Heller’s central argument is that Beik and I have underestimated the weight of an ‘independent’, that is capitalist bourgeoisie in France. He believes that my treatment of the trading and manufacturing class is ‘cursory and dismissive’¹ and amounts to no less than a declaration of the ‘death of the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century’.² Yet, in the passages to which Heller alludes, I observed that, despite the relatively depressed economic conditions of the seventeenth century, maritime trade continued to expand even if more hesitantly than during the preceding hundred years; notwithstanding significant geographical and institutional obstacles there were, I wrote, identifiable successful ‘merchant capitalists’ who contributed to a slow integration of local, regional and international-commercial networks.³

Heller’s view that I have killed off the bourgeoisie is buttressed by the further claim that I have ‘failed to notice the process of primitive accumulation, social differentiation and growing bourgeois strength in the French countryside’.⁴ This involved the expropriation and pauperisation of a substantial proportion of the peasantry and the concentration of land into the hands of a bourgeoisie both urban and rural. It is Heller himself who is guilty of not noticing. I dealt at some length with these developments in twenty or so pages devoted precisely to ‘The Dispossession of the Peasantry’ and ‘Agrarian Class Relations’.⁵ I even observed, as many others have done, that, despite the remorseless fragmentation of peasant landholdings over the best part of two centuries and the well-documented decline in the number of substantial peasant-holdings, every

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¹ Heller 2009, p. 52.
² Heller 2009, p. 55.
⁴ Heller 2009, p. 43.
⁵ Parker 1996, pp. 51 ff.
community still contained a small group of rural notables who occasionally founded farming dynasties which lasted into the twentieth century.

In similar vein, Heller asserts that I concluded that ‘there was no participation by substantial merchants’ in the extraordinarily successful revolt at La Rochelle of the lesser bourgeois in 1614, a view, he says, disputed by the later work of Kevin Robbins. If I had actually reached such an unqualified conclusion, Robbins would undoubtedly have put me right. In fact, I had been very careful to say that a definitive view of the social composition of leaders of the revolt would require a systematic investigation of the notarial records at La Rochelle.

Robbins subsequently carried out the necessary research and was indeed able to reveal the significant role played by some wealthy merchants in directing and sustaining a movement rooted in the middling groups of the Rochelais community. The coalition of forces which he describes has a striking similarity to those which contributed to the earlier establishment of the Dutch Republic and the imminent revolution in England. Heller might have made more of this, but he was perhaps aware that Robbins's analysis contained a significant rider. ‘After 1614’, he observed, ‘La Rochelle became even more anomalous among French provincial cities, combining a majority of religious schismatics with a substantial influential number of innovative political actors drawn from the middle ranks of urban society’. In other words, developments at La Rochelle during the 14 years in which the lesser bourgeois secured a leading role in the municipal government were not typical of French towns in general; except, it should be stressed, in the sense that the rebellion of the lesser bourgeoisie was itself a reaction to the emergence of a self-perpetuating, increasingly venal, urban patriciate – a process replicated virtually everywhere. No doubt, Heller is right, though he produces no evidence, in suggesting that merchants also played a part in the most celebrated urban revolt of all in mid-century Bordeaux. Antipathy to the office-holding elite was again a significant factor.

In presenting a caricature of my view of French economic and social developments, Heller misses the point. The existence of those whom we may describe as capitalists or bourgeois is not and has never been in dispute. The picture I offered is sufficiently nuanced to accommodate both the discovery of merchants who were not only wealthy but hostile to authority and the existence of the hundred or so gros fermiers of the Ile de France identified by

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6 Heller 2009, p. 47.
7 Parker 1980, p. 44 & note 3.