

Ernest F. Henderson, trans. and ed., *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1892), pp. 165–167; ...  
Gene Brucker, ed., *The Society of Renaissance* (Boston: Ginn, 1935), p. 263; (4, 5) ...  
Harper Torchbooks, 1971), pp. 235, 237–239. Used by permission of the author.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Using the sources above, along with what you have learned in class and in this chapter and Chapters 9 and 10, write a short essay that analyzes popular revolts in the late Middle Ages. How did population decline and economic crisis, and the response of those in power to these challenges, spur calls for reform and revolts among peasants and workers? Why do you think the response of those in power to these revolts was so brutal?

When the *popolo* [common people, that is, the *ciompi*] and the guildsmen had seized the palace, they sent a message . . . that they wished to make certain demands by means of petitions, which were just and reasonable. . . . They said that, for the peace and repose of the city, they wanted certain things which they had decided among themselves. . . . The first chapter [of the petition] stated that the Lana guild would no longer have a [police] official of the guild. Another was that the combers, carders, trimmers, washers, and other cloth workers would have their own [guild]. . . . Moreover, all penalties involving a loss of a limb would be cancelled, and those who were condemned would pay a money fine instead. . . . Furthermore, for two years none of the poor people could be prosecuted for debts of 50 florins or less. The *popolo* entered the palace and the podestà [the highest official in Florence] departed, without any harm being done to him. . . . Then the banners of the other guilds were unfurled from the windows . . . and also the standard of justice [the city's official banner]. Those inside the palace threw out and burned . . . every document that they found . . . and they entered all the rooms and hang the poor people. . . . Several young men climbed the bell tower and rang the bells to signal the victory which they had won in seizing the palace, in God's honor. . . . Then [the *popolo*] decided to call priors who would be good comrades . . . and these priors called together the colleges and consuls of the guilds. . . . And this was done to give a part to more people, and so that each would be content, and each would have a share of the offices, and so that all of the citizens would be united. Thus poor men would have their due, for they have always borne the expenses [of government] and only the rich have profited. . . . And they deliberated to expand the lower guilds, and where there had been fourteen, there would now be seventeen, and thus they would be stronger, and this was done. . . . So all together, the lower guilds increased by some thirteen thousand men.

**5** Chronicle of the Ciompi Revolt, 1378. An anonymous chronicle describes the 1378 revolt of the *ciompi*, the lowest-paid workers in the wool trade in Florence, against the Lana guild of wool merchants, which controlled all aspects of cloth production and dominated the city government. The changes described lasted four years, until an army organized by the wool merchants overthrew the new government.

**3** English peasants meet with the king. In 1381 peasants angered by taxes imposed to pay for the war with France seized the city of London and forced the young king Richard II to meet with them, as reported in this contemporary chronicle by Henry Knighton, an Augustinian priest. The King advanced to the assigned place, while many of the wicked mob kept following him. . . . They complained that they had been seriously oppressed by many hardships and that their condition of servitude was unbearable, and that they neither could nor would endure it longer. The King, for the sake of peace, and on account of the violence of the times, yielding to their petition, granted to them a charter with the great seal, to the effect that all men in the kingdom of England should be free and of free condition, and should remain both for themselves and their heirs free from all kinds of servitude and villeinage forever. . . . [But] the charter was rejected and decided to be null and void by the King and the great men of the kingdom in the Parliament held at Westminster [later] in the same year.

**4** Judicial inquiry of a labor organizer in Florence. The rulers of Florence investigated the actions of a man seeking to organize a guild of carders and combers, the lowest-paid workers in the cloth industry; he was arrested and executed by hanging.

This is the inquisition which the lord captain and his judge . . . have conducted . . . against Ciuco Brandini, of the parish of S. Piero Maggiore, a man of low condition and evil reputation. . . . Together with many others who were seduced by him, he planned to organize an association . . . of carders, combers, and other laborers in the woolen cloth industry, in the largest number possible. In order that they might have the means to organize and to elect consuls and leaders of their association . . . he organized meetings on several occasions and on various days of many persons of lowly condition. . . . Moving from bad to worse, he sought . . . to accomplish similar and even worse things, seeking always [to incite] noxious disorders, to the harm, danger, seeking always [to incite] noxious disorders, to the harm, danger, and destruction of the citizens of Florence, and of the stable regime of that city.