


INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST PUBLICATION¹

THE reflections that I submit to the readers of the *Mouvement Socialiste* on the subject of violence have been inspired by some simple observations about very evident facts, which play an increasingly marked rôle in the history of contemporary classes.

For a long time I had been struck by the fact that the *normal development* of strikes is accompanied by an important series of acts of violence ;² but certain learned sociologists seek to disguise a phenomenon that every one who cares to use his eyes must have noticed. Revolutionary syndicalism keeps alive in the minds of the masses the desire to strike, and only prospers when important strikes, accompanied by violence, take place. Socialism tends to appear more and more as a theory of revolutionary syndicalism—or rather as a philosophy of modern history, in as far as it is under the influence of this syndicalism. It follows from these incontestable data, that if we desire to discuss Socialism with any benefit, we must first of all investigate the functions of violence in actual social conditions.³



¹ These Reflections were first published in the *Mouvement Socialiste* (first six months, 1906).

² Cf. "*Les Grèves*" in the *Science sociale*, October-November 1900.

³ In the *Insegnamenti sociali della economia contemporanea* (written in 1903, but not published till 1906) I had already, but in a very inadequate manner, pointed out what seemed to me to be the function of violence, in maintaining the division between the proletariat and the middle classes (pp. 53-55).

I do not believe that this question has yet been approached with the care it admits of ; I hope that these reflections will lead a few thinkers to examine the problems of proletarian violence more closely. I cannot too strongly recommend this investigation to the *new school* which, inspired by the principles of Marx rather than by the formulas taught by the official proprietors of Marxism, is about to give to Socialist doctrines a sense of reality and a gravity which it certainly has lacked for several years. Since the *new school* calls itself Marxist, syndicalist, revolutionary, it should have nothing so much at heart as the investigation of the exact historical significance of the spontaneous movements which are being produced in the working classes, movements which may possibly ensure that the future direction of social development will conform to Marx's ideas.

Socialism is a philosophy of the history of contemporary institutions, and Marx has always argued as a philosopher of history when he was not led away by personal polemics to write about matters outside the proper scope of his own system.

The Socialist imagines, then, that he has been transported into a very distant future, so that he can consider actual events as elements of a long and completed development, and he can attribute to them the colour that they might take for a future philosopher. Such a procedure certainly presupposes a considerable use of hypothesis ; but without certain hypotheses about the future there can be no social philosophy, no reflection on evolution, and no important action in the present even. The object of this study is a more thorough investigation of customs, and not a discussion of the merits or faults of certain important people. I want to find out how the feelings by which the masses are moved form themselves into groups ; all the discussions of the moralists about the motives for the actions of prominent men, and all psycho-

logical analyses of character are, then, quite secondary in importance, and even altogether negligible.

It seems, however, that it is more difficult to reason in this way, when we are concerned with acts of violence, than with any other set of circumstances. That is due to our habit of looking on conspiracy as the typical example of violence, or as the *anticipation of a revolution*; we are thus led to ask ourselves whether certain criminal acts could not be considered heroic, or at least meritorious, if we were to take into account the happy consequences for their fellow-citizens anticipated by the perpetrators, as the result of their crimes. Certain individual criminal attempts have rendered such great services to democracy that the latter has often consecrated as great men those who, at the peril of their lives, have tried to rid it of its enemies; it has done this the more readily since these great men were no longer living when the hour for dividing the spoils of victory arrived, and we know that the dead obtain admiration more easily than the living.

Each time an outrage occurs, the doctors of the ethico-social sciences, who swarm in journalism, indulge in reflections on the question, Can the criminal act be excused, or sometimes even justified, from the point of view of the highest justice? Then there is an irruption into the democratic press of that casuistry for which the Jesuits have so many times been reproached.

I think it may be useful here to mention a note on the assassination of the Grand Duke Sergius which appeared in *Humanité* of February 18, 1905; the author was not one of those vulgar members of the *Bloc* whose intelligence is hardly superior to that of a negrito, he was one of the leading lights of the State universities: Lucien Herr is one of those who ought to know what they are talking about. The title *Just Reprisals* warns us that the question is to be treated from a high ethical standpoint; it is the

*judgment of the world*¹ which is about to be pronounced. The author scrupulously endeavours to assign the responsibility, calculates the equivalence which ought to exist between a crime and its expiation, goes back to the original misdeeds which have engendered this series of acts of violence in Russia ; all this is a philosophy of history strictly in accordance with the pure principles of the Corsican vendetta. Carried away by the lyricism of his subject, Lucien Herr concludes in the style of a prophet : " The battle will go on in this way, in suffering and in blood, abominable and odious, till that *predestined day*, which cannot be far off, when the throne itself, the *homicidal throne*, the throne which heaps up so many crimes, will fall down into the ditch that has to-day been dug for it." This prophecy has not yet been realised, but the true character of all great prophecies is never to be realised ; the *homicidal throne* is much more secure than the cash-box of *Humanité*. But, after all, what can we learn from all this ?

It is not the business of the historian to award prizes for virtue, to propose the erection of statues, or to establish any catechism whatever ; his business is to *understand what is least individual* in the course of events ; the questions which interest the chroniclers and excite novelists are those which he most willingly leaves on one side. And so I am not at all concerned to justify the *perpetrators of violence*, but to inquire into the *function of violence of the working classes* in contemporary Socialism.

It seems to me that the problem of violence has been very badly formulated by many Socialists ; as a proof of this, I instance an article published in the *Socialiste* on October 21, 1905, by Rappoport. The author, who has written a book on the philosophy of history,² ought, it

¹ This expression is not too strong, seeing that the author's studies have been mainly confined to Hegel.

² Ch. Rappoport, *La Philosophie de l'histoire comme science de l'évolution*.

seems to me, to have discussed the question by examining the remoter consequences of these events ; but, on the contrary, he considered them under their most immediate, most paltry, and, consequently, least historical aspect. According to him, syndicalism tends necessarily to opportunism, and as this law does not seem to be verified in France, he adds : "If in some Latin countries it assumes revolutionary attitudes, that is mere appearance. It shouts louder, but that is always for the purpose of demanding reforms inside the framework of existing society. It is a meliorism by blows, but it is always meliorism."

Thus there would be two kinds of meliorism : the one patronised by the *Musée Social*, the Direction du Travail, and Jaurès, which would work with the aid of maxims, half-lies, and supplication to eternal justice ; the other proceeds by blows—the latter being the only one that is within the scope of uneducated people who have not yet been enlightened by a knowledge of advanced social economics. These worthy people, democrats devoted to the cause of the Rights of man and the Duties of the informer, sociologist members of the Bloc, think that violence will disappear when popular education becomes more advanced ; they recommend, then, a great increase in the numbers of courses and lectures ; they hope to overturn revolutionary syndicalism by the breath of the professors. It is very strange that a revolutionary like Rappoport should agree with these *worthy progressives*¹ and their acolytes in their estimate of the meaning of syndicalism ; this can only be explained by admitting that even for the best-informed Socialists the problems of violence still remain very obscure.

To examine the effects of violence it is necessary to start from its distant consequences and not from its immediate results. We should not ask whether it is more or less directly advantageous for contemporary

¹ See note p. 13. Trans.

workmen than adroit diplomacy would be, but we should inquire what will result from the introduction of violence into the relations of the proletariat with society. We are not comparing two kinds of reformism, but we are endeavouring to find out what contemporary violence is in relation to the future social revolution.

Many will reproach me for not having given any information which might be useful for tactical purposes ; no formulas, no recipes. What then was the use of writing at all ? Clear-headed people will say that these studies are addressed to men who live outside the realities of everyday life and outside the true movement—that is, outside editors' offices, parliamentary lobbies, and the ante-chambers of the Socialist financiers. Those who have become scientists merely by coming into contact with Belgian sociology will accuse me of having a metaphysical rather than a scientific mind.¹ These are opinions which will scarcely touch me, since I have never paid any attention to the views of people who think vulgar stupidity the height of wisdom, and who admire above all men who speak and write without thinking.

Marx also was accused by the great lords of positivism of having, in *Capital*, treated economics metaphysically ; they were astonished " that he had confined himself to a mere critical analysis of actual facts, instead of formulating receipts." ² This reproach does not seem to have moved him very much ; moreover, in his preface to his book, he had warned the reader that he would not determine the social position of any particular country, and that he would confine himself to an investigation of the laws of capitalist production, " the tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results." ³

¹ This expectation has been realised ; for in a speech in the Chambre des Deputés on May 11, 1907, Jaurès called me " the metaphysician of Syndicalism," doubtless ironically.

² *Capital*, Eng. trans., p. xxvi.

³ *Loc. cit.* p. xvii.

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 that one might formulate this apparently paradoxical rule, "It is necessary to be outside in order to see the inside." When we apply these principles to contemporary events we run the risk of being taken for metaphysicians, but that is of no importance, for this time we are not at Brussels *savez-vous, sais-tu, pour une fois*.¹ If we are dissatisfied with the unsystematic views formed by common sense, we must follow a method altogether opposed to that of the sociologists, who found their reputation amongst stupid people by means of insipid and confused chatter ; we must firmly resolve to ignore immediate applications, and think only of elaborating generalisations and concepts ; it is necessary to set aside all the favourite preoccupations of the politicians. I hope that in the end it will be recognised that I have never broken this rule.

Though they may lack other qualities, these reflections possess one merit which cannot be questioned ; it is quite evident that they are inspired by a passionate love of truth. Love of truth has become a rare enough quality ; the members of the Bloc despise it profoundly ; official Socialists regard it as having anarchical tendencies ; politicians and their hangers-on cannot sufficiently insult the wretched people who prefer truth to the delights of

¹ Some Belgian comrades have been offended by these innocent jokes, which nevertheless I retain here ; Belgian Socialism is best known in France through Vandevælde, one of the most useless creatures that ever existed, who not being able to console himself for having been born in a country too small to give scope to his genius, came to Paris and gave lectures on all kinds of subjects, and who can be reproached, among other things, for having made an enormous profit on a very small intellectual capital. I have already said what I think of him in the *Introduction à l'économie moderne*, pp. 42-49.

power. But there are still some honest people left in France, and it is for them alone that I have always written.

The greater my experience the more I have recognised that in the study of historical questions a passion for truth is worth more than the most learned methodologies ; it enables one to break through conventional wrappings, to penetrate to the foundations of things, and to grasp reality. There has never been a great historian who has not been altogether carried along by this passion ; and looking at this matter closely, one sees that it is this passion which has given rise to so many happy intuitions.

I do not claim that I have, in this book, said everything that there is to say about violence, and still less to have produced a systematic theory of violence. I have merely reunited and revised a series of articles which appeared in an Italian review, *Il Divenire sociale*,¹ a review which maintains, on the other side of the Alps, the good fight against the exploiters of popular credulity. The articles were written without any fixed plan ; I have not tried to rewrite them, because I did not know how to set about giving a didactic appearance to such an exposition ; it even seemed to me better to preserve their untidy arrangement, since in that form they will perhaps more easily awake thought. We should always be careful in opening up a little-known subject, not to trace its boundaries too rigorously, for in this way the door is closed to the many new facts which arise from unforeseen circumstances. Time after time the theorists of Socialism have been embarrassed by contemporary history. They had constructed magnificent formulas, clear-cut and

¹ The last four chapters have been much more developed than they were in the Italian text. I have thus been able to give more space to philosophic considerations. The Italian articles have been collected in a brochure under the title *Lo Sciopero generale e la violenza* with a preface by Enrico Leone.

symmetrical, but they could not make them fit the facts. Rather than abandon their theories, they preferred to declare that the most important facts were mere anomalies, which science must ignore if it is to obtain a real understanding of the whole.