

INTRODUCTION

Henri Rochefort – or, to give him his full title, the Marquis Victor-Henry de Rochefort-Luçay – was born in Paris on 31 January 1831 into a family of ancient nobility. His early career, from 1851 onwards, saw him hold a minor clerical post in the Préfecture de la Seine and later the position of *Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts* at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, a post from which he resigned. He then undertook a variety of roles, from writer of light comedies in 1856 to political journalist, in which he followed in his father's footsteps (his father, the Marquis Claude-Louis-Marie de Rochefort-Luçay, being a dramatic author and journalist of strong "legitimist"¹ views, who wrote under the name of Armand de Rochefort). As well as writing theatre criticism for *Le Charivari* and *La Presse théâtrale*, Henri contributed to the satirical journal *Le Nain jaune*, founded in 1863 by Aurélien Scholl, and to the widely-read daily *Le Figaro*. His scathing criticisms of the government of Napoléon III (1852-70) brought about his dismissal from the editorial staff of the latter publication, as a result of government pressure. On 30 May 1868, with the financial support of J. Cartier de Villemessant, he founded a weekly newspaper of his own, known as *La Lanterne*², fiercely hostile to the Empire and marked by the wit and venom of its attacks. The historian Alfred Cobban, who describes the paper as "notorious", points out that it "reached a sale of half a million by June 1868. After three months of calculated and brilliant, if irresponsible, insults against the whole Bonapartist establishment, it was suppressed by legal action."³ Rochefort himself was prosecuted but fled to Belgium, where for a time he continued his paper and had it smuggled into France, its political attacks becoming even more violent.

On his return to France in 1869, he founded another newspaper, *La Marseillaise*. Elected as a Deputy for Paris that same year, he was implicated in a duel between Prince Pierre Bonaparte and Paschal Grousset (one of Rochefort's colleagues). For this he was condemned to prison, but was saved by the Revolution of 4 September 1870 in which crowds filled the streets of Paris and demanded the proclamation of a republic.

In 1871, Rochefort was elected to the Government of National Defence which was established in the wake of France's capitulation at the end of the Franco-Prussian War and the armistice which followed. He was one of a number of Deputies from Paris, including Louis Blanc, Victor Hugo and Alexandre Ledru-Rollin⁴. But the new Assembly, under Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), was brought back from its initial seat in Bordeaux, not to Paris, but rather to Versailles. Republicans, many of them Parisians, were a decided minority in the Assembly, and in the eyes of the monarchist majority (who reflected the conservative attitude of the provinces) were quite intolerable : on the other hand, the republican Parisians feared that the Versailles-based Assembly would restore the monarchy. Rochefort's attacks were now directed at both Thiers and the Assembly, and were made both within the Assembly and (after his resignation as a Deputy and member of the government in order to concentrate on journalism) in his newly-founded newspaper *Le Mot d'ordre*, which first appeared on 3 February 1871⁵..

Thiers' decision to disarm the Paris National Guard (composed largely of workers who had fought during the siege of Paris) led to resistance. The attempted seizure of the 400 guns in the hands of the National Guard by Thiers' troops from Versailles was in fact the spark which set off revolution in Paris and led to the formation of the Paris Commune (18 March to 28 May, 1871). Though Rochefort did not participate in the Commune itself, the views he had expressed both in person and through *Le Mot d'Ordre* ended in his being tarred with the same brush as the

Communards.

Often equivocal towards both the Commune and the Versailles Government, Rochefort had in common with the Communards mainly their enmity towards the National Assembly from which he had resigned. With enemies on both sides, he had to flee from Paris during the *semaine sanglante* in order to avoid reprisals. Leaving Paris on 20 May, he was arrested as soon as his train reached Meaux and was taken, handcuffed and under guard, to the prison at Versailles. Here he found, already incarcerated, his former employee from *Le Mot d'Ordre*, Paschal Grousset, as well as the painter Gustave Courbet.

The charges against Rochefort related to the attacks on the government made in *Le Mot d'Ordre*, which (along with the campaigns in his earlier newspapers and articles) led to his being tarred with the same brush as the Communards. He remained in prison until, on 21 September, he was sentenced to be deported for life, his sentence to be served in a fortified place. Victor Hugo pleaded with Thiers on his behalf, the latter agreeing that he should not be sent abroad but could be held in a French fortress where he could see his (illegitimate) children. Accordingly, on 9 November Rochefort was transferred, in leg-irons, to La Rochelle, then to Fort Boyard on the nearby Ile d'Aix where most of the prisoners - including Paschal Grousset, who was to be sent to New Caledonia - were awaiting deportation.

For the best part of two years, Rochefort was confined in various penitentiaries in the vicinity of La Rochelle: from Fort Boyard he was sent in June 1872 to a dungeon in the citadel on the Ile d'Oléron, and in August that year to the more comfortable citadel of Saint-Martin on the Ile de Ré, later to be the place of incarceration of two other famous Frenchmen – Dreyfus and Henri Carrère (known as Papillon).⁶ During this period he completed a novel (*Les Dépravés*, intended for publication in instalments by the Hugo set in Brussels⁷ in their journal *Le Rappel*) and was released for a short period to Versailles in order to marry his ex-mistress Marie Renaud and legitimize his children by her.

After 1871, political opinion within France began to shift in the direction of republicanism, though a monarchist majority still prevailed in the Assembly. Thiers had made up his mind that the republican cause would prevail at the next election, and began to throw his influence on that side. The reaction of the monarchists within the Assembly was to force his resignation in May 1873 and to replace him as head of state by Marshal Patrice Mac-Mahon (1808-1893); at the same time a leading Orleanist, the duc de Broglie (1821-1901), was installed as head of the government. The new government not being bound by Thiers' commitments, Rochefort's deportation again became a live issue. Victor Hugo once again pleaded on his behalf – this time, not with the President, but with his fellow-Academician de Broglie - , describing Rochefort as “one of the most celebrated writers of our day” and as a man by now in poor health.⁸ De Boglie's sole concession on the latter point was to agree that Rochefort should be deported only if medically fit. A doctor having pronounced him well enough to travel, his personal possessions were sold and he was allowed to bid farewell to his children before embarking on the *Virginie* on 10 August 1873, his destination being the penal colony of New Caledonia.

His stay on the island lasted a mere four months, his escape (recounted here) taking place on the night of 19th -20th March 1874 in the company of five others. Of these, three were of sufficient significance to merit an entry in the *Larousse du XXe siècle* encyclopedia. Two of

them in particular had held important positions in the Paris Commune. They were :

– [Jean-François-] Paschal Grousset (1844-1909), born in Corsica, who abandoned his medical studies for a journalistic career. In 1869, he worked on one of Rochefort's newspapers, *La Marseillaise*, for which he wrote anti-religious and pro-revolutionary articles. For his campaign against the Empire in Rochefort's paper, he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment in 1870. Elected a member of the Commune for the 18th arrondissement, he became its *délégué aux Relations extérieures* and a member of its Executive Committee. In 1872 he was sent to New Caledonia on board the *Guerrière*. After his escape, he lived for various periods in Sydney, San Francisco, New York and London, making a living by teaching French. He returned to France after the 1880 amnesty, for a while abandoning politics for literature and physical culture, but eventually returning to politics and becoming in 1893 a socialist Deputy for the 12th arrondissement of Paris. He published a great deal under various pseudonyms.

– François Jourde (1843-1893). Having been a notary's clerk and bank employee; in 1868 he opened a business which soon failed, after which he founded a journal (*La Pipe en bois*) of which only one number ever appeared. During the siege of Paris, he was elected by the 5th arrondissement as a member of the Commune, and in April 1871 was placed in charge of Finances. He was arrested on 30 May and condemned to deportation on 2 September. Arriving on the Isle of Pines in October 1872, he went to live in Noumea in October 1873 and worked as an accountant. Jourde lived abroad after his escape, first in Switzerland, then Brussels and finally London. He was granted amnesty in 1877. With Grousset, he published in 1876 (from Geneva) an account of the escape from New Caledonia (*Les Condamnés politiques en Nouvelle-Calédonie : récit de deux évadés*). On his return to France, he was editor of the journal *La Convention nationale* before attempting a career in politics. Unsuccessful in his attempts at gaining election as a municipal councillor in Paris and Deputy in Lyons, he died poor.⁹

– Less is known about Olivier Pain (1845-1885), a journalist who had participated in the Commune. Born in Troyes in 1845, he worked on journals such as *L'Affranchi* and Rochefort's *Le Mot d'ordre*. After his escape from New Caledonia he went to live in Switzerland, then went as a war correspondent for *Le Temps* and *Le Figaro* to follow the operations in the war between Turkey and Russia. After gaining amnesty in 1879, he returned to France, and was later to work on another of Rochefort's newspapers, *L'Intransigeant*. His next move was to Egypt, then to Sudan where he died in 1885. Two accounts exist of his death : that of Bernard Noël (*Dictionnaire de la Commune*), which states that he either died of "fever" or was shot by the English who found his presence inconvenient; and that of the *Larousse* which states that he was a prisoner of the Mahdi (a Muslim messianic figure) "whom he had, to his misfortune, succeeded

in approaching.”¹⁰

Of the other two escapees, Achille Baillièrè and Charles Bastien Granthille, little is known. Granthille was a deportee and a military man. In accounts given in the Australian newspapers, his name is misquoted as “Charles Bostiere Grandhille, Commandant de Bataillon” (*Newcastle Chronicle*, 28 March 1874) and “Caven Grant Achille, ex-Commandant of the National Guard” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 1874). A letter to *The Empire*, Sydney, dated 3 April 1874, is signed “A. Balliere, Architect-surveyor”. This seems to be the only information available as to Baillièrè’s profession.

After his stay in Australia, Henri Rochefort was to go to the United States, on which he was later to include a number of chapters in the account, entitled *Retour de la Nouvelle-Calédonie de Nouméa en Europe*.¹¹ from which the extracts translated here are taken. As the political situation in France grew more stable under the Third Republic, the Chamber of Deputies returned to Paris from Versailles in 1879, opening the way to amnesty for those who had supported or participated in the Commune. In Cobban’s words,

“*La Marseillaise* became the national song, and the Quatorze Juillet the national holiday. A long campaign which had been waged in favour of an amnesty for the Communards sentenced to exile or deportation had provided one of the chief lines of cleavage in the republican ranks. In 1881 the wound was healed, so far as it could be, by the grant, thanks mainly to an intervention by Gambetta, of a total amnesty.”¹²

Although the total amnesty had to wait till 1881, individuals who had been deported had been the recipients of amnesties granted earlier, Rochefort being included in a group amnestied in 1880.

Back in France, Rochefort soon found himself editing yet another newspaper, this one entitled *L’Intransigeant* (founded in July 1880)¹³. Having begun his career as a supporter of the extreme left, he had gradually moved closer to supporting the right, and his campaigns in *L’Intransigeant* were conducted in support of the extreme Radicals. In 1885, he was again elected as a Deputy for Paris, but resigned the following year. By the later 1880s, discontent and disaffection with the republican government was growing, and many on both the left and the right focused their hopes on a popular general, Georges Boulanger (1837-1891), whom Clemenceau had appointed Minister of War in January 1886 but whose retirement from the army was forced in 1888. Rochefort, who as editor of *L’Intransigeant* had characteristically been conducting a guerrilla war against the Republic, contributed his clientele to a campaign to promote Boulanger’s political career. It was no doubt his dislike of moderate Republicans that led him to support a man like Boulanger, described by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as a “reactionary adventurer”¹⁴. When the latter won overwhelming support in the Paris election of January 1889, a campaign was led by the Ligue des Patriotes for a *coup d’état* aimed at installing him as President. Momentum was growing and success looked likely, but Boulanger himself appears to have lost his nerve and when the government began proceedings against him he fled to Brussels, fearing arrest. [He later committed suicide there, on the tomb of his mistress.] Rochefort followed him to Belgium, incurring yet another governmental condemnation, this time *in absentia* (*par contumace*).

Returning to France in 1895 after a period spent in London, Rochefort continued to

exercise a public voice, increasingly in support of the right. From London he had attacked what he called the *chéquards* (bribed backers) of the Panama Canal scheme. At the time of the Dreyfus affair (1894-99), he sided with the anti-Dreyfus forces – a certain anti-Semitism being already recognisable in the extract reproduced here (in which members of the Montefiore family are described as “too Israelitish” – *trop israélites* – not to put their financial interests ahead of Captain Law’s career). During his final years, he wrote for the conservative and nationalistic press.

Henri Rochefort described his varied career, including his various arrests, his deportation, and the founding of his newspapers, in *Les Aventures de ma vie* (5 volumes, 1896-8)¹⁵. Other works written by him include *Les Français de la décadence* (1866), *La Grande Bohème* (1867), *Les Dépravés* (1875), *Les Naufrageurs* (1876), *L’Aurore boréale* (1878) and *L’Evadé* (1880).

He died on 30 June 1913 at Aix-les-Bains.

The account of his escape from New Caledonia to Newcastle was reprinted in 1997 by the Paris-based *Atelier Littéraire Franco-Australien (ALFA)* as part of the publication series known as «La Petite Maison». With Introduction and Notes by Jean-Paul Delamotte, the edition consists of the first and last chapters of Rochefort’s *De Nouméa en Europe* – Chapter 1 (arrival in Newcastle and impressions of the town as it was in 1874) and Chapter 16 (how the escape from Nouméa was planned and effected). Of the intervening chapters, Chapters 2 to 5 relate to Sydney and to Australia generally, Chapters 6 to 8 describe the crossing of the Pacific, and Chapters 9 to 14 deal with Rochefort’s time in the United States. Also included in the *ALFA* edition were relevant articles from the *Newcastle Chronicle* of the period.

Jean-Paul Delamotte entitled the edition «Henri Rochefort, *De Nouméa à Newcastle (Australie) : récit de son évasion*». As a former resident (with his wife Monique) of that city, where their daughter Guibourg was born, he dedicated the work to the City of Newcastle as a mark of his attachment to it on the occasion of the bicentenary of its foundation (1797-1997). The present translation is, in return, dedicated to the work of *ALFA* and of the *Association Culturelle Franco-Australienne*, created by Jean-Paul Delamotte and dedicated to the strengthening of cultural links between France and Australia on a basis of reciprocity.

My thanks are due to Jean-Paul Delamotte for bringing the work to my attention and for his permission to translate it into English. I also take this opportunity of thanking Denis Rowe for pointing out to me the need for an English translation of Rochefort’s account, and to Gianni di Gravio for his kind assistance in bringing it to fruition as an on-line document. I hope that it adds in a minor way to our knowledge of 19th-century Newcastle and of the reactions of those who visited it.

I have tried to keep my translation as literal as possible, consistent with naturalness. Not that Rochefort’s style is particularly “natural” : at times there is an annoying pretentiousness about the turns of phrase used, and he has a fondness for a display of erudition based on rare, esoteric or antiquated terms (a translator’s nightmare). I have not attempted to replicate 19th-century modes of expression in English : French having evolved far more slowly than English, the language used by Rochefort, notwithstanding his quirks of style, is closer to contemporary French than (say) the language of the *Newcastle Chronicle* in 1874 is to contemporary English.

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NOTES

¹ I.e. He was a supporter of the Comte de Chambord as against the “Orleanist” Comte de Paris as the rightful heir to the French throne.

² *La Lanterne* had 74 weekly editions, several of them seized by the Government, before it was suppressed in November 1869. It re-appeared, though with Rochefort replaced as editor, as a daily in 1877, becoming a radical-socialist and anti-clerical magazine; it ceased publication in 1928.

³ Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, Vol 2 : 1799-1945, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 189.

⁴ On Ledru-Rollin, see text, p.

⁵ *Le Mot d'ordre* ceased to appear as from 20 May 1871. A re-created *Mot d'ordre*, not under Rochefort's editorial direction, appeared in 1877. In 1892, it merged with *La Bataille* under the name *La Marseillaise* (not to be confused with Rochefort's earlier journal of the same name).

⁶ In *Ile of Ré* (Nantes, Artaud Frères, undated) Monique Jambut describes Rochefort as the most famous of the 400 insurrectionists of the Commune sent to the Saint-Martin citadel in 1872: he had been found “guilty of provoking by his writing [...] with the aim of fomenting civil war”. I am grateful to Professor John Ramsland for this information.

⁷ The chief members of the Hugo set in Brussels were Victor Hugo's sons Charles and François-Victor, together with Paul Meurice and Auguste Vacquerie. These made up the initial editorial team of *Le Rappel*.

⁸ Roger L. Williams, *Henri Rochefort: Prince of the Gutter Press*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966) p. 133.

⁹ On Pain, Grousset and Jourde, I am indebted to Jean-Paul Delamotte for the use of notes in his edition of Rochefort's work. I have also used references from the *Larousse du XXe siècle*.

¹⁰ Information from *Larousse du XXe siècle* and Jean-Paul Delamotte's edition.

¹¹ The work was published in 1877.

¹² Cobban, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

¹³ *L'Intransigeant* continued after Rochefort left its editorship. From 1905 to 1932 it was run by L. Bailby, who made it the most important evening daily in France until the emergence of *Paris-Soir*. It kept on going until 1940, production being interrupted by the German Occupation. Resuming in May 1947 under the name *L'Intransigeant-Journal de Paris*, it merged with *Paris-Presse* in September 1948.

¹⁴ See article "Rochefort, Henri" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed.

¹⁵ *Oxford Companion to French Literature*, article "Rochefort [Rochefort-Luçay], Henri de". The *Larousse du XXe siècle* gives the dates of this work as 1895-96.