



Ravachol

François Claudius Koenigstein, known as Ravachol, (1859-1892), was a French anarchist who came to be the best-known hero of the "propaganda of the deed". He was born 14 October 1859 at Saint-Chamond (Loire) and died guillotined 11 July 1892 at Montbrison.

Son of a Dutch father (Jean Adam Koenigstein) and a French mother (Marie Ravachol), he adopted his mother's maiden name after the father abandoned the family when he was only 8 years old. From that time on he had to support his mother, his sister, his brother and looked after his nephew. He eventually found work as a dyer's assistant, a job which he later lost. He was very poor throughout his life. For additional income he played accordion at society balls on Sundays at Saint-Étienne.

Ravachol came to stand for the propagandists of the deed; anarchists not interested in organizing mass movements to overthrow the bourgeois order, but who felt that killing the representatives of that order, the worst enemies of the proletariat, would bring about a better world.

A difficult early life, spent wandering France looking for work while being paid a pittance, taught him to hate capitalism. Reading Eugene Sue's *Le Juif Errant* at age 18, and attendance at a collectivist circle, made of him a convinced atheist and socialist. Continued reading led him to choose anarchism as his chosen path against the capitalist system.

After years of difficulty, he felt forced to a life of crime as a way of surviving. He tried grave-robbing, counterfeiting, and smuggling. In 1891 he robbed and killed a hermit.

Escaping from police custody, in 1892 he embarked on the series of political attacks for which he was to become famous.

On 1st May 1891, at Fourmies, a workers demonstration had taken place for the eight hour day. Confrontations with the police followed. The Police opened fire on the crowd, resulting in nine. The same day, at Clichy, serious incidents erupt in a procession in which anarchists were taking part. Three were; two were sentenced to prison terms.

These events, but also the ongoing repression of the communards, revolted Ravachol. He placed bombs in the living quarters of the Advocate General, Bulot (executive of the Public Ministry), the councillor Benoit who presided over the Assises Court during the Clichy Affair. Informed on by a restaurant employee called Lhérot, Ravachol was captured. In reprisal, the restaurant where Lhérot worked was bombed the day before Ravachol's trial.

Ravachol was arrested on 30 March 1892 for his bombings at the Restaurant Véry and he was condemned to prison for life. Ravachol was condemned to death in a second trial for three killings, though his participation in two of them remains very doubtful (he admitted the murder of the hermit of Montbrison).

On 9 December 1893, Auguste Vaillant threw a bomb into the French Chamber of Deputies to avenge Ravachol (however the explosion merely injured one deputy).

Ravachol became a somewhat romanticised symbol of desperate revolt and a number of songs were composed in his honour, such as *la Ravachole*, on the air of *la Carmagnole*.