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The Belle Epoque and revolutionary syndicalism

On May 6, 1889, the Universal Exposition of Paris opened its doors to hundreds of thousands of excited French men and women. The Exposition's impressive iron and steel architecture was dominated by the controversial Eiffel Tower, "the symbol of machinism" and "the aggressive embodiment of calculation" for a new age.[1] Topped by the tricolor, its 1,792 steps seemed emblematic of France's march toward an industrial, scientific, and prosperous future. During the six months of its existence, the Exposition displayed to thirty-two million visitors the usefulness of science and technology for everyday life, promising a future of unlimited possibilities because of their benefits. Since 1851, Universal Expositions had celebrated the "wedding of knowledge, technique, and industry."[2] The 1889 Exposition, with its *palais des machines*, pavilions of electricity, telephones, and natural gas, continued this tradition. Indeed, the Exposition is often viewed as the inauguration of the Belle Epoque, an era that would see impressive technological and scientific achievements, ranging from the construction of a subway system linking Parisian arrondissements to the expanding suburbs, to the initial implementation of citywide electric light. Though France was still predominantly an agrarian country at this time, it seemed clear that industrialization and urbanization were the waves of the future.[3]

Conceived by the school reformer and colonial advocate Jules Ferry, the Exposition was a centerpiece for the liberal achievements of the young Third Republic, and its populist spirit infused the great Fair. Still shaky from the threat of a coup by the popular General Boulanger, the government was eager to visibly promote its scientific credentials for the people. In fact, the enthusiasm which the Exposition generated appeared to justify the Republic's hopes, for the linkage of science and progress seemed palpable for French men and women of all backgrounds. For

example, the printer and future reformist syndicalist Auguste Keufer, then the young secretary of the fledgling printers' federation, saw in this "marvelous exposition" not only technical progress but an anticipation of "the normal organization of humanity."[4] Workers, like others in French society, could share in the benefits of industrialization.

The condition of the working class and its place in French life was a major theme of the Exposition. Its new exhibition on social economy drew on the ideas of the paternalistic social reformer Frédéric Le Play. Commissioner-general of the 1867 Universal Exposition under Louis Napoleon, he had been among the first to attempt to study laborers scientifically in his monumental work, *Les Ouvriers européens*. His disciple, Emile Cheysson, and the liberal economist, Léon Say, who together arranged the 1889 exhibit, also mobilized science to address the social question. Their exhibit idyllically portrayed the lives of workers while offering implicit suggestions about how to ameliorate their condition. Say and Cheysson recognized, if only implicitly, that industrialization might morally and economically damage some workers. Like Le Play, they believed that class conciliation based on shared morality was a better answer than "misguided" state-centered or socialist solutions to the social question. This spirit informed their building of a rational, well-ordered model of a "worker village," consisting of laborers' houses, cafés, and restaurants. This company town was akin to the Exposition's representations of colonial villages (Chinese, Indian, etc.). At the center of the village was the town circle, where all classes could mingle and find "agreeable and sane distractions."[5] This picture of working-class life followed many of Le Play's paternalistic and reformist assumptions. Say and Cheysson depicted "thrifty, prévoyante [provident], and disciplined" proletarian families embedded in well-organized communities, which helped produce the social harmony necessary for a successful industrial society.[6] Just as foreign administrators romanticized the conditions of their colonial subjects, so French elites could assume that working-class neighborhoods were, and could increasingly become, "peaceable kingdoms" that assured tranquil class relations.[7]

This portrait of working-class life was far removed from the proletarian hovels sketched by Zola in *Germinal*. Indeed, the one-third of the French who were urban workers at this time tended to congregate in increasingly class-segregated, crowded, and unsanitary suburban housing that grew haphazardly throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.[8] Nevertheless, the metaphor of the village did capture an important part of the working-class neighborhood. Workers did congregate in taverns, restaurants, and the like. Yet these meeting places often

promoted a distinctive working-class sensibility, proud of manual labor and suspicious of any authority emanating from outside its ranks, rather than any belief in class conciliation.[9]

As representatives of this working-class culture, later revolutionary syndicalist leaders such as Victor Griffuelhes or Emile Pouget would have undoubtedly scoffed derisively at this exhibit. They believed that the "amelioration" of the working class entailed the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the Republic. The society of the future would be based on the free and voluntary association of producers, federally organized in decentralized syndicats. The exhibit's construction of the working class as a kind of internal colony showed the gulf separating elites and the newborn social sciences from such a syndicalist vision, and from the real lives of working people.

Thus, the republican desire for a democratic, scientifically progressive *patrie* sustained by the support of *le peuple* was still a dream in the fin-de-siècle. A large segment of the people were members of a growing proletariat who did not share in French prosperity. In late nineteenth-century France, industrialization was slowly developing, and small shops dominated manufacture. The dirty, oppressive factories that did appear were hardly an advertisement for a bright industrial future.[10] The founding of the Second International in Paris during the 1889 Exposition punctuated the rift between elites and a growing proletarian movement.[11] The killing of twelve striking workers and the wounding of thirty others by soldiers on May 1, 1891, in Fourmies, as well as the sympathy of many workers for the anarchist bombs that terrorized the rich from 1890 to 1894, graphically demonstrated their alienation from the nation. The founding of the CGT in 1895 and its rapid advocacy of a revolutionary general strike followed the waves of strikes in the 1890s, which were larger than any previous surge in French history. These strikes were in turn dwarfed by the outbreak of labor militancy some fifteen years later. This worker radicalism demonstrated that the class conflict of the 1848 June Days and the 1871 Paris Commune had not disappeared, but rather seemed to be evolving to a new stage of confrontation. Demonstrations and strikes were symptomatic of an "escalation of political battle from the purely parliamentary field to mass struggle," as republican and proletarian interests radically diverged.[12]

Led by many former anarchists, the CGT tried to unify this proletarian radicalism, calling for the revolutionary overturning of bourgeois society and its replacement by workers' control of production. Yet beneath the proletarian militancy of the fin-de-siècle, the image remained of the worker who, like others in French society, embraced the technological

utopia of the 1889 Exposition. For all their opposition to the emerging capitalist and republican order, workers tended to accept industrial change as they problematized its capitalist form. Yet the CGT's advocacy of decentralized, participatory production conflicted with a vision of inevitable, large-scale technological change. As the CGT grew, this tension resulted in political and ideological struggles, as bases of legitimacy were rethought. In so doing, syndicalist leaders drew on positivistic and democratic themes that were raised in both the plebeian and liberal public spheres.[13] The rise of a sophisticated social science superior to its paternalistic ancestors complicated this discursive controversy, as did syndicalism's grounding of its theory of industrial society in a positive evaluation of labor and production. The stakes of this reconsideration were formidable. The complex interplay of these themes and publics not only sealed the fate of the CGT, but contributed to the distinctive industrial vision of modernity that helped stabilize a fragile Third Republic in post-World War I France.[14]

By 1900, the industrial vision of the 1889 Fair had given way to a much more complicated image of social life. Eiffel's technological utopia was challenged by a more private and subtle perception of future possibilities. These differences were exemplified in the 1900 Parisian Universal Exposition. While the Herculean architecture of 1889 was a paean to technological progress, the fifty million people who attended the 1900 Exposition saw a World's Fair emphasizing the distinctive decorative style of French design. Dominated by the interior designer Siegfried Bing, the "art nouveau" of the 1900 Exposition covered the iron and steel girders of 1889 with traditional stone, ceramic, and plastic exteriors. Silverman believes that this new architectural style expressed an emerging, particularly French, nationalist discourse of "private organicism," the interior world of refined sensibility in contrast to the public spectacle of confident technology.[15]

This concern with elaborate interior space did not simply represent a haven that afforded refuge from the tribulations of modernity, for it also pointed to a complex rethinking of the self and its relationship to society. Electricity infused the 1900 Fair; as the harbinger of the second Industrial Revolution, it seemed to confirm the promise of a clean, more subtle technology which could illuminate great spaces while avoiding the dangers of flames, smoke, and steam associated with the first Industrial Revolution.[16] Like an electric current, the new interior world of the self throbbed with movement and energy.

The interest in the private world intersected with other cultural and

social trends which complicated the relatively innocent technological and positivist faith of 1889. The "dream world" of consumption was an important part of the 1900 Fair. It signified the emergence of an embryonic consumer culture, represented by department stores such as the Bon Marché, which promoted individualistic desires for goods and supported a growing split between work and leisure. Further, symbolism helped inaugurate a cult of the self in opposition to the nineteenth-century large-scale technological sensibility. Medical research correlated the growth of city life to a rise of nervousness, labeled neurasthenia. The private sphere was no longer a realm free from the problems of social life, for its sanctity was invaded by urban ills. Coupled with a surge of interest in the psychological phenomena of suggestibility, hypnotism, and dream states, and the fascination with Bergsonian *élan vital*, such beliefs helped break down the clear distinctions between inner and outer, rational and irrational, self and society, that had framed so much nineteenth-century liberal and positivist discourse. In sum, the faith in technological expansion leading to a good society needed to be supplemented, if not replaced, with a more chastened perspective that recognized the distinctive and often mysterious characteristics of mental life and its complicated connection to the enigmatic problems of cultural and social solidarity.[17]

The new complexity of self/society relations contributed to a rethinking of the social question and its relationship to the Republic, as the fragility of social bonds was recognized. A new basis for the solidarity linking workers and the Republic occupied a prominent symbolic place in the 1900 Exhibition. The newly erected Porte Binet, crowned by a statue of a woman, *La Parisienne*, replaced the Eiffel Tower as the entryway to the exhibit. This "bejeweled and mosaic-covered" archway was decorated with carvings, the *Frieze of Labor*, which paid homage to the corporations of craft workers who had helped construct the Exposition. The gateway signified that the Republic and labor could work together in the spirit of national solidarity.[18]

Indeed, by 1900, solidarity was the watchword of the moment. At this time, the reformist socialist Alexander Millerand was minister of commerce and industry. He was a supporter of the new doctrine of *solidarité*, formulated by Léon Bourgeois, which stressed the organic interdependence of organized groups, such as syndicats, with a government oriented toward social welfare. The social economy exhibition of 1900 expressed this new solidarist philosophy. The paternalistic worker villages of 1889 were replaced with exhibits extolling the benefits of state intervention and labor associations in addressing the social question. Displays accented the social legislation of the Third Republic, from the

1898 law on accidents to child labor laws. The improvement of worker hygiene, tied to expert medical and engineering knowledge, was a major theme. These concrete advantages demonstrated the efficacy of *solidarité*, which began to displace both paternalist discourse and the revolutionary language of fraternity among social reformers and radicals. During the Exposition, from July 30 to August 4, 1900, the first International Congress of the Teaching of Social Science was held in Paris. The objective of the Congress was to assemble proponents of *solidarité* and forge links between politicians and intellectuals. Participants included Millerand, Bourgeois, Georges Clemenceau, the historian Charles Seignebos, the economist Charles Gide, the journalist Gustave Geffroy, and the sociologist Emile Durkheim.[19]

In such an atmosphere, the great sociologist Durkheim surveyed the evolution of French social science. By 1900, having eclipsed Le Play and his school, Durkheim found the *solidarité* of Bourgeois too dependent on legislative action. He searched for a new version of social science that rejected paternalism and overt state control, and could prove adequate for a republican society. Though finding its earliest practitioners such as Saint-Simon and Comte simplistic, he believed that these social science pioneers helped overcome the hegemony of tradition and superstition, pointing the way toward a science of society. Like his contemporaries Weber and Tönnies, Durkheim saw the rise of the scientific worldview as an integral component of the great transformation of the West. Despite developing in different intellectual cultures, Durkheim's positivism, along with that of his more hermeneutically oriented German counterparts, recognized that the legitimation of social power in the modern era had become tied to rationality, democracy, and individualism. In the wake of the triumph of Enlightenment rationality, the spectacular scientific advances of the nineteenth century, and the growth of democracy and individual freedom, the foundations of government and society were altered. For Durkheim, the democratic conditions of France proved especially favorable for the emergence of sociology, which could grasp the laws governing modern organic solidarity, and its transformation of tradition into a more rational form of social authority. In his words, "everything predestines our country to play an important role in the development of this science."[20]

His confidence in the future of a sophisticated social science tied to democracy seemed justified during the Belle Epoque. The authority of science was an integral part of the democratic promise of the Third Republic. The intricate bonds between science and republicanism were expressed in the rise of the social sciences to prominence in the complex

intellectual and academic milieux in the fin-de-siècle. Exemplified most powerfully in Durkheim's sociology, and in opposition to the literary perspectives that had dominated the academy, these new social sciences advocated a sophisticated positivism that could lead to the understanding of the patterns of "social facts" ordering everyday life.

For Durkheim, the emerging social sciences entailed a new role for intellectuals. In the wake of the Dreyfus Affair and the rise of public opinion associated with a mass press, the modern intellectual should consider himself/herself an opinion leader who could help guide popular sentiment. As academics and scholars rather than aristocratic notables, modern intellectuals should educate rather than attempt to dictate beliefs to the public. In Durkheim's words, "our action must be exerted through books, seminars, and popular education. Above all, we must be *advisers, educators*. It is our function to help our contemporaries know themselves in their ideas and in their feelings, far more than to govern them."[21] Intellectuals would foster the replacement of liberal, atomistic, utilitarian individualism with a new "moral individualism," in which people recognized that self-realization and the rights of man were inseparable from the increased social interdependence demanded by an egalitarian democracy.[22] A public enriched with a scientific worldview and informed by moral individualism, accompanying a rationally organized industry bolstered by a free civil society and a reformist republican state, promised future prosperity.

Such a view no longer depended on a simple faith in technology. Like Tocqueville and Guizot, Durkheim recognized that autonomous intermediary organizations tying professional groups to one another and to the state were central building blocks in social stability. Further, by 1900 many republican leaders realized that their energies should be directed toward the promotion of republican values, rather than attempting to foster giant industrial projects. While some business elites advocated economic concentration, the rise of German and American industry in the late nineteenth century, coupled with French industrial stagnation, helped promote a sensitivity to small business and a protectionist approach to the economy. In such a context, the state turned to the tasks of social reconciliation, solidarity, and education. The government's concerns thus merged with those of the social sciences, a tie reinforced by the Comtean positivism of many early Third Republic political leaders. Despite differences between the relatively liberal positivism of Ferry and Gambetta and the *solidarité* of later Radicals such as Bourgeois, several themes remained constant. Like Durkheim, these politicians realized that scientifically educating French children could

guarantee a public able to make the sophisticated decisions required of a democracy. A rich civil society composed of a number of voluntary associations complemented by an effective school system would encourage such democratic sociability. Consequently, the Third Republic promoted the status of secondary education, hoping to realize Comte's dream of the university as a secular Church.

Yet French public life also revealed discomfort not only about the virtues of scientific progress, but also the viability of a republican government.[23] The Boulanger adventure was followed by the protracted Dreyfus Affair, which showed that powerful conservative elements in French society such as the army were ambiguous at best about republican principles. Further, Bergson's philosophy of *élan* and the rise of spiritualist philosophies demonstrated an uneasiness about the costs to spiritual and inner life that a disenchanting science invariably advanced. The memory of the Franco-Prussian War compounded fears of French decadence and loss of will, exacerbated by the low birth rate and the high incidence of suicide, alcoholism, and venereal disease.[24]

The social question especially haunted the vaunted progress of the Third Republic. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the new social science and the republican state had not successfully quelled worker radicalism, and the revolutionary syndicalist movement grew in strength. The Catholic *Ralliement* of the early 1890s, while accepting the existence of the Republic, had contributed to the visibility of the social question, for it prominently championed the social improvement of the working class. Reforms benefiting labor, such as the eight-hour day, were slowly implemented in France, despite the doctrine of *solidarité* and republican attempts to integrate the workers into the nation. The gradual and uneven development of French industry left in place a workforce dominated by artisans proud of their independence, while many French employers intransigently demanded total control of the *atelier* and factory. A strong civil society tying classes to one another remained underdeveloped in the Belle Epoque.

Social science recognized this underside of modern material and social progress. Durkheim's rhetoric was suffused with the language of crisis; he and his school believed that a major indicator of anomie was the pervasive class conflict in French society. The Durkheimians recognized the immense power of the non-rational in social life, even if they believed its contours could be rationally grasped.[25] While Durkheim sympathized with many of the left's demands, for other, more conservative, social critics, democracy and particularly socialism promised the end of civilization. Many popular social psychological studies of collective behavior

echoed Le Bon's fear of *la foule*, and the rise of a new barbarism associated with it. The social question, and especially revolutionary syndicalism, provided perhaps the major challenge for social scientific and democratic aspirations of the Third Republic.[26]

At first glance, syndicalism indeed seemed dangerous, backward-looking, and irrational, justifying Le Bon's fears. The rhetoric and actions of the movement helped fuel the most paranoid bourgeois anxieties, reaching a fever pitch in the early twentieth century. On April 13, 1906, Gaston Dru, journalist for the very conservative *L'Echo de Paris*, interviewed Griffuelhes, the revolutionary syndicalist leader of the CGT, by then the largest leftist union organization in France. The CGT had called for massive worker demonstrations on May 1, less than three weeks away. Reflecting the mixture of trepidation and curiosity that characterized many of his colleagues and middle-class readers, Dru painted Griffuelhes, a shoemaker who once followed the revolutionary conspirator Blanqui, as a modern-day sans-culotte who looked and acted the part of the revolutionary artisan. Griffuelhes, proud, defiant, with a touch of the authoritarian, had "the air of someone who is, and wishes to remain, a worker." For Dru, Griffuelhes seemed radically "other," an early twentieth-century representative of the "dangerous classes," with few ties to mainstream French society.

His interview only confirmed this perception. Dru asked Griffuelhes if he believed that worker strikes were responsible for the precarious condition of the French economy. Griffuelhes did not even bother to reply to this question, and instead confirmed Dru's fears by stating that "we [workers] demand nothing. We take."[27] Griffuelhes said that he cared little about the competitive position of France vis-à-vis other countries, for a vast class chasm separated laborers and *patrons*. Workers have nothing, he said, they will gain nothing by an accord with capitalists, and they have nothing to lose. For Griffuelhes, notions of civilization and patriotism were the creations of the bourgeoisie and held no meaning for the proletariat.

Griffuelhes's remarks reflected the sense of cultural difference cultivated by the CGT. Syndicalist militants, drawing on rich socialist and artisanal traditions, fashioned an *ouvriériste* discourse and cultural style emphasizing the social centrality of the producer rather than the citizen, the nobility of the worker, and the barbarism of the bourgeoisie and its republican lackeys. They stressed the importance of *élan* in energizing worker activity in opposition to bourgeois decadence. Direct action was a key component of this unique working-class sensibility. *Les gestes*, whether strikes or demonstrations, expressed workers' will and turned

their subordinate economic position into a powerful force. This "pragmatic of direct action," incarnated in decentralized syndicats, increased worker solidarity while promoting concrete social reforms. As the historian Perrot states, "To go on strike was such a positive act, from the vantage point of working-class morality, that those who stayed out of it were called, by a significant twist of language, idle."[28] Demonstrations and strikes also served as discursive laboratories, a "liminal space" where new conceptual vocabularies were forged and bourgeois culture was challenged.[29]

These themes were exemplified in the circumstances surrounding the unfortunate death of a Mme. Chatel on January 25, 1907. The thirty-two-year-old Mme. Chatel and her husband owned a café across the street from the Parisian Bourse du Travail, the central meeting place of the CGT. The newly installed prime minister, the Radical Dreyfusard Clemenceau, had ordered the Bourse du Travail closed in the wake of CGT demonstrations demanding that the *repos hebdomadaire* law be observed. Enacted in July 1906, the law mandated Sunday as an obligatory day of rest for French workers. The CGT called for a massive demonstration on January 20 to show workers' displeasure with the laxity of the enforcement of the law. Over 20,000 demonstrators showed up at the Bourse and the Place de la République, erecting barricades in the spirit of their revolutionary ancestors and shouting "Give us back our Bourse!" Clemenceau, showing the vengefulness that would later lead him to punish Germany after World War I, turned the area around the Bourse into a veritable fortress. He covered Paris with troops, deploying upwards of 20,000 men. Workers and police clashed in front of the Bourse and several laborers fled into the Chatel café with the police in pursuit. A fight then ensued as workers cried "Down with the assassins! Down with the army! Down with the traitors! Down with the cops!" Mme. Chatel became extremely excited and fearful, passing out in the midst of the struggle. She died five days later of an aneurysm provoked by the experience, according to one account.[30]

Though Mme. Chatel was not a syndicalist, the CGT treated her as a fallen comrade. Her funeral on January 27 was attended by at least 1,500 workers (the socialist paper *L'Humanité* account puts the number at 5,000), slowly marching behind her carriage, many wearing red carnations and carrying wreaths of red flowers while singing the proletarian anthems, the "Internationale" and the "Carmagnole." Luminescent red, the color representing the blood spilled by workers at the hands of the bourgeoisie, was everywhere; the CGT felt red was appropriate for what it termed a murder. Several syndicalist leaders spoke at the cemetery

before her burial. In part encouraged by the rhetoric of these eulogies, some workers passionately cried for vengeance. The funeral decorum broke down as one distraught young man threw himself on Mme. Chatel's casket, vowing revenge on Clemenceau and Lépine (the Parisian prefect of police).[31]

The language of the eulogies at the burial was particularly interesting, for it turned typical elite descriptions of radical workers against the ruling class. Many elites considered radical workers to be violent and uncivilized, fanatically bent on destroying the private rights of the bourgeoisie. CGT speakers at the funeral inverted these classifications, castigating police, government officials, and the bourgeoisie alike as assassins, the true perpetrators of violence and brutality. Mme. Chatel, who was compared to the working-class women of Zola's *Germinal*, was "the victim of an invasion by barbarians, by the Tartars," who were unfit to be called human. The police had violated the sanctity of her domicile, just as they had violated the private space of the Bourse du Travail. The "jackals" Clemenceau and Lépine were directly responsible for such "brigandage." The imagery of the unrestrained *foule* was transferred to the police, who were called a "gang" who "invaded" Mme. Chatel's establishment. This language dovetailed with other typical worker inversions of bourgeois categories. Overturning capitalist complaints about worker idleness, the bourgeoisie were depicted as lazy parasites living off the work of others. Factories, military barracks, and jails were all described as penal colonies, *les bagnes*.[32]

This colorful language was a major aspect of the emerging proletarian public sphere in fin-de-siècle France. Radical workers turned the language of the ruling class on itself. As had peasants in Rabelais's time, workers recast derogatory terms directed at their class into an idiom critical of the elite. Further, like the passion displayed at the funeral, CGT discussions at their Congresses were often emotional, unruly, and demonstrative. Syndicalists also developed their own distinctive institutions and ideology. Union leaders attempted to create a positive picture of worker self-reliance, based on the centrality of the producer in society. Following Pelloutier, they stressed the importance of workers autonomously creating an egalitarian morality tied to the *atelier*, in contrast to the atomistic individualism of the bourgeoisie. The Bourse and the syndicat were concrete representations of such an independent space which belonged to the workers. According to the speakers at Mme. Chatel's burial, the actions of the police showed that workers could not trust the authorities, and reinforced this sense of autonomy. The only reforms worthy of worker allegiance were those brought about under the pressure

of proletarian direct action. Direct action was not only a means to this end, but most fundamentally a way to empower workers by building solidarity through participatory activity, such as strikes.

The funeral eulogies also invoked the modern language of rights. Militants drew on republican themes while radicalizing them, advocating a worker version of social republicanism which placed the republican virtues of egalitarian participation and moral development in the context of the workplace. Their republican *ouvriérisme* also called for an improvement in working conditions and a higher standard of living. Thus, while some leaders advocated sabotage at the workplace, syndicalists were far from Luddites. The majority sentiment among workers enthusiastically welcomed technological progress, a more efficient and well-organized workplace to lessen fatigue, the eight-hour day, and increased material abundance. They believed that workers' control would not only increase the power of laborers, but also improve the productivity of the economy. Science was integral to this progress. As the Nancy Federation of Syndicats told its working-class readership in 1899, "You must instruct yourself politically and scientifically in order to gain the knowledge necessary for the complete development of your intelligence and your faculties."[33] Pelloutier called for the working class to develop a *science de son malheur*, which would free workers from the oppression of capitalism while advancing the laws of material and moral progress.[34]

This belief in science and productivity showed the complex relationship of the bourgeois and proletarian public spheres. Syndicalists embraced their cultural marginality, seeing the syndicat and the Bourse as the birthplace of a new proletarian morality. Further, radical workers had a clear awareness of governmental attempts to co-opt them through the passage of social reforms; they were extremely skeptical of the Third Republic's claims about democracy and popular sovereignty. Yet their inversion of bourgeois categories showed that they were tied to the liberal public sphere, if only negatively. More importantly, workers shared much of the same discursive terrain as their liberal counterparts. Both discourses centered upon the modern categories of rights, class, production, and science.

In the years to follow, the revolutionary impetus of French syndicalism began to wane. Socialists unified in 1905 and presented a parliamentary alternative to direct action, and the CGT faced union competition such as the conservative *les Jaunes*.[35] After 1907, CGT membership stagnated. The 1908 deaths of several workers at strikes at Draveil and Villeneuve-Saint-Georges were blamed by many within the CGT on the radical rhetoric of the syndicalist leadership. Shortly thereafter, Griffuelhes was

forced to resign the presidency of the union in a scandal which may have been masterminded by rivals, who accused him of embezzling union funds. He was replaced by the ineffectual socialist Niel, who was in turn supplanted six months later by the more militant Jouhaux.[36]

In a May 1, 1909, interview with *L'Eclair*, the aging Georges Sorel commented on the evanescence of syndicalism's radicalism. His famous *Reflections on Violence* had painted a sophisticated portrait of syndicalist workers who rejected bourgeois morality in favor of a proletarian, heroic ethic motivated by the myth of the general strike. According to Sorel, this ethic had disintegrated largely because the syndicalist leadership after Griffuelhes was an ambitious coterie seduced by the socialist spirit of compromise. These leaders reduced the revolutionary ideal of the general strike to a mundane program concerned with consolidating gains and avoiding trouble with the police. The CGT ethic of direct action was subtly redefined to reflect this new passivity, for it now ritualized radical behavior, thereby domesticating it. As Sorel stated, CGT May Day demonstrations "habituated workers who descended to the Place de la République on this day to march docilely according to the commands of the police."[37] Sorel's fears about the reformist tendencies of the movement were realized several years later, when the CGT leader Jouhaux joined the French *union sacrée* during World War I rather than attempting to lead a general strike.[38]

Like Sorel, many syndicalist militants recognized that the movement seemed to be losing its revolutionary *élan*. The militants' analysis centered on a crisis of leadership resulting from the introduction of "non-producer" values into syndicalism. Several CGT leaders commented on the syndicalist "malaise," engaging in an extensive discussion about the fate of the CGT after 1908. They contended that the movement was subtly involved in a *rectification de tir*; critics often pointed to insufficiently militant leaders as responsible for the syndicalist crisis.[39] By 1914, this debate had been for the most part effectively silenced, as the CGT president Jouhaux convincingly argued that radical action must take into account new economic exigencies which demanded more centralized union control, more reliance on expertise within the union and in the economy as a whole, and a corresponding de-emphasis on the moral component of direct action and its ties to federalist, worker control of production.

How can we account for this transition? Undoubtedly, the Republic's increased repression of the CGT, the concentration of some industries, the international tensions pointing toward war, and the seeming failure of the general-strike strategy played an important role. There are also

some interesting clues in Sorel's interview. Sorel's framing of the problems faced by syndicalism in terms of reformist and revolutionary orientations reflected the interpretation advanced by CGT leaders of all stripes. The revolution-reform dichotomy had framed syndicalist self-understanding since the inception of the CGT, yet this binary opposition helped draw attention away from the language of science and technological progress that was profoundly influencing the movement.

The discourse of science and productivity so important to republicans was not problematized by the CGT, but was rather embraced by syndicalists. If anything, by 1908 many militants criticized republicans and capitalists as not being scientific enough, as preventing progress because their class prejudices inhibited an understanding of the functioning of the economic *ordre naturel*. As syndicalism adopted a thoroughly technocratic discourse, the organizational framework of the movement changed. Though critical of the bureaucratic tendencies that characterized political parties from the French Socialists and German Social Democrats to the "bourgeois" French Radical Party, the CGT gradually adopted a centralized, bureaucratic structure itself.

The syndicalist glorification of the laborer, whose nobility they contrasted with the murderers of Mme. Chatel, linked syndicalist productivism to the logic of the emerging industrial society. What the American sociologist C. Wright Mills calls, in another context, the left's belief in a "labor metaphysic" is important here.[40] For Mills, Marxist and socialist doctrine overemphasized the role of the working class as an agent of emancipatory social change. Such a perspective reduced the complexity of social change to the history of labor. While syndicalism embraced this philosophy of history, the labor metaphysic had more subtle consequences for the movement. The concept of labor supplied the CGT with a particular *ouvriériste* version of the positivism so important in the French public sphere, providing syndicalists with a vantage point from which to criticize bourgeois society as both inefficient (not allowing the maximum production of goods) and immoral (undermining the nobility of work). However, the assumption of labor did not prompt syndicalists to reflect upon the epistemological foundation of their theories of social action and change, for they viewed labor as the natural motor powering industrial society.

This valuation of labor helped furnish the CGT with a new definition of democracy and popular sovereignty, for the worker's place in production rather than the abstract political rights of the citizen provided the basis for social interdependence, social participation, and social power. However, the labor republicanism of revolutionary syndicalism had no

adequate theory of large-scale organizations and other "systemic" trends associated with the rise of an international economy. The labor metaphysic also had productivist implications, for it assumed that "human society and nature are linked by the primacy and identity of all productive activity," in particular labor.[41] As Habermas argues, this *ouvriériste* epistemology contended that social solidarity and identity were based on the labor process, for people recognized and reproduced themselves through the products that they created. In good positivist fashion, the labor metaphysic's concern with the control of social and natural processes obscured differences between natural and social sciences, which merged in their instrumental orientation toward knowledge. Labor required technical rules, for the control of natural processes must be harnessed to human ends; it privileged instrumental or strategic logic over other, more hermeneutic types of knowing. Knowledge of the social world was tied to the history, functioning, and control of production.

Yet such a productivist perspective was not inevitable, as Habermas's rational, evolutionary perspective would have it. Syndicalist *ouvriérisme* also raised the themes of alienation and workers' control. The vision of work developed by Pelloutier and Sorel had a strong normative dimension, for it emphasized the aesthetic, moral, and expressive moments of labor, tying these themes to democratic control of the workplace.[42] This laborist version of republicanism derived from many of the same roots as the solidarism of Bourgeois and Durkheimian sociology, and emphasized similar links between moral solidarity and democratic participation. However, in the context of the crisis of the CGT, the failure of the fin-de-siècle revolutionary approach to appeal to non-worker groups and develop a theory of large-scale organization, and the powerful positivism and conservative turn of the French public sphere, proponents of the productivist orientation redefined labor as a homogeneous, quantitative act, eclipsing in the process the social republican strands of the movement. In so doing, Jouhaux, Merrheim, and their comrades believed that they were adopting a scientific perspective on the labor process, in contrast to what they called the romantic version of fin-de-siècle syndicalism.

The leadership's interpretation of the problems of worker solidarity dovetailed with its analysis of the introduction of Taylorist methods of production, for both revolved around issues of fatigue and the dissipation of energy. They adopted an ostensibly neutral scientific vocabulary to discuss these issues, which subtly redefined the syndicalist conception of the private sphere, and ushered in a new abstract, cybernetic language of technical efficiency and control of social processes. By 1914, the CGT's

analysis of the problems faced by workers accepted the necessity of worker adaptation to the laws of the division of labor. Such adjustment focused on changing workers' aptitudes, energy, and morality rather than on altering the division of labor. The private sphere was invoked as the locus of consumption and the region where energy could be rekindled.[43]

The presidency of Jouhaux and the rise to prominence of Merrheim, the leader of the metalworkers' federation, systematized this new orientation.[44] Jouhaux and his colleagues utilized the new psychological and scientific language of adaptation and equilibrium to focus on problems of increased productivity and consumption rather than the moral context of workers' participation in the *atelier*, arguing that experts could best arrange a healthier and more productive workplace. This *ouvriérisme* did not merely replicate the positivism of the liberal public sphere or institute the changes advocated by reformists within the CGT. Jouhaux's and Merrheim's language remained nominally revolutionary, focusing on worker autonomy while remaining suspicious of state action. Yet this new vocabulary abandoned any interest in creating new types of proletarian sociability, privileging increased production over these other aspects of the movement. In sum, they gradually replaced the myth of the general strike with the equally mythological belief in the inevitable development of a large-scale industry with a complex structure, to which workers necessarily had to adapt.

This new syndicalist mythology of a society organized around industrial and scientific progress was intensified by the experience of many leaders in the French government during World War I. Moreover, after World War I, syndicalist productivism could be understood as a radical position because of Clemenceau's conservatism and the attempts to return to a laissez-faire economy. Syndicalists thus allied with those elites and socialists, such as Albert Thomas, who favored state-sponsored rationalization of the economy, and joined them in denouncing as inefficient the small-scale production that still characterized much of the French economy. The CGT contributed to the rationalization of the emerging capitalist order, outdoing even elites in its enthusiasm for industrial society. With its socialist, progressive capitalist, and republican allies, the CGT advocated a version of a corporatist system in which consensus, in Maier's terms, was achieved through "bargaining among organized interests" of labor, business, and the state, rather than through mass public approval or parliamentary means.[45] This neo-corporatism provided the outline for a new postwar public sphere, based on the ostensibly shared interest of the French in increased production and the irrelevance of prewar models of class conflict and social organization.

While the formation of the Communist Party in opposition to reformist syndicalism in 1921 integrated many revolutionary syndicalist themes such as the primacy of class struggle and a suspicion of the republican state, the Party did not question the desirability or inevitability of industrial society, the importance of economic growth, or the viability of a neo-positivist "scientific" approach to social life. The French union movement thus helped contribute to a post-World War I "vision of society in which social conflict was eliminated in favor of technological and scientific imperatives [which] could embrace liberal, socialist, authoritarian, and even communist and fascist solutions."[46] It was an active player in the rise of the instrumental rationality in the West catalogued by the Frankfurt School, restricting more democratic, alternative visions of modernity, at least for this historical era.

Such an outcome was by no means inevitable. However, in the CGT's turn toward reformism, its distinctive social republicanism was forgotten by its leaders, as well as by later historians of the movement. A particular vision of social organization that might have oriented France, and possibly Europe, toward a more participatory type of society, perhaps in the direction of democratic socialism with an emphasis on workers' control, was branded as unrealistic.

It seems as if many contemporary Western social movements have learned these lessons well. In the wake of the decline of the hegemony of the labor movement in the West and the fall of communism in Europe, "new social movements" have become major agents of social change. Unlike syndicalists, both activists and theorists of new social movements, such as the environmental, women's, and gay and lesbian movements, are quite skeptical about the claims of scientific expertise, especially when tied to the ideology of economic growth. They reject the productivist discourse of the labor movement in favor of issues centering on the quality of life and social identity. New social movements also dismiss the proletariat as a universal, emancipatory class, looking to race, gender, and the like rather than class as sources of cultural identity. They are circumspect about the possibility and/or desirability of an apocalyptic revolution, a teleological philosophy of history, and any type of simple dedifferentiation.[47]

Indeed, my approach shares many of these themes with the theorists of new social movements. However, these contemporary authors are too quick to consign labor movements such as syndicalism to the dustbin of history. The theorists of new social movements merge with neo-conservatives in rejecting the entire syndicalist tradition as little more than an authoritarian and productivist chapter in the history of the left, to be

dismissed out of hand. Such an approach conflates historical outcomes with historical inevitability. In so doing, authors from Habermas to Touraine grant too much to the liberal tradition, and do not draw on the rich legacy of the plebeian and proletarian public spheres, as exemplified in part by syndicalism. Even in its productivist form, syndicalism certainly helped promote a more open public realm. The CGT never completely abandoned the issue of some sort of workers' participation in and control of the labor process, it provided a necessary prelude for more radical claims for workers' control that surfaced again, for example, in post-World War II France. Syndicalism also brought concrete issues of labor practices, from wages to collective bargaining, into the public domain.

Moreover, syndicalism's advocacy of direct action, decentralized participation, and moral development clearly presages the new social movements, thus calling into question their newness. Further, many economists now recognize that flexible, small-scale firms with much labor participation may be more economically viable than large corporations.[48] In sum, in the context of the contemporary zeitgeist, the complexity of the "utopian" visions of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social movements should be recognized. Not only revolutionary syndicalists, but also the Chartists and Guild Socialists in Britain, the Knights of Labor and the IWW in the United States, and the council communists in post-World War I Germany and Italy were very different from the bureaucratic, hierarchical, and state-oriented Marxist and reformist unions. The amnesia of the new social movements complements the earlier hegemony of Marxist and social democratic models of modern society on the left, for they restrict our view of historical possibilities and contribute to a scarcity of symbolic resources for contemporary attempts to devise new forms of decentralized community. A rethinking of the legacy of the syndicalist movement is no less than an attempt to stake a claim to the "popular sense of history" and not cede this terrain to liberals or neo-conservatives. It means giving the socialist tradition its due in "the debate over who shall inherit the old European vocabulary of freedom, equality, and solidarity."[49]

To ground a theory of public discourse which can adequately inform an analysis of revolutionary syndicalism, the thicket of research surrounding these issues must be investigated. This involves not only examining the literature on new social movements, but also entails navigating through the studies of syndicalism and the French labor movement while drawing out their underlying theoretical assumptions. Finally, the Habermasian approach to public discourse must be critically examined, concerning especially issues of culture and the historically situated character of social movements.