21. Solidarism

After the establishment of the republic, its victory over monarchism and its inauguration of a lay educational system and a colonial empire, one is generally given the impression that, by the 1890s, the regime represented a spent force, with nothing new to offer. Jacques Chastenet, in his six-volume history of the Third Republic, claimed each decade in it had a special character. The 1870s were marked by a determination to recover from the humiliating defeat of the Franco-Prussian war and the Paris exhibition of 1878 was a gesture to show that France was itself again. Eleven years later, the exhibition of 1889 demonstrated that the republic was securely established, and preaching its dedication to science. But after that the exhibition of 1900 'lacked a soul': France had no new ideal. The Panama scandal (1892–3) and the Dreyfus affair (1894–9) gave the impression that internal bickering, corruption and an ageing oligarchy had brought reform to a halt. Stagnation appears to be the mark of the nineties. There is a traditional view that only in 1905, when the clerical question was more or less solved, did the republic at last free itself from its old preoccupations and henceforth it was the social question which dominated politics. The *fin de siècle* is thus an interlude.

This kind of generalisation is the result of regarding French history as a chronicle, in which laws and crises follow each other in blundering succession. To concentrate on the scandals is to give excessive importance to symptoms and to lose sight of continuities and breaks of deeper significance. It is wrong, first of all, to imagine that interest in social questions became predominant only after 1905. The opportunists are usually criticised for not having a social policy, but the previous chapter has shown that though they may not have passed many laws on the subject, social questions were very much in the forefront of their minds. They believed in political and educational solutions to them, and those which they offered did seem to win much support. They were not blind to the threat of

socialism, even though that was then attracting only a tiny minority. And moreover, in the nineties a new social doctrine—solidarism—was virtually adopted by the republican government to meet the increasing challenges of industrialisation.

It is wrong, secondly, to assume that after 1905 religious disagreements ceased to be a major divisive force, even though Church and state were separated. The problems facing the French did not change drastically at the turn of the century: the unequal distribution of wealth, education and religious belief was a permanent feature, and successive regimes and governments had policies on each of them. These are the acknowledged continuities in French history. The question that remains unresolved is why so little headway was made in tackling them. The nineties are particularly illuminating in providing the answer, for they were a period when original efforts were made to adopt new approaches, in institutional, religious, social and diplomatic ways. This chapter will describe these efforts—some less well known than others—and will try to explain why they were largely unsuccessful. The failure is very important, because it meant that France could not get out of its rut. The purpose of this group of chapters is to indicate what this rut was, what ways of thinking and what inherited institutions were so firmly entrenched that they cast off reforms like water off a duck's back.

In politics, a situation of deadlock had been reached through the triangular conflict of state, ministers and parliament. This could only be ended by revolution or a *coup d'état*. That is what Boulangism attempted. Boulangism has a very colourful side to it, with the result that it is usually studied in a largely personal way. The vanity and ambition of General Boulanger with his blond beard, on his white horse, turning discipline in the army upside-down, trying to win popularity with the junior officers against his fellow generals, collecting votes in election after election, negotiating with every opposition party, accepting vast sums from the royalists, consorting with shady political adventurers, placing all his bets on being able to capture power, but lacking the nerve to be a new Saint-Arnaud or the character to be another Mahdi, so finally running away to Belgium and committing suicide on the grave of his mistress, provides an entertaining contrast to the boring speeches of the grey-beard

politicians.[1] This comic-opera approach has led a recent historian of the Third Republic, Guy Chapman, to call Boulangism 'a trivial and tedious episode, which should never have happened and almost certainly never would have but for the absence of men of character and courage. It is surprising that after so much fret so little resulted from it.'[2] This judgement, however, is precisely the opposite of that which this chapter will put forward. The Boulangist crisis deserves to be compared with that of 1848 rather than with some adventurer's intrigue. It had a similar social background, and it was similarly a challenge to a whole system of government. For twenty years the politicians were absorbed in getting a sufficient measure of agreement in the country to consolidate the republic. They thought they had found it. Ferry was proud of having got the peasants behind him. 'We must seek nothing further beyond this for a long time to come,' he said. Boulangism questioned this. The country's judgement, as between Ferry and Boulanger, was a vital one, pregnant with implications.

By 1885 republicanism had shown its limitations as well as its merits. It could be accused of being, like the July Monarchy, a joint stock company to exploit the country for a small group of shareholders. The opportunists who held power ceased to command a majority in the country. Ferry was unable to hold his policy of marking time for a decade. Just as Louis-Philippe was abandoned by some of his supporters, so Ferry found radicalism undermining his system. The deputies discovered the electoral advantages of criticising the government. The policy of conciliation, preached by the ministers, was unworkable in the constituencies, which were seething with a new generation of ambition. In 1885 the opportunists lost almost half their seats, falling to about 200 and the radicals returned with 170. The conservatives, profiting from this division, doubled their numbers (from 90 to 180). Parliament was thus faced with a stalemate of three almost equal and irreconcilable parties. The reformers made a survey of the opinions of the deputies and found that there was not a single policy for which a majority could be found. Out of 543 deputies, the most who could be

[1] Saint-Arnaud, general in charge of the *coup d'état* of 1851; it was Ferry who made the comparison with the Mahdi.

[2] Guy Chapman, *The Third Republic: The First Phase* (1962), 291.

got to agree on anything were 240 who were in favour of a reduction in the period of military service, 184 who wanted the separation of Church and state, and 159 who favoured income tax. The opportunists could not stand still, since alliance with the right would mean abandoning their anticlericalism and favouritism, and alliance with the left would lead them to reforms they did not want.

The only way out of the impasse was a revision of the constitution. Different parties viewed this each in their own way, but they were agreed on the destruction of the system Gambetta and Ferry had established. Numerous grievances were ready to hand to justify and support the agitation. The most important was economic. Opportunism was failing to give prosperity. The peasants were suffering from the import of foreign wheat and from the phylloxera crisis; the fall in the value of their land began ironically with the establishment of 'the republic of peasants'. The building, metallurgic and mining industries suffered a serious slump after 1885, with around a quarter of a million workers being thrown out of work. The impact of this was all the more noticeable in that it was concentrated in certain areas and in Paris worst of all. Import duties were now levied to save the peasant, so the price of bread rose in 1887, and increased further because of the bad harvest of that year. A general slackening of economic activity plunged the state's budget into greater deficits: receipts from taxation between 1883 and 1887 were repeatedly inferior to the estimates. The Wilson scandal (the president's son-in-law selling decorations) revealed corruption in high places, barely concealed behind a front of moral rectitude.[1]

The massive support that united behind General Boulanger showed how powerful were the forces which rejected the opportunist republic. The royalists are said to have put between 6 and 8 million francs in the campaign in his favour. Even the U.S.A. joined in, with the publisher of the *New York Herald* and an American cable magnate contributing enormous cheques.[2] Radicals and Bonapartists and socialists, Jews and anti-Semites, nationalists, mobsters and intriguers, combined

[1] For the wider significance of the Wilson scandal, which was the climax of a fascinating career as a press magnate, see vol. 2.

[2] Frederic H. Seager, *The Boulanger Affair* (Ithaca, New York, 1969), 258, 186.

strangely in the hope that he would overthrow the system. But the system survived, because it too had great strength behind it. First, it tried to meet the challenge by carrying out reforms, to dish the radicals. Floquet, a radical, but much mellowed as president of the chamber of deputies, was made prime minister. When he failed to stem the tide, force was used. Constans was appointed minister of the interior. This bankrupt manufacturer of lavatory cisterns who had then become a professor of law, deputy and governor-general of Indo-China, had survived accusations of corruption, and won fame as a master of election management. He threatened Boulanger with arrest, but cleverly allowed him time to escape, which Boulanger obligingly did. The agitation was quickly snuffed out. The radicals, terrified by the monster they had created, agreed to co-operate with the opportunists in the election of 1889. The republic was saved.[1]

The importance of Boulangism was twofold. On the one hand it showed the limits of opportunism. Ferry did not fully understand the Boulangist movement and dismissed it as the work of extremists manœuvred by monarchists. He failed to appreciate the social discontents which had given Boulanger much of his popular support. But so too did the radicals. The result was that the republic lost the chance of keeping the support of the industrial workers. These had rallied to Boulanger in the hope of getting a government which would do something to alleviate their distress. The crisis was a double disillusionment for them: not only the opportunists, but even the radicals revealed themselves as being incapable of really understanding the workers. As a result it was the socialists who became the backbone of Boulangism when the radicals deserted it. They defined it clearly as a movement for social reform, for action to meet the economic crisis, with constitutional revision as the means. Boulangism survived after the flight of the general, to become one of the elements in a reinvigorated socialism. It turned Jaurès, hitherto an opportunist, into a socialist. It was thus an important catalyst in the development of a new social conscience. But secondly the apparent defeat of Boulangism confirmed the conservative tendencies of the regime. Ferry failed

[1] The result was 363 united republicans, 167 conservatives, 38 Boulangists (18 of these being in Paris).

to become president of the republic, because too many people hated him, but he was elected president of the senate, and his system was thus entrenched in that bastion of moderation. The long-term significance of Boulangism is that it confirmed that, in a crisis, the republic would show itself to be conservative rather than attempt innovation, and that though its oratory was all about justice, its instincts rated stability more highly. The ultimate meaning of republicanism is to be found in the values which it thus tried to preserve, and from which it could not escape.[1]

By the 1890s, the time seemed to have come for a new classification of political divisions, on the basis of the changed realities of the time. Monarchy was no longer a practical possibility. The nobles and notables who had attached themselves to it needed to find a new outlet for their ambitions. The question was whether the republicans could be flexible enough to provide this, to give them some stake in the regime, democratically accepting the fact of their surviving influence and growing economic power. The position of the Church also had to be reconsidered. The battle against its influence had become somewhat confused, as was shown by the contradiction between the polemical rhetoric and the moderation of what was actually done. The republicans were not as totally at war with the Church as appeared, and, for their part, many Church leaders were conscious that the war had got out of hand and that they could not profit from its continuation. The problem of how to deal with industrialisation, with socialism and with increased expectations among the masses in general demanded new thinking. There were good reasons therefore for the 'new spirit', which Spuller, Gambetta's faithful disciple, demanded and for the *ralliement*, by which the former enemies of the republic were invited into its fold.

[1] Jacques Néré, 'La Crise industrielle de 1882 et le mouvement boulangiste' (Paris doctorat d'État, 1959, unpublished, in the Sorbonne library), is the fullest study of the social and economic basis of the movement; also his complementary thesis, 'Les Élections de Boulanger dans le département du Nord' (unpublished, 1959). A. Dansette, *Le Boulangisme* (1938), and F. H. Seager, *The Boulanger Affair* (New York, 1969), are also very able accounts, from different viewpoints. For contemporary views see Mermeix, *Les Coulisses du boulangisme* (1890), and Maurice Barrès, *L'Appel au soldat* (1900).

As early as 1880 the Church had tried to make a deal with Freycinet for mutual concessions. The very news of it had caused parliament to force his resignation, but in 1890–2 Freycinet was back in office as prime minister, and once more open to offers. Several attempts had already been made in the 1880s to reach some agreement. In 1886 Raoul Duval, an energetic Bonapartist industrialist, had attempted to start a conservative alliance against socialism and radicalism, which would have cut across the old alignments and created a *Droite républicaine*; his death a year later destroyed what small chances it had of success. In 1887 Baron Mackau, leader of the monarchists in parliament, had offered the opportunist Rouvier his support, to save the republic from the radicals, but Mackau then went on to back Boulanger, with the hope of overthrowing the republic, so it is not surprising that these monarchist overtures were treated with great suspicion. In 1888 Albert de Mun had tried to found a Catholic Party, free of dynastic attachments, modelled on the Centre Party in Germany, but his social ideas worried the conservatives and the pope, fearing that he would be unable to control it, ordered its dissolution. A basic difficulty of any *ralliement* was that in order to benefit from it, the Catholics needed to be united in a party; but their leaders, having royalist backgrounds, could never be trusted by the republicans and so could never obtain office, however many concessions they made. The more concessions they made to the republicans, the more they lost their royalist supporters.

This was the dilemma that ruined the efforts of Jacques Piou. In 1890 he founded another 'Constitutional Right', consisting of Catholic and royalist deputies who, after the Boulangist débâcle, were willing to make a deal. They would abandon their support of a royalist restoration in return for religious and economic concessions: that religious instruction should be allowed in primary schools which wished to give it, that the laws exiling the pretenders should be repealed, that public expenditure and taxation should be reduced, and that decentralisation, social legislation and tariff protection should be introduced. Piou's idea was to collect support on the right to enable opportunists (who now usually called themselves progressists) to do without radical votes and so to end the anticlerical campaign. In February 1893 he agreed to be

satisfied if the government merely enforced the school laws in a 'neutral' way, abandoning the demand for their repeal. He declared that he accepted the republic *with its laws* and he changed the name of his party from 'Constitutional Right' to 'Republican Right'. But in the election of that year only thirty-six of his ninety-four candidates were elected. He himself, de Mun and Lamy, the three leaders, were defeated. The royalists as a whole refused to accept the bankruptcy of their movement and fifty-eight intransigent ones were elected as such. The dying cause of the monarchy refused to die. The confusion of the monarchist and clerical issues led to a stalemate.

It is true the advocates of a *ralliement* had mixed motives. A new pope, Leo XIII, brought a new willingness to negotiate and to compromise, based on a realism and an awareness of social change which marked an important modification in the Church's attitudes. But the republicans were, not surprisingly, suspicious of the fact that he hoped to widen the appeal of the Church by this modernisation, that his attack on Gallicanism would strengthen his own power, and that, from the diplomatic point of view, he sought in France an ally to help him recover the papal states from Italy. Cardinal Lavigerie, whose famous toast to the republic in 1890 publicly launched the idea of the *ralliement*, believed that a modification of the Church's attitude to the republic was essential, because the Church's very existence was at stake: he feared that the ending of the concordat would ruin its finances. He did not expect the republic to last very long, at least in its present anticlerical form; he urged co-operation with it simply to reduce its hostility to the Church, and to keep the Church going until the inevitable collapse. Nevertheless, Étienne Lamy, whom Leo commissioned to found a republican Catholic party, was one of 363 deputies who had followed Gambetta in 1876, and he was willing to accept that the majority of Frenchmen were not active Catholics. He wanted the Church to work not for a purely Catholic programme, but for the end of anticlericalism in the name of liberty, to unite, that is, liberals and Catholics. In the election of 1898, he put up Catholic candidates wherever they had some chance of success, and, when they were defeated on the first ballot, he arranged for them to desist in favour of the opportunist-progressists in return for promises of a relaxation

of the anticlerical campaign. However, he could find few men who were both republican and Catholic, able and willing to stand as candidates. He was unable to impose a central control over local politics, and his plans for a united party collapsed. The pope's hope of a *ralliement* was sabotaged above all by the parish priests, who, since they were the people who suffered most from the republic's anticlericalism, had little sympathy for the idea of reconciliation. The Assumptionist Order, important for the newspapers it controlled, waged a vociferous campaign against the republic, oblivious of the papal commands.

On the other side, the republican government was half-hearted in welcoming these overtures from the Church. It paid lip-service to religion as a great moral and social force which, provided it was freed from the domination of the royalists, could be an invaluable weapon against socialism. It allowed unauthorised religious congregations—even the Jesuits—to go about their work unmolested. It took local circumstances into consideration in its enforcement of the laicisation programme, and did not force the clergy out of primary schools when there were no ready replacements. But it was worried by the accusation that it depended on the aid of the reactionary Right, on the obscurantist Catholics, for its survival, that it had sold out the traditions of the republic. The fear of progressing beyond these traditions paralysed it; and in any case it could not carry its supporters in a new policy. The local republican notables, even the prefects, could not abandon the habits of a generation, and continued their anticlerical struggles, just as the parish clergy did. The national leaders were powerless. They would not offer the Catholics any share of power. They were willing to accept Catholic votes only with reservations. They said their republic was an open one, but it was not to be handed over to the Catholics, *ouverte* but not *livrée*. The *ralliement* was a failure. The attempt to achieve it had shown that some people had a vision of politics organised on new lines. But the clerical obsession could not be exorcised.[1]

[1] Alexander Sedgwick, *The Ralliement in French Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), using the papers of Étienne Lamy; Maxime Lecomte, *Les Ralliés. Histoire d'un parti 1886–1898* (1898); Denys Cochin, *L'Esprit nouveau: origine et décadence* (n.d., about 1912); David Shapiro, 'The Ralliement in the Politics of the 1890s', in *The Right in France 1890–1919*, St. Antony's Papers, no. 13 (1962); Emmanuel Barbier, *Histoire du catholicisme libéral*, vol. 2 (1924); id., 'Du royalisme à la république ou

In the economic field, there was a similar inability to meet the challenge of international competition, or to adopt new attitudes in industrial planning. The failure can be illustrated in the career of Jules Méline, who as minister of agriculture under Ferry and who as prime minister in 1896–8, gave clearest expression to this policy of resistance to change. Méline is known to history as the principal creator of the far-reaching system of protection established in the 1880s and 1890s, and called the Méline tariff.[1] Some historians have tended to dismiss him as a mere tool in the hands of the industrialists; others have it the other way round and believe he represented the agricultural interest, using the industrialist for its benefit. His skill as a middleman is certainly revealed in this double reputation. He won fame as the saviour of both industry and agriculture.

He was himself neither a manufacturer nor a farmer and he knew very little about either occupation: his daughter said that he could never tell the difference between a sheaf of wheat and one of barley. He came of modest, lower middle-class stock. His father had owned some land but had also been *greffier de la justice de paix* of Remiremont, a very junior civil servant. His mother was the daughter of a provincial notary of peasant origin. Méline's ambitions always remained modest, circumscribed within his own small world. He dreamt of a career in the *Bureau de l'enregistrement* (which registered documents and levied stamp duties). He became a barrister, but did not achieve any particular success. He lived most of his life on his salary as a deputy, in the same humble apartment in the rue de Commaille.[2] He made no pretence of being other than what he was, though he was very proud of his wife who came of a family of small calico manufacturers, representing a marriage above his station and setting a seal on his rise in the social hierarchy, minimal though that was. He entered politics, moved neither by enthusiasm, nor by passion nor by a vivid imagination, but as an essentially practical, common-sensical,

le ralliement du marquis de Solages', *Annales du Midi* (Jan. 1959), 59–70. For provincial opinion see Gaston Routier, *La Question sociale et l'opinion du pays. Enquête du Figaro* (1894).

[1] E. O. Golob, *The Méline Tariff* (New York, 1944); cf. Marcel Dijol, *Situation économique de la France sous le régime protectioniste de 1892* (n.d., about 1910).

[2] No. 4, Paris 7e.

stubborn party worker, with a smiling and somewhat sly equanimity. Small, thin, with slight gestures and a discreet bearing, he gave the impression of being an obscure provincial notary. As a student in Paris he had been an admirer of Proudhon, whose ideal of a society of satisfied petty proprietors reflected his own exactly. He had joined the Freemasons in 1865 but by 1870 he had left them. He was too *sage* for their increasing bellicosity. He had reservations about Ferry's anti-clerical programme. He believed in a lay state, but also in tolerance. He was a deist who thought that religion was inextinguishable. His wife was a fervent Catholic and he approved of his daughters being brought up to practise that religion. He had worked for Thiers in the electoral campaign of 1869 and he ever retained a genuine admiration for this incarnation of the self-made provincial. He spoke with reverence of Jules Ferry as a great statesman but he was never on intimate terms with him. Ferry was too aristocratic for him. His patron in politics was Claude, senator and president of the *conseil général* of Vosges, who had been a foreman in a textile factory, rose to be its director, and then its owner. 'I am only the pupil of M. Claude', he said, and if he had gone further than his master, 'it was only the force of circumstance.' Méline typified the petty bourgeois in a static society, whose mentality the Méline tariff helped to save and perpetuate.[1]

Méline was not an economist nor a theorist, nor had he studied the controversy between free trade and protection in any serious way. He had certain elementary beliefs. 'The best economic regime for a country', he said, 'is that which produces the greatest amount of employment.' He stated plainly that he was an opportunist not a doctrinaire, and 'if I were an Englishman, I should be a free trader'. But he had no wish that the French should become like the English. His tariffs have been criticised for slowing down the pace of industrial development, but then that was precisely what Méline wanted. He was against industrialisation, and here the continuity of attitudes between Proudhon, Thiers and himself is evident. He admitted industry had produced some material benefits, but on the other hand it was draining the countryside of labourers, it was

[1] A. M. Heber-Suffrin, 'Les Débuts politiques de Jules Méline 1870–1885' (unpublished D.E.S. mémoire, Nancy, 1963).

always having crises of overproduction, and in the future increased mechanisation would produce even more unemployment. The socialist remedy of reduced hours of work would only raise costs and prices. His own solution was the revival of agriculture, which should be made efficient and prosperous once more by protective legislation, modernisation, co-operative marketing, less taxation, more liberal credit, the revival of rural industries. He published a book entitled *The Return to the Land and Industrial Overproduction.*[1] He compared his ideas rather vaguely to those of Chamberlain in England and the Centre Party in Germany, but the parallels were misleading. The arguments he used to justify protection reveal a different attitude, distinctive of France in this period. He did not offer industry protection so that it could afford to modernise and produce more. He had a deep fear of producing too much. French taste, he thought, conflicted with mass production: it was suited to making varied but individual goods. France should therefore keep its 'multitude of small workshops' and from the moral and social point of view 'nothing is more desirable than a sensible distribution of work and of profits, to allow thousands of small employers to win a modest competence'. Protection was the only way to avoid a reduction of wages, which would be forced by foreign competition, since he ruled out the possibility of modernisation. He frankly admitted French employers were timid, inefficient and failed to use enough capital, but he accepted this as an inevitable counterpart of the pursuit of the golden mean and the virtue of moderation. He did not spurn the progress of science. He looked to it and to education to make agriculture profitable once more, but he always put aside any notion of structural change among the peasantry. Transport costs were a major cause of the uncompetitive price of both agricultural and industrial products in France, as well as high taxation. His remedy was not to remove these impediments, which with peasant resignation he accepted as inevitable, but to offer compensating protection. He believed that the duties he imposed, after elaborate calculations, were mathematically the exact compensation needed to offset these disadvantages.

It was the economic crisis of the 1880s which gave him the

[1] J. Méline, *Le Retour à la terre et la surproduction industrielle* (1905).

idea by which he reconciled protection of both industry and agriculture. The poverty of the peasants was making it impossible for them to buy the produce of the manufacturers. Since the republic was above all a government based on public opinion, it was only fair that the peasants should get some advantages from the state like everybody else. Steeped in the old centralising tradition, he did much to confirm the peasantry in their habit of looking to the state for their salvation. The widespread sympathy Méline won was recognised in his election as president of the chamber of deputies (in preference to Clemenceau). His assumption of Ferry's mantle was seen in his tenure, from 1893 to 1902, of the editorship of *La République française*, the paper which Gambetta had established as the principal organ of the republicans.

When Méline became prime minister in 1896, he made an attempt to reorganise the political parties on the basis of the issues which he considered were the real ones. He believed that there was an urgent need to end the meaningless republican coalitions, repeatedly abortive of legislation. Méline formed a cabinet composed entirely of moderates. He wanted to redefine the divisions in politics, to show that the major difference among politicians was over socialism. The republicans were no longer divided simply in degree, over questions of method. The socialists were no longer simply their left wing, just advanced reformers, as they might have been in Gambetta's day, for they wished to subvert the whole social order of which Méline was the champion. The groups of the right were no longer a threat to the republic, because they had virtually abandoned their royalism. They were obvious allies in the struggle against socialism. The radicals, on the other hand, needed to be split: they embraced too many incompatible tendencies. A section of the radical party had, under the leadership of Goblet, made common cause with the socialists. No alliance was possible with it. By contrast, there were only two questions on which the moderate republicans differed from the right—the army and the Church. On these Méline advocated the implementation of Walpole's famous maxim, 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' The army, he insisted, must not be provoked: the Dreyfus case must be silently buried. Attacks on the army by the left were only producing a reaction in the form of a dangerous

nationalist movement. For the same reason, the progress of socialism must be halted or it would produce a demand for a new saviour of society, a new Napoleon. The monarchists should therefore be welcomed into the republic, instead of being forced into opposition by persecution. Anticlericalism should in the same way be abandoned, to cement this alliance with the right: and in any case it was a dead issue, which profited only the radicals. The republic had built up enough defences against the Church. It would be an enormous source of strength if, by a policy of appeasement, the Church could be induced to accept Ferry's legislation and a limited role in the new order. In this way there could be a genuine political confrontation of the defenders of private property against those who wished to abolish it, of those who believed in the conciliation of the classes against those who advocated the class struggle, between those who saw trade unions as instruments of a new co-operative society and those who regarded them as a revolutionary means of paralysing capitalism, between those who looked on taxation as a contribution to public expenses and those who hoped to use it to produce greater economic equality, between those who saw in the senate a rampart of order and those who wished to weaken or abolish it, between those who respected religion and would allow freedom to the Church provided it respected the concordat and abstained from politics, and those who, denying that this was possible, demanded the separation of Church and state.[1]

Méline's ministry lasted longer than any previous one under the republic, but he was unable to achieve the political reorganisation or religious appeasement with which he hoped to complete his economic work. It required more than the skill of an individual. Méline never succeeded in building up a party to present his ideas to the electorate; his followers were poor attenders in the chamber; they never dominated the parliamentary commissions; some of them objected to his hostility to the radicals.[2] But Méline deserves to be remembered not just as the author of protection, but also as the person who carried

[1] J. Méline, 'Les Partis dans la république', *Revue politique et parlementaire*, 23 (Jan. 1900), 5–16; see also Edmond Demolins, 'La Nécessité d'un programme social et d'un nouveau classement des partis', *La Science sociale* (Feb. 1895), 105–16.

[2] 'Le Parti progressiste, par un député', *Revue politique et parlementaire* (10 June 1897), 485–507.

through the law of 1898 on friendly societies (*sociétés de secours mutuel*). The significance of this has seldom been noticed. It was part of the solidarist movement which characterised the 1890s. The period cannot be understood without going further into this product of a philosophy, by which the Third Republic attempted, again unsuccessfully, to break away from the past.[1]

Solidarity was the most talked about ideal of the nineties and the first decade of the twentieth century. The president of the republic, Loubet, opening the great Exhibition of 1900, declared that all governments paid homage to 'this higher law', and acknowledged it as 'the great common inspiration' of the day. His socialist minister of commerce Millerand hailed solidarity as a new scientific revelation containing 'the secret for the material and moral grandeur of societies'. The monarchist comte d'Haussonville remarked, 'Today, anyone who wishes to receive a sympathetic hearing or even to obtain professional advancement must speak of solidarity.' It was claimed that solidarity was exciting people as passionately as Cartesianism had once done, and that its formula 'Every man his neighbour's debtor' caused as much stir as Proudhon's 'Property is theft.' People started writing theses about it, conferences were held, and the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences devoted four sessions to debating it.[2]

The first significant feature of solidarism was that it represented a new attitude to the French Revolution. Worship of the principles of the Revolution had always been an essential mark of a republican. Lip-service to these principles still continued to be paid, but now, coinciding almost exactly with the

[1] *L'Œuvre économique et sociale de M. Jules Méline* (pamphlet published by the Association nationale républicaine, 1902, copy in Remiremont Municipal Library); *L'Œuvre agricole de M. Jules Méline* (n.d., Assoc. nat. répub.); Georges Lachapelle, *Le Ministère Méline* (1928); Gabriel Hanotaux, 'Jules Méline', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (15 Jan. 1926), 440–53.

[2] The fullest account is in J. E. S. Hayward, 'The Idea of Solidarity in French Social and Political Thought in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1958). See also his article, 'The Official Philosophy of the French Third Republic: Léon Bourgeois and Solidarism', *International Review of Social History*, 6 (1961), 22–5. John A. Scott, *Republican Ideas and the Liberal Tradition in France 1870–1914* (New York, 1951), 157–86; Charles Gide, *La Solidarité*, cours au Collège de France 1927–8 (1932); C. Bouglé, *Le Solidarisme* (1907); Louis Deuve, *Étude sur le solidarisme et ses applications économiques* (Paris thesis, 1906).

centenary of 1789, a more critical and even hostile reaction emerged among men with impeccable radical antecedents. There had been vague talk about implementing the promises of the Revolution more fully, but now people suggested that they were inadequate. Léon Bourgeois, leader of the radical ministry in 1895, said that the Declaration of the Rights of Man needed to be supplemented by a declaration of his duties. The individualism which the Revolution had consecrated was an evil and a delusion. The liberty it proclaimed was only force under another name, which allowed the rich to oppress the poor. The individual it tried to liberate was an abstraction, for men were not independent beings capable of being considered apart from their obligations and ties to other men. The sociologist Durkheim wrote that the Revolution must be studied in its historical context, and only when this had been done would it be possible to say whether it was a 'pathological phenomenon' or not. The Revolution was seen as the product of metaphysical confusion, which the new positivism rejected. It was described in the schoolbooks as the dawn of a new era, but it was becoming clearer all the time that it did not break with the past all that completely. Tocqueville's dictum was recalled, that the *ancien régime* was still alive, and that the repeated attempts to kill absolute power had only placed new heads of liberty on the same servile body. As the problems involved by implementation of the Revolution's ideas became increasingly complicated, protests were raised against persisting in 'a tradition that was exhausted, and a political method that was out of date and sterile'.[1]

Laissez-faire, which the Revolution had adopted as a principle, had in the course of the century been rejected by the republicans in varying degrees, but they had been equivocal about it when they gained power. Charles Gide's *Principles of Political Economy*, published in 1883, demanded that it should be openly and officially abandoned. He declared that orthodox liberal economics were discredited and 'a thaw' of its harsh doctrines had set in.[2] Henri Marion's thesis on *Moral Solidarity* ('an essay in applied psychology') argued that morality could no longer be considered simply a question of individual virtue,

[1] Th. Ferneuil, *Les Principes de 1789 et la science sociale* (1889); review of this by Durkheim in *Revue internationale de l'enseignement* (1890).

[2] C. Gide, *Principes d'économie politique* (1883).

that the ideal of the noble savage was a false one, that reliance on divine providence or exhortation were inadequate, because human character was deeply influenced by the environment in which it developed. Man's liberty was really very restricted, and moral progress therefore required active organisation: it could not be expected to happen naturally.[1]

The new discoveries of science were held to require new attitudes in politics. Hitherto Darwin's teachings about the struggle for life had been seen as justifying *laissez-faire*, for it led to evolutionary progress. But now Milne-Edwards (a French zoologist) argued that living organisms were made up of large numbers of cells working together. The 'law of nature' was therefore co-operation, not hostility, solidarity not individualism. Works on the *Fauna of the Normandy Coast* and *Comparative Physiology* were quoted by politicians to support the view that man should no longer be considered as being born perfect, invested with rights against his fellow citizens, but rather as part of a larger organic whole, from which he had much to gain and on which he was necessarily dependent. Durkheim's thesis on the *Division of Labour* (1896) condemned the society of the day as crumbling from 'anomie'. The weakening of the old bonds of religion and the family had created moral chaos, and economic specialisation had completed the disruption. The Revolution had believed in effecting reform by state action or by leaving it to the individual. Neither was adequate. Durkheim argued that a new morality was needed to hold the country together and a new social organisation, based on professional associations—precisely the bodies the Revolution had tried to destroy.[2] Every branch of knowledge was reinterpreted, to show man's interdependence and the need for co-operative action, rather than unrestricted liberty, to enable him to flourish.

It was Léon Bourgeois who brought together all these hints from the scientists to make solidarism a political doctrine. Born in 1851, the son of a watchmaker, he had made his own way out of the lower middle class, through the civil service, to become prefect of police at the age of thirty-six. He was a man of great

[1] Henri Marion, *De la solidarité morale. Essai de psychologie appliquée* (1880, 3rd edition revised 1890).

[2] E. Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (1896).

charm, animated by a constant desire to please, but it was a sign of the new times that, though brought up as a servant of the state, he did not continue to worship it when he became a politician. Bourgeois's contribution was to give solidarism a theoretical basis, with his doctrine of the 'social debt' and the 'quasi-contract'. Men were not born free, he said. Even a child was a debtor to society, first to his mother for his food, then to his teachers for his education, then to a far wider group for his economic opportunities, and he incurred new debts all his life. This idea was not a new one, but Bourgeois transformed it from a moral one into a legal one. He claimed that men had not simply a moral duty to repay their debt, but a positive obligation, enforceable with sanctions, because they had made a 'quasi-contract' with society. He found an obscure section of the Civil Code which showed that individual agreement was not essential to create a binding contract. Rousseau's notion of the social contract for mutual benefit was overthrown. Rights were replaced by obligations. However much one contributed to society, one also had debts to repay. In this way the rich owed something to the poor, who were part of society. Charity, which was optional, should be replaced by solidarity, which was compulsory. The state could legitimately force people to pay their debts.

This gave a new justification for a programme of social welfare, founded on an income tax, but one poised carefully half-way between liberalism and socialism. On the one hand solidarism accepted that men were unequal in ability, and that they should continue to derive benefits from their different natural endowments; but justice required that these inequalities should not be increased by inequalities of social origin, like education and inherited wealth. All who enjoyed special advantages of this kind should be required to pay larger taxes to compensate. However, Bourgeois firmly rejected socialism. Its ideal, he said, was a collective one, whereas he started with collective obligations as a fact of life, and his aim was to free men from them, by getting them to pay their debts to society. His ideal was the free individual, and he believed that private property was the 'prolongation and guarantee of liberty'. 'My social ideal is one in which every man will have reached, within the limits of justice, individual proprietorship.'

Solidarism required men to co-operate not in production or in the division of wealth, but in insuring themselves against the risks of life. Equal wages were neither possible nor desirable, but a minimum wage was necessary, in the name of justice, and illness, accident and unemployment insurance were a social duty. Taxation should exist not for the purpose of levelling incomes but to support common services, though each should contribute in proportion to his income. Education should be free. The important thing was that the only limit to a man's ascent should be his natural abilities. Bourgeois thus saw society as a giant mutual insurance company, which helped the disadvantaged, but left each man free to make his own way once he had paid his premiums. There was no need to hope optimistically that men would behave altruistically. As Alfred Croiset, one of his supporters, said, 'Once the machine is set up, it works automatically, and the well-being of all is the necessary result of the operation, if it is conducted intelligently. This gives it a sort of scientific character which is pleasing to the spirit of our time.' Charity was condescending. Justice was too dry and narrow. Fraternity, as was seen in 1848, was too sentimental. Solidarity, based on biology, was scientific. It would transform the blind and unfair but inevitable interdependence of humans, which had created so many social evils, into a voluntary and rational relationship based on equal respect for the equal rights of all. It would socialise not property, but men's minds and give them a new conscience. France would then be, in Michelet's phrase, *une grande amitié*.[1]

Though solidarism was supported by arguments drawn from the natural and social sciences, which made it appear topical and new, its doctrines were of course composed of much older elements. The word itself had been invented by Pierre Leroux, as the opposite of individualism. Auguste Comte had written about it, though largely confining himself to solidarity between generations. Renouvier had attacked the ideals of the eighteenth century and had urged that solidarity should be added to liberty. The revolution of 1848 had expressed the same

[1] Léon Bourgeois, *La Solidarité* (1896); Maurice Hamburger, *Léon Bourgeois 1851–1925* (1932); Alfred Croiset and Léon Bourgeois, *Essai d'une philosophie de la solidarité* (1902); Léon Bourgeois, *La Politique de la prévoyance sociale* (1914–19, 2 vols.); Émile Ferré, *Un Ministère radical* (1897).

longings in a more emotional manner. Solidarism could not escape the accusation that it was fraternity dressed up in scientific clothes. However, it was popular because many aspirations—socialist, aesthetic and Christian—found some echo in its teachings. It was to the Third Republic what Cousin's eclecticism had been to the July Monarchy. It was, almost inevitably, equally confused, if not hypocritical. It had more than a suggestion of being designed to steal the thunder of the socialists. It was more or less contemporaneous with William II's new course in German politics, in which Christian socialism was aimed at winning the workers away from revolution: it could be called a lay version of it. Though the solidarists claimed that the peculiar feature of their movement was that it was totally French, this international context was not irrelevant. They were, to a certain extent, inspired by fear or remorse, as much as by a constructive idealism. Hanotaux said that the bourgeoisie 'has sinned by its laziness, its imprudence, its egoism'. It had treated the government as its enemy and it had therefore not used it to help the people. It had failed to bridge the gap between the classes. Poincaré, in a famous speech, asked in the same vein, that the bourgeoisie should make 'necessary concessions'. Renouvier—the profoundly religious inspirer of so many republican ideas—declared on his death-bed, 'The bourgeoisie has not kept its promises: it has worked only for itself.' Solidarism was a kind of retribution.

Its theoretical paraphernalia was probably more cumbersome than helpful. To suggest to those who possessed nothing that they were in fact debtors to society, and to add that they could never repay their debt because they were always contracting new ones, to inform them if they succeeded that their achievements were not their own, was hardly a way to win enthusiastic support. Though solidarism contained idealistic elements, it was also, in important ways, conservative. It appeared to be a new justification of unequal private property. Its sociological arguments took what existed as the norm and condemned forces that disrupted society as pathological. Durkheim's professional groups seemed too like the corporations of the *ancien régime*. Izoulet, professor of philosophy at the Lycée Condorcet, whose book on the modern state was quoted approvingly by the solidarists, defined the problem they were

trying to solve as how to prevent the crowd from overthrowing the élite, while yet admitting the crowd 'loyally and cordially into the state'.[1] The solidarists were divided among themselves as to exactly what they meant, and as to what language they ought to use. Those with religious (usually Protestant) backgrounds disliked the word debt and wanted to talk of duty or sacrifice. Liberals objected to the use of sanctions, which, they said, made solidarism no different from socialism; but the socialists ridiculed it as a half-way house, which ignored the problem of the exploitation of labour. It was pointed out that though microbes might indeed be mutually dependent, there was no evidence that they loved one another. Gabriel Tarde, whose book on *Imitation* had argued that this was the main principle determining human conduct, claimed that solidarism was based on a contradiction and would therefore inevitably lead to socialism: it aimed at harmony, but the idea of debt was bound to lead to quarrels about the extent of each individual's debts and either the debtors or the creditors would seize power. This showed that the doctrine was not properly understood, and that was certainly one of its weaknesses.[2]

The solidarists placed their main hopes on the development of voluntary mutual benefit societies. They hoped that these would provide the whole range of social services—employment exchanges, loans, medical attention, pharmacies, pensions and insurance—all without much cost to the state. 'The French Republic', said Paul Deschanel, 'must become a vast mutual benefit society.'[3] Now mutualism already had a long history in France. Though forbidden by the Revolution, societies had started up soon after. They received encouragement from the July Monarchy, which in 1837 allowed their formation provided official permission was obtained. By 1845 there were 262 in Paris alone. The revolution of 1848 gave them a new stimulus, so that in 1852 there were 2,488 societies with 239,500 members. Then Napoleon III found a new use for them. Fearing that they

[1] J. Izoulet, *La Cité moderne: métaphysique de la sociologie* (1894).

[2] 'Étude sur la solidarité sociale comme principe des lois', *Séances et Travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques* (June 1903), 305–434. C. Bouglé, professeur de philosophie sociale à l'université de Toulouse, 'L'Évolution du solidarisme', *Revue politique et parlementaire*, 35 (10 Mar. 1903), 480–505.

[3] G. Weill, *Le Mouvement social en France* (1924), 452.

might develop into subversive organisations, he transformed their character. He exempted them from the general prohibition of clubs, provided they did not have members from more than one commune, and kept their numbers to a maximum of 500 (if 'approved' or 2,000 if declared of 'public utility'). He reserved to himself the right to appoint the president of every society, and to dissolve them with the minimum of formality. They had to admit as 'honorary members' the village notables who would preserve them from revolutionary tendencies; prefects, *curés* and mayors were required to help establish societies in as many communes as possible. Ten million francs, from the confiscated Orleanist estates, were set aside to provide encouraging subsidies. Napoleon thus made these societies the stimulants of thrift and prudence, nuclei for a new self-reliance, but also political and electoral organisations, disunited so that they could not develop any independence against him. By 1870 half a million people had been enrolled.

The solidarists gave this movement an enormous boost. A law of 1898 gave the societies the same freedom as the law of 1884 had given trade unions, but adding financial privileges and the promise of state subsidies on an elaborately calculated scale, proportionate to their achievements. By 1902 over a million more people had joined, to which should be added half a million school children enrolled in a junior branch.[1] In 1910 it was claimed that there were 15,832 societies with 3,170,000 active members and 400,000 honorary members.

Mutualism was the practical and popular aspect of solidarism. There was a National League of Mutuality (launched with a gift of 10,000 francs from the millionaire owner of the Magasins du Louvre, Chauchard, and the blessing of Sadi Carnot, president of the republic). Six national congresses were held by it, from 1883, and in 1900 the first international congress, in Paris, was an impressive affair. Newspapers and journals entitled *L'Avenir de l'Épargne*, *L'Écho de la mutualité*, *La France prévoyante*, *Le Mutualiste*, *La Mutualité*, *La Revue des institutions de prévoyance*, etc. appeared in large numbers. It is curious that no historian has ever done research on these papers

[1] This junior branch was known as the *petit Cavé* after its founder. The children paid very small subscriptions, but considerable insurance benefits were promised, down even to funeral expenses.

or these congresses, in contrast to the large number who have investigated the activities of the far less numerous socialists.[1]

Being a member of a mutual society came to be looked on almost as a public service. Organisers were rewarded with medals. The Second Empire had instituted a special medal—black ribbon with a blue selvage—for the most successful of them, but it was a decoration which could not be worn on its own and in any case only at society meetings. Between 1898 and 1903 the restrictions on its use were abolished, and the holders of the gold medal were allowed to wear it publicly as a rosette (instead of as a mere ribbon). In 1875 only 579 such medals had been awarded. In 1895 no fewer than 3,281 were given. In 1900 the figure rose to 8,175 and in 1907 no fewer than 17,000. It was almost as though the societies were formed to obtain medals, and it was asked what kind of medals these were, which were awarded for extorting subsidies from the state. If left to their own devices, the societies would have made a loss of about 10 million francs a year. Subscriptions accounted for only two-thirds of their income; the rest was obtained from public subsidies and even more from honorary members. It was not surprising therefore that many people looked askance at the societies, as organisations for legalised begging, subject to the domination of the rich. The presence of honorary members, like the state subsidies, made these societies very different from the English friendly societies (which had far more members—over 5 million in 1898—and were three times as rich as the French societies). They never had any of the *friendly* character of the English ones. In England, social activities played as important a part as the insurance, with the annual feast or outing, the hearty drinking at the monthly meetings—the expenses of which were put down as 'room rent'—the initiation ceremonies and mystic rituals of such bodies as the Oddfellows and the Free Foresters. The English, by excluding the upper classes, made it possible for these societies to form a part of working-class culture. The French societies, by contrast, were absorbed into the tradition of state intervention, employers' paternalism and political manœuvring.

[1] *Premier Congrès international de la mutualité 1900*, (president M. V. Lourtiès, sénateur), report ed. Jules Arboux (1901), contains a lot of information. Cf. the criticism of the national organisation by Eugène Joly, president of a society in St. Étienne, *Le Passé, le présent, l'avenir de la mutualité* (St. Étienne, 1893).

Subscriptions were very low—on average 13 francs a year (about 50 pence). The benefits were therefore equally low. The average pension paid at the turn of the century was less than 71 francs (£3) per annum. The societies sought to offer as many benefits as possible, in order to qualify for the maximum number of subsidies which each kind of service attracted. They therefore performed none satisfactorily. Running expenses absorbed on average 27 per cent of their income. The societies were far too small to provide a proper insurance service. In 1902 71 per cent had fewer than 100 members and 39 per cent had fewer than 50. Ignorance of the principles governing insurance was common, methods of administration amateur in the extreme. The government did not really help, even though innumerable guides on how to practise mutualism were issued. The most serious omission was that the whole movement was never established on a proper actuarial basis. The tables of sickness and mortality promised in a decree of 1852, promised again in the law of 1898, were still unpublished in 1907, when the minister of labour, Viviani, declared that they were so difficult to prepare that they could not be expected for some time. France was in this respect over fifty years behind England, where more or less reliable tables had been produced in 1845.

Unlike Napoleon III, the solidarist politicians urged the mutual societies to unite. They had visions of a great moral upsurge, in which the egoism of the small societies would be replaced by a solidarity spread throughout the land: the union of friendly societies would be the basis of a new reconciliation of all Frenchmen. But the old habits were too firmly ingrained. A national council was formed, but it had no authority over the societies and merely acted as an organ of propaganda. It was accused of being unrepresentative and its policies were disputed. Some federations were established on the departmental level, and these were sometimes effective: they were able to provide, between them, pharmacies, clinics and baths. The contrast between the idealism and what was achieved can be seen in the matter of baths. Baths, it was said, were extremely important. Fernand Faure declared: 'When Frenchmen come to have two baths a week, the moral, intellectual and political condition of our country will be trans-

formed.'[1] The researches of Russian and Japanese professors on the value of baths were carefully studied. The number of microbes removed by baths of various kinds were counted, from which it emerged that all baths increased the microbes, while showers reduced them. This was fortunate, for showers were much cheaper to build and used less water, and the hygienists had intended to build showers in any case. But then came the question of money, and far less was done than was promised. Similar frustrations arose in the medical services provided by the societies, which moreover were often used more by the well-to-do than by the poor. Relations with the doctors and pharmacists always remained difficult. So the effect of mutualism was to create a great new vested interest, which did not provide the social services demanded of it, but stoutly resisted their development by the state. In 1900 only 30,000 peasants had joined and only half a million manual workers out of 11 million.[2] The politicians inflated the membership figures (just as the trade unions did theirs) and talked of a 'mutualist élite', comprising one-fifth of the working class, infused with a respect for the established order, and a pillar against 'the rising champions of collectivism and anarchy'.[3]

Mutualism made far more rapid progress than the co-operative movement. A bill to encourage the latter was discussed and amended for eight years, only to be finally rejected by the senate. This was largely due to the opposition of the small shopkeepers. Only about half a million people showed an interest in co-operation before the war. The movement was split in 1890 between socialists and independents, with the result that small local societies tended to avoid joining either federation. Reunion was finally negotiated in 1912, with victory going to the independents under Professor Charles Gide, one of the earliest solidarists, but he admitted that its progress was halted by more than these doctrinal divisions: 'Frenchmen', he said, 'and especially French workers, do not like to be governed by their equals.' The movement for profit sharing, on which a

[1] Michel Heim, *Contribution à l'étude de quelques services supérieurs de la mutualité dans le département de l'Hérault* (Montpellier thesis, 1913), 99.

[2] Léon Bourgeois's figures in *La Politique de la prévoyance sociale* (1914–19), 1. 149.

[3] A. Weber, *A Travers la mutualité: étude critique sur les sociétés de secours mutuels* (1908), 262; Armand Alavoine, *L'Action économique et sociale des sociétés de secours mutuels* (Paris thesis 1914); Georges Assanis, *La Mutualité pratique: guide* . . . (1914).

great deal was also written, and which also held national and international congresses, converted only a tiny minority and involved only about 500 firms. The appeal to private enterprise was not successful.[1]

One of the common misconceptions about the Third Republic, before the 1914 war, is that it passed very little social legislation. On the contrary, there was a great deal of it. It is worth examining because it shows, on the one hand the solidarist ideas being put into practice, and on the other the limitations, inadequacies and failures of the doctrine. To supplement the work of the mutual societies, several important social services were set up. The largest problem that needed to be tackled was that of the poor. If private charity was to be replaced by solidarist assistance, a major redeployment of resources would be needed. There was already an institution for dealing with the poor in the *bureaux de bienfaisance*, which in theory were supposed to distribute aid in each commune, under the direction of the mayor; but in 1871 only 13,367 out of France's 35,989 communes had one, catering for only 60 per cent of the population; and on average they distributed only 28·6 francs in a whole year to each person they helped in Paris and 14·9 francs in the provinces. The commission appointed to inquire into them in 1872 made no recommendations for any radical change, since it accepted the traditional attitude to charity.[2]

However, in 1886 a special office to deal with public assistance was set up at the ministry of the interior and Henri Monod, a Protestant solidarist, took charge of it until 1905. He soon realised that the implementation of the solidarist ideals could not be achieved in one general reform. Opposition to helping able-bodied men out of work was strong. So he started by agitating for help for the sick, the infirm, children and the aged. Several societies were started and five national congresses were held between 1894 and 1911. In 1893, 'in the name of the great principle of solidarity', a law was passed by which 'every Frenchman without financial resources should receive without charge . . . medical aid at home, or, if he cannot be effectively

[1] J. Gaumont, *Histoire générale de la coopération en France* (1924); Albert Trombert, *Charles Robert, sa vie, son œuvre* (1927–31), and the publications of the *Société pour l'étude pratique de la participation du personnel aux bénéfices*, founded 1879.

[2] Ministry of Interior, *Enquête sur les bureaux de bienfaisance* (1874), report by Paul Bucquet.

cared for there, in a hospital'. Every commune was required to establish a *bureau d'assistance*, to draw up lists of those entitled to such aid and the state promised 80 per cent subsidies. At that date the communes were aiding less than half a million people. By 1897 the list of those entitled to aid contained 1·9 million persons and 13 million francs were in fact distributed to 701,000 people in medical aid. This, however, represented only 19·5 francs a head per year. The incurable, moreover, were excluded from this law, so though a hospital would take in a poor man free of charge, it would send him home as soon as it declared him incurable. An attempt was made in 1897 to remedy this serious defect by offering a state subsidy to local authorities, to enable them to pay pensions to the incurable old; but again this failed because local authorities refused to spend money for this purpose: five-sixths of the sum voted by parliament was never used. The situation therefore was that in order to get an old man free medical treatment it was necessary to prosecute and convict him for begging. Even so free hospital treatment did not carry with it payments to compensate for loss of wages, or to care for dependants. A bill was therefore moved to create in the words of its title 'a public service of social solidarity', in the form of obligatory assistance to the old, infirm and incurable and in 1905 it finally became law. It provided for the relief of the sick aged over seventy. In its implementation it revealed widespread distress. Over half a million people were to benefit from it each year: the state's subsidy was 49 million francs in 1907 and by 1914 it had been increased to 100 million.[1] But the poor still received on average only 34·9 francs each annually, compared to 180 francs (£7·20) distributed to almost twice as many in England. In 1914 there were still 8·6 million Frenchmen living in communes without *bureaux d'assistance*. The bureaucracy created to manage all this became filled with political nominees, so the standard of efficiency was exceptionally low.

In 1901 the government introduced, as 'an act of solidarity', a bill to give about 10 million workers the right to a pension,

[1] C. W. Pipkin, *Social Politics and Modern Democracies* (1931), 2. 190. This is a good study of the social legislation of this period: volume 2 deals with France. L. Mirman, 'Une Loi de solidarité sociale', *Revue politique et parlementaire* (July 1903), 49–73; J. H. Weiss, 'The Third Republic's War on Poverty' (unpublished paper, Harvard, 1966); Henry Joly, *De la corruption de nos institutions* (1903), 196–7.

but it was only in 1910, after much protestation by the senate at the expense involved, that it became law, in modified form. The delay was encouraged by the opposition of employers and workers alike. An inquiry into the opinion of trade unions in 1901 revealed that a great number of them were hostile to all contributory pension schemes because they believed it would diminish what they had to offer and would make the collection of their own subscriptions more difficult. The chambers of commerce declared they preferred mutuality to a compulsory state scheme. But mutuality had clearly not been successful, for in 1900 only 10 per cent of the working class were insured for their old age.[1] Under this new law, some 10 million workers were to receive pensions at the age of sixty-five, from a fund of which half was to be subscribed equally by employers and workers and half by the state. Some 6 million independent workers and peasant proprietors were given the chance to insure voluntarily. In 1912 the pensionable age was reduced to sixty. France took a long time to reach this result, and appeared all the more dilatory because the principle of compulsory insurance against illness and old age had been admitted as far back as 1894 in a law confined to miners.

A law of 1898 provided that workers who sustained accidents would be compensated on a generous scale, whoever was to blame. (Previously the victim had to prove that the employer had been negligent.) Three further laws had to be quickly passed between 1898 and 1902 to remedy serious defects produced by excessive caution. Employees were encouraged but still not compelled to insure themselves against accidents. The insurance companies, over-anxious to profit from the new business, began forming a consortium to raise their premiums. The state therefore offered an alternative official insurance scheme (1899) but most of the insurance continued to be done by the companies. Mutual schemes were disappointingly inactive. In any case, the laws applied only to industries using machines, and they excluded illnesses contracted at work.

The *prud'hommes* had long provided a court of arbitration for the settlement of disputes between masters and individual men.

[1] Maurice Bellom, 'Les Retraites ouvrières en France, Le Referendum de 1901', *Revue politique et parlementaire* (Jan. 1902), 119–39; M. Duboin, *La Législation sociale à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle* (1900).

The new solidarist hopes of social peace, together with the emotion caused by the great miners' strike at Carmaux, gave birth to the law of 27 December 1892, setting up similar machinery for arbitration in collective disputes. Appeal to arbitration, however, remained entirely voluntary and little use was made of it. In November 1900 Millerand moved a bill to make arbitration compulsory, but this received such opposition from both employers and trade unions that it was never even discussed by parliament. Instead masters and men were brought together in a series of consultative institutions. In 1891 a *Conseil supérieur du travail* was created to advise the minister on social problems; at first it was nominated by the minister, but after 1899 one-third of the members were elected by trade unions and one-third by employers' organisations. It was an important body, for all its tribulations, because it did a lot of work on most laws proposed in this period, virtually taking over the functions of the legislative section of the Conseil d'État, as far as labour questions were concerned. In 1891, likewise, an *Office du travail* was set up in the ministry of commerce, with the function of collecting information on labour conditions. It issued some fifty volumes in its first ten years of more or less imaginary statistics, for it had no power or staff to undertake direct inquiry, and it had to rely on others for its sources. Local *conseils du travail* were set up in theory by a decree in 1901, elected by employers' and workers' organisations, but this meant that the majority of French workers, not being members of unions, had no vote: the idea was to encourage them to join. In practice only five were set up in the main cities.

The first law controlling the employment and working hours of children in factories had been passed in 1841 (eight years after the English Factory Act of 1833), but in the absence of governmental interest or any effective inspectorate, it had been ignored.[1] The census of 1851 showed that half of the employees in factories were women and children, but only in 1874 was a new law passed providing for the appointment of fifteen inspectors and forbidding factory work under the age of twelve (or, with government permission, ten). This law again was only partly effective, so in 1881 and in 1885 the chamber of deputies passed further bills, which were, however, rejected by

[1] A decree of 1813 had forbidden the employment of children under ten in mines.

the senate. Only in 1892 had the spirit of solidarity spread sufficiently for a law to get through, limiting women and children aged sixteen to eighteen to eleven hours a day, children of thirteen to sixteen to ten hours, and forbidding children under thirteen to work at all, unless they had a certificate of primary studies, in which case they could work at twelve. This law also required one day's rest a week. There were thus several different legal working days. The result was that enforcement proved to be almost impossible, and the government closed its eyes to the flouting of the law. A new law of 1900 limited all factories in which women and children were employed to a uniform ten hours a day (including men). The employers again ignored this, or else paid the small fines for breaking it; some dismissed the children in order to be free from inspection. Exceptions were moreover officially sanctioned by a law of 28 March 1902 and a decree of 30 April 1909. Nevertheless the importance of the law of 1900 was that, in certain cases, i.e. in model factories, the hours of adult men were limited and this was the thin end of the wedge that led to the eight-hour day. But workers in shops and in the food trade remained unprotected. In 1905 the eight-hour day was introduced for miners—but only in 1919 was it extended to all workers.

The fixing of a minimum wage, though promised, was postponed. Millerand in 1899 asked state public works to pay the 'normal wages in the region', but this requirement was not binding on local authorities who (except for a few large ones) ignored it. A truck bill introduced in 1892 was held up by the senate. A wages law, passed in 1895, protected workers against creditors receiving over one-tenth of their wages, but the main beneficiaries seem to have been the legal officials who drew large fees from the complicated machinery established to enforce it. The *livret*, which every worker, like a suspect criminal, had to carry since Napoleon instituted it, and whose abolition had been promised as far back as 1870, was finally abolished in 1890, at last making employer and worker equals in law. That was as far as the solidarists could get.[1]

If carried to its logical conclusion, solidarism would have

[1] E. Levasseur, *Questions ouvrières et industrielles en France sous la Troisième République* (1907); Astier, Godart *et al.*, *L'Œuvre sociale de la Troisième République*, leçons professés au collège libre des sciences sociales (1912).

involved a very drastic transformation not only of social relations but also of the state. Some of its advocates adopted an entirely fresh outlook on the traditional character of the state. Until the end of the nineteenth century, French jurists had been content to comment on laws and decrees, to describe the judicial system as it worked, but they did not attempt to explain or to question its bases. The cult of the law was too powerful and jurists considered themselves as its priests. This attitude was shown by the publication in 1886 of a version of the Civil Code in verse: it had become a classic. Sieyès had said: 'The end of every public institution is individual liberty', and Esmein, a leading law professor at the turn of the century, approved this in his standard work on public law. Now, however, the question of where the state derived its authority, and what it could use it for, was reconsidered by a new school of legal theorists, led by Léon Duguit. Because the purpose of the state was considered to be the safeguarding of liberty, and because after the establishment of universal suffrage it was held to derive its authority from the people, the conclusion had been drawn that—apart from administrative errors—the state could do no wrong. Duguit protested against this, pointing out that in effect this meant that the *ancien régime* state had been preserved in a new guise. He argued that the rule of law and justice was independent of the state and of the government, which should be subject to it as much as the individual. The civil servants should be regarded as performing a public service, not as exercising sovereignty, 'a myth whose efficacy is exhausted'; and power should be considered as legitimate only when properly used. Governments had obligations, more than rights; they were not the embodiment of the nation, as they claimed; and the individual should be able to sue them if they did not carry out their duties. The Conseil d'État went some way to accepting this new doctrine and to allowing appeals by individuals against official mismanagement. A new kind of jurisprudence developed. But the courts could not force the civil service to act, they could only issue injunctions to them. The omnipotence of the state was therefore not undermined.[1] Solidarism did not produce the radical change it could have

[1] Michel Halbecq, *L'État, son autorité, son pouvoir 1880–1962* (1965), discusses the new legal theories; Léon Duguit, *Law in the Modern State* (1919).

done. This, rather than the lack of social legislation, was the great failure of the nineties.

One explanation of the stability which underlay the polemic can be found in the career of Waldeck-Rousseau. It spans two generations: he was minister under Gambetta (1881) and also prime minister at the time of the Dreyfus Affair twenty years later (1898–1901). His career is particularly instructive because he was associated with some striking, though unsuccessful, attempts to bring about change. In it one can see why the grand paper reforms were so often less than what they appeared to be, and one can get a clearer understanding of the limitations both of the politicians and of the environment in which they worked.

Waldeck-Rousseau was the son of a barrister of moderate means (with an income of 5,000 to 6,000 francs—£200 to £240—rising to 12,000 in the best years). His origins were thus distinctly modest; he inherited little; he was brought up to economise; and he had to support his father in his old age. By the end of his life, however, he was one of France's most successful barristers, able to save 136,000 francs in the three years 1885–8. He married at the age of forty-two the widow of an even richer colleague and lived in great style in a grand house filled with impressive *objets d'art*.[1] He kept a yacht and mixed with the rich. His friends, he said proudly, were 'great industrialists'. He was set on his feet by the Société Dreyfus, exporters, whose legal consultant he became and who paid him a retainer during most of his career. He specialised as a barrister in commercial cases bringing in large fees. His admiration was increasingly for the rich. He criticised the men of 1848 for being too emotional about the lot of the poor. He once asked himself why he was so little moved by their misery, and he never seems to have had any particular sympathy for them.

Like so many of the followers of Gambetta, he had been an unsuccessful student; he had failed his *licence* at the first try, he had abandoned his doctorate, and at the age of twenty-two he was already filled with a profound bitterness towards life which never left him. He concealed his timidity and disillusionment with a coldness and a reserve which made everyone compare

[1] 35 rue de l'Université, Paris 7e.

him to a fish. Success turned his brusqueness only into arrogance. He never had a personal following. His best friends were his animals—dogs, cats and birds. As a student he had not mixed with his contemporaries; he had lived on the right bank in Paris. As a barrister establishing himself in a town where he had no ties, he had shunned society and could be seen daily at the same café, alone: he was famous for his public silences. He was barely influenced by the intellectual movements of his day. He knew virtually nothing of positivism; he read little; he despised politicians, theoreticians and doctrinaires. When he did go into politics—which he never looked on as a career but to which a strong ambition drove him—his disappointments exacerbated his animosity and added a hate of parliaments and deputies, whom he called 'pygmies' and 'larvae'. As an adolescent he had been a practising Catholic, a fervent defender of the pope's temporal power and even a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. In 1868 he lost his faith not from conversion to science, but in a revulsion produced by a sense of having wasted his youth, and possibly as a result of separation from and disagreement with his father. He never dreamt of replacing faith by science. He did not share the republicans' passionate interest in education; he never asked for a school for his constituency. He had been educated in a church school in Nantes and had no complaints about its teachers: it had taught him, he said, that Catholicism need not necessarily be militant. He was uninterested by Gambetta's anticlericalism, as he was by his patriotic fervour: he hated the nationalism of Deroulède. He travelled all over Europe in his holidays, but went mainly to beaches and museums. One month by the English seaside was enough to make him conclude that the English were a nation of hypocrites. He appears to have had little knowledge of foreign affairs and to have taken little interest in them. He was almost blind in one eye. His main hobby was painting. Hunting, riding, canoeing, gymnastics, boxing, 'all sports, even violent ones, attracted him'. He accepted with resignation that life was inevitably boring and happiness impossible to achieve. 'Puisqu'il faut s'ennuyer, ennuyons nous.'[1] Waldeck-Rousseau is worth studying because he was so different from the standard

[1] Henry Leyret, *Waldeck-Rousseau et la Troisième République (1869–89)*, 54, 56. See the excellent, stimulating biography by Pierre Sorlin, *Waldeck-Rousseau* (1966).

image of the optimistic republican militant, an idealised mythical creation if there ever was one.

It was this man, however, who was chosen by Gambetta to be his expert on the social question. Waldeck's ideas on the subject were pretty vague. His principal interest hitherto had been the reform of the magistracy, which he believed to be crucial to the development of the republic: this was something barristers (and even more republican ones who had been fined or imprisoned by judges) felt strongly. The social programme he developed was one aimed at establishing social peace. He considered that industrialisation had given the capitalists an excessive and therefore dangerous preponderance. The workers would not put up with this indefinitely. They had to be given greater equality, and this could be achieved through association: united they could face their employers on a fair basis. 'I consider', he said, 'association as the regulator of social forces and the way to bring about equilibrium in them.' They would enable the educated and moderate workers to teach the ignorant and impulsive ones, and the responsibility of managing these organisations would show them that strikes were not the answer to their problems. Improved moral and material conditions would make the workers bastions of order. Waldeck preached to them what he had done himself—that they should rise in the world, save, make money, and lead a sober bourgeois existence—and he did so sincerely, for he had no prejudice against the lower classes. He harboured something of the fraternal utopianism of 1848, inherited from his father. It should not be forgotten that before becoming a republican, he had been an admirer of the naïve romantic Émile Ollivier (whom he had described in 1869 as the only statesman who had studied politics 'scientifically') and that his favourite in literature was Lamartine. Waldeck's ideal was a fraternal society, without any of the paternalism or hierarchy of the Christian socialists. Bills he introduced into parliament in 1882 included many of the proposals the solidarists were to adopt on pensions, insurance, *prud'hommes* and *sociétés de secours mutuels*. The trade union law of 1884, with which his name is linked, was not his own, and he only helped it pass its final stages. He wanted a much broader treatment of the question of associations, and thought unions—which were only one form—should not receive special treatment.

This reveals how much his proposals were developed in isolation from the working-class movement. The socialist Malon said his ideas were admirable but utopian, out of touch with reality. Waldeck in fact met only moderate worker's leaders, and mainly artisan ones; he seems not to have appreciated what the miners told him, that in the mines workers' associations would never be strong or rich enough to free them from capitalist domination. He saw a minority of extremists as misleading the large mass of sober, honest workers. This meant that his social policy, when he became prime minister, was one of hostility to the vigorous, organised, politically oriented unions, while he tried to raise a new kind of workers' association against them. His bills on pensions and compulsory arbitration were opposed by the unions. In social questions, he hovered between two positions. On the one hand he felt uncomfortable in crowds, he did not wish to be led by the masses and thought that men like him had a duty to establish a new order of justice, to help transform the wage earner into a property-owning partner, even if the masses in their ignorance could not properly understand what he was doing. But on the other hand he believed that, in his resistance to extremism and socialism, he represented the silent majority, 'the true country, the hard-working country, which is not heard often enough because it does not speak enough, and whose opinion needs to be found in its very intimate manifestations'. Increasingly he looked to the provinces against Paris, to the peasants against the extremist towns. He saw the radicals as the great menace. His situation in 1900 was thus not all that different from Louis Napoleon's in 1848. He continued to preach the ideals of that revolution. He wished to win the workers away from their leaders. He appointed a renegade socialist, Millerand, to his ministry: he looked on left-wing politicians as simply men with strong ambitions. But he was also firm with the employers, whose paternalistic attitudes he criticised as being equally serious obstacles to social peace. Arbitrating in a strike at Le Creusot, he laid it down as a principle that employers must not discriminate against trade unionists and must not oppose the election of shop stewards.[1]

[1] R. Waldeck-Rousseau, *Questions sociales* (1900), contains his main speeches on this subject; cf. Henry Leyret, *De Waldeck-Rousseau à la C.G.T.* (1921).

Waldeck had a reputation for firmness, which he established with his authoritarian, antiparliamentary attitudes as Gambetta's minister of the interior. He was opposed to decentralisation. He opposed the granting of more freedom to the city of Paris, and its emancipation from the control of the prefect of police. He condemned the city councillors as unrepresentative and he urged businessmen to replace the professional politicians among them, so that the 'economic élite' could run its administration in the most efficient manner. He had temporarily retired from politics in 1889 'in disgust' with the parliamentary system. He returned as a senator, but seldom attended debates, and never spoke much in parliament even when he held office. His most interesting political experiment was an attempt in the 1890s to start a new kind of party. He wanted to 'close the era of politicians'. 'Purely speculative politics has lost its importance and its interest.' Practical questions should replace it. Businessmen and industrialists should get elected to parliament instead of the lawyers, doctors and journalists.[1] He wanted to introduce his image of English parliamentary government into France: to unite the scattered moderate groups in the chambers and what political associations existed into a cohesive party, to hold elections on issues, and to reduce the power of the individual deputy to obstruct government by interpellation. He had, as minister of the interior, been interpellated about dustbins and his government could have fallen on this issue. The country needed strong and long-lasting ministries. He attributed the slowing down of the economy to political instability: the important effect of his reforms would be to stimulate prosperity, and so make it unnecessary to introduce an income tax, for the old taxes would, if properly reorganised, yield enough revenue once more. He looked upon income tax as subverting the principle of the French Revolution that there should be equality of rights and burdens. The tax would, he claimed, create a new privileged class, dividing the nation between those who paid taxes and those who did not. His great aim therefore was to split the radicals, to win over the moderate antisocialists among them, and so create a great centre party. This would, he hoped, not be simply a new coalition, and certainly

[1] Speech of 3 July 1896 to the Société d'économie industrielle et commerciale, quoted Sorlin, 382.

not the old 'concentration'. It would be based on a common programme, not on a compromise. He dreamt of putting up 500 candidates with one platform.

In June 1897 Waldeck-Rousseau launched the *Grand Cercle républicain*, modelled on the English Carlton and Reform Clubs, and a sort of counterpart to the aristocratic Jockey Club. The subscription was high: 200 francs for Parisians and 100 for provincials. He sent young men out to canvass the rich businessmen and industrialists throughout the country. His club would be quite different from the other similar associations (and to some of which he himself belonged). The *Association nationale républicaine* (presided over by Audiffred), the *Association gambettiste* (whose president was Cazot) were primarily concerned with spreading republican propaganda from Paris into the provinces. Waldeck-Rousseau's new organisation was designed to recruit a new kind of leadership for the nation. But by March 1898 he had managed to persuade only about 1,000 people to join. His club never really got under way. The politicians had no wish to destroy the system they were running or to submit to Waldeck's yoke. He got the support only of a few fence-sitters like Poincaré and Deschanel, who were without any personal following. The local notables were unwilling to sacrifice their independence. The defeat of Méline gave the club a serious set-back: the Dreyfus case completed its disintegration. Waldeck-Rousseau himself destroyed his own creation when he took office with a socialist in his government, and accepted socialist and radical votes, abjuring the very policy for which he had founded his club. In any case he lacked the demagogic talents necessary to create a popular party. The *Revue politique et parlementaire*, founded in 1894 to further Mélinisme, and which became the principal organ of the new club, was the only relic that survived of Waldeck-Rousseau's plans; but it was too serious, running to 240 pages each month, with only a narrow intellectual appeal. The businessmen refused to stand for parliament, though a few, including a regent of the Bank of France, gave him sizeable donations. The *Comité républicain du commerce et de l'industrie*, which he helped to found and of which Mascuraud, a jewellery manufacturer, became president, preferred to work behind the scenes, representing the interests of employers, trafficking in decora-

tions—and discreetly subsidising the professional politicians. Waldeck thus failed to change the system. It is not clear that he would have got much further even if he had had more suppleness and guile.[1]

Waldeck-Rousseau sought not the separation of Church and state but the very opposite, the strengthening of governmental control over the clergy and particularly over the religious orders. These latter had not been mentioned in the concordat of 1801 and so by implication they continued to be excluded from France, but they gradually infiltrated back and they enjoyed a freedom from state supervision quite unknown to the secular priests. Waldeck-Rousseau wished to remedy this lacuna in the law, to be 'the Bonaparte of the monks', to bring the concordat into line with the realities of the new situation, to republicanise (not to abolish) the Church. In 1900 there were about 162,000 regulars, almost 60 per cent more than in 1789; they appeared to be the richest single group within the state; it was estimated (rather wildly) that they had doubled their wealth in the last fifty years and that they now possessed at least a milliard francs (£40 million). They had openly taken a part in politics, culminating with their violent campaign in the elections of 1898; the Assumptionists in particular had developed an antirepublican organisation to rival the state. They had refused to pay the admittedly heavy taxes imposed upon them and had been an obstacle to the *ralliement*. With the years the republic had succeeded in filling the bishoprics perhaps not with docile prelates but at least with conciliatory ones, and Waldeck-Rousseau revelled in the power to treat them in the same way as he treated his prefects, to send them stern letters of rebuke when they made the wrong political pronouncements and to withhold their salaries if they were obstinate. Waldeck-Rousseau believed (too optimistically) that the rivalry which had developed between bishops and regulars would enable him to win assistance from the former in making the latter submit to them. For the regulars had usurped many secular

[1] Léopold Marcellin, 'Waldeck-Rousseau et le Waldeckisme', *Revue universelle* (1 Aug. 1923), 306–29; Boris Blick, 'Waldeck-Rousseau 1894–1904' (Ph.D. Wisconsin, unpublished, 1958); *Revue politique et parlementaire* (1894 ff.), and in particular the issue of Apr. 1900 (vol. 24) which contains a history of the journal and the club; Victor Meric, 'Mascuraud', in *Les Hommes du Jour* (12 Mar. 1910), no. 112; Paul Reynaud, *Waldeck-Rousseau* (1913), for his authoritarian reputation.

functions: in Paris alone they had 511 chapels as against 76 parish churches; in France they ran 49 of the 87 grand seminaries which were training the new parochial clergy.[1] Waldeck-Rousseau's aim then was not to abolish all congregations, but to bring them as far as possible within the fold of the episcopal hierarchy, virtually to secularise them. Waldeck-Rousseau brought forward a bill on associations requiring congregations to be authorised by the Conseil d'État, and laying it down as a condition that they should accept the jurisdiction of the bishop. Certain orders would of course never do this, and Waldeck-Rousseau definitely intended to evict the particularly intransigent ones, like the Assumptionists and the Jesuits with whom no compromise was possible. (One of his first acts indeed had been to prosecute the Assumptionists as an illegal association and the courts had declared them dissolved in January 1900.) Altogether 215 congregations, out of 830, preferred not to seek authorisation and formally dissolved themselves in order to escape the law. Waldeck-Rousseau, persevering as ever, issued instructions that secularisations would not be recognised unless the former monks placed themselves under the authority of their bishops.

Nothing worked out as Waldeck-Rousseau planned. The deputies added a clause to his bill forbidding members of unauthorised congregations to teach at all. This attack on the Catholic schools precipitated matters and made quite impossible any compromise with the bishops. Another addition required the congregations to be authorised by parliament, not by the Conseil d'État, and so Waldeck-Rousseau lost control over his schemes.

Waldeck-Rousseau had come to power at the head of a government of republican defence but he never succeeded in turning it into one of republican union. The republican leaders refused to join it, in the same way as they had refused to join Gambetta's great ministry of 1881: Waldeck-Rousseau's ambition to be a 'real' prime minister was incompatible with his having over-powerful colleagues. In consequence two of his ministers (Caillaux, finances, and Baudin, public works) had been deputies for only one year; another (Decrais, colonies) was a former prefect and ambassador of Orleanist origins, who

[1] Lecanuet, 3. 262.

had only been elected to parliament in 1897. His main adviser was the minister of war, General de Gallifet, famous for his repression of the Commune.

So, far from uniting all moderates, Waldeck-Rousseau split them. When voted into office in 1899 he was opposed by the right, the nationalists, most of the progressists and some 30 radicals. He had the support of only 61 moderates, and survived thanks to 173 radicals and 21 socialist votes. Waldeck-Rousseau had little skill in the management of men, and for all his dominating personality, found himself carried away by the left, whom he disliked but on whom he depended. It was he, not the left, who was duped. He virtually admitted as much when he resigned after increasing his majority in 1902, saying it was too large. He advised the formation of a radical government. Perhaps he hoped to give the radicals a chance of discrediting themselves, in the expectation that he might then return to power at the head of a moderate party of which he could be the real leader. He suggested that Combes should succeed him. Combes at once proceeded to destroy his work. Waldeck-Rousseau died in 1904 protesting against the consequences of his own political career.[1]

It is against this background of deadlock and stalemate that one should judge the significance of the Dreyfus Affair. It is frequently said that the case of the obscure Jewish army staff captain who was wrongly convicted of handing military secrets to the Germans, and who, because of the opposition of the army, the nationalists and the clericals, was never able to get the verdict reversed, split the country into two. On the one hand, the Dreyfusards are seen as standing for justice and for the individual, demanding his acquittal whatever reasons of state or military prestige stood in the way. They appear as heirs of the eighteenth-century movement of individualism and liberty. Against them were the army, devoted to order, hierarchy, obedience, possessing a different set of values from the republicans, with Catholic officers perpetuating the ideals of the *ancien régime*. Against them also were the anti-Semites, who

[1] Sorlin, op. cit., gives a full bibliography. For a more laudatory view of Waldeck see Henry Leyret, *Waldeck-Rousseau et la Troisième République 1869–1889* (1908).

saw in the Dreyfus case an enormous Jewish conspiracy, backed by Protestants—for the Dreyfusards included a lot of both—undermining the integrity of the nation. The clergy took up this cry and the hierarchy refrained from condemning them. However, the matter is far more complicated. The truth about this case has not been fully established, and almost every year a new theory is produced to explain its mysteries. Dreyfus was not guilty but it is not known who was, and the discovery that a forgery to help convict him was concocted by an over-zealous officer, who later committed suicide, does not solve the question of who the traitor was. The suggestion that the government and the army tried to suppress further investigations, in the name of the national interest, is only partly true: repeated inquiries and new trials were ordered, but the truth was so complicated that no obvious course of action emerged. The refusal to release Dreyfus, even when it became clear that his conviction was debatable, to say the least, shows not a reactionary conspiracy, for those in power were far from united, but rather two more fundamental factors.

It was difficult to be rational when all the facts were not known and nearly everybody knew only some of the facts; the conviction was upheld on the general circumstances of the case, and people were variously affected by these. Once they had formed their opinion, they found it difficult to change it, because the proofs were never conclusive; passions and prejudices repeatedly clouded the issues. It was thus a human, psychological failure more than a political one. Secondly, it was a legal failure. The case showed the limitations of the French legal system, in which the odds are loaded against the accused, and Dreyfus, who was a poor witness, could never refute the circumstantial evidence which made him a more or less plausible culprit, particularly in the atmosphere of the time, when spies were seen on every side.

The defence of Dreyfus was taken up by a number of distinguished intellectuals, who presented his case as the same one for which the French Revolution had been fought, and themselves as defenders of truth against expediency. Certainly, it was due to their insistence and sometimes courageous agitation that an innocent man was released. But one cannot accept completely their version of the matter. The Dreyfusards were

not all inspired simply by a passion for justice. There were a large number, Boulangists among them, happy to seize this new occasion to fight the established system. They, for their part, made accusations almost as wild as their opponents did, without adequate proof, even if they did present them in the name of 'science'. Their *esprit de corps* was probably stronger than that in the army they attacked, which was much more socially diverse than they imagined. As experts trying to identify the criminal through examination of different handwritings, they showed the limitations and divisions of science. The battle for Dreyfus was part of a battle against clericalism for many people, as much if not more than for individual liberty; the claim of the Dreyfusards that they were the representatives of liberalism was hardly borne out by their willingness to persecute Catholics.

The Dreyfus affair was important, perhaps above all else, in giving the intellectuals a sense of their mission, and in confirming their importance. The politics of the nineties, as has been seen, were dominated by a desire to escape from the traditions and divisions of the past. The intellectuals claimed that they were clarifying issues when they insisted that the French could not escape, that they were inexorably divided by the Revolution, between those who accepted and those who rejected its principles. It may be claimed that they set France back thirty years by this, refusing to let it go forward to the solution of the problems of the day. One result of the Dreyfus case was the resurrection of the question of Church and state and the persecution of the congregations. It is curious that socialist historians have continued to accept and transmit so much of the mythology of this period. The mass of the people were not interested by Dreyfus.[1] He was hardly mentioned at all in the election of 1898, which was fought, if anything, on the issue of the price of bread, which had just rocketed because of a bad harvest, despite the temporary duty-free importation of wheat allowed by 'Méline Pain-cher'. The case did indeed serve the purpose of freeing the socialists of their anti-Semitism, and turning this into an exclusively right-wing phenomenon;

[1] On the election of 1902, see Claude Levy, 'La Presse de province et les élections de 1902: l'exemple de la Haute-Saône', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (1961), 169–98.

but it also exacerbated anti-Semitism and chauvinism into far larger proportions. It was one of the great failures of the republic, precisely because it impeded advance beyond the disputes of the nineteenth century.[1]

[1] Joseph Reinach, *Histoire de l'affaire Dreyfus* (1901, 7 vols), the fullest Dreyfusard account; Douglas Johnson, *France and the Dreyfus case* (1966), the most judicious and perceptive study; Roderick Kedward, *The Dreyfus Affair* (1965), contains selected documents, which very effectively bring the passions back to life, with penetrating comments by the editor. The bibliography on this subject is enormous: good guides will be found in these last two books and in L. Lipschutz, *Une Bibliothèque Dreyfusienne* (1970). For general deflation, see Georges Sorel, *La Révolution Dreyfusienne* (1911, 2nd edition); for the intellectual view, the lively account by Léon Blum, *Souvenirs sur l'Affaire* (1935). Modern French studies include M. Baumont, *Aux sources de l'Affaire* (1959), F. Miquel, *L'Affaire Dreyfus* (1961), M. Thomas, *L'Affaire sans Dreyfus* (1961).