CHAPTER IV

ATTACK ON DEMOCRACY

In early 20th century France, democracy as a way of life implied a society which cherished values of tolerance rather than fanaticism, compromise rather than rigidity, persuasion rather than force, diversity rather than conformity, discussion rather than dogmatism. Democracy as a system of government implied the consent of the governed, the possibility of an individual's participating in the process of government, and the government's taking account of the wishes of those governed. This implied, therefore, an electoral system in which all would be free to participate, a refusal to recognize that any individual or group was indispensable to the governmental process, and the essential right of an opposition to exist.

Barrès, Maurras, and Sorel were not prepared to accept these essential characteristics of democracy; they all disputed the desirability of an electoral system and postulated the desirability as well as the inevitability of a rigid elite.

Barrès had no organized or methodological approach to the basic problems of society, nor did he deal with theoretical questions in any systematic way. Rather, by a process partly of intuition and partly of sensitivity, he touched on a number of defects he observed in a democratic system, although he was primarily concerned with the specific problems of the Republic, its political institutions, and its politicians.

It is paradoxical that the chief defect that Barrès, the aesthete who stressed the desirability of refined, emotional, individual sensations, should have seen in democracy was that of individualism. In a manner reminiscent of de Maistre, he asked, "The Rights of Man? What Man? Where does he live?"[1] For Barrès, the thoughts of an individual were the product of and determined by his time and place, and were not of his own making. The individual was limited and circumscribed. Individual experience was only part of the whole

[1] *Mes Cahiers*, II:83.

tradition of society which, made up of the sum of individual experiences, alone truly represented "the idea." Presumably, Barrès would have resolved the contradiction between the right of individual sensitivity and the individual's dependence on society by means of the elite which he considered inevitable.

With Sorel and Maurras there was a more unequivocal attack on democracy than was to be found in Barrès. Pirou, one of the biographers of Sorel, argued that "antidemocracy was the immovable point about which his doctrine turned."[2] And indeed, his hatred of democracy was such that at the end of his life he confessed, "May I before dying, live to see the humiliation of the bourgeois democracies full of pride and and today cynically triumphant."[3] He wrote to Delesalle on August 18, 1918 that it was because of his hatred of democrats that he had so much sympathy for Lenin and his colleagues.

Sorel found all the deficiencies of 20th century democratic philosophy present in the 18th century: materialistic philosophy, pantheistic religion, cynicism, immorality, optimism. This supposed century of light was above all "the era of superficiality," the *Encyclopédie* no more than "bric-a-brac written in folio." The 18th century had transformed everything into agreeable subjects of conversation; literature had degenerated into journalism. The educational reforms of Condorcet would produce "enlightened men," men free of all chains, all authority, all traditions. "The meanest village meeting would seem like a branch of the salon of Mme Geoffrin."[4]

Sorel was more concerned with the deleterious moral effects of democracy and with its specious ideological premises than with democracy as a system of political institutions. "When one speaks of democracy," he wrote, "it is necessary to be concerned less with political institutions than with the effect on the popular masses."[5] The entry of the mass into politics and the increase in literacy brought a number of dan-

2 Gaetan Pirou, *Georges Sorel*, Paris, 1927.
3 *Reflections on Violence* (ed. E. Shils), p. 311.
4 *Les Illusions du progrès*, p. 58.
5 *Matériaux*, p. 72.

gers to any desirable political system. Sorel was alarmed by the passion with which the public was interested in events, by the influence that opinion exercised on governments, and by the dissemination of the press and its consequent hold over the masses.

Sorel attacked the ideological premises on which democracy rested, including its rationalism, its abstract nature, its pacific nature, its optimism and belief in progress, its hedonism—and also the results of the system. He regarded democracy as false science, as *scientisme*, the result of a rationalism too abstract, too universalist, too unitary, too unrelated to facts. Ideological constructions were necessary, but they were also the most frequent causes of error. Rationalism did not sufficiently take account of the constant changes and transformations in life, and did not appreciate living reality. He criticized Descartes for having seemingly given the answer to everything through his oversimplified rationalism, a philosophy which was essentially one for the habitués of salons, which was resolutely optimistic, which pleased a society eager to amuse itself, and which led to a senseless confidence in the decisions of enlightened people. Sorel was opposed to the excessive rationalism that, for Comte, would lead to the adoration of the Earth, Space, Humanity. Comte could just as well propose for adoration the steamship, photographic plates, and the Bibliothèque Nationale.[6]

Moreover, democratic theories implied abstraction, and that produced two problems. One was that abstraction was used to dupe the people. It was the feeling of the lack of reality of democratic philosophy that led Sorel to doubt that democracy had any real principles at all. Democracy had a credo as abstract and as unintelligible as that of any religion; its trinity—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—presented as many mysteries as the Apocalypse.[7] He compared it unfavorably to syndicalism, which was a reflection of reality, a theoretical

[6] Georges Sorel, "La Crise morale et religieuse," *Le Mouvement socialiste* (July 15, 1907), 22:13.

[7] Sorel, "Y-a-t'il de l'utopie dans le Marxisme?" *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (March 1899), 7:154.

interpretation of working-class struggles and a basic concern for the producer. The decrees of democracy, like those of popes, based on revelation, were foreign to the nature of experimental science. Democracy therefore would favor the theoretician rather than the practical experimenter; for Sorel it was not surprising that the Physiocrats were much less famous than the Philosophes.

The second problem was that a bourgeois democracy, through the most charlatan methods, used the superstitious respect that people instinctively had for science both to heighten its own prestige and to attempt to transform the least literate individual into a mandarin. Sorel was as distrustful of Christian democracy as of all other kinds; for him it was a farce designed to dupe the simple for the benefit of an oligarchy.

An essential element of the strong current of rationalism on which modern democracy floated was the idea of progress—a bourgeois doctrine and a democratic dogma. The idea was harmful because it permitted the consumption of available goods, without thought for the difficulties of the future. For democrats and Cartesians, "progress consists not in the accumulation of the means of techniques, nor even in scientific knowledge, but in the adornment of the mind."[8] But true progress, which was neglected by democrats, took place in the technique of production. It was fortunate for modern democracies that the benefits from the riches drawn from nature enabled it to survive its faults.

The idea of progress in a democracy meant optimism about man and society, and the optimist in politics "is an inconstant and even dangerous man, because he takes no account of the great difficulties presented by his projects."[9] By pretending that problems have solutions, the optimist attempted to make the masses believe that unrealizable things were possible, in order to control them more easily. Sorel, like Nietzsche, saw optimism, rationalism, utilitarianism, and democracy, its po-

[8] *Les Illusions du Progrès*, p. 51.

[9] Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, New York, 1941, p. 9. Henceforth, all references will be to this edition, unless otherwise stated.

litical contemporary, as nothing but symptoms of declining strength, senility, and exhaustion.

The significance of Sorel's criticism was that he found contemporary ethical ideas in great disorder; the old idea of ethics as an imitation of moral theology was no longer valid, but a social ethic had not yet replaced it.[10] In the forwarding of this social ethic, Sorel believed that Aristotle and Marx were to be allies in the attack on Descartes and Kant. Democracy, with its exciting sentiments, cupidity, hatred, puerile dreams of happiness, vulgarity, and lack both of personal dignity and of appreciation of the dignity of work, had not succeeded in developing a theory of a General Will conforming to reason, following the theory of Rousseau. Democracy, inheriting the defects of the aristocracy, was decadent in spirit, not revolutionary. Lacking in organization and directed by instincts of destruction, it was a school of servility, denunciation, and demoralization. The contemporary Republican democratic philosophy of *Solidarité* was more exactly one of hypocritical cowardice. Sorel warned that the greatest danger menacing the working-class movement would be its imitation of democracy.

Maurras was as complete an antidemocrat as Sorel. He confessed he took his opinions of democracy from Renan, who took them from Comte, who took them from de Maistre and de Bonald, who took them from the great traditions of the human mind.[11] For him, democracy was not simply decadent but also poisonous, evil, and fatal. Having neither body nor soul, its essence was a denial or neglect of the eternal laws. Maurras attacked not simply the defects but the essence of the democratic and parliamentary regime. Liberalism, democracy, universal suffrage were equally abhorrent, the result of Protestant and revolutionary individualism, of Rousseau. To Maurras, the chain was completed; democracy was libertarian, individualist, revolutionary, Kantian, Jean-Jacquist, and Lutheran. The individual had become the center to which every-

[10] Sorel, *D'Aristote à Marx* (L'Ancienne et la nouvelle métaphysique), Paris, p. 260.

[11] Charles Maurras, *Les Princes des nuées*, Paris, 1933, p. 59.

thing was to be subordinated, and individuals left to themselves made a society of barbarians.

Democracy was a natural state in primitive societies, very poor and very simple civilizations where the division of labor had not introduced great complexities. It was the politics of Robinson Crusoe, conceived and forged entirely in terms of isolated man. The democratic convention was the extreme refuge of savage states or states fallen into barbarism.[12] Maurras held the democratic and Republican doctrines to be visionary and unrealistic. The democratic idea was in disagreement with nature, because it submitted the best to the worst, the superior to the inferior, quality to numbers. It inspired laws that were disastrous, destructive to the natural tendencies of customs, to spontaneous instincts, and to the development of progress. Social hierarchies and even the principle of hierarchy itself were overturned. Hereditary distinctions were excluded to such a degree that, outside of a revolution, the superior man could only reach the top slowly.

Democracy was unrealistic in that it refused to recognize that society arose not from a contract of wills but from a fact of nature. Maurras took from Comte the analogy of the lack of freedom in mathematics and in society, an argument which would be unanswerable if the end of society were the creation of definitive behavioral patterns. Law for Maurras was not arbitrary, but was determined from an examination of natural situations; it was the expression of the relation of things and not, as the Declaration of the Rights of Man had said, of the General Will.

Moreover, democracy, together with concepts like liberty, equality, justice, the natural goodness of man, was a *nuée*, a false idea which would prove to be fatal, leading to anarchy and disorder. Democracy destroyed values and honors, could not maintain harmony in community interests, and set up false values. Curiosity and tolerance were two basic characteristics of democracy, and this meant that all objects would be subjected to examination by the same standard and assigned a uniform value.

[12] *L'Action française*, August 14, 1915.

Democracy meant a regime of profit and immediate pleasures, forgetful of the past and negligent of the future.[13] It was characterized by disunited individuals who were ruled by the caprice of money. Full of envy, division, and hate, a democratic regime was a permanent conspiracy against the public welfare. Another source of danger arose because democracies were founded on the will and social comforts of the individual in the present. This meant that the dimensions of time were neglected, and that the lessons of the past, providing useful precedents and warnings, were unheeded. Only provision for the future would control consumption, would stimulate production, and would encourage moderation, initiative, prudence, and precaution.

Those defenders of democracy who did not altogether lack sense and intelligence were pure mystics; their opinions were upheld only by a mixture of reveries and truly subjective impulses. The democratic theories of Renouvier and other Kantians were "creations of pure mythology, anthropomorphic shadows."[14] Views of this kind were in manifest and complete disagreement with all the theorems of positive politics. Science was an adversary of democracy, for the latter would not admit a science of politics.[15] Democracy instead evoked the concept of pure ethics at the moment when it should have studied the relations of facts and of their combinations. The insidious revolutionary spirit never failed to introduce the moral concept at the precise point where ethics had nothing to do with the matter.

Democracy was not only undesirable in itself, but also for France in particular. Most governments and peoples put their material interests first. France alone put general causes before its particular profit and made war for an idea. Taine was wrong to call the democratic spirit a classical one. In reality it was foreign, Protestant or Jewish, Semitic or German. The democratic and parliamentary idea came, as Mon-

[13] Maurras, *L'Allée des philosophes*, Paris, 1924, p. 28.

[14] Maurras, "Les Droits de l'homme et la philosophie naturelle au XIXième Siècle," *La Revue hebdomadaire* (November 1899), 12:522.

[15] Maurras, *De Démos à César*, 2 vols., Paris, 1930, 1:115.

tesquieu said, out of the forests of Germany.[16] The idea was dangerous for France because the obsolete forms of democratic rights struggled against the realities of national rights. What Michelet, "theologian of the rights of the multitude and of that popular instinct which seemed infallible to him," exalted were two passions, not native to France: the disparagement of order and the passion for equality.

Democracy was both inefficient and harmful. It was inefficient in that forgetfulness was the rule and management was paralyzed. Its timidity, unpredictability, violence, and turbulence, its delay in making decisions, its absence of all authority, and its inferior personnel would lead democracy to anarchy or to state socialism. Democracy took care of the physical necessities of the mass of the population less than any other regime. It impoverished and enfeebled communities. Maurras refused to recognize the United States as a democracy because in it reality it was governed by captains of industry, a mobile feudal group, after having been governed by a theocratic and rural patriarchy. Neither were England or Germany democratic, for in both countries the rulers were either members of or brought into the aristocracy. Democracy was harmful in its ability to destroy other systems or ideas. What rendered socialism anarchical and revolutionary was not its Socialist aspect, but the democratic poison it contained. "Inorganic, individualistic, inert or revolutionary, democracy kills what is living in socialism."[17]

THE NEED FOR AN ELITE

A democratic system includes in its underlying assumptions the views that no man is indispensable, that political positions are occupied on the basis of competence or aptitude, that careers are open to talents, and that talents are widespread. Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras denied these premises, treated the elite as a reality of political life, and postulated the existence of a minority naturally capable and inevitably

[16] Maurras, *Réflexions sur l'ordre en France*, Paris, 1927, p. 36.
[17] Maurras, *Pour un jeune français*, Paris, 1949, p. 159.

destined to rule. Each of them confessed that he was writing for the few, for the minority that would heed his warnings and would be prepared to take up the responsibility that rightfully belonged to it.

"It is reserved for certain members of the elite to explain what is fundamental in the emotional life of an epoch and to describe it," said Sorel.[18] The object of Barrès was to touch "a small public, the princes of youth," those who could develop the *culte-du-moi*, their own sensibility. Maurras, possibly speaking of himself, wrote that a single person, well equipped and well placed, could, if he had ability, dominate millions of others and determine their destiny.[19] There were active and passive Frenchmen, and the passive, although eminently respectable, were useless to a revolutionary movement like the Action Française. Maurras was not concerned with converting the whole electorate, but only with convincing a minority, energetic enough to found a monarchical regime. An elite could not appeal to numbers; a true aristocracy did not strengthen its regime on the infamous liberties of the publican. The general interests of the French nation were far too complicated to be equally and clearly within the understanding of all alike.

Sorel agreed with part of this analysis. The masses, he argued, held to their traditions. Not only was the mass of the population unable to appreciate or to understand political phenomena, they were incapable of initiating change. The struggle for the conquest of power was made in the name of the masses by innovating groups holding ideas contrary to those that were generally accepted. The innovators were an elite who could succeed only by boldness; they were a minority, but if they had a faith, they could sometimes triumph by taking advantage of favorable opportunities.[20]

Sorel applied the concept of the elite to all fields. In war, an elite of soldiers, officers, and generals decided victories. In production, American capitalists—a minority with indom-

[18] *Sorel, D'Aristote à Marx*, p. 150.
[19] Maurras, *Mademoiselle Monk*, Paris, 1923, p. 50.
[20] Sorel, *Le Procès de Socrate*, Paris, 1889, p. 205.

itable energy, audacity, and a cold calculation of interests—were the captains of industry, controlling the industrial riches. In ideology, it was the superior individuals who understood what was fundamental in the emotional life of a period. In revolution, it was always the minority who, with much guile, utilized a momentary discontent of the people against the old authorities. In religion, it was the elite of the monks which gave to Catholicism its ability to encounter all obstacles and its absolute confidence in victory.

A democratic system was no exception to this general pattern, and Sorel regarded it as a kind of aristocratic dictatorship. It rested on the existence of a solid hierarchy, an oligarchy of professional people, intellectuals, and politicians.[21] When one thought of the Third Estate, it was always necessary to think of the bourgeois elite of officials and lawyers which succeeded in governing France almost completely, and which had given it such a strong statist tradition.

Maurras similarly could find no example in history of a positive and creative action initiated by a majority. The normal procedure was the opposite. Will, decision, enterprise came from small numbers; it was minorities that possessed virtue, audacity, power. A religion, an education were necessary not for the people but for its leaders and advisers. It was wrong that everyone should be concerned with politics, because in a world of inequality, gifted people were in a minority. However, this gifted minority was likely to be an hereditary elite, and with such an elite, a prosperous republic would still be possible. Maurras saw the Third Republic as under the influence of people lacking in direction, deficient in culture, and wanting in dignity. Moreover, while all prosperous republics had been governed by a jealously closed aristocracy, in contemporary France there was a further danger because the leading oligarchies were antinational and wide open to foreigners.[22]

Barrès treated the concept of the elite in a somewhat different way. He saw the human species as composed of a rather

[21] *Les Illusions du progrès*, p. 272.
[22] *L'Action française*, March 17, 1914.

limited elite, an elite made up above all of the dead, Athenian, Roman, and French, while the rest of mankind remained in a state of barbarism, of savage nature, and, although benefiting from the work of the elite, ignoring and even detesting it. Humanity moved through its elite. Barrès confessed, "I wish to be of that elite, of that small number."[23] He admired the man of Brumaire and the five or six heroes, "men who knew how to walk on the waves and were not engulfed, because they had confidence in themselves."[24]

But it was on the nature of the elite that the writers differed. Sorel, argued the Nationalist Lasserre, invented working-class imperialism and conceived syndicalism as "an instrument of aristocratic selection among the workers."[25] Barrès and Maurras differed on the necessity of monarchy, but agreed on the value of hereditary rulers. In his reply to the questionnaire of Maurras on monarchy, Barrès argued that an aristocracy, indispensable if monarchy were to exist, was lacking in France, and therefore the revival of monarchy was impossible.[26] A people or a religion which lacked an aristocracy no longer had a model, a direction toward which to aim in order to perfect itself. Rich people did not know toward what to climb. France needed, urged Barrès, a traditional cadre which would permit the French mind to develop and flourish happily, to impose a necessary but not too rigid discipline. Louis XIV as well as Robespierre had been responsible for destroying the nobles who would have been the political leaders of the country.

Maurras agreed on the desirability of an aristocracy. The unity of France resulted from a small number of families devoting themselves over a long period to the permanent interests of France. It was through these families—generations of dukes of France—happy, doing good, used to the exercise of supreme power that Capet had succeeded where Bonaparte

[23] *Mes Cahiers*, IV:155.

[24] Barrès, "Napoléon, professeur d'énergie," *Le Journal*, April 14, 1893, as cited in J-N. Faure Biguet, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

[25] Pierre Lasserre, "Georges Sorel, théoricien de l'impérialisme," *Revue des deux mondes* (September 1, 1927), 41:163.

[26] *Enquête sur la monarchie*, p. 135.

had failed, since Bonaparte did not have behind him what had supported Capet. It was the decay of aristocracy that meant the impossibility of a prosperous, powerful, viable Republic. But Maurras disagreed with Barrès that the monarchy had been partly responsible for this decay and that the monarchy itself was not indispensable for the re-creation of such an aristocracy.

Elitist theorists, as Friedrich has shown,[27] often assume what they need to prove, that there is in a society a coherent group, possessing distinguishing characteristics. Maurras, Barrès, and Sorel were all guilty of this, and tended to attribute to the individual or social group they supported most or all of those characteristics that Mosca in his *The Ruling Class*[28] said were necessary for the members of an elite. Moreover, their theories of the elite were rigid in a way in which that of Pareto was not. With the latter, the emphasis was on the circulation of the elite, the inevitable changes that take place in the types of individuals who will be dominant, and the relatively free circulation up and down the social hierarchy. With Maurras, Barrès, and Sorel there was a much more pronounced emphasis on limitation, both of numbers and of flexibility. In their discussion of the limited group that would be capable of wielding either political or economic power and correcting the deficiencies of the regime, all three writers took for granted a fixed internal or external hierarchy of peoples or nations. They all agreed with Pareto that an attempt by a new elite to supplant the existing one would introduce tension and probably force. They agreed also that emotion, myth, charisma, the sudden leap were essentials that would be involved in the change. Yet essentially their view of the elite was an aristocratic one, an application of Bergson's concept of the outstanding individual to the needs of monarchy, dictatorship, or heroic action.

[27] Carl J. Friedrich, *The New Belief in the Common Man*, Boston, 1942, p. 251.

[28] The characteristics include capacity for hard work, ambition, no extreme sensitivity or goodness, perspicacity, an intuition of individual and mass psychology, strength of will and self-confidence, and the luck that results from having been born in the right bed.

Democratic theorists have been slow to admit the existence of an elite, but both historical insight and empirical research have made it acceptable. The democratic theory of an elite, however, differs in several important ways from the theories suggested by Maurras, Barrès, and Sorel. First, it is a pluralistic conception rather than a unitary one, an admission that power is used only to a limited degree and that it is always subject to other powers used by other individuals or groups in society. Once a notion of equilibrium of political powers, it is now willing to recognize constant oscillation in the expression of these powers. Secondly, even if the theory is willing to admit that the power of decision-making is still limited to relatively few, it also qualifies this proposition by specifying that this limited number will be subject to constant change. And thirdly, there is the final assumption that ultimate power remains in the hands of the people. The concept of the sovereignty of the electorate may be a vague one, and may leave many problems unresolved, but at least it does introduce the vital element of responsibility of government into the political system.

THE ATTACK ON THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

If the writers regarded an elite as essential, it was not surprising that they should whole-heartedly challenge the desirability of an electoral system, regard it as an inefficient, incompetent, and weak political institution, or think that its consequences were disastrous.

Sorel looked on the electoral system as incompetent and subject to chance. Elections were like dishonest roulette where the banker and the players tried to cheat each other.[29] They meant compromise, the sale of favors, the buying of the press. To politicians, the electoral advantages resulting from a conciliation of interests were worth more than a very large bribe. Sorel found a great resemblance between the activity of an electoral democracy and the Stock Exchange.

[29] *Le Procès de Socrate*, pp. 182-186.

For Maurras the inefficiency and incompetence of the system lay in the fact that the inferior elements of the population were allowed to choose the superior. For the "people," Maurras had contempt; he regarded electoral bodies as inorganic collectivities, with unlimited faculties of forgetfulness and no faculties of reflection.[30] Those exercising power found themselves at the mercy of ignorance disguised as public opinion, played on by the press and the financial system. It was necessary to relieve the incompetent citizens from the heavy weight of responsibilities with which they had been overwhelmed in order to dupe them more easily. Although Maurras nowhere criticized the method by which a pope or members of the French Academy are chosen, he regarded the electoral principle as enfeebling or destroying authority, in contrast with the hereditary principle, which led to tranquillity, order, and stability. The case Maurras made against the electoral system is the case always made against Jacobinism, that the electorate was usurping the place of government. Moreover, the larger the number of people concerned with governing, the more it seemed to him that government was being affected by formulas and generalizations, and becoming more unrealistic.

Maurras regarded the electoral regime as weak because it was based on individualism, because it was open to foreign influence, because it resulted in a failure to consider the general interest of France, and because it led to a class of professional politicians. Psychologically, the regime could be defined as the intense antagonism of eleven million egos or delegates of egos.[31] This meant that organizations and parties depending on the electoral process had neither will nor unity. Individual interests were put ahead of the general interests of the French nation, which were far too complicated to be equally and clearly within the understanding of all alike. It was unrealistic to treat each elector, as Sangnier did, as if he had the soul of a saint or a king, or to presume the equality of electors and the uniformity of functions. Maurras believed

[30] Maurras, *La Contre-révolution spontanée*, Paris, 1943, p. 112.
[31] *Enquête sur la monarchie*, p. lxxxvii.

that if people were allowed the vote and the choice of a leader, they would assuredly elect the man "whose nose pleases them, and who will have no more brain than a calabash."[32]

For Maurras this was disastrous, because the great offices of state—the ministries for Foreign Affairs, War, Navy, Justice—ought not to have been dependent on election, especially when the electoral mechanism upheld the domination of foreign influence through the four *Etats Confédérés*. Under a nondemocratic regime, opinion was only one of the powers in the state, and the state was capable of resisting opinion and resolving problems which affected the public interest in spite of public sentiment to the contrary. A state definitely enchained to the caprices of opinion led to suicide.[33] A political system based on election produced agitation, chronic revolution, and constitutional anarchy. This was demonstrated when the Second Empire, born of plebiscitary and democratic origins and dependent on popularity, had found itself condemned to economic and foreign adventure.

An electoral regime, moreover, produced a powerful group of politicians, a plebs, half-bourgeois, half-proletarian, that controlled elections. The evils were that eminent representatives could never be obtained, while those who were elected dreamed only of popularity in order to be re-elected. They did whatever flattered the eye, with no thought for the future. "Electoral parasites," deputies traveled first class when unseen, third class when nearing their constituency.

Sorel and Barrès agreed with Maurras on the mediocrity of deputies—an evil arising from the system. Sorel held that in all states where elections existed, men of ability were turned down in favor of politicians and the *déclassés*, although even this exclusion of the capable was, for him, less of an evil than government by intellectuals. Democrats were wrong, he thought, to ask for free secondary education. They were wrong to think that France would be a hundred times happier and stronger when it would have a greater number

[32] Maurras, *Mes Idées politiques*, Paris, 1937, p. 165.
[33] *Les Princes des nuées*, p. 192.

of candidates for elective functions capable of dazzling the workers by their facility of speech.[34]

For Barrès, the deputies of the Third Republic were undistinguished, possessing a mediocrity which allowed them not to offend their electors. "With us," he said, "the deputies never forget that they are future candidates; they are all concerned with satisfying their constituency electoral committees rather than with serving their country."[35] In fact, all their behavior could be understood by this desire to remain candidates. Barrès wrote of the fictional tutor and adversary, M. Bouteiller, professor and deputy from Nancy (a figure that was based on Barrès' own teacher), that he "had too much sense to give money to a Parisian newspaper which had no local influence and which would compete with and irritate the Nancy newspapers."[36]

Both Maurras and Sorel regarded electoral reforms as useless and illusionary, Sorel saying that no reform in the method of voting could change a result which depended on the fundamental structure of contemporary society.[37] He suggested that proportional representation would serve only to develop the party spirit; Maurras thought that since the majority system oppressed minorities, proportional representation would reverse the evil, not suppress it, and the majority would be suppressed by a minority. The referendum at best was only a negative remedy. It could prevent certain stupidities and misfortunes. It could not create an active organ of government, because of the essential lack of direction in the system.[38]

All three writers attacked democracy because of its individualism, its incompetence, its electoral process, and its lack of direction. Sorel attacked it for its premises of rationalism and inevitable progress, and for its lack of absolute standards. Maurras attacked it as essentially unnatural. Barrès attacked

[34] Sorel, *Introduction à l'économie moderne*, 2nd edn., Paris, 1922, p. 208.

[35] Barrès, *Leurs Figures*, Paris, 1902, p. 19.

[36] Barrès, *Les Déracinés*, 2 vols., Paris, 1897, II:129.

[37] Sorel, *La Révolution Dreyfusienne*, 2nd edn., Paris, 1911, p. 72.

[38] *L'Action française*, April 16, 1913.

it for its lack of stimulation to excite enthusiasm, glory, and adventure. In these attacks there are two fundamental mistakes, one concerning the premises of democracy and the other concerning individualism.

The first results from Sorel's having taken an extremist argument as a typical one. The view of a limited number of 18th century Philosophes on the inevitability of progress is not one that a 20th century democrat would uphold. Even if he were optimistic, he would not claim progress to be either inevitable or automatic, but instead would devote his efforts to its promotion. In Sorel's analysis of the rationalistic basis of democracy (which reappears in Chapter VII), he fell into that pitfall described by Graham Wallas as a false dichotomy between reason and impulse since reflection consists of processes which are largely subconscious. But above all, Sorel's assumption that democracy could have no fundamental ethical beliefs and that it had no final end was based upon his misunderstanding of the character of the tolerance that is essential to democracy. A democratic society is characterized by its toleration of dissent, but this does not imply an inability to hold an absolute ethic of right or wrong, a lack of judgment and of values, or a refusal to preserve its existence. Whatever characteristics a democratic system may have, suicide is not one of them.

The second mistake arises from the false antithesis of the individual and the state. There was in Maurras and Barrès, and to a lesser degree in Sorel, the tendency to see social relationships in these stark terms, and to ignore those other organizations and voluntary associations to which men belong and to which they may owe their strongest allegiance. It may be going too far to suggest that Maurras and Barrès merged state and society, as later totalitarians did, but certainly they identified the state with the nation, argued that no freedom existed except within the state, and that democracy meant liberty against the state and a limitation of the latter. Maurras and Barrès were typical of that tendency of Nationalists in general who, as defenders of a specific social group, the nation, are even more clearly disposed than conservatives to sacrifice

individual values in the interests of society.[39] By this false antithesis between the isolated individual and the supreme state, the three writers' picture of the relationships among the individual, group, and government became necessarily an incorrect one.

Since the French Revolution, the mass has entered politics. In the period under discussion, the significance of this factor had been increased by a more highly developed industrial system, the beginning of universal education, and the growth of working-class movements. In this context the writers postulated their antidemocratic theories. These theories were not only antiplutocratic but, with Maurras and Barrès, antiproletarian as well, and the combination of these two antipathies created a new dilemma. The ruling group needed mass support in order to survive, but the mass was incompetent. It is no coincidence that Maurras called the mob feminine and argued that it must be mastered, or that all three writers agreed that only a limited group could understand contemporary conditions and be capable of ruling. It is this dilemma —the power of the mass and the writers' fear of it, and their conception of the practical interests of the country—that caused the three to attack the Revolution so bitterly.

[39] Frederick M. Watkins, *The Political Tradition of the West*, Cambridge, 1957, p. 281.