



Stanford Model United Nations Conference



October 17 to October 19, 2014

Paris Commune of 1871

Crisis Committee

Message from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this crisis committee, the Paris Commune of 1871, of the Stanford Model United Nations Conference of 2014. Allow me to introduce myself and the topic.

My name is Katherine Kaiser, and this is my second Stanford MUN Conference. As I am from France, I enjoy bringing aspects of my culture into my day-to-day life in university, and so this is why I am very excited to chair the Paris Commune committee.

The French country saw many deep changes during the 19th century, starting with the French Revolution in 1789 and culminating in several other revolutions. The people begun demanding a voice, an opinion in deciding who governs them, as they are tired of famine, poverty and war. The demonstrations, uprising and subsequent elections of 1871 that brought on the Commune government in Paris constitute what is regarded as the first successful workers revolution, as most elected members hailed from working class backgrounds. The committee will start off right after the elections of March 26th 1871, and then you, delegate, will have the chance to rewrite French history as you see fit.

In the rest of this report, I give you the basic outline of the events of the time as well as a list of committee members. I encourage you to use this information as a foundation for more precise research of your own so that you may fully enjoy the conference.

Good luck!

Sincerely,

Katherine Kaiser

Presentation of the committee

The committee is comprised of elected members of the Paris Commune, following the elections of March 26th 1871. The council declared Paris to be an independent commune, the goal being for France to become a state of several self-governing communes. In such, the committee only has governance over the city of Paris, and not the rest of France. They do have at their disposal the National Guardsmen, who helped the workers take control of Paris in the first place, though other than that little power to enforce their laws, meaning that the council has to rely heavily on the respect the Parisian have towards them. The main goal of the committee should be to try and spread their vision of French citizens being truly equal, while all the while defending themselves against the Thiers government in Versailles.

Rules and Procedure

Time frame of committee: Starting on March 28th 1871, the way the committee will progress will depend largely on the delegates, yet the 3 days of conference should cover the first few months of the Commune only.

The committee will make decisions and take action through Personal Directives and Directives. Individuals or groups can try to use their personal power and resources to influence the committee and the governance of Paris through notes to Crisis, who will ultimately decide the consequences of such actions.

Communiqués are public declarations or private communications with individuals or groups. Crisis will embody the people you are trying to contact, and update you on your communiqué accordingly. Rules for committee, joint and personal communiqués follow the same rules as directives.

Please note that you shouldn't assume your communiqués are secure just because you mark them as secret. You may want to include specific measures to prevent sabotage or sensitive information getting leaked.

LEADING UP TO THE ELECTIONS OF MARCH 26th 1871

Legacy of the French Revolution

The last century leading up to 1871 saw great turmoil in France, starting of course with the French Revolution of 1789, when the French people, mainly the Parisians, brought an end to the monarchy. The Revolution proved that the people did have the ability, and the power, to decide who ruled them. It also saw the rise of certain factions that continued to play an important role up until the Commune, namely the Jacobins, the Blanchists, the Girondins, and the rise in popularity of socialist and anarchist parties.

The tone was set for the 19th century: the people, mainly the Parisians, were unhappy with their government yet few seemed to know precisely what they wanted. From 1793 to 1871, France saw 8 changes of power, including two republics, 2 empires and one return to the monarchy. It would take little to upset the French people.

The Franco-Prussian war

The main trigger for the uprising that preceded the Commune was the Franco-Prussian war that started in 1870.

The chancellor of the North German Confederation, Otto von Bismarck, sought to unify Germany rapidly, as it was split into Protestant states in the North and Catholic in the South. He felt that to achieve this, he would need to rally all the Germans around a single cause, and one thing that all Germans shared was a hatred for France following Napoleon I's invasion during the First Empire.

Similarly, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte III, nephew to the previous emperor, was elected President in 1848, with a sweeping 74% of the votes, and later staged a *coup*, proclaiming a Second Empire. He hoped to maintain support in his Empire by taking back what the French felt was rightfully theirs, the Alsace-Lorraine region, which had been lost to Prussia under Napoleon I.

Both sides needed this war for political reasons, and all that was left was to find a pretext. It presented itself in 1869, when the Spanish Parliament sought to

give the vacant throne to King Wilhelm I of Prussia's nephew, even though the Spanish throne had previously been occupied by the descendent of the French line, the Bourbons. On the 2nd of July 1870, the French Ambassador to Prussia asked the King to sign a document renouncing his claim to the Spanish throne, yet insulted, he refused. As a result, the French Chamber on July 15, 1870 declared war on Prussia.

The Loss of the War and End of the Empire

Yet the results did not favor the French Emperor, and by September 19 1870, Paris was under siege, after Napoleon III capitulated at Sedan 17 days prior and was taken prisoner. The Parisians remained defiant, and the National Guard moved the city's cannons into 'safe' districts away from the city limits, yet as we will later see, this was decisive in the setting up of the Commune. On September 4th, the Third Republic was proclaimed, with the general Trochu at the head of the Government of National Defense. The leaders of the government later moved to Bordeaux, so as to avoid the siege and properly govern the country. Yet the new leaders faced internal threats, as the radicals and unhappy workers that had amassed in Paris over the past century took to the streets during several demonstrations. The National Guard assembled in the center of the city, demanding that a new government, a Commune, be elected. Trochu had little men available to him to fight both the Prussians at the Paris gates and the uprising inside. Tensions were rising inside the city, resulting in the Hotel de Ville getting stormed on October 31st, with shots narrowly missing Trochu. On November 5th, municipal councils in each of the twenty arrondissements of Paris voted to elect mayors, with five councils electing radical opposition candidates.

Meanwhile, the leader of the conservative faction in the National Assembly, Adolphe Thiers, was trying to gather support for France in foreign countries, but found little. He reported to Trochu that Paris had no other solution than to negotiate an armistice. There were several attempts at negotiating, though Thiers rejected the offer of the 31st of October on Favre's orders, the foreign minister of the Government of National Defense, as Bismarck demanded Alsace and Lorraine. Furthermore, in Paris, shouts of "No armistice" were heard during

the demonstrations. The city remained under siege throughout the winter, which turned out to be a brutal one. Parisians had to endure many shortages, especially food, coal and medicine, bringing on a famine, darkness and confusion.

Reaching an agreement

By mid-January, the French army had suffered great losses and agitation only increased within Paris, especially among the political clubs and the National Guard. After the city was bombarded for several days, the President Trochu resigned on the 20th of January and Favre was allowed to lead the cabinet towards an armistice. Negotiations with Bismarck lead to a 3 week agreement signed on the 28th of January, which mandated a cease-fire, the surrender of Parisian forts by the Prussian, a vote by the assembly on whether to continue the war after the three week deadline and an indemnity of 200 million francs was levied on France. On the 8th of February, national elections were held, proving that France was still largely monarchist, but Paris favored republicans and socialists. The new Parliament chose Adolphe Thiers as President on February 17, and he was in favor of peace and his first goal was to restore order. Though either side was permitted to denounce the armistice after March 3rd, the Germans instead pulled their troops out of Paris. And this marks the beginning of the uprising leading to the Commune.

The cannons in Paris

The siege of Paris proved difficult due to famine and cold, which only increased the unrest. After the Prussian troops left the city after a small two-day invasion from March 1-3, the National Guard prepared for conflict by organizing a Central Committee. Thiers saw the threat, and ordered the removal of the cannons from the Parisian districts, which has been moved there during the siege. Yet the National Guard took control of them first to defend the city against any attack by the national government, making the cannons the symbol of authority over Paris, which Thiers was determined to regain. He convinced his Council of Ministers to order an attack on Paris to take back the cannons, even though the army was weak, demoralized and many too sympathetic with the Parisians. On March 18th, soldiers entered Paris through Montmartre, where most of the

cannons were collected, yet they were met by revolutionary national guardsmen, who were later joined by fellow members of the Guard. Though the army successfully seized cannons in other parts of Paris, the Montmartre situation quickly boiled over, as soldiers joined the surrounding crowd, and the General Lecomte was taken prisoner, to be tried and executed. Meanwhile, General Clement-Thomas was recognized by soldiers, arrested and then shot by a crowd of angry guardsmen. The Lecomte met the same fate minutes later. Barricades were being raised throughout the working-class neighborhoods of Paris as Thiers withdrew the troops to Versailles, already planning his next attack on Paris. He and the rest of the government evacuated to Versailles as well on the 18th of March. The National Guard had the control of Paris.

The Commune

Overnight, guardsmen filled the empty offices at the Ministry of Finance, of the Interior and of War, and the Central Committee started meeting in the Hotel de Ville. Though some wished to march on Versailles, most agreed that a more legal authority needed to be established in Paris, so a delegation of mayors of arrondissement, led by the republican Georges Clemenceau, was sent to negotiate independence for Paris with the Thiers government and elections were called for the 23rd of March. 48% of Parisians voted in the Commune elections held on the 26th of March, with mainly the upper-class citizens abstaining. In the end, the Council had just 60 members. Nine of the winning candidates were Blanquists, some of whom were also candidates of the First International, the most influential workers union in Paris. Twenty-five, including Delescluze, and Pyat, classified themselves as "Independent Revolutionaries;" about fifteen were from the International; and the rest were from a variety of radical groups. A variety of professions were represented in the Commune council members. As the winners were announced the next day, the National Guard held a large ceremony and parade in front of the Hotel de Ville.

THIS COMMITTEE

The committee begins on this day, March 28th 1871, the first meeting of the Commune council members. Time is key, as there are many obstacles that must be dealt with in a short period. You, delegate, are an elected member on the council and are faced with several difficulties.

Mobilizing a Defense

The Thiers government has been gathering its strength and troops in Versailles following its flight from the capital. The council is very much aware that the Versailles government is planning to strike Paris and regain control of the city. Several options present themselves to you: march on Versailles with the National Guard before they do; try to continue negotiating for Parisian special independence; preparing for the oncoming attack; taking away their power and control over the French national army.

Establishing a New Government

The new Commune government also needs to establish itself as an official governing entity so as to earn respect and support from Parisians. Decisions need to be made concerning the values, symbols and laws that your government wants to put forward to appease the tension in the city. Furthermore, respect and acknowledgement is needed from foreign countries to become a true, recognized government capable of going up against the Thiers government.

Dealing with the Economic Situation and the Lower Class

As the Commune is seen as the first successful workers revolution, the working class is expecting a great deal from its new government. Certain areas of the city are still decimated by the war, with rubble and the remnants of barricades. The lower class has been hungry since the siege, and even before then, and it needs bread. Their living conditions are miserable in many cases and most lack any form of education. Shortages of all kinds still abound following the siege. There is little to no possibility of social mobility, and little access to

medical care.

Yet actions such as rebuilding the city and helping the workers are hindered by the financial situation of Paris, which is in debt due to war expenses, and the new government does not have a treasury, nor does it have the influence or respect to seek loans from outside France. Taxing the people is not favorable, as they expect you to improve their situation, not worsen it.

Working with Factions

While dealing with these issues, the council also needs to reconcile political views within, as many of the elected members have very radical views. They must also balance their legislative functions as well as their executive and military ones, so there is little time for disagreement. Remember that the time constraint is significant, as an army is amassing at your doorstep and your people are prone to uprising and barricades.

Gathering followers and Spreading the Word

Another goal of the Commune is to spread their ambition of turning France into a confederation of independent communes. You must spread the word whilst avoiding the Thiers government and convince other cities that it is worth defying the French army to create independent governments. The biggest difficulty will be the rural areas of France, where there are few workers and little caring over who governs them.

Keep in mind that even Paris needs to be completely allied to your goal, as there are still groups that oppose the new government from within, especially the upper-class that has remained.

Positions:

All members were elected in the March 26th 1871 elections.

Charles Amouroux: active within the unions opposing the Second Empire, earning him an exile, and member of the National Guard, he is elected to the Commune Council in the 4th arrondissement. He is a member of the International Workingmen's Association; he works on the central committee of the National Guard and was previously a hatter.

Armand Antoine Jules Arnaud: a journalist for *La Marseillaise*, he denounced the Government of National Defense for its capitulation by signing *the Red Poste* and joined the National Guard, as part of the central committee. He is elected in the 3rd arrondissement and initially starts as secretary of séances, and is part of the Jacobin faction and the International Workingmen's Association.

Adolphe Assi : as participant in the Schneider factory strikes, he suffered an arrest and trial. He later is chosen as colonel of the National Guard during the siege and is part of the central committee. He then becomes government of the Town Hall of Paris and is elected by the 11th arrondissement.

Louis-Denis Chalain: previously a worker in a glass factory, he is elected by the 17th arrondissement. Involved in the International Workingmen's Association, he is active in the many Parisian clubs where radicals and pro-democracy citizens meet.

Jean-Baptiste Chardon : worked as a factory boiler before getting fired for his radical views as a Blanquiste. He becomes a captain of the National Guard during the siege, a member of the International Workingmen's Association and is later elected to the Commune council by the 13th arrondissement.

Charles Delescluze : a journalist with a law background, he had already been involved in the July revolution of 1830 before the Commune, and after 1848 he started his own democratic newspaper, resulting in two imprisonments and later exile to French Guiana. Elected by the 11th and 19th arrondissement, he had a strong Jacobin opinion.

Louis-Simon Dereure : working as a shoemaker and a member of the International Workingmen's Association, he was imprisoned for endangering the security of the State, but was freed by the proclamation of the Republic in 1870. He was a member of the National Guard and was elected vice-mayor to the 18th arrondissement alongside Georges Clemenceau, and was elected by the same arrondissement to the Commune council.

Emile-Victor Duval : as a foundry worker and member of the International Workingmen's Association, he was already causing tension with successful strikes in 1870, though he suffers 2 months of imprisonment for it. He becomes a delegate of the central republican Committee of the 20 arrondissements and starts insurrections against the National Defense government. With Blanquiste tendencies, he is elected to the council by the 13th arrondissement.

Théophile Ferré: an accountant and Blanquiste militant, he suffered numerous imprisonments under the Second Empire for his political opinions. Member of the National Guard, he was a delegate of the central republican Committee of the 20 arrondissement. He was in charge of the defense of the cannons in Montmartre and in favor of a direct attack on Versailles once elected by the 18th arrondissement to the council.

Gustave Flourens: a professor at the *Collège de France*, he was banned from teaching due to his anti-religious and anti-bonapartist views. He was a fierce republican and supported international movement, mainly the insurgent Crete against the Ottoman Empire. He was in constant conflict with the Second Empire, forcing him to flee to the Netherlands and later the United Kingdom. He was a member of the society *Libre Pensée*, writing mainly about how God was a lie used to oppress the lower class. He returns to France after the proclamation of the Republic, becomes a member of the National Guard and is elected to the Commune council by the 19th arrondissement.

Léo Frankel: a jeweler and member of the International Workingmen's Association, he is arrested for being a member of a secret socialist society. He is

active in the central republican Committee of the 20 arrondissements and in the National Guard before being elected to the council by the 13th arrondissement.

Charles Gérardin : hailing from a bourgeois family yet a Jacobin, he is elected as commander of a battalion of the National Guard under the German siege, and becomes a member of the central republican Committee of the 20 arrondissements. He denounced the National Defense government for its capitulation by signing the *Red Poste*, and was elected by the 17th arrondissement to the Commune council.

Paschal Grousset : a Jacobin journalist, writer and politician who is known under several under pseudonyms, he was against the Imperial regime and become chief editor of *La Marseillaise* journal. He engages in the 1870 war despite his views against the Emperor and becomes a member of the Commune council, thanks to his election in the 18th arrondissement.

Fortuné Henry : a poet and journalist who often wrote under false names, he lived in the 10th arrondissement, to which he will later owe his place on the Commune council. He is condemned to a month in prison for an article that was judged obscene. After giving up his literary career, he joins the International Workingmen's Association and is a delegate of the central republican Committee of the 20 arrondissements, which influences him to sign *the Red Poste* against the National Defense government.

Henri Mortier : a wood turner and Blanquiste member of the International Workingmen's Association, he was captain of a battalion of the National Guard during the siege and is later elected to the Commune council by the 11th arrondissement.

François Louis Parisel - French doctor and pharmacist who was elected by the 7th arrondissement and served the Committees of Subsistence and Scientific Delegation. A Jacobin.

Eugène Pottier - French poet and member of the National Guard; elected as a representative of the 2nd arrondissement. Served on the Committee on Public

Services. He was a member of the International Workingmen's Association and a Jacobin.

Eugène Protot - French lawyer and major of the National Guard; elected as a representative of the 11th arrondissement. As a Blanquiste, he worked on the Executive Committee of the Commune Council.

Ernest Puget – A painter and accountant, he commanded the 157th battalion of the National Guard during the Siege of Paris; elected as a representative of the 19th arrondissement for the Commune council. Served on the Committee of Labor and Exchange Commission.

Paul Philémon Rastoul - French Jacobin Physician elected to represent the 10th arrondissement on the Commune council. In charge of the Parisian medical service.

Raoul Rigault - French Blanquiste Journalist and politician who was actively anticlerical and a noted atheist. Elected to represent the 7th arrondissement, and placed in charge of the Committee of General Security. He ordered the arrest of Georges Darboy, the archbishop of Paris, who was later executed by the Communards.

Albert Theisz - Bronze worker who was imprisoned for leading strikes in the French Empire; freed by the Parisians and elected to the 12th and 17th arrondissements (he chose to represent the 17th). Served on the Committee of Labor, Industry, and Exchange Commission and was the Postmaster.

Gustave Tridon – French Blanquiste revolutionary and anti-Semitic politician who was vocally against the Thiers government and negotiations with the Germans. Elected as a deputy for Côte-d'Or in the National Assembly, he resigned when the peace treaty was signed and returned to Paris, where he was elected by the 5th arrondissement. Served on the Commune's Executive Commission and the Commission of War. He staunchly opposed the Committee of Public Safety, fearing the terror that it had unleashed in the first French Revolution - on this regard he was allies with Eugène Varlin and at odds with Théophile Ferré.

Raoul Urbain - French Jacobin teacher who served as mayor and representative of the 7th arrondissement. He was first on the Committee on Education and then the Committee of External Relations and the War.

Éduoard Vaillant – French politician and teacher, one of four editors of the Red Poster calling for the Commune, he was a member of the International Workingmen's Association. He served the 20th arrondissement and oversaw education policy.

Jules Vallès - French journalist and famous author who edited the Red Poster. Elected by the 15th arrondissement; served the Commission on Public Education. Although a revolutionary, he opposed the suppression of “reactionary” newspapers and the separation of Church and State.

Eugène Varlin - French bookbinder unionist and secretary for the French at First International (IWA). Elected in a landslide to the 6th, 12th, and 17th arrondissements, became the Commissioner of Finance, member of the War Commission, and in charge of labour relations. Although a factionalist, he was generally popular due to his idealism and energy. Voted against creating the Committee of Public Safety. Tried in vain to save the lives of hostages executed by the Communards.

Auguste-Jean-Marie Vermorel - French journalist imprisoned under the Second Empire for disseminating socialist ideals. Elected by the 18th arrondissement and served on the Committee on Justice and the Executive Committee and finally General Security.

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