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The Role of Revolution and Rioting in French Wine's Relationship with Place

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This book is the second volume of the proceedings of the highly successful AFIS Conference held in University College Cork in May 2009 entitled "France, Ireland and Rebellion". The first volume dealt with the literary aspects of the matter, whereas this tome concentrates on historical material. It is the ambition of the authors to explore the upheavals which marked the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both Ireland and France that had a deep and long-lasting impact on Franco-Irish relationships, both in terms of how each nation viewed itself and of the ideological influence of this interaction between the two countries. The book is consequently divided into two sections. In the first part, P. Howe, P. Ranger, G. Neville, M. Pernot-Deschamps and J. Shanahan analyse major events that affected both nations, from the 1798 United Irishmen uprising to the 1848 rebellion and the perception of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-71. P. Ranger and J. Shanahan then conclude the section by analysing the "Years of the French". The second part focuses on how the representations of revolt may affect and influence attitudes and/or bring about transformations. K. Deslandes, E. O'Brien, M. Pierse and B. Murphy provide fascinating explorations of issues like the saga of the Cork hurlers' strike, attitudes to painting, wines or the perception of the conflict in the North in French left-wing papers *L'Humanité* and *Libération*.

Rebellion should not therefore be considered as an erratic, temporary and meaningless phenomenon, but rather as a paradigm that allows us to revisit Hobsbawm's idea of the invention of traditions and that is indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of cultural and ideological interactions

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*Volume 2:
Proceedings of the 5th AFIS Conference,
Cork 2009*

Edited by Yann Bévant,
Anne Goarzin & Grace Neville



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Figure 5. Franchise tea advertisement, 1914

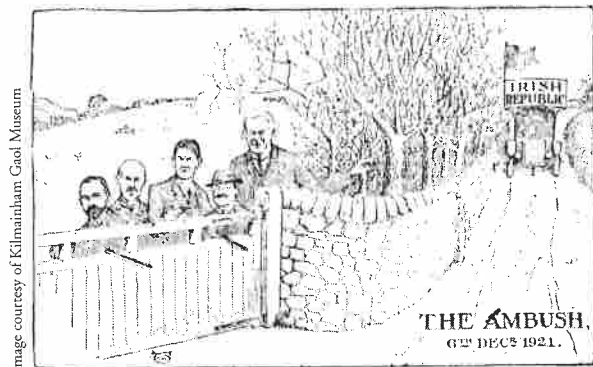


Figure 6. Constance Markievicz, political cartoon, 1921

CHAPTER 9

BRIAN MURPHY
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THE ROLE OF REVOLUTION AND RIOTING IN FRENCH WINE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH PLACE

France has one of the most extensive and widely imitated wine legislation systems in the world¹. It is based upon geographical location and the relationship between wine and “place” and it is fundamental to our understanding of how the French wine industry operates. Many of the rules and regulations surrounding the production of French wines have been heavily debated and criticised over the years. These rules have been accused of strangling the ability of French wine to compete with new world marketing offensives. France has suffered at the hands of these strategies, particularly over the last 15 years. Countries like Australia, USA and New Zealand have introduced wines into Ireland and the UK markets that trade heavily on varietal recognition, clear and attractive labelling and appropriate price positioning. This has led to situations where the growth in the recent Irish market has been driven by the “New World” which now accounts for a staggering 74% of the overall market. Of the top 20 brands in Ireland, only two are from France, with 16 out of 20 originating from the New World².

One of the most authoritative and comprehensive works on wine in

¹ G. Matthews and E. Milroy, *Wines of the World*, London, Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2004, p. 52.

² J. Smullen, “The Democratisation of Wine”, in *Licensing World*, October 2007, p. 22-23.

recent years has been *The Oxford Companion to Wine* by Jancis Robinson. In this book, Robinson explores the French *appellation contrôlée* system offering clear insight into what she considers to be the pros and cons of such a system³. Robinson suggests that, though not perfect, the system does offer some advantages with regard to the authenticity of French wine. It is, in general, a more reliable guide to France's best wines than, for example, the QbA system in Germany, the DOC system in Italy and Portugal or the DO system in Spain, even though each of these was modelled originally on the French system. Robinson also suggests that some of the failings of the system occurred because it was originally drawn up as a reflection of current practices rather than as a fresh new approach to the regulation of wine production.

Similarly, Andrew Jefford in his 2002 work *The New France* has both positive and negative elements to his analysis of the *appellation contrôlée* system in France. Although he acknowledges that the system has been heavily criticized, particularly outside the country, by journalists, merchants and wine producing rivals, he also suggests that from his experiences of talking to French wine producers they are generally happy with it⁴.

All of the above confirms that the area of *appellation contrôlée* law is not only complex and confusing but also one that causes division among the general wine community. The system is often seen as a typically French, over-regulated and bureaucratic system that stifles creativity and experimentation. However, others view it as a necessary control that protects the specified origins of the wine product and enforces adherence to the production techniques that ensure a product that reflects the typicity of a particular region. Regardless of where one sits on the argument, it cannot be denied that it is here to stay and that it is continuously evolving. Richard James confirms this in his recent article on the *appellation contrôlée* system suggesting that the debate on

³ J. Robinson (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 41-42.

⁴ A. Jefford, *The New France*, London, Octopus Publishing Group Ltd, 2002, p. 14.

the overhaul of the AC laws and the role of *terroir* wines within that system is set to continue⁵.

This chapter explores the *appellation contrôlée* system. It examines its history and origins and goes on to look at two important historical and violent events that may have been representative of elements that encouraged the development of what Robinson refers to as "France's prototype controlled appellation"⁶. The events described here played a part in the development of the strict regulations that have developed into the current AC system used in France and so much imitated throughout the wine world. One event in particular has resonance today because it has been referred to by CRAV (*Comité Régional d'Action Viticole*), a violent protest group made up of dissatisfied southern French winemakers who have recently expressed their discontent through violent acts of protest in the Midi in an effort to encourage the French Government to supply more vigorous support to the southern French wine industry.

In his 1996 paper, Bohmrich offers a history of the AC system prior to its official introduction in the 1930s. The author stresses the important link between the notion of *terroir* and its relationship to wine quality. He suggests how such a concept has greatly divided Old and New world views with regard to its importance and relevance⁷. If the origins of *appellation contrôlée* are to be understood it is important to deal with the concept of "*terroir*". There is often confusion between the word *terroir* and soil. It is much more than just soil, though soil does make up an important component part of "*terroir*". Karen MacNeill in the *The Wine Bible* offers a comprehensive explanation of what she believes the French definition of "*terroir*" to be.

⁵ R. James, "Straining at the leash", *Decanter Magazine*, September 2008, p. 52-55 (p. 55).

⁶ J. Robinson, Online version of *Oxford Companion to Wine*. Available at: <http://www.jancisrobinson.com> (Accessed 11 January 2009).

⁷ R. Bohmrich, "Terroir: Competing perspectives on the roles of soil, climate and people", *Journal of Wine Research*, 7: 1, 1996, p. 33-47.

It is the total impact of any given site: soil, slope, orientation and elevation to the sun plus every nuance of climate including rainfall, wind velocity, frequency of fog, cumulative hours of sunshine, average high temperature, average low temperature and so forth⁸.

In a recent article, Tomás Clancy, one of Ireland's foremost wine writers, agrees with MacNeill and suggests that the French would think you crazy if you suggested that *terroir* relates to soil alone⁹. Clancy also confirms that the direct result of this French attitude to "*terroir*" is the *appellation contrôlée* system and suggests an irony that even though it is generally perceived that the marketing of varietal wines and the dismissal of the French understanding of *terroir* is usually embraced by the New World, it is to history in the Old World that one must look to for the first example of the mass marketing of varietal wines. Clancy gives the instance of the 1395 decree by Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, that only Pinot Noir be grown in the Burgundy wine region. Thus Burgundy red made from Pinot Noir became one of the first examples of a varietal wine directly linked to a particular region though obviously not labelled as such. Bohmrich takes things back even further with his example of Falernum, a famous wine from Roman times, grown in Campania and which was produced in three particular sub-districts of the time offering us an early example of a quality hierarchy¹⁰. He suggests further examples from oenological history such as the Benedictines and Cistercians who in the middle ages established the boundaries of many of today's great wines in areas such as Burgundy, the Mosel and Rheingau. The author also suggests that attempts were made at drawing boundaries in other famous wine

⁸ K. MacNeil, *The Wine Bible*, New York : Workman Publishing Company Inc, 2001, p. 21.

⁹ T. Clancy, "Around the world with Pinot Noir", in *The Sunday Business Post* 8 March 2009 [Online]. Available at: <http://archives.tcm.ie/businesspost/2009/03/08/story40007.asp> (Accessed 21 April 2009)

¹⁰ R. Bohmrich, p. 34.

areas such as Tokay in 1700, Tuscany in 1716 and in Portugal's Douro valley in 1756.

What all of these examples suggest is that there were many precursors that ultimately fed into the development of the modern AC laws and all are bound up with the notion of quality, geographic delimitation and differentiation. What concerns me in particular are two violent events separated by four years and predating the official 1935 introduction of the AC system that arguably played an important part in the general move towards *appellation contrôlée* laws.

In attempting to explain the violence and revolt associated with both events, we need to start with a simple little yellow insect, the famous *Phylloxera Vastatrix*, so named by Jules-Emile Planchon, Professor of Pharmacy at Montpellier University in 1868. The word *Vastatrix* means "devastator" and it is very apt. Arles in Provence was the location of the first reported case of phylloxera in 1863. The plague spread far and wide and touched many countries other than France¹¹. One by one all French wine regions were affected starting with Provence in 1863 and ending with Champagne in 1900. Because of phylloxera it is believed that in France alone 6.2 million acres of vineyard were destroyed¹². Indeed, along with the subsequent onslaught of another new disease, downy mildew, wine production fell dramatically and an estimated 30% of total vines were lost. The effects of phylloxera eclipsed all other viticultural disasters when it arrived in Europe¹³. Indeed it is suggested in the *Oxford Companion to Wine* that in agricultural history the phylloxera onslaught rivals potato plight and the Irish Famine as a plant disease with widespread social effects¹⁴. Because of the devastation

¹¹ C. Fielden, *Exploring Wines and Spirits*, London, The Wine and Spirit Education Trust, 1994, p. 76.

¹² J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 725.

¹³ J. Halliday and H. Johnson, *The Art and Science of Wine*, London, Octopus Publishing Group Ltd, 2003, p.59.

¹⁴ J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 725.

caused, the diminishing supply of French wines couldn't meet demand. Thus a situation came about prior to the introduction of AC where there were elements of misrepresentation by other regions with similar products and also cases of importation of inferior products passing themselves off as the original¹⁵. The Languedoc in particular suffered and this eventually culminated in the biggest civil revolt in France in the 20th Century¹⁶.

Due mainly to the onslaught of phylloxera, for a number of years wine was in short supply in the Midi. This led to an influx of unscrupulous producers from other areas who brought with them inferior sugared wine made through the newly discovered chaptalisation process. In addition, the traditional Midi mass market of French industrial working classes had been infiltrated by wine from colonies in North Africa and by *absinthe*¹⁷.

Having made major inroads into combating phylloxera, by 1900 the Languedoc was back at full production. Production levels were also helped in 1903 when the government reduced sugar taxes, thus encouraging further chaptalisation and hence increased production. 1904 and 1905 in particular saw good harvests. In fact, the records of Pol Roger one of the better known Champagne houses, indicate that 1904 vintage in Champagne was remarkable in terms of both quantity and of quality¹⁸. The inevitable happened and due to increased supply

¹⁵ J.-F. Casson, "Controlled appellation versus freedom of choice. What best serves the interests of the consumer?", *Journal of Wine Research*, 2 :1, 1991, p. 51-81 (p. 56).

¹⁶ J. Lichfield, "Languedoc looks back in anger when France's wine growers saw red" in the *Independent* 2 June 2007 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/Europe/> (Accessed 27 February 2009)

¹⁷ J. Lichfield, "Appellation contrôlée label 'no guarantee of quality'" in *The Independent*, 5 September 2007 [Online] Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/> (Accessed 27th February 2009)

¹⁸ P. Roger: <http://www.polroger.co.uk/?id=33&Vintage+Reports> (Accessed 6 January 2009)

the price fell dramatically. The Midi found itself once more in the midst of a wine glut. The "*Révolte du Midi*" is often described as a peasant revolt. In his comprehensive 1978 article, Smith suggests that this is not strictly the case. He goes on to argue that the revolt, though agricultural in origin, very much involved city dwellers, clerical workers and shopkeepers who in truth reacted to the military repression, revealed by the then French Premier Georges Clemenceau, by sending in the army to the Midi and arresting supposed leaders of the mass demonstrations that occurred particularly throughout May/June of 1907¹⁹. The revolt occurred at a time when parliamentary delegates were actually carrying out investigations into the national wine crisis, and fraud in particular²⁰. Indeed, the first meeting occurred when 87 winegrowers met with such a parliamentary investigation running an inquiry in Narbonne on March 11th. The number of meetings grew rapidly, culminating in a meeting in Montpellier on June 9th with an estimated 500,000 people in attendance²¹.

The revolt was led by one Marcelin Albert, a small grower and café owner from Argelliers who had been attempting to organise the wine growers of the Narbonne region for several years. In a *New York Times* article of June 23 1907 Albert is described as the black apostle, a man who was fed in his youth on revolutionary literature. The article goes on to describe a man who for years harboured revolutionary tendencies but his mission fell on deaf ears until the situation in the south was in such dire straits that the population had to listen to him²². He was the organiser of a number of meetings in 1907. As the size of the meetings grew from 87 attendees to 500,000 in the summer of 1907, Marcelin

¹⁹ J. Smith, "Agricultural workers and the French Wine-growers revolt of 1907", *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies*, 78-81, (1978) p. 101-125, (p. 101).

²⁰ R. James, "CRAV-100 Years of Protest", *Decanter Magazine*, December 2007, p. 42-45 (p. 42)

²¹ J. Smith, p.118.

²² "Man who has aroused Southern France" in *The New York Times* 23 June 1907 [Online]. Available at: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive> (Accessed 20th April 2009)

Albert was hailed as a hero of the winegrowing people and nicknamed "the redeemer"²³.

It is important to note that despite tensions there were initially little or no public order incidents, even at meetings of great magnitude. *The New York Times* of May 20 1907 makes reference to a telegram sent by Albert to the government insisting that demonstrations would remain peaceful. The article suggests that Albert lived up to his word and in this regard refers to the fact that the strike leader was able to make good his pledge that there would be no violence²⁴. The trouble really started on the 19th of June in response to Clemenceau's use of the army to invade the Midi. The meetings eventually led to a situation where the assembly organisers launched their revolt, suspended payment of taxes, encouraged work stoppages and caused numerous council and mayoral resignations²⁵. The army occupied the cities of the Midi and arrested and imprisoned the leaders of the unrest, except for Marcelin Albert who slipped away and hid in his hometown of Argelliers²⁶. Following Clemenceau's occupation of the main cities there were extensive riots in Montpellier, Narbonne and Perpignan which ultimately led to the deaths of six protesters and extensive injuries to many army personnel²⁷. In one instance, the 17th regiment, who were recruited in the local area, mutinied and sided with the local protesters. The song "*Gloire au dix-septième*" is still sung in the Midi in their honour praising the troops for their mutiny and unwillingness to open fire on their local brethren. Albert was later to have a one-to-one meeting with Clemenceau in an

²³ C. Salès, *La Révolte des Vignerons L'Histoire, Le Mythe* [DVD-Rom], Argelliers, CS Prod., 2007.

²⁴ "French men in giant protest; One Hundred Thousand Parade at Perpignan - Proceedings Orderly" in *The New York Times*, 20 May 1907[Online]. Available at: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-> (Accessed 22nd April 2009)

²⁵ J. Smith, (1978), citing *Dépêche de Toulouse*, p. 10, 13 June 1907 in "Agricultural workers and the French Wine-growers revolt of 1907", *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies*, 78-81, p. 101-125 (p. 118).

²⁶ C. Salès.

²⁷ J. Smith, p. 119.

effort to plead the Midi winegrowers' plight²⁸ although it is popularly thought that Clemenceau used the meeting to discredit Albert by reporting that Albert had broken down in tears at the meeting, and indeed accepted 100 Francs from Clemenceau for his train journey home²⁹. Whatever the truth of the meeting it left Marcelin Albert discredited and he ultimately became a figure without any influence at all in the Midi.

Though not obviously linked to the introduction of AC laws in 1935, there is no doubt that the dramatic events of 1907 did contribute to the emerging opinion at the time that something needed to be done in order to assist the ailing wine industry in the South. At the end of his detailed analysis, Smith suggests that the wine growers viewed the revolt as bringing about government control on production limits, winemaking and employment and the imposition of collective agreements on landowners³⁰. I would argue that this was a positive turn of events. In fact, a law was passed on 29 June 1907 which regulated the use of sugar in vinification and discouraged other forms of fraud by getting every grower to register the size of his vineyard and his annual wine harvest. Thus one can argue that the revolt of 1907 did in some way help progress France towards the implementation of controls that would ultimately lead to the *appellation contrôlée* laws of the 1930s. The revolt, though very violent in nature was in a sense typical of the time and indeed of the French disposition towards protest. There is no doubt, as suggested by Smith earlier, that the revolt was a direct anti-government protest. It is interesting to note that prior to the government occupation of key southern cities the protests took the form of non payment of tax and mayoral resignations. These acts were designed to target the government of the time for their lack of regulation of the wine industry. This approach would not be mirrored 100 years on when the then

²⁸ "Marcelin Albert visits Clemenceau" in *The New York Times*, 24 June 1907 [Online]. Available at: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive>

²⁹ G. Wright, *Rural revolution in France: the peasantry in the twentieth century*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1964, p. 28.

³⁰ J. Smith, p. 120.

protest would take the form of direct and violent attacks on property and persons associated with the importation of wine into France.

Once again phylloxera "the devastator" helps explain the origins of the violence that occurred in Champagne in 1911, four years after the Southern Wine Revolt. The arrival of the phylloxera louse into Champagne over a number of years prior to this had led to a situation where there was an intensification of competition in the lucrative sparkling wine market from countries such as Germany as well as from other French wine makers. In addition, similar to the effects of phylloxera in the south, as previously mentioned, the shortage of grapes allowed a situation to develop where unscrupulous merchants were importing juice and wine from abroad for bottling and sale as champagne. This fraud compounded the misery felt through the phylloxera onslaught and led up to the 1911 riots³¹.

Stevenson suggests that in truth these riots were again the fault of the French government, at the time led by Prime Minister Monis. The government was asked to legislate on the boundaries of Champagne to offer protection against competition from sparkling wines from outside the region. This they did in 1908. However the Aube was excluded, a region that was historically part of the Champagne area³². The Aube growers did not object at this time as they were continuing to supply the major Champagne houses without interference from the authorities. Following two devastating harvests in 1907 and 1910, particularly in the Marne region, growers were in financial difficulty. Their neighbours further south in the Aube were less troubled as finer southern weather had protected their harvests to a degree. When the Marne growers realised a lot of grapes were coming from the Aube they protested and forced the government to introduce a stiffer decree in 1911 restricting the use of the Aube harvest. The Aube growers were furious and protested. They were also bitter that the Champagne merchants were using their grapes to

³¹ J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 211.

³² S. Stevenson, "Champagne", in *A Century of Wine*, edited by S. Brook, London, Octopus Publishing Group Ltd, 2000, p. 99-100.

supplement their poor production while at the same time the Aube were not officially allowed label their own wine "Champagne"³³. According to Stevenson, the Aube protest involved 8,000 people marching on the streets of Bar-sur-Aube, and setting fire to both tax forms and effigies of Prime Minister Monis across 36 towns throughout the Aube. In addition 36 Mayors resigned³⁴. The Monis government backtracked and annulled the 1908 and 1911 laws. Although the Aube growers were satisfied, the Marne growers reacted violently and large mobs developed causing a lot of damage. They destroyed the cellars of producers in Damery and Ay. In the end it took the presence of 40,000 troops to help calm the violence and avoid a civil war. Eventually the Aube was included as a "second zone" in Champagne and it was finally included when the boundaries were again fixed 16 years later in 1927³⁵.

Once again, as we previously saw with 1907, the 1911 riots were a direct result of government action, or sometimes inaction, when it came to the regulation of wine in Champagne. This lack of regulation and essentially indecision on the part of the government was at the heart of the protest that gave rise to the 1911 riots. The initial protests in the Aube were relatively peaceful as they had been in 1907. They involved such acts as mayoral resignations and the burning of tax forms in the street. At a massive rally in Troyes in 1911 attended by 40,000 people, protests were still for the most part peaceful. According to Klaudstrup even though some demonstrators scaled the iron gates of the Prefecture de Police in order to hang up protest flags, there was no real trouble as crowds were happy that they had made their point³⁶. In fact when police did try to break up some of the rally they were greeted with catcalls of *Vive le dix-septième*, a reference to the 17th regiment who mutinied during the 1907 revolt. The protest remained peaceful until of course

³³ G. McDonagh, "Wine, Politics & Economics" in *A Century of Wine*, p. 26.

³⁴ S. Stevenson, p. 100.

³⁵ J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 211.

³⁶ D. & P. Klaudstrup, *Champagne: How the World's Most Glamorous Wine Triumphed Over War and Hard Times*, Chichester, West Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, 2006, p. 143.

the government's decision to annul the 1908 and 1911 laws which had excluded the Aube from the Champagne designation.

I would therefore argue that the resulting Marne riots that caused so much damage were a direct result of both the government's decision and indeed the way that decision was delivered. The manner in which it was debated actually contributed to the violent flare ups in a region which was already potentially very volatile. As the debate was being held in the Senate, the people of both the Aube and the Marne were gathered in cafés, and stood outside telegraph offices etc awaiting the decision regarding the fate of the 1908 law³⁷. It is not surprising therefore that violent protests occurred following such a closely monitored debate with so much at stake. It could be suggested that in order to diffuse tensions, the government of the day could have delayed the decision to annul the 1908/1911 laws.

Later we will argue that both the CRAV (*Comité Régional d'Action Viticole*) motivation and method were very different to the historical protests among winegrowers. As with the 1907 revolt, initial protests were peaceful in 1911 and the majority of demonstrations were a direct result of attitudes to government decisions. They involved the burning of effigies and the destruction of tax forms as well as mayoral resignations. In my opinion, the protests were ultimately driven by frustration with government decisions regarding setting boundaries and thus relating wine to place. Obviously these decisions then impacted on the price *vignerons* could charge for their grapes and ultimately impacted on the money in workers' pockets and their ability to survive. It is claimed by the CRAV that they also want to see better prices for the *vigneron*, which they insist will come about through the reduction in the importation of wine from other countries. Thus we could argue that in this way current struggles reflect past struggles in relation to place. In all cases, although the *vigneron* has looked to the government to solve the problems of reducing prices, it has to be said that with the CRAV today there are other quality issues at play. These will be discussed in greater depth later.

³⁷ D. & P. Klaudstrup, p. 144.

According to Robinson, laws passed early in the 20th century were an attempt to end the adulteration and fraud that had become widespread at that time³⁸. The events detailed above are two substantial violent examples of where this fraud and adulteration can ultimately lead. The Southern wine revolt 1907 and the Champagne riots of 1911 are but the most dramatic in a series of protests. In general, overcoming the phylloxera era and the economic crisis is what ultimately led to the growth in regulation of wine³⁹. In a similar vein, Simon suggests that the 1907 riots were a culmination of reactions to huge surpluses and collapsing prices and out of this came the first steps to regulate the French wine industry properly⁴⁰. The two key events mentioned in this paper, along with the necessity to protect a specific region's grape production, led to laws which were predominantly based on geographical delimitation⁴¹. Simon goes on to further suggest that these early moves with regard to geographical delimitation evolved into the *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* system. Robinson concurs with Simon by suggesting that it became clear that geographic delimitation would not suffice and other variables such as grape varieties and vinification methods could greatly influence whether a wine actually reflected the delimited regions *terroir*. The author also notes the influence of Baron le Roy who by 1923 in the Chateaufort-du-Pape area of the southern Rhône was introducing detailed rules on permitted vine varieties, pruning methods, vine training methods and minimum alcoholic strength.

A combination of the above, the reality of economic depression, serious wine surpluses and fraudulent blending led to the French *appellation contrôlée* system becoming a reality in 1935 with the creation of the *Institut National des Appellations d'Origine*, the French government

³⁸ J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 41.

³⁹ C. Foulkes, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Wine*. 2nd Edition, London, Octopus publishing Group Ltd, 2001, p. 25

⁴⁰ J. Simon, "Rest of France", in *A Century of Wine* edited by S. Brook, London, Octopus Publishing Group Ltd, 2000, p. 109.

⁴¹ J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 41.

organisation responsible for controlling the *appellation contrôlée* laws⁴². The appellation laws cover the area of production, the permitted grape varieties, the minimum natural alcohol content, the maximum yield per hectare, the pruning system used and sometimes various vinification and maturation techniques used⁴³. The laws are very complex and tend to cause a lot of controversy. There are many examples offered of where some people feel the AC system has failed the French wine sector. Joanna Simon offers the example of *Domaine de Trevallon's* demotion in 1994 due to changes made to AC law and not to the quality of the wine itself⁴⁴. According to Mike Steinberger, Jean-Paul Brun, a leading Beaujolais wine maker, has been denied AC status for his 2007 *L'Ancien Vieilles Vignes*. Steinberger argues that this is simply wrong⁴⁵. He goes on to quote many examples of excellent winemakers who have been turned down in recent times for AC status because their wines do not reflect the *terroir* of their region of origin. The *appellation contrôlée* system has however been the subject of change and reform over the years. The latest comprehensive reforms are taking place over the period 2008 and 2009 in an effort to combat the impression that the jumble of AC labels makes French wine more difficult to sell than simply labelled new world wines⁴⁶. In the same article the author suggests that based on a survey by UFC (*Union Fédérale des Consommateurs*) *Que Choisir*, the French consumer watchdog, *Appellation d'origine contrôlée* has become meaningless. Because of the increase in AC wine production in recent years, much of it is produced without quality checks, with the survey finding that 98% of all AC wine was "waved through" by the organisations that were supposed to be checking quality. In contrast with

⁴² J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 41.

⁴³ J.-F. Casson, "Controlled appellation versus freedom of choice. What best serves the interests of the consumer?", *Journal of Wine Research*, 2 (1), 1991 p. 51-81 (p. 56)

⁴⁴ J. Simon, p. 109.

⁴⁵ M. Steinberger, (2008) "How Bureaucrats are wrecking French Wine. It's time to throw out the rule book", in *Slate.com*. Available at <http://www.slate.com/> (Accessed 29 January 2009).

⁴⁶ J. Lichfield, "Appellation contrôlée label 'no guarantee of quality'".

the above arguments against the AC system, some authors, as previously mentioned, also argue that the system, though not perfect, does offer a more reliable guide to classification than those of other countries like Germany, Spain and Italy⁴⁷. Many are watching to see whether the most recent reforms will help improve the situation.

Comité Régional d'Action Viticole, often referred to as the CRAV, is a militant group of winemakers from Languedoc, in Southern France, dedicated to undermining businesses who in their words collaborate with foreign suppliers⁴⁸. The CRAV has been known to hijack tankers of foreign wine and dynamite government buildings or supermarkets⁴⁹. On initial investigation it may very well seem that the actions of CRAV are linked with the actions and aspirations of the leaders of the Southern Wine Revolt, motivated by a desire to see livelihoods protected in a time of unrelenting price reduction and oversupply. However, as we shall see later, the current CRAV agenda may be far removed from that of Marcelin Albert and his colleagues from the Southern Wine Revolt of 1907 and the Marne protests of 1911.

CRAV first emerged in the late 1950s but trace their roots back to the 1907 wine revolt. There has been intermittent violence from the group over the years in response to various crises in the wine sector. As with the 1907 situation and the Champagne riots of 1911, there now exists a threat from the importation of foreign wine. The CRAV have gone on record in their 2007 video address to Nicolas Sarkozy calling on fellow winemakers to unite and referring to the 1907 Montpellier uprising by asking vintners "to reignite the spirit of 1907"⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 42.

⁴⁸ M. Campbell, "France's wine guerrillas gun for Sarkozy" in *The Sunday Times* 27 May 2007 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/toi/news/world/Europe/article> (Accessed 17th April 2009)

⁴⁹ H. Samuel, "Wine terrorists make streets run with Rioja" *The Telegraph*, 30 April 2005 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/core/content> (Accessed 7th January 2009)

⁵⁰ C. Mercer, "France: French militants, CRAV increase attacks" in Just-Drinks.

There is no doubt that CRAV used the 1907 centenary celebrations to good effect in their 2007 threats to the French government. Though there are some superficial similarities to the two situations, there are also some fundamental differences. In 1907 and 1911 unscrupulous merchants were passing off imported wines as French and indeed adulterating wines with sugar also. Growers became convinced that in 1907 traders were adulterating their honest red wine with sugar and water thus reducing prices further⁵¹. Robinson suggests that along with phylloxera, the importation of fraudulent wines into Champagne contributed to the 1911 riots⁵². There is a marked difference between 1907 and 1911 and the situation today. France in 2009 is very much at the heart of Europe and merchants have every right in a modern European community to import wine from other countries and legitimately sell it. Overproduction is a factor with regard to many agricultural products and of course it depresses prices. Jean Clavel, a local Languedoc historian cited in *The Independent*, suggests that just like in 1907, the interests of Languedoc are being ignored due to centralised decision making⁵³. The current depressed wine market in Languedoc does provide ample fodder for increasing recruitment of direct action groups like CRAV. Membership of CRAV reputedly stands at 800⁵⁴. Though open revolt on the scale of 1907 and 1911 may never be a feature of the current problem, it is worrying that the severity of attacks by the CRAV is increasing and that there are so many examples of such attacks. *Decanter* magazine has to date published more than 20 articles on the militant group the CRAV highlighting their exploits⁵⁵. Most recently CRAV has

com 2009. Available at <http://www.just-drinks.com/article>. (Accessed 6 January 2009)

⁵¹ J. Lichfield, "Languedoc looks back in anger when France's wine growers saw red".

⁵² J. Robinson, *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, p. 211.

⁵³ J. Lichfield, "Languedoc looks back in anger when France's wine growers saw red".

⁵⁴ C. Mercer, "France: French militants, CRAV increase attacks".

⁵⁵ *Decanter.com* [Online]. Available at <http://www.decanter.com/specials/149001.html>, 2009 (Accessed 15 January 2009).

claimed responsibility for blowing up the visitor centre at La Baume winery in Languedoc causing €100,000 worth of damage. In another recent incident CRAV members wearing balaclavas caused €500,000 euros worth of damage at a Nîmes co-operative.

On March 3 2009, CRAV attacked *Le Domaine de La Baume*⁵⁶. Interestingly this estate is owned by *Grand Chais de France*, France's second biggest wine group. La Baume director Frédéric Glangetas told *Decanter* that he felt CRAV were attacking people who are actually working to promote Languedoc wines and therefore were only perpetuating a negative image of the region. Earlier in the article Anson refers to the CRAV as anti-globalisation protesters all of which suggests an agenda other than the pure defence of southern wine from the pressures of external imports as would have been the case exclusively in terms of the 1907 and 1911 riots.

The Languedoc has had a long history of wine-related violence. Unrest among growers has become particularly prevalent in recent years. Many protestors are and have been resistant to the controversial European Union vine pull schemes, introduced in the late 1980s in an effort to decrease EU wine surpluses⁵⁷. Historically, the Languedoc wine growers were more interested in quantity than quality and until relatively recently very little AC wine was produced in this region when compared with the rest of France. According to Robinson, this figure constitutes as little as 10% even though the Languedoc is certainly France's most important region in terms of volume production. It produces nearly 60% of France's *Vin de Table*. This, at a time when the world's wine buying market are moving towards more quality-driven products. It can be suggested therefore that the exploits of CRAV are in some part due to tensions created through this move towards quality from a position

⁵⁶ J. Anson, "CRAV attacks Grand Chais de France Estate" in *Decanter* 3 March 2009 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.decanter.com/news> (Accessed 17 April 2009).

⁵⁷ J. Robinson, Online version of *Oxford Companion to Wine*. Available at: <http://www.jancisrobinson.com> (Accessed 11 January 2009).

of quantity and volume dominance in recent years. The 1907 analogy is used as a tool to engender a spirit of rebellion among the wine growers but the situations are very different, as has been previously discussed. Both the Champagne riots of 1911 and the Southern Wine Revolt of 1907 were examples of how tensions among wine growers, based on government policy at the time, ultimately led to a situation where increasing controls were introduced in the form of AC laws. These laws were based on place and geographical delimitation. More recent unrest differs in that it is in part a reaction to those strict AC laws that have developed over the years, which has led to the trouble evident in the Midi today. I would suggest that it is in fact the demand for a higher quality product among the wine drinking population that is leading to a fall in the market for lower quality wine and hence reduced pricing for many Midi winegrowers. It might very well be argued that the demands placed on growers to produce wine worthy of AC standard is at the heart of the tensions expressed by violent protests today. Robinson suggests that the Languedoc is still principally a source of red wine. However a typical representative now is a dense and exciting glass of wine as opposed to its historical reputation for a thin pale wine that was badly made⁵⁸. It is the demand for this new style of quality wine, deserving of AC status that is driving current tensions in contrast to the 1907 and 1911 situation where the demand for product regulation based on delimitation was the principal driving force.

These two significant historical events, however, did offer the future a glimpse of stories past. True stories that began two generations ago with the Southern Wine Revolt of 1907 and the Champagne Riots of 1911 but which still have relevance today. As we have previously outlined, that relevance doesn't lie with the exploits of the CRAV. In fact, it not only offers us a route to the origins AC but this relevance also emphasises the French industry's close connection with "place". As mentioned before, all French wine products are very much tied to "place" not only through the country's complex AC systems but also through

⁵⁸ J. Robinson, Online version of *Oxford Companion to Wine*.

its extensive wine history. Attractive stories associated with wine offer the consumer an insight into the rich heritage that the French wine industry possesses, a heritage that is often not exploited for the benefit of the French wine sector, particularly among potential export markets. This suggests therefore that there are evident possibilities for further research into the role of these true stories in making French wine more attractive and indeed more competitive in an increasingly crowded market place. It is this rich wine heritage that might ultimately prove the key differentiating factor between French wine and cheaper new world alternatives. These alternatives certainly trade on heritage but very often have little history to back up their claims. True historical events such as those explored here may one day have the ultimate benefit of improving French wine export levels and returning a status to French wine that has all too often been lost to new world competitors over recent years.