, he attempted to organize revolutions in Lyon and Marseilles. Like Dabrowski, he is one of few Communards with professional military experience.

Eugène Varlin: A socialist, anarchist, and leader of the bookbinder's union in the IWA, who organized strikes and protests. During the siege, he organized relief programs for Parisians. He was elected to the Council as a representative for the 6th, 12th, and 17th Arrondissements.

Théophile Ferré: Little is known about Ferré's early life, though he may have plotted to assassinate Napoleon III. He was elected to the Montmartre Committee of Vigilance, a political organization with close ties to the IWA during the siege, and was elected to the Council.

Félix Pyat: A socialist journalist and playwright. His involvement in revolts and publication of controversial articles caused him to flee France, supporting socialist movements in Belgium, Switzerland, and England. He was elected to the Council.

Raoul Rigault: A socialist anti-establishment journalist. He is a staunch atheist and holds animosity towards the Catholic church. He was involved in revolutionary activity in France from a young age and expressed violent sentiments.

Émile Eudes: A physician and anti-clerical revolutionary. He was almost sentenced to death after leading an unsuccessful insurrection in Paris. He became a commander in the National Guard and joined the Central Committee. He was elected to the Commune's Council.

André Léo: A socialist feminist writer and member of the IWA. Before the Commune, she organized a feminist group focused on education for girls. She wrote fiction and essays commenting on leftist beliefs. Her original name was Victoire Léodile Béra.

Elisabeth Dmitrieff: A Russian Marxist feminist, writer, and founder of the Russian section of the IWA. Being the illegitimate daughter of a Russian aristocrat, she was shunned by the aristocracy. She arrived in Paris just as the Commune was declared on an information-gathering mission assigned by Karl Marx.

Henri Rochefort: A French noble and writer who founded the socialist newspaper *La Marseillaise*. He wrote comedies, theater criticism, and political journalism. He was a member of the Third Republic's government before being expelled for expressing sympathy for the Communards. Note: Rochefort supported the Commune. For this committee, he will be an active participant.

Leó Frankel: A Jewish Hungarian goldsmith and socialist. He was a labor organizer in the German and French sections of the IWA. During the siege of Paris, he served in the National Guard until the city surrendered to Prussia. He was elected to the Council.

Benoît Malon: He was involved with the French section of the IWA, organizing factory workers and leading strikes. Before being elected to the Commune's Council, he organized public relief programs for poor Parisians during the siege. In the Commune, he opposed the Jacobin faction.

Élisée Reclus: An anarchist writer and geographer. He traveled across Britain, the United States, and Central America, publishing multiple books on geography. Upon returning to France, he served in the National Guard during the siege and at the start of the Commune.

Gustave Flourens: A scientist rejected from professorship because of his radical political and scientific beliefs. In particular, his scientific ideas went against those of the clergy. He traveled across Europe and organized some uprisings in France. He was elected to the Council to represent the 20th Arrondissement.

Questions to Consider

1. What exactly is your ideology, and what do you hope to achieve by creating or supporting the Commune?
2. What are your plans for ensuring the longevity of the Commune, or do you intend for it to collapse? What governmental, economic, or social policies will you advocate for?
3. Considering the recent siege and strength of the French government and Prussian militaries, how will you ensure your military and security policies are effective while staying true to socialist or anarchist principles?
4. How will you deal with Parisians, including left-leaning ones, who do not support the Commune? What about influential organizations like the Catholic Church? Will you use diplomatic measures, resort to violence, or something else?
5. In the aftermath of war, how can you use the limited and dwindling resources within Paris to achieve your goals? Could you use resources outside the city's walls?

Resources for Further Research

1. Map: [Chrono Cartography of the Commune](#)
2. Locations Map: [Paris Commune - Important Locations](#)
3. [Marxists Internet Archive: History of the Paris Commune \(primary sources\)](#) - I highly recommend Karl Marx's *The Civil War in France*.
4. [Siege and Commune of Paris Collection - Northwestern University](#)
5. [The Paris Commune - Library of Congress Research Guides](#)
6. [The Fires of Paris - The New Yorker](#)
7. [The War of the Paris Commune, 1871 - USMC Command and Staff College Case Study](#) - For a less romantic interpretation of the Commune than that of Marx.



CONFERENCE POLICIES

Gratefully adapted from the NAIMUN LX delegate guide

1. Position Papers

Position Papers are required for all delegations who wish to receive an award. Position papers should be emailed to the chair by March 29, 11:59 p.m. ET. Please email the chair with any additional questions regarding position papers.

2. Plagiarism and Pre-writing

Plagiarism is strictly prohibited at CAMUN. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, verbatim or near-verbatim copying from digital or physical sources. This rule applies to any document submitted by delegates throughout the conference, including position papers, draft resolutions, directives, and other documents. Additionally, CAMUN prohibits the use of artificially intelligent generators like ChatGPT in the creation of written documents. All work will be thoroughly checked for plagiarism.

3. Technology

CAMUN prohibits the use of technology in committee sessions, including but not limited to computer and cell phones, except during unmoderated caucuses as directed by the Chair.

4. Accommodations

For questions and requests related to disability and special accommodations, please email the CAMUN secretariat at ModelUN@ConcordAcademy.org. CAMUN will do its best to fulfill all appropriate requests.