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| 2018
Special Issue (English)

Fashion in Moderation

The *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* and the Appeal to Female Consumers at the Turn of the 20th Century

Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel

Traduction de Liz Carey-Libbrecht

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LA VEILLÉE HOMICIDE.

Dans un atelier de couture: Pour achever une robe, trop tard commandée, trop vite exigée, elles sont contraintes de travailler jusqu'au milieu de la nuit, douze et quinze heures de suite, et sur des sièges sans dossier.

La terrible veillée, malgré la loi, et le plus souvent par le caprice de la clientèle, est plus fréquente qu'on ne peut le supposer; en 1903, à Paris seulement, les inspecteurs du travail ont dressé de ce chef 2992 contraventions.

Editions de la Ligue Sociale d'Acheteurs. No. 1.

IMP. ATAR, GENÈVE CORRATERIE, 12.

LE DÉBALLAGE INUTILE.

La cliente, insouciante et impassible, fait déballer tout le rayon, sans songer à la perte de temps, de force et d'argent qu'elle inflige à la vendeuse — et elle s'en va sans rien acheter.

Editions de la Ligue Sociale d'Acheteurs. No. 2.

IMP. ATAR, GENÈVE CORRATERIE, 12

by **Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel**
translated from French by Liz Carey-Libbrecht

Fashion in Moderation

The *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* and the Appeal to Female Consumers at the Turn of the 20th Century

When the descendants of the geographer Jean Brunhes decided to deposit his private papers at the French National Archives, in the early 2000s, they had one condition: that the documents regarding the associative action of this social Catholic also be conserved. This was how the archives of the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* [LSA - social consumers' league], which he founded in 1902 and hosted along with his wife Henriette, *née* Hoskier, up until the death of the latter in 1914, were conserved[1]. Historians interested in these pioneering militants of consumerism have since had access to them. These records contain a large amount of correspondence and publications, as well as the productions of this League, including the calendar reproduced on the following page.

The calendar provides us with information on this association, its discourses, and the types of action that it invented at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the time, political action through consumption was not a novelty: it had previously been used in other countries to fight against slavery or to affirm American independence against the British colonizers[2]. Consumption was a topic of interest in socialist circles, as demonstrated by the cooperative movement headed by Charles Gide as well as the British activists who defended their empire[3]. The case of the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* is interesting in that it constitutes a specific example of the appropriation and transformation of an example originating elsewhere. This calendar provided the Catholic men and women using it with an original tool for action within the public sphere.

← Postcards published by the Ligue sociale d'acheteurs, Paris. Paris, n.d. [1905]. Photographer: L. Fuselain-Rigaud, (female) apprenticeship supervisor for Rodolphe Schlemmer (1878-1972), postcard publisher in Geneva. On the backside: "Programme: to develop, among buyers, a feeling of their social responsibility. To trigger, on the part of suppliers, improvements in working conditions. Using our postcards means spreading our ideas". © Private collection.

Political action through consumption

This pamphlet primarily informs us about the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs*, a non-profit association in terms of the Law of 1901, created in 1902 by a small group of men and women who presented themselves as social Catholics[4]. The group was led by a couple: the geographer Jean Brunhes (1869-1930) and his wife Henriette Hoskier-Brunhes (1872-1914), better known as Henriette Jean Brunhes. Inspired by the American example, where consumers' leagues had existed since 1890, these militant Catholics came to see consumption as a way to carry out social or even political action without saying so[5]. This was even truer for women, who did not yet have the right to vote. Consumption was moreover

also a field for substitution actions for Catholic intellectuals, the majority of whom were supporters of the Third Republic. They saw social action in association with other members of the "*nébuleuse réformatrice*" or loose conglomeration of reformists as a way to "find their place" within the Third Republic despite the prevalent mistrust of Catholics[6].

Members of the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* participated in several large reform campaigns which laid the groundwork for labour laws in France: the defence of weekly rest time, the fight against the "sweating system", in particular for women working from home, the regulation of night-time work for bakers, etc. From 1890-1910, the majority of laws – e.g. the Law of 1906 on weekly rest – were enacted following a long period of gestation but were poorly or rarely applied. In this context, the activism of militants, whether they were socialists, radicals, or social Catholics, played a crucial part in the genesis of labour rights.

The calendar sheds light on the philosophy of the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs*: to encourage consumers to take the working conditions of labourers or employees into account in their purchases. Hence, long before the invention of "fair trade", militants were invited to base their purchases on the rhythm of the work: not ordering during "high-volume periods" when the demand was high, and instead offering work to employees during the "off-season".

For example, the calendar makes note of the seasonal nature of the work of professions related to the fashion and clothing industry (tailors, seamstresses, milliners, or hatters): they had a heavy workload during the months from March to June and then from September to December. The "high-volume" or overworked periods were April-May-June and October-November-December. During these months, consumers were advised to limit the work that they gave to these different professions by not ordering hats during Easter week or by waiting before requesting large jobs in November or December – or be responsible for "deathly nightshifts" ["*veillée homicide*"], the night-time shift for seamstresses. Inversely, during the months when these professions were "out of work" (in January-February and in July-August-September), women were invited to give hatters felt hats to clean and seamstresses repairs to do, or to order new garments.

→ *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* 1912 Calendar. The two excerpts chosen illustrate periods of unemployment for many professions. © Private collection.

The business calendar is equally apparent. For example, members were advised to do their Christmas shopping at the beginning of December to avoid "overworking store employees" during the holidays. More generally, consumers were advised to be "polite and patient with store employees", particularly during busy times.

Other occupations were also mentioned in the calendar with respect to consumers' domestic needs: these included construction workers, bookbinders and framers, for example. Therefore, in January, when these professions were out of work, consumers were called upon to ask themselves: "Do we have any books to bind, furniture to repair, or mattresses to remake?" To support these recommendations, the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* invented specific modes of action such as their "white lists" ["*listes blanches*"] which indicated that suppliers complied with certain rules regarding working conditions or labelling. Suppliers' labels were not commonly used in France, unlike the situation in the US, because they constituted competition for union labels. Labelling was a tool introduced by American unions at the end of the nineteenth century to encourage consumers to give preference to products manufactured by unionized

JANVIER ☘

DIMANCHE.	—	7	14	21	28
LUNDI . . .	1	8	15	22	29
MARDI . . .	2	9	16	23	30
MERCREDI.	3	10	17	24	31
JEUDI. . . .	4	11	18	25	—
VENDREDI .	5	12	19	26	—
SAMEDI . .	6	13	20	27	—

Le paiement des notes *sans retard est un saine économie domestique. En* payant comptant, *on*

☘ JANVIER

CE MOIS-CI chôment :

TAILLEURS
MODISTES
LINGÈRES
CHAPELIERS
TAPISSIERS

◊

Le travail diminue chez les

COUTURIÈRES
CHEMISIERS
FOURREURS

La morte-saison se généralise dans tous les corps de métiers. Aux ouvriers du vêtement, on peut ajouter ceux du bâtiment, les ébénistes, ainsi que les relieurs, encadreurs, etc.

Faisons faire de suite nos réparations de vêtements de printemps.

Donnons aux chapeliers nos chapeaux de feutre à nettoyer, nos chapeaux de paille à blanchir.

Avons nous des livres à relier, des meubles à réparer, des matelas à refaire ?...

principe d'élémentaire justice sociale et de proportionne mieux ses dépenses à ses ressources.

JUILLET ☘

DIMANCHE.	—	7	14	21	28
LUNDI . . .	1	8	15	22	29
MARDI . . .	2	9	16	23	30
MERCREDI.	3	10	17	24	31
JEUDI. . . .	4	11	18	25	—
VENDREDI .	5	12	19	26	—
SAMEDI . .	6	13	20	27	—

Le pourboire *est pour le consommateur une charge rémunération peu digne et incertaine prêtant à de*

☘ JUILLET

CE MOIS-CI chôment :

TAILLEURS
COUTURIÈRES
LINGÈRES
MODISTES
CHAPELIERS
CHEMISIERS
TAPISSIERS
FOURREURS

Si nous partons en vacances, songeons à ceux que nous laissons derrière nous. Plus de clients, plus d'ouvrage.

Examinons nos vêtements, cherchons les raccommodages, les remises à neuf, les travaux de couture et de lingerie qui peuvent se faire en notre absence.

Regardons nos malles ; de graves accidents peuvent être occasionnés aux facteurs des gares ou aux portefaix par un clou qui dépasse, une ferrure recourbée qui blesse.

Evitons les bagages de poids excessif, qui risqueront d'accabler ceux qui les porteront.

abusive et gênante et pour celui qui le reçoit une grave abus. La L. S. A. demande sa suppression.

Ligue Sociale d'Acheteurs

Hotel des Societés Savantes : 28, rue Serpente, Paris

COMITÉ DIRECTEUR :

Mesdames BLANC-GENTON, KLOBB, Gustave BRINCARD, L. de CONTENSON.
Secrétaire : Mesdames Jean BRUNHES, R.-E. CHALMET, Maurice J. BERGERON.

COMITÉ DE PERFECTIONNEMENT :

MM. CAUWES, professeur à la Faculté de droit de l'Université de Paris, président de l'Association nationale pour la protection légale des travailleurs. — E. BOGLER. — Henri JAY, professeur à la Faculté de droit de l'Université de Paris, membre du Conseil supérieur du travail. — ALCIER, secrétaire général de la Fédération des syndicats ouvriers du Livre, membre du Conseil supérieur du travail. — Henri LORIN. — Ernest RIVIÈRE, ingénieur, c. r. c. — R. SALEILLES, professeur à la Faculté de droit de l'Université de Paris.

POUR LE REPOS HEBDOMADAIRE

« Tant qu'il y aura des gens pour acheter, il y aura des gens pour vendre »

ACHETEURS ET ACHETEUSES,

L'application intégrale d'une loi juste et humaine dépend de nous.

Le principe même du Repos hebdomadaire n'est plus sérieusement discuté. C'est une première victoire, victoire d'opinion, qui a son prix. Mais cette victoire ne nous suffit pas.

En attendant le repos au moins partiel de l'après-midi du samedi, comme complément normal et logique du vrai repos du dimanche, sachons apprécier à sa juste valeur et rendre effective la présente conquête sociale.

A tous les amis, connus ou inconnus, timides ou convaincus, de la loi du 13 juillet 1906 — loi bienfaisante, malgré toutes les imperfections et dérogations — à tous ceux qui depuis si longtemps ont souhaité, préconisé ou préparé la réalisation positive d'une des lois du travail les plus vieilles, les plus autorisées, les plus vérifiées, les plus admirables.

Nous voulons dire :

Ne vous occupez plus des objections, insinuations et lamentations contre la loi, mais agissez! Travaillez vous-même à la faire comprendre d'abord et surtout à la faire observer!

Par vos Achats !

Par vos achats quotidiens, vous avez la puissance décisive sur le monde du commerce et sur le monde du travail.

N'achetez rien

sans faire de votre achat un acte de propagande pour le Repos hebdomadaire.

Tant de privilégiés qui jouissent pratiquement depuis longtemps de la liberté de leur dimanche ne veulent songer qu'aux facilités de ceux qui se distraient ou s'amusent! Ils essaient de dénaturer le sens social de la loi, en oubliant et négligeant cette foule immense

de Travailleurs

contraints, bon gré, mal gré par les régimes économiques modernes à travailler sans discontinuer les 7 jours de la semaine : —

si souvent placés dans l'alternative inhumaine des repos sans salaire ou des salaires sans repos; — asservis à un surmenage sans détente, condamné par la morale bien avant que de l'avoir été par l'hygiène!

ACHETEURS ET ACHETEUSES,

REFUSEZ VOTRE CLIENTÈLE aux commerçants qui fraudent ou violent ou tournent la Loi du Repos hebdomadaire.

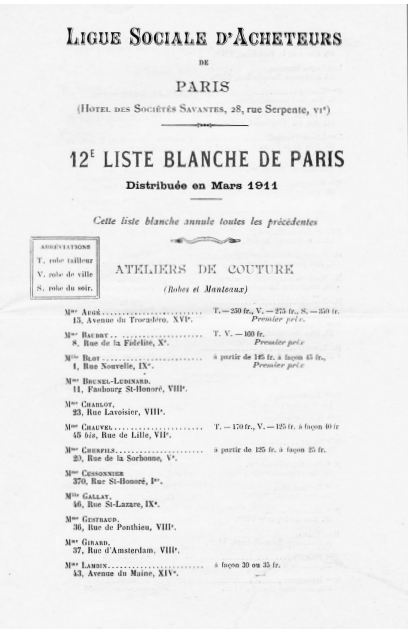
Faites une large réclame aux ateliers et magasins, à toutes les organisations, corporations et compagnies, qui non seulement réalisent, mais favorisent la fermeture légale.

Une loi règle les habitudes et prépare les mœurs, mais les mœurs seules assurent la durée d'une loi.

Que chacun de nous, acheteurs et acheteuses, prenne de plus en plus conscience de sa responsabilité sociale!

Le Secrétaire Général de la Ligue Sociale d'Acheteurs,
Henriette-Jean BRUNHES
28, rue Serpente, Paris.

N.-B. — La Ligue sociale d'acheteurs met gratuitement des affiches semblables à la disposition de tous les groupes, organisations ou particuliers désirant s'associer à sa propagande; les frais de port et de timbre restent bien entendu à la charge des destinataires. S'adresser au Secrétariat, 28, rue Serpente, Paris 6e.



LIGUE SOCIALE D'ACHETEURS
DE
PARIS
(HOTEL DES SOCIÉTÉS SAVANTES, 28, rue Serpente, VIe)

12E LISTE BLANCHE DE PARIS

Distribuée en Mars 1911

Cette liste blanche annule toutes les précédentes

ABRÉVIATIONS
T. robe tailleur
V. robe de ville
S. robe du soir.

ATELIERS DE COUTURE

(Robes et Manteaux)

Mme AUGÉ ..... T. — 250 fr., V. — 275 fr., S. — 350 fr.
15, Avenue du Trocadéro, XVIe. *Premier prix.*

Mme BAUDOT ..... T. V. — 100 fr.
8, Rue de la Fidélité, Xe. *Premier prix*

Mlle BLOT ..... à partir de 125 fr. à façon 45 fr.
1, Rue Nouvelle, IXe. *Premier prix*

Mme BRUNEL-LUDINARD.
11, Faubourg St-Honoré, VIIIe.

Mme CHARLOT.
23, Rue Lavoisier, VIIIe.

Mme CHAUWES ..... T. — 150 fr., V. — 125 fr. à façon 60 fr
45 bis, Rue de Lille, VIIe.

Mme CHERFILS ..... à partir de 125 fr. à façon 25 fr.
20, Rue de la Sorbonne, Ve.

Mme CESSONNIER
270, Rue St-Honoré, Ier.

Mlle GALLAY.
46, Rue St-Lazare, IXe.

Mme GESTNAUD.
36, Rue de Penthièu, VIIIe.

Mme GIRARD.
37, Rue d'Amsterdam, VIIIe.

Mme LAMBIN ..... à façon 30 ou 35 fr.
43, Avenue du Maine, XIVe.

↑ Poster promoting weekly rest. *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs of Paris*, 1907. "So long as there are people who buy, there will be people who sell. [...] Through your daily purchases, you have decisive power over the world of trade and work. Don't buy anything without turning your purchases into advocacy for weekly rest. There are so many privileged people who have had their Sundays free for so long who only want to think about the comforts of people distracting or amusing themselves! They are trying to distort the social meaning of the law, by forcing and neglecting these huge numbers of workers".

↗ 12th white list of sewing workshops (dresses and coats). *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs of Paris*, 1911.

workers. It was introduced to France by the the CGT federation of workers in the printing (*Fédération du Livre*) whose representative, Auguste Keufer, was closely tied to the LSA. This is why even though union labels were infrequently used in France, the LSA did not want to compete against it[7].

These tools were combined with postcards and publications that used images or words to try to convince consumers of their responsibility towards workers, both in cities and the countryside. For example, the LSA published a series of postcards showing images such as seamstresses working from home or customers unrolling fabric. These postcards combined photos of misery with a text accusing consumers. League members were well aware that the photographs used in the postcards were not accurate reproductions of social realities. One league member, Baroness Marie-Thérèse de Brincard, wrote to Henriette Brunhes regarding these photos: "In the majority of the hovels where blue-collar workers work, it would be impossible to take photos due to the lack of light". She indicated her preferences with respect to these photographs: "I would remove [the photo] of the worker in the attic who earns 2 to 3 francs per day; I don't think that's really a 'starvation wage'. I would replace it with the image, which I think is very well composed, where people are manufacturing handles for irons (babies sitting on the ground, a young man working at the machine in the window, general disorder)"[8]. In other words, it was necessary to "show" a reality that was sufficiently squalid and different from what consumers normally saw. Interestingly, a photo was deemed to be inadequate because the worker's wage was too high, whereas the wage was not visible in the image. This can be related to "misery expositions" ["*expositions de la misère*"], expositions of objects intended to show under what working conditions they were

manufactured… except that indications only appeared on signs, because the objects had nothing specific about them[9].

In 1912, the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* was already a well-established organization with 4,500 individual members across the French territory. At the time, its head office was no longer located in Paris where it was founded, but rather in Lyon, where its hosts were social Catholics closely associated with the *Chronique sociale* and "social weeks" ["*semaines sociales*"], the itinerant university of social Catholicism. Chapters existed in about twenty cities. The French league was closely associated with the Swiss league, as bulletins and letters published in collaboration attest, particularly because Jean and Henriette Brunhes moved to Switzerland, where the geographer taught. It was in Switzerland that the first international conference of social consumers' leagues was held, in 1908. That was when the slogan found on the calendar was first used: "To live is to buy, to buy is power, power is duty" ["*Vivre c'est acheter, acheter c'est pouvoir, pouvoir c'est devoir*"].

The *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* was a mixed organization, as the list of chapter heads in France attests: eleven chapters were headed by women, and the same number by men. Even though this may partly have been for the image, it was representative and shows that this league, which was long presented as a women's association, was also a space of political activism for men.

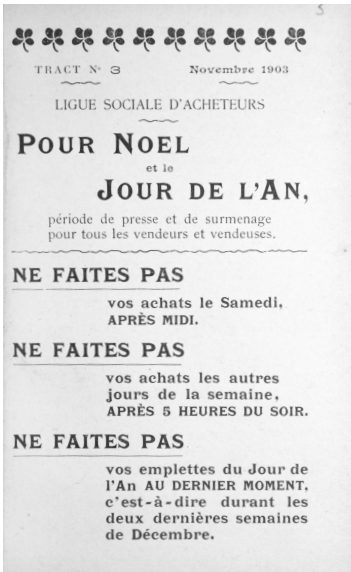
The First World War put an end to its activities, despite multiple attempts to recreate it during the inter-war period, primarily around Jean and Henriette Brunhes' daughter, Mariel Brunhes-Delamarre (1905-2001) and the *Union féminine civique et sociale* [civil and social women's union]. Multiple factors explain its disappearance: mainly the death of Henriette Brunhes in 1914; the inability of the League to unite with other consumers' associations fighting against the "high cost of living"; and the existence of new modes of activism for social Catholics – including men as well as women – during the inter-war period. The *Union féminine civique et sociale* took the reins, but by becoming a "consumerist"-type consumers' association, it abandoned politically-active consumption in order defend consumers' rights.

A world destined to disappear?

Behind its advice and moralizing rules, this document implicitly shows us the consumption practices of the *haute bourgeoisie* who hosted this *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs*. The calendar provides us with information on the objects that contributed to shaping bourgeois identity from the nineteenth century: clothing, furs, felt and straw hats, books, furniture or mattresses, stoves and heaters, or even trunks[10]. This association also most probably served to defend a world that would soon be lost.

The arrival of new products in fabric shops for women is noted in February, as well as the benefits for consumers in ordering at the right time: "the advantage of February purchases: a more complete choice, quicker delivery, more careful work"[11]. However, what is apparent above all is the calendar of the movements of this bourgeois class, which went on vacation during the summer, whether to the countryside or, as was more often the case, to the family château or second home, and its social calendar, with its "season of dinners and receptions".

This traditional calendar goes hand-in-hand with distrust of the democratization of consumption, which was establishing itself at the beginning of the



TRACT N° 3 Novembre 1903

LIGUE SOCIALE D'ACHETEURS

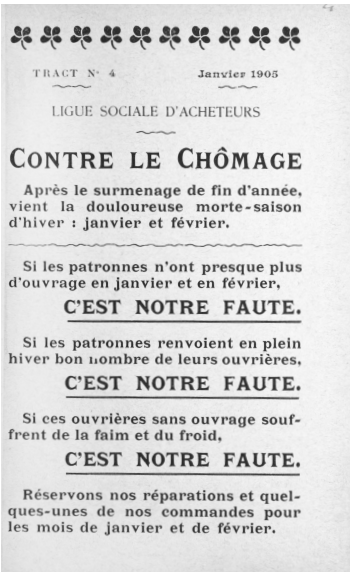
POUR NOEL
et le
JOUR DE L'AN,

période de presse et de surmenage pour tous les vendeurs et vendeuses.

NE FAITES PAS
vos achats le Samedi, APRÈS MIDI.

NE FAITES PAS
vos achats les autres jours de la semaine, APRÈS 5 HEURES DU SOIR.

NE FAITES PAS
vos emplettes du Jour de l'An AU DERNIER MOMENT, c'est-à-dire durant les deux dernières semaines de Décembre.



TRACT N° 4 Janvier 1905

LIGUE SOCIALE D'ACHETEURS

CONTRE LE CHÔMAGE

Après le surmenage de fin d'année, vient la douloureuse morte-saison d'hiver : janvier et février.

Si les patronnes n'ont presque plus d'ouvrage en janvier et en février,
C'EST NOTRE FAUTE.

Si les patronnes renvoient en plein hiver bon nombre de leurs ouvrières,
C'EST NOTRE FAUTE.

Si ces ouvrières sans ouvrage souffrent de la faim et du froid,
C'EST NOTRE FAUTE.

Réservons nos réparations et quelques-unes de nos commandes pour les mois de janvier et de février.

➜ Pamphlets No. 3 from November 1903 and No. 4 from January 1905. These pamphlets were handed out during the "high-volume" season, end of the year celebrations, and the low season following it. *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs*. © Private collection.

twentieth century. It was clearly necessary to be distrustful of "sales", which were necessarily deceitful, and to repair clothing in order to use it. In 1905, Baroness Brincard, a member of the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* from the outset, explained "sales prices" to her readers: "Certain women", she criticized, "receive catalogues from all of the large stores, compare them, and go to the best deal above all else". They waited for it to be "the time of the big sale for the exposition regarding this article (end of January for white, February for lace, October for furniture)". They kept an eye out for deals, "tricked by this fascination with clever staging", and purchased low-quality products. Moreover, this practice had social consequences for the workers who had produced this clothing: consequently, female consumers exploited – albeit involuntarily – the misery of other women. In other words, "when female consumers come to prefer good-quality well-made articles over junk, they will truly be saving money from their own point of view, and at the same time will be rendering a service to male or female workers, whose professional skills they will be encouraging by paying them for these abilities"[12].

This position with respect to the democratization of consumption goes hand-in-hand with criticism of credit: one must pay one's bills immediately, we are told. However, we know that lower classes were granted greater access to credit in the early twentieth century, for instance through purchasing furniture at the Dufayel department store, where "collectors" ["*abonneurs*"] would subsequently visit households to recover the small amounts of money owed[13].

The suppliers mentioned on the calendar had professions related to clothing (tailors, milliners, seamstresses, hatters, shirt-makers, furriers, etc.), or employees whose job was to maintain clothing (launderers). There were also cabinetmakers and other artisans (bookbinders, framers), who were studied by Pierre du Maroussem, a sociologist of Leplaysian inspiration. In 1900 du Maroussem taught members of the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* how to carry out labour surveys, the results of which they used to draw up their white lists[14]. They would look at how seamstresses worked and would then list the workshops that

respected certain social conditions. Fed by the example of the surveys carried out by American consumers' leagues, this practice of Catholic surveys established in study circles also benefited from the Leplaysian heritage passed on by Pierre du Maroussem through his classes at the *Collège libre des sciences sociales* [free college of social sciences][15].

Local commerce is also mentioned, consisting of confectioners, bakers, and pastry makers. It is apparent that the LSA's actions were based on its members' own world and were focused on the servants and labourers who worked for them. They were not interested in reforming the world of factories or that of the countryside.

While the members of the *Ligue sociale d'acheteurs* were both men and women, the advice was clearly gender-specific: the "whims" of female consumers were denounced, as were "useless unpacking" or "thoughtless complaints". Such criticism was normal at the time, and focused on the transience of feminine fashion as opposed to male fashion, which was admittedly very conservative. Within the league as well as elsewhere, rational consumers were often assumed to be male, whereas irrational consumers were most often women[16]. ■

Notes

1 Archives nationales, 615 AP, Fonds Jean Brunhes.

2 Charlotte Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender and British Slavery 1713-1833*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000; Timothy Hall Breen, T*he Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004; Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power. Consumer Activism in America*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

3 Ellen Furlough, *Consumer Cooperation in France. The Politics of Consumption, 1834-1930*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991; Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation. Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

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