The revolt against reason

Julien Benda, in an essay on existentialism, speaks of a permanent philosophical position which exalts life, experience, action, existence, at the cost of thought and ideas.[1] France is often described as the country of Reason, but rationalism is only one strand of French thought and the existentialism of which Benda speaks is a recurrent phenomenon in French philosophy. Thus Pascal is the companion of Descartes, Rousseau of Voltaire, Bergson of Comte, Sartre of Maritain. And if France produced its rational socialists, from Saint-Simon to Jules Guesde, then by Benda's definition syndicalism belonged to the existentialist camp, to the revolt of life against reason. It was often no less theoretical for that, but then Reason, in France, is the delight even of its opponents; anti-intellectuals are often intellectuals themselves.

This current of thought, loosely described as the revolt against Reason, became particularly prominent in the first decade of the twentieth century, when it spilled over from the realm of philosophy to religion, art and politics. The irrationalist political doctrines of this period can be explained in terms of the history of ideas; they can also be explained in terms of the social, political and economic circumstances which, by creating a particular mood, made popular those philosophies which catered for it. The following chapters are concerned with both these explanations. They attempt to place syndicalism first in an ideological context, then in the context of its own time.

The existentialist position has no real genealogy; it represents no clear line of thinkers, no unbroken development of thought. It is, rather, a recurrent phenomenon, a tradition based on similarities rather than on continuity. If the link between one philosopher and another is often weak, that between philosophers and historical events is even weaker. The evidence for the influence of philosophy on politics is small at the best of times. One author, tracing the origins of fascist ideas from Luther to Hitler, maintains that the fascist regime was the result of a political philosophy which had crystallised slowly throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.[2] A better explanation is that the objective situation in Germany and Italy made the fascist leaders sympathetic to certain ideas invented at an earlier date. The link with philosophy is especially tenuous in the case of syndicalism. Syndicalism, a working-class movement, was almost entirely divorced from that world; the militant workers had neither

[1] J. Benda, *Tradition de l'existentialisme*, 1947, p. 61.
[2] W. M. McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler*, 1941, p. 7.

the opportunity nor the inclination to study the writings of philosophers, nor did they wish to contribute in that field themselves. At first sight, therefore, one would expeet syndicalism to stand outside whatever line of irrationalist thought that historians of ideas may trace. It was not true of the syndicalists, as it was of the fascists, that their situation made them sympathetic to the ideas of earlier thinkers, but rather that a similar situation and a similar temperament gave rise to similar ideas; the causes of the syndicalist revolt were in part at least those of the wider revolt against Reason. All revolutionary movements and ideologies that coexist at any time always have a lot in common.

This view needs some qualifications, however. Syndicalism was elaborated, if not created, by a few theoretically-minded leaders. It is largely with their ideas and those of Sorel that the following chapters are really concerned. The relationship between Sorel and the irrationalist philosophers is clear enough. Except for some rather weak links that Sorel provides, it is impossible to show a direct link between the militants of the French labour movement and the philosophers of the revolt against Reason. Schumpeter makes the point, referring to this problem, that while they are the product of the same social processes and in many ways react in a similar way to similar necessities, they cannot at the same time avoid borrowing from each other and splashing each other with their colour.[1]

The Age of Reason began with Descartes who proclaimed it the only key to knowledge and sole test of what was true or false. Once it had established a foothold, Reason gradually invaded all fields of human concern. French thought in the eighteenth century was largely an endeavour to apply this principle not only to philosophy and science but also, beyond Descartes' intention, to religion, morality and politics. The cartesian spirit, however, was characterised by its scepticism: having sometimes found my senses deceitful, I will distrust all they teach me. This brought with it its own reaction. The advance of reason in philosophy tended to undermine man's faith in Reason itself as an instrument for the discovery of truth. At the same time, having destroyed old faiths, Reason alone proved an insufficient faith to live by, offering but little scope for sentiment, still less for imagination and the hidden activities of the mind, The vacuum was soon filled by more inspiring, if less rational, philosophers. Two movements, therefore, contributed jointly to the revolt against Reason: the anti-intellectual and the romantic. Anti-intellectualism is the attempt to arrive rationally at a just appreciation of the limits of rationality in human affairs; it does not reject thought but regards it as only a limited guide to human affairs. Romanticism, by contrast, rejects thought in favour of

[1] J. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, 1943, p. 340.

intuition and exalts non-rationality as a desirable mode of conduct. The two are related in so far as the former provides argument for the latter.

INTUITION AGAINST REASON. Romanticism was foreshadowed by Pascal, whose famous dictum 'The heart has its reason which Reason knows not of' was made in defence of the autonomy of religious truth. It was Rousseau, however, who provided the real impulse to the romantic movement. Hostile to the philosophy of his own time, he did not try to demolish it on its own ground: the heart rejects, conscience condemns, and from this verdict there is no appeal. He first made vocal a newly awakened fear that rational criticism might go too far. His revolt was essentially that of the common man who abruptly declares that he knows what he likes because he does not understand the philosophers and, in his heart, both fears and despises their apparently superior arguments. All his moral judgements turned on the worth of common feelings; philosophy was mere intellectual frippery. The syndicalists' reaction was much the same. Rousseau rejected the artificiality of existing society in favour of a society based on natural virtues and natural instincts. This led him to a direct attack on philosophers and intellectuals, an attack which was to become an important theme of the revolt against Reason. "These vain and futile declaimers," he wrote, "go forth on all sides, armed with their fatal paradoxes, to sap the foundations of faith and nullify virtue." "A thinking man is a depraved animal", he added, swinging to the opposite pole. He appealed against Reason to the inward light of conscience; against the 'principles of a high philosophy' to those 'written by nature in ineffaceable characters in the depths of his heart'. Rousseau's appeal to intuition, emotion, sentiment, so familiar afterwards, was popularised in *Emile* and *La Nouvelle Héloise*. It came as a relief to many people, then and later, that they could do without philosophy and without philosophers.

Hans Kohn sums up the Romantic movement: "The irrational forces in men and society seemed not only the true directives, but they seemed also the only creative forces able to lift men to enthusiasm and great deeds, to liberate them from the dryness and mediocrity of intellectual life."[1] Wordsworth called upon man to 'close up those barren leaves'. The cultivation of sentiment, the dismissal of learning, the worship of nature—that was the Romantic's position. If one substitutes 'experience' for 'nature', one may see in it the direct precursor of the later, political, revolt against Reason: of the conservatives who said with Burke that one sure symbol of an ill-conditioned state is the propensity of people to resort to theories

[1] H. Kohn, *The Twentieth Century*, 1950, p. 49.

and who appealed instead to tradition, the accumulated experience of the past; and of the syndicalists who, equally hostile to the terrifying apparatus of the philosophers, claimed to draw their ideas from the practice of everyday life.

PHILOSOPHY AGAINST REASON. Hume, rational and sceptical, provided in his *Treatise on Human Nature* the mine which, according to Bertrand Russell, eventually blew the edifice of Reason sky high.[1] He showed that the rigorous application of rationalist empiricism led to results which few persons could bring themselves to accept. The reaction to this unbearable agnosticism took a more subtle form in Germany than that which Rousseau had given it in France. Kant, whom Russell described as a pedantic version of Rousseau's savoyard vicar,[2] brought back into philosophy the appeal to a non-rational faculty, the moral intuition, by his distinction between 'pure' and 'practical' reason. He opened the gates to the Romantics, though he was hardly the villian McGovern paints him in *From Luther to Hitler*: "As time went on his definition of true reason led to the growth of philosophical and political systems which were openly irrational in character."[3]

If Hume undermined the place of Reason in philosophy, it may be argued that Schopenhauer, writing at the very time when the philosophy of Reason appeared triumphant in the works of Hegel, was the man who dethroned it. Hegel proclaimed that history was the self-unfolding of Intelligence; Schopenhauer countered that it was the creation of a blind life-force, of aimless Will. Far from rational, the Real was irrational. Of the mind, as of the earth, we knew but the crust; in the depths under the conscious intellect lay the unconscious Will, a persistently striving vital force, the cause of spontaneous activity. The Will of life dominated man who could use intellect to bring order to this blind whirl of forces but, in the last resort, remained its servant. It is only by intuition that this reality can be grasped, a doctrine which has been interpreted thus: "In real life the scholar is far surpassed by the man of action, for the strength of the latter consists in perfect intuitive knowledge. Philosophy must be brought back to the recognition of the richness of an immediate and direct knowledge of reality. It must learn that the meaning of things is to be realised more by living than by thinking."[4] The doctrine that Will was paramount was later held, in one form or another, by many philosophers. Russell sees Nietzsche,

[1] B. Russell, *Let the People Think*, 1941, p. 63.
[2] B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 1948, p. 731.
[3] W. M. McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler*, 1941, p. 139.
[4] M. Beer, *Schopenhauer*, 1914, p. 80.

Bergson and James in this tradition.[1] It acquired a popular vogue outside the circle of professional thinkers. The syndicalist leaders often spoke in a similar vein.

SCIENCE AGAINST REASON. Science joined philosophy to undermine man's faith in Reason. The trusting rationalism of the eighteenth century met its first challenge as an expanding knowledge of foreign cultures showed the relativity of all beliefs and institutions. Montesquieu and Burke had already pointed out that social and political arrangements were less the creation of Reason than of tradition and environment. The new anthropology—Frazer in *The Golden Bough*—showed that many beliefs were primitive myths in disguise. The economic materialism of Marx showed that others were mere superstructure, reflecting the modes of production of the time. The behaviouralist psychology of Pavlov showed that many actions were the result of automatic reflexes, either natural or conditioned. Freudian psycho-analysis showed the extent to which man was dominated by deep, pre-rational instincts and unconscious motives, inborn or formed in early childhood. More important, perhaps, was the study of social psychology, which attracted widespread attention towards the end of the nineteenth century. Tarde, Durkheim and Le Bon enjoyed considerable popularity in France. In different ways such writers provided evidence that mental processes and resulting activity were influenced by non-rational forces within society and within the individual.

A distinction has been made between the anti-intellectual and the Romantic movements. The social psychologists, for example, were not themselves necessarily hostile to Reason. Graham Wallas, while stressing the place of instinct, emotion and habit in political life, remained a rationalist and a democrat, seeking to bring the forces of unreason under control. Some took the opposite view: while Le Bon considered the group mind the lowest form of psychic life, Durkheim tended to see the collective consciousness as the highest. The newly discovered irrational forces of society could be interpreted either in terms of the romantic realism of Burke, as the accumulated wisdom of past generations, or in terms of the romantic idealism of the Nazis, as an expression of the *Volksgeist*. The same was true of the discoveries of psychology. Freud hoped to submit the irrational to the control of Reason. Herbert Read, in his *Politics of the Unpolitical*, took the opposite view. It could be argued that the full expression of man's personality meant opening the barriers of intellect which tended to repress natural instincts and the unconscious mind. This claim was advanced most successfully in the fields of art and literature. In France at this time, for

[1] B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 1948, p. 787.

example, André Breton was trying to register the richer truths of the irrational by means of automatic writing.

Kohn summed up the consequences: "Man seemed subject to biological forces (in the widest sense) against which his reason was powerless, of which his reason, perhaps, was only an instrument. Organic and vitalistic theories gained ground in all the social sciences."[1] The triumph of *bios* over *logos* had considerable repercussions. Paul Tillich describes the new atmosphere: "Against the imperious reign of technical reason, yielding the detached impersonal knowledge of mechanistic naturalism, there arose a demand for knowledge concerned with life, in which the very nature of the knower is involved. Existential truth was the new goal. A truth which concerns us as living, deciding men has a character quite different from the truth which reason was supposed to provide."[2] Socialist theory did not escape this influence. Marxism had earlier transferred the rationalist categories of Hegel to the economic processes of a material world; it now seemed that the internal forces of the mind, neither rational nor predictable, were more important than the external objective forces on which the scientific socialists had based their philosophy. The path was open for a reinterpretation. Sorel and De Man were among those who offered it for syndicalism.

[1] H. Kohn, *The Twentieth Century*, 1950, p. 49.
[2] P. Tillich, *The Christian Answer*, p. 55.

Nietzsche and the transvaluation of all values

Friedrich Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's immediate heir, carried his argument to its logical conclusion while turning it upside down. The former saw salvation in the denial of Will, in the Will-less life of pure contemplation, in Nirvana. The latter, touched by a more heroic temper, scorned this escape. Nietzsche preached a joyful acceptance of the irrational, a Yea to life and to the struggle it entails. "Wherever I have found life, I have found the Will to Power." The force Nietzsche discovered at the centre of all things was the urge, experienced by every man, to dominate his fellows and control his environment. For him eternal strife was the father of all things, an echo, transformed, of Darwin and Marx. From this understanding of life, and its acceptance, all else follows.

Knowledge is both subjective and instrumental. Man's understanding evolves in accordance with his need to master the external world; to say that an idea is true is only to say that it has proved useful to his preservation—therein lies its cause and its justification. The same is true of values: they express the needs of a community and differ with different needs. If nothing is true independently, then nothing is really true and Nietzsche concludes, naturally enough, that all must be permitted, man must penetrate beyond good and evil, a notion that had already occurred to the Marquis de Sade. Nietzsche's own view of life, however, led him not to the destruction of ethics but only to their reinterpretation. His transvaluation of all values followed from his affirmation of life. What he saw around him, and in history, was the denial of the Will to Power: his wrath was great and he attacked with a hammer.

Nietzsche hated the rationalist tradition of Europe. Socrates, its first martyr, was for him (as for Sorel) the villain of subsequent evils. The old Greeks were creatures of instinct and habit, fighters and revellers, athletes and singers; in so far as they thought at all, it was simply to find ways of satisfying their natural desires. But then a change took place in the Greek way of life: philosophy replaced poetry, science art, talk games. Socrates, the first intellectual, taught Athenian youth to think about what they wanted of life rather than to rely upon instinct, to think, indeed, rather than to live. This subordination of Will to Reason was the deformation of man. Nietzsche's attack on the civilization of his own time was no less bitter. The bourgeoisie was rotten to the core, its ideals were the final travesty of life: sordid materialism, vulgar pleasure-seeking, complacent mediocrity.

Democracy, the slaves' attempt to remake the world in their own image, the rationalists' talking-shop, the rule of nonentities—that was the final decadence. Heroism had been killed by reason, nobility driven out by the mob, adventure banished by the self-satisfied, joy expelled by the virtuous: "Today the little people are masters, preaching submission and modesty and policy and the long boring toll of little virtues", he wrote, and: "With their virtue they have made a wolf a dog and man Man's best domestic pet."

The verdict: "The world hitherto has been a dispiriting place; it is impossible to believe in anything that has existed." The conclusion: "The meaning that must be inherent in this vast creation is in the future, not in man but in Superman." Thus spake Zarathustra! The concept became notorious, though Nietzsche was as discreet as Marx about the future. He tended to ask How shall Superman be brought into being? rather than What will he be like? Some have suggested that Superman should be understood as a poetical substitute for God, an ideal towards which one may strive but which must necessarily remain mysterious. He showed the path and inspired men to follow it. Nietzsche probably intended to spur men on to greater affirmation of life here and now rather than to speculate about some future utopia. The Sorelian myth springs to mind as a parallel. Like Sorel and other activist philosophers, he was more concerned with the movement than with the end.

Nietzsche in fact preached the full life, an old doctrine but with a difference: the complete man of earlier tradition was replete with all the virtues; Nietzsche wanted him to have all the vices as well. Such men had existed in pre-Socratic Greece: "The value judgements of warlike aristocracy were founded on a powerful bodily constitution, on flourishing health, not forgetting what was necessary to the support of this overflowing vigour: war, adventure, the hunt, the dance, games and physical exercises." He praised the ancient heroes' terrible gaiety and profound joy. In Renaissance Italy, in the person of Cesare Borgia, he found these virtues linked with a taste for beauty and the spirit of creation. War and courage, discipline and pride, had done more great things than charity but, a philosopher himself, he saw the same virtues accessible to philosophers: in Schopenhauer he admired the adventurer's impulse to discovery, the enjoyment of dialectical chase, the love of battle and of victory. The range of aphorisms which constitute his distinctive style was almost endless and by their selection one can establish almost any picture of his hero: the blonde beast and the stoic, the warrior and the poet. It is well to remember that he wrote in *Ecce Homo* "I know both sides because I am both sides."

Relevant here is Nietzsche's romantic attack on the cult of Reason. It

was the pulsations of the Will to Power that determine man's thoughts; instinct was the direct operation of this Will, unfalsified by consciousness. Thus "instinct is the most intelligent of all kinds of intelligence" or, as Zarathustra proclaimed "there is more wisdom in your body than in your subtlest learning". Warriors and poets did not require such learning. Nietzsche was generally interpreted as preferring the man of action who, by the simple argument 'I will', scorned to conceal his desires under the cover of Reason. The intellectual, preferring Reason to the promptings of life-force, rejected life itself. It was the man of action who expressed the life struggle and embodied the Will to Power that was its true essence.

Reliance on instinct and glorification of struggle—both themes were echoed by Sorel. "Proletarian violence, practised as a pure and simple manifestation of the feeling of class struggle, appears as a very beautiful and very heroic thing; it is at the service of the primordial interests of civilization; it is perhaps not the most appropriate method for obtaining material advantages but it may save the world from barbarism."[1] This scorn of the utilitarian in favour of the heroic was pure Nietzsche. E. H. Carr has made the point: "While the goal is the goal of Marx, the voice is the voice of Nietzsche."[2] If one looks at Sorel's own philosophy, rather than at his interpretation of syndicalism, one might be as inclined to write: The goal is the goal of Nietzsche, the voice is the voice of Marx. Either way, the synthesis can be found.

The transvaluation of all values has on occasion been interpreted in socialist terms. Charles Andler in France, for example, claimed that, having shown the decadence of the bourgeoisie, he hoped to see it replaced by a working class that would be a class of masters; "One may legitimately call the system of Nietzsche a socialism."[3] It was true that Nietzsche disliked the socialism he knew, but that was because he saw in it not heroism but only envy. If, however, the older socialism represented the worst expression of slave morality, the rise of syndicalism, according to Sorel, meant a fundamental change in the character of the socialist movement. The syndicalists were fighters. Opposed to the sentimental humanitarianism of the bourgeoisie, with its doctrine of social peace, he saw a syndicalist morality founded on war and its virtues, on class struggle, violence, courage and discipline. As producers, the syndicalists were creative; as workers, not deformed by intellect. Sorel reinterpreted Nietzsche's transvaluation, blending his distinction between master and slave moralities with Marx's proletarian and bourgeois moralities. The proletarian revolution was to be the coming of Superman.

[1] G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1916, p. 130.
[2] E. H. Carr, *Studies in Revolution*, 1950, p. 156.
[3] C. Andler, *Nietzsche, sa vie et sa pensée*, 1920–31, vol. 5, p. 321.

Bergson and creative evolution

For Bergson the world was divided into two conflicting forces, life and matter. Life was a force, an impulse (*élan vital*), making a path for itself through the material world which Bertrand Russell summarised quite neatly: "Meeting the resistance of matter, struggling to break through matter, learning gradually to use the matter by means of organisation; divided by obstacles it encounters into diverging currents; partly subdued by matter through the very adaptation which matter forces upon it; yet retaining always its capacity for free activity, struggling always to find new outlets, seeking always greater liberty of movement amid the opposing walls of matter."[1] This continuous adaptation of the life was evolution, a concept which lay at the beginning of Bergson's philosophy. Bergson argued that the orthodox doctrine of adaptation to environment by survival of the fittest could explain the way in which the process took place but not its cause; that could only be explained by the existence of a life-force, perpetually striving to transform matter in accordance with its own need to achieve a greater freedom of action. In that sense evolution was itself both free and creative. The upward surge of life created its own path at every movement, a path that could not be mapped in advance towards a goal that could not be predicted.

One bifurcation of the life force was the separate development of plants and animals; another was the development of some animals in the direction of instinct and others in the direction of intellect, at the end of which process stood man himself. Intellect was an organ to control man's environment, evolved to deal with matter and adapted to matter. Like the eye, a similar organ, it was far from perfect. There were thus many aspects of reality which the intellect was unable to grasp. Bergson made a distinction between time and space. The material world existed in space; it was divisible and measurable. Life, on the other hand, flowed like a river through time. The natural sciences, servants of intellect, measured, counted and weighed; they were determined by the utilitarian purpose they served, control of the material world. It was a mistake to apply this quantitative-intellectual method to life. If one attempted to measure time after the fashion of science, by dividing it into moments, one was forced to do so in spatial terms, symbolised by the swing of the pendulum. The intellect, trying to grasp true psychological time, merely created an artificial material time. In its struggle with the material world, thought became deformed by its object; it got in the habit of understanding—or misunderstanding—everything in spatial terms.

[1] B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 1948, p. 820.

The split in the life force which led to the specialisation of man in the direction of intellect instead of instinct was, for Bergson, the moment of original sin. Reflection, abstraction, division, analysis, these were his vices. Life—'real time'—was a process, an indivisible whole, a constant flow, a continual Becoming. To divide this process into separate parts, and then to classify the parts, was to arrest the flow, destroy the whole and falsify what remained. Bergson accepted that it was necessary for science to analyse reality in terms of the abstract categories of the intellect, with its mechanical representations, but argued that one could never reconstitute reality from such elements. The analogy he used was that of the cinema film. The intellect can only see the isolated frames. To see the film in motion, to grasp life as a whole, required another faculty, one capable of seizing life in its immediacy. While intellect observed life from the outside, instinct sprang directly from life and was a continuation of life. Instinct, however, was not self-conscious: it determined action but itself provided no knowledge. It was to a synthesis of instinct and intellect, therefore, that man needed to turn in order to understand reality—to an instinct which had become aware of itself and was capable of reflection.

Intuition means to penetrate into life, *Einfühlung*. Of its working little can be said, though the difference between intuition and intellect can be suggested by thinking of the visual faculty of the artist, and the faculty for abstract thought of the logician. The exponents of the philosophy of life tended to the former way of thinking. It was significant that Bergson relied heavily on metaphors to convey his ideas. The same approach can be found in the existentialist writers: Sartre found it simplest to convey the essence of his philosophy in novels and plays. If the philosopher is to translate intuitive pictures into words, these must of course be submitted to the intellect; only the painter and the musician can convey direct experience directly. Nevertheless, the writer must also rely on the suggestibility of his work, rather than on its logic, to convey his ideas to the reader as immediate experience, as *données immédiates*; these cannot be recreated by the reader himself through intellectual analysis. It was Goethe who said that truth, in the last resort, can only be created and can only be seen. The case arises, however, where intuition remains inarticulate. Sorel described the general strike as an image which presented itself directly to the mind. While such a myth-picture might inspire men to action, it was not necessarily translated into words, the more so as workers were not creative writers. To the extent that the workers had intuitive knowledge which defied intellectual analysis, it becomes difficult to explain syndicalist ideas. To understand the syndicalist movement requires some empathy—that is a lesson to be learnt from Bergson.

Ideological context

Henri Bergson lived from 1859 to 1940. In his time, particularly the early years of this century, he was a major, perhaps the dominant, figure in French thought. While his own contributions to philosophy are now generally discredited, his earlier influence was considerable. It was an influence that spilled out well beyond the field of professional philosophers. In 1913 A. O. Lovejoy could write that his philosophy had ceased to be merely a body of arguments and conclusions contained in certain books; it had become an influence to be reckoned with in the life of that time.[1] Some twenty years later another student concluded more cautiously that in the preceding years some attempt had been made to utilise the Bergsonian point of view in the sphere of political thought.[2] In practice, this meant that Bergson's terminology was borrowed by writers of the most diverse allegiance, from the syndicalist Sorel to the neo-catholic Le Roy, all of whom found his language useful for their own purpose. In the case of Sorel this adaptation was especially clear, indeed self-avowed. Bergson himself, on the other hand, never dealt with social questions and, as he himself pointed out, it was false to the spirit of his philosophy to pass from his conclusions in one field of study to another field. He was consulted about his relationship with the syndicalists and his reply was published in 1910. He admitted that Sorel and his close collaborator Edouard Berth quoted certain of his ideas correctly, but added that this could as legitimately be done by sociologists of quite different schools. That, from his point of view, was the extent of the link.[3]

It has nevertheless been claimed that syndicalism could be interpreted from some points of view as an application of Bergson's philosophy to the field of political economy and that Sorel and his circle might be called the left-Bergsonians, just as earlier in Germany Marx and Engels had been left-Hegelians.[4] According to Bergson evolution was creative and Sorel proceeded to apply this doctrine to the phenomena of social change. For the life force he substituted action or violence. Bergson's *élan vital* pushed life on to ever new forms; Sorel saw the evolution of society (a matter not considered by Bergson) as the creation of a similar *élan*, the urge of a class, unhampered by intellect, expressing itself directly in action, in conflict with environment. This conflict was the class war and out of it new forms of society arose. *Elan vital* was spontaneous; its direction could not be

[1] Lovejoy, 'Practical Tendencies of Bergsonism' in *Journal of Ethics*, April/July 1913, p. 253.

[2] Jacques, 'Significance of Bergson for Recent Political Thought in France' in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, series 3, section 2, 1932, p. 5.

[3] *Cit.* Goldstein, 'Bergson und die Sozialwissenschaften' in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*, vol. 31, 1910, p. 15.

[4] G. Serbos, *Une philosophie de la production*, 1913, p. 49.

predicted in detail. Sorel thus excluded any logical analysis of the socialist movement and any real discussion of the future socialist society: the syndicalists should not ask where they were going or even what exactly they wished. Sorel translated Bergson from the individual to the social sphere, interpreting intuition in terms of class conscience. And just as the one urged an awakening of intuition, so, in his fashion, did the other. The purpose of course, was different: intensification of the class war. In this Sorel was a reasonable interpreter of the militant syndicalists who themselves rejected scientific socialism in favour of a more intuitive approach, believing that too much thought not only distorted the truth but fatefully weakened the springs of creative action.

James and the pragmatic approach

William James, in his pragmatic philosophy, evolved a theory of perception very similar to that of Bergson. While earlier writers usually took the view that experience is composed of distinct sensations between which the mind interposes connections, James, like Bergson, reversed this argument to show that experience in fact came as a continuous whole in which the mind then interposed distinctions. "Consciousness does not appear to itself chopped up in bits" was the way he put it. A world of immediate experience which was a vast indeterminate flow would, however, prove impossible to live in from a practical point of view; therefore it was the first task of mental activity to break up this flow, separate it into parts, analyse it into objects and their relations, reduce it to manageable proportions. This analysis was dictated by the interests and temperament of the perceiver: the mind discriminated; it is only selected but added in relation to his purpose. This purpose reflected the demands of life, but within that limit perception was conditioned by will and thus an expression of choice. In other words, man made his own reality and that reality was the one which best served his purpose. Action was of prime importance in this process, for it was in action that man's purpose lay: all knowing was relative to doing. Goethe again is often quoted at this point: "In the beginning was the deed!".

James approached the question of truth in similar fashion. He pointed to the barrenness of the internal consistency doctrine, favoured by the rationalists, which allowed a hundred and one theories to exist side by side, all apparently logical, without any one of them bearing a direct relationship to the problems of everyday life. Science, on the other hand, directly concerned with the control of environment, proceeded by hypotheses, purely utilitarian truths only accepted because (and so long as) they produce useful results. James maintained that a similar process actually (and justifiably) took place in the ordinary affairs of men. He came to this conclusion by studying the psychology of thinking. What the mind held to be a truth, he found, was really a hypothesis or convenient formulation of experience, a truth-claim to be tested and validated in action. The truth of a belief was established if it proved useful in furthering the purpose in hand; truth was the cash value of an idea. In James' sense there could never be an absolute truth. All one could say was that certain hypotheses appeared consistently more successful in coping with the demands facing man and thus, over time, became established as truths. In this way man made his own truth, just as he made his own reality, and both were linked to a

utilitarian purpose. The essence of pragmatism was that a belief was true if it worked and not for some abstract logical reason; it was good if it was effective and not because it accorded with some abstract ethical system. A belief formulated to meet the needs of action, in other words, was really a policy for action, just as a scientific hypothesis was really a policy for research. It led to action and if the action it stimulated had the desired effect it became true. More likely, almost certainly, given the difficulties of prediction in the social sciences, the effect would not be entirely what was expected. A continuous process of modification and adaptation of beliefs followed: truth was being made continuously, the essential fact at any stage being the ability of the beliefs in question to satisfy the wishes of the holder in regard to his environment.

This interpretation sheds a light on the nature of syndicalism. Syndicalist ideas on a number of major issues (e.g. political neutrality, the nature of direct action, the general strike) changed over time. The analytic observer is bound to raise the question of consistency. Syndicalism, however, was essentially a pragmatic philosophy. It was, like science, a policy and not a creed, a policy which—given changing environment—was never complete and could never be completely true. A contemporary observer defined it as a doctrine evolved by men immersed in action in order to render their action more effective.[1] Seen thus, it was not surprising that the syndicalist militants should continuously modify their principles in the light of the unsatisfactory nature of their experience when they tried to apply them. It was the particular satisfaction demanded, perhaps, rather than the belief in how this could be achieved, that was the true constant. The syndicalist method, the changing policy, on the other hand, can be seen to have a different sort of consistency as a pattern of gradual adaptation. The Italian syndicalist theoretician Panunzio made this point very clearly: "It is facts which, by their external force of expansion, must alone determine the living process and the flux of ideas. If facts contradict the first ideas, they must not oppose them inflexibly but reformulate themselves, plunging into the melting-pot of new elements which will raise them to a new theoretical unity."[2]

W. Y. Elliott, in *The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics*, published in 1928, attributed the current political revolt against rationalism—and he included not only Sorel and Mussolini, but also Laski and Duguit—to the ideology of pragmatism. The evidence was not very convincing but it was true that the writers he considered all shared a pragmatic impatience with

[1] Challayé, 'Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire', in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, January/March 1908, p. 105.

[2] Panunzio in *Mouvement Socialiste*, 15 January 1906, p. 61.

truth that remained at the level of theory but did not work, was not even designed to work, in practice. They showed the same pragmatic inclination to favour action over discussion and to look to activity rather than speculation as a guide to further action.

If pragmatism meant that beliefs were true because they worked, and not that they worked because they were true, it was logical enough for the pragmatists to look to their own experience. Thus James: "A pragmatist turns away from abstraction, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasoning, from fixed principles, closed systems and pretended absolutes. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant and the rationalist temper sincerely given up." This attitude obviously corresponded closely to that of the militant syndicalists. Like James, they preferred 'the open air and possibilities of nature' to artificiality and dogma. They did so, however, for no very philosophical reason. Pragmatism was nevertheless very much in the air they breathed. Some of the theorists were probably subject to a more direct influence: the similarities of argument are striking, at very least. Lagardelle, for example, declared that within the broad, even elastic, frame set by its aims, the tactics of the labour movement should be determined not by reference to some pre-constructed system but in action, according to the needs of the moment and the lessons of experience. The class struggle would itself enlighten the workers. "Theory arises out of practice, action creates the idea."[1]

James said that there were two commands for the philosopher: 'Believe truth!' and 'Shun error!' These were not identical. One may regard the search for truth as paramount and the avoidance of error as secondary; or one can treat the avoidance of error as imperative and let truth take its chance. The sceptical attitude of the rationalist favoured the latter. For the pragmatist, on the other hand, theories were instruments rather than solutions; their ultimate truth was less important than the need for an immediate guide to action for unless something is believed, one is condemned to inactivity. One may therefore commit oneself, in fields other than science, to working hypotheses if by backing them one thinks one can live more happily or more effectively. James applied this to religion, thus justifying Pascal's famous wager: You must either believe in God or not; if you stake all on God's existence and win, you gain eternal salvation; if you lose, you lose nothing at all. There were other hypotheses which, if backed, could prove of more immediate, temporal value than Pascal's. What was important was that the backing of such a hypothesis could help to make it true. As James points out: "Who gains promotion, boons,

[1] Lagardelle in *Mouvement Socialiste*, September/October 1911, p. 174.

appointments, but the man in whose life they are seen to play the part of live hypotheses, who sacrifices other things for their sake before they have come and takes risks for them in advance. His faith acts on the powers above him as a claim and creates its own verification." This principle, could, of course, be transferred to the field of politics. There, it sounded very like the syndicalist slogan *vouloir, c'est pouvoir*.

The notion that faith in a fact can help to create that fact linked even more closely with the Sorelian myth of the general strike. The myth was an instrument in the class struggle which Sorel specifically defined as a means of acting on the present. It was true or false, therefore not at any abstract level of truth or falsity but to the extent that it worked, i.e. succeeded in sharpening the class struggle. And this, in turn, depended on the extent to which it was believed. If the militants had sufficient faith, they would commit themselves to action and thus validate the myth in practice. The same relationship could be shown to exist between the idea and the reality of the class war itself: the hypothesis became real when sufficient people accepted it. What else was syndicalist propaganda designed to achieve?

The revolt against democracy

The revolt against Reason burst the boundaries of philosophy and swept into the field of politics in the twentieth century. This was *The Great Betrayal*, the *trahison des clercs*, which Benda attacked in 1927. Until his day, men of thought and culture had generally remained strangers to political passions, saying with Goethe 'Let us leave politics to the diplomats and soldiers'. If, like Voltaire, they took such passions into account, they adopted a critical attitude towards them; if, like Rousseau, they actually took them to heart, they did so with a generalising of feeling and a disdain for immediate action which made the term inappropriate. Men like Mommsen, Treitschke, Barrès, Péguy, Maurras, d'Annunzio and Kipling, however, showed all the characteristics of passion: love of action, thirst for immediate results, preoccupation with ends, scorn for argument, excess, hatred, fixed ideas.[1] Social, economic and political conditions were such that these philosophers found a willing audience and ready-made allies.

The rule of Reason meant the rational conduct of public affairs. In practical terms: reliance on persuasion rather than force; persuasion by argument rather than emotion; argument based on observation rather than intuition. And it meant reasonableness in another sense: willingness to accept other points of view and to compromise one's own. This was a bourgeois attitude as well as an intellectual one. Whatever the hidden truth about the springs of thought and action, the bourgeoisie modelled its behaviour on assumptions of rationality and enshrined this belief in its institutions. Private enterprise assumed the rational and advantageous exchange of goods in the economic market; liberal democracy assumed a similar exchange in the political market. Parliamentary government—argument, persuasion and compromise—was a mode of conducting affairs favoured by the bourgeoisie. Did not Alain, the most quoted exponent of liberal democracy in France, write simply "est bourgeois ce qui vit de persuader" and was it not a commonplace to call parliament a talking-shop? This phrase, hostile in use, actually pointed to the heart of the democratic faith: that men were essentially rational; that they (or their delegates) were capable of reaching agreement through debate; that decisions so reached would reflect the best interests of the community.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the revolt against Reason should have expressed itself in political terms as a revolt against bourgeois intellectuals and the parliamentary democracy which enshrined their rule. Or, looked at the other way round: the revolt against bourgeois democracy

[1] J. Benda, *La trahison des clercs*, 1927, p. 33.

(political, not philosophical, in origin) was bound also to express itself as a revolt against Reason. The direct, political causes of the revolt against democracy in France will be examined in the following chapter. Here two points are to be stressed.

First: the terms Reason, bourgeois and intellectual, parliament and democracy, were all closely linked and an attack on one usually implied an attack on others. The link between democracy and rationalism was particularly close in France. The men of 1789 had hoped to replace the aristocracy of blood by an aristocracy of the intellect; what survived was the prestige of the intellectual. The radical party, most deeply rooted in the life of the Third Republic, was also the party of the intellectual and the petit-bourgeois; the journalist, the schoolmaster and the lawyer were its typical figures. Thibaudet provided the label *République des professeurs.*

Second: historically, it was the apparent failure of democratic institutions which made so many people sympathetic to attacks on Reason in politics. It was their rejection of democracy and all it implied that brought syndicalism, fascism and nationalism into a common historical perspective. The divergence between these movements (and others of like nature) was obvious enough, but this itself reflected a characteristic common to them all. Lovejoy saw this in 1913: "The peculiarity of anti-intellectualism is that you cannot be sure where it will bring you out. What it leads from, the sober austerities and the hard slow achievements of the life of reason, you know. But it is a road that soon forks, and there is at the turning no plain guide-post to point in one direction rather than another; all the clearly decipherable guide-posts have been left behind in the place you came from. And the one branch if followed to its extreme brings you to a position diametrically opposite to that which lies at the end of the other."[1]

WIDER PERSPECTIVES OF REVOLT. The revolt against democracy was wider than the revolt against Reason. The rationalist, anti-parliamentary left ranged from communism to guild socialism. The revolt against Reason, for its part, did not always imply a rejection of democracy. Bergson and James both remained rational democrats. It is nevertheless significant that in other anti-intellectual movements, non-political in origin (in the field of art, for example) close parallels to the political revolt can be seen.

In 1909 *Figaro* published the first futurist manifesto of Italian writers and painters. They sang the love of danger and the beauty of struggle. An activist temper was coupled with an attack on bourgeois values and a call to destroy such bourgeois institutions as museums and libraries. In their

[1] Lovejoy, 'Practical Tendencies of Bergsonism' in *Journal of Ethics*, April/July 1913, p. 253.

place, they glorified the machine and the worker, symbols of the new age, describing lyrically the sounds and vibrations of the industrial plant, its bright lights and perpetual movement.[1] 'Plastic dynamism' was not, perhaps, a great success. Interesting was their cult of action and their cultivation of the workers. One critic, drawing the parallel, suggested that futurism represented syndicalism in art. More significant was the fact that many members of the group and especially its leader, Marinetti, counted among the first supporters of Mussolini, himself an activist on the road without guide-posts.

Dada was the absolute revolt against bourgeois values and outlook. The only consistent aim of the dadaists, indeed, appears to have been to shock the bourgeoisie. It was also a revolt against Reason chemically pure. The last words of one of its manifestos were 'don't know, don't know, don't know!'—the literally nonsensical was its only standard of value. Out of dada arose surrealism, the last romantic movements in art as Cyril Connolly once called them. Instead of the dynamism preached by the futurists and the absurd preached by the dadaists, surrealism came out as the champion of the irrational forces in man, of intuition and the unconscious. To Plato's recognition that the inspired poet must be out of his senses, the surrealists merely added a knowledge of Freudian psychology. Plato had also demanded the exclusion of the poets from the Republic and, to prove the truth of his foresight, surrealism became a revolutionary movement in France. It was necessary to overthrow the authority of Reason in order to set free the poetry stored in the darker recesses of the mind, and this, the surrealists argued, could not be separated from the overthrow of the bourgeois society which Reason had created to protect itself. *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* was the title of their magazine. The service, though never gratefully acknowledged, was that of the communist revolution. Had surrealism flourished a decade earlier, however, it would have seen itself as the ally of the syndicalists.

CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRACY. Both right and left identified the Republic with their own enemies and laid the blame for its weakness at their door. The workers naturally saw capitalists and bourgeoisie as the source of all evil; the nationalists found their scapegoat in Jews, foreigners, protestants and freemasons. In less prejudiced moments, however, most critics agreed that the vices of democracy were inherent in the system itself. Reason stultified action and led to weakness. As Hamlet recognised, "conscience does make cowards of us all, and the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought". Too much Reason also undermined old

[1] *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909.

virtues without creating new traditions to replace them. This fault lay not only in the rationalist spirit of the age but deep in the falsely rational structure of democratic society.

A passage in the *Communist Manifesto* is relevant here: "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors' and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy waters of egoistic calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms has set the single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade." The triumph of capitalism, or the Great Revolution—the choice is according to taste—destroyed all bonds and all values; traditional morality was replaced by an abstract liberty that in fact meant self-interest and sordid commercialism; an integrated society gave way to an abstract equality that in fact meant individualism run riot and the ultimate domination of money. This development was reflected in the political system. "L'état s'est démystiqué" wrote Péguy. Parliament was merely an extension of Free Trade: "The world of politics had acquired the morality of the market place", declared Paul Louis, a syndicalist sympathiser.[1] Lagardelle found democracy a demoralising system, incapable of producing human values[2]—a sentiment that could have been attributed to the nationalist right as easily as to the syndicalist left. A new morality, the regeneration of society, seemed to require the rejection of the individualism and the materialism that went with democracy. Syndicalists, nationalists, fascists, all joined in the attack.

Democracy's concept of citizenship also meant the disintegration of society. If Free Trade had destroyed all bonds save the cash nexus, the Revolution of 1789 had, for its part, tried to destroy all social ties save those of the state. In Le Chapelier's words, no group loyalty could be allowed to intervene between the citizen and the state. The opponents of democracy could argue that it ignored the real man, with his real interests and his real groupings; the abstract citizen, counted and represented in parliament, was a figment of the theorists' imagination. This was the criticism the monarchists brought against the Republic: in place of the real man, participating in matters of immediate concern and within his competence through a variety of natural organisations (local, professional, religious or family), democracy had substituted the elector, whose only right it was to

[1] P. Louis, *Le syndicalisme contre l'Etat*, 1910, p. 56.
[2] Lagardelle in *Les documents du progrès*, 1908, p. 304.

pronounce at intervals on matters about which he knew nothing. The Revolution has been described as an expression of the *esprit géométrique*; with it the mechanistic rationalism of Descartes was transferred to the state. In Bergsonian terms, democracy was based upon analysis—*ordre géométrique*—and thus failed to grasp the reality of the *ordre vital*. The point was made by Pirou in 1910 when he said of the syndicalist theoreticians that they saw democracy as the political expression of intellectualism and universal suffrage as a philosophy of discontinuity, a misunderstanding of the deep, internal unity of social reality.[1] Proposals for a more real, more organic structure of society were advanced on all sides: social catholicism, guild socialism, solidarism and communism in the days when it still favoured government by soviets. Such proposals formed part of the same movement as the fascists' call for a corporate state, the monarchists' for a nation of estates and provinces, and the syndicalists' for a society based on trade unions. Alternatives to parliamentary democracy were very much in the air, before and after the first world war.

[1] G. Pirou, *Proudhonisme et syndicalisme révolutionnaire*, 1910, p. 307.

The discredit of French democracy

The Third Republic was but a poor thing compared with the monarchy of Louis Quatorze and the empire of Napoleon. Whatever its virtues, it was never glorious or inspiring. The sombre black of the civilian frockcoat proved dull after the splendours of King and Emperor. Its prestige was low abroad as well as at home. Militarily weak, nothing was done to avenge the loss of Alsace-Lorraine: the figure of Strasbourg in the Place de la Concorde was a perpetual reproach to the Republic in the eyes of men who valued honour above peace and prosperity. Although France had joined in the race for colonies, she was consistently rebuffed by the stronger power of England, her humiliation dramatised at Fashoda. The result was something like an inferiority complex, especially severe in the case of the nationalists. While few Frenchmen ever abandoned hope of reversing the Treaty of Frankfurt, the reconquest of the lost provinces gradually sank into the background as attention focussed on colonial expansion abroad and commercial activity at home. For the nationalists, however, *revanche* remained the question that dominated all others and they were soon brought together by Déroulède in the *Ligue des Patriotes*. After the death of Gambetta, whose slogan 'guerre à l'outrance!' had won Déroulède's confidence, they lost faith in the politicians of the Republic. The League, which had been non-partisan so long as the parties seemed united on reconquest, turned to attack the democratic regime, demanding strong government as a necessary step to the war of revenge. The parliamentary Republic was at the same time attacked by a wider front for its weakness in dealing with internal affairs.

FAILURE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM. The French democratic tradition differed from the English. It was based less on community feeling than on individualism, less on participation than on defence against government. The Radical Republicans, who set the tone, had an almost anarchic suspicion of authority. After their experience of strong executives, it was not surprising that the deputies of the Third Republic tried to keep power in their own hands. Parliament, distrusting the executives, would have liked to govern itself. Assembly government as tried at the French Revolution was hardly possible, but France got something nearer to parliamentary than cabinet government. Constitutional practice reinforced this. MacMahon's misuse of the power of dissolution in 1877 undermined the presidency. It also deprived the cabinet of what might have been a useful weapon against an irresponsible legislature: deputies

were free to do what they liked for four years. The system of interpellations allowed a deputy to call on a minister to explain his policy on any issue, and necessitated a debate before the business of the day could continue. If defeated on this, no matter how trivial, the government was expected to resign. Ministerial stability was thus sacrificed to parliamentary control over policy. The committee system was another spoke in the wheel. The specialised committees, introduced in 1902, were used to control, even direct, the action of government.

The multi-party system in the assembly worked in the same direction. After Gambetta's failure to create a sufficiently wide and well-disciplined Republican party, it was clear that no prime minister could rely on a continuous majority of his own. France was to have weak premiers as well as weak presidents. Coalition government has its difficulties at the best of times; the weakness of party organisation, the instability of parliamentary groups and the large number of independents in the Chamber made the life of any coalition even more precarious. A game of politics was played in the Palais Bourbon, shifting groups conspiring to gain office, overturning ministries with light-hearted impunity in the process. The making, unmaking and remaking of cabinets was a favourite pastime of the Third Republic: its seventy years saw eighty-eight ministries and fifty prime ministers. Ministers were more often appointed as a reward for political intrigue than for administrative skill. The uncharitable said that this hardly mattered as they were so busy manoeuvring to keep their portfolios, in the next cabinet if not the present, that they hardly had time to visit their ministries. It was difficult to get agreement between coalition members of the cabinet, even more difficult to retain the support of the coalition parties outside. Policy often tended to vanish in the search for a common denominator.

None of the parties had very effective national organisations, the radicals virtually none at all. When single-member constituencies replaced the system of voting for party lists in larger constituencies, the nomination of candidates fell into the hands of self-appointed committees of local shopkeepers, schoolmasters, doctors, lawyers and journalists, primarily concerned with local issues. Their power led Halévy to speak of the *République des comités*. While candidates generally adopted a party label or subscribed to a national programme, they were often really standing as individuals or fighting on local issues. As a result, the *esprit de clocher* of the constituencies was introduced into parliament. Sectional interests confused national politics. Their personal following made many deputies free-lancers, socialists not excluded, and played havoc with parliamentary discipline. They could bargain, vote, realign as they pleased, owing only a final

allegiance to their electors. There were numerous national parties, numerous, and often distinct, parliamentary groups, and endless splinters, not to mention the band of independents. This kaleidoscopic confusion of views in the Chamber made agreement on any major issue difficult. Cabinets based on such shifting sands were bound to be unstable and weak.

The only counter-balance was the ever present threat to the Republican regime. This forced the parties of the centre to unite, after a fashion, in republican defence, in bloc and cartel. Republican defence, however, was a negative policy; there was no agreement on economic or social reform, little positive action, indeed, beyond anti-clerical legislation. *Débrouillage* was the motto of the Third Republic and that meant half-measures, usually too little and too late. The failure of legislative programmes, the weakness of governments in the face of crisis, their instability, the obvious need for reform in many sectors, the permanent intrigue in the corridors of parliament, the careerism of the deputies and their irresponsibility in overthrowing cabinets—all combined to undermine parliamentary democracy. R. K. Gooch wrote in 1927, and his comment was equally true of the pre-war years: "There can be little if any doubt that the parliamentary system is today in discredit in France. The attitude of the people towards parliament and the parliamentary system may take the form of violent antipathy, supercilious disdain or regretfully admitted criticism; but enthusiasm or even mild popularity seems not to exist."[1]

THE CHARGE OF CORRUPTION. The first Republic, with its cult of the classical, placed high value on public morality. The scandals that were a feature of the Third made a mockery of that tradition. In 1887 a widespread traffic in honours and promotions came to light and the trial led directly to the Elysée Palace where the deputy Daniel Wilson was residing with his father-in-law, President Grévy. At the trial of the military commander of Paris, one of those implicated, it was found that the file of the case had been tampered with and documents exchanged. The regime itself became suspect. Grévy stood behind his son-in-law. Despite obviously sincere protestations of personal innocence, he could hardly escape the touch of suspicion and was eventually forced to resign. Sadi Carnot was chosen by the Assembly to replace him, reputedly on the principle 'vote for the stupidest', and this itself marked a further stage in the decline of the presidency. Wilson, aquitted on technical grounds after appeal against a two-year sentence, returned to the Chamber. The deputies ignored him

[1] Gooch, 'The Anti-parliamentary Movement in France' in *American Political Science Review*, August 1927, p. 553.

but, as an observer said, "It was the whores keeping clear of the woman taken in adultery."

Two years later came the failure of the Panama Canal company. It had been financed by thousands of small investors throughout the country, attracted by the name of de Lesseps, successful constructor of the Suez canal. De Lesseps, however, had badly underestimated the cost and this was aggravated by mismanagement in Panama. As more and more funds were required and investors grew scarce, money had to be spent bribing the press. Finally, when the public refused to subscribe to a lottery, work had to stop and the whole scheme collapsed. The investors raised an outcry; an enquiry followed and the officers of the company, including de Lesseps, were found guilty of obtaining money by false pretences and malversation of funds. The trial of the great Frenchman of Suez caused a stir but it was not until 1892 that the real scandal broke. The *Libre Parole*, an extreme anti-semitic paper recently founded by Drumont, accused the company of having used the Jewish financier Baron de Reinach to bribe members of parliament. Two days before the Chamber was to debate the question Reinach committed suicide. A story of blackmail and embezzlement emerged, involving another Jewish financier. It was then discovered that large sums of money had been distributed to members of parliament, largely to obtain their vote for the authorisation of a lottery to finance the company. Legal proceedings were instituted against a number of deputies and senators, including five former ministers. With one exception, they were later withdrawn: Baihaut insisted on confessing that he had accepted a large bribe when Minister of Public Works to pilot through the lottery legislation; he was convicted.

For the republicans all was saved but honour. The mud which had been stirred up did not settle again for many years, however, and those who were labelled *chéquards* found it difficult to regain the confidence of the public. In 1893 even Clemenceau was not re-elected while the socialists increased their seats from twelve to fifty. The atmosphere of suspicion lasted for many years. The scandal seemed to confirm vague suspicions that had existed before and seemed to make probable charges subsequently made. Thus Paul Louis, in his book on syndicalism, could speak of a much wider corruption in parliament, deputies generally in the pay of great industrialists and financiers, without his accusation sounding too implausible.[1]

THE DREYFUS AFFAIR. The tragedy of Captain Dreyfus is too well known to need retelling. The story dragged on for twelve years, from 1894 when the leakage of military information was discovered and Dreyfus

[1] P. Louis, *Le syndicalisme contre l'Etat*, 1910, p. 53.

sentenced to imprisonment on Devil's Island, until 1906 when he was finally rehabilitated by a resolution of the Chamber. With Zola's open letter to the president—'J'accuse!'—and Clemenceau's articles in *L'Aurore* in 1898, the personal destiny of Dreyfus became linked with that of the Republic and his case became *l'Affaire*. In the following years it resolved itself into a conflict between those loyal to the Republic and its principles, including justice, and its opponents: nationalists, traditionalists, militarists, monarchists and clericals.

The foreign posting of Colonel Picquart who had protested at the weakness of the evidence against Dreyfus; the discovery that the Chief of Military Intelligence, Colonel Henry, had been forging evidence in the dossier against Dreyfus; the refusal of the military authorities to revise their attitude after Major Esterhazy, on whom suspicion had originally fallen, fled the country—all went to undermine the honour of the army and the faith of the public first in the High Command, then in the conservative government of the time. The stubbornness of the anti-Dreyfusards seemed also to show the complete immorality of the conservative parties, ready to sacrifice an innocent man in order to preserve the good name of the army. The tone of their campaign, the virulence of their attack on republican opponents, the intolerance, the hatred of foreigners, the anti-semitism, the crudeness and dishonesty of their propaganda—these left a taste as unpleasant as anything Goebbels could later produce.

In time, however, the virtue of the Dreyfusards was also challenged. Originally appearing as the disinterested champions of honesty, decency and the rights of the individual, they turned out to be politicians. To Sorel and some others it appeared as if they were using the case as a spring-board, an electoral issue to advance their own party. Both sides drew what benefit they could from the affair: the anti-clericals used it against the church and the radicals against the right; the reactionaries used it against the Republic and the militarists against the parliamentarians. The Dreyfusards, once in power, suppressed their enemies. They could have done little else in the circumstances of the time. But it allowed Sorel to accuse them of rivalling the intolerance of their opponents by their own petty vengeance. Writing of Jaurès, he declared: "Experience has always shown that revolutionaries plead *raison d'état* as soon as they get into power, that they then employ police methods and look upon justice as a weapon which they may use unfairly against their enemies."[1]

It was the attack on the Church that gave some ground to Sorel's accusation. A law of 1901 provided for the dissolution of all religious

[1] G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1916, p. 118.

orders not specifically authorised by parliament. Few requested authorisation and few requests were accepted. The majority were dissolved, particularly the teaching orders, whose members were forbidden to teach in France; unauthorised religious establishments and schools were closed by force. In 1904 the Concordat was denounced. A law of 1905 proclaimed the final separation of Church and state: all state subsidies to religious bodies were ended and all ecclesiastical property was transferred to the state. The confiscation of buildings and the expulsion of the orders were carried out with vigour. The laws themselves were harsh and they were further strained by Combes in their application. When churches were later handed back on loan, they bore—as they bear to this day—the stigma of the Republic on their walls: *Liberté, Egalité Fraternité.* To a large extent the Church reaped what it had sown. Its consistent hostility to republican principles, its open allegiance with the forces conspiring to overthrow the Republic, probably made the expulsion of certain orders and *laïcisation* of the schools inevitable. And it is hard to feel much sympathy for the priests behind the anti-semitic campaigns of *La Croix.* The radical revenge was nevertheless intolerant and often petty: *Clochemerle* was a satire, not a fantasy. While the anti-democratic right naturally saw only the faults of the radicals and republicans, Sorel concluded despairingly that all were corrupt but the workers.

THE CRITIQUE OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT. The failures of parliamentary democracy in syndicalist eyes have been discussed earlier. Attention may nevertheless be drawn once more to two aspects which link syndicalism with two wider but distinct movements hostile to the parliamentary system.

At the turn of the century, at a time when the workers were becoming more vocal in their demands, it seemed as if the political system was wholly incapable of dealing with their demands. The fast moving forces of industrial development were quite beyond the slow-working machinery of the French parliament. The political capacity of democracy to organise the economic and social life of the nation was challenged. By its organisation and procedures parliament was obviously ill-suited to deal with the legislation required; it had neither the time nor the knowledge required. The situation was aggravated in France by its extreme reluctance to delegate powers to more competent bodies, notably the executive. At the same time, and this was another peculiar fault of the French parliament, it was invariably occupied with political questions and the defence of the Republic. The manoeuvres necessary for any legislative programme to succeed meant that it could only contain the common denominator of

agreement—and as there were many groups that had to agree, that denominator was always low.

While this was sufficient to damn the whole democratic system in the eyes of hostile critics, the more friendly criticised the machinery while remaining attached to the spirit of democracy, of rationality and reasonableness in politics. The revolt against parliamentary democracy was thus wider than the revolt against Reason. It included all those groups which hoped to replace, or at least supplement, traditional political institutions by economic institutions designed to meet the needs of a complex industrial society. The Webbs' constitution for the socialist commonwealth of Great Britain was an example of this trend.

More important for the syndicalists than the incapacity of the parliamentary machine, itself something of an abstract notion, was probably the more emotional charge of corruption. The socialist deputies appeared to have betrayed the interests of those whom they were elected to represent. The ever more bourgeois character and republican policies of the socialist parties were noted. It was natural that the workers should resent the attempted leadership of another class. The French experience of *arrivistes* and turncoats was an added provocation. It led to bitter hostility towards politicians whose life and outlook stamped them as bourgeois or intellectuals, whatever political faith they professed, towards socialists as much, if not more, than others. This hostility was directed equally against the parliamentary government. Having corrupted the socialist deputies so that the socialist opposition appeared to merge into the bourgeois majority, the whole parliamentary system became identified with the interests of the capitalist class. It was thus rejected in its entirety. As Lagardelle said, syndicalism was born from the reaction of the proletariat against democracy. The workers, thrown on their own resources, relied on their own strength to achieve their demands. No more discussion, but action; no more compromise, but war. From the revolt against democracy to the revolt against Reason was but a step.

This aspect of the syndicalist revolt, based as it was on the bourgeois-intellectual character of parliamentary democracy, linked it to the anti-democratic movements of the right. Of course, there was an important difference. The syndicalist complaint was essentially material: for one reason or another—*embourgeoisement*, corruption or inefficiency—they had failed to obtain the advantages they hoped from the system. The right ostensibly based its attack on moral grounds: it condemned both the corruption and the weakness of the regime; democracy was undermining the prestige of France abroad and the good order of society at home.

Nationalism, monarchism and the right

The history of the anti-parliamentary right in France, from Bourbon legitimates to fascist leagues, was an endless stream of movements, parties and groups of thinkers, polemicists and doctrines, far more complex than French socialism. A right-wing movement ran parallel to the syndicalist left, forming part of the same revolt against democracy, linked by a common enemy, sometimes a common temperament, with an overlap of ideas, and brought together in the person of Georges Sorel.

THE BOULANGER CRISIS. In 1882 Déroulède founded the *Ligue des Patriotes* to press for the reconquest of the lost territories. To this aim another was soon added: revision of the constitution to establish a strong government capable of achieving this end. He found a potential leader in General Boulanger, the Minister of War, a popular hero who had earned the nickname *Général Revanche*. The radicals and moderate conservatives combined in alarm to keep the general out of future cabinets. Thwarted, he decided to seek direct, popular support in his plebiscitary campaign of 1888, when he won six by-elections in different parts of the country on the programme 'Dissolution, Constituente, Révision'. The climax came next year when he was elected in Paris amid scenes of great enthusiasm. Had he given the word that night, a *coup d'état* might well have succeeded. He hesitated and the government, shocked into action, decided to impeach him. Boulanger's nerve failed entirely; he fled to Belgium and shortly afterwards committed suicide.

Boulanger had become the focus for all those discontented with the regime, for those who longed for revenge against Germany, for those who wanted a revision of the constitution, for those who wanted to purify the state of its corruption, for monarchists and even for some of the extremists of the left who sought a transformation of the social order. If there was any positive agreement, it was the belief in strong, personal, but democratically elected, government. In that sense the movement was Bonapartist, though the attack was directed against the parliamentary system rather than the Republic itself. Déroulède demanded not the Empire but a *République plébiscitaire*. Boulanger was an ostentatiously republican general who had shown his hostility to the royalists by depriving the princes of their commissions and to the Church by not releasing candidates for the priesthood from military service. Much of his support, however, came from

quite different quarters: he was financed by the ultra-royalist Duchesse d'Uzès and had the support of the Baron de Mackau, leader of the monarchists in the parliament; he was also financed by Baron Hirsch, a Jew, but supported at the same time by Drumont and his anti-semitic band; his campaign manager, Dillon, was a catholic while one of his main supporting newspapers was the violently anti-clerical *Intransigeant*, edited by Rochefort. Monarchists, imperialists, republicans, anti-semites and even *blanquistes*—the failure of *boulangisme* reflected not only the General's lack of nerve but also the lack of unity in the anti-parliamentary opposition.

One effect of the Boulanger affair was to show the royalists that the parliamentary monarchy of the Orleanist tradition was unlikely to attract many supporters. The Comte de Paris announced his conversion to the imperialist doctrine of the plebiscite and strong government without ministerial responsibility. The way was thus opened for the monarchy to become a rallying point for the anti-parliamentary forces.

THE DREYFUS CRISIS. The next crisis centred round the figure of Dreyfus. The former *boulangistes*, now simply *plébiscitaires* or nationalists, the anti-semites, the royalists and most of the clerical party again formed a common front. For many there appeared no choice. On the one hand there was a Jewish captain convicted of treason, not a true Frenchman and therefore probably guilty; even if he were not, what were abstract principles like truth and justice compared to the things they really loved: the army's honour, *la patrie* and the authority of the state? But the affair also provided an obvious opportunity for the rallying of forces. Rioting in the streets grew to dangerous proportions. The *Ligue des Patriotes* was revived and joined by the *camelots du roi*, the *jeunesse anti-sémite*, the *comités de la jeunesse royaliste* and other groups. But the anti-democratic forces again lacked cohesion. When Loubet, a Dreyfusard, was elected president in 1899, Déroulède planned a *coup d'état*, only to find that some of the other groups preferred to organise their own. Nor was there a leader available. General Pellieux, who was to lead the troops to the Elysée after President Faure's funeral was even less reliable than Boulanger. The curtain fell with Déroulède running alone after the troops as they marched home to their barracks, trying to persuade them to turn.

The formation of a ministry of republican concentration by Waldeck-Rousseau placed the moderates firmly in control of the government. A new *Ligue de la Patrie Française*, headed by Lemaître, turned to electoral activities. Though it had considerable membership, it was internally divided and had little success. The victory of the Dreyfusards was sealed when the president remitted Dreyfus' sentence of imprisonment. At the

same time, the senate found Déroulède and others guilty of plotting to overthrow the Republic. In the face of their defeat, many made their peace with the Republic. The demoralisation of the anti-parliamentary forces was completc when royalists and nationalist republicans began to quarrel about the responsibility for their failure.

THE ACTION FRANÇAISE. This disintegration led Barrès to remark despairingly in 1899 that no progress was possible without a doctrine. Charles Maurras found the answer. The doctrine was monarchy and 'integral nationalism'. The organisation that rallied the anti-republican forces anew was the *Action Française*. This group, formed in 1898, was originally led by Henri Vaugeois who declared himself a sincere republican but a Frenchman first and foremost. He advocated a mixture of boulangiste strong government and Drumont's anti-semitic nationalism: a new, oligarchic Republic, where power would be personal and responsible. France was to be governed not by laws but by living heads, or even one head, though it might have to be cut off from time to time—so Maurras later summed up his programme. Maurras wrote for the group's magazine and used his polemical skills to obtain the support of those who remained firm anti-Dreyfusards even after the discovery of the Henry forgery. His defence of Colonel Henry, whom he painted as a martyr in the public cause and whose forgery he described as a work of the highest patriotism, coming at a time when less brazen minds were disconcerted, made him almost overnight the leader of the anti-democratic right. He soon won over Vaugeois to his way of thinking and, after him, many other prominent nationalists and *républicains plébiscitaires*.

In 1901 the *Action Française* formally adhered to the royalist cause. In Maurras it had a man whose power of argument and strength of conviction provided a framework of political doctrine within which most of the right wing opponents of democracy were to work, at least until the rise of the fascist leagues; which, indeed, was not without influence on some of its opponents on the left. The *Action Française* provided both the organisation and the philosophy which the *Ligue des Patriotes* and the *Ligue de la Patrie Française* had lacked. In many ways, however, the philosophy was more important: the *Action Française* was less of a party than an organ for the propagation of a doctrine to which the discontented could rally. In a very real sense the *Action Française* was Maurras himself.

The organisation nevertheless proved effective in carrying the fight against the Republic into the streets. Its main vehicle of propaganda was its paper which changed from a fortnightly review to a daily in 1908 and carried articles by Maurras, Daudet and Bainville. The work of propa-

ganda was also carried out through the publications of the *Nouvelle Librairie Nationale*, under Jean Rivain and Georges Valois, and by the *Institut d'Action Française*, a 'royalist Sorbonne' founded in 1906, which drew distinguished audiences to its lectures. The *Ligue de l'Action Française* was formed in 1907 to rally a wider circle of supporters under the slogan *France d'abord*. The fighting wing of the movement, led by Maurice Pujo, included the *Etudiants de l'Action Française* and the *Camelots du Roi* whose original purpose was to hawk the newspaper in the streets of Paris but who soon turned into a body of storm-troopers.

NATIONALISM AND THE REVOLT AGAINST REASON. In an article published in 1899 in the royalist *Gazette de France* Maurras showed that the contemporary anti-parliamentary movement was split into several groups, each pursuing different lines, but all opposed to what were in fact only different aspects of the doctrines of the Revolution.[1] Some, who wanted testamentary freedom and the reconstruction of the family, criticised the succession law. Some, who wanted the reconstruction of the communes, the restoration of the provinces and a measure of local independence, criticised the division of the country into artificial *départements* and the centralised state. Some wanted to strengthen the role of professional corporations and criticised economic liberalism. Some criticised the parliamentary system because they wanted strong government, directly answerable to the people but able, at the same time, to restore the authority of the state and make France a great power once more. If one added up these criticisms, one got the five natural powers which were the basis of the constitution of ancient France. Combine the family, the commune and the province, the corporation and stable political authority and you have the formula of the monarchy. In the following year Maurras published the *Enquête sur la monarchie* and drew his conclusion more clearly. Nationalism logically implied the monarchy, for that alone could integrate the diverse strands of nationalist thought into a consistent doctrine: the monarchy was integral nationalism. History, moreover, showed that monarchy alone could achieve the ends which nationalists had been trying to pursue by other means; it must therefore be their first objective. The monarchy was logically necessary. The argument was rationalist. Maurras was always a precise thinker, if often dishonest, and loved to exalt Reason. He spoke with contempt of the alien barbarous romanticism of Rousseau, which he saw as a perversion of the classical tradition on which French civilization was based. Indeed, he also spoke of the microbe of romanticism and revolution; on romanticism he blamed the Revolution, the cult of

[1] *Cit.* W. C. Buthman, *The Rise of Integral Nationalism in France*, 1939, p. 270.

democracy and individualism, the disorder of society and the destruction of morals.

It may seem difficult to fit this rationalist outlook into the revolt against Reason. The answer is to be found in the realism which lies at the root of his approach to politics. Edouard Berth, ardent disciple of Sorel and Bergson, but also of Maurras, showed—to his own satisfaction at least—how the gap could be bridged. He claimed that Bergson's intuition was in practice the same as the classical Reason which Maurras professed. Democratic rationalism—naturally to be despised—was really idealism, the attempt to base politics on speculation. The classical variant, on the other hand, was another way of saying realism, the derivation of policy from experience. The monarchist programme was based on the lessons of history: France had invariably benefited from the wars of the *ancien régime* while her emperors had left her smaller than they found her; Britain and Germany were flourishing under their monarchs while France was languishing under the Republic. "We judge an institution by its fruits" declared the *Action Française*, staking a claim to pragmatism similar to that of the syndicalists. Maurras called his method *empirisme organisateur* after Sainte-Beuve. His interpretation of history was always directed to a purpose: how to make France strong, great, prosperous and well-ordered. Having discovered in monarchy the social and political order which experience proved successful, he preached reorganisation on those lines.

Maurras' attitude to politics was almost machiavellian. He knew his goal and would use any practical means to attain it. Typical was his view of the Henry forgery: "The great fault, but the only fault, of Colonel Henry was that he let himself be found out. The irregularity, I will not say the crime, has one excuse in success. It must succeed. It ought to succeed." As typical was his attitude to catholicism. He supported the Church because he judged it a valuable force in promoting order in society and an essential part of the tradition he wished to restore, but at the same time he was too much of a rationalist to believe the doctrines for which it stood: "*Je suis catholique, pourtant athée.*" The validity of an 'ism', even traditionalism, lay in its ability to work. This was the pragmatic approach; it also came close to an acceptance of the myth as a means of acting on the present, thus forming another link with syndicalist ideas.

A very different approach can be seen in the writings of Maurice Barrès, the other great protagonist of nationalist thought at the time, also closely associated with the *Action Française*. His traditionalism, though it claimed also to be realistic and pragmatic, really fitted better into the romantic movement and showed similarities to the intuitive elements of syndicalism. He did not apply Reason to history in order to use its lessons

but accepted history as his guide. "My enemies," wrote Barrès, "are those who would transform France according to their own ideas, whereas I want to preserve France." The Revolution had meant that the success of those enemies; the France he wished to preserve was in fact that which had ceased to exist a hundred years earlier. The syndicalists looked forward to the triumph of the working class while the nationalists looked back to the glories of the *ancien régime*. The syndicalists were guided by their experience in the class struggle; the nationalists preferred to consult the accumulated wisdom of the past—their pragmatism was that of Burke. The comparison was made in an article on pragmatism and democracy published in the *Revue des Sciences Politiques* in 1911.[1] Both syndicalists and nationalists declared themselves realists or positivists, but the latter saw 'positive reality' in tradition. From the sort of positivism in Barrès' dictum that nationalism was the acceptance of determinism, only an irrationalist philosophy could emerge. The determining forces he sought were tradition grasped intuitively by the true Frenchman in touch with the soil of France; it meant submission to the *suggestions de notre terre et de nos morts*. Traditionalism could be interpreted in purely intuitive terms: France was a living organism with its own infallible vital instincts which it was necessary to discover.

The parallel to syndicalism is clear. For France one need only substitute the proletariat; for the nationalist claim that the Revolution had falsified French traditions, the syndicalist claim that democracy falsified the class struggle and thus the true path of history. The nationalist corollary was that all developments since the Revolution should be ignored; for the syndicalists the same applied to the democratic system. It is also worth noting that monarchist traditionalism was highly selective, not only in its idealisation of the past but in its resolute blindness to a whole century of French experience. The fact, of course, was that their hatred of the democratic system far outweighed their professed political realism. In that, too, they stood on common ground with the syndicalists. When it came to the test, the real pragmatists were the conservative republicans and the reformist socialists who accepted the reality of the regime in the name of expedience, rather than the revolutionaries of left and right whose strategy (though not tactics) was determined less by a realistic analysis of the situation than by their overwhelming dislike of parliament.

THE NATIONALIST ALTERNATIVE TO DEMOCRACY. It is time to return to the conquering idea of Maurras. In 1900, after consultation with

[1] Combes de Patris, 'Pragmatisme et démocratie' in *Revue des Sciences Politiques*, September/October 1911, p. 797.

representatives of the Duc d'Orléans, he published his *Enquête sur la monarchie*. The question he posed was this: Does salvation lie in the traditional, hereditary, anti-parliamentary, decentralised monarchy? The traditionalist aspect has already been discussed with its distinction between a natural society and the artificial order imposed by democracy. The task of the monarch was simply to study forces at work in the country and to embody them in laws. According to the *Enquête*, nationalists had declared almost unanimously against the parliamentary system and in favour of personal, personally responsible, government. This was the real theme of many who were neither monarchists nor traditionalists at heart but who supported the *Action Française* because it seemed the only effective anti-parliamentary movement on the right and because they needed some political philosophy to make respectable their demand for authoritarian government. In the process, tradition had to be strained a little. Anti-parliamentary authoritarianism was associated with the plebiscitary empire, with *boulangisme* and Déroulède's republican nationalism, rather than with the monarchy of Orleans. All these, of course, the *Action Française* regarded as perversions, by-products of the democratic ideas of the Revolution. The king must be freed not only from the control of parliament, but from the electorate also, in order to act firmly in the national interest. Only the hereditary character of the office could ensure continuity and devotion to the long-term interests of the nation. With strong, unhampered government guarding the interests of France, glorious things might again be achieved.

Parallel to this centralisation of power in all matters affecting the national interest, particularly foreign affairs and defence, Maurras argued for an extensive decentralisation of powers to professional and regional bodies in all matters concerning professional and regional life. This included much of the economy. The artificial system of democracy was to be replaced by an organic structure based on natural units, representing not abstract electors but the real interests of a particular town or profession. Decentralisation thus meant the re-creation of semi-autonomous municipalities and provinces, with their own loyalties, each allowed to manage its own affairs. The picture was similar to that drawn by G. K. Chesterton in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and probably reflected the romantic mediaevalism common to many catholic thinkers of the time. It also meant the re-creation of the mediaeval system of semi-independent, self-regulating corporations: trade guilds, professional organisations, academies, inns of court, religious bodies and similar institutions. A parliament, with advisory functions, would be based upon them.

The differences to syndicalism are clear, but so are the similarities. The

monarchists were devoted to a national, the syndicalists to a class interest; the monarchist corporations were based on class collaboration, not on class war. The monarchists wanted a powerful ruler at the head of the state, responsible for his actions but not responsible to anyone; the syndicalists wanted the abolition of the state. Common, however, was the concept of an organic society based on a double system of professional and regional organisations: the corporations, provinces and municipalities on the one hand, the *syndicats*, federations and *Bourses* on the other. A few monarchist writers, emphasising the functional corporation as an alternative to parliamentary government, tried to use syndicalist ideas to forge a link between the two movements (e.g. Valois' book *La Monarchie et la classe ouvrière*, published in 1909). From the other side, the syndicalist theoretician Panunzio emphasised the regional basis of syndicalist organisations and stressed the civic character of the *Bourses*, actually comparing them to mediaeval communes.[1] Both systems, moreover, would have excluded the professional politician in favour of the expert, in one sense or another. Both, by the same token, were hostile to the role of intellectuals in politics. Thus Berth could write approvingly of the Maurrasian monarchy that it would be "a non-intellectual state...no longer the prey of intellectuals and their instrument of government, the modern democratic state".[2]

HE NATIONALISTS AND DIRECT ACTION. In his original enquiry Maurras had answered the question "What is to be done?" by "Establish the monarchy." It was not until the edition of 1903 was published that he answered the question "How is it to be done?" His answer was simple: "As all other governments since time immemorial—by force." The first task, however, was propaganda. For a whole generation Maurras spoke as if the king was going to enter Paris any day. The picture of the triumphal return of the Duc d'Orléans filled the need for a myth, playing a role similar to that attributed by Sorel to the general strike, serving as a rallying point and as a spur to action.

Four groups were hostile to nationalist aims. The 'four confederate states' —Jews, protestants, freemasons and citizens of foreign origin—had gained control of the country according to Maurras, just as capitalists and bourgeoisie had for the syndicalists. Both considered it hopeless to try and defeat them by constitutional means as they had the parliamentary machine firmly in their hands. The evidence seen by syndicalists has already been traced; the nationalists found theirs in the reaction to Boulanger's electoral campaign. In any case, it was the republican constitution itself they wished

[1] Panunzio in *Mouvement Socialiste*, July/August 1912.
[2] E. Berth, *Les méfaits des intellectuels*, 1914, p. 57.

to overthrow. With the syndicalists, they echoed Proudhon's *vaincre le pouvoir sans lui demander rien.* Until 1914 the *Action Française* refused to participate in electoral campaigns or press for reforms through parliament.

"The monarchists did not want to cap the Republic with the *fleur-de-lis* of the monarchy; they wanted to cut its throat."[1] Their revolutionary position was clear. So were their methods. Riot, conspiracy, *coup d'état*—all would serve. Blanqui was their unacknowledged master. As Brogan has pointed out: "The revolutionary doctrine of a conservative party backed by fighting squads of ardent young men was a French invention, destined to achieve great things outside the country of its birth."[2] The fighting squads were largely recruited from the students of Paris. How the *coup d'état* was to be achieved was left for events to determine. On joining the *Ligue de l'Action Française* members had to sign a declaration engaging them to employ all means to fight the Republic and serve the restoration. But it was not until 1934 that a serious attempt was made, not until 1940 that the republican regime collapsed, and then only through military defeat. Though many nationalists turned into collaborators, such was their hatred of the parliamentary system, it was the *Etat Français* that was established, headed by a marshal, not the monarchy. One may judge for oneself which part of such members' engagement reflected their true desires, which part was mere doctrine.

The importance of Maurras lay in the fact that he had a doctrine available when a doctrine was needed. Its content mattered little. The first words of the Enquiry were significant: "Those who are satisfied need not open his book; it is for the discontented." Many of the discontented took his word for the doctrine and followed the *Action Française* because it was the best outlet for their discontent. They had a wide range of dislikes: the Republic, parliament, democracy, freethinkers, Jews, pacifists, internationalists, the bourgeois parties, socialists—or just their own dull lives. It appealed to the activists whose social background made it unlikely that they would find an opportunity for action in the revolutionary left. "The strength of the *Action Française* was to be found in its opportunism rather than in its programme", wrote Dorothy Pickles.[3] The true character of the movement showed itself in the form taken by its revolutionary action: members restricted themselves to hostile demonstrations, more or less violent, directed much less against the Republic than against individuals they happened to find displeasing.

This can be illustrated by the two most notorious of the numerous

[1] D. Pickles, *The French Political Scene,* 1938, p. 63.
[2] D. W. Brogan, *The Development of Modern France,* 1940.
[3] D. Pickles, *The French Political Scene,* 1938, p. 63.

incidents mounted by the *Action Française* before 1914. In 1908 and 1909 a campaign was directed against Professor Thalamas of the Sorbonne, whose demythologisation of Joan of Arc was seen as an outrage against a national saint and against the honour of France. There were riots within the university and in the streets outside, violence to persons and battles with the police, the whole showing considerable evidence of conspiracy. Thalamas was prevented from lecturing and shortly afterwards the dean of the law faculty, Lyon-Caen, a Jew, was forced to resign. In 1911 royalist youth broke up the performance of a new play by Henry Bernstein, another Jew and a former deserter, at the *Comédie Française*. These attacks were doubtless seen as a romantic crusade. They were also an outlet for activist tempers. Such violence probably served its own purpose. As with other activist movements, the end was less important than the means. The means were direct action, fighting in the streets, assault, breaking up meetings, damage to property and the terrorisation of opponents. These practices bore some resemblance to the riots, violence and intimidation employed by the syndicalists to further their purpose. In both cases it reflected the same limited, immediate hostility to a specific group, whether Jews or blacklegs, and bore little relation either to the forms it was supposed to take (i.e. *coup d'état*, strike) or the ends it was supposed to serve (i.e. restoration of the monarchy, emancipation of the proletariat). Nationalist action was almost entirely an expression of this undirected spirit of revolt and was invariably violent. The direct action of the syndicalists, on the other hand, was more often directed to an end, was generally less personal and was frequently not violent at all.

Fascism: the alternative path

Fascism was the most acute expression of the revolt against Reason and democracy. By the time it took shape, well after the 1914–18 war, revolutionary syndicalism had virtually disappeared. Similarities nevertheless showed that both were part of the wider revolt of the time. Both were a reaction against liberal democracy, the parliamentary system, bourgeois society and the capitalist economy. The means they employed had something in common, as did the new social order they preached. More important, perhaps, were the direct personal links. Syndicalism was a movement of the working class, fascism, though the subject is still much debated, was essentially middle class. But there were those, particularly the theorists, intellectuals, *déracinés*, who turned from a movement that had failed to one that seemed to promise success, another outlet for revolutionary action, remaining true at least to their rejection of bourgeois democracy. A consideration of fascism makes clear this aspect of the romantic activist temper. While extreme right and extreme left were two ends of a spectrum, in the case of syndicalism and fascism it was a spectrum that met.

THE CASE OF MUSSOLINI. In the early days of the century the Italian socialists were split, like the French, into reformists and revolutionaries. Labriola's *Avanguardia Socialista* spoke for the latter. It stressed the proletarian basis of the socialist movement, advocated the general strike as a means of emancipation and criticised the *embourgeoisement* of the parliamentary socialists. Its policy closely resembled that of the *Mouvement Socialiste*, edited in Paris by Lagardelle. Mussolini was a contributor to the paper and, at the time, a revolutionary socialist with strong syndicalist sympathies. He attacked the reformists in parliament for their ministerial tendencies and their commitment to social legislation, both of which diverted socialists from their real aim, the abolition of the capitalist system. The bourgeois government had succeeded in domesticating them without offering any real concessions in return. Following the slippery road of opportunism, the party had become respectable and was no longer a threat to the system; the danger was that it would also undermine the revolutionary spirit of the workers. Mussolini preferred direct action, the general strike. During the great strike of 1904 he wrote: "I hope this will be the strategic prelude to the coming and supreme battle."[1]

In the decade before the war, then, Mussolini was an active revolutionary socialist, a successful agitator and an effective journalist. In

[1] *Cit.* G. Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 1938, p. 105.

1912, when the revolutionary wing gained control of the party, he became one of its leading spokesmen. The years that followed brought rapid changes of front. As editor of the *Lotta di Classe* he had preached antipatriotism and antimilitarism with a fervour equal to Hervé in France, making his own the latter's dictum that the national flag was a rag to be planted on a dunghill. In 1914, like Hervé and the French syndicalists, he was converted to patriotism and—expelled from the socialist party—urged Italy's entry into the war. In 1919 he organised his *fascio de combattimento*, battle groups, with a very heterogeneous programme, more or less democratic: electoral reform, anti-clerical legislation and workers' control of industry. Finding the parliamentary approach a failure—not a single fascist was elected—he moved back towards the revolutionary left. In 1920 he supported the occupation of factories in northern Italy by strikers and the policy of direct action then propagated by the communists. The failure of this revolt, and a realisation that support for his fascist bands was coming largely from the middle class, caused him to veer sharply to the right again. In 1921 the fascists fought the election as members of the anti-socialist constitutional bloc. The March on Rome came in 1922. Mussolini headed a government of fascists, nationalists and conservatives; made his peace with the monarchy and the Church; declared himself in favour of economic liberalism and parliamentary government. A final switch came in 1925 when he felt strong enough to dissolve all parties except his own: state control of industry and the abolition of parliamentary government followed.

How can one explain such instability? It has been said that fascism was no more than Mussolini's own biography. He said himself: "Having created the fascist party, I have always dominated it."[1] Was Mussolini simply an adventurer, a twentieth century *condottiere* consumed by the lust for power and willing to follow whatever course served that overriding purpose? The worker's inability to maintain control of the factories showed him in 1920 that he could not step to power on their shoulders. He turned, therefore, to exploit the very bourgeoisie in whom his own earlier, syndicalist tactics had aroused such fear of revolution that they were now ready to welcome a strong man and a firm hand in the defence of property and order. He dropped syndicalist, and emphasised nationalist, ideas in recognition of the changing clientèle for his bands: as the workers and ex-servicemen drifted towards communism, they were replaced by middle-class youths and student admirers of the adventurer-poet Gabriele d'Annunzio.

But this was not the whole explanation. The constant was Mussolini's

[1] B. Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 1936, p. 296.

activist temper, a temper which declared that the movement was all, the end nothing. He cared more for passionate political combat than for the ultimate social object of such combat. Much of the same was true of his earlier followers. The fascist movement was *azione e sentimente*; it found joy in action for action's sake, in action without preconceived ideas or much racking of brains, determined by the opportunities of the moment and shaped by the ever changing experience of life. The activist temper sought its outlets where it could and it was the changing opportunities, outside its own control, which explained the shifts of direction. The opportunities open to Mussolini were, in turn, syndicalist agitation, war, and the fighting bands of anti-socialist youth. Finally, when he had attained power and there was no one left to fight at home, he turned outwards to military expansion, which he pursued in a spirit no less bellicose than that of his revolutionary youth. The first step was also taken by the militant syndicalists of France, the second by many of the theoreticians who had supported the movement.

PRAGMATISM, INTUITION, ACTION AND MYTH. There was nevertheless a rationale for this sort of activism. In his preface to Rocco's *Political Doctrine of Fascism* Mussolini claimed that "fascism has a doctrine or, if you will, a particular philosophy with regard to all questions which beset the human mind today". This book—the first official statement of such a philosophy—was not published until after the fascist conquest of power, however, and by then the fascist party had become identified with the state. There was thus considerable difference between the philosophy elaborated by Rocco and Gentile, with its Hegelian trappings, its emphasis on the state, order and tradition, and the unwritten philosophy of Mussolini's days as an outsider, which lacked both the metaphysical and the *étatiste* paraphernalia. The ideology of fascism was in some ways a fusion of syndicalist and nationalist ideas, but the former gradually receded into the background and the latter came to dominate. The present concern is with the earlier period.

Mussolini made a remark that has often been quoted: "The sanctity of an 'ism' is not in the 'ism'; it has no sanctity beyond its power to do, to work, to succeed in practice. It may have succeeded yesterday and fail tomorrow, failed yesterday and succeed tomorrow", and he added: "The machine must first of all run."[1] The machine was the movement. He made no secret of his anti-intellectual bias, his dislike of abstract thought and his practical attitude to all questions. He condemned marxism on the same grounds as the syndicalists. "Fascism is based on reality, bolshevism

[1] B. Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 1936, p. xiv.

on theory. We want to be definite and real, we want to come out of the clouds of discussion and theory."[1] This was the pragmatic approach to politics. Mussolini was equally attached to the intuitive approach. "Before all I trust my insight. What I call my insight—it is indefinable."[2] The result was a striking combination of realism and mysticism. Both were characteristic of the revolt against Reason.

Another constant in Mussolini's philosophy was the demand for action for its own sake, as a value in itself, typical of the romantic movement. "Fascism desires man to be active and engaged in action with all his energies. It wants him to be virilely conscious of existing difficulties and ready to meet them. It considers life a struggle, thinking that it is man's task to conquer for himself that which is really worthy of him...So for the individual, so for the nation, so for humanity." And again: "Above all fascism believes neither in the possibility nor in the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of pacifism, born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone can bring up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the people who have the courage to meet it."[3] Earlier, Mussolini would have substituted class for nation and class struggle for war, but there was no doubt that this Nietzschean hymn also represented, perhaps more truly indeed, his attitude in the years before success.

As Lovejoy said, the peculiarity of anti-intellectualism is that one can never see where it will lead. It was impossible to understand Mussolini without realising that the core of his philosophy, in socialist as well as fascist days, was his belief in the need for violence as an instrument of social change. He has been described as a voluptuary of activism whose entire life was a hymn to the nobility of violence.[4] In syndicalist days he declared that the final triumph of the workers would involve 'a bloody duel—an insurrectional tempest'.[5] But he was really more of a *blanquiste* then, believing in propaganda by the deed, minority leadership, insurrection, *coup d'état* (even the general strike was seen in political terms) and transitional dictatorship. This explains why he was really more interested in the organisation of revolutionary élites than in trade union organisation as such. To an extent, of course, the same was true of the militant syndicalists. Some were followers of Blanqui, or anarchists, who had come to the labour movement because they saw there the best opportunity for revolutionary action. They too believed in minority leadership; they too wanted

[1] *Cit.* F. W. Coker, *Recent Political Thought*, 1935, p. 473.
[2] *Cit.* E. Ludwig, *Talks with Mussolini*, 1932, p. 109.
[3] Cf. 'Political and Social Doctrines of Fascism' in *Enciclopedia Italiana.*
[4] G. Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 1938, p. 104.
[5] *Cit.* G. Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 1938.

to keep the unions as a fighting force. In time, however, as the labour movement grew stronger and more effective, they adapted their philosophy to possibilities of reform; Mussolini, like Sorel, sought the revolutionary spirit elsewhere.

There are other similarities, though with Sorel rather than the syndicalist workers. Fascism was action and sentiment. "Were it otherwise," wrote Rocco, "it could not keep up the immense driving force, that renovating power which it now possesses, and would merely be the solitary meditation of a chosen few."[1] For Sorel it was the action and sentiment (*élan*) of the workers, not any theory they held, that would save the world from moral degradation. Mussolini also believed that it was faith that moved mountains, not reason. He endorsed Sorel's doctrine of the myth. Though his myth was not the general strike—by the time he had digested Sorel it was no longer opportune—his exposition was that of the master: "We have created our myth. The myth is a faith, a passion. It is not necessary that it shall be a reality. It is a reality by the fact that it is a goal, a faith, that it is courage. Our myth is the nation, our myth is the grandeur of the nation. And to this myth we subordinate all the rest."[2]

THE CORPORATE STATE. In 1926 the fascist Labour Charter set up a system of parallel *syndicats* and national federations for workers and employers whose purpose was to establish collective agreements, settle disputes and ensure collaboration between capital and labour (though without derogating from the managerial responsibility of the employer). In 1928 the composition of the Chamber of Deputies was altered and the electors were presented with a single slate of candidates chosen—ostensibly at least—by an elaborate procedure involving a large number of organisations including local authorities, economic organisations and cultural institutions. In 1934 employers and workers were brought together in national corporations, co-ordinated by a National Council of Corporations. Although they were supposed to determine wages and prices, production standards, plant management and labour relations, they were in practice little more than a façade for control by the Ministry of Corporations. It was not until 1939, finally, that the corporate state itself was created. The Chamber of Deputies was replaced by a Chamber of *Fasces* and Corporations. There were no elections: councillors were selected from the Fascist Grand Council and the National Council of Corporations. The Senate remained unchanged, its composition according well with fascist ideas. Senators were appointed from specified groups such as dignitaries

[1] A. Rocco, *The Political Doctrine of Fascism*, 1926, p. 10.
[2] *Cit.* H. Finer, *Mussolini's Italy*, 1935, p. 218.

of the Church, ambassadors, judges and senior civil servants, distinguished scientists and academicians. Neither assembly had any power. The party's Grand Council was recognised as the highest organ of government and legislation.

The attempt was thus made to build some semblance of an organic, or corporate, structure into an authoritarian system. It clearly bore little resemblance to the sort of society the syndicalists had envisaged. The only common element was the notion that society should be organised on a functional basis. Radically opposed was the enforced collaboration of capital and labour as well as the supremacy of the state. Significant, however, was the fact that it was an attempt to find an institutional alternative to the hated system of parliamentary democracy with its abstract electors, its conflicting parties, its power in the hands of professional politicians. That power was concentrated instead in the hands of a dictator was another matter. Significant too was that the fascist state did not pursue bourgeois-material values. It was true that capitalists did well, but the pursuit of national glory did even better. War was the result. The syndicalist utopia was never tried. The fascist alternative, when achieved, proved to have only a shadowy resemblance to the original ideals of the right-wing opponents of democracy.

INTELLECTUALS AT THE FORK WITHOUT SIGNPOSTS. Mussolini's own discontent he himself also ascribed to Nietzsche: "the *tedium vitae* of our life, of life as it goes on in contemporary civilized societies where irremediable mediocrity triumphs".[1] It was bourgeois life he disliked. In Italy, as in France, the revolt against bourgeois values was a characteristic of the nationalist right as of the syndicalist left. The causes were different, so were the ostensible goals, but the two seemingly opposite poles were linked by their hostility to the centre, clarified in an attack on the democratic order. They shared a common temper in the cult of action. The intellectuals in both camps soon lost themselves in an orgy of anti-bourgeois heroics which quite overshadowed the original differences between them. As the effective centre of action shifted to the right, syndicalist intellectuals, disappointed as the syndicalist revolution did not materialise, drifted steadily and without much thought to the camp of reaction, speaking of revolution all the while. Instability was characteristic of the revolt against Reason and democracy. On the whole, Lovejoy was right when he claimed that experience semed to show that the tendency of anti-intellectual movements was to issue in traditionalism. To that extent, Ramsay MacDonald was justified when he declared that "the answer to

[1] *Cit.* G. Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 1938, p. 107.

syndicalism is Fascismo".[1] It must be remembered, however, that this applied to the syndicalist theoreticians who were not tied to reality by the pressure of material interests as were the syndicalist workers.

The case of Georges Sorel will be discussed later but is also relevant here. As a theoretician of syndicalism he was probably better known in Italy, where the *Reflections on Violence* were first published, than in France itself. After 1908 he gradually disassociated himself from the syndicalists and turned his interest to the *Action Française*. Mussolini, as editor of the *Lotta di Classe*, bitterly attacked this somersault in 1911: "The parabola of Georges Sorel is highly significant. The man has passed, almost with impunity, from the theory of syndicalism to that of the *camelots du roi*."[2] The association of Sorel, and the even closer association of his disciple Edouard Berth, with the royalists was indeed significant, for it symbolised a similar and wider movement that was taking place in Italy, where other syndicalist theoreticians were flirting with the nationalism of Corradini. Mussolini might well castigate the intellectual politicians of syndicalism, oscillating between Sorel and Corradini, but in 1914 he followed the same parabola. One could thus say that in Sorel's own flirtation lay the seeds of the marriage between revolutionary syndicalism and revolutionary nationalism, the child of which, Italian fascism, was born in 1925. It is also worth noting that in 1912 Sorel himself professed to admire Mussolini as a *condottiere* who would redress the feebleness of Italian governments. That did not last, however, and in 1919 it was Lenin he welcomed as yet another possible force of regeneration.

Georges Valois was another link. Son of the working class, at eighteen an anarcho-syndicalist, pupil of the organiser of the *Bourses du Travail*, Pelloutier, then briefly a disciple of Sorel, he crossed in 1906 to the *Action Française*. For a while there was a meeting. Followers of Maurras and Sorel joined to form the *Cercle Proudhon* and published their own review. After the war he again tried to influence the *Action Française* in a syndicalist direction, conducting there an anti-bourgeois campaign greatly to the dislike of Maurras—a campaign which he himself called the fascism of the moment. Frustrated, he left the monarchists and organised his own *Faisceau* in 1925, the first fascist group in France. Then he swung back from right to left, rallying to the Republic in the process and forming in 1927 the *Parti républicain syndicaliste*. He thus moved in the opposite direction from Mussolini and, as he said afterwards, for a while their paths appeared to cross.[3]

[1] R. MacDonald, *Syndicalism*, 1912.
[2] *Cit.* G. Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 1938, p. 235.
[3] G. Valois, *Technique de la révolution syndicale*, 1935, pp. 23–110.

The career of Gustave Hervé showed even greater instability. In his youth he had been a *boulangiste* and a follower of Déroulède. Then, as a member of the socialist party, editor of the *Piou Piou de la Yonne* and *Guerre Sociale*, he became the most virulent of the antimilitarists and anti-patriots in France, the scandal of his party and the object of numerous prosecutions by the state. He lost his job as a history teacher and was imprisoned several times. With the outbreak of war, he became an ardent patriot: *Guerre Sociale*, which had been favourable to syndicalism after its fashion, turned into *La Victoire* and supported the Clemenceau government. After the war he left the socialist party, trying in 1919 to find a link between left and right in his own *Parti socialiste national*. By 1925, in his *Lettre aux ouvriers*, he was preaching the authoritarian Republic, a mixture of *boulangisme*, collaboration of the classes and the corporate state. Ten years later came his pamphlet with the prophetic title *C'est Pétain qu'il nous faut*. In 1936 he was converted to the Roman Catholic church.

Finally, and perhaps most interesting, there was the case of the syndicalist theoretician, Hubert Lagardelle (1875–1958). As editor of the intellectual review *Mouvement Socialiste* he brought together labour militants, Sorel and his disciples, and other socialists. While Sorel was primarily interested in the moral problems of democracy, Lagardelle, like Valois, was more concerned with the institutional. He described syndicalism as a socialism of institutions. His move to the right was less a reflection of Sorel's search for moral heroism or Mussolini's search for action than a search for new, organic institutions to replace democracy. He came to realise that syndicalism could only be effective if it passed beyond the boundaries of the labour movement: the industrial workers, after all, were a minority in France while the crisis of democracy affected the whole nation.[1] After the war Lagardelle spent some time in Italy, finding his organic order in the authoritarian corporate state which, he claimed, he had helped Mussolini to create. These links led the French government to appoint him a councellor at their Rome embassy from 1933–40. Finally he moved the whole circle, coming in one sense at least back to his point of departure: having supported the *C.G.T.*'s unsuccessful campaign against the parliamentary Republic in his youth, he associated himself with Pétain's more successful attack in his old age. At the age of sixty-seven he became Vichy Secretary of State for Labour in 1942 and 1943 and it was during his period of office that the *Charte du Travail* was introduced. In practice inoperative, though intended as one of the constitutional laws of the new French State, the charter was actually a synthesis of fascist corporatism and the nazi Labour Front, its slogan 'Solidarity, Duty,

[1] Lagardelle, preface to J. Gaumont, *L'Etat contre la nation*, 1911.

Sacrifice'. Lagardelle preferred to see it as the foundations of an organised society, based on the institutions of natural groups, part of an organic state that was replacing the individualistic structure of the democratic Republic. He proclaimed it a truly revolutionary step in which he had rediscovered a dream linking his whole career.[1] Such confusion was inherent in the dream. The awakening came when, in 1946, he was sentenced to life imprisonment as one of those responsible for the deportation of French workers to Germany.

[1] H. Lagardelle, pamphlet, *La Charte du Travail*, a speech made on 23 September 1942.

Sorel: a moralist in search of action

At the age of forty-five Georges Sorel (1847–1922) resigned from the civil service—he was a member of the elite corps of civil engineers—to devote the rest of his life to study. He spent much of it in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, reading voraciously, almost indiscriminately, whatever came his way, filling page after page with angry exclamations as he read. These exclamations he rushed into print in a host of small journals, occasionally re-editing those that pleased him most in book form. As he said, "I am a self-taught man exhibiting to others the notes which have served for my own instruction."[1] The results were encyclopedic: interpretations of the bible, the metaphysics of Aristotle, ancient and modern science, the history of technology, the origins of mathematics, Renan, Vico, Proudhon and Bergson—all were considered. Syndicalism formed but a small part but the notoriety of the *Reflections on Violence* stamped him in the public mind as its philosopher. In fact, he was a philosopher who wrote about syndicalism. An eternal student, he wrote to Croce: "I have never asked myself what would be the synthesis of my various writings; I wrote from day to day, according to the needs of the moment."[2] He produced no system nor, indeed, was he consistent. His was an endless search. "The wandering Jew may be taken as a symbol of the highest aspiration of mankind, condemned as it is never to know rest."[3] It is hard to find the pattern even in a single work. Sorel was a conversationalist rather than a writer, stringing together unexplored allusions and half-developed ideas, omitting from the chain of argument what failed to interest him, little concerned with the logical organisation of his material. There was a Bergsonian justification for this approach—"We must beware of too much strictness in our language because it would be at odds with the fluid character of reality"[4]—ingenious but not always helpful.

A certain unity can nevertheless be found in his thought, common themes that ran through his articles and books. Much has been written about Sorel and this is not the place for another assessment. It will simply be shown that a certain approach, an unchanging hope, lay behind all his changes of political front. This temper dominated theory. Sorel, the wandering Jew, sought a movement as much as a philosophy.

[1] G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1916, p. 3.
[2] *Cit.* V. Sartre, *Georges Sorel*, 1937, p. 17.
[3] G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1916, p. 5.
[4] G. Sorel, *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, 1919, p. 58.

THE UNCHANGED TEMPER. Sorel was first and last what the French call a *moraliste*. As deeply concerned as Nietzsche with the decadence of the society in which he lived, his life's work was an unbroken search for the means of regeneration. He was a pragmatist, seeking not truth for its own sake but a moral principle that would work, interested in parties and programmes not for their own sake but as the troops and tactics in a moral cause. *Morale d'abord*—but what sort of morality did Sorel hope to see? The answer lay in a single word, heroism. All Sorel's thought turned on the question of how to restore the heroic virtues of older days.

A recent editor of the *Reflections* put it thus: underlying all is a common theme, that the highest good is the heroic, aggressive, action performed with a sense of impersonal consecration to the ends of a group bound together in fervent solidarity and impelled by a passionate confidence in its ultimate triumph in some cataclysmic encounter.[1] One can point, as in Nietzsche, to passages glorifying war, discipline, dedication and sacrifice. It was Proudhon who declared "La France a perdu ses moeurs", the Proudhon *belliciste* of *La Guerre et la Paix*, who was his favourite model. Sometimes he wrote of the possibilities of a European war as an antidote to the demoralising social harmony favoured by the bourgeoisie,[2] but more often it was the class war he sang—a means by which the nations, at present stupified by humanitarianism, could recover their former energy.[3] Heroism and the sense of the sublime were essentially military virtues. The proletarian acts of violence, incidents in the class struggle, he saw as 'purely and simply acts of war', as such 'carried out without hatred, without spirit of revenge'.[4] By their unity, their disciplined resolution, their personal courage in the pursuit of an impersonal end, the workers showed a high level of morality. What mattered for Sorel was not the material gains the workers might reap from the class war, whether in the short term (e.g. wage increases) or in the long (i.e. expropriation of the capitalists), but the immediate, social value of war as such. It was not unfair to say that it was pure action, action for its own sake, that concerned him; in such action alone was true nobility to be found; through it alone could the world be saved.

His was the activist temper. In 1908 he wrote: "I do not hesitate to declare that socialism can no longer exist without an apologia for violence."[5] But it was Sorel, rather than socialism, who felt the need for this rationalisation. His activism, of course, was purely intellectual, for his own life was one of quiet routine, spent among books and in conversation. He wore

[1] E. A. Shils (ed.), *Reflections on Violence*, 1950, p. 18.
[2] G. Sorel, *Insegnamenti sociali della economia contemporanea*, 1906.
[3] G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1916, p. 90.
[4] G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1916, p. 21.
[5] G. Sorel in *Le Matin*, 18 May 1908.

the rosette of the *Légion d'Honneur* with pride and did nothing to disgrace it; no life could have been more respectably bourgeois than that of the apostle of violence. The thrill could nevertheless be experienced at second hand. One critic spoke aptly of his nostalgia for heroism. He identified with it when he thought he had found it. He did, however, play his part in the battle with the pen. Thus Wyndham Lewis' accusation: "Of all the apostles of dangerous living, pure action, heroism, blood and iron, Sorel was the worst—the most shrewd and the most dangerous."[1] Like Nietzsche, he really desired a sublimated form of war, but even that left him without a compass at the crossroads. Any cause interested him that looked as if it might serve his purpose. And he was likely to drop it on finding that it could not live up to his high expectations. It has been said that he valued means more highly than ends but, in fact, the means were the end: it mattered less who was heroic and to what end that someone should be heroic to some end. Such a morality was empty of content and could be applied to many social movements. He admitted this frankly: "It is hardly worth while to know what is the best morality but only to determine if there is a mechanism in existence capable of guaranteeing the development of morality."[2]

Another aspect of Sorel's character must, however, be taken into account. His make up had a very strong puritan strand. With Proudhon, again, he declared that the world would only become better as it became more chaste. Chastity, loyalty, duty, discipline, family life, pride in work—these were the virtues he cultivated and the virtues he praised. Another interpretation of Sorel's instabilty could be based on this side of his character. He has been seen as an old-fashioned conservative, in the tradition of Renan, Le Play and Taine, whose world had vanished; he was left seeking for something to fill the gap. More realistic than the traditionalists, influenced by Marx, he saw that history could not be turned back. The restoration of an older bourgeois morality was impossible; the bourgeoisie, indeed, had become the very symbol of present degeneration. Another and more vigorous class, one with the forces of history on its side, might, however, achieve the same end by overthrowing the existing society. He could thus be called a revolutionary conservative.[3] It was something of a paradox that Sorel should have seen the proletariat as the class capable of saving the best of the bourgeois tradition and the only truly conservative force in society; he had an equally paradoxical forerunner in Proudhon.

[1] Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, 1950, p. 33.
[2] G. Sorel, *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, 1919, p. 127.
[3] Cf. M. Freund, *Georges Sorel, der revolutionäre Konservatismus*, 1932.

There was, of course, on the level of theory at least, a link between these two aspects of his character. The key lay in Sorel's pessimistic view of the nature of man and society. A high level of morality could only be maintained by great effort. Times of peace were times of decadence because they did not inspire such efforts. Without the stimulus of war, man sank into complacency and self-interest, society tended to disintegrate. Sorel compared the morality of militant Sparta with the immorality of civilized Athens. He preached war as the creator of heroes and of puritans also.

This moralism explained the greater part of his sympathies and his antipathies. While his sympathies changed, his antipathies remained constant. His enemy was the bourgeoisie, its values and its institutions. He saw bourgeois society through Nietzschean eyes as the triumph of the slaves. R. H. Soltau summed up his accusations for him. "You dare not take any risks for your children and therefore bring them up as molly-coddles with a safe government post and a pension, or with a dowry as an insurance against possible disaster. You dare not take any risks for your country: economically you are incapable of far-seeing schemes which involve the barest possibility of financial loss; politically you dare not consider any change that might disturb the fixed balance of political forces in the country; militarily you try to obtain security by colossal expensive armaments which as likely as not will lead to another war, or by preaching a pacifism which is only another form of cowardice or a shrinking from reality: you sometimes try and combine both methods, and proclaim with equal ardour the need for national defence and the terror of war. You are afraid for your skins, afraid for your class, afraid for what you call European civilization."[1] Fear had led the bourgeoisie to the unheroic doctrine of class solidarity and social peace; fear had led it to forsake action for talk. Democracy embodied both vices. What linked the extremes of right and left was their common attack on bourgeoisie, Reason and democracy. Sorel's significance for modern political thought was that he stood at its most important crossroads. His *Plaidoyer pour Lénine* ended with these words: "I am only an old man whose life is at the mercy of trifling accidents; but may I, before descending into the tomb, see the humiliation of the arrogant bourgeois democracies, today shamelessly triumphant." This, his life-long ambition, led him to explore many paths.

THE CHANGING POLITICS. Sorel's earliest writings were in the conservative tradition; some could have come from the pen of Burke. In his first book he studies the Scriptures from a pragmatic-traditionalist point of

[1] R. H. Soltau, *French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 1931, p. 454.

view, as powerful literature, a moralising and conserving force in society that might prevent the spread of utilitarian and revolutionary ideas which threatened old values, inspiring men at the same time with a sense of the heroic and the sublime. In the same year, 1889, came his *Trial of Socrates*, a traditionalist attack on the intellectual approach to politics with a Nietzschean flavour, though he had then not yet read Nietzsche. Socrates, the first rationalist, had committed the sin to which all rationalists in politics aspire, breaking the chain that bound man to society in the name of an abstract idea. Captivated by the theory of the Absolute, refusing to acknowledge the value of historical laws, he was a revolutionary of the worst sort. The book was really a trial of the intellectuals in contemporary government. The theme was to appear in the *Reflections*.

Sorel's retirement in 1892 coincided with the discovery of Karl Marx, previously little read in France, by a group of younger intellectuals. Marxism appealed to him immediately. This may have been because he was by training and outlook a technician and liked Marx's emphasis on the role of technique (i.e. the methods of production) in determining the economic system and, with it, the superstructure of ideas. Other factors were a growing dislike of the bourgeoisie, so colourfully attacked by Marx, and a new vision of working-class morality brought to him by his wife, herself of working-class stock. Disappointed in the former, he found in Marx reasons to pin his hopes on the latter. For a few years he contributed regularly to marxist reviews. He managed to find the link between morals and classes, morality and class war. Edward Shils explained: "He regarded political separatism as the morally most appropriate form of social and political organisation. Only when one group drew sharply defined boundary lines around itself could it lead a moral life. Only when it regarded itself as bound by no moral obligation to other sections of the population could it perform its moral duty. For moral duty entails hostility to those outside one's own group. The very content of moral action lay for him in the aggressive affirmation of the group's integrity and solidarity against an outside group."[1] To the slave morality of the bourgeoisie, Sorel opposed the master morality of the emergent proletariat. He followed Marx and Nietzsche simultaneously, discovering, more by instinct than reflection, a way of reconciling the two. Nietzsche saw the slaves' revolt in socialism. Sorel answered by distinguishing between the eternal rebellion of the envious masses and socialism proper—the battle waged by a courageous, dedicated elite of skilled producers, capable of creating a new civilization to replace the one they wished to destroy. This, he claimed, was Marx's distinction between proletariat and *Lumpenproletariat*. He

[1] E. A. Shils (ed.), *Reflections on Violence*, 1950, p. 17.

emphasised that Marx had not only preached the class war but also the historic mission of the proletariat, essentially moral.[1]

Temperamentally unsuited to the rigidities of Marxist doctrine as interpreted in France by Guesde and his followers, he soon revolted against the new clericalism of the marxist doctors. The death of his wife in 1897 left an emptiness in his life and he turned, as he said, to a deeper study of the working class in order to create a monument worthy of her memory. Inspired also by Pelloutier, he laid even more emphasis on the autonomy of the working class. In two articles published the following year and in an introduction of Pelloutier's history of the *Bourses du Travail* (1902) he endorsed the *syndicat* as basis for the reconstruction of society and declared with Proudhon that the proletariat must discover its own capacity: education through action was the key to the progress of socialism.[2] His position, however, was broadly reformist; he defined socialism as a labour movement within democracy.[3] He contributed, in his own style, to the revisionist movement represented in Germany by Bernstein and by Croce in Italy. He was a Dreyfusard and supported Millerand's entry into the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet, a step he called the passage from the sectarian spirit to the political.[4] The disillusion was swift. The Dreyfusards, Jaurès included, turned out no better than their opponents, intolerant, petty and dishonest once in power.

Disgust with the present led him to reject parliament, democracy and socialism even more decisively than his earlier historical studies. His loyalty to the working class remained. This was the moment for revolutionary syndicalism. He urged the labour movement to break completely with bourgeois democracy, isolating itself to prevent the corruption from spreading. A sharpening of the class war was the best barrier. The concept of proletarian violence—revolutionary direct action—was increasingly emphasised. The *Reflections on Violence*, written between 1906 and 1908, concentrate his ideas at this stage. The dominant theme remained the search for heroism and a new morality. For a moment his hopes were pinned entirely on the proletariat, whom he saluted as the Greeks saluted the Spartan heroes who defended the Thermopyles and helped to preserve the ancient world. Hardly had the *Reflections* been published, however, than his enthusiasm began to wane. He discovered that the militant syndicalists were not heroic lovers of battle but imbued with the same utilitarian spirit as the bourgeoisie; the class struggle was about material things.

[1] *Cit.* Dolléans, 'Le visage de Georges Sorel' in *Revue d'Histoire Economique et Sociale*, vol. 26, No. 2, p. 102.
[2] G. Sorel, preface to F. L. E. Pelloutier, *Histoire des Bourses de Travail*, 1902.
[3] G. Sorel, *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, 1919, p. 179.
[4] G. Sorel, preface to N. Colajanni, *Il socialismo*, 1898.

Worse, the unions were turning reformist, seeking immediate concessions, often through parliament; the revolutionary general strike was fading into the background.

In 1908 Lagardelle tried to form a syndicalist group within the socialist party. The first number of a new paper, *Action Directe*, carried a statement trying to reconcile the two. The role of the party in the grand strategy of the labour movement remained limited: the emancipation of the proletariat could only be achieved by the direct action of the proletariat itself. The party's task was to extend political liberties, thus assuring a democratic environment more favourable to the autonomous development of the labour movement.[1] It allowed the workers to join with other classes in parliamentary politics for this purpose without thereby compromising the class character of their own unions. As a result Sorel broke not only with Lagardelle but with his *Mouvement Socialiste*. He wrote to Delesalle that he was retiring into his hole so as not to compromise himself, though he retained his faith in the working class.[2] By his action he broke up the small group of syndicalist theoreticians who had gathered in the review's office. As they constituted his only real link with the syndicalist movement, he could thereafter be little more than a well-wishing observer. Even that did not last long. The drift towards reformism was as strong in the *C.G.T.* as in the editorial offices of the *Mouvement Socialiste*. By 1907, before the *Reflections* had even been published in their final shape, syndicalism had already passed its heroic age. "The bourgeoisie may find resources to defend itself for a long time to come", he noted.[3] In 1910 he lost patience. As syndicalism had failed to follow the path he had mapped out for it, he would write no more on the subject but devote himself to other matters. "I am too old to wait for distant hopes to come true, so I have decided to use the few years I have left to study more closely other questions in which French youth takes a lively interest today."[4] It was typical of Sorel that this statement, published in Italian, should have been omitted in the French edition which appeared after his reconversion to syndicalism.

Sorel's remark was a little disingenuous. The problems which interested French youth were those of nationalism. Nationalist youth was also anti-bourgeois. It was not merely enthusiastic for action but appeared idealistic also—student violence was not directed to sordid economic gain but pursued for its own sake. The nationalist movement had as its explicit

[1] *Action Directe*, 30 September 1908.
[2] G. Sorel, *Lettres à Paul Delesalle*, 1947, letter of 2 November 1908, p. 108.
[3] G. Sorel in *Mouvement Socialiste*, July 1907, p. 36.
[4] G. Sorel, *Confessioni*, 1910, introduction.

aim the moral regeneration of France, an aim which Sorel had merely been able to impute (and impute wrongly) to the syndicalists. Here were new tactics to combat the decadence of bourgeois society, a new army to lead against the Republic. The fact that Sorel's admirers were already almost entirely drawn from the right no doubt also influenced him. Having contributed an article to a royalist review, he wrote to Croce: "These youngsters are very intelligent; since they cite my books all the time, I could not well refuse them a collaboration of this sort." Perhaps he thought he had more chance of influencing them than the workers; perhaps he was happy to find an attentive audience; above all, there was a new outlet for his energies.

In 1910 plans were drawn up for a new review, *La Cité Française*, to be edited by Sorel, his *alter ego* Berth, the royalist Variot, for a time his Boswell, and Valois, an earlier disciple who had realised some years before that his master had misinterpreted the syndicalist movement and who had thereupon joined the *Action Française*. It was never published as the editors could not agree on its policy. In a prospectus they had sent out, however, they spoke of a need to re-awaken the classes to the self-awareness that democracy had stifled—a need to inspire them with a sense of their own peculiar virtues, without which none could accomplish its own historic mission. By its lack of discrimination between the classes, this statement made clear what was already implied in Sorel's earlier work: the virtues he sought were not specific to one class but could be found in several at the same time. Certain bourgeois writers soon discovered this fact. In the work of their *frère-ennemi* they found argument for the bourgeois counter-revolution. In his *Eloge du bourgeois français* Johannet wrote that Sorel was the best introduction to the bourgeois idea. Of Bourget, whose play *La Barricade*, which Pirou described as the transposition of Sorelian ideas for the edification of the middle class,[1] Sorel himself said: "I would be happy if his great talent determines the bourgeoisie to defend itself, to abandon its inglorious resignation in the face of a courageous enemy."[2] Small wonder that Wyndham Lewis should exclaim: "Sorel's masterpiece of incitement to violence was directed to providing the maximum of class hatred. It was a matter of complete indifference to him which class got charged with hatred first. The bourgeoisie was all right, provided it loathed the proletariat so much that it increased the natural dislike of the poor class for the rich class. There was a beautiful detachment about Sorel."[3]

Sorel then joined with Variot to found another review, *l'Indépendence*.

[1] G. Pirou, *Georges Sorel*, 1924, p. 40.
[2] *Cit.* G. Pirou, *Georges Sorel*, 1924.
[3] Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, 1950, p. 34.

Its committee listed many distinguished names of the right, including Barrès and Bourget. The tone was nationalist, traditionalist, authoritarian and anti-semitic. A possible explanation of his collaboration was the breach that had occurred between Sorel and Péguy, at the office of whose *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* he had held court for more than a decade; at the new editorial office he tried for a moment to fool his hunger. He resigned brusquely in 1914, however, when he saw that he could no more direct the policy of the nationalists than that of the syndicalists. His relations with the *Action Française* during this period were more distant. He remained hostile to Maurras, whom he paradoxically accused of being too much of a democrat, by which he meant too much of a rationalist—and the hostility was mutual. Berth, always a step ahead of his master, was converted to the monarchy; in *Les méfaits des intellectuels* he saluted both as the two masters of French regeneration. In 1911 the *Cercle Proudhon* was founded under their dual protection but was never much more than a small group of monarchists who admired Sorel. "Despite the efforts of Berth and Valois, monarcho-syndicalism never melled. It remained the brainchild of a coterie, still-born."[1]

Sorel was now disillusioned with nationalist youth. In 1914, glossing over his temporary infidelity, he dedicated to his wife and to Delesalle of the *C.G.T.* a collection of essays, the *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*—"this book written by an old man who insists, as did Proudhon, on remaining a disinterested servant of the working class". But he expected little of it. When the war, which he had once hoped would rouse Europe from her lethargy, actually came, he was too sunk in pessimism to see any good in it. It was the sordid conflict of plutocracies; the democratic war aims of the Allies just another step in the wrong direction.

After the war two heroic figures appeared on the European scene. One was Mussolini. Sorel had told Variot as far back as 1912 that he would one day see Mussolini, no ordinary socialist but a *condottiere* of the fifteenth century, salute the flag of Italy at the head of a consecrated army.[2] This time Sorel appeared to have picked a winner; fascism was a successful movement. Croce, for one, thought that he approved it; in answer to an enquiry, he wrote: "Being the impressionable man he was, he was in principle favourable to Mussolini; he hated professional politicos, and saw mistakenly in Mussolini a spontaneous and beneficial force."[3] But Sorel was a shrewd enough observer of Italian affairs to realise his own mistake. In one of his last letters to Delesalle he confessed to having suggested that the Italian

[1] J. H. Meisel, *The Genesis of Georges Sorel*, 1951, p. 241.
[2] *Cit.* G. Pirou, *Georges Sorel*, 1924, pp. 55.
[3] *Cit.* J. H. Meisel, *The Genesis of Georges Sorel*, 1951, p. 225.

socialists should come to an agreement with the government in order to defend the institutions of the labour movement against fascism.[1] That concession to democracy must have cost him dear; it showed it was the workers to whom his loyalty returned in the end.

The second heroic figure was Lenin. It was the Russian revolution of 1917 that aroused Sorel from his pessimism. In 1919 he added a post-script—*Pour Lénine*—to his *Reflections*. He was impressed by the *élan* of the revolutionaries. The bolshevists had overthrown bourgeois civilization in its entirety, destroyed the democratic state, ousted politicians and intellectuals. They had created a spontaneous new order based on producers' soviets. Sorel hailed Moscow as the Rome of the proletariat. "Lenin may with good right be proud of what his comrades have done; the Russian workers have to their eternal glory begun to realise what was hitherto only an abstract idea." While Mussolini paid him unsolicited tribute, Lenin, whom Sorel admired to the last, repudiated the philosopher who had taken up his cause. He dismissed Sorel in one sentence: "There are people who can give thought to absurdity; to that class belongs the notorious muddlehead, Georges Sorel."[2] Had Sorel lived longer, he would doubtless have found the bolshevist contribution to the noble and the sublime even more illusory than that of the other movements which had aroused his hope. His last loyalty was doubly tragic.

[1] G. Sorel, *Lettres à Paul Delesalle*, letter of 13 July 1921, p. 236.
[2] V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, 1947.

The philosopher and the labour movement

It would probably be true to say that whatever interest exists in revolutionary syndicalism outside France today is the result of the attention drawn to it by Georges Sorel. The *Reflections on Violence* has become one of the classics of political science. It is in his terms that syndicalism is usually discussed, not only in the histories of political thought but even in the histories of the social movement. Posthumously at least, Sorel has monopolised syndicalism. This is a false identification. He was never an active member of the labour movement, not did he have any real influence on its militants. His interpretation of their ideas, moreover, was very much his own. Two facts remain: his insights contribute to an understanding of the syndicalist movement; his ideas add depth to the philosophy of syndicalism, if such a philosophy is allowed to exist independently of the movement.

SOREL AND THE SYNDICALISTS. Sorel had no contact with the labour movement as such. He never set foot in the offices of the *C.G.T.* and played no part, however small, in its affairs. His world consisted of his home, the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, the editorial offices of whatever review he was associated with at the time and the bookshops of Marcel Rivière and Paul Delesalle. His contact with the militant theorists of the *C.G.T.* was hardly greater. Delesalle was a personal—probably the last—friend; they corresponded regularly after 1917 and he was sufficiently interested in Sorel's work to compile an excellent bibliography which was published in 1939. But this contact came after Delesalle had left the *C.G.T.* Griffuelhes and Pouget told a historian of the movement that they had never read a single line of Sorel's work.[1] He probably met some of the militants during the brief period when both contributed to the *Mouvement Socialiste* although there is no record of any discussion between them. The style of some of the militants was occasionally reminiscent of Sorel, especially Griffuelhes, who claimed, however, to read nothing but Dumas. The ideas of Pouget and Delesalle were shaped by the anarchist tradition from which they came; Yvetot and Sorel were poles apart. It was unlikely that the rank and file had even heard of the *Reflections*; had they read it, they would probably not have understood; had they understood, they would certainly not have agreed. Sorel the *causeur* was usually the centre of a group of young bourgeois intellectuals; Sorel the syndicalist was an isolated figure. His connection

[1] M. Leroy, *Les tendances du pouvoir et de la liberté en France au XXe siècle*, 1937, p. 89.

with the *Mouvement Socialiste* was itself short lived, lasting from 1898 to 1901 and again from 1906 to 1908. Lagardelle was for a time under his spell but remained a political creature at heart, a fact which led to their break. The syndicalist *nouvelle école*, of which he liked to write, consisted in the last analysis of himself and Edouard Berth.

It could of course be said that Sorel never claimed, nor even wished, to influence the labour movement; he wanted merely to understand and clarify the tendencies working themselves out within it. He saw himself as a historian and remained constantly aloof despite the polemics that filled his work. Sorel certainly stressed his own detachment in the *Reflections*: "One does not need a great knowledge of history to perceive that the mystery of historical development is only intelligible to men who are far removed from superficial disturbances; the chroniclers and the actors of the drama do not see at all what, later on, will be regarded as fundamental; so one might formulate this apparently paradoxical rule: it is necessary to be outside in order to see the inside."[1] But this view was not entirely consistent with the Bergsonian theory of knowledge he professed. By standing outside the drama, he risked seeing a play which had no existence in reality; falling into the rationalist-utopian trap he so often condemned, he could people the stage with imaginary characters. That, of course, accounted for his subsequent disappointment.

Nor can one easily accept the claim that Sorel remained aloof from current strife. If one takes into account the whole tenor of his work, one is likely to see not the disinterested historian but a man passionately concerned that syndicalism should succeed in the task he had set it. His repeated demands for an intensification of the class struggle were not the revelations of historical inevitability nor, presumably, were they thrown out without an audience in mind. For a decade at least he tried to influence the men of action, to convert socialists and urge on syndicalists, by the only means open to an intellectual: polemical articles in left-wing reviews. He has been more justly described as a Commander of the Faithful proclaiming the Holy War against the infidel, incessantly preaching the virtues of violence to the workers.[2] But he preached from his bourgeois retreat and they barely heard him.

Questions of influence aside, how much did the syndicalism of the militants have in common with Sorel's syndicalist philosophy? There were undoubted similarities but there were also fundamental differences. The workers saw the class struggle not as a tactic of moral regeneration but as a way of improving the material conditions of their life; this was as true of the

[1] G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1916, p. 49.
[2] P. Perrin, *Les idées sociales de Georges Sorel*, 1925, p. 104.

revolutionary phase (the emancipation of the proletariat meant the material expropriation of the expropriators) as it was of the reformist. For such ends Sorel showed no sympathy. As a rule he simply ignored the fact that immediate, material improvements might be achieved by strike action. Sometimes he even opposed the workers' immediate demands: the eight-hour day, a fundamental issue for the *C.G.T.*, he rejected as an element of decadence.[1] He was not even entirely committed to the ultimate triumph of the proletariat. The movement was all; merit lay in the battle rather than in victory. Even if the general strike never occurred and the proletariat remained unemancipated, the idea of the strike would have served its purpose if it had rendered socialism more heroic. Another point: the militants, optimists of anarchist extraction, looked forward to a utopian era of peace and plenty; this the pessimist Sorel saw as a bourgeois ideal of the worst sort. His utopia meant discipline, morality and hard work which, in Proudhon's phrase, would be the moral equivalent of war. It is only fair to add, though it would have been little consolation to the workers had they grasped it, that he was almost consistently devoted to their interests as he saw them.

Sorel professed to see in the emerging class of skilled industrial workers the development of a new morality to replace the threadbare morality of the bourgeoisie. He rediscovered the virtues of the mediaeval craftsmen in the modern producer: integrity and pride in work, discipline and solidarity. But, while craftsmen contributed to the development of syndicalist ideas, it was often the unskilled labourers who formed the revolutionary—or at least violent—rank and file. It was unlikely that many syndicalists found pleasure in work for its own sake; it was, on the contrary, something they hoped to reduce to a minimum after the revolution. Their practice of sabotage was an obvious offence against the principle of pride in work, a fact which Sorel realised. Nor did they share his code of morals, summed up in the phrase that the world would only become more just as it became more chaste. He opposed syndicalist propaganda for birth control for this reason.

Sorel's writing about violence, though it referred to syndicalist direct action, also showed little appreciation of reality. He contrasted the 'jacobin violence' of the bourgeoisie with the 'pure violence' of the proletariat. The latter he saw as a form of war as it might have been practised in some distant age of chivalry: its motives were neither hatred nor vengeance, nor selfish interest, but only devotion to a higher cause. The violent methods used by the syndicalists have been discussed under the headings of strike, boycott, sabotage, intimidation and political pressure. These were neither disciplined nor disinterested; they were not war at all in Sorel's sense but often outbursts of hatred, directed to no other purpose than revenge.

[1] G. Sorel, *Insegnamenti sociali della economia contemporanea*, 1906, p. 252.

Sorel looked at the syndicalist movement through the spectacles of his own morality. His account was not an objective description but a subjective interpretation charged with value judgements; his anti-intellectualism notwithstanding, it was really a utopian construction. Syndicalism developed without Sorel and Sorel without syndicalism. What, then, was their relationship? Allowance must be made for his natural and sustained sympathy for the workers, and for the fact that his support of the proletariat found some logical justification in the marxist doctrine that it was the class of the future. In the last resort, however, his espousal of the proletariat was an accident of history. Sorel turned to syndicalism because it appeared to reflect his temper and because the forces of history appeared to be on its side. As Schumpeter said, to those who at the time hated not so much the economic arrangements of capitalist society as its democratic rationalism, syndicalism could well have appeared as the complement of their own need in the world of the masses.[1] His syndicalist philosophy was a superstructure built to justify this utilitarian alliance.

The first decade of the present century saw the dominance of syndicalist ideas in the labour movement. Syndicalism soon gave way to reformism and the movement developed along orthodox lines of co-operation with party and state. This remained true even with the subsequent development of a communist wing. The aim—the welfare of the working class—remained unchanged; what changed was the temper and with it, the strategy. Syndicalism was the anti-democratic, anti-intellectual, activist moment in the history of the French trade-union movement. During this period Sorel called himself a syndicalist. It was the trade-union moment in the history of the revolt against Reason and democracy in France. For a short while the two movements crossed one another. Sorel stood at the crossroads.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF GEORGES SOREL. According to Sorel, the official marxists of his day had entirely failed to grasp the inner meaning of their master's work and were simply repeating in a pedantic manner the more trivial, and dubious, of his formulae. Their blind devotion had led all but Bernstein to ignore the failure of his prediction that the class war would become ever more acute. Starting with Bernstein at this point of criticism, Sorel followed a revisionist path of his own to reinterpret Marx in terms of his own theory of the myth. Marx's theory of the class struggle, he wrote, was not objective but subjective, not a scientific observation but an abstraction, a happy symbolic formula—a sort of social poetry, designed to inspire the workers, urging them forward in the best interests of mankind.[2]

[1] J. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, 1943, p. 340.
[2] G. Sorel, *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, 1919.

Another way of putting it was that he reinterpreted historical materialism in terms of the new philosophy of pragmatism. The class war was not necessarily a social fact already but thinking could make it so: the myth might validate itself. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." That—Marx's concluding thesis on Feuerbach—Sorel felt deserved more weight than the marxists gave it. For the militants, concerned with action, ideas only mattered as motors of action. The idea of class war simplified the complexities of the social order and created a class awareness that itself made the conflict a reality. Sorel's interpretation of the doctrine of the class war as myth rather than law of history, of the class war itself as something to be achieved rather than a fact of existence, was a view not entirely dissimilar from that of the syndicalist leaders. They recognised the material conflict of interests, but saw the need to stimulate awareness of that conflict in the minds of the rank and file, on the whole by the propaganda of action.

Scientific socialism, with its claim to the knowledge of social causation and its deterministic view of history, was repugnant to Sorel's temper. He reinterpreted what he still claimed to be historical materialism in psychological terms, injecting at the same time a large measure of free will into history. Class consciousness was not determined by objective production relations but subjectively by a myth which was more than a marxist superstructure of ideas. Sorel used Bergson's philosophy of creative evolution. The orderly process of social change was periodically broken by spontaneous mass movements, similar to mutations in biology. History moved forward by revolutionary surges, when a new force suddenly burst on the world. Dialectical materialism recognised similar revolutions, when quantitative change gave way to qualitative, but these were part of a unilinear process (even if the line moved dialectically) and were historically determined. The Sorelian revolution was the result of an almost self-generated force of ideas and largely unpredictable. Twisting the marxist phrase, he saw those moments as leaps from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom.

Sorel complained that the doctrinaire marxists of his time were ignoring the first half of the sentence: "Man makes his own history, but in determined conditions." Berth took up this theme in his *Du 'Capital' aux 'Réflexions'*: it was necessary to adopt a less mechanistic philosophy than the vulgar marxism which taught the workers that history would serve them their emancipation on a platter; the workers must realise that revolution depended on them, not on events—it was the human factor, free will, that counted in the end.[1] The syndicalists shared this view. Rejecting the fatalism

[1] E. Berth, *Du 'Capital' aux 'Réflexions'*, 1933, pp. 39, 43, 48.

of Guesde and his marxist colleagues, they saw the revolution as a potentiality, not as the iron law of necessity; it could only become actuality by the workers' own conscious efforts. *Vouloir, c'est pouvoir* was the militants' slogan.

The class war, far from becoming sufficiently acute to create a revolutionary situation, was actually being smothered by the spread of democratic ideas. According to Sorel, the intellectual theorists of democracy had diverted the capitalist bourgeoisie from the unadulterated pursuit of its own interests, which naturally clashed with those of the workers, to a timid policy of compromise that went under the name of social peace. The socialist parties had done nothing to prevent the resulting confusion of classes; indeed, they had been the first to fall under the spell of the intellectuals. It was the task of syndicalism to reassert socialist independence. Both Sorel and the militants preached the complete breach between proletariat and the bourgeois order, its institutions as well as its parties. Only thus could the struggle acquire clarity, the proletariat its identity, and the myth its content.

Sorel's interpretation of the idea of the general strike has already been discussed. He argued in the *Matériaux* that it contained all the essentials of the syndicalist stand: it proved that the proletariat could emancipate itself without resort to political revolutions; it showed the futility of reforms, expressing in concrete terms Kautsky's thesis that capitalism could not be abolished piecemeal; it was born of everyday experience, learnt in the everyday strike by a simple association of ideas, without any need to study the philosophy of history.[1] In this respect the general strike was as much the centre-piece of Sorelian doctrine as of syndicalist theory. The truth of the myth was a question without meaning; it was a useful formula for influencing the present. This was something of an esoteric doctrine; one which would have lost all potency had it been shared by the workers. And what of the picture itself that he wanted them to grasp without reflection? To the critical observer he seemed to be preaching a new mysticism, a new religion almost, with its own believers. The myth of the general strike was intended as a stimulant; it could be seen more negatively as a new opium of the working class.

"The whole future of socialism lies in the autonomous development of the *syndicats*", wrote Sorel.[2] The unions were to be the basis of the new society as well as the ranks in which the battle was to be fought. A conservative at heart, he saw the unions as a modern alternative to Le Play's *autorités sociales*. He quoted Durkheim to the effect that corporations,

[1] G. Sorel, *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, 1919, p. 59.
[2] G. Sorel, *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, 1919, p. 59.

composed of persons doing the same work and with the same interests, were the best foundation for the growth of a social spirit. Wisely, he refused to commit himself on details of the new order. He asked a critic who complained about this whether he thought that the socialists were students sitting an examination: the working class had entered the struggle without waiting for the permission of schoolmasters; they were making a siege, not a critique.[1] One thing could however be said of the *syndicats*. Exclusively working class in membership, they isolated the workers from bourgeois ideas and bourgeois values. A society based on the unions would be a producers' society. Socialists should look with suspicion on those who live on the margin of production—and what he meant by production was quite clear: there were not a hundred ways of producing but only one, and that was in the workshop. There would be place neither for the business men of capitalism nor for the intellectuals of democracy. His hostility to the non-productive professions was absolute: apropos the expulsion of managers from industry, he declared that they were as useless as members of the Academy, sociologists and heroes of national defence.[2] It was an attitude shared by the militants of the *C.G.T.* In Sorel's case it may have reflected the hostility of the engineer to the administrator, but it came oddly from a man who spent the last twenty-five years of his life as a professional thinker—scribbler, the militants themselves might have said.

[1] G. Sorel, *La décomposition du marxisme*, 1908, p. 4.
[2] G. Sorel, *Les illusions du progrès*, 1908, p. 358.

The militants and the activist temper

Syndicalism, defined as the ideas and practice of the French labour movement, could not be understood simply by looking at books expounding syndicalist theory: it is necessary to consider what actually happened, to impute, as best one can, a theory into behaviour. Even the ideas of the leaders of the movement cannot be presented as straightforward theory. It was not just that they wrote occasional propaganda rather than texts for the history of political thought. Syndicalism was primarily an attitude of mind, an approach to politics—more basically still, a temper. This was even truer of the leaders than the rank and file. Their philosophy was a superstructure, not of marxist production relations but of their own spirit of revolt; the policies they advocated were part rationalisations, the form in which their personality could find expression at a given time, in a given place. The activist temper was the real core of syndicalism, just as it was the underlying core of the wider revolt against Reason and democracy. This motivating force was directed into the channels it took by the objective conditions in which the militants found themselves and was, to that extent, not divorced from economic realities. But there was another side. The activist temper, undirected in origin, sometimes translated itself into undirected practice. The syndicalist movement contained a measure of pure action, action for its own sake. Schumpeter commented. "Why should we refuse to recognise the truth which life teaches us every day—that there is such a thing as pugnacity in the abstract that neither needs nor heeds any argument?".[1]

It is difficult in the analysis of any social movement to strike a balance between the part played by men and the conditioning scene. Earlier chapters considered the background, the various factors—social, economic, political, ideological—which together made revolutionary syndicalism possible, even likely. In the last resort, however, such historical 'causes' are insufficient to explain more than the possibility. Movements finally depend upon action; thus upon the motives for action; the motives are individual, not social, phenomena. This is the more true of movements in which the leadership plays an important role. The role of the hero in history can obviously not be discussed here. The fact remains—and the point has been made earlier—that a few militants led the syndicalist movement and put its ideas into words; it seemed fairly clear that they also shaped those ideas and

[1] J. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, 1943, p. 340.

influenced the direction the movement took. At some point, therefore, a psychological element must enter any explanation.[1] Clearly, not every person with an activist temper is driven to political revolt. Many find other outlets—on the battlefield, in the sports-field or even at the desk, in journalism or philosophy. The form their action takes is a secondary matter, however, because it depends on external circumstances, to that extent on chance. It is a secondary matter, furthermore, because in itself it contributes little to their satisfaction compared to the fact of action, of revolt as such.

THE MILITANTS OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT. It is not hard to find in the writings of the militants statements which go far beyond the expression of any rational discontent with, for example, the economic system (a dissatisfaction that one might legitimately expect of workers in a capitalist system) but which point to a more fundamental conflict. Pelloutier, when he called himself a '*révolté de toutes heures*', gave no economic form to the object of his revolt; he added significantly that he was an irreconcilable enemy of all forms of despotism, not only material but moral. 'Moral despotism' sounds very much like 'social order'; Pelloutier was in revolt, not against the capitalist system or the political regime of his time but against society as such and its demands on the individual. Indeed, in another passage, he specifically praised the free man who placed himself outside the laws, however liberal they might be, in order to destroy them.[2] Pouget also expressed this sentiment of absolute revolt. The *révolté*, the revolutionary, he declared, was the man who denied the legitimacy of existing society and worked for its destruction; his attitude was one of permanent insurrection, permanent refusal to adapt himself to the existing order.[3] The tone was such that for 'existing order' one could almost certainly have substituted 'any order'. Both, of course, came from anarchism and had more than a touch of Bakunin in their make-up.

Not enough is known about the early life of the syndicalist leaders to explain their character. In several cases, however, one can point to the sort of conflicts that might give rise to a sense of frustration. In many cases the spirit of revolt preceded their allegiance to syndicalism. Nor were all the leaders born into the working class: they were not natural syndicalists (i.e. by force of circumstance).

Fernand Pelloutier (1867–1901) came from a bourgeois family which was, with the exception of a republican grandfather, of legitimist leanings. His

[1] Cf. R. Behrendt, *Der politische Aktivismus*, 1932.
[2] Pelloutier, *Lettre aux anarchistes*, *cit.* H. Montreuil, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier en France des origines à nos jours*, 1947, p. 162.
[3] E. Pouget, *Le parti du travail*, 1905.

first education was in a seminary. At the age of nineteen he failed the *baccalauréat*, a necessary qualification for the sort of career normally followed by one of his class and education. He turned, as a result, to the typical profession of the dissatisfied intellectual—radical journalism; and from radical politics he turned to anarchism.

Emile Pouget (1860–1931) also came from a bourgeois background; he was the son of a notary. In his case the spirit of revolt can be traced back to his schooldays: at the age of fourteen he edited a manuscript newsletter in the radical cause, the *Lycéen Républicain*. He was preparing for the *baccalauréat* when the death of his stepfather forced him to leave school at fifteen and seek employment as a shop-assistant. Thereafter he was a professional revolutionary: at nineteen he organised the first union of Paris shop-assistants: at twenty-three he was arrested together with Louise Michel on a charge of riot and pillage; released from prison after serving part of an eight-years sentence, he edited the anarchist paper *Père Peinard*; his support of the anarchist outrages of Ravachol, Vaillant and Emile Henry (themselves examples of revolt without content) forced him to flee the country and he lived as an exile in England until the next amnesty.

Georges Yvetot (1868–1942) came from a humbler but respectable family. His father was a guardsman and he was born in the barracks of the Paris *gendarmerie*. The background was military and religious. When he was seven his mother died and he was sent to the Christian Brothers to be educated; soon in conflict with the school authorities, he was sent home again. Then his father died and he received the remainder of his schooling in a catholic orphanage. His vehement antimilitarism, it may be guessed, had its roots in family history.

Paul Delesalle (1870–1948), like Pouget, was from early youth a professional revolutionary and figured regularly as such in the police records of the time. He was a leading member of the anarchist *Groupe des étudiants socialistes révolutionnaires internationalistes* from its foundation in 1891 and of other anarchist groups. According to one historian, though his evidence is not convincing, Delesalle himself confessed many years after the event that he was responsible for one of the anarchist outrages of the time, a bomb thrown in the Restaurant Foyat in April 1894.[1]

The leaders of the *C.G.T.*, far from being manual workers, in many cases led a white-collar life similar to that of a less prosperous bourgeois intellectual. Pelloutier was a journalist and at one time edited the *Démocratie de l'Ouest*. As secretary of the *Fédération des Bourses* from 1895 until his death in 1901, he also edited, and in large part wrote, the review

[1] A. Zévaès in *Ordre*, 13 and 29 April 1948.

L'Ouvrier des Deux Mondes. For a time he held a post as temporary civil servant in addition, doing research in labour statistics. Pouget was another journalist. Having edited the *Père Peinard* and *La Sociale*, his main function in the *C.G.T.* was the *Voix du Peuple*. Delesalle was a skilled craftsman, a precision mechanic who, in his youth, had received a medal for draughtsmanship at evening classes. He also took the first opportunity, at twenty-five, to turn to journalism and after 1897 assisted Grave with the anarchist paper *Temps Nouveaux*. In 1908 he acquired a secondhand bookshop and to all intents retired from the labour movement. Yvetot was a typographer, a trade that has always been noted for the intellectual character of its members (Proudhon was a forerunner). Victor Griffuelhes (1874–1923) alone had a genuinely working-class background, starting life as a shoemaker. But even he became a permanent union official in early youth, secretary in turn of his local *syndicat*, of the leatherworkers federation, the trades council for the Seine and the *C.G.T.* He spent most of his life as an organiser, speaker and pamphleteer.

It is an old fact that revolutionary movements have been led by uprooted members of the very class against which they were directed. There is hardly a great name that escapes this rule, from Marx, author of a thesis on Greek philosophy, down to Stalin, the Tiflis seminarist. It may be argued that socialism was largely the product—and the instrument—of activist-minded intellectuals.[1] Before such a generalisation is applied to syndicalism, its character as a popular movement must be remembered. So, however, must the fact that the principles adopted by the *C.G.T.* owed a good deal to a small group of leaders. A syndicalist historian of the *C.G.T.* called Pouget its grey eminence: "Il fit triompher ses convictions et ses procédés par la souplesse de son esprit, son opiniâtreté d'auvergnat, sa puissance de travail, sa logique de dialectique, son expérience de tous les instants."[2] Another historian saw the energy of Griffuelhes as the decisive factor in the growth of the *C.G.T.*: "Il possède les vertus d'un chef: courage, force agressive, rapidité de vision et décision."[3]

In any case, the question here is not whether a revolutionary-minded group of militants created the syndicalist movement but why they themselves turned to syndicalism as an outlet for their energy. Activism, according to Karl Jaspers, finds its direction by the chance of the situation in which it occurs.[4] One must distinguish between the activist temper as such (i.e. the motive for action) and the form in which it is expressed (i.e. the politics it pursues). Allegiance to a movement depends on the possi-

[1] Cf. R. Behrendt, *Der politische Aktivismus*, 1932.
[2] A. Pawlowski, *La C.G.T.*, 1910, p. 102.
[3] E. Dolléans, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier*, 1936–9, vol. 2, p. 118.
[4] K. Kaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 1919.

bilities of the time, involving not a rational decision but a rationalisation. At this point, of course, economic factors enter the picture. The conflict between the individual and society may actually have an economic cause: career frustration rather than frustration in earlier youth; even if that is not the cause, it may still be that the economic structures prevent him from finding an adequate outlet for his energies. More important, his politics, his language and way of thinking, will certainly reflect a class background and class interest. This is good marxist doctrine and hardly needs elaboration. Griffuelhes may be cited as an example. Before he became a syndicalist he was a *blanquiste*—and *blanquisme* was essentially a matter of temperament, a mode of action, rather than a political doctrine; it was clearly the economic environment, however, that determined the direction he took.

On the other hand, it is not so simple to explain the adherence to syndicalism of such militant anarchists as Pouget and Delesalle. The development of Pouget's ideas was nevertheless instructive. Although his revolutionary activity went back at least to 1883, the year he was arrested with Louise Michel, he did not turn to syndicalism until 1894 when, a refugee in London, he finally saw the futility of the anarchist tactics of the time, mainly individual action, propaganda by the deed (in other words, bomb-throwing). As he wrote in the *Almanach du Père Peinard*: "I am an anarchist; I want to spread my ideas; I already have the *bistro*; I want something better."[1] He discovered the *syndicat* as the best place for revolutionary propaganda. The same argument was put forward by Delesalle in a later pamphlet advising the anarchists to take over the *syndicats* as the ideal basis of revolt.[2] Both came to syndicalism because they saw there the best chance of revolutionary action; individual action having failed, they turned to collective action and, making a virtue of necessity, translated their old anarchist doctrines into the new theory of syndicalism.

Equally significant was the extent to which Pouget remained an individualist at heart even as leader of the *C.G.T.* In a revealing passage he proclaimed the right of the individual to act as he thought fit regardless of the sentiments of his fellows: he had the right to revolt against oppression even if he was in a minority of one; the mass of men, indeed, he contemptuously described as 'human zeros' who could be safely ignored by the militant. That Pouget should have allowed himself so open a glorification of the individual, despite the theory that syndicalism expressed the will of the movement (and that in a pamphlet entitled *Les Bases du syndicalisme*), showed the nature of his conversion to syndicalism and the primary character of the activist temper.

[1] E. Pouget, *Almanach du Père Peinard*, 1897.
[2] P. Delesalle, *L'action syndicaliste et les anarchistes*, 1901.

There were other times when this primary temper broke through rationalised syndicalist doctrine and the militants affirmed the virtue of action as such, regardless of content. Thus Pouget again, in his pamphlet *Action directe*: "Action is the spice of life, the creative element in human societies. Outside action there is nothing but inertia, weakness, passive acceptance of servitude. In such periods men are reduced to the level of beasts in the field, drudges without hope, their minds empty, their horizon closed. But let action come! Their torpor is shaken, their tongue-tied minds function, radiant energy transforms the human mass." Even the more sober Griffuelhes wrote that syndicalism called the workers to action and thus showed itself as the force capable of regenerating the world.[1] This was the spirit of the romantic movement. The militant syndicalists could take their place beside Nietzsche and Sorel.

On the other hand, the four militants of the *C.G.T.* never showed the instability of the adventurer Mussolini or the theoretician Lagardelle. Griffuelhes, secretary of the *C.G.T.* from 1902 to 1909, played no role in union affairs thereafter, though he did sympathise with the communists after the war. Pouget, assistant secretary from 1901 to 1908, tried to start another paper but soon withdrew. Delesalle, assistant secretary of the *Section des Bourses* from 1898 to 1908, turned to his bookshop. Yvetot, secretary of that section from 1901 to 1918, disappeared until 1939 when he signed an appeal for immediate peace. Consistent in his pacifism, unlike Hervé, though perhaps confused by age, he allowed himself to be appointed president of a collaborationist committee for workers' aid and it was a representative of the German embassy who spoke at his funeral. None of the four sought alternative outlets for action; discouraged but loyal, they preferred retirement once the heroic age of syndicalism had passed.

[1] V. Griffuelhes, *Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire*, 1909.

Syndicalism as a philosophy of action

Syndicalism has sometimes been called a philosophy of action. This description was apt because it covered in a single phrase the twofold character of the revolt against Reason. First, distrust of theory as a proper guide to conduct: syndicalism derived from action, drawing its principles from the lessons of life rather than ivory-tower speculation; it was concerned with action, a strategy to achieve material aims, rather than the solution of philosophical problems. Second, the glorification of action itself: instead of rational, democratic modes of conduct such as discussion, compromise and reform, it preached the tactics of direct action. Syndicalist hostility to Reason thus reflected on the one hand an approach to problems that was part intuitive, part pragmatic, and on the other the spirit of revolution and the activist temper. The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate further the anti-intellectual aspects of syndicalist doctrine. It is necessary to emphasise once more that the syndicalism considered here is that of the leaders and, to that extent, is something rather different from the principles and practice of the *C.G.T.* as discussed earlier. The philosophy of action is found, or, better perhaps, implied, in the ideas of the militants. The point has already been made, of course, that these were themselves something of a rationalisation and could not be taken entirely on their face value. This, however, no more invalidates their philosophy than any other.

THE INTUITIVE ELEMENT. The phrase 'philosophy of action' has sometimes been used as if to imply that there was no consciously held syndicalist theory at all, as if syndicalist action was a philosophy in itself. The syndicalists, so the argument ran, did not philosophise about their actions but acted more or less spontaneously; in their case, therefore, the way they acted could be considered as the equivalent of the philosophies found in other social movements. An example of this view: "Syndicalism is a mode of action rather than a doctrine, and it is in the activity of the workers rather than in any books that its expression is to be found."[1] Seen thus, syndicalism was a mode of conduct, unreflected upon beforehand and not reflected upon afterwards, given its 'ism' merely to bring it into line with other social movements.

A similar definition, but one that raises other problems: "Created by the daily action of the militants, syndicalism is a practice rather than a theory; for them, it could not resemble a theory which one might adopt or reject—

[1] R. H. Soltau, *French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 1931, p. 465.

it grew out of them and was identified with them."[1] Clearly, the militant theorists of the movement could not themselves have believed that syndicalism was simply a form of action, for that would have contradicted their own activity as writers and thinkers. Nor could they have believed that it simply grew out of them, without the possibility of choice between theories; as writers and thinkers they were, after all, self-conscious. They nevertheless maintained that syndicalism was characterised by spontaneous action and this view was not untypical. Such remarks, taken more literally than they deserved, would force one to conclude that syndicalism really existed on two levels: as a spontaneous form of action in the case of the rank and file; and as a theory about such action in the case of the pamphleteers. It is a nice point whether the theorists were simply putting practice into words or producing something rather different: the syndicalist theory that syndicalism was action is not the same as syndicalist action. It looks a bit like language and meta-language and perhaps one should talk of syndicalism and meta-syndicalism. In practice, however, it is enough to remember that the theorists were making two points: that syndicalist action ought to be largely spontaneous and that syndicalist principles in fact emerged more or less spontaneously from the experience of action.

According to Pouget, the grouping of workers into *syndicats* took place spontaneously and without the intervention of preconceived ideas.[2] This was confirmed by Griffuelhes: it was economic need and the sense of exploitation that drove him, as a worker, to his union. There, he learnt the lessons of action one by one, his vision widened, the implications of the class struggle became clear and his ideas began to define themselves.[3] A composite picture of ends and means gradually took shape. This syndicalist picture—the principles and practice of the *C.G.T.*—grew out of experience and impressed itself on the mind in the same natural fashion, intuitively, without the intervention of thought. Socialist theory, by contrast, was the result of reflection in the abstract—about life, perhaps, but in a study—and was accepted intellectually. Lagardelle, as usual, took the argument to its extreme. Experience was the school of syndicalism; life would reveal to the working class what it must do; the class struggle would enlighten the workers; practice would shape their ideas; *l'action crée l'idée.*[4] This brought one directly to the romantic movement: life was the true guide; the barren leaves scattered by intellectuals could only divert the workers from their true path.

[1] J. Maitron, *Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire: Paul Delesalle*, 1952, p. 34.
[2] E. Pouget, *La C.G.T.*, 1908.
[3] V. Griffuelhes, *L'action syndicaliste*, 1908.
[4] Lagardelle in *Mouvement Socialiste*, 1/15 October 1905, p. 263, and September/October 1911, p. 174.

The intuitive and the pragmatic approach were inseparable here. Practical experience was a better guide than any theory, so was the common-sense of the ordinary working man. This double point was made by Pouget in a less mystical version of the experience-is-the-school-of-life argument. The revolutionary could learn the most useful lessons from a study of the tactics working themselves out within the proletariat; when they did not allow themselves to be diverted by outsiders, the good sense of the workers nearly always showed them the best direction to take.[1] The task of the theorist of syndicalism was thus to study the existing practice of the working class and its sentiments. He should clarify, formulate and explain. As a propagandist, he should make the workers aware of the nature of their hitherto spontaneous action, the significance of their hitherto unexpressed feelings. The theorists were to be interpreters, not original thinkers, explaining the workers to themselves, not teaching them their own philosophy. This duty was laid down by Griffuelhes: "It is not a question of teaching a strategy of action but of exposing its *raison d'être* (i.e. its origin) and its justification (i.e. its use)—thereby giving syndicalist action the clarity and authority it requires."[2] The role of the propagandist, in other words, was to enable the rank and file to act more effectively and to stimulate it to further action.

THE PRAGMATIC ELEMENT. The term 'philosophy of action' could be defined in another way—as "a doctrine evolved by men immersed in action in order to render their action more effective".[3] This was another way of saying that principles were adopted because they were useful, because they worked. The syndicalists were much less concerned with elaborating a closed social philosophy, an internally consistent doctrine, even a programme consistent over time, than with solutions to the immediate, practical questions facing them in their everyday struggle against employers and state—questions of strategy and tactics. The ends of this strategy, the sense in which it was to be effective, could be taken as self-evident, hardly requiring discussion: in the short run the improvement of the workers' position, in the long run the emancipation of the proletariat. The answers did not need to form a systematically organised body of ideas, nor did they have to remain unchanged. Individual problems, altered circumstances, even changing demands—all could be accommodated.

The syndicalists made this pragmatic, essentially non-theoretical,

[1] Pouget in *Mouvement Socialiste*, June/July 1904, p. 166.
[2] V. Griffuelhes, *L'action syndicaliste*, 1908.
[3] Challayé, 'Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire' in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, January/March 1908, p. 114.

approach part of their theory. It was expressed most clearly in the writings of Griffuelhes. In an important passage (from which the remark that syndicalism was characterised by the spontaneity of its action has already been quoted) he said that syndicalist action was the result of practical experience, reflecting the needs of the moment, rather than the expression of a previously worked out theory or even a previously defined plan. He added that as syndicalism sprang from practice, and as this practice was created by events, by life that changed and modified every day, so, for that reason, it was incoherent and full of contradictions.[1] Ideas were held, in other words, so long as they served a purpose. Such ideas did not need to be consistent as their logical underpinning was hardly relevant to their usefulness.

The pamphlet in question, however, was written at a time when he had moved towards a more realistic interpretation of the tasks of the labour movement, slightly different from his earlier and purer revolutionary ardour. In the following year, in 1908, he commented approvingly on an increase in trade-union activity which, by filling the militants' time, had detached the movement from its earlier revolutionary romanticism and bound it to actuality, to the ordinary everyday issues of unionism.[2] Unless one remembers the underlying revolutionary temperament, as well as the pragmatic approach, one is likely to miss the true character of the syndicalist movement.

THE ACTIVIST ELEMENT. Yet another commentator said of syndicalism that it represented a renaissance of revolutionary volontarism.[3] Elie Halévy declared that, having awoken the taste for violence in the working class, it had led to the reappearance of a romantic ideal.[4] The syndicalists' taste for revolutionary action was indisputable. Certain of the militants made a cult of action that went well beyond the merely practical. Action, wrote Pouget, was the spice of life—or, more simply, action was life itself.[5] To an extent, such remarks reflected a particular temperament, one for which the mere fact of action was as important as the ends to which it was directed. But the cult of action also formed an integral part of syndicalist doctrines. This was dramatically expressed in the key slogan of the movement—*action directe!* That sober arguments were advanced in support of direct action has been shown in the earlier discussion. The failure of the workers to achieve their demands through parliamentary (i.e. indirect) action threw them back on their own resources (i.e. direct action). Support

[1] V. Griffuelhes, *L'action syndicaliste*, 1908.
[2] Griffuelhes in *Action Directe*, 23 April 1908.
[3] M. Raléa, *L'idée de révolution dans les doctrines socialistes*, 1923.
[4] E. Halévy, *Histoire du socialisme européen*, 1948, p. 234.
[5] E. Pouget, *L'action directe*, 1910.

could also be found in the truth recognised by the *Communist Manifesto*: the emancipation of the proletariat must be the work of the proletariat itself. Good fortune was not a gift, wrote Griffuelhes, it had to be conquered; syndicalism proclaimed the duty of every worker to act for himself.[1]

The communists, when it suited their purpose, also preached direct action to the workers, but their understanding of the term was very different. This difference highlights the activist character of syndicalism. A marxist historian of the labour movement stigmatised syndicalism as anarchistic on the not entirely unfair grounds that it involved the exaltation of the individual, the rejection of discipline, the reliance on an active minority—as compared to the massive action of the proletariat.[2] The only thing odd about his interpretation was that it was written after Lenin's elitist revolution. The syndicalist concept of direct action was certainly marked by three notions: emphasis on the individual rather than the mass; acceptance of spontaneity rather than planned, disciplined policies; belief in the creative possibilities of action regardless of historical laws.

Of all the syndicalists, Pouget advanced the elite theory in its most extreme form. The rule of the slumbering, unrevolutionary majority, so many zeros, he contemptuously labelled *démocratisme*. For him, the strength of syndicalism lay in its giving the class-conscious minority the right to act as it thought fit. He relied on the impulse of the elite to spur the movement forward.[3] *Vouloir, c'est pouvoir* was another favourite slogan of the syndicalists. Given the will to act, all can be achieved, The revolutionary task of the proletariat was thus far greater, and far nobler, than the mere midwifery ascribed to it by Marx and Engels. It would create the revolution by its own power and of its own free will. This volontarist doctrine, in the words of Lagardelle, taught the workers that there was no fatality, that man made his own history, that syndicalism needed only to call upon *ardeurs combatives*, *appétits d'héroïsme*, *enthousiasme*, *besoin de combat* and *soif de conquête* to triumph against all odds.[4] Spontaneity was the third characteristic. Griffuelhes claimed that the French worker, once aroused, passed immediately to action. It was this that distinguished him from his German brother, stolid, prudent and overburdened by marxist theory. The syndicalist did not allow himself to be distracted by too much reflection; he did not waste his time on unproductive arguments. Carried forward by his impulsive spirit, he acted—*et voilà tout!*[5] Griffuelhes might well have quoted Hamlet on the dangers of thought: enterprises of great pith and

[1] V. Griffuelhes and L. Niel, *Les objectifs de nos luttes de classe*, 1908.
[2] R. Garmy, *Histoire du mouvement syndical en France*, 1933, p. 276.
[3] E. Pouget, *La C.G.T.*, 1908.
[4] Lagardelle in H. Lagardelle *et al.*, *Le parti socialiste et la C.G.T.*, 1910, p. 31.
[5] Griffuelhes in H. Lagardelle *et al.*, *Syndicalisme et socialisme*, 1908, pp. 56–8.

moment by this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action. There was much to be said, in practical, revolutionary terms, for the Latin temperament.

THE ANTI-INTELLECTUAL ELEMENT. Schumpeter maintained that syndicalism differed from all other forms of socialism in being anti-intellectual, both in the sense that it despised constructive programmes with theories behind them and in the sense that it despised the intellectuals' leadership.[1] He might have made a partial exception for British socialism, but that is by the way. Historically seen, hostility to the intellectuals could be explained by the betrayal of the bourgeois socialists in parliament. It was also the result of a natural antipathy to those who, as members of another class, had not experienced the privations of the workers and who led an entirely different life—a point made by Yvetot.[2] Intellectuals have theoretical programmes, moreover, and these also the less well educated workers were likely to regard with impatience: they often had little capacity, and even less taste, for theoretical discussions which led to no immediate results. But the double hostility to which Schumpeter drew attention was also a corollary of activism, The attitude of the militants was a common one, found in all walks of life—that of the practical man or the man of action towards mere theory and the armchair critic. It was expressed by Pelloutier when he likened socialist theory to the predictions of the astrologer's almanac; the unions preferred the more practical approach of the workers.[3]

The refusal to philosophise Pouget called the sobriety of syndicalism.[4] He saw in it, like Schumpeter, the mark that distinguished syndicalism from all other forms of socialism, but he also saw in it its superiority—*on philosophe peu; on agit!* The reports of the first labour congress of 1876 already had warnings against the infiltration of bourgeois intellectuals into the labour movement. The ineffective socialist utopias of earlier years could all be attributed to socialist thinkers who were quite out of touch with the realities of working class life, however well intentioned they might have been. To prevent such system-makers from leading the movement along another blind alley, the congress decided to admit only working-class delegates. In similar fashion, Pouget warned the proletariat against allowing itself to be deflected from the path indicated by its own good sense by those who would set themselves up as its directors of conscience. For this

[1] J. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, 1943, p. 339.
[2] G. Yvetot, *Les intellectuels et la C.G.T.*, n.d.
[3] F. L. E. Pelloutier, *Histoire des Bourses du Travail*, 1902, p. 155.
[4] E. Pouget, *Le parti du travail*, 1905.

reason the syndicalist contribution to socialism, the idea of the general strike, could boast no proud genealogy; it emerged from the everyday practice of the labour movement: this explained both its discredit in orthodox circles and its superiority as a weapon in the hands of the proletariat.[1]

The rejection of intellectuals had deeper roots than this. Hostility to the bourgeoisie as a whole was deeply ingrained in the syndicalist movement. Syndicalism, in this respect more marxist than Marx, preached class war in its purest form, the absolute breach between proletariat and the rest of society. Pouget defined syndicalism quite simply as the autonomous organisation of the working class.[2] The proletariat was sufficient unto itself. It tended to see any member of another class, and such the intellectual necessarily was, as an irreconcilable enemy, however ardent his protestations of good will. In a pamphlet on the intellectuals and the *C.G.T.* Yvetot drove the doctrine to its ultimate conclusions. *Chacun chez soi!*—leave us in peace!—was his slogan. The proletariat could manage its own affairs; it alone understood what needed to be done, the goals to be achieved and the strategy to be followed; it neither required, nor desired, assistance from another class—be it moral or material. Sympathetic members of the bourgeoisie and well-intentioned intellectuals had no role to play in the strategy of syndicalism. The general strike would not involve any action on the part of professors, lawyers, doctors, journalists or parliamentarians. Nor, it appeared, would intellectuals have much of a role to play in the new society that the syndicalists hoped to establish. Literature and art were secondary professions at best; the workers could in any case write the novels and sing the songs themselves that society might legitimately require. The proletariat alone would inherit the future: then, said Pouget, all parasites will be eliminated and only the working class will survive.[3]

[1] Pouget in *Mouvement Socialiste*, June/July 1904, p. 166.
[2] E. Pouget, *Le parti du travail*, 1905.
[3] E. Pouget, *Le parti du travail*, 1905.

Conclusion

There were many similarities between the ideas of syndicalism and those of the wider revolt against Reason and democracy. Similar factors influenced both; both were a reaction against bourgeoisie, parliament and intellectuals. This double relationship—at once ideological and historical—suggests that syndicalism was itself part, the extreme left wing, of that revolt. There were also many similarities between the temper of the militants of the labour movement and the militants of the extreme right. This suggests another—psychological—relationship: not only a common enemy, but a common activist spirit, finding different outlets. The two can be linked. Activism was bound to mean revolt against the centre, partly because the centre was in power, partly because it stood for discussion, compromise and social peace. Syndicalism was not the last romantic movement of the left, any more than fascism was of the right. The revolt against Reason and democracy continues—and it continues for much the same reasons as those which influenced the syndicalists.

Until recently, syndicalism seemed to have been almost forgotten. The historians of political thought have usually treated it as a minor by-way of socialism, not part of any mainstream leading to the present, a curious, almost eccentric, episode, short-lived and several decades extinct. The syndicalists, it seemed, had explored a dead-end path. Even if this were all there was to the movement, it was more than a curiosity. The historical importance of syndicalism should not be underrated. It dominated the French labour movement for two decades and had its echoes elsewhere. Nor should it be underrated ideologically. Despite its apparent lack of coherence and its self-avowed dislike of theory, it offered, properly understood, a coherent, self-contained theory of socialism which could hold up its head amongst others, not as scientific as marxism perhaps, but no less scientific than fabianism. And it is no longer clear that it is entirely dead, that the path it followed was entirely false. True, there is no syndicalist labour movement today, but many of its ideas are in the air once more. Until recently, two socialisms dominated the scene: the reformist and the marxist, social democracy and communism. There was a tendency to write off most other socialisms as irrelevant, most other socialists as slightly odd. Tito, Mao and Castro, changed that. Socialist thought is richer for them. It is richer also for syndicalism which, it is now clear, also has something to contribute to the debate. Some may find its goal, the producers' society based on trade unions, too simple for the present day. Others may find its strategy of the general strike no longer plausible. Neither need invalidate

what it had to say about bourgeois democracy, the parliamentary system, party politics and reformist socialism. Nor need it invalidate what it had to say about the marxist alternative. The syndicalists, indeed, were they alive today would have found much in the intervening decades to prove them right. It is in its critique, perhaps, that syndicalism is most effective. That, unfortunately, it shares with many social philosophies. Unfortunately, there may be no practical alternatives that avoid the vices the syndicalists saw in the rival socialisms of their time. The direct-action socialisms of our own day may suffer the same fate.