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## *The Royal Manufactures and Economic and Technological Progress in France before the Industrial Revolution*

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Any general discussion of this topic at once runs up against two problems. Firstly, there are major gaps in the documentary sources<sup>1</sup>, and when these are added to the uneven way in which the problems have been explored by contemporary historians, the result is that our understanding of this relationship is still far from clear. We shall probably never be able to gauge exactly either the extent of the State's financial involvement in industrial innovation or the ways in which this was distributed between different enterprises and between different branches of the same industry. At most, one can only attempt a qualitative judgement on the basis of a mere handful of reliable sets of data. There are no statistics on production or prices which would enable us to assess the efficiency and achievements of governmental intervention in industry. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the micro-economic studies of the type carried out by C. Pris on Saint-Gobain<sup>2</sup> at present contribute more to our knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the disappearance of a section of the papers of the Office of the Controller General was an irreparable loss.

<sup>2</sup> PRIS CLAUDE, *La manufacture royale des glaces de Saint-Gobain. Une grande entreprise sous l'Ancien Régime (1665-1830)*, Lille (service de reproduction des thèses), 1975, 2 t.,

in this field than do those vast macro-economic analyses which tend to lead to the often over-hasty compilation of statistical data of very uneven value.

But there is another and less obvious reason which makes it difficult to tackle a subject that has been obscured or distorted by ideological prejudice ever since the first pioneering research was carried out by E. Levasseur and P. Boissonnade. For some, the supposed virtues of liberalism mean that the State by its very nature cannot act efficiently in the economic field. For others, the absolutist State of necessity played a decisive role in all areas of national development. And the books of liberal inspiration by Alain Peyrefitte and Henri Lepage<sup>3</sup> have recently given new interest to the debate on the efficiency of French enterprise during the *Ancien Régime*. This is why the discussions between D. Landes, R. Cameron and M. Lévy-Leboyer<sup>4</sup> on French industry after the Revolution have also tended to move back to the reign of Louis XIV and to "Colbert's programme"<sup>5</sup>.

We have, therefore, attempted to bring together all the data on the granting of the privileged royal charters and on the financial balance-sheets that are available. We have also tried to re-assess the theoretical concepts relating to royal manufactures and the role of the State in economic life.

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1286 p. See also "La glace en France aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Monopole et liberté d'entreprise dans une industrie de pointe sous l'Ancien Régime", in *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, 1977, n<sup>o</sup> 1-2, pp. 5-23.

<sup>3</sup> PEYREFITTE ALAIN, *Le mal français*, Paris, 1976, 452 p. LEPAGE HENRI, *Demain le capitalisme*, Paris, 1978, 448 p.

<sup>4</sup> LÉVY-LEBOYER, MAURICE, Le patronat français a-t-il été malthusien?, in *Le Mouvement social*, juillet-sept. 1974, pp. 3-49. CAMERON RONDO E., *French and the Economic Development of Europe (1800-1914)*, Princeton, 1961, 586 p., (trad. fr., 1971, 425 p.) LANDES DAVID S., *The Unbound Prometheus, Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present*, Cambridge, 1969, (trad. fr.: *L'Europe technicienne*, Paris, 1975, 781 p).

<sup>5</sup> LAVISSE ERNEST, *Louis XIV*, Paris, 1911 (rééd. 1978) t. I, pp. 170-166. One scarcely need mention that, as R. MOUSNIER (preface, p. XIII) points out, the idea that "Colbert's programme" was presented to the king on a plate is a 'figment of Lavissee's imagination'.

I. THEORY AND PRACTICE OF INDUSTRIAL INTERVENTIONISM IN THE PERIOD UP TO THE MID-XVIII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

As is well known, historians have described as "mercantilist" all the policies of economic intervention carried out by the modern European states from the XVI<sup>th</sup> to XVIII<sup>th</sup> centuries. In particular, the mercantilist system is seen to have been typical of countries struggling for economic independence and mobilizing their resources in an effort to make up for lost time in the manufacturing and commercial fields.<sup>6</sup> In France, Jean-Baptiste Colbert's name is associated, as far as posterity is concerned, with this kind of political development, as it was he who formulated the characteristic system and model.

A. *The precepts of Colbertism*

Colbertism did of course exist before Colbert. The well-coined maxims of Richelieu<sup>7</sup> strongly inspired the Controller General, whose destiny it was to take on with formidable energy the grandiose project that had been drawn up a long time before: "to make the State opulent".<sup>8</sup>

There would be no point in rehearsing the debate over Colbert's successes and failures. From E. Lavisse's panegyric to the hyper-critical re-assessment of P. Goubert<sup>9</sup>, Colbert's work has always been the object of impassioned polemic, and studies with a strong ideological content have abounded in this field. Even an exemplary scholar like P. Boissonnade does not emerge unscathed, and viewed Colbertism as a form of "State socialism"

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<sup>6</sup> DEYON PIERRE, *Le mercantilisme*, Paris, 1969, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> HAUSER HENRI, *La pensée et l'action économique du cardinal de Richelieu*, Paris, 1944 196 p.

<sup>8</sup> HAUSER HENRI, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> GOUBERT PIERRE, *Louis XIV et vingt millions de Français*, Paris, 1966, pp. 85 et seq. For a "revision" of Colbert and Colbertism see the excellent study by H. Méthivier, *Le règne de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1975, pp. 95-109.

responsible for the inauguration of a "dictatorship of labour".<sup>10</sup> Although such terms are quite inappropriate, and reflect a basic misconception of the nature of Colbertism, they should not be allowed to discredit a work which, in terms of information at least, still remains the most thorough study of the topic. Nor would we wish to hide our own debt to Boissonnade, only part of whose research was ever published. We have in fact been able to recover from the archives of the *Academy of Moral and Political Sciences* two huge manuscript memoirs which he edited with great scholarly erudition.<sup>11</sup>

This immense labour of scholarship has made it possible to establish the fundamental precepts of Colbert's policies. As is well known, Colbert believed that international economic competition was a "war of money", that the prosperity of a State could only be built up at the expense of its neighbours and that his aim as Controller General was to liberate French foreign trade from Dutch tutelage. Is there anything more to be said on Colbertism then? In fact, when reading through these papers,<sup>12</sup> especially the preambles to the privileges that were grant-

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<sup>10</sup> PROSPER BOISSONNADE, *Le socialisme d'Etat: l'industrie et les classes industrielles en France pendant les deux premiers siècles de l'ère moderne (1453-1661)*, Paris, 1927, 380 p. P. BOISSONNADE, *Colbert, le triomphe de l'étatisme, la fondation de la suprématie industrielle de la France, la dictature du travail (1661-1683)*, Paris, 1932, 392 p.

<sup>11</sup> In competition for the Rossi prize in 1897 Boissonnade submitted an essay of 727 pages entitled: *Etude sur les réglemens relatifs à la fabrication, sur les inspecteurs des manufactures, sur la police générale des métiers et en général sur l'intervention de l'administration royale dans l'industrie*. In 1899 he won the second prize with a really remarkable essay on *Les manufactures royales avant 1789* (497 fos.). We are grateful to M. Chazelas, the Secretary to the Academy, for granting us access to these two essays.

<sup>12</sup> The list of studies on Colbert and Colbertism is long, from P. CLÉMENT (*Histoire du système protecteur en France depuis le ministère de Colbert*, Paris, 1854) to Elisabeth Pauly-Charreyre's thesis for the *École des Chartes* in 1961, and including F. JOUGLEAU (*Études sur Colbert*, Paris, 1856), E. LEVASSEUR (*Histoire des classes ouvrières et de l'industrie en France avant 1789*, t. II, Paris, 1901), Germain-Martin (*La grande industrie sous le règne de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1899), R. GONNARD, *Histoire des doctrines économiques*, 1927) and many more. Nevertheless, to gain familiarity with Colbert's thought nothing could be more fruitful than attentive study of the *Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Colbert*, 2 vols., 1865 (by P. Clément).

ed, one is at times surprised to find that certain aspects of Colbert's thought, although not totally ignored, have been passed over in silence in the general reconstructions of his ideas. A good example is provided by the preamble to the privilege granted to the commercial company for the North (1669) which bursts with commercial humanism. "Commerce is the most proper means of conciliating different nations and engaging the most opposed spirits in a beneficial reciprocal dialogue; it both brings and propagates abundance by the most innocent means, causes people to be happy and States to flourish".<sup>13</sup> It could be argued that this was mere empty rhetoric, but this was probably not the case, any more than the repeated references to the "war of money" fully expressed the official thought of the time.

The privileges granted to the manufactories were not, as is sometimes suggested, the sign of an excessive interventionism and fear of competition. Take, for example, the arguments justifying the granting of a privilege in February 1671 to Sieur Guichard for his *piqué* factory at St. Quentin: "Such a manufactory never having been established in our kingdom, he (Sieur Guichard) has been obliged to make great expenditure to attract workers from foreign countries in order to have the frames built on which to make the *piqué*, and as this manufacture is of considerable use to the public, since a number of persons who were previously unemployed have found work here, the petitioner has very humbly requested us to grant him permission...".<sup>14</sup> In fact the claim that employment would be increased by the enterprise in question was an argument constantly invoked in appeals for support for various new enterprises. The privileges were not seen as conflicting with the public good, as would be the case in a liberal economic system, but rather as the only efficient safeguard of a social group which, if left to itself, would be in jeopardy.

<sup>13</sup> P. CLÉMENT, *op. cit.*, t. II, 2<sup>e</sup> partie, p. 800.

<sup>14</sup> P. CLÉMENT, *op. cit.*, t. II, 2<sup>e</sup> partie, pp. 850-851. Text quoted by P. DEYON, *Le mercantilisme*, pp. 96-97.

Nevertheless, Colbert always saw manufacturing privileges as "temporary crutches" to support emerging enterprises and to help them evade the constraints of the corporative regime.<sup>15</sup> He took it as an axiom that patronage would disappear after an initial period of technical adaptation was over and the new commercial venture had become established.<sup>16</sup> We must, however, add that the interplay of influence and protection, as well as the inaccuracy of the accounting systems used by the enterprises, often meant that government assistance was prolonged for several generations, with the transfer to common law of the regulations which amounted to the concession of privilege.

### B. *The main forms of intervention in manufacture*

Intervention in manufacturing took two basic forms. Firstly, there was the huge mass of regulations, in the form of thousands of letters patent, edicts and decrees referring to manufacture and the general policing of the manufactures and crafts. A calculation of the number of regulations issued by the royal offices reveals the frequency of the royal administration's intervention in the development of manufactures. From the unpublished memoir of 1697, P. Boissonnade listed 150 decrees and orders made between 1664 and Colbert's death. Between 1684 and 1753, he listed no less than a thousand.<sup>17</sup>

There is no need to comment at length upon the "mania for regimentation" behind mercantilist policies, and it seems more interesting to concentrate on the ways in which the State intervened directly in the creation and operation of these companies. In fact, the royal manufactures were by no means all

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<sup>15</sup> PAULY-CHARREYRE ELISABETH, *Recherches sur la grande industrie privilégiée sous Colbert*, thesis for the *École des Chartes*, 1961, p. 100 (Arch. Nat. AB XXVIII 36).

<sup>16</sup> "You must be assured that every time I find a greater advantage or an equal advantage I do not hesitate to suppress all privileges", Letter to Sieur Dallyez, director of the Levant Company, 17th february 1679, CLÉMENT P., *op. cit.*, t. II, 2<sup>e</sup> partie, p. 694.

<sup>17</sup> P. BOISSONNADE, *Etude sur les règlements relatifs à la fabrication...*, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

built on a single model, but fell into three rough categories. The monarchy sometimes granted, as an honorary title, the status of royal manufacture to all the manufacturers and master craftsmen of a city who would otherwise have remained bound to the usual guild regulations. The State was also able to take over a company by buying up all its assets, and in this case it assumed the direct management of the factory and was usually its principal customer. Royal manufactures of this sort grew continually in number, but the monarchy only took on the role of manufacturer in the case of workshops of high artistic quality (Gobelins, Savonnerie) or factories of military supplies.<sup>18</sup> However one cannot over-emphasize the fact that in most cases the royal manufactures were and remained private concerns which were judged important for the prosperity of the kingdom and its commercial equilibrium and so enjoyed the care and protection of the State in the form of subsidies, loans and privileges. The latter could either be juridical, (the privilege of *committimus*)<sup>19</sup> or fiscal (exemption from personal taxes for the labour force, and total or partial exemption from the taxes on the raw materials and finished goods). Apart from the concession of the title of royal manufacturer, the advantage that was most sought after must have been the exclusive privilege prohibiting any competition in the production or sale of goods.

C. *The main alternatives open to French manufacturing policy up to the mid-XVIIIth century*

Before analysing the nature of the initiatives taken in public manufactures, one must first measure the financial support given

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<sup>18</sup> HAVARD HENRI ET VACHON MARIUS, *Les manufactures nationales: les Gobelins, la Savonnerie, Sèvres, Beauvais*, Paris, 1889, 632 p.

<sup>19</sup> We should remember that this privilege gave the right to bring a case before a high court, normally before that of the receivers of the local Parlements or municipalities. In settling litigation by appeal to higher jurisdictions, the entrepreneurs were able to avoid the mass of lower legal authorities in Ancien Regime France which would almost certainly have reduced the practical value of their privileges.

to these companies. In this field it is difficult to reach reliable conclusions since assistance and subsidies could be obtained from widely differing sources. However, in 1670 Colbert devoted 500,000 *livres* to this item of expenditure from a total budget of 70 million, which probably represents a real record in terms of percentage, if not of absolute value.<sup>20</sup> A hundred and ten years later, if Necker is to be believed, the credits earmarked for the same purpose which came from the *Fund for Commerce* and the State treasuries did not exceed 800,000 *livres* out of a total expenditure of 600 million.<sup>21</sup>

The main principles of the policy towards manufactures can be seen from the types of manufactures which received the royal title. Research in the series F12, G7, H1, O1 and X1A of the National Archives enabled Boissonnade to confirm that there were 40 new privileges for royal manufactures granted under Henry IV, 20 under Louis XIII and Mazarin, 113 under Colbert's administration and 243 more between 1683 and 1750. This shows how Colbert's successors pursued his policy with unremitting zeal.

But royal assistance was not granted to all the different sectors of industry indiscriminately. Between 1661 and 1683, Colbert concentrated on granting privileges and monopolies to metal-working and textile workshops. The title of royal manufacturer was granted to 55 companies, or groups of companies, engaged in textiles, (especially in cloth, silk or woollen hosiery making) and to 51 metal workshops which were often involved in producing military supplies and equipment.

Between 1683 and 1753 new royal manufactories<sup>22</sup> were still

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<sup>20</sup> P. BOISSONNADE, *Colbert, le triomphe de l'étatisme...* op. cit., p. 49. The work by J. GUIFFREY, *Comptes des bâtiments du roi sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1881-1901, 5 vols.) which collects all the sources, is of fundamental importance for reference.

<sup>21</sup> J. NECKER, *De l'administration des Finances de la France*, Paris, 1784.

<sup>22</sup> In order to curtail our text we have used the abbreviation n.r.m. for new royal manufacture.

mainly concerned with textiles (149 out of 243, or 61.32%). As before, it was the production of fine, mixed or ordinary cloth which benefited most from royal protection. Silk continued to merit special attention (17 silk-spinning mills and 8 weaving mills obtained the royal title), and neither was tapestry-making neglected, as 6 factories received the coveted title, but interest in expanding the hosiery trade decreased slightly. The other "non-textile" manufactories covered many sectors, with glass-making at the head with 21 concessions, excluding the 9 new royal manufactories of mirrors and crystal. There was definitely less interest in armaments. The cannon foundries and arms manufactories created in Colbert's time were thought to be sufficient and only two new concerns of this type received privileges. On the other hand, there were 19 new royal manufactories devoted to the making of steel (5) white iron (7) copper and lead (2), figures which show that tangible progress had been made when compared with figures for the preceding period.

One of the most interesting points to emerge from these statistics is that the mercantilist desire to support manufacturing activity, far from ending with Colbert's death, showed a remarkable continuity and a certain flexibility in diversifying the range of intervention. On the whole, it would be natural to attribute at least part of the credit for the expansion of production and exports — for example, of woollen cloth — during this period to the varied and continuing activity of the State. It may not, of course, be possible to confirm this hypothesis in quantitative terms, yet it nevertheless remains convincing and very probable. Unfortunately, the period after 1750 does not enable us to make any comparison with a different situation, since the spread of physiocratic and their liberal theories neither reduced nor modified in real terms the extent of industrial dirigism on the part of the State.

## II. CAN ONE SPEAK OF A LIBERAL TURNING POINT IN THE 1750s' AND IF SO WHAT WERE ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND ITS LIMITATIONS?

It is generally acknowledged that the 1750s saw the emergence of new economic attitudes of physiocratic or liberal inspiration, and that this began the process of dismantling the network of privileges and monopolies that had been built up by the monarchy since Colbert's days. Such views are supported both in textbooks and in research monographs, and even a historian as well informed as P. Léon is able to claim: "Resistance to dirigism hardened from 1760-1770... the dirigist apparatus was dismantled at great strokes... Turgot's suppression of the corporations in 1776, and the modification of the regulations following the edict of 5 May 1779... gave legal recognition to the victory of large-scale industry and annihilated later attempts at reaction. The State recognized the *fait accompli* and did so with pleasure".<sup>23</sup> But there would seem to be a case for looking more carefully both at the nature of these doctrines and at the ways they were in fact applied. This means re-opening a case which has been closed too quickly.

### A. *The main points of the classical argument*

Let us take up the main points made in the traditional analysis, which claims that there was a new development in both the theory and the practice of industrial interventionism. Historians stress that the administrators won over to liberal ideas crowded the corridors of power and had an increasingly important voice in the commercial administration. This new administrative ethos found a leader in Daniel-Charles Trudaine. He became director of commerce in 1749, while continuing to supervise the Department of Roads and Bridges. In April 1751, with the

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<sup>23</sup> LÉON PIERRE, *La réponse de l'industriel*, in *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, t. II, Paris, 1970, p. 226.

Controller-General Machault, he nominated Vincent de Gournay<sup>24</sup> as superintendent of commerce, and this initial group was joined by men of talent such as Bertin, Silhouette, Trudaine de Montigny and many more administrators.<sup>25</sup>

All of them were infatuated with the creed of "*Laissez-faire, laissez-passer*", and were convinced of the merits of free prosperity, free enterprise and free trade... Isaac de Bacalan, the superintendent of trade, summed up well the spirit motivating these men of power in 1768: "Liberty is without doubt preferable to any rules... all rules are absurd and injurious".<sup>26</sup> Armed with these principles, these late XVIIIth century "technocrats" could not do other than conduct a resolute policy of liberalization. The results are well known, and we shall only give a rapid survey of the main landmarks. In 1754, a first measure appeared aimed at ensuring the free circulation of grain, which was one of the "economist's" obsessions. In 1759, an order authorized the manufacture of printed calico, and another relaxed the exclusive rights granted to the Antilles. In 1762, free labour mobility in the countryside was proclaimed, and free ports were established at San Domingo. In July 1764, convinced of the beneficial effects of trade freedom, Averdys went so far as to proclaim the removal of controls over the export of grain. After marking time under Terray's administration,<sup>27</sup> the liberals again took the offensive under Turgot, and after his disgrace they then proceeded with greater caution until the end of the *Ancien Regime*. Their actions, then, formed an uninterrupted prelude to the Constituent Assembly's historic proclamation of the freedom of enterprise.

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<sup>24</sup> See G. SCHELLE, *Vincent de Gournay*, Paris, 1897, 300 p.

<sup>25</sup> A valuable biography of the administrators of the Bureau de Commerce is contained in the analytical inventory of minutes published by P. Bonnassieux and E. Lelong (Paris, 1900).

<sup>26</sup> Arch. Nat.: F12 650. Document referred to by E. LEVASSEUR, *op. cit.*, t. II, p. 577, n. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Terray, for example, suspended the export of grain with his order of 23 December 1770.

The law of 2 March 1791, known as Allarde's law, suppressed the guild masters as well as the royal manufactures. But is all this indisputable and beyond question? In our view, no.

B. *Was the development of administrative policy continuous or disrupted?*

The question of the privileged manufactures was not at the centre of the liberal polemic, which after 1750 was directed much more at impediments to free trade, at corporative monopolies and controls over production. When it was a question of judging the legitimacy of an exclusive privilege, most physiocrat and liberal theoreticians or administrators condemned it on principle, but they then immediately qualified this by admitting that some form of privilege was acceptable when it protected the inventor or creator of an innovatory enterprise for a limited period of time.

But was there really anything new in this? Let us examine the long series of preambles and the views of the trade deputies in response to requests for privileges made by entrepreneurs. As far as principles go, nothing changed substantially after Colbert who, as we have seen, had stressed the provisional nature of the privileges conceded to manufactures. In 1701 Anisson, the deputy of the king's council, announced that privileges must only be granted to "those who work at perfecting the arts by the invention of some new machine or the establishment of some new trade".<sup>28</sup> On 26 October 1716, replying to an application for a privilege for a starch manufactory the Bureau de Commerce objected: "We have proved many times how pernicious to commerce is the use of privileges, which the Council is determined to grant no longer, except to those who are offering some secret or some hitherto unknown trade".<sup>29</sup> And lest we should imagine

<sup>28</sup> *Correspondance des Contrôleurs généraux*, t. II, app.

<sup>29</sup> Arch. Nat.: F12 693.

that the exclusive privileges were favoured by the members of the Bureau as a matter of course, one reporter wrote as early as 1717, in a burst of enthusiasm worthy of the liberal ideologues of the later XVIIIth century: "Exclusive privileges are always odious and contrary to public liberty".<sup>30</sup>

The objection might be raised that these early years of the Regency were favourable to innovations, but this was not to last, so that they are not convincing evidence. There is no doubt that under the administration of the Colbertist Orry such attitudes were no longer approved. However, if one searches carefully one can find in this period professions of a crypto-liberal faith which corresponded exactly to the line of conduct we previously described. On 20 August 1744, in the middle of the period when Colbertism was being re-activated, a resolution by the *Conseil du commerce* recorded that "the exclusive privilege should normally only be granted to those who establish some enterprise useful for trade and hitherto unknown".<sup>31</sup> This was not an isolated case; in October 1744 the deputies of the council rejected an application from Boizot of Rouen and justified their "opinion" by invoking "the principles which are observed by the Bureau du Commerce" with regard to exclusive privileges: "Sieur Boizot is proposing nothing that is new or that has not already been established, nothing that gives greater advantage to trade".<sup>32</sup>

The fact is that the physiocrat administrators of the second half of the century showed the same pragmatism in combining the concession of a monopoly with encouragement of new and useful sectors.<sup>33</sup> In other words, when they held positions of

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<sup>30</sup> P. BOISSONNADE, *Les manufactures royales avant 1789*, op. cit., p. 436.

<sup>31</sup> Arch. Nat.: F12 91, f<sup>o</sup> 497.

<sup>32</sup> Arch. Nat.: F12 702.

<sup>33</sup> It is revealing that in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique* Roland de la Platière concedes that "the exclusive privileges are just and necessary in certain cases, and are a kind of reward for the labour involved in the invention of manufactures, work processes and

power, they were prepared to accept exceptions to their general principles and their interventions demonstrated this belief in voluntarist action and their faith in industrial development. Proof of this is provided by Turgot himself who had in the most rigorous of terms set out the new principles in his "Eloge de Gournay"<sup>34</sup> while yet showing considerable eclecticism as a practical administrator. In 1766, for example, in a letter to Trudaine concerning a cotton manufactory in the Limousin, he definitely opposed the granting of a monopoly "for a manufacture that is not new in the kingdom" but made no objection to the renewal of the privilege of royal manufacture.<sup>35</sup>

This is why the reform movement in the second half of the century showed scant interest in privileged manufactures and the new regulations concerning them reflect a considerable regard for particular circumstances as well as a certain respect for a tradition of patronage and industrial protection. The declaration of 24 December 1762 fixed a term of 15 years for the duration of privileges of a commercial nature but hastens to add "while permitting the concessionaries the right to obtain extension of their privileges where this may be deemed appropriate".<sup>36</sup> Neither should we imagine that the famous letters patent of

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machinery useful either to the public or to the great commercial enterprises" (*Encyclopédie Méthodique, Commerce*, 1781, p. 4471).

<sup>34</sup> In 1759 Turgot, as a young man, expressed in his *Eloge de Gournay* in crystal-clear language those liberal aspirations which were soon to achieve a real cultural hegemony. Social harmony, he suggests, results from each man's pursuit of his own personal interests. This is why "from all point of view in which commerce can involve the State, particular interest if left to itself will always lead to general good more surely than steps taken by government, which are always incorrect and of necessity dictated by vague and uncertain theories". Starting from these premises, Gournay can only condemn formally "prohibitions and exclusive advantages" and "only with many reservations is accessory to the steps taken by the government". Elsewhere he clearly defines the problem of the patent of invention, hoping that encouragement will be given "to the authors of useful discoveries" and that "everything that could represent an object for emulation should be supported". (In *Oeuvres de Turgot*, ed. Daire, Paris 1884 t.I., p. 276).

<sup>35</sup> *Oeuvres de Turgot*, op. cit., p. 353 et seq.

<sup>36</sup> ISAMBERT, *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises*, t. 22, p. 387.

5 May 1779 were more rigorous. Although they stated in an apparently peremptory tone that the title of royal manufactory would no longer be granted, they also reduced the full effect of this decision by allowing for "exceptions in favour of inventors or of new manufactories imported from abroad".<sup>37</sup> There is no reason for believing, then, that manufacturing policy was radically transformed between the first and second halves of the century. Moderate Colbertism, like reformist physiocracy or the new liberal aspirations, all acknowledged the State's responsibility in certain sectors, and made use of the same forms of intervention in industry and in like manner protected a large group of privileged manufacturers.

*C. Continuity and change in the administrative practice in the later XVIIIth century*

The statistics provided by regulations and privileges, although extremely sketchy, bear out what we have concluded from examining the theoretical literature and the policy and practice of the administration. Let us first examine the statistics of the decrees or ordinances relating to industry. As we have already said, there were no less than 1,000 between 1683 and 1753 (approximate date of the appointment of an administration of liberal persuasion) while for the period between 1753 and 1789 Boissonnade has counted about 500 more regulations.<sup>38</sup> We are of course aware that certain of these regulations were aimed at introducing greater flexibility into production, but it would still be paradoxical to conclude that less legislation was brought about after 1753.

In the same way the frequency of letters patent and orders granting the title of royal manufactory did not decrease after 1753; on the contrary, there were 158 in 35 years: the most

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<sup>37</sup> E. LEVASSEUR, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et de l'industrie en France avant 1789*, t. II, Paris, 1901, p. 665.

<sup>38</sup> P. BOISSONNADE, *Etude sur les règlements relatifs...*, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

surprising evidence to be gleaned from this statistic is that the ten-year average for the granting of the title was higher in the later XVIIIth century than it was during the previous period. Boissonnade himself does not seem to have grasped the full import of this evidence. There was a relative but indisputable growth in liberal ideas after 1750, but the liberal phraseology appears to have been merely a façade around a basically unchanging practice.<sup>39</sup>

How can one explain the contradiction between declarations that are liberal in spirit and the continued frequency with which these privileges were granted? If the men in power continued to offer such rewards, it was certainly because the entrepreneurs continued to seek them and the state was always, in their eyes, an indispensable protector and the "guarantor of reputations".<sup>40</sup> Can one conclude from this that the liberal attitude was only a smokescreen of no importance at all? Probably not, but both entrepreneurs and administrators in the late XVIIIth century saw no irreducible contradiction between the demand for liberty and concern for protection.<sup>41</sup> In a society organized on a corporative basis personal initiative could only flourish under the protection given by exemption and privileges. With its power for initiative and reform the monarchy seemed to be the essential

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<sup>39</sup> Could the same be said for the renewal of privileges for royal manufactures? In fact no enquiry of this sort, interesting though it would be, has ever been carried out. Stormy arguments that were the gossip of the day accompanied the renewal of the Saint-Gobain privilege, and even, in a milder form, the Van Robais privilege. Despite recriminations, the privileged factory owners seem to have had the best of it. (see C. PRIS, *La manufacture royale des glaces de Saint-Gobain, op. cit.*, pp. 40-47). The documentary sources are still too few and far between to permit any authoritative conclusions to be drawn.

<sup>40</sup> HIRSCH JEAN-PIERRE, "Les milieux de commerce, l'esprit de système et le pouvoir à la veille de la Révolution", in *Annales E.S.C.*, nov. déc. 1975, p. 1359.

<sup>41</sup> In his article quoted above Jean-Pierre Hirsch stresses that the name of liberty was never invoked by men of commerce against the royal authority, which was seen as "the guardian divinity of commerce" and adds: "Liberty and protection were like two faces of the same relationship of submission to the political power; the privilege continued to be experienced as the dominant form of liberty".

force for progress within the kingdom and the natural protector of national industry, which was engaged in stiff competition with British rivals.

It is obviously not enough just to take the overall statistic of privileges granted to royal manufactures. Were these privileges accorded on the basis of intrigue and ambition, or did they conform to a pattern of priorities and choices which made up an industrial strategy? After 1753 certain new considerations seem to have become established. The French lead in the manufacture of certain luxury fabrics (lace, tapestries and silks) was thought to be well established, and so private initiative was entrusted with the main responsibility for its development. The production of fine cloths had expanded to such levels that royal encouragement was no longer necessary. On the other hand, Daniel Trudaine and his colleagues were much concerned with the industry of stretching and throwing silks, especially in the Languedoc. Even greater assistance was given to the cotton spinning mills and manufactures; not only were 22 privileges granted to the entrepreneurs of Picardy, Normandy, Alsace and the Lyons area, but the administration was by no means niggardly with financial assistance and did not hesitate to provide free machines and equipment on occasions. To a greater extent than in the past, government intervention also affected industries outside the textile sector (only 46.8% of new royal titles). In certain sectors previous policies were strengthened; the interest of the central authority in paper mills (3 titles) and tanneries (6 titles), which was already evident in the early part of the century, did not diminish. The same applied to earthenware manufactures (5 new titles), porcelain factories (2) and ceramics (3).<sup>42</sup> The manufacture of French porcelain that was first installed at Vincennes and then at Sèvres, and which became the property of the State in 1759 had, in this respect, a symbolic significance.

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<sup>42</sup> We should again mention that we obtained data for new royal manufactures from P. BOISSONNADE's manuscript *Les manufactures royales avant 1789*, passim.

As the administration kept abreast of English examples, many efforts were made to imitate or catch up with the neighbour across the Channel. Three "English" hat manufactories were established at Lyons, Clermont and Rennes and were granted the title of royal manufactory. In 1774 Holker founded a stoneware manufactory at Montereau on English lines of production. It is also significant that the central authority increased its efforts to encourage the metal-working industries, which alone accounted for almost a quarter of the new royal manufactories. This doubtless resulted from a revival of interest in the armaments industry; 8 establishments received the envied privilege which meant that pioneers like Gribeauval or Wilkinson were able to develop their most successful processes for the casting, boring and preparation of cannon and ships' anchors in the factories of Indret, Montcenis and Ruelle. It was in this period that the manufactories of guns and side-arms, which would soon become famous, were established at Tulle and Saint-Etienne.

But contrary to what happened in Colbert's time, armament factories were not favoured at the expense of primary metal-working industries; 19 establishments treating iron, lead, copper and steel became royal manufactories. A particular effort was made on behalf of copper production, with 7 n.r.m., which is not surprising, as although French cast-iron and iron production exceeded Britain's, French copper production was still far behind Britain's, which justified a special effort to make good the handicap. Neither were the factories that manufactured metals neglected; in the list of newly-privileged establishment there were 3 hardware factories operating on English lines, workshops for plated ware "in the English fashion", and watchmaking factories to compete with the Swiss.

One problem still needs to be faced — although it is still far from resolved. What contribution did the privileged manufactures make to French industry and enterprise as a whole? Several lifetimes would be needed to provide an answer, so vast

and pressing is the problem. But it must be emphasized that the State-directed industrial intervention was an attempt to respond to the demands of growth and competition. This was the most long-lasting of the Colbertist principles. And right down to the present, French industry has never ceased to demand guarantees, protection and often direct aid too from the State.

#### A PROVISIONAL CONCLUSION

Despite the areas of uncertainty we have previously mentioned, certain points need to be stressed in conclusion.

1. It was the existence in the kingdom of a vast network of interests, institutions and corporative regulations which justified and made necessary the privileges conceded to manufactures. The organized world of craft guilds and small workshops that were often supported by town councils, magistrates and local notables was opposed to all technical innovation and added to the number of Malthusian obstacles to the growth of production and employment.

2. Technical innovation, the introduction of a new manufacture imitating a foreign model, the use of "machinery", all seemed to be reasons that fully justified the granting of either an exclusive privilege or the status of royal manufacture. Even advocates of liberalism accepted this deviation from the rules of free competition and free enterprise. In the absence both of any efficient legislation on industrial patents for inventions and of any clear understanding of theories of capital-labour substitution, a monopoly appeared to be the only guarantee for the inventor and the only protection that the entrepreneur could be afforded. The State was, we find, involved through the Bureau du Commerce, inspectors of manufactures, support, subsidies and privileges in all the innovations that were slowly transforming a great

many sectors of production. In the cotton industry Holker and Milne imported and distributed spinning machines from England, and on their recommendation Trudaine, Turgot, Necker and Calonne distributed awards, subsidies and privileges. At Amiens, Morgan's famous cotton velvet manufactory was recognized as a royal manufacture as early as 1766; on the eve of the Revolution the first French spinning jennies were installed in his workshops.<sup>43</sup> In the wool industry, Roland de la Platière, inspector of manufactures in Picardy, encouraged and supported innovators. On his initiative some of the first Arkwright spinning machines were brought into operation in the royal manufactures at Sens and Amiens (Martin, Flesselle); State intervention seemed even more effective in the introduction of the coke furnace. We know of the parts played by De Wendel and Wilkinson in this technical success, but we must not forget that their factories had been established as royal manufactures as early as 1781.

3. The public authorities did not offer only support and privileges, but also investors and sleeping partners. From the XVIIth century ministers made a habit of canvassing eminent men, finance officers and revenue farmers who were sometimes invited, but more usually instructed, to participate. This has been clearly shown by C. Pris to be the case for capital investment in the royal glass manufactory of Saint-Gobain. The contractors of tax farms and the state monopolies were among the richest shareholders in the French point lace company, the Chateau de Madrid and the Londres serge companies.<sup>44</sup> Such participation became automatic in the XVIIIth century although it was then more voluntary and more permanent. In fact, in the most important sectors of the kingdom's economy the im-

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<sup>43</sup> SCHMIDT CHARLES, "Les debuts de l'industrie cotonnière en France 1760-1806" in *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, 1913, p. 272 et seq.; BALLOT CHARLES, *L'introduction du machinisme dans l'industrie française*, Paris, 1923, p. 575.

<sup>44</sup> PRIS CLAUDE, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-238.

pulse for creative investment often came from the treasurers of the great public banks — the Receivers General of the Fleet, of War, of the King's House, and the Court bankers. There are innumerable cases of intervention by financiers. Let us simply mention the activities of Mégrét de Sérilly and Claude Baudard de Saint-James, the Treasurer General of the Fleet, who with Le Creusot invested several million *livres* to establish the company for the great French steelworking complex.<sup>45</sup> For a long time, almost to the end of the Ancien Regime, privileged manufacture provided an attractive outlet for the investment of the only capital available, and it was also an area in which official mercantilist policy and private financial speculation converged, if only temporarily.

4. The regulations which were drawn up for the management of the royal manufactures were scarcely different from the general regulations for cloth-making, dyeworks or foundries in the kingdom. There were the same provisions for working hours, holiday periods, against stoppages and combinations, and penalties for theft or poor workmanship. Although the reasons for the regulations were identical, one can imagine that they were more rigorously applied in the royal manufactures. Even in the slightest cases of conflict over work the owner was instructed to inform the police authorities and to ask the delegate official or the superintendant to intervene. In these State manufactures an almost military or monastic discipline was imposed on the worker, under threat of sanctions on pay or imprisonment.<sup>46</sup> But the company's privileged status did not bring only disadvan-

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<sup>45</sup> HOWEVER, Baudard de Saint-James and Mégrét de Sérilly were unable to avoid a resounding failure in 1787. See CHAUSSINARD-NOGARET, GUY, *Les financiers de Languedoc au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1970 and OZANAM DENISE, *Claude Baudard de Saint-James, Trésorier général de la Marine et Brasseur d'affaires*, Genève, 1969.

<sup>46</sup> Boissonnade notes that some of the orders concerning work in the manufactures seem to the reader like part of the *Code noir*. But of course in reality the rules were applied in very varying degrees. (*Les manufactures royales...*, *op. cit.*, p. 385 et seq.

tages for the workers, for they often enjoyed relatively high stability of employment, together with some degree of personal exemption both from fiscal duties and from such obligations as billeting soldiers or serving in the militia; sometimes they were eligible for the freedom of a trade company or to participate in sickness or retirement schemes. But however the restraints and privileges balanced out, the intervention and protection of the State certainly helped to facilitate the recruitment of labour in the countryside, the hospitals and the schools and to provide technical training. In the case of the more concentrated and advanced manufacturing processes this enabled the work force to adapt progressively to the discipline of a production process which was both collective and specialized.