**The Reveillon riots**

The Reveillon riots pre-dated both the Estates-General and the assault on the Bastille, so they demonstrate the potential of the Paris crowd for violent disorder, even without a political incentive. The Reveillon incidents centred around a Paris factory owner named Jean-Baptiste Reveillon, who manufactured expensive wallpaper for nobles and wealthy bourgeoisie (rumour has it he also supplied the royal family). His factory employed about 300 workers. In April 1789 with food shortages beginning to bite, Reveillon made a speech suggesting that bread prices should be frozen or even cut, to alleviate the suffering of the poor. His apparently benevolent comments were later misinterpreted as a suggestion that wages should actually be cut, prompting angry Parisians to march on his factory.

**“The so-called Reveillon riots are often presented as a curtain-raiser to the French Revolution and an early example of class conflict between the working classes and wealthy manufacturers. There were certainly hints of this, but it was not a class conflict in the 19th century sense. In many respects the incident bore more resemblance to the periodic attacks on Paris bakers. The crowd was attempting, as in the classic bread riot, to reimpose community values by punishing two individuals who had infringed them. In this case it was the principle of a fair wage Reveillon and Henriot reportedly attacked… Rather than a conflict of classes, it was two cultures that collided here. One was the customary culture that was strongest in the communities of the city… the other was a metropolitan culture, city-wide, consumer-oriented and outward-looking…”
David Garrioch, historian**

Once there they found it under the guard of a few dozen troops, however the following day the mob returned and destroyed both the factory and Reveillon’s house. Reveillon and his family managed to escape over a garden wall. This image (above) is a contemporary representation of their looting. Contemporary reports suggested that the mob burned most of Reveillon’s stock, including blank paper, completed wallpaper, glue, paint and machinery. They did not destroy much, if any, of Reveillon’s 2000-bottle wine cellar, which was raided and either pilfered or drunk on site. The crowd also went on to destroy a second factory, owned by another businessman who they believed to have made similar comments. The riots were brutally suppressed by the Paris Guard, an early armed police force, who fired on looters with guns and artillery. At least two dozen were killed, perhaps as many as two-hundred.

According to one eyewitness, the Marquis de Ferrieres, writing in late April 1789, the riots were supposedly about food prices but other factors may have been at work:

*The pretext is the high price of bread but this is less dear in Paris than it is in the provinces. The Estates-General will be stormy. There is great ill feeling between the orders. A great many people have been arrested. Yesterday the king issued an edict bringing guilty persons within the jurisdiction of police courts. The parlement behaved as it always does: slackly. A few unfortunate rioters were found dead in Reveillon’s cellars… they had drunk varnish and raw alcohol, thinking it to be brandy.*

Reveillon himself fled to England, where he re-established his business. For a time he even produced ‘patriotic wallpaper’ (in red, white and blue with revolutionary motifs) and exported it to France during the revolution. The Reveillon incident meant little in the great political scheme of things, however it certainly filled the Paris crowd with confidence that it could deal with alleged tyrants and exploiters. According to Schama, mobs would effectively rule the streets from April to the storming of the Bastille in mid-July 1789.

- See more at: http://alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/reveillon-riots/#sthash.z2NDUEl5.dpuf