

The rise of Marxism in France - From the late 18th to the end of the 19th Century

Friday 13 May 2016, by [ENAA GREEN Doug](#) (Date first published: 11 May 2016).

Contents

- [I. Economy and society of \(...\)](#)
- [II. Political developments](#)
- [III. French socialism](#)
- [IV. Boulangism\[29\]](#)
- [V. Eclipse](#)
- [VI. Conclusion](#)

To the memory of my great grandparents, radicals in their way, Helen and Frank Last.

May 11, 2016 - *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal* - In the late nineteenth century, despite the ascendancy of Marxist-led socialist parties across Europe, it was not inevitable that Marxism would become the hegemonic trend on the French left. France possessed a rich and vibrant revolutionary history from 1789 to the Paris Commune that produced many vibrant movements, figures and ideologies, who all contended for allegiance of the working class. One of the most prominent was the Blanquist trend of Jacobin Communism, who embraced and pledged fealty to the French revolutionary heritage. Yet the Blanquists remained tied to a dying form of politics - focused on elitist conspiracies and remembrances of the past - which was unable to adapt to the possibilities of the present. The growth of capitalism in France created a growing and combative working class that French Marxists, led by Jules Guesde, managed to successfully appeal to. Despite the Guesdist vulgarization of Marxism as a dogmatic and deterministic theory of inevitable revolution, their sectarianism and many political missteps, they understood better than any of their socialist rivals that working class politics was no longer based on sects or conspiracy, but on developing mass and independent political parties, who engaged in broad-based public agitation on both the national and international levels. Through their revolutionary faith, ceaseless organization and agitation, the French Workers' Party (Parti Ouvrier Français/POF) was able to organize the proletariat of France into a class party that not only challenged the rule of capital, but steeled them to fight for the "inevitable victory" of socialism.

I. Economy and society of the Third Republic

Although the French Third Republic was the third largest industrial power in Europe before 1914, its development remained uneven. Despite trends towards centralization and concentration of capital, agriculture and small shops continued to dominate the French economy. According to Arno Mayer, during the Third Republic, "land claimed between 40 and 45 percent of the active population and generated between 30 and 35 percent of national income, or about 40 percent of the total national product." [1] More than six million peasants owned less than 2.5 acres of land, living perilously close to poverty and had to sell their labor for supplementary income. By 1906, "small properties between 2.5 and 25 acres accounted for 75 percent of all production units." [2] These small plots of land

accounted for less than 30 percent of all cultivated land and were mostly family-operated. Despite the militancy of some rural regions, their “capacity for collective self-defense in scattered rural workers was generally low.”[3]

Large landowners in France, who possessed “over 100 acres and averaging 400 acres covered between 40 and 50 percent of the cultivated land, they totaled only 4 percent of the production units” were the leading sector of commercial agriculture.[4] Even by the eve of World War I, 23 million out of 35 million people, or close to 55 percent of the French population still lived in the countryside, most in settlements of less of 2,000, however, the number of people living in rural areas increases to nearly 60 percent, if communities of less than 4,000 are included.[5] A great deal of industry was located in the countryside relying on water power and wood fuel. The large rural population provided a steady influx of workers to industries in the major cities, who were often willing to work for low wages. For example, the textile industry of Normandy and major cities like Lyons relied on fresh workers from the countryside.

France possessed only 4 million industrial workers in 1890, rising to 5 million by 1914. However, the working class was not concentrated principally in heavy industry, but largely employed in small households and handicraft industries. In 1896, 36% of proletarians worked in industries employing less than five workers and another 36% in industries of 50 or more employers.[6] Yet France saw growth of larger industries accelerate as the “second industrial revolution” took hold. France also doubled her railroad network during this period.

By 1910, the number of craft workers had fallen to 900,000 while workers in industrial companies rose to 4.5 million.[7] While France did possess large enterprises, most of these were in capital goods and mining, meaning that the economy was composed overwhelmingly of smaller firms. The capital goods sector of the economy rose from 13 percent in 1870 to 25 percent in 1913. There was also notable expansion in chemical production and coal output during this same period.[8] Consumer manufacture continued to hold a predominant place in the French economy, claiming 72 percent of industrial workers, while capital heavy goods employed only 18.5 percent of workers or 1.2 million.

Furthermore, commerce, trade, banking and transport employed 2.3 million workers and proprietors while another half million white collar workers worked for the government. The number of shopkeepers in France remained steady from 1870 to 1914 in the range of 700,000 to 800,000, most of whom employed less than five workers.[9] At the outbreak of World War I, France had also developed a major automobile industry which was largely concentrated in Paris and employed 33,000 workers.

A great deal of the workers recruited during this period of the “second industrial revolution” were women, immigrants and rural migrants. Women made up forty percent of all domestic workers in Paris by 1914.[10] While living standards improved slightly during the 1880s as the first rudimentary social safety measures were introduced, unemployment remained high. Although real wages grew by 25 percent from 1873 to 1896, wages increased less than the rate of productivity. Lastly, French unions (legalized in 1884) remained small in comparison to those of Britain, Germany and even the United States, reaching a million members only in 1912, but were politically advanced, guided by various forms of revolutionary syndicalist ideology.

There was a continued trend of urbanization in the Third Republic with a total of 7.5 million people living in the cities by 1914 (compared to 2.5 million in 1870) and 44 cities now numbering over 50,000 - the largest being those of Paris, Lyons and Marseilles.

Despite the regional disparities and the uneven development of French capitalism, it was still one of the leading powers in Europe. The increase in monopolies led to the export of capital and imperial

expansion across the globe. Capital investments abroad in 1914 came primarily from only three countries - Britain, Germany and France. For example, in 1914 "43 percent [of capital investment came] from Britain alone, 20 percent from France, 13 percent from Germany." [11] However, three-fifths of French capital exports remained in Europe (mainly in Russia and Eastern Europe). From 1876 to 1914, France also expanded its overseas empire of colonial slaves, adding 3.5 million square miles chiefly in Northern Africa and Southeast Asia. Colonial rivalry between France and other nations led to the growth of alliance systems, the expansion of armies and navies throughout. For instance, France maintained a standing army of nearly 1 million in 1914 (compared to 1.5 million in Russia and 760,000 in Germany). [12]

French Marxists and Blanquists responded to these socio-economic developments and trends in diametrically opposed ways. For the Guesdist Marxists, the evolution of capitalism was confirming Marx's predictions that France was becoming more and more clearly defined between classes of workers and capitalists. The workers, in turn, were growing more and more impoverished (despite evidence to the contrary), rebelling against the bourgeoisie and were ready to carry out the task of leading the struggle for socialism. Yet the Marxists exaggerated the pace of concentration and centralization of French capitalism; at the same time, they ignored or minimized countervailing factors (since these did not fit easily into their deterministic framework). All this being said, the Marxists were correct that the working class was the force of the future, therefore, they sought to popularize their 'scientific socialism' amongst them so that the proletariat would take up its historical mission. Yet the Guesdists faced difficulty in becoming a mass party comparable to German socialists, since France remained a country of small-scale industry with a working class minority, thus they were "trying to appeal to people who did not exist in large numbers, and its lack of steady growth was largely a reflection of this misperception." [13] By contrast, the Blanquists were oblivious to all these developments, remaining tied to an conspiratorial and Jacobin vision of revolution resting on a base of craft workers and small shopkeepers. The Blanquist conception of elitist politics was quickly being superseded in the new era of mass politics.

II. Political developments

In 1870, France had established its Third Republic, which bore the scars of its birth in military defeat at the hands of Imperial Germany, who annexed the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, and the revolution of the Paris Commune, which was put down without mercy. Throughout the life of the Republic, its ruling class feared the specter of further red revolution at the hands of the "dangerous classes" and they yearned for revenge against Germany. Although the chances for a restoration of the monarchy ended following the elections of 1877, the exiled dynasties still yearned and plotted for the downfall of the "Godless Republic."

By the 1880s, France was governed by the "Opportunistic Republicans," who favored moderate social and political reform. Yet the Opportunist regimes, despite their commitment to the Republic, were marked with instability, corruption, political patronage, and scandals. They were opposed by the Radical Party, who were only radical so long as they were losing elections or not offered a ministerial portfolio, after which they became indistinguishable from the Opportunists.

Throughout the 1880s, France suffered from the 'great depression' as workers suffered privation and unemployment. The class struggle was also reviving in France. Following the election of a republican government, there was an upsurge in strikes in 1879-80, which "emerged from the workers' belief that they would receive sympathetic treatment from Republican prefects in struggles against large, often royalist, employers." [14] However, the Republic proved itself just as merciless as any royalist government in using violence to quell strikes. The following decade, there were major

strikes in Anzin (1884) and a near insurrection at Decazeville in 1886. Despite their small numbers, the Guesdist message found a receptive audience in the ranks of the French proletariat, who were practically fighting a war with their employers.

III. French socialism

The French working class movement had been decimated following the bloodletting of the Paris Commune. Organized expressions of socialism, such as the First International, were banned and unions were driven underground. By the mid-1870s, the first revival of the labor movement occurred, but possessed a decidedly non-political character. The stabilization of the Republic in 1875-6, which granted universal male suffrage, heartened workers and opened the door to future political action. Jules Guesde and the first Marxists, who were still very loosely organized, saw the potential of workers organizing not only economically, but also politically. A further republican victory in 1879 led to a wave of strikes and more political agitation by the Marxists. In a climate receptive for political action, the Marxists organized for demands that had widespread appeal amongst workers such as amnesty for the Communards. The campaign for amnesty centered on the release of the imprisoned Louis-Auguste Blanqui – an elder revolutionary statesman and symbol of working class struggle. Following two successful (and annulled) elections of Blanqui in 1879, he was released, shortly followed by amnesty for the Communards.

Another demand which gained acceptance among workers was for an independent labor party to represent their interests. Shortly after the amnesty, Guesde played a major role in forming the Federation of the Socialist Workers of France, but the Marxists split from the reformists in 1881 to found the French Workers' Party – the first Marxist-led socialist party in France. That same year, the Blanquists created the Central Revolutionary Committee (CRC) as their own political organization. For the next decade, the POF and CRC would vie for leadership of the revolutionary left.

a. Blanquism[15]

Following Blanqui's death in 1881, the movement he founded continued to organize and explore the possibilities for revolutionary action in a changed climate. However, whereas the politics of Blanquism – a tightly-organized conspiracy that aimed to carry out a revolutionary coup – possessed some logic under the July Monarchy and the Second Empire, that was no longer the case during the Third Republic. The Third Republic saw not only amnesty for the Communards, the rise of the modern labor movement, but the establishment of a long lasting republican regime, in which socialists could participate. This was an era of mass politics, not underground conspiracies.

The Blanquists organized into the Central Revolutionary Committee needed to find their way in this new environment where they were just one of many competing currents. Despite their atheist and rationalist philosophy, the Blanquists became guardians of the revolutionary tradition, celebrating anniversaries of the past and treating people like Blanqui as martyrs and saints. The Blanquists hoped that by keeping the memories of struggle alive, that they could reignite the Jacobin and revolutionary spirit amongst the people in order to spur them into action. Yet their perspective was fundamentally backward-looking. There was no critical analysis of the Commune or Blanqui, just commemoration of myths and legends. In effect, Blanquism became a secular religion.

Nor did they have a well-thought out theory to understand reality or to guide them in political struggles. Some Blanquists such as Eduard Vaillant had been in contact with Marxism while living abroad and understood the changes of agitation in an era of mass politics – using elections, newspapers and other modes of propaganda. This meant Vaillant was moving away from Blanquist insurrection, drawing close to Guesde, embracing an early form of revisionist Marxism, which

angered traditionalists in the movement. Still, no group inside the CRC had a viable long-term strategy for revolutionary change. They could only look to their martyred dead and hope for an apocalyptic revolution that to grow more unlikely as time passed.

This was in contrast to other socialist parties and organizations that were springing up in France. There were several reformist socialist groups, such as the Possibilitists concentrated in the Federation of the Socialist Workers of France. There were also syndicalist movements such as Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party, which formed in 1890. All of them, along with the Marxists, were attuned to the potential of mass politics.

The Blanquists, who were being drawn into present-day politics, originally utilized elections as just one form of action. Yet elections, according to Patrick Hutton, "became the focal point upon which all of their other activities converged. In the process, their energies were for all practical purposes transferred from revolutionary agitation to political participation." [16] Since the Blanquists lacked a class focus like the Marxists, they turned instead to populism (something embedded in the Jacobin tradition) which "was an expression of protest against the current trend of large-scale economic organization. Its common denominator was an anxiety about the social implications of rapid industrial concentration in a country in which artisan industry had long been the predominant mode of economic organization." [17] As the possibilities of revolution receded from their vision, the Blanquists saw their task as joining "with other groups who shared their populist sympathies." [18] The stage was now set for the disastrous Blanquist embrace of the right-wing Boulangist movement.

b. French Workers' Party

Throughout the 1880s, the French Workers' Party remained small and isolated, but they were driven by a profound faith in the inevitability of socialism. French Marxists had to contend with a vastly different situation than socialists faced in Germany or Austria, where formal political freedoms didn't exist. In France, Marxism had to contend with different schools of socialism (Blanquism, Proudhonism, anarchism, and reformism) which made it difficult for them to distinguish themselves and gain a hearing.

Despite their adherence to Marxism, the POF's understanding of that theory was eclectic, superficial and vulgar. Guesde and the POF were convinced that Marxism offered a "more objective approach to the social question, one which drew its insights not from the revolutionary experience of the past but from the new science of society." [19] For Guesde, Marxism offered a science of history which explained the logic and laws of capitalist development that inevitability led to crises and collapse. [20] Capitalism, in building up the productive forces, concentrating wealth and simplifying class contradictions, laid the basis for socialism, "once Marxism permeated its natural proletarian constituency, once the Parti Ouvrier had fulfilled its historical mission of propaganda and organization, the liberation of labor would follow problematically." [21] According to Guesde, for the proletariat to carry out their mission, it was imperative for them to constitute themselves into a class party with the aim of "1. The capturing of political power. 2. The seizing of capitalist property to restore it to the national collectivity." [22] It was with a missionary's zeal that the Guesdists spread this Marxist gospel.

During the 1880s, the POF's fervor burned bright, despite their lack of success. The party remained weak in Paris (the center of French political life), did poorly in elections, and had difficulty maintaining a journal in the capital. [23] The POF possessed a small constituency within the National Federation of Syndicats from 1886 to 1895, after which they lost most of those supporters due to their opposition to the general strike. [24] The POF was overwhelmingly a male party, and by the 1890s only 2-3 percent (or 50) of their members were women. [25] During this period, the party remained largely a sect, barely exceeding 2,000 members. [26] The party's focus on the industrial

working class meant that only 7 percent of its members were of peasant origin.[27] Yet all was not grim, the party did have solid support among textile workers, with fully a third of their membership located in the Lille textile mills where they practically formed an alternative society.[28] This region would remain a solid bastion of POF support, even during its hardest years. Yet the industrial war in France, the corruption of the Republic, and their revolutionary fire and conviction kept the POF from succumbing to defeat.

IV. Boulangism[29]

a. Radical Right

General Georges Boulanger (1837-1891) was a career military officer who had been decorated for bravery in the Franco-Prussian War and had taken part in the suppression of the Paris Commune. Despite the blood of workers on his hands, Boulanger's later strongholds were in the working class districts of Paris. By the 1880s, Boulanger headed the War Ministry, making a name for himself as a reformer by improving morale and efficiency, winning him the support of conscript soldiers. Boulanger was also one of the loudest and most uncompromising voices demanding revenge against Germany, earning him the nickname of *Général Revanche* (revenge). Boulanger also received support from the public as France expanded her colonial empire.

In 1887, Boulanger continually provoked the Germans and during the Schnaebelé Affair, his actions not only almost caused a war, but after the Germans backed down, this shored up his nationalist credentials. Following a change in government, he was removed from the Ministry of War in May 1887. The government decided to take a further step and remove Boulanger from Paris. Yet in July, when Boulanger's train was leaving, a crowd attempted to prevent his departure. Boulanger's popularity was apparent during an election in a district of the Seine when he received 100,000 votes, despite not being a candidate.

A movement was born. In 1888-9, Boulanger gathered thousands of supporters in the face of a corrupt government that seemed more concerned with their own profit as opposed to the good of France. He won elections in seven districts. He was seen not only by workers, but many in the middle classes as a "man on horseback" who would avenge France's defeat at the hands of Germany, favor the common man and revise the Republic's constitution. For enemies of the Republic, whether left-wing nationalist Blanquists, anti-Semites, or exiled royalists (who provided the bulk of his financial support)[30], his rise portended the downfall of the hated regime. For all those dissatisfied with the Third Republic, Boulanger appeared to be their hope and savior.

In January 1889, Boulanger stood as a candidate in Paris, winning the election by 244,000 votes to 160,000. In the victory celebrations, Boulanger was urged to seize power via a coup. His nerve failed and Boulanger did not take the opportunity. Finally, the Republic moved against the popular general with legal action. Fearing his immediate arrest, Boulanger fled to Belgium with his mistress. Boulanger's image was destroyed overnight and the movement surrounding him quickly collapsed. In 1891, a disgraced Boulanger committed suicide.

Despite claims of Boulanger being a proto-socialist, this is belied by the evidence. According to William Irvine, when a genuine socialist movement came on the scene in the following decade, few Boulangists decided to join it.[31] Boulanger's appeal amongst the working class was the reason why the royalists supported him.[32] Although many Boulangists described themselves as socialists, their socialism was foreign to both democratic and revolutionary socialism, and had more in common with national socialism, which is to say, it wasn't socialism at all.[33] Yet the subsequent careers of Boulangists were not in the elitist politics of French conservatism or royalism, but in the mass

politics they pioneered – on the radical and nationalist right – advocating an authoritarian man on horseback, who on behalf of the “people,” would be “neither left nor right,” but would destroy the corrupt and decadent Republic and restore France to national greatness.

b. Blanquism[34]

For the Blanquists, who were growing increasingly directionless in the late 1880s, the rise of Boulanger appeared to be a golden opportunity to bring down the bourgeois Republic. The Blanquists were intrigued and impressed as Boulanger gathered a movement around himself and received massive amounts of votes in elections, even if he didn’t run in them.

Moreover, the Blanquists were receptive to Boulanger’s demagogic appeal and believed that they could ride on his coattails to power. However, Vaillant was not willing to go this far since he was not blind to the threat that Boulanger represented to the Republic. And he was not willing to surrender principles for short term political gain. A split occurred in 1888. A minority of Blanquists agreed with Vaillant, remaining in the CRC. However, the majority of Blanquists joined the Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee (CCSR), staying loyal to Boulanger. The split in the Blanquist Party was the final nail in the coffin of the Jacobin Communist tradition. In wake of the split, both groups would abandon Blanquism and move in different political directions of either Marxism or nationalism.

c. POF, Engels and Boulanger[35]

The POF did not dishonor themselves by supporting the Boulangist movement, rather they maintained a stubborn neutrality, believing it was of no concern to them. As Guesde argued, the fight between Boulanger and the Opportunists was a feud between two sections of the bourgeoisie that the working class had no stake in. Guesde summed up this position with the phrase (‘Ni Rue de Seze ni Rue Cadet!’) or “Between cholera and the plague, one does not choose.”[36] However, there was another trend in the POF who were attracted to Boulanger, such as Paul Lafargue (Marx’s son-in-law).[37] Lafargue believed that, due to Boulanger’s popularity, socialists shouldn’t attack him for fear of being isolated. Lafargue feared that if the socialists attacked Boulanger, they would be mistaken as bourgeois republicans, losing them votes.

Frederick Engels, viewing Boulanger from afar, saw the threat of a right-wing military dictatorship, warning socialists in France:

“The finest thing of it all is that three months after these two congresses Boulanger will be in all probability dictator of France, do away with parliamentarism, epurate the judges under pretext of corruption, have a gouvernement à poigne (trans. a strong government) and a chambre pour rire (trans. mock chamber), and crush Marxists, Blanquists and Possibilists all together. And then, ma belle France—tu l’as voulu! (trans. my beautiful France - that’s what you wanted!”)[38]

Engels recognized the danger of a Boulangist dictatorship as spelling the end not only to the socialist movement in France, but the Third Republic itself. For him, the question was not just how to analyze Boulangism, but how to fight it.

Engels was enraged at the passivity of the POF, writing of the general’s ties to royalists and that his threat of war would be used to kill off the workers’ movement. Engels warned the socialists not to let their hatred of the radicals and the Republic blind them to the threat of dictatorship.

“You will get him all the same, the good Boulanger whom you crave, and the Socialists will be his first victims. For a First Consul has got to be impartial and, for every time he lets the blood of the Stock Exchange, he will place another curb on the proletariat, if only to even things out”.[39]

Engels told the workers that the defense of democracy was vital, so vital in fact, that its defense could not be left to the bourgeoisie. Rather the preservation of democratic freedoms needed to be led by the socialists, utilizing revolutionary means.

However, Engels' castigated Lafargue's tailing of Boulanger, warning that it was not the job of socialists to just go along with the tide, even if it appeared momentarily popular, stating that such a course was bankrupt. Rather, socialists needed to take a long-term view and not just follow whatever was popular:

"But if we are not to go against the popular current of momentary tomfoolery, what in the name of the devil is our business?"[40]

What Engels stressed to Lafargue and Guesde was that the options before them were not simply between the Opportunists and Boulanger, but that there was a third option of independent political action by the working class. He urged the socialists to put up their own candidates, opposed to those of both camps. When the Marxists put up their own candidate in Paris in 1889, Engels hailed it as "at least one step in the right direction by proclaiming the necessity of an independent socialist candidature." [41] As Engels, reminded Lafargue, "For the past twenty years we have been advocating the formation of a Party that was distinct from and opposed to all bourgeois parties." [42]

What Engels advocated to the POF, was not renouncing the fight against Boulanger or seeing it as just another inter-bourgeois affair, but that the working class needed to protect democratic freedoms with their own revolutionary means, as opposed to relying on the good graces of the ruling class or the ballot box. And in order to defeat reaction, the working class needs their own flag in the field - an independent political party with its own revolutionary agenda.

V. Eclipse

a. Sunset of Blanquism

For the Blanquists who followed Boulanger, their fate was tragic. The Socialist Revolutionary Central Committee found itself embroiled in financial scandal that, on top of their embrace of Boulanger, helped to discredit them as a revolutionary organization. In the later 1890s, they turned to nationalism, viewing their essential task as engaging not "in class conflict, but to suppress the notion of class altogether. For this reason, they expressed preference for the concept of the 'people,' as opposed to that of the 'working class,' in identifying participants in the revolutionary movement." [43] They also adopted an anti-Semitic and anti-parliamentary philosophy, believing that Jews had taken over France through the corruption of parliament. As Michael Howorth says of the CCSR,

"The prefiguration of some of the ingredients of fascism is striking: the fundamental equation between socialism and nationalism; the accusation that the republicans and parliamentary democrats have sold out to the Jews and must be done away with; the virulent Anti-Semitism behind almost every utterance; the denunciation of revealed religion as a vile form of moral servitude, with the corollary that the only true guiding spirit should be la patrie."[44]

By the end of the 1890s, the CCSR had faded into oblivion.

Vaillant and his wing of the Blanquist movement moved away from their old program and in 1892 they adopted a new "scientific programme" based upon Marxism. In 1898, the CCR dissolved itself into a new formation, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which was a moderate reformist Marxist

party. Vaillant, who had already worked with Guesde during the 1880s, had moved closer to the POF during the Boulangier crisis, which eventually led to the fusion between the PSR with the POF in 1902 to form the Socialist Party of France (PSdF). In 1905, under pressure from the Second International, the Socialist Party of France joined with the reformist-led French Socialist Party (PSF) to create the French Section of the Workers' International (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière, SFIO) who had a membership of 30,000.

b. Rise of Marxism

Despite the neutrality and passivity of the Guesdists during the Boulangist crisis, they managed to come through unscathed. Their reformist rivals had rallied to the defense of a corrupt Republic, while the Blanquists had torn themselves apart over whether to back Boulangier or oppose him. A vacuum had been created on the socialist left and the POF stepped in to fill it. After a decade as little more than a tiny propaganda group, the POF's Lille Congress in 1890 established them as

"a centralized and rationalized party structure: a still largely notional but none the less impressive pyramid of local sections, departmental federations, and Parisian central apparatus - the first 'modern' party organization in France, soon to be emulated across the political spectrum."[45]

Their revolutionary confidence soaring, the POF also encouraged the creation of a new trade union federation (which collapsed after just a few years) and the celebration of May Day as a militant form of proletariat protest.

By the early 1890s, the POF had its first electoral breakthroughs, winning control of several municipal governments and electing Guesde and Lafargue to the Chamber of Deputies. The socialists seemed poised for greater gains in wake of the Panama Corruption scandal, which exposed the underlying bourgeois nature of the Third Republic. However, the POF suffered a serious setback by remaining aloof from the Dreyfus Affair. Guesde believed that the Dreyfus Affair, similar to the Boulangier Crisis, was a feud between two bourgeois factions in which workers had no stake. This time, their neutrality backfired as it became clear that reactionaries, conservatives and royalists were threatening to overthrow the Republic itself. Reformist socialists, such as the great orator Jean Jaures, thus stepped into the breach and rallied to the defense the Republic. Many Guesdists abandoned the movement's neutrality in order to collaborate with bourgeois republicans and reformists in a pact of "Republican Defense" to defeat reaction.

In 1902, the culmination of this collaboration was the entrance of the Independent Socialist (non-POF), Alexander Millerand into the government of Republican Defense led by Rene Waldeck-Rousseau, which also included General Gaston De Galliffet as Minister of War (one of the butchers of the Paris Commune). The entrance of Millerand into a bourgeois government split French socialists into two camps - 'Ministerialists', led by Jaures, who supported the government Republican Defense and Millerand's reformist programme, and 'Anti-Ministerialists', led by the POF, who opposed socialist participation in a bourgeois government. Many Guesdists abandoned their party's position by joining the Ministerialists, leading to widespread demoralization of those who remained opposed to any participation.

Jaures appealed to the workers, stating that this new government would soon fulfill the dreams of a social republic by instituting substantial benefits to the working class. The Marxists appeared to be doomed to isolation by clinging to their "purist principles." Yet those who remained true to their principles were proven right. In 1901, during a major strike at Montceau-les-Mines, the government sent in troops who shot the workers, discrediting the advocates of "Ministrialism." Furthermore, the promised reforms of Millerand were shown to be hollow, demonstrating that there was no promised transition from bourgeois democracy to social democracy. Very quickly, Millerand left the socialist

movement and moved to the political right. For the Guesdists, their intransigence on “Ministralism” may have led to a temporary isolation, but they were shown to be correct. Subsequently, they were able to dictate the terms of the unification of the socialist movement on a Marxist basis in 1905.[46]

VI. Conclusion

By the turn of the twentieth-century, Marxist socialism was well on its way to becoming the dominant tendency on the French left. It is true that Jules Guesde and the Parti Ouvrier Français advocated a vulgarized and deterministic Marxism with a sectarian and economistic politics. Yet Guesdist Marxists were successfully able to adapt to the new era of mass politics, while the Blanquists remained tied to a superseded mode of politics. Despite their limitations and drawbacks, the Parti Ouvrier Français were pioneers, walked on unexplored terrain, who popularized socialism for hundreds of thousands of workers as an alternative society that would end capitalist exploitation and oppression.

Doug Enaa Greene

Notes

[1] Arno J. Mayer, *Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 23.

[2] *Ibid.* 29.

[3] Dick Geary, ed., *Labour and Socialist Movements in Europe Before 1914* (Providence: Berg Publishers, 1989), 49.

[4] Mayer 1981, 30.

[5] *Ibid.* 71-2. For some more figures on the French economy see Geary 1989, 49-55.

[6] *Ibid.* 49.

[7] Michel Beaud, *A History of Capitalism, 1500-1980* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 127.

[8] Mayer 1981, 46 and 54.

[9] *Ibid.* 75.

[10] *Ibid.* 75-6.

[11] Beaud 1983,138. A more detailed view of the trends in European capitalism from 1875 to 1914 can be found in Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 34-55.

[12] Mayer 1981, 313. Formally, the POF condemned French colonialism in 1895 at their thirteenth congress:

“Considering that colonial policy is one of the worst forms of capitalist exploitation, which tends exclusively to enlarge the field of profits of the proprietary class at the expense of the blood and money of the producing proletariat; considering that its expeditions undertaken under the pretext of civilization and national honor lead to corruption and destruction of primitive populations and unleash on the colonizing nation itself all sorts of scourges . . .; considering that the only really

human way of securing outlets to modern mechanical production is to abolish class differences and enable the producers, masters of the social forms of the means of production, to consume themselves the wealth produced by their manual and intellectual labor; the thirteenth national congress of the French Workers' Party protests with all its forces against the colonial filibustering expeditions for which no conscious socialist will ever vote one man or one penny." Quoted in Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, ed., *Discovering Imperialism: Social Democracy to World War I* (Brill: Boston, 1912), 10.

[13] Gary Steenson, *After Marx, Before Lenin: Marxism and Socialist Working Class Parties in Europe, 1884-1914* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 127.

[14] Geary 1989, 55.

[15] This section draws mainly from Patrick Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864-1893* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Patrick Hutton, "The Role of the Blanquist Party in Left-Wing Politics in France, 1879-90," *The Journal of Modern History* 46.2 (Jun., 1974): 277-295; Jolyon Michael Howorth, "The Myth of Blanquism under the Third Republic (1871-1900)," *The Journal of Modern History* 48. 3 (Sept., 1976): 37-68.

[16] Hutton 1981, 135.

[17] *Ibid.* 137.

[18] *Ibid.* 139.

[19] *Ibid.* 111.

[20] For more on the background of Jules Guesde see: Samuel Bernstein, "Jules Guesde, Pioneer of Marxism in France," *Science & Society* 4.1 (Winter, 1940): 29-56.

[21] Robert Stuart, *Marxism at Work: Ideology, class and French socialism during the Third Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 43.

[22] Jules Guesde, "Programme of "Le socialisme," Marxists Internet Archive.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/guesde/1907/12/program.htm>

[23] Extensive background on the formative years of the POF can be found in Steenson 1991, 122-41.

[24] *Ibid.* 127-8.

[25] Hobsbawm 1987, 210.

[26] Stuart 1992, 36.

[27] *Ibid.* 391

[28] *Ibid.* 47.

[29] This section is based on my "Engels, Boulanger and the Fight Against Fascism," *The North Star*.
<http://www.thenorthstar.info/?p=12509>
The literature on Boulangism is extensive. Aside from the sources already cited, the following were consulted for this section: Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Volume IV: Critique of Other Socialisms* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 204-237; William D. Irvine, *The*

Boulangier Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); William D. Irvine, "French Royalists and Boulangism," *French Historical Studies* 15.3 (Spring, 1988): 395-406; Patrick Hutton, "Popular Boulangism and the Advent of Mass Politics in France, 1886-90," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11.1 (Jan., 1976): 85-106; Paul Mazgaj, "The Origins of the French Radical Right: A Historiographical Essay," *French Historical Studies* 15.2 (Autumn, 1987): 287-315; Bruce Fulton, "The Boulangier Affair Revisited: The Preservation of the Third Republic, 1889," *French Historical Studies* 17.2 (Autumn, 1991): 310-329; George L. Mosse, "The French Right and the Working Classes: Les Jaunes," *Journal of Contemporary History* 7.3 (July-Oct., 1972): 185-208; Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Random House, 2004), 46-7.

[30] "To create a significant popular movement whose ultimate trajectory would benefit the royalist project, three vital conditions had to obtain. First, the leaders and symbols of the movement could not evoke images of the old regime, ideologically or socially. Second, the immediate leaders of the movement would have to know how to get their hands dirty and adopt a style of politics suited to mass society. Finally, royalist control of the movement would have to be both secret and in the final instance total. The chance of attaining such conditions were inherently remote, but in 1888 and 1889 it appeared to many that the right combination was about to present itself." Quoted in Irvine 1989, 72.

[31] *Ibid.* 180.

[32] *Ibid.* 105-6.

[33] *Ibid.* 179-82.

[34] See sources in footnote 15, mainly Hutton 1981, 143-61.

[35] Draws mainly from Draper 1990, 204-237.

[36] Stuart 1992, 39.

[37] Lafargue was not the only one in the POF who looked favorably on Boulangier. The Party's Bordeaux branch made tactical alliances with the Boulangists. See Patrick Hutton, "The Impact of the Boulangist Crisis upon the Guesdist Party at Bordeaux," *French Historical Studies* 7.2 (Autumn, 1971): 226-244.

[38] "Engels to Laura Lafargue - 7, May 1889," *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 48* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 309. Henceforth MECW.

[39] "Engels to Paul Lafargue - 1, April 1889," MECW, 48. 288.

[40] "Engels to Laura Lafargue - 4, February 1889," MECW, 48. 262.

[41] "Engels to Laura Lafargue - 2, January 1889," MECW, 48. 244.

[42] "Engels to Paul Lafargue - 16, November 1889," MECW, 48. 406.

[43] Hutton 1981, 157-8.

[44] Howorth 1976, 59.

[45] Stuart 1992, 40.

[46] Ibid. 51-54. For more on the Millerand Affair and its ramifications in France and throughout the Second International see Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1851-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 87-90.

P.S.

* "The rise of Marxism in France". Links. May 11, 2016:
<http://links.org.au/node/4684>