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## Economic Crisis and Unemployment in 19<sup>th</sup> Century literature

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A dramatic increase in unemployment followed the crash of 1929 and signaled the downward economic slide initiating the depression; thereafter unemployment (meant as involuntary unemployment) became the most significant indicator of the economic crisis. In the *General Theory*, Keynes distinguished three categories of unemployment: frictional, voluntary and a third category, which he defines as “involuntary unemployment” and asserted that Classical economics “do not admit the possibility of the third category (Keynes, 1936, p.6). This focus on cyclical unemployment was an important feature of the Keynesian Revolution, it led to the reconstructed vision of “Classical” economics and it did not include any representation of cyclical unemployment. The many controversies about Say’s law have clearly established that the existence of involuntary unemployment had been recognized very early on in the long lasting discussion about poverty. Classical economists, as well as their critics, generally considered an excess of labor supply to be very common, especially as a consequence of the introduction of machinery. Despite the fact that they did not deal at length with the short-term fluctuations in employment, JB Say himself was perfectly aware of the consequences of the crisis with workers, and he went so far as to advocate Keynesian policies of public works in order to cope with unemployment (Baumol, 1999).

Nevertheless, it was only in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that cyclical unemployment became a major issue in economic literature, while the first insurance schemes were being implemented. Several authors confused the implementation of these remedies to unemployment with the “discovery” or the invention of unemployment (Salais et alii (1986), Topalov, C. (1994), Walters, W. (2000), Alberti, M. (2013), Lipowski, J., (1912), Promberger, Markus (2005); Zimmermann, B. (2001)). It is nevertheless true that there was no room for cyclical unemployment in the opinion of some neoclassical economists (Hicks [1932], 1963) but decades before the Great Depression and the *General Theory*, Gustav Cassel, commenting on (?) British unemployment statistics, concluded that “The real significance of these statistics is that they are a symptom of trade cycles, and represent a kind of barometer of crises” (Cassel, 1918).

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### Early recognition of involuntary unemployment in economics

It would be vain to look for the origin of the word or the idea of « involuntary unemployment », which has its roots in the treatment of poverty. It is very plausible that it was always common knowledge that among poor people, some were able and willing to work. The Poor Law system classified people into categories: those considered deserving and those who were not considered deserving of poor relief. Four categories were distinguished:

The impotent poor

The able-bodied poor - with an able body but were unwilling to work.

The idle poor

Vagrants or beggars, sometimes termed "sturdy rogues"

The second category included those who were unable to find work – either due to cyclical or long-term unemployment in the area, or due to a lack of skills. Attempts to assist these people, and move them out of this category, varied over the centuries, but usually consisted of relief either in the form of work or money. In a wide range of literature, we can pick up the position sustained by the novelist Henry Fielding (1707-1754) and the economist and statesman Turgot. The author of the famous novel *Tom Jones* (published in 1749) was also the author of an *Enquiry into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers* (1751), written at the request of the City of London. Fielding who is often considered as a democrat and a radical social reformer held views on unemployment which were, to say the least, unsympathetic.

The poor emulated the vices of the rich when they sat idle: aspiring still to a degree beyond what belongs to them, and not being able by the Fruits of honest Labor to support the State which they affect, they disdain the Wages to which their Industry would entitle them; and abandoning themselves to Idleness, the more simple and poor-spirited betake themselves to a State of Starving and Beggary, while those of more Art and Courage become Thieves, Sharpers, and Robbers (ibidem, p. 4).

Like most works on the subject, Fielding's *Enquiry* attempted to classify the poor (defined as having no source of 'gaining a comfortable subsistence') into distinct groups. His three 'divisions' were drawn from Elizabethan statutory distinctions: 'Such Poor as are unable to work', 'Such as are able and willing to work', and 'Such as are able to work, but not willing'. Fielding judged that the first class was very small and it would not be difficult to provide them some relief. The second, on the contrary:

“though not in fact, equally objects of the regard of the compassionate man, and much more worthy the care of the politician; and yet, without his care, they will be in a much more worse condition than the others a: for they have none of these incitements of pity

that fill the pockets of the artful beggar, and procure relief for the blind, the lame, and other visible subjects of compassion. Such, therefore, without a law, and without an honest and sensible execution of that law, must languish under, and often perish with want. [...] To say the truth, this affair of finding a universal employment for the industrious poor is of great difficulty, [...] And yet difficult as it is, it is not, I hope, not impracticable”

Fielding reached the conclusion that “it is a task surely not above the reach of the British parliament to find work for the hands” willing to work (ibidem, p.52).

For Turgot, the task seems altogether possible and necessary <sup>2</sup>. When Turgot was “Intendant” of the Limousin region, France suffered one of the last subsistence crises of the eighteenth century, and the experience of the crisis exercised a profound influence on Turgot’s subsequent policies. During 1769-1770, following a series of bad harvests food prices increased sharply in the Limousin region, and mortality began to increase, especially in remote rural areas. The freedom of the corn trade could not prevent scarcity “in the first years when it is established”, as Turgot concluded; “if commerce is to be able to prevent the scarcities entirely”, he wrote to Dupont de Nemours, “the people would already have to be rich”. The prospects of the landless poor were evidently insecure while a charity of individuals (or their “moral economy”) provided insufficient security during the crisis of 1770. There was a tendency for prosperous farmers to send away their sharecroppers, Turgot wrote, and to “turn out their domestics and servants” so that unemployment grew. His principal strategy, in the Limousin, was to provide short-term employment for public works, and later as Minister of Finance, he attempted to generalize his policies in other regions, his reform of relief policies aimed to reduce the numbers of people who were unemployed for long periods. Therefore, he established a system of “Charity Offices and Workshops” on the grounds that the poor, who are able to work, “need wages, and the best and most useful alms consist of providing them with the means of earning”. He laid special emphasis on “the employment of women”, which he described as “an objective no less worthy of attention” than the employment of men; he proposed that the Charity Offices should providespinning wheels to “poor women”, and pay for spinning lessons in each village.

### **Crises and unemployment in classical economics**

The spread of Keynes’ criticisms addressed to the Classics led to the reconstruction of Classical economics as if these authors had ruled out the crisis and the resulting unemployment. During the last decades, several authors (notably Kates, Baumol and Hollander,) have proved that this was not the case and Baumol, completing Kates’ argument demonstrated that Say advocated a clear Keynesian remedy for unemployment: public works, in line with the mercantilists’ recommendations.

The main concern of Say, Malthus, and Ricardo in their discussion of unemployment was related to technical progress. In Say's view, it is necessary to distinguish between the short and long run:

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<sup>2</sup> Turgot’s welfare policies have been analyzed by Rothschild (1995) and Clément (2004)

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The ultimate effect is wholly in its favor. . .The multiplication of a product commonly reduces its price, that reduction extends its consumption; and so its employment to more hands than before. It is beyond question, that the manufacture of cotton now occupies more hands in England, France, and Germany, than it did before the introduction of the machinery that has abridged and perfected this branch of manufacture to such a remarkable degree. . .When printing was first brought into use, a multitude of copyists were of course immediately deprived of occupation; for it may be fairly reckoned, that one journeyman does the business of two hundred copyists. We may, therefore, conclude that 199 out of 200 were thrown out of work. What followed? Why, in a little time, the greater facility of reading printed than written books, the low price to which books fell, the stimulus this invention gave to authorship, whether devoted to amusement or instruction, the combination, in short of all these causes, operated so effectually as to set at work, in a very little time, more journeymen printers than there were formerly copyists. (Say, 1814, 88).

But Say was perfectly aware of the evils produced by the introduction of technical progress and he concluded that new machinery might not only depress earnings but was also likely to lead to unemployment. As he put it:

Whenever a new machine or a new more expeditious process is substituted in the place of human labor previously in activity, part of the industrious human agents, whose service is thus ingeniously dispensed with, needs are thrown out of employ. Whence many objections have been raised against the use of machinery that has been often obstructed by popular violence, and sometimes by the act of authority itself.

. . .This...however advantageous to the community at large, as we shall presently see, is always attended with some painful circumstances. For the distress of a capitalist, when his funds are unprofitably engaged or in a state of inactivity, is nothing to that of an industrious population deprived of the means of subsistence [Say, 1814, p. 86].

And consequently, in his view public policies to alleviate them seemed to him not only legitimate but also perfectly appropriate:

“Government could, in the beginning, restrict the introduction of new machinery to some regions where labor is rare and already employed by other industries. It could prepare in advance how to offer employment for the idle hands, by creating at its own expenses, public utilities, as a canal, a road, a big building. It could also organize a colonization, a transfer of population from one place to another” (Say 1814, 1: 55n. & 1817, 1: 55n.)

## **From Say to the Ateliers Nationaux**

If Say devoted significant development to the unemployment caused by commercial crises as well as technological progress, this concern was not elaborated by Say’s French liberal economists followers.

For example, the *Dictionnaire* edited by Coquelin and Guillaumin includes a long article on “Crises commerciales” which mentions only in passing the consequences of crises on labor. First, in the introduction we have a general description of a crisis, the last consequence of which is that workshops stop or slow down their activities, releasing a part of its employees. Therefore, labor suffers and wages decrease [...] The whole society is impacted and a universal disarray develops during the duration of this crisis”. Then the *Dictionnaire* reproduced Say’s comments on the English crisis of 1825, where unsurprisingly Say mentions that a multitude of workers remain out of work.

Nevertheless, it is noticeable that the remedies to cure technological unemployment were advocated by Michel Chevalier (1806-1879), a former student of Polytechnique and a Saint-Simonian economist. In his *Cours*, he advocates the introduction of machinery taking on Sismondi’s case for technological unemployment that was famously illustrated by Sismondi’s vivid image of “the King, remaining alone on an island, by constantly turning a crank, [producing] through automata, all the output of England”(Sismondi, (1991, [1827]), p. 563, footnote).

Chevalier does not deny that under exceptional circumstances, a crisis could trigger unemployment and he discusses the example of the consequences of the 1837 crisis in the United States on Lyon’s industry where “20,000 workers were put out of work”, a very dangerous situation for the workers, their employers, the city, and the whole of France. Therefore, a committee was set up to deal with this evil. It launched a subscription, which could help some workers to move in order to find subsistence elsewhere but the subscription was unable to provide support for the remaining workers. Therefore, the committee auctioned on behalf of the city, the army, the administration of bridges and roads, for the construction of a warehouse, a slaughterhouse, a road, a cemetery, several fords and a dyke, works which would be run in all circumstances. It was the hope that the unfortunate workers would find in these undertakings something to do and a fair return for their work”. (Chevalier, p. 128) and Chevalier concludes “It is a duty for governments to have work plans prepared in advance where, if necessary, it is possible to employ the suddenly decommissioned laborers” (*Ibidem*, p.130).

This idea that plans can be made to cope with unemployment was extended to its limit by Louis Blanc. In the aftermath of the 1848 Revolution, he writes hastily on February 25<sup>th</sup>, a decree proclaiming that “The provisional government of the French Republic undertakes to guarantee the existence of the workmen by work. It undertakes to guarantee work for every citizen”. As a result, the *ateliers nationaux* (national workshops) were created in order to provide work and a source of income for the unemployed. They opened on February 27<sup>th</sup> but were quickly overwhelmed by the flow of the unemployed whose numbers rose to 6000 by March 15<sup>th</sup>, to 30,000 by March 30<sup>th</sup>, 64,000 on April 15<sup>th</sup> and reached a peak of 117,000 by April 30<sup>th</sup>. They were closed on June 21<sup>st</sup> by the Commission Executive, which replaced the provisional government after the conservatives won the elections, as they were horrified by the *ateliers nationaux*.

### **Mill and “The more or less of the labor”**

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Despite its terrific ending (their closure pushed the proletariat into a rebellion that was squashed in a bloodshed), this public employment experiment was vindicated by J.S. Mill:

“The declaration of the *droit au travail* was followed by the creation of *ateliers nationaux*; which, indeed, was its necessary consequence; since, in the great falling-off of the employment through the industrial stagnation consequent to the Revolution, it would neither have been honorable nor safe to make zero commencement of fulfilling the promise given, and circumstances did not allow improvising any better mode of temporary employment for the destitute. Some such measures would have been necessary after any revolution. In 1830, large sums were expended in setting the unemployed to work. It was the misfortune, not the fault, of the Provisional Government, that the numbers requiring employment were so much greater than any former period, and that the other circumstances of the case were to render the creation of these ateliers and eventually the greatest calamity of the time. Since it soon became impossible to provide funds for continuing them, while the first attempt to dissolve them was likely to produce, and did, in fact, produce, an outbreak in June.” Mill, ([1849] 1873, p.58).

In addition to this pamphlet, Mill considers in his article the *Principles* the *droit au travail* and its consequences in a rather benevolent way, despite the fact that “experience has shown the sort of work to be expected from recipients of public charity [..] to extract real work from day-laborers without the power of dismissal is only practicable by the power of the lash”. Therefore, Mill agreed with the supporters of the *droit au travail* in France; provided that “any unemployed laborer [is given] a right to demand support in a particular place or from a particular functionary” and that “the government undertakes to create additional employment [only] when there was a deficiency, and reserving, like other employers, the choice of its own workpeople”. Mill, ([1848], 1965, pp. 357-8).

Actually, Mill’s ideas about employment did not differ notably from Say. Mill quoting Smith argues that “a journeyman may be pretty sure of employment almost every day in the year that he is able to work” observing that “the interruptions of business arising from overstocked markets, or from a suspension of demand, or from a commercial crisis, must be excepted” (Mill, [1848] 1908, p. 387). As Kates (2015) has emphasized, Mill rejected the Malthusian argument that demand deficiency was the cause of the recession and a body of unproductive consumers was needed to raise the level of demand if everyone who wished to work was to find employment. Mill’s answer was that buying goods and services would not increase employment, or, in Mill’s own words:

“Demand for commodities is not demand for labor. The demand for commodities determines in what particular branch of production the labor and capital shall be employed; it determines the direction of the labor, but not the more or less of the labor itself, nor of the maintenance or payment of the labor. (Mill, [1848], 1907, p.79).

With this radical stance, Mill precluded active employment policy through deficit spending, whilst unemployment was reduced to a severed formulation of “more or less of labor”.

## Unemployment during the Belle Époque

Despite these first “years of high theory” related to the marginal revolution, and the occurrence of several serious commercial crises, the academic economists paid very little attention to unemployment till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Walras and Menger mention unemployment only in an exotic context (a war between Peru and Chile for the first, the interruption of cotton imports for the second) and the labor market did not raise any specific question that could not be solved by individual foresight. Therefore, Topalov concludes that « le processus d'émergence de nouvelles catégories ne coïncide en effet nullement avec le rythme court des dépressions industrielles » the process of the emergence of new categories does not coincide at all with the short pace of industrial depressions (Topalov, 1994 p.28). There are two exceptions to this academic indifference, the Historical School on the one hand, and Marshall on the other.

Almost nothing is to be found in his *Principles*, but his Correspondence includes two letters largely devoted to unemployment. The first letter addressed to the Economist exposes Marshall's views on real wages during business cycles:

Under the present system, their real value 'falls when prices are rising and the purchasing power of money is falling, so that the employer pays smaller salaries and wages at the very time when his profits are largest in other ways, and *vice versa*, when trade is bad and prices low, wages and salaries of the old nominal value rise in real value above their normal level. This causes extra pressure on the employer just when he has the least power of bearing it, and thus increases the number of the unemployed in times of depression.

Marshall (Letter 201, 16 March 1887, 233)

Even if the first sentence sounds like a critic of the employers' behavior, one cannot help conclude from the second sentence that the stickiness of wages during the recession is the culprit of unemployment.

Marshall came back to the topic in 1903 when the debates about unemployment insurances were in full swing and there were a large number of unemployed. Marshall observes: “unemployment is a symptom of several distinct social maladies, which require different treatment”. Firstly, Marshall distinguishes “the occasional unemployment of capable energetic workers of all grades” which he attributes to “the inability of beings of finite intelligence to forecast coming economic needs and opportunities with perfect precision”. Curiously, Marshall thinks that this unemployment could be remedied by “the diffusion of the notion, that to spend the whole of one's income in prosperous times and to be without resource when the tide turns, is inconsistent with the respect that everyone owes to himself.” Eventually, Marshall considers “systematic unemployment [...] caused by the existence of large numbers of people, who will not or can not work steadily or strongly enough to make it possible that they should be employed regularly”. Thus, Marshall argues that the lack of employability is the culprit for this systematic unemployment. He suggests as a cure “de-urbanizing life, in the sense in which urbanized life is enfeebled life”. He concluded his letter by a last eugenic argument:

This [cure] should be supplemented by kindly but the severe discipline of those who are bringing up children under physical and moral conditions which will make them recruits to the great army of the habitually unemployed. Ibidem pp 3-4.



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The approach in Germany was very different as could be expected from Kathedersozialists (Socialist of the Chair). With the economic downturn after 1873, the Historical school had concluded that something needed to be done to provide workers with more effective insurance against the hazards of life. Lujo Brentano published several studies about unemployment and a thick book in 1879 in which he studies unemployment since the time of Charlemagne. He found that trade unions alone in the face of large-scale cyclical unemployment could not provide the needed cover. In light of these problems, he criticized the existing benefit funds, arguing that these were in effect outdated and not functioning, especially since they provided insurance only to those employed and were a hindrance to trade union development. He called instead for the creation of voluntary, nationally amalgamated insurance benefits funds supported by wage contributions that would provide old age, disability, health, life, and unemployment insurance for specific occupations. This concern with unemployment insurance led to heated discussions not only in Germany but also in many other countries and culminated in the early decades of the 20th century especially the United Kingdom, which suffered severe depressions in 1900-4 and 1907-8. Then a new generation of economists devoted a great deal of attention to the unemployed, proof of which is the exuberance of publications (Pigou, Beveridge, Gide to quote only a few of them), whereas Wicksell and Cassel designed the first monetary policies intended to cure recessions and related unemployment.

## **II Zola and Unemployment – a literary perspective**

During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two major novelists, Stendhal (1783-1842) and Balzac (1799-1850) considered their novels as competing with historians' works in order to depict and represent French society and its evolution. They also read economists, Stendhal read Smith and Say and Balzac - Sismondi. Simultaneously, Smith was very concerned by Rhetoric and Belles Lettres and JB Say wrote novels, resulting in the blurring of the frontiers between fiction and the social sciences. Balzac wrote that he was "competing with registry office" but as Christophe Reffait has emphasized, he certainly provided us with a remarkable analysis of speculations, financiers and stock markets and his novels are useful tools to understand the economy and sociology in the post-Napoleonic wars.

Émile Zola (1840-1902) was the self-proclaimed champion of naturalism, a literary movement or tendency that used detailed realism to suggest that social conditions, heredity, and environment had an inescapable force in shaping human character. Zola was born in Paris in 1840. His father, François Zola (originally, Francesco Zolla), was an Italian engineer. With his French wife, Émilie Aubert, the family moved to Aix-en-Provence in the southeast when Émile was three years old. Four years later in 1847, his father died leaving his mother with a meager pension. In 1858, the Zolas moved to Paris, where Émile's childhood friend Paul Cézanne soon joined him. Zola started to write in the romantic style. His widowed mother had planned a law career for Émile but he failed his Baccalauréat examination. During his adolescence, he dreamt of a literary career from an early age he dreamt very early of a literary career and he read many authors such as Molière, Montaigne and Shakespeare, but he also read a large number of texts by Jules Michelet, the famous French historian. He fell in love

with a prostitute whom he dreamt to exfiltrate from her condition. He failed, but his efforts gave him a good knowledge of life in the slums for poor people. Meanwhile, he worked as a clerk in a shipping firm but unsatisfied by the job, he quit after a couple of months and remained unemployed for two years before he was hired on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1862 as a clerk by Louis Hachette who owned a bookshop and a publishing house. There, he was quickly in charge of the advertising department and this was to influence his writing as well as his concern with modern distribution (*Au bonheur des dames*). He began to write papers or short stories for newspapers at the same time as his first novels and plays. Among his early books was *Contes à Ninon*, published in 1864. With the publication of his sordid autobiographical novel *La Confession de Claude* (1865) attracting police attention, Hachette - disquieted by the content of his novels - fired him. After his first major novel, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), Zola started the series called *Les Rougon Macquart*, about a family under the Second Empire; but he also continued to make his living by writing for newspapers.

In 1870, the French-Prussian war caused hard times for Zola who wrote to E. de Goncourt on August 20<sup>th</sup>: “This terrible war made me drop the pen from my hand. I'm like a lost soul. I beat the streets” (Zola, 1870, p.360). Even after the Republic was proclaimed on September 4<sup>th</sup> at the Hotel de Ville in Paris, there was a blockade and newspapers could not be published and hence, Zola remained unemployed. Despite his links with several figures among Communards, Zola kept his distance with the revolutionary forces during this episode. Even if his personal situation improved dramatically under the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic, his concern with unemployment surged continuously in his works<sup>3</sup>. He devoted a short story to this theme that was to appear in December 1872 under the title “Lendemain de Crise” (The Aftermath of the Crisis) in a radical newspaper “*Le corsaire*” and was inserted later in his new book *Nouveaux contes à Ninon* under the title “Le chômage” (“Unemployment”).

The story began with a layoff of workers employed by a petit patron close to his employees, but the enterprise is condemned to close as he exposes them in his paternalistic way:

“My good fellows, there is no work to-day - I receive no orders; countermands reach me from all quarters, I shall remain with goods on my hands. This month of December, on which I relied, this month that, in previous years, has been a very busy one, threatens to ruin the most stable firms — we must suspend everything. [...] My position, also, is dreadful, more so perhaps than yours. I have lost fifty thousand francs in a week. I am stopping work to-day so as not to deepen the abyss, and I have not the first sou of the money I shall require meeting my acceptances on the 15<sup>th</sup>.”

Then Zola focused on the individual fate of the worker who embodies the painful fate of the unemployed. As the choice of the words is crucial, we present side-by-side, the original presentation by Zola and the first translation into English under the title “The Slack Season”. Clearly the link established by Zola between crisis and unemployment has not been completely understood .

II	II
L'ouvrier est dehors, dans la rue, sur le pavé. Il a	The workman is outside, on the road, on the

<sup>3</sup> See annex III appearances of ‘chômage’ in Zola’s words

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<p>battu les trottoirs pendant huit jours, sans pouvoir trouver du travail. Il est allé de porte en porte, offrant ses bras, offrant ses mains, s'offrant tout entier à n'importe quelle besogne, à la plus rebutante, à la plus dure, à la plus mortelle. Toutes les portes se sont refermées.</p> <p>Alors, l'ouvrier a offert de travailler à moitié prix. Les portes ne se sont pas rouvertes. Il travaillerait pour rien qu'on ne pourrait le garder. C'est <b>le chômage, le terrible chômage</b> qui sonne le glas des mansardes. La panique a arrêté toutes les industries, et <b>l'argent, l'argent lâche s'est caché.</b></p> <p>Zola, <i>Le chômage</i></p>	<p>pavement. He has been running about the streets for a week without being able to find employment. He has been from door to door, offering his arms, his hands, his whole self for any kind of labour, the most revolting, the hardest, the most fatal. All doors have been closed to him.</p> <p>Then, he was willing to work at half price. The doors did not open. Were he to work for nothing, he could not be employed. It is <b>the slack season, the terrible slack season</b> that sounds the death-knell of the garrets. The panic has stopped all trades, and <b>money, cowardly money, has hidden away.</b></p> <p>Zola translated by Vizetely 1898</p>
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It is interesting to emphasize some points in the short story which illustrate the representation of unemployment related to the crises in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and can help us to understand why this marginal point in *Dictionnaire de Coquelin* or Mill went to the fore as the barometer of the crisis in Cassel.

Firstly, it is important to understand that “chômage” (the French word for “unemployment”) has a religious origin<sup>4</sup>. “Chômage” represented the suspension of activities for religious motives (Sundays and other religious celebrations). It is by this extension that “chômage” went to mean any suspension of activities (even for machinery) but the religious connotation remains predominant to this day (among the French “jours chômés”, all of them have a religious origin with the exception of May 1<sup>st</sup>, November 11<sup>th</sup>, May 8<sup>th</sup>). This suspension of activity was clearly out of the control of the individual (a worker or an employer) so that the word went on to be used to represent unemployment (and to distinguish among idle persons “chômeurs” represent involuntary unemployed). In this very short story, Zola succeeded in stressing several features of “unemployment”.

Secondly, he insisted forcefully that the level of wages is not a factor, as even if the workers were ready to work with no compensation, they could not find a job. Nevertheless, discrimination on the labor market makes “unemployment” “more cruel for the women than the men”. Thirdly, technical progress is not at stake either and “chômage” as well as hands strike the machinery<sup>5</sup>. Eventually Zola could see that cyclical unemployment was not a consequence of misbehavior of the employers and he exonerated the employer of any moral fault. It does not mean that they are not revolting against the inequality in the society and that the rich cannot understand how terrible unemployment could be for the poor. It is possible that this understanding was related to Zola’s fourierist sympathy, which he was

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.cnrtl.fr/lexicographie/chomage>

<sup>5</sup> In other places, Zola established some links between technological progress and unemployment (cf. *Germinal* for example) but he did not wholly adhere to Sismondi’s vision.

to develop later in his life (cf. *Le Travail*). In any case, he doesn't hide his support to the solidarity between producers ("patrons" and "compagnons") and his reluctance vis à vis communism. This explains why Friedrich Engels or Franz Mehring were very critical vis à vis Zola, in spite of the sympathy he expressed for the working class in many of his novels (just think of *Germinal*) and his criticism of the world of finance ("cowardly money").

We can now consider the contemporary translations of this novel? as indices of the evolution of public opinion in Europe vis-à-vis cyclical unemployment. The English translator and biographer of Zola, Ernest Vezelety, who was a journalist in Paris as well as in Berlin, completely failed to understand the true meaning when he translated "chômage" as "slack season". Similarly, the first German translation picked up a word (*Geschäftstockung*) related to depression, but it does not emphasize the dramatic consequences for workers. It took half a century before improved translations appeared in the GDR using the term "arbeitslos" and "arbeitslosigkeit" (unemployed and unemployment):

<p>II Es ist die Geschäftstockung, die schreckliche Geschäftstockung, welche in den Mansarden das Todtenglöckchen läutet. Die Panik hat alle Industrien gehemmt, und das Geld, das niederträchtige Geld hat sich versteckt Die Geschäftstockung, in <i>Neue Erzählungen an Ninon</i>, Deutsch von Mathilde Günther, Budapest, Grimm, 1892</p>	<p>II Das macht die Arbeitslosigkeit. die schreckliche Arbeitslosigkeit. die in den Mansarden die Totenglocke läutet. Panik hat alle Industrien zum Stillstand gebracht. und das Geld. das feige Geld. hat sich versteckt. Arbeitslos, <i>Erzählungen</i> ; (Dt. v. Curt_Noch. Mit Einf. v. Herbert Kühn) ([19]58)</p>
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## Conclusion

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, representation of crisis evolved in economic literature as well as in novels. Say and Ricardo were well aware of the dramatic situation of workers when discussing gluts and their adherence to Say's Law did not prevent them from seeking remedies to this evil. Nevertheless, the unemployed were hardly distinguished from the ordinary poor. At the end of the period, various different positions could be found among economists: many denied or paid very little attention to involuntary unemployment while they focused on unionization that prevented the clearing of the labor markets, others seeking to introduce some dynamics, considered unemployment as the barometer of crisis, and another group tried to implement remedies to cure unemployment through insurance and to lessen the recessions.

On the other hand, Zola's short novel depicted the suffering of the unemployed and insisted on several features which are now taken into account in the economic analysis of crises.

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