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## Introduction

In the history of political thought, the year 1848 appeared as a special point in modern French history. For the first time, during the three glorious days of July 1848, the French people had taken their own destiny into their own hands and had undertaken the task of fulfilling the aims of the first French Republic. "What is the Third Estate?" the Abbé Sieyès had asked in 1789 and his answer — "Everything!" — was now on the point of fulfilment, with the nation finally and truly united under the general will and according to the principles of liberty and justice. For a time this political dream of bourgeois democracy, pursued within the framework of constitutional monarchy, was shared by workers as well as members of the propertied class, who were following François Guizot's famous advice — "Enrich yourselves!"

Before the decade was up, however, the July Monarchy seemed to many observers to have degenerated into a tyranny of wealth and status hardly better than the Old Regime. Love of liberty had been turned into a "religion of property"; the ruling principle was no longer equality but "fraternity" — the nation, as celebrated by Gobet, Michelet, and others, had become a scene of class struggle between owners and workers — the haves and the have-nots — or, in the parlance of the day, the politicians versus the proprietors. The vision inspired by the *Trois Glorieuses* had become a social nightmare that portended another, perhaps more fundamental, round of revolutionary struggle against a corrupt regime, with another basic question posed, most notably by Proudhon, about the excluded part of the society.