

CLEMENCEAU AND FRENCH LABOUR;
THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES, 1906 - 1909.

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ABSTRACT

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This essay is concerned with Georges Clemenceau's first ministry (October, 1906 - July, 1909) and its response to labour. The nature of the French labour movement is considered and a short description of Radical politics during the period under review is also offered. However, the central portion of the paper deals with several of the major Chamber debates themselves. These have been selected to feature those more prominent issues which best expose what Jean Jaures and the Socialists unceasingly insisted was the fundamental social conflict, the question of property.

CLEMENCEAU AND FRENCH LABOUR:
THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES, 1906 - 1909.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close it became increasingly apparent to French Radicals that, as the focus of politics shifted from the consolidation and defense of the Republican state, a definite stand would have to be made on what was euphemistically termed "la question sociale". In other words, in the past, the very ideological underpinnings of the bourgeois republic had sufficiently cloaked the hard, practical calculations of the politicians. Now, with specific relations between labour and capital rapidly becoming the focal point of the new social issue, it was questionable whether bourgeois cultural hegemony, maintained in the past, could continue to prove effective without substantial emphasis on reform.

The dilemma was most dramatically posed, although by no means resolved during Georges Clemenceau's first ministry (October 1906 - July 1909). It had been put to the deputies some time before in Jean Jaurès' famous interpellation of Charles Dupuy in November, 1895. The Republic, the Socialist leader insisted, had itself created fundamental contradictions within the country which were becoming increasingly intolerable: on the one hand, republican institutions had produced a wage-earner sovereign on the political front and emancipated from the old religious bonds of passivity and resignation; on the other hand, new economic conditions had reduced him to a new slavery, prey to all kinds of hazards and servitudes and indebted to the recent sovereign of the labour force, the oligarchies. Such contradictions could only be

resolved when, as Jaurès put it, "the nation became sovereign in the atelier as well as in the Assembly". "It is you", he charged the government, "who have raised the revolutionary temperature of the proletariat."¹

This essay is concerned with Clemenceau's first ministry and its response to labour -- thirty critical months during which the "temperature" of the working force seemingly reached a fever pitch. It was also a period during which the myth of Radicalism as a party of progress was laid to rest; when the conservative drift of politics became acute; and when the Socialists, tenuously united since the Congress of Amsterdam, railed away at the established order without much success while the strike movement accelerated in a frantic effort which belied both its impotence and its strength.

There are two short introductory sections; the first section concerns the nature of the French labour movement; the second offers a brief description of Radical politics during the period under review. A third and final section deals with several of the major Chamber debates themselves. They have been selected to feature those more prominent issues which best expose what Jaurès and the Socialists unceasingly insisted was the fundamental social conflict, the question of property.

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Assuming, as historians do, that Revolutionary Syndicalism, with its blueprint for overthrowing the State, was the distinguishing feature of the French labour movement during the first decade of this century, the fact remains that little evidence suggests any close relationship between theory and actual practice; between the principles and methods as put forward

¹Chambre des Députés, Journal Officiel, Nov. 21, 1893. pp. 80-81.

by its militant leaders and theorists, and the activities and attitudes of the rank and file itself. Peter Stearns, for example, concludes that even during Revolutionary Syndicalism's most "heroic" age (1902-1907) — a period which experienced an unprecedented rate of strike activity and one in which syndicalist leaders paid explicit attention to fomenting strikes directly — French workers were, as a whole, moderate and peaceful, more modest in their demands than their British and German counterparts, and no more violent, although repressive measures in France were often more severe than elsewhere.²

Revolutionary Syndicalism was an extraordinary if not very clearly defined doctrine incorporating Proudhonist, Blanquist and anarchist tendencies. As vigorously revolutionary as Marxism, it lacked, however, the appropriate historical and economic arguments, especially as put forward by its self-appointed apostle, Georges Sorel. The latter's political theoretization (*Reflections on Violence*) stressed myth, vitalism and moral regeneration. Yet it should be emphasized that while Sorel managed posthumously to monopolize Revolutionary Syndicalism he had no contact with the labour movement as such during his lifetime. Furthermore, the movement's leaders and theorists themselves remained ignorant of his ideas and writings both before and after their publication around 1908.

The one over-riding principle of the doctrine, the central principle unanimously agreed upon by rank and file, militant and armchair theorist alike, represented that most deeply rooted tradition of French labour, the notion of autonomy. This idea was all too apparent in the three essential points which Revolutionary Syndicalism stressed: complete

²Peter Stearns, Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labour, (Rutgers University Press, 1971), pp. 55-73.

hostility to the State and the existing system; a belief that the only way to attack the system was by economic rather than political means; and a vague indication that the future society would be organized without a central political structure on the basis of local economic units (syndicates) by producers themselves.³

The conviction that the State should be undermined and no longer "captured" -- a new revolutionary tactic -- was obviously the most important source of disagreement on a theoretical level between Syndicalists and Marxists. On a practical level, the history of the Socialist parties after 1873 merely confirmed the Syndicalists' profound distrust of politics and their belief that any such contact, however revolutionary the intent, would only sully the purity of the movement without advancing its purpose. For, from the mid 1870's the Socialists moved steadily away from their original revolutionary position and, in order to reap the benefits of universal suffrage, turned eagerly to political and parliamentary action. Yet the Syndicalist suspicion of politics and the State was deeply rooted and legitimately inherited, as Edouard Dolléans suggests, with consideration of the French State's active hostility vis-a-vis workers throughout most of the nineteenth century, including the period after 1884 when the government reluctantly granted the right of legal association to the workers. "The Syndicalists" he writes, "would not, or could not readapt themselves to the society that had excluded them for so long."⁴

³Stearns, p. 9.

⁴E. Dolléans, Histoire du Mouvement ouvrier, (A. Colin, Paris, 1936-1953), Vol. II, p.

Logistically at least, the growth and development of the organized labour movement in France closely paralleled that of the Socialist parties; a laborious process, organizations gradually taking form, slowly growing stronger, often changing, until the pattern of a central organization emerged at the end of the century. Syndicalist ideas did not emerge within the movement to any significant extent until after 1884 when the first important associations of unions (bourses) from various professions arose on a local basis. This bourse de travail movement, anti-political, exclusivist, largely artisan in its composition and loosely federated at the national level by the 1890's was led by Fernand Pelloutier, the first real articulator of syndicalist ideas. Alongside this federation of bourses existed a parallel federation of national industrial unions founded in 1895 and dominated by Jules Guesde and the Parti Ouvrier Français. The two movements merged in 1902, retaining the name of the latter, La Confédération Générale de Travail, but, more importantly, retaining the anarchro-syndicalist spirit and leadership of the former. Thus, like their estranged Socialist colleagues, whose Unity Congress in the spring of 1905 resulted in the formation of a new Socialist Party, the S.F.I.O., labour, too, managed to create an aura of organized unity. The formation of such a centralized organization, however, did little to resolve the factionalism and conflict already inherent within the movement and intensified by the merger.

The leaders who, during this period, directed the policies and activities of the Confédération, or the C.G.T. as it is popularly referred to, working men such as Paul Delasalle, Victor Griffuelhes, Georges Yvetot and Emile Reuget understandably preferred to emphasize the methods rather than the doctrine of syndicalism; the "direct action" of mass demonstrations,

sabotage, boycott and the strike. The latter, according to theory, was considered the basic form of daily action because of its psychological effect in creating bonds of solidarity and a revolutionary state of mind, a necessary training period for the final concerted effort which would bring about the downfall of capitalism. And indeed, Revolutionary Syndicalist theory aside, in retrospect, the efficacy of such action cannot be disputed.

The advocacy of one practice, however, the rejection of la patrie, as put forward by a small but vocal faction which echoed the pungent rhetoric of Gustave Hervé, bore little relation to reality and may have proved momentarily injurious to the movement. Nevertheless it could be argued that anti-patriotism was not only the logical result of the syndicalist vision of revolution on an international scale, but the result, too, of empirical experience, namely, the repressive tactics of successive French governments and their frequent use of the army to break strikes.⁵ Both anti-patriotism and anti-militarism became formal tenets of the Confederation's statement of principles, initially introduced in the Charter of Amiens (1906) in somewhat tentative fashion, and featured later in 1908 at the C.G.T. Congress at Marseilles.⁶ Nineteen fourteen, of course, which saw syndicalist and socialist alike hastening to the front like any loyal bourgeois, certainly belied the naive contention of any such homogeneous proletarian class interest.

In fact, the issue of anti-patriotism had enjoyed a certain prominence in labour circles as early as 1901 with the publication of Manuel de Soldat,

⁵ P. F. Ridley, Revolutionary Syndicalism in France, (Cambridge at the University Press, 1970), pp. 180 ff.

⁶ ibid.

a work generally attributed to Yvetot. La patrie, the Manuel explained, was a magic word that permitted and glorified all kinds of crimes: low wages, high taxes, the export of French products, and above all, its most frightening consequence, militarism. The brochure argued that the army, justified by the "religion of patriotism" was but "a means of enslavement", an institution which protected the property of the capitalists by using workers to assassinate other workers.⁷ This was indeed the first task of the militants -- to dissuade soldiers from siding with the employers against their own comrades during strikes. Yet, needless to say, the elaboration of such ideas, however peripheral, only exacerbated the tension already caused by the innumerable dissensions and doctrinal quarrels which had beset the labour movement since its formation.

The extent to which the major Revolutionary syndicalist ideas were shared by the working class as a whole is, of course, a moot point, or rather, one of a psychological dimension, impossible to measure. It is true that in 1906 the U.G.T. claimed but a nominal membership of 500,000 out of a total of 836,000 "organized" workers, and these represented less than 1/10 of the entire wage earning force.⁸ Yet it enjoyed a considerable influence, disproportionate to its numbers. Parisian artisans, for instance, shared many of the traditions from which Revolutionary Syndicalism sprang, and many other types of non-unionized and unskilled workers, faced with enormous barriers against protest, were susceptible to the vigor and immediacy of the doctrine. Within the Confederation itself, however, Syndicalist ideas were by no means generally representative, and

⁷ Le Nouveau Manuel du Soldat, (Paris, ed. of 1908), pp. 3 - 6. Cited in Harold Weinstein, Jean Jaures: A Study of Patriotism in the French Socialist Movement, (Columbia University Press, 1936), pp. 99 - 100.

⁸ Ridley, p. 77.

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factors such as the system of representation at congresses (one syndicate, one delegate -- regardless of size) and the failure of many syndicates to send delegates at all must be considered in attempting to assess the real popularity of the radical leadership. Certainly the militants faced consistently strong opposition within their ranks: moderate reformists led by Auguste Keufer, secretary of the printers' federation from 1884 to 1920, advocated negotiations with employers instead of "direct action" but opposed political alliances; political Marxists like M. Renard, secretary of the textile federation, led a wing which was strongly represented by miners and textile workers of the Nord and which urged a close alliance between the C.G.T. and the Socialist parties.⁹

To complicate matters further, it must be remembered that the goals and tactics of Revolutionary Syndicalism as articulated by the C.G.T. leaders were themselves, within a relatively short period (1900-1908), modified if not essentially altered by the stress of events.¹⁰ In the early days -- not many years later described by Griffulhas as a period of revolutionary romanticism -- great emphasis was placed on the spirit of battle, on revolutionary ardour. Simple strikes in demand of "reformist concessions" were belittled as trivial and likely to distract from the revolution ahead, as were the machinations of "bourgeois socialist politicians" with their preoccupation with elections and ministerial participation. In its early issues (1901, 1902) the principal C.G.T. paper, Voix du Peuple, regularly warned the workers of the ephemeral character of immediate gains and urged that all efforts be

⁹Ridley, pp. 176 - 181.

¹⁰For a general discussion of this topic see Ridley, pp. 147 - 156.

saved for the "Great General Strike". Yet, with every small success, better organization and larger membership, the C.G.T.'s stance became naturally less intransigent. Complete emancipation of the proletariat remained the goal but an artful and convenient synthesis of revolutionary ethos and reformist practice was achieved whereby everyday "reformist" activities were now seen in a revolutionary light -- "a permanent revolution carried on in the present as well as the future", according to Pouget.¹¹ Concessions came to be described as "partial expropriations", the political goals and tactics of the Socialists were recognized, as was the party's right to pursue its task outside but parallel with the C.G.T. The Charter of Amiens reflected the new outlook, although it retained, with its emphasis on class struggle and its inclusion of a clause recognizing the efficacy of anti-patriotic propaganda, sufficient revolutionary flavour to appease the most ardent of syndicalists.

Socialist politicians, opposed as they were to the preponderant hold which revolutionary and anarchist elements maintained within the labour movement's central organization, also exhibited increasingly conciliatory attitudes. In the Chamber, for example, they vigorously defended the C.G.T., for, in a sense which they well understood, it did speak for all workers. Jaurès, on one particular occasion, eloquently expressed his feelings on the subject:

I have not the presumption to dictate conditions to the working class, nor to its first persevering effort to organize, not by categories or fragments but by the rapprochement of all the syndicalist forces ... in a way in which the living unity of the whole proletariat appears in its diversity...
 ...no socialist has the pretension of submitting to his

¹¹Ridley, p.85.

formulae, to the conformity of his reason, an organization which represents the superior revolutionary right of an oppressed and exploited class ... who believes that in emancipating that class, it is freeing all men, and which carries with it the human future. ¹²

Moreover, whatever most French workers wanted during this period, — and apart from the pronouncements of the C.G.T. militants, workers presented, it would seem, an unusual variety of non-revolutionary demands¹³ — the fact remains that there existed good reason for workers to be revolutionary in the revolutionary syndicalist sense, and, in fact, some workers were so. The political causes have been frequently cited: the century long antagonism of the State towards the working class; the repressive tactics of successive Republican governments from the time of the Commune; the paucity of labour legislation and the disinclination to enforce that little which existed; and the lack of enthusiasm for both orthodox Marxism and reformist socialism, the one with its authoritarian and inflexible stress on discipline and political methods, the other with its belief in evolution and bourgeois democracy.¹⁴

But more importantly, there was good reason for workers to be radicalized by deteriorating conditions of an economic nature — an inevitability, when one considers, even in the most general sense, the long term effects of the famous Méline Tariff, that all important foundation for conservative republican politics, and, in particular, its condemnation of the urban community to dangerously high food prices. Indeed, aside from the average annual unemployment rate which never fell below 7% between 1901

¹² J.O.C.D., May 12, 1907, p. 954.

¹³ Stearns, pp. 35 - 73. Also, J. Chastenot, La France de M. Fallières, (Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1949), pp. 168 - 188.

¹⁴ Stearns, pp. 13 - 16.

and 1909, trends in wages and prices, Stearns argues (by no means conclusively but sensibly), most directly spurred working class grievance during the period.¹⁵ Real wages, he points out, did not increase by 4.5% in 1905 or by 6% in 1910 as the conventional picture shows, although such statistics are in no way incompatible with an understanding of worker protest after 1900. Money wages rose, but prices rose much faster, and Stearns argues that the latter, when adjusted for the actual importance of each item in working class budgets, increased 13% to 14% from 1900 to 1910. The rise of food prices alone added 12.5% to the total cost of living by 1910. With workers pay probably only rising 12% during the same period -- a period of supposed economic boom -- it would appear that workers were, in fact, becoming poorer, at least until 1910. Furthermore, as others argue, any modest gains that workers had made by 1910 were surely outdistanced by the huge increase in industrial profits. Total corporate revenue rose rapidly: even in 1909, a recession year, it stood 24% above 1901 levels.¹⁶

The Socialists, at the time, knew all too well that "progressive" bourgeois rule was changing little in the fundamentals of the social system, that the system was most definitely not moving, in any perceptible fashion, towards a more equal distribution of wealth. On the contrary, disparity between the possessing and non-possessing classes appeared to be on the increase. Examination of a long statistical report on declared inheritances released in the summer of 1903 prompted Jaurès to reply to establishment economists like

¹⁵Stearns, pp. 17 - 18; 111 - 120.

¹⁶Ibid. p. 17.

Paul Leroy-Beaulieu who wrote frequently of the trend toward equality:

In 1902 the total amount left by the twenty-seven wealthiest of the deceased was higher than that left by the 243,000 poorest, who represent the vast majority of the people.... The decisive and glaring fact is that after a hundred years of capitalist democracy.... the great class of workers possesses only a miserable scrap of the public wealth. 17

Indeed, around 1906, an overwhelming number of "that great class of workers" lived a dehumanizing existence,

....from day to day, without the slightest security for the morrow, always threatened by sickness, accident, unemployment. No savings, no holidays, no day off. The aged -- those whom the pressure of work had not killed off -- were thrown to the rubbish, reduced to asking for handouts. In Paris a million inhabitants had hardly enough air to breathe; a third of the dwellings were terribly unsanitary, without running water or lightThe conditions of labour were frightful....The annual rent represented a month's wage, sometimes more. The worker, driven to despair by his fatigue, low wages, his dismal hovel, his pressing debts, the illness of his family sought escape in drink it was, we are told, la belle époque. But not for everyone. 18

* * *

The leftist hue of the old Combiste bloc faded quickly once the law of Separation finally passed in December, 1905. Now mounting social strife and a renewed pressure for social and financial reform -- long since delayed by the anti-clerical struggle -- defined the new, dominant issue in parliament, the relation between labour and capital. Yet, because the line between clerical and anti-clerical remained the most obvious division in French politics, obscuring common ground of a more temporal nature which members on both sides of the Chamber shared, the Radical victory

¹⁷ La petite République, July 26, 1905. Cited in Harvey Goldberg, The Life of Jean Jaurès, (University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), p. 313.

¹⁸ Jean Preville, Né du Feu, (Paris, 1960); Cited and translated in Goldberg, p. 310.

of May, 1906 and the eventual formation of the Clemenceau ministry in October appeared as an overwhelming victory for the Left, or, as François Goguel preferred, "the party of progress".¹⁹

In the May election, the coalition of the Right lost almost sixty seats. The 177 returning deputies were divided into three distinct groups: the Progressist Centre led by the former Prime Minister Alexandre Ribot, the Chamber's most vigorous defender of the status quo; a Liberal Catholic faction, the ralliés, naively still presenting themselves as a serious political alternative, and generally inclined under the appropriate conditions to support social reform; and on the Extreme Right, a vast assortment of Monarchists, Nationalists, Independents and eccentrics.²⁰ On the Extreme Left, the fifty four Socialist deputies included such diverse and prominent figures as Jules Guesde, Edouard Vaillant, Jean Allemane and the acknowledged leader of the deputation, Jean Jaurès. The remaining bloc of Left Republicans, Radicals, Radical Socialists and Independent Socialists controlled, therefore, a solid majority of 360 seats.²¹

The strength of such a coalition, in conjunction with the initial reformist tone of the Clemenceau ministry -- beside which even its predecessor's paled in comparison -- appeared, indeed, to indicate some movement in the direction of what the effervescent Radicals, in

¹⁹ F. Goguel, La politique des partis sous la III^e République, (Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1946), pp. 25-29.

²⁰ ibid. p. 129. Also Georges Bonnefous, Histoire politique de la Troisième République, (Presses Universitaires de France, 1956), V. 4. pp. 17-20.

²¹ ibid.

the flush of victory, had proclaimed for France: "a glorious new era of peaceful progress."²² The immediate creation of a new Ministry of Labour was entrusted to the ex-socialist, René Viviani, and was accompanied by a grandiose plan of social reforms which included such projects as the reduction of the working day to ten if not eight hours; the establishment of workers' pensions and collective bargaining contracts; a more flexible reworking of the 1884 law on trade unions; the creation of a progressive income tax; and the purchase of the Great Western Railroad as an initial step in a plan to nationalize the great monopolies.²³ Yet, despite the fine promises, there were few ministries in the Third Republic so barren of achievement or so ruthlessly antagonistic towards Labour and the Left.

The blantly careerist nature which Radical politics had assumed by the era of Clemenceau offers some explanation for such an anomaly. Certainly, as an opposition movement within Republican ranks after 1884, the Radicals, unwilling to admit with their conservative colleagues that the principal social and economic policies characterizing the republican order had been realized, genuinely dedicated themselves to further reform -- reform in no way designed to undercut bourgeois capitalist hegemony (their doctrine of solidarité attested to that) but reflecting, rather, the modern notion that a more socially advanced programme was an increasingly necessary condition of retaining power. Subsequent developments precluded, however, the maintenance of such reformist commitments and reduced Radicalism in the process

²² Goldberg. p. 394.

²³ J.O.C.D. June 12, 1906.

"from a cause to a career".

In the countryside, the brilliantly contrived peasant-capitalist alliance, consolidated by the protectionist policy of 1892, forced Radicals, in so far as they wished to maintain significant (i.e. rural) electoral support, to ignore the social purpose of their programme, respect the "politique de village" and concentrate on the more traditional issues of anti-clericalism and Republican defence. In urban areas Radical reformist efforts were equally frustrated: the direct action of syndicalism and the harder Socialist line appeared more relevant to the proletariat than constitutional and clerical issues and steadily eroded whatever support the up-dated Jacobinist ideology of the Radicals had enjoyed in working-class quarters during the decade following the Commune.²⁴

Adrift, therefore, from its original moorings, although retaining its vast clientele among the petty bourgeoisie, Radicalism, with its formation as a political party in 1901, came increasingly to be directed and influenced by a small group of politically powerful "converts" and the business interests with which they were associated. After the 1906 election victory, for example, Camille Pelletan, one of the few "pure" Radicals, complained bitterly that the party's ranks had been further swollen by the wave of opportunists who had ridden to electoral victory on the Radical ticket. Further, he expressed doubts that the new constellation of the Left would permit the

²⁴E.W. Fox., History in Geographic Perspective: The Other France, (Norton & Co. Inc., N.Y., 1971), pp. 149-50.

Radical ministry to exhibit any real socializing tendencies.²⁵ Indeed, during a period when Louis Barthou, the most vocal spokesman for Alliance démocratique (a group whose members dwelt at the heights of French capitalism), declared himself a Radical and when the party's official journal, Le Radical, was owned by the entrepreneur deputy M. Perchet and his brother-in-law Marc Katy, a director of the Comité des Forges, the party label "Radical" was obviously unclear and meaningless.

In fact, critics have argued — most colorfully among them, Emmanuel Beau de Loménie — that the parliamentary politics of the Third Republic are intelligible only in terms of an eternal "centre" making temporary alliances, at one time with the Left, at another with the Right, and thus continuously ensuring the growth and consolidation of the financial and industrial interests of those "bourgeois dynasties" which it represented. The indispensable parliamentary complicity was inevitably assured since French finance and industry regularly offered to the most influential Republican and, later, Radical politicians access to their great boards. By the time of the Clemenceau ministry the list of recruits was impressive. It included: Eugène Étienne, president of Tréfileries du Havre and La Compagnie des omnibus; Antoine Gillain, a director of the Comité des forges and La Société d'électricité de la Thomson-Houston; Paul Doumer, administrator of the Comité des forges and president of the Compagnie générale d'électricité; Pierre Baudin, president of the Banque Franco-Américaine; Jules Siegfried, director of Fives Lille;

25 Goldberg. p. 354.

paul Cochery, chairman of the Banque Nationale de Credit; and Camille Krantz, chairman of l'Ouest-Lumière and the Comptoir d'Escompte.²⁶ The Comité des forges, in particular, was frequently singled out at the time, by the Socialists, as enjoying a preponderant influence within the Chamber.²⁷ It was then, of little wonder, that the Socialists expressed some diffidence with regard to that "glorious new era of labour progress" which the Clemenceau ministry proclaimed.

The Socialists had particular difficulty reconciling the reformist proposals of the new ministry with the fact that during the preceding months, when Clemenceau and his associates had come to grips with the labour crisis, their attitude had been tough and repressive. A tragic mining disaster which occurred at Courrières in the Pas de Calais on March 10, 1906 and claimed 1,100 victims initiated this unusually agitated period. The catastrophe precipitated a strike movement which originally involved 4,000 miners but which quickly gathered momentum as it spread into the neighbouring département pitting not only workers against the companies, but the older reformist syndicates against their newer more revolutionary counterparts. By the end of the month troops had been sent onto the strikefield despite the fact that the Minister of the Interior had assured syndicate leaders that the government had no intention of using the army to infringe upon the strikers' rights. On March 30, 33,354 miners voted in a referendum to continue strike action; 18,074 elected to return

²⁶ E. Beau de Loménie, Les Responsabilités des Dynasties Bourgeoises, (Edition Denoël, Paris, 1947), V. II, pp. 411 - 415.

²⁷ Humanité, Feb. 21, 1911.

to work; and approximately 20,000 abstained. As the strike continued confrontations between strikers and non-strikers, and strikers and troops became more frequent and often violent. During one unfortunate demonstration at Lens, the nerve centre of strike activity, several mounted infantrymen were wounded, one fatally. Soon over 20,000 soldiers occupied the entire area and the turmoil gradually subsided by the middle of May as workers, prevented from congregating in any of the customary places and thus isolated from any leadership, confined themselves to their homes in increasingly large numbers.²⁸

Nor was the industrial front of Northern France the sole arena of labour unrest and government repression. On April 11, several thousand postal workers, voicing chronic complaints of administrative corruption and favouritism, went on strike in Paris. And, despite the ambiguous attitude of the Sarrien Ministry with regard to those civil servants' syndicates already formed, Louis Barthou, Minister of Public Works, promptly fired and replaced 300 of the most active and vocal protesters. Furthermore, when the C.G.T. called for a great eight-hour work day on May 1 -- a movement which had been prepared for by countless lectures, pamphlets and posters since 1904, and was intended primarily as a symbolic gesture of working-class solidarity -- Clemenceau, in apparent anticipation of a state of siege, called in more troops (45,000) than had been seen in the capital since the days of the Commune. As an added precaution, Victor Griffuelhes, along with several other prominent leaders of the Confederation, was arrested and detained prior to the demonstration itself. The

²⁸ Bonnefous, pp. 12-15.

pungent and vivid rhetoric of the Revolutionary Syndicalists had been dutifully featured in Republican and reactionary newspapers throughout the month of April, and the Parisian bourgeoisie, close to panic, easily conjured up the vision of another revolutionary journées. Yet May Day came and went without cause for alarm although 285 strikes occurred, involving 202,507 workers and affecting 12,585 companies, Parisian workers providing most of the impetus to the movement.²⁹ "Indeed", Jean Allemane, the old Syndicalist and Communist remarked, "... the government has a strange need of le grand spectre rouge!"³⁰

Such intransigence on the part of the government provoked within the Chamber an impassioned debate between Jaurès and Clemenceau, during the course of which "... new political battle lines were drawn that remained intact until the war...."³¹ Reproaching the ministry for its repressive policies, and systematically demonstrating that the implementation of such "preventative measures" could in no way be justified, the Socialist leader questioned the credibility of the new ministry's extravagant declarations; "... these wonderful affirmations of principles and social progress in parliament when outside the free legal action of the working class is perpetually thwarted...and, in fact, more severely repressed than under any previous Republican regime." How was one to equate a desire for social evolution and progress, Jaurès scornfully asked, with the artifice

²⁹ L. Levine, Syndicalism in France, (Columbia University, N.Y., 1914), pp. 175-177.

³⁰ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. p. 944.

³¹ Goldberg, p. 357.

and violence methodically directed against workers, with the seeming preference for the public opinion of reaction to the legitimate demands of labour: "I can well understand the embarrassment of a man who had merely applied to existing institutions a purely negative criticism", Jaurès addressed the Minister of the Interior, "...you know well how to criticize the social order but you have no idea how to replace it: I shall tell you how."³²

The deputies were attentive and silent as Jaurès castigated the Radical ministry with an incisiveness which few in the Chamber could emulate. When he attempted, however, in an equally characteristic but speculative fashion, to elevate the debate and etch out his vision of a new society, he was greeted with successive rounds of hilarity and ridicule. With some difficulty he proceeded. The "economic civil war", he declared, borrowing Millerand's phrase, did not only manifest itself on the surface of society through strikes; it existed at the very core of society itself in the form of property which favoured the few and condemned the rest. Offering the Chamber an impressive variety of statistics, Jaurès warned that the important role that the petty bourgeoisie played in the France of 1905 should not be overestimated, that the distance had not ceased to increase between the immense and evermore concentrated fortunes on the one hand and the great mass of suffering and anxious propertyless workers on the other. Agreeing that under the present system shocks could be attenuated and conflict palliated, the Socialist leader insisted that the permanent fundamental antagonism resulting from such

³² L.O.C.D., June 12, 1906. pp. 1947-48.

privilege could only be abolished by the collectivization of the means of production, by the absorption of capital within labour, "thereby ensuring the existence of only one force, both possessing and directing the creative force of labour!" Only thus could one truly speak of creating a society free of want, a society lodged spaciousy and healthfully, remunerated fairly, secure in old age and sickness.³³

Unable to settle the issue of whether the necessary socialization of capitalist property would be accompanied by a system of indemnity (Socialist congresses not yet having arrived at a doctrinal decision on that point), Jaurès indicated his own preference vis-a-vis such a thesis and his belief that the socialists, at any rate, had no intention of "rushing to the spoils". It was, he explained, merely a question of precipitating a peaceful evolution by generalizing the right to expropriation when in the public interest -- a right already recognized by existing legislation. "Don't you believe", asked the Socialist leader, "that a society where the mines, factories and land will be owned by a collectivity of producers, rather than monopolized by a small minority, will be more just and humane?" As for the administration of the new social domain, Jaurès described a new "democratic", decentralized State, assisted directly by the entire people and by professional groups representing every category of human labour.³⁴

Finally Jaurès challenged the Radicals directly. They were

³³ J.O.C.D., June 14, 1906. pp. 1958-59.

³⁴ J.O.C.D., June 14, 1906. pp. 1958-59.

now in power; it was time to account for their declarations. How did they intend "to realize the economic and social Republic... to enfranchise producers after having enfranchised citizens?" Recalling Clemenceau's recent protestation that he was ".... but a fallible man groping towards obscurity like all of you", Jaurès concluded on a rousing note. It was not by "gropings of superb modesty" that the men of 1789 had abolished the old world and created the new:

....There are moments in history when men must choose sides. One hundred years ago, when that Great Revolution broke out, Mirabeau, Verginaud, Robespierre and Condorcet were also uncertain and confused.... But finally, they decided; they dared; they knew that the old world was crumbling, and they had to sweep away the debris to launch a new society.... We are now at such a moment and you are offering empty phrases, partial solutions, hesitation. You have fallen behind the will of the people.... 35

arguing that his aims were law and order, and that his instructions to the prefects had emphasized moderation despite the recent and unprecedented provocations of labour, Clemenceau found little difficulty in replying to Jaurès' accusations. Implicit in the account of his actions which he presented to the Chamber was a categorical denial that an issue of class conflict existed. "The working class", he declared, "was not en cause everywhere an organized worker appeared", nor certainly was it made up of "anarchist provocateurs" or "the miserable wretches who pillaged and destroyed the homes of fellow-miners whose only crime was their refusal to strike". wounded soldiers were children of the people too, they were members of the working-class as well. Furthermore, continued

Clemenceau, the issue of whether workers were recruited to defend their country from within or without was a senseless one. Did M. Jaures not think that it was also in the service of the patrie to defend legal order, a right to which all citizens of every class shared? "My efforts were those of a Minister of the Interior doing his duty", Clemenceau insisted, characteristically ignoring the dynamics of class struggle, "... maintaining social order when that social order was troubled not by the working-class but by certain members of the working-class."³⁶

Returning to the subject of strike-breaking, Clemenceau invoked the freedom to work, a right that he attached to a theme frequently alluded to in his writings -- that of conurrence vitale. The striker, he argued, merely battled to improve his situation, for better wages, for shorter hours; the non-striker (and scab) fought for his very life. Society and the state had a duty to assure such a right. As for the right to strike, he contended, it was not to be confused with the right to harass (le droit à la matraque): "I consider myself to be the defender of the working-class", Clemenceau challenged the socialists, "against those who without a mandate pretend to speak in its name,.... against you and in spite of you."³⁷

An irate Jaures later replied. What sense indeed did his opponent give to life? Surely workers deserved more than an elementary right to survive! Describing the immense and courageous

³⁶ J.O.C.D., June 18, 1906. pp. 1994-95; 1997.

³⁷ J.O.C.D., June 18, 1906. p. 1998.

effort, both physical and mental, which the establishment of a union presupposed on workers and militants -- efforts often pushed to heroic lengths in moments of crisis -- he wondered

...what state would the industrial proletariat be in today, materially and morally, if some had not from time to time, by struggling, by striking, claimed a better life more bread, a few more pleasures, a little more freedom? What would the workers' life be like?a bestial one....³⁸

Those on strike struggled for their class as well, Jaurès declared, they were the "very forces of civilization". Conditions were terrible enough without workers having, in the heat of struggle, to confront others, "dispersed, fragmented, hurling themselves against labour's effort to emancipate itself, and, whether by weakness or an excess of misery, lending support to their oppressors."³⁹

The Minister of the Interior devoted the most successful portion of his speech to a refutation of the collectivist thesis sustained by Jaurès, opposing to the latter's conception of a new social milieu an examination of the "actual state of affairs". Society, Clemenceau charged, was a complex organization, one which could not be dealt with in extremist, absolute terms. Its most sacred institution, private property, had evolved over centuries and would continue to evolve. Thus, the relationship between individual and social property would not remain static: there were an infinite number of social conceptions which could develop in the future. Yet, he insisted, social progress ultimately depended on one factor alone, "the primordial reform of the individual"; and while, in

³⁸ J.O.C.D., June 19, 1906. p. 2016.

³⁹ J.O.C.D., June 19, 1906. p. 2016.

theory, it might seem easier to alter the framework of society, since society was and could only be the product of successive human conceptions", it could not therefore, in reality, be arbitrarily modified with man in no moral state to adapt himself to it. "If you reform the human personality", Clemenceau proclaimed, "man himself will find the milieu which suits him".⁴⁰ Such a doctrine, Jaurès retorted, negated all the great movements of history: "... did the French Revolution claim only to change individuals?"⁴¹

The irreducible individualism of the Minister of the Interior presented a most salient contrast indeed to the collectivist character of Jaurès' solution.

You pretend/ Clemenceau accused the Socialists / to directly fabricate the future We are fabricating the man who will fabricate the future.... a prodigious feat, greater than yours.... We are taking man as he is, fallible, contradictory.... and we are enlightening him, enlarging him, attenuating the evil about him.... We are liberating him from a bestial regime of oppression and leading him towards an approximation of greater and greater justice. That is our ideal, to magnify man, the reality rather than the dream.... While you have enclosed yourselves and every man with you in the narrow domain of an anonymous collectivist absolutism. 42

"You invoke us", Clemenceau continued, "to follow the example of the great revolutionaries...., to take out part. I have taken my part, as you well know, against you and your ideas, and for a society based on justice, liberty and the sovereignty of the individual, a society which emanated from the French Revolution itself." The abolishment of the wage-earning class (the old Jacobin myth of a

⁴⁰ J.O.C.D., June 19, 1906. pp. 2007-8.

⁴¹ J.O.C.D., June 19, 1906. p. 2013.

⁴² J.O.C.D., June 19, 1906. p. 2008.

France composed entirely of small property owners), Jaurès was reminded, was a goal which radicals had by no means renounced, but one which, never attainable by decree, could only occur eventually through a fusion of capital and labour -- a social transformation dependent upon the gradual reform and education of the working classes. Similarly, the radical programme, with its promise of an eight hour day, a progressive income tax, nationalization of the great monopolies, etc., -- a programme more socialist than the socialists', Clemenceau boasted -- would be realized indeed, but in time. Reiterating his belief in the impossibility of passing over important periods in the evolution of peoples, he summed up his philosophy: it was the movement, the tendency towards a genuine expression of social democracy which was everything; the final goal of socialism itself was nothing, merely the most recent chapter in the history of Utopian thought.⁴³

The following day, Jaurès, in his rebuttal, returned to the point of Clemenceau's solicitude for "yellow unions" and "scabs". "We ask the working class to organize itself legally, to avoid all temptations of violence.... but", he insisted, "we are not, we cannot be the dupe of the social hypocrisy of the ruling classes." The latter, he stressed, had a singular understanding of order and violence:

what they understand by the maintenance of order is only the maintenance of order... that which they understand by the repression of violence is the repression of all the deviations, all the excesses of the labouring force... It is also, under the pretext of repressing their deviations, a way of repressing the working class itself and leaving the

⁴³ J.U.C.U., June 19, 1906, pp. 2008-10.

field open to the violence of the employers alone.⁴⁴

In so far as workers were concerned, Jaurès explained, violence was a visible, palpable and easily definable thing, the characteristic prop of an otherwise unresourceful labour movement in times of acute stress. The menacing gesture, the brutal act, these were tangible steps of intimidation, easily seized upon, testified against, brought up before the judges and dealt with accordingly. The employers, on the other hand, had no such need of violence. Luxuriously, "like diplomats", they pronounced upon the fate of the workers behind closed doors, without effort or noise, refusing reasonable salary demands and blacklisting those who continued the struggle, their very great culpability vanishing in a kind of obscurity, in the detail of complications and subtleties of evasion within which bourgeois institutions were so neatly enveloped. Thus, while the employers and engineers debated, researched and formally explored the cause of the mining disaster at Courrières, workers were hurled before the courts and condemned. "That", Jaurès bitterly pointed out, "was bourgeois justice!" Yet the Socialist leader was careful to blame neither the government nor the courts themselves. It was, rather, "the very nature of things", the covert and subversive violence of the capitalist system itself, "assured not by the complicity of men but of institutions", which accounted for the formidable contrast between the brutal facility with which workers' liabilities were established, and the essential obscurity wherein those of their employers faded away.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ J.O.C.D., June 19, 1906. p. 2015.

⁴⁵ J.O.C.D., June 19, 1906. pp. 2015-2016.

If, however, the government could not be blamed for its sense of false equilibrium; its sense of a symmetrical impartiality, it could indeed be blamed for violating that false sense to the detriment of the working class, as it had most recently with regard to the events of May 1. Calling the Minister of the Interior to account for his actions on that day, Jaurès cried

Admit the truth! ...you were afraid of the fear of the bourgeoisie and you wished, like all governments, to exaggerate your part in the action vis-a-vis public opinion and the electorate, you wanted to redeem your responsibility, reassure those who were afraid... haphazardly without knowing if there were any conspiracies in the C.G.T. without really believing yourself in designs of violence on the part of the workers ... who were increasing their delegation around you...strange conspirators that they were! 46

Before concluding, Jaurès warned the Radicals that the new "political battle lines" were indeed rapidly taking shape. Anticipating the conservative drift of both the reactionary Right and the Radical Left towards the Centre where the moderates of the Alliance Democratique would again set the norm for French politics, he reminded Clemenceau that in maintaining his defence of the working-class "against the Socialists and in spite of them", he was automatically reaping the unanimous approval of the rest of the Assembly including the Right.

The long and impassioned oratorical joust, dismissed by some as a vain and superficial exercise, nevertheless offered some of the clearest and most categorical statements which had issued from the Chamber in years. Finally evident was the fact that Radicals and Socialists (even those of the eclectic Jaurèsian variety) belonged

to very different and irreconcilable intellectual universes, in spite of the tactical rapprochements that the Bloc had reinforced. Less apparent was that the march of time had turned Radicalism into conservatism and that Republican ideas of liberalism, especially in the economic sphere, were no longer applicable to present social discontents. For while Clemenceau's success in defending his government's interventionist tactics remained questionable, the Parisian newspapers enthroned him as victor of the debate and the Ministry easily won its vote of confidence on June 21. The following day in Humanité, Jaurès graciously allowed that the Minister of the Interior was sincere in his desire for reform but pointed out that the ambiguous nature of the governmental coalition would severely inhibit such an effort. Those who surrounded and supported the minister of the interior, he warned, had no such commitment; what they had applauded in the speech was merely the attack against socialism.⁴⁷

Thus, the prelude to the formation of Clemenceau's own ministry in October, 1906, was of a nature sufficiently tumultuous to preclude any favourable reaction on the part of Jaurès and the Socialists who wisely preferred to adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude. For indeed, notwithstanding the avowedly Leftist basis of the new cabinet's personnel, the pious overtones of the ministerial declaration, and early feints in the direction of reform such as the creation of a Ministry of Labour, the ambiguity and incoherence of Radical politics, together with Socialist disillusionment, became ever more pronounced.

⁴⁷ Humanité, June 21, 1906.

In the early spring of 1907 France experienced another succession of bitter strikes which the government proceeded to break with the usual intransigence and brutality. The major and most publicized event occurred in Paris when the electricians, on order from the C.G.T., walked off the job and plunged the capital into semi-darkness. Since the turn of the century, the various networks of the electrical industry in and around Paris had been separately conceded to a number of private interest groups, with the exception of one sector which had been administered directly by a municipal board -- an arrangement which, with its comparatively favourable working conditions, proved more advantageous to the workers concerned. Early in 1907, with the amalgamation of all the sections under the direction of the Banque de l'Union parisienne -- an enterprise largely controlled by the Schneider family -- the new Compagnie parisienne d'électricité was formed. Protesting the Compagnie's refusal to acknowledge or extend those benefits which the one, privileged, municipally-run group had formally enjoyed, the strikers managed to enlist a certain public sympathy with their additional contention that such a monopoly would not only ensure abusive working conditions but an increase in consumers' rates. Their protest was short lived. Within forty-eight hours Clemenceau called up soldiers from the engineering corps to replace the striking workers.⁴⁸

On March 11, Jaurès, on behalf of an infuriated Socialist delegation, interpellated the government on such interventionist

⁴⁸ Beau de Loménie, pp. 387-88.

tactics, condemning as both illegal and degrading the Prime Minister's use of the army. On what pretext now had the government dared to intervene, after its frequent and recent assertions of the necessity of neutrality in labour disputes unless property or lives were threatened? Let there be no confusion, Jaurès cried, anticipating his opponent's reply, the issue at hand did not concern public servants and their right or lack of right to strike. The electrical industry was not a public service, he declared, reminding the Chamber of the circumstances of its recent new formation. Perhaps the government intended to justify its harsh measures by calling attention to the vital necessity of the industry itself, the Socialist leader asked facetiously. "Would workers be deprived of their guarantee to strike because their labour was indispensable.... were they to be enslaved in proportion to their worth?" "Did such logic suggest that when the alimentation industry went on strike the army would be called in to replace the bakers?.... and what of the coal industry? did the government insinuate that the miners' right to strike could be suspended under certain conditions because of the economic importance of coal?" By what right, by virtue of what law, what constitutional principle, Jaurès demanded, had the government acted? ⁴⁹

"In the name of good sense and simple reason", Clemenceau replied, ".... in the name of the right of society to live, in the name of a government's duty to assure that life!" Did M. Jaurès actually believe that plunging Paris into darkness had not presented problems of security? The Prime Minister offered the Chamber a

⁴⁹ J.O.C.D., March 11, 1907. pp. 626-28.

graphic description of the anarchy and chaos which had begun to fester, but which decisive and responsible action, unanimously approved by the cabinet, had effectively checked. "You advocate the oppression of the social body by a small minority", he lashed out at the Socialists, ".... you think that we are anxious to reduce workers to a level of slavery! No.... laws voted here are not for that. But we are even less willing that workers become tyrants!"⁵⁰

Further discussion centred on the plight of the Paris poor throughout the crisis and prompted one Socialist deputy, M. Melin, to wonder that a few weeks previously, when 22 employers at Fougères staged a lock-out affecting literally thousands of workers, not one word of protest had emanated from the government.⁵¹ The marquis de Rosambo, an independent deputy returned to the issue at hand. Whether the Prime Minister had or had not prudently and effectively intervened in the electricians' strike, he insisted, in no way answered Jaurès' interpellation. The issue, the marquis believed, was a theoretical one: did the right to strike exist or not? And if it did, under what precise conditions did the government have the right to obstruct or limit it? The marquis wryly emphasized his preference for recourse to a law over the "good sense" which the Prime Minister claimed the ministry unanimously shared. Recalling the recent verbal gymnastics of Briand and Viviani who pretended neither regret for their past nor renunciation of their former convictions, he expressed the view that the government was indeed degenerating into a state of intellectual

⁵⁰ J.O.C.D., March 11, 1907. pp. 629-30.

⁵¹ J.O.C.D., March 11, 1907. p. 633.

and political anarchy.⁵²

His colleague of the Right, Joseph Lasies, Nationalist deputy from the Gers, who was the final speaker at the tribune, blamed the recent disturbances on the formation of trusts and cartels, and their "methodical monopolization and exploitation of those resources most indispensable to the economy and to the livelihood of the working class and the poor." petrol, Lasies noted, on which the working class was especially reliant, cost five times less in Belgium.⁵³ Thus, the recent formation of the electricity consortium presented, in view of the radical programme of nationalization, an irony that was not lost on either side of the Chamber.

Motions of censure put forward by both Jaurès and Lasies were defeated by votes of 418 to 90 and 357 to 26 respectively; a third motion approving the government's actions was put forward by several Radical deputies and adopted by a vote of 378 to 68. A special request to speak on the part of one Radical Socialist further evidenced the incontrovertible conclusion that the political battle lines created by the old Leftist Bloc were indeed forever dead and buried.

Explaining to the Chamber that his vote of confidence in no way negated his commitment to syndicalism or the right to strike, he declared that the ambiguities of the Socialist party -- a party containing such "diametrically opposed elements" -- were such that they inhibited him from supporting a motion, however appropriate, put forward by any of its members.⁵⁴

⁵² J.O.C.D., March 11, 1907. pp. 634-35.

⁵³ J.O.C.D., March 11, 1907. p. 635.

⁵⁴ J.O.C.D., March 11, 1907. p. 636.

Ambiguities or no, the gulf between Radicals and Socialists proceeded swiftly to widen into an unbridgeable chasm when, during the following month of April, the problem of civil servants and their right to syndicate was finally and clearly posed. Although state employees had, over the years, formed syndicates, the legality of their action had never been resolved. Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes, in their desire to exclude, especially at election time, "all that could divide the Republic", had ignored the issue. The Sarrien ministry had resorted to half measures: toleration of those syndicates already formed on the one hand, and prevention of new ones on the other. Clemenceau immediately announced his unequivocal opposition to such a state of affairs. After submitting to parliament a measure which merely permitted civil servants to associate in the form of a professional order, he sent on April 6 a strongly worded letter to the teachers' syndicate which had, the previous month, addressed him in a formal attempt to justify its formation and affiliation to the *pourses*. Under no condition, the Prime Minister stressed, could teachers, as public servants contracted by the nation, be accorded either the right to strike or the right to affiliate themselves with organized workers of private industry. Indeed, their very mission, he insisted, consisted in combating the odious doctrines of the C.G.T. and its "exhortations to sabotage, desertion and treason."⁵⁵

The teachers' syndicate, supported by other groups of state employees, responded with a manifesto posted on the walls of Paris.

⁵⁵Bonnefous, pp. 59-61.

Equally intransigent in tone, the manifesto denounced the arbitrariness and tyranny of the State in its role as privileged employer, insisting that the status of civil servants as workers and ordinary producers be recognized, and protesting the validity of a contract which resulted in the alienation of such fundamental liberty as the right to strike.⁵⁶ The government retaliated with its customary perversity, dismissing from their jobs not only the secretary of the teachers' syndicate but also several postal workers who had signed the manifesto. On the one hand, disciplinary action of the Prefect of the Seine — action contrary to the Council of Education's favourable decision of acquittal — was ratified by Briand; on the other hand, the unfavourable decision of the Postal and Telegraphic Council was piously deferred to.⁵⁷ In the meantime, the C.G.T. entered the dispute with public denunciation of "Clemenceau, Briand and Viviani, who have passed to the other side of the barricade".

The C.G.T.'s intervention ensured that the forthcoming discussion in the Chamber on the subject of syndicalism would be lengthy and bitter. Indeed when the deputies returned on May 7 after the Easter recess, Clemenceau and his ministers faced no less than eighteen interpellations. The Socialists launched the attack; Edward Vaillant, Marcel Sembat, Allemane and Jaurès, all castigating the government for the brutality and arbitrariness which it systematically manifested towards organized labour. Events of the last twelve months, they declared, clearly underlined the impossibility of Socialist participation in power.

⁵⁶ J.O.C.D., May 13, 1907. p. 977. Cited in Briand's speech.

⁵⁷ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907, pp. 942-43. Speech by Allemane.

The Radical programme had not been realized, nor was there any evidence of a serious attempt to realize it; one modest movement in that direction, the bill on a weekly day of rest, was conveniently disintegrating in the Senate. The sole promise which had been adhered to was the prime Minister's recent declaration of war on socialism and syndicalism, and his insistence on order. To this end had been harnessed all the government's energies, the repressive nature of which, former and less "progressive" ministries had found distasteful. The scattering of secret agents and provocateurs among thousands of workers and socialists, and the use of their imaginary declarations as pretexts for subsequent arrest and dismissal, were tactics, Vaillant angrily reminded the Chamber, which French governments had not relied upon for years. Was it not finally clear that in its desire to disarm and intimidate the syndicalist movement the present government intended to act both inside and outside of the law? Was this not evident when Le Temps, "one of the principal organs of reactionary politics", consistently congratulated Clemenceau on his "preventative methods" and invited him in fact, to dissolve the C.G.T. itself.⁵⁸

Particularly aggravating to the socialists was the different system of weights and measures with which the government persisted in judging the Confederation: its emphasis of the anarchist position within the movement when powerful and conservative men like Keufer exercised political and moral authority as well; its expression of horror and concern with regard to anti-patriotic propaganda

⁵⁸ J.O.C.D., May 9, 1907. pp. 925-28.

directed at workers when, at the same time, bourgeois novels celebrating themes of desertion such as those of Tolstoi went uncriticized; more concretely, its insistence on the sabotage of the workers, in no way comparable to the chronic sabotage in market and capital production.⁵⁹ Jaurès cited a further and blatant example of such arbitrariness. Had not Albert Sarraut, Under-Secretary of State for the Department of the Interior, in a recent speech in Lyon, condemned the direct action of C.G.T. affiliated workers and threatened that the government would proceed against such disorder? Yet, at that very moment, were not his own constituents in the Midi -- in mass meetings which far excelled the largest rally of workers -- protesting the government's negligence in settling the crisis in the wine-growing industry, and announcing publically and without prohibition their intention to withhold taxes and their refusal to vote in any of the forthcoming Communal elections? "Did the tolerance shown towards these property owners reflect", the Socialist leader wondered, "the disproportionate influence that the Midi, through the ministerial talents of its intrepid Gascons, exercised on politics?" If ever there had been direct action, he insisted, not only announced but practiced, if ever the hand of public authority had been forced, it had been there, in that region representative of authority in the government!⁶⁰

Thus the government's imperious arbitration in the case of the dismissed civil servants was only the most recent provocation

⁵⁹ J.O.C.D., May 11, 1907. pp. 961-64.

⁶⁰ J.O.C.D., May 11, 1907. p. 961.

in what had become a virtual attempt to disarm if not entirely destroy the syndicalist movement itself. Especially intolerable to the Socialists was the fact that the Council of Education's favourable decision with regard to the culpability of the Secretary of the teachers' syndicate had been ratified by Briand himself, their former colleague in arms. Did the Chamber seriously believe, Marcel Sembat railed, that men could be lawfully proceeded against for ideas that they upheld, when those very ideas had been proposed and launched by a man who was presently in power, and in fact had initiated such proceedings? Furthermore, he argued, "no jury, no tribunal in France, after reading articles from La Lanterne in which the Minister of Education spoke as those anti-militarists who are today arrested, would consent to condemn them...."⁶¹

Jaurès spoke at length on the crucial issue -- civil servants' syndicates and the "danger" entailed in their affiliation with the C.G.T. If indeed the fundamental concern was, as the government pretended, the problem of a strike, he expressed the doubt that either legal interdiction or partial and arbitrary repression could deter all wage-earners of the state, however associated, from proceeding, if they so desired, in that very direction. Admittedly, such an undertaking was almost practically impossible, yet if the government insisted on warding off the phantom of such an event, the real solution lay, Jaurès informed the Chamber, in giving civil servants legal guarantees which would ensure not only certainty of work and fair remuneration, but a definite and personal responsibility in the

⁶¹ J.O.C.D., May 14, 1907. pp. 993-95.

whole collective undertaking. In other words, guarantees were needed which would render a strike psychologically impossible. As for the teachers, the question need never have been posed, Jaurès explained. The teachers themselves had resolved to abstain from strike action, not, as the Prime Minister believed, in fulfillment of their mission to combat the C.G.T., but "perceiving that their daily task of educating the children of the people was in itself a singular way of serving the working class in battle." Thus the strike per se was not the issue at hand, although that fact did not negate the importance of allowing civil servants to adopt the syndicalist form of union employed by industrial workers. In fact, the Socialist minister declared, communion with the labouring world was to their greatest advantage. Between workers of the state and those of private industry was an identity and community of interest: the former with a certain security but no liberty; the latter with a certain liberty but no security. "Did not the very essence of social progress consist in acquiring for both this double guarantee?" "The moment you confine the civil servants in a special association, in a restricted status, placing them outside the common right of syndicalist association, Jaurès declared, "you go against the entire labour movement itself".⁶²

Furthermore, he pointed out, teachers had a special interest in fraternizing openly with organized labour. For while they lent to the movement a constant reminder that the assertion of workers' rights had an idealistic end -- that social reforms not only entailed more material pleasure but a life more edifying in a spiritual sense as

⁶² J.O.C.D., May 10, 1907. pp. 954-55.

well — they received far more in return: "measure of spirit", "modesty of thought", and most importantly, by engaging in the very life struggle of a class committed to the historical realization of "the noblest idea which has appeared since the origin of time, the idea of a humanity where work will be sovereign", they acquired a real understanding of the grandeur of past human effort, "the secret of human history itself". Therein lay the wisdom of the labour movement, Jaures explained in his inimitable fashion, "a fusion of the ideal as perceived by some and the lesson of combat which life teaches to others ...an equilibrium both hardy and wise". "If you wish devoted and wise teachers allow them to communicate with the great popular working force.... you will accomplish thereby a work of education and civilization". Thus the Socialist leader concluded before an unimpressed Chamber, suspicious, for the most part, that many teachers, along with C.G.T. militants, harboured anti-patriotic sentiments, and convinced that a C.G.T. affiliated teaching force would mean foyers of revolution and anarchy in the nation's classrooms.⁶³

Clemenceau and his ministers faced further attack from the Centre and the Right of the Chamber. Yet neither support (in a verbal sense) nor criticism emanated from the benches of the governmental coalition. Was it not significant, Jean Allemane remarked, that when Ferdinand Buisson, the lone member of the Radical Party to interpellate the government, demanded justice and clemency on behalf of the civil servants, not more than six or seven or his

⁶³J.O.C.D., May 10, 1907. pp. 955, 957-58.

colleagues applauded.⁶⁴

If indeed applause was any criterion (and certainly a measure of the Chamber's enthusiasm was invariably reserved for a display of agility and wit) a resounding ovation from both Left and Centre suggested that Paul Deschanel's mannered and elegant -- yet none the less vacuous -- speech most aptly summed up the feeling of the vast majority of deputies. The former President of the Chamber's major concern was "the struggle between legal and revolutionary syndicalism," and of knowing what measures the government intended to take with regard to "this progressive deviation of the Syndicalist movement toward the revolutionary organization of the C.G.T.", "an organization of social war." Employing that childish style of polemic which so angered the Socialists in its obvious design to inhibit their defense of the C.G.T. within the Chamber, Deschanel regaled the deputies with carefully selected citations from the Confederation's leading theorists -- citations which stressed the anti-democratic, elitist nature of revolutionary syndicalism and its revulsion for all political parties and parliamentary legislation. "Is this concentration of executive power in the hands of a few men who imagine they are infallible, is this anti-egalitarian conception", he demanded, "a natural way of preparing the masses for the role they are expected to play in future society?"⁶⁵ Particularly distressing to Deschanel were the tactics and "grand design" of the doctrine. Reminding the Chamber that the General Strike entailed not only the concerted

⁶⁴ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. p. 943.

⁶⁵ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. pp. 936-37.

cessation of work, he proceeded in a lengthy account to describe how the anarco-syndicalist leaders of the C.G.T. intended to carry out "the decentralized revolution"; how it was necessary that

workers act in a revolutionary manner use force, for it would be the height of incoherence, in wanting to communize all the instruments of production, not to seize them immediately, and it would be ridiculous in attacking private property not to seize it.... 66

After quoting further, from Emile Pouget's writings, Deschanel cited from texts published by the propaganda Committee for the General Strike, and from speeches and resolutions from the Congress of Amiens. Most effective was a selection of anti-militarist and anti-patriotic exhortations from the notorious Manuel de Soldat and Nouveau Manuel de Soldat. The Nouveau Manuel, Deschanel announced, had enjoyed twelve printings of not less than 10,000 copies. Would such a thing be permitted in Germany, he asked, recalling the rupture of relations between the C.G.T. and the International Secretariat headquarters at Berlin when the latter refused to include the General Strike and anti-militarism on its agenda.⁶⁷

"To the illegalities and violence, to the barbarous and regressive conceptions of Revolutionary Syndicalism", M. Deschanel opposed "the democratic syndicalist programme and the politics of solidarity". After a graceful tribute to the "courage, intelligence and devotion of our French workers", he elaborated: "far from wishing to compromise the working class we should like to see

⁶⁶ Comité de propagande de la grève générale: la grève générale Son but, ses moyens. Imprimerie nouvelle, 11 rue Cadet, 1901. Cited by Deschanel. J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. p. 957.

⁶⁷ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. p. 957.

them in a stronger and more viable position.... a goal attainable through legal syndicalism, through the professional syndicate.... an institution not only intended to defend labour against oppression but designed to offer it easier access to capital and private property."⁶⁸

Concerning civil servants and the wisdom of their affiliation to workers' syndicates and the bourses, Deschanel was adamant and brief: such a development, however desirable in theory, could too easily prove injurious to public services, to the ensemble of citizens. The general interest had necessarily to prevail over the particular one. But the cause of the crisis was another matter, "more worthy of discussion", and Deschanel argued that real responsibility was with the Radical government, its leaders, and their "fifteen year flirtation with socialism". "The real danger", he never tired of repeating, "was that shameful evil of democracies.... the fear of not appearing advanced enough". "Surely those dismissed and arrested workers would have far preferred to be governed by men who had never promised them what they had no intention of fulfilling.... who had not deliberately roused them on the one hand and crushed them on the other." The June programme of reform had fooled neither himself nor his Republican colleagues, Deschanel concluded: "... under its bright sallies and the burst of talent was nothing but the thirty year old individualist doctrine of Radicalism.... the old homo economicus to which was artfully wedded State monopolies."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. p. 938.

⁶⁹ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. pp. 939-40.

Similarly effective at the rostrum was Joseph Massabuau who frequently spoke on behalf of the Liberal Catholic delegation within the Chamber. Reflecting the ambivalent attitude of the Right, as a whole, towards civil servants, Massabuau sympathized with their plight, insisting that their need and desire to form syndicates was a direct result of government arbitrariness and favouritism. Yet in his further agreement with their need to strike, he merely expressed the views of a significant minority of his colleagues, willing to condone any action "which would free civil servants from the étatisme of a government which had been all too eager to use their associations in order to combat its political enemies at election time."⁷⁰ The law, Massabuau declared, distinguished between two categories of civil servants: those agents of authority who exercised public power and whose relationship to the State was of a sovereign nature; and all other civil servants who were simply tied to the State in a purely contractual sense. Surely granting the right to syndicate and strike to postal workers and teachers who fell within this latter category was no more hazardous than according it to employees of the great arsenals and shipyards, employees of war supply stores, construction and maintenance personnel of postal and telegraphic offices -- groups which already enjoyed such liberties.⁷¹

The affiliation of civil servants' syndicates to the C.G.T. was, however, a separate issue. "This state within a state", this "new International", as Massabuau described the Confederation,

⁷⁰ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. p. 933.

⁷¹ J.O.C.D., May 8, 1907. p. 934.

was the real evil, the "root cause" of present disorder. And unlike Deschanel who, although questioning the licitness of its goals and methods, reluctantly admitted its legality as a corporate labour organization under the law of 1884, Massabuau urged either a more prudent reading or modification of such legislation. He specifically singled out Article Five for revision which stated simply that "professional syndicates could.... unite in defense of their economic interests....", and which did not designate, as Massabuau would have preferred, that those "economic interests" were to be of an identical nature. "The day you make this modification in the text of Article Five, the C.G.T. will be illegal", declared Massabuau, "and the syndicates will return to their rightful role which is to occupy themselves with professional interests -- not revolution."⁷²

Most extreme in his denunciation of Radical policy and representative of the most negative section of the Right in his attitude to the social question was the former Prime Minister, the Progressist deputy from the Pas de Calais, Alexandre Ribot. Ribot even objected to a recent government bill which provided for a general confederation of civil servants' associations, and he predicted dangers at election time if such a development were to materialise. The C.G.T., he stated, already exercised considerable influence on the government through certain deputies and committees of the Chamber. Arguing that civil servants' syndicates had been declared illegal at all levels of the courts and at the Cour de

⁷²J.U.C.D., May 8, 1907. p. 936.

Cassation as well, and that they had been condemned formally and energetically within the Chamber itself, Ribot wondered what the government was waiting for. What false pudeur prevented it from going directly to the courts and declaring the syndicates illegal for once and for all? In fact, he protested, they could simply be dissolved in the name of discipline.... "by virtue of the power of command.... for that there is no need of law...." what was necessary was a government which knew what it wanted and which imposed its authority. Dismissals, arbitrary measures, feeble circulars of warning, the condemnation of a few "wretched individuals" followed by amnesty -- these offered no solution, Ribot complained, and reproached the Radicals for bringing to the labour issue a sentimentality and a preoccupation with electoral politics that had resulted in a policy which lacked both justice and firmness. "Your two-year old army was not created to be dismantled on the Eastern frontier and mobilized on the strike-field", Ribot further declared pointedly to the government.⁷³

As for the C.G.T. itself, Ribot assured the deputies that there were several legal experts in their midst who could easily find sufficient cause to proceed against it. There was not one country in the world, he reminded the Chamber, where such systematic excitation to crime was not punished with a severity almost equal to that which was applied to the crime itself.⁷⁴

Clemenceau and Briand defended themselves ably, the government

⁷³ J.O.C.D., May 14, 1907. pp. 990-92.

⁷⁴ J.O.C.D., May 14, 1907. p. 993.

winning its vote of confidence, 323 to 205. To the delight of the Right, Briand, in particular, expressed his intransigence in the most adamant of terms -- a prelude in tone to his forthcoming ministry. No absolute principle existed with regard to the right or the desirability of civil servants to form syndicates, the Minister of Education argued; in fact, many members of the C.G.T. shared Arturo Labriola's suspicion of civil servants and were most reluctant to see workers "duped into sustaining the interests of a 'parasitic bureaucracy'". If this hostility seemed temporarily modified, Briand explained, such modification had to be understood as a new tactical approach intended to generate further social confusion and enfeeble public authority. Furthermore, he pointed out, there were the vast majority of civil servants themselves who had equally little desire to affiliate with the C.G.T. and whose real attitude was one of anxiety and fear -- fear, above all, that in the eyes of the country they would be considered as partisans of its improbable theories. Refuting Jaures' thesis that civil servants and workers shared common interests which could and should be defended by common action, Briand contended that such assimilation was inconceivable. The state, he pretended, was the very nation "made flesh". "...how, indeed, could civil servants whose authority was bestowed upon them by the nation, turn against the nation." At any rate the issue was settled. A bill had been tabled, appreciated by those concerned. Civil servants would be accorded neither the right to strike nor the right to join the C.G.T.; the former right incompatible with the exercise of their functions; the latter, especially in the case of the teachers, an imposition on their solidarity such as to render inept the exercise of such functions.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ J.O.C.D., May 15, 1907. pp. 975-77.

As for the dismissed civil servants, Briand differentiated between the private citizen who spoke as an individual and enjoyed every right to the pretention of inaugurating a new society, and the civil servant who spoke on behalf of his profession -- a profession hierarchical in nature, the consequences of which had necessarily to be expected. The issue here was one of discipline, he insisted. Neither syndicalism, nor the right of collective petition, nor even the dignity of man and citizen were at stake. ".... even if civil servants were syndicated", Briand argued, "we could not allow them to rise up insolently against their superiors, attacking the very representatives of the nation, circulating offensive opinions treasonable in nature."⁷⁶

The Minister's final remarks only served to accentuate further the extraordinary volte-face which so embittered his former colleagues. He explained to the Chamber that the "convulsive" and "infantile" behaviour of workers' organizations was symptomatic of their frustrations and very real impotence. Insufficient labour legislation as well as the unhappy state of leadership within the movement were to blame. ".... give some incentive to the working class, more responsibility, more say", urged Briand, ".... give the working class access to property and you will sober it!" Thus concluded the former champion of revolutionary syndicalism, a man who had to his credit, as Sembat wryly remarked, not only the paternity of the General Strike but the origins of Hervéism as well.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ J.O.C.D., May 13, 1907. p. 978.

⁷⁷ J.O.C.D., May 13, 1907. p. 981.

The Prime Minister struck a somewhat more conciliatory note. He stressed once more his programme of reform and its "spirit of socialism", yet insisted on the impossibility of realizing any measure of reform while the present state of anarchy and disorder persisted. Devoting the major portion of his speech to the problem of the C.G.T. and its legality, he admitted that neither the law of 1884 nor the law of 1901 could be implemented in a fashion hostile to the Confederation. With regard to the most frequently cited cause for the C.G.T.'s dissolution -- the illegality of its methods and goals -- he examined Article Three of the 1901 law which stated that only associations founded with an illicit goal in view were illegal and contained no provision for the case of an association outgrowing its status. That this was a deplorable lacuna, Clemenceau heartily agreed, but he reminded the Chamber that it remained in the law nevertheless. He further informed the deputies that he had no intention of submitting civil servants' syndicates to his own arbitrary wishes; that they could not be suppressed as Ribot wished until Parliament made a definite statement to that effect; and that their present dubious status would continue to be respected in the meantime. The Radical government, he assured the Chamber, was not prepared to violate the law in order to remain in power and live from day to day with a majority that ultimately could not support it.⁷⁸ "we have repressed, we will continue to repress if necessary....", declared the Prime Minister, aptly summing up the essence of the

⁷⁸ J.U.C.D., May 14, 1907. pp. 1002-04.

stalemate at the turn of the century in French Radicalism, "... but we hold ourselves to those conquests already attained and we will not retract any measure or reform in the realm of justice and liberty which has been bestowed upon the nation by the Republic,"⁷⁹

The Socialists were unimpressed with such piety. Firstly, the very institutional complexity of the C.G.T. with its national federations in specific trades, its bourses de travail and its departmental unions -- "a vast network without any principal switch-board", as Marcel Sembat described it -- precluded the possibility of any real dissolution. This was a fact which the Prime Minister and his assistant in the Department of the Interior knew all too well, and one which offers some explanation for the zeal with which they invariably urged the prosecution of individuals rather than the implementation of general measures against the group.⁸⁰ Further, as Edouard Vaillant succinctly stated, the Clemenceau politique, in so far as it accomplished anything, had amply demonstrated to the working class that syndicalism and socialism remained its only defenders and representatives; that, although "Radical", the government lay entirely at the disposition of those who exploited it. Moreover, Vaillant contended, the Socialists had never entertained any illusions regarding the action of Radicalism in power. They had always understood that "reformist" policy would cease as soon as the necessity of making any change in the social order made itself apparent, obliging those in power to recognize, as had their predecessors, that their

⁷⁹ J.O.C.D., May 14, 1907. p. 1004.

⁸⁰ J.M. Sherwood, Georges Mandel and the Third Republic. (Stanford University Press, 1970), p. 26.

first duty and highest mission was to defend the privilege of the bourgeoisie.⁸¹ "The fact that this situation, which we supposed had inevitably to occur at the end of a certain period, has produced itself without delay", Vaillant cried, "means that we are now in the heat of battle.... against Clemenceau, against the government and against the Radical party which supports him".⁸² The political issue therefore, according to the old militant Blanquist, was no longer one of simple reform. It was, rather, one of knowing whether the Republic would, on the one hand, develop and progress through its recognition of the syndicalist right, thereby setting out in the direction of those socialist forms with which it would one day renew itself; or whether, on the other hand, it would conserve those "monarchical, imperial, centralising forces of before" and maintain the status quo, or even, retreat.⁸³ As for the Socialist leader, Jaurès, there remained (for the moment, at least) little trace of that incurable optimism in the final words of his rebuttal: "All the veils", he sadly concluded, "have been torn away".⁸⁴

⁸¹ J.U.C.D., May 9, 1907. p. 926.

⁸² J.U.C.D., May 9, 1907. p. 926.

⁸³ J.U.C.D., May 9, 1907. p. 927.

⁸⁴ J.U.C.D., May 14, 1907. p. 999.

Conclusion

In the twenty months that followed this debate, Clemenceau and his associates continued to combine wit, threat and repression to protect the established order.⁸⁵ To cope, in 1907, with an incipient rebellion by workers and peasants in the vine country of the Midi, troops by the thousands were sent into the critical area.⁸⁶ When, in the spring and summer of 1908, strikes broke out among the quarry workers of the Seine at Lime at Draveuil-Vigneux, the police charged, killing two strikers and wounding ten on June 1. Several weeks later, when a C.O.T. led workers' movement assembled in a neighbouring town to protest the tragedy, troops opened fire again, killing four workers and wounding fifty more. In the immediate aftermath all leading members of the Confederation's central committee were arrested on the pretext of inciting insurrection and not released until November, 1909.⁸⁷ These were only a few of the many instances of government repression. According to Edouard Dolléans, the fruits of the Clemenceau labour policy were 104 years in prison sentences, 667 wounded workers, twenty dead, and 392 dismissals.⁸⁸

Bitter interpellations in the Chamber accompanied these events and the hostile motions put forward by the socialists were regularly defeated with the customary majority.⁸⁹ What genuine radical protest existed issued from the executive Committee of the party itself. In the Chamber, the Radicals presented, significantly,

⁸⁵ see Goldberg, p. 368.

⁸⁶ Bonnefous, pp. 68-75., for a full account.

⁸⁷ Levine, pp. 185-87.

⁸⁸ Dolléans, p. 145.

little or no opposition. The accusations of the extreme Left were by now familiar, although the issue of the government's implicit sanction of the tragic events in the Seine et Oise and its deliberate use of agents provocateurs, which the Socialists substantiated, provoked several exceptionally tense and unpleasant sessions.⁹⁰ The Prime Minister continued to defend himself as he had on previous occasions such as the strike movement in the Nord and Pas de Calais, the electricity crisis in Paris and the syndicalist demands of postal workers and teachers. Employing the same facile and tendentious arguments he relied heavily on patriotic themes, an underdeveloped interpretation of the Rights of Man and the necessity of class reconciliation to justify his actions. What sort of man were they facing, Allemane demanded in June, 1908, referring to Clemenceau's self-styled politique d'incoherence. "... the democrat, inspired by the idea of progress, wishing to see the Republic evolve, or the Governor, born defender of all capitalist privileges, ready to say to Democracy, 'you have gone far enough?'"⁹¹ Indeed, Radicalism, after 1905, was, as one historian remarked, "a bit like Gaullisme after de Gaulle. The men were there, the institutions carried on, even the ideas did not fail to appear. But the task had been accomplished."⁹²

There is, no doubt, some truth in the contention that the violent rhetoric of Revolutionary Syndicalism inhibited or retarded

⁸⁹ Fiechter, J.J., Le Socialisme Francais: de l'Affaire Dreyfus à la Grande Guerre, Tableau n. 111, Legislature 1906-09. (Librairie Droz, 1965).

⁹⁰ J.O.C.D., June 11, 1908. pp. 1155-69.

⁹¹ J.O.C.D., June 11, 1908. p. 1168.

the realization of many reforms. Obviously, for those eager to postpone even the most innocuous legislation, such rhetoric served its purpose. But the fundamental issue, the essential conflict, obscured as it was by the many secondary issues and political elaborations, concerned, as Jaurès ceaselessly reiterated, the question of property. Certainly, the antagonism of the actual state of affairs and that which was possible was becoming ever more pronounced during this period of bourgeois prosperity, big business and feverish colonial activity. Such conflict was, indeed, as the Socialist leader put it, "in the very nature of things".

The Radicals were no less aware of this fact. Like their conservative colleagues of the Right, Clemenceau and his ministers responded to the anxious demands of labour with echoes of Guizot, urging an increasingly alienated proletariat to avail itself of France's "most sacred institution" and become proprietors. Thus, by denying that workers existed as a separate class, they merely confirmed the fact of their very existence.

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