THE SOCIALIST TRADITION IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

By

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Professor of Political Science in the University of London

London:

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

11 Dartmouth Street, Westminster, S.W.1

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ONE SHILLING

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NOTE

This pamphlet was originally delivered as a lecture in the well-known series which my colleague, Professor F. J. C. Hearnshaw, organises annually at King's College, London. It is reprinted here by his kind permission. There is not, to my knowledge, any discussion of the subject in English; and it seemed to me that socialists might be interested in a period peculiarly important in the development of their creed.

The bibliography is no more than a handlist of the more important books on the subject. Had I sought to make any pretensions to completeness, the size of this pamphlet would have been at least double.

H. J. L.

March 8th, 1930.

The Socialist Tradition in the French Revolution

I

ALL Revolutions centre around the relation of political authority to the distribution of economic power; for, as Madison long ago insisted, the only durable source of faction is property. Anyone who examines the history of French social thought in the eighteenth century realises at once that its very essence is a changing conception of the place of property in the State. In a sense, indeed, the main work of the Revolution was simply the translation of that change from the realm of ideas into the realm of fact. From Fénélon to the outbreak of catastrophe there were few thinkers who were not impressed by two things: the indefensible character of privilege, upon the one hand, and the immense disparity between rich and poor, with its attendant and inherent dangers, upon the other. Not merely the systematic philosopher and the professional pamphleteer, but the novelist, the playwright, even the theologian, find it difficult to defend the actual distribution of economic satisfactions. They seek consistently for a remedy for this condition. They are widely aware that its continuance must inevitably mean the disruption of the State.

The consequence is the presence, throughout the eighteenth century, of an attitude to the rights of property which is profoundly critical in character. In a sense, it is even a socialist attitude, in that, not seldom, it is altogether sceptical of the régime in which individuals possess the means of production. But I hesitate to call it definitely socialist for three reasons. In the first place, it is a purely moral criticism; outside the Abbé Meslier, there is no writer of repute who seriously considered the means of redressing the balance of social good. It is, moreover, hardly aware of the relationship of an economic

system to the power of the State; even in Rousseau, this defect is noteworthy. It is, in the third place, diagnostic rather than reconstructive; Mably and Morelly, Diderot and Rousseau, Sebastien Mercier and Rétif de la Bretonne are all in an essential sense socialist; but, for all of them, the mechanism of transition to an egalitarian order is always by the conversion of men's hearts to better ways.

Rousseau and those I have named are, properly speaking, merely the extreme wing of a wider attack upon the notion that property can be a legal or moral right independently of the social consequences it involves. Attack upon the contemporary social order proceeded from the most various angles. Some of it came from a bitter revival of the sixteenth-century discussion of usury. Some of it was the outcome of that curious controversy over luxury of which Mandeville's too-famous *Fable of the Bees* is, through Voltaire's *Mondain*, the real parent. Not a little can be traced to that grim defence of Conservatism by Linguet, in which he anticipated so many of the theses of Karl Marx for almost antithetic ends. Part of it can be traced to the makers of imaginary Utopias where private property is unknown, or, related to this, to the reports of travellers of places like America, in which a Utopia of fact has come to birth. The creation, moreover, with Quesnay and the Physiocrats, of an economic philosophy upon something like scientific foundations was important. Administrative chaos, economic confusion, religious bankruptcy, all contributed their lesson to the torrent of criticism. When the States-General was summoned, the mind of France had been widely prepared for large economic innovation.

II

I understand by socialism the deliberate intervention of the State in the process of production and distribution in order to secure an access to their benefits upon a consistently wider scale. From this angle, it is clear that no theories are entitled to be regarded as socialist which are not distinguished by at least two features. They must admit the right, and duty, of the State to subordinate

individual claim to social need, not as an occasional incident of its operation but as a permanent characteristic of its nature; and they must, in the second place, seek the deliberate and continuous reconstruction of social institutions to the end of satisfying social demand upon the largest possible scale. It is in terms of these definitions that I propose to approach the difficult and complex years from 1789 until the failure of Babeuf, in 1796. I shall consider, first, how far a genuine socialism is discoverable in the cahiers and pamphlets which accompanied the summons of the States-General. Then I shall analyse the period until the advent of the Directory to see what of socialism there is in both the literature and the legislation of the time. I shall seek, above all, to show that the effort of Babeuf and his fellow-conspirators was the one genuine socialist movement in this epoch with a definite programme and an equally definite method of moving towards its realisation. Finally, I shall seek to estimate what of significance there was in the socialist experience of this epoch and how far it has given any specific character to the socialist movement of a later time.

Let me begin with a simple affirmation. Neither in the cahiers nor in the pamphlets which resulted from the summons of the States-General is there any important or general socialist doctrine. That does not mean that it was non-existent; for, as Chassin has pointed out,[1] what we are dealing with here are the wants, at the most, of six million Frenchmen, and the needs of at least as many may have gone unexpressed. But when this type of literature is examined neither the grievance expressed nor the claims put forward are socialistic in any serious sense. There is bitterness, indignation, protest; but if these are the inevitable accompaniment of socialism, they are not of its inner substance. Taken as a whole, what do the cahiers demand? Fiscal reform, especially in the matter of equal taxation, judicial reform, administrative reorganisation. There is profound hostility to feudal rights. There is some criticism, not seldom urgent, of ecclesiastical property. There are occasional attacks on the greed of rich landowners. There is protest against the erosion, by aristocratic usurpation, of communal pro-

[1] *Génie de la Revolution* (1862), i. 334.

perty. There is some demand for taxation in terms of ability to pay, a tendency to desire limitation of testamentary disposition. A careful search will discover scattered demands for the restriction of inheritance, occasional schemes for public granaries, the fixation of prices, the limitation of usury. No one, I think, can honestly go through the cahiers upon any considerable scale without the impression that they represent not a theory of social reconstruction but the keen expression of practical experience. They are what the solid merchant, the comfortable peasant, the thinking and social-minded curé, would naturally set down as the lessons of the ancient régime.

Nor is this all. Throughout the cahiers there is a universal sense of the respect that is due to private property. The main complaint, indeed, against the past age is that the capriciousness of its system prevented the wholesale expression of that respect. "The object of the laws," said the Third Estate of Paris, "is to secure liberty and property." That note is omnipresent. Men seem unable sufficiently to emphasise the fact that property is sacred and inviolable, that no one can be deprived of property save for public purposes and with adequate compensation. District after district emphasises the right of all property to respect, save where its possession entails abuse; and, to my own knowledge invariably, abuse only means the justly hated privileges of feudalism. There is no objection that I can discover to unequal property. There is dislike of luxury, a demand for special treatment of the needy and the orphan, a sense that the proletariat should be lightly taxed or even free from all imposts. One discovers suspicion of the financier, a claim that the poor man should be able as surely to live by his labour as the rich to be secure in his property. There is the well-known plea from Paris for the creation of public workshops. There are various suggestions for the more humane treatment of the poor and the mendicant, and the improvement of hospitals. No one can look at demands like these and call them specifically socialist unless socialism is a mere synonym for humanitarianism. For the most part, they are the obvious dictates of common sense; and they are far less radical in temper than much of the social criticism of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*.

Those who drew up the cahiers of 1789 were entitled, like Clive, to be astounded at their own moderation.

The pamphlets of 1789 cannot, I think, be put upon quite the same footing as the cahiers; they announce certain principles which it is difficult not to describe as socialistic. But before I summarise some of their ideas I would venture upon a word of caution. It is necessary, I suggest, to distinguish between declamatory denunciation and definite plan. It is easy to find the first; it is difficult to find the second. We are no more entitled to call denunciations of inequality and misery socialistic than we can justifiably term Southey and Carlyle and Ruskin socialists because they were indignant with the horrors of factory civilisation. There are innumerable pamphlets which insist that the right to property is a social creation, which society can abolish as it pleases; there are literally hundreds which establish the principle of the right to work as inherent in the structure of the State. But most of the first group insist equally on the immense danger of disturbing established expectation; and few, if any, of the second group leave the right as more than an empty declaration to which no concrete scheme is annexed. Even Marat, in his *Project of a Declaration of the Rights of Man*, while he begins by insisting that the law must prevent excessive inequality of fortunes, and that a wise redistribution of wealth is necessary, ends by saying that the best thing that could have happened to France would have been for Montesquieu or Rousseau to have drawn up its constitution. But no one would have expected either to construct a socialist state.

We must, then, distinguish between declamation and positive plan. Of the first there is abundance and to spare. There is passionate denunciation of those rich who "eat in a single meal what would suffice for ten families in a year" [1]; there is the warning that unless the people is fed and the right to work assured, insurrection is certain and justified. There is the bitter plea of men like Devérité that the worker is like an army mule who breaks beneath his burden; but the only remedy of which he can think is the suppression of machinery as the root cause of low wages. One writer, Dufourny de Villiers, points out with acuteness that the real poor are not represented in the

[1] *La Colère du Père Duchêne.*

States-General, and argues that they are entitled to compensation for the property they lack; but his cure for the evil he vividly depicts is merely "a new moral foundation for a better-organised society." Another writer, after a piteous description of the sufferings of the workers, is satisfied to urge that public workshops are the logical consequence of the right to work; yet he tells us nothing of how they are to be organised or what they are to produce.

We are nearer to socialistic ideas with Gosselin,[1] whose views are very akin to the agrarian socialists of the Cromwellian Revolution. After a trenchant exposure of the injustice of the existing social order, and an emphatic note that conditions would justify such a socialisation of land as existed in Sparta, he agrees that the remedy would be worse than the disease. But he urges the desirability of four measures in order to obtain equality. Uncultivated land should be given to the poor, as the Romans formerly settled soldiers on the soil. The clerical demesne should similarly be used, the recipients paying a small rent to the State and its former possessors; and each year the government is to set aside a sum for buying up the estates of large landowners and distributing them in the same way. Finally, he suggests a progressive capital tax on private fortunes to extinguish the public debt. In a brief time, he thinks, these measures will establish a "happy equality," if the land so divided is declared indivisible and inalienable. The worst features of luxury will disappear; and the engagement of a vast majority of citizens in agricultural pursuits will make commercial fortunes of insignificant importance. Sufficiency will mean an instructed people. Population will increase; and emigrants will take this new model to happier climes. Gosselin has no doubt of the practicability of his scheme, and he offers it to the king with a simple faith of which no one can deny the charm.

Two other schemes of socialistic tendency deserve a word. Seven years before the Revolution Rétif de la Bretonne, in his *Andrographe*, had published a complete Utopia upon a rigorously communist foundation. But, like Plato with the *Republic*, he had realised that it was meat too strong

[1] *Réflexions d'un Citoyen* (1787); on Gosselin, see A. Lichtenberger, *Le Socialisme Utopique* (1898), p. 132.

for human digestion; only complete agreement could achieve it, and for this it was hopeless to look. In 1789, therefore, he published a revised version of his plan in the *Thesmographe*, which might, he thought, be capable of realisation. While private property is to remain, its possession is to be limited and difficult. Prices are to be controlled by local authorities and failure to cultivate as government prescribes is to result in forfeiture. At the back of the whole scheme is the principle that private property is a mere legal convention made by the State, and subject at any moment to its power of eminent domain.

Rétif's ideas, clearly, have no more than a paper value, for he had no vision at all of how to bring them into being. If Babeuf's Utopia is not less visionary, it is more important, because it shows how constant was his devotion to the principle of equality. The son of a former tutor of Joseph II, after a grim and starved childhood he became an agent to a nobleman, and acquired there that practical acquaintance with feudal privileges which played so large a part in the shaping of his life. In 1787 he began to correspond with the secretary of a provincial academy to whom he put questions which make evident his pre-occupation with equality as the key to social good. It is to inequality that he traces the pride of the rich and the excessive humility of the poor; and he urges upon his friend that it is the cause of all the evils of our social condition. The correspondence reveals him as a man profoundly influenced by Rousseau, passionate, and bitterly antagonised by the inequalities of the *ancien régime*.

In 1789, in conjunction with the mathematician Audiffred, he submitted his views to the National Assembly in something like coherent form. The *Cadastre Perpétuel* does not yet envisage the need for revolution, but something at least of the spirit which, seven years later, was to take him to the scaffold is already there. No man, he says, who has sufficiency can be regarded as other than an exploiter if he seeks to obtain more than this. Men are by nature and right equal, and it is the business of the law to keep them so. Yet, as the law works, the very opposite is the case. The rich are the masters of society. The poor grow in numbers and their wages continually

decrease. This is an impossible position. The land, " the common mother of us all," must be divided equally so that each citizen has an assured patrimony which he cannot lose. Instruction must become general lest the wise oppress the ignorant. Unless this is done, the rich will cut the throats of the poor ; and the latter are entitled to property, as a ward may, when he attains his majority, recover his rights from a defaulting trustee. But the first step on the road to reform is education. Equality in knowledge is the keystone of the arch of social reconstruction.

Babeuf's plans, doubtless, did not reach more than a handful ; the Assembly was occupied with more immediate questions. What I wish only to emphasise again is the presence of a socialist ideal among the pamphlets of 1789, while noting that it is extraordinarily rare. Where there is an attack on the existing order, that is not socialism. It is nothing more than the final deposit of that sense of waste and injustice common, for instance, to all reformers of the age of Louis XIV. There is a good deal of Utopia-making, not a little violent paradox. But what there is of revolutionary destructiveness comes from sources which, as with Mably or Rousseau or Montesquieu, we cannot call genuinely socialist in the sense in which I have defined that term. Men feel vaguely that a new age has come, big with possibilities. There is a spirit of optimism abroad. But reform, and not revolution, is the essential tenor of men's minds in the first hours of the new dawn. What socialism there is is small in volume and insignificant in expression. It needed the realisation that civil equality and the reform of politics did not mean an end of suffering before a widespread change was possible.

III

By the early months of 1790 the ultimate character of the Revolution had been fixed. Feudal privileges had been abolished ; the monarchy had been put in fetters ; the church had been overthrown. The Declaration of Rights contemplated a middle-class liberal State. If it was an exaggeration to say with Loustalot, that " everything tends to substitute an aristocracy of wealth for an

aristocracy of birth," the proletariat had not seriously benefited by the changes made. Phrases had been used in the Assembly, even by men so conservative as Mirabeau and Malouet, which implied a belief in equality, but the social legislation of the next few years showed clearly that they meant nothing. Already property was afraid; and the warnings of Edmund Burke had fallen upon ready ears. By 1790 the main preoccupation of the leaders was to stabilise and make effective the results of the first enthusiasm of the Revolution, while assuaging the sufferings of the common people. Few were able to see the effect of foreign war upon social policy, or to guess, as Burke so marvellously foresaw, that a successful general would emerge as the dictator of the State.

Anyone who analyses the literature and the legislation from 1790 until the fall of Robespierre has, above all, to be careful not to discover too much in what he reads. He must remember that he is dealing with a peasantry which was hungry for the indisputable possession of the land, and angrily suspicious of its former masters; where, therefore, he sees peasant riots he must not assume that they are grounded in socialist principle. He must remember, too, that in these years bad harvests were general, and unemployment widespread. The problem of feeding the towns and finding work for the proletariat was a difficult one, intensified by the timidity of the rich and their anxiety to put a term to experiment in social policy. Every revolutionary leader treads the edge of an abyss; and in the effort to satisfy a hungry and indignant constituency he uses phrases and threatens measures which are meant as denunciation rather than argument. The period, therefore, is full of declamation which has a socialist character. Rights are asserted, pledges are made, which suggest much more than they in fact mean. The political figures of the time cannot, in my judgment, be called in any case socialist; nor were they dealing with a public which, in any serious degree, expected socialist measures. What rather we are confronted with is a people full of misery to whom attacks upon the wealthy as the source of their misfortune might be expected to appeal. The Girondins, certainly, had no sort of sympathy with socialism; Danton, as I think, had no sort of social principles at all, and Brissot, differently from his earlier

views, was the defender of the small proprietor rather than anything else. There is socialism among the Jacobins, as there is also among the *enragés*; but I regard it less as a body of consistent and systematic principle than as a series of extraordinary ideas meant to cope with an extraordinary situation. It is not until the Conspiracy of Babeuf that we meet with socialism in a serious and effective form. In a word, until Babeuf there are socialist ideas, but there is no socialism.

So to regard the character of this period is, I know, to run counter to a famous thesis of Taine. But I think his view is built upon a complete misunderstanding of the evidence. Undoubtedly there were attacks on property, hatred of the rich, revolutionary risings, a good deal of pillage and confiscation. But these are the inevitable accompaniments of any revolution where there is a hungry mob, a bewildered government, foreign and civil war. Socialism, as I have said, is a theory of social reconstruction and a methodology; it is not an angry crowd attacking a speculator or burning the documents of its ancient servitude. It is not even a Jacobin deputy preaching the argarian law, or Marat insisting that, in time of crisis, each commune can take measures without limit to help its poor; nor is it Robespierre arguing that excess of property is only justifiable where there is general sufficiency. Broadly speaking, the temper we confront is one which insists that, in a period of scarcity, the rich man who does not put his surplus at the disposal of the community is an enemy of society. It is a hatred of greed, of speculation, a suspicion that great wealth implies counter-revolutionary sentiment, that we meet almost everywhere. But this attitude cannot be described as socialism any more than its Russian analogue means an acceptance of the principles of Lenin.

The true approach lies, I believe, along quite different lines. The Revolution inherited from the *philosophes* a rigorous criticism of property as an absolute right, an ethical defence of communism, and a profound sense that, because the privileges of aristrocracy are indefensible, the state might be made to serve the people creatively. These notions had to be applied in a time of crisis, without time to think either of their philosophic significance or their administrative possibility. They had to be applied

when there was civil war at the centre of national life, and foreign war at its circumference. Measures which are suitable to an extremity are rarely the expression of a considered philosophy. They represent merely the response to immediate exigency, and their very authors are, often enough, the first to deny that they have permanent significance. Certainly there could not have been any widespread socialism in a revolution which began in enthusiastic loyalty to Louis XVI and ended in a loyalty at least superficially enthusiastic to Napoleon. Girondins who anathematised the agrarian law, Jacobins who hissed the leading *enragés* out of the Paris clubs, do not sound like the apostles of socialist principle. Effectively, I should argue, there would have been no socialism at all if the economic condition had not been acute. What men were prepared for was the abrogation of what was restrictive in the *ancien régime*. Crisis drove many to heroic words and measures which they felt to be suited to an heroic time; but when the situation, after the death of Robespierre, became administratively manageable, what emerges as stable is the bourgeois liberalism which drove Babeuf to revolt. And the very memory of how property had been in danger was so driven into men's minds that, after 1796, it was in process of becoming the very absolute against which the eighteenth century had made its magistral protest.

This, at least, is how I read the evidence. It does not exclude the fact that there were socialist ideas; it does deny that there were either many to put them forward or a wide public conscious of their meaning and anxious for their application. It is worth while to consider the expression of those ideas in some little detail, and to note their affiliations with orthodox Jacobinism on the one hand, and the Conspiracy of 1796 upon the other. I begin by noting one general point: all parties in the State agreed upon the undesirability of excessive differences of fortune. Mirabeau, Malouet, Vergniaud, Brissot, Condorcet all spoke in this sense; and there was a fairly widespread tendency to approve the simple life and a progressive income-tax. These are, of course, views which the eloquence of Rousseau had made almost platitudes. They were things which everyone had to say who did not wish to be regarded as reactionary. The first person worth

mention who went at all far in a socialist direction was the Abbé Fauchet, who founded in 1790 a discussion circle, and was himself, later, a Girondin deputy. His views undoubtedly influenced a wide circle, though the fact that, as Camille Desmoulins tells us, he could be hissed in his own section for support of the agarian law, shows that men were rather interested in, than moved to accept, his ideas.

His views are obviously founded upon Rousseau. His journal—the *Bouche de Fer*—preaches the original goodness of man, and his right to an equal share of the earth. When he enters the State he surrenders all his rights which are then possessed by government for the general welfare. By this is meant that all men have something, and no man has too much. What must be prevented is extreme poverty and wealth and, above all, social parasitism. He recommends the establishment of national factories, the limitation of land-holding, a rigorous control of inheritance, and such a regulation of the marriage-laws as would prevent the union of large family fortunes. It is noteworthy that even these moderate views were bitterly attacked, not only by conservatives like Mallet du Pan, but also by radicals like Desmoulins. Fauchet himself continually softened whatever of rigour they may possess; and he put them forward rather as an ultimate, than as an immediate, programme. He was less a doctrinal socialist than a Christian mystic imbued with the importance of equality by his desire for a change in the heart of mankind.

Among the Girondins, I think, there was no one who was socialist in any real sense of the term. Brissot was an exponent of Jeffersonian democracy, Condorcet was a radical much of the school of Thomas Paine, Sebastien Mercier shares the horror which, as he tells us, Rousseau would have felt at the ideas of Babeuf; and Rétif abandoned his *Thesmographe*, being content, amid wild denunciation of Jacobins and sansculottes, to insist that equality in land or in incomes below fifty thousand francs is both impossible and criminal. The only important Girondin who shows signs of more radical views is the one-time pastor Rabaut Saint-Etienne; though he may be said less to embrace socialism than to fringe its boundaries. Equality, he tells us, is the soul of a republic; unequal

wealth divides classes and ruins equality in politics. But it cannot be established by force, and the best we can hope for is to reduce inequality by law. How this is to be done he does not tell us in detail. A maximum fortune can be fixed, the State taking the remainder, whether by gift or force, for foundations of public utility or unforeseen State expenditure. National workshops should be created, and inheritance and testamentary disposition should be controlled. But, even more, Rabaut Saint-Etienne would desire the State to encourage those moral habits in the people which are favourable to the atmosphere of equality.

These can hardly be called extreme views; though it is worth pointing out that they, and their like, excited the wildest alarm among conservative thinkers. Equality and an agrarian law seemed to a charitable worker named Lambert "a violation of all the laws of nature." Men like La Harpe exhausted themselves in expressions of horror at the extreme and dangerous attacks upon the foundations of social order. Their very demand to have done with experiment naturally provoked the antithesis of their caution. To have accepted their attitude would have meant simple futility before the grave economic problems—how grave M. Mathieu has recently shown [1]—which confronted the State. The conservatism of the Right did not appeal to the Girondins. But the latter, to whom disorder was hateful, and whose fear of the proletariat was omnipresent, shrank from a policy which seemed to jeopardise the property of the middle classes. They were naturally overthrown by the Jacobins, whose policy of centralisation and experiment provided the only hope the masses could see for assuaging their misfortunes. Brissot might join hands with Mallet du Pan and Barruel to accuse them of subverting the foundations of social order; to themselves, and, in general, I think, quite honestly, they merely appeared as men prepared to utilise the authority of the State for the preservation of the Revolution.

I do not mean to imply that there was not a definitely socialist background to Jacobin policy. Certainly there was; though, to understand it, we must remember that its sources are complex. Partly, it was born of immediate necessity, partly of the fact that their leaders, Marat and

[1] *Robespierre et la Vie Chère* (Paris, 1927).

Robespierre in particular, were deeply read in those earlier thinkers, especially Rousseau and Mably, who had insisted that the right to property is a social concept made by, and limited by, the will of the State. They never had a new theory of a different social order. For the most part, they were the *petite bourgeoisie* to whom Montesquieu and Rousseau were a gospel to which they were prepared to sacrifice much. And the sacrifices they were prepared to make were such as the poorer classes welcomed, especially when these saw in hostility to the Jacobins the privileged of the the old régime and the rich men of the new. What they said and did no more made them deliberately and consciously socialist than did the programme unfolded by Mr. Lloyd George in 1909 make him a member of the Socialist Party. They would attack the rich, but they would not have the agrarian law. They would demand sacrifices—Mr. Chamberlain's doctrine of "ransom"—but they would do nothing to injure the idea of individual property itself. Danton, for example, was merely a democrat who wished that the rich should bear their full share of the common burden, and that men should be recognised to have an equal right to happiness. Marat, as I have noted, was a moderate liberal in 1789. Experience made him more violent in declamation. But no journalist who merely thinks from one day to the next, especially if he is gambling for his head, has a considered philosophy. If he regarded economic equality as desirable, it was for some distant future he need not discuss. What he was above all concerned to maintain was the sovereign right of the State to take whatever measures it might think fit to prevent disaster. Reasonable wages, prices within the reach of the poor, local control of food supply—these were the things he emphasised day by day in the *Ami du Peuple*. But no one can read his articles without seeing that he is merely inventing remedies for a crisis. He has no thought of permanent principles.

With Robespierre it is different; from his writings and speeches one can, I think, piece together a coherent doctrine which has clearly socialist affinities. Property for him is simply a social institution; it is the citizen's right to enjoy as he will the goods guaranteed to him by the State. The latter can, therefore, limit its rights, punish speculators, and control inheritance. But absolute

equality is a chimera impossible of realisation in civil society. To preach it is to invite a detestable anarchy. There is an excessive inequality which the State should control. It leads to the domination of the community by a few wealthy men, and their vices contaminate society. The State owes to the poor, the source of moderation and civic virtue, the right to work or maintenance ; to procure this for them is a more sacred task than to protect the wealth of the rich. Fixation of prices in their interest is essential, and no punishment is too strong for speculators in food. A severe and progressive income-tax is justified ; in an ideal State no one would have more than an income of three thousand livres. All this, clearly enough, is the mind of a man nourished on Rousseau and Mably, the partisan of a simple and equal society, the enemy of the rich whom he feels to stand in the way of its achievement. He speaks the language of bitterness and hate ; for, to him, the rich are the enemies of the republic. But if Robespierre's ideal is anything, it is that of the small town radical rather than the socialist. It is the excess of wealth, not property itself, to which he takes objection.

Much the same might be said of Saint-Just, whose *Institutions Republicaines* shows us pretty fully the direction of his mind. A nation of small farmers, general equality, a compulsion upon all to work, a rigorous control of inheritance to the direct line, a national system of education, and the endowment of young married couples, are the chief proposals he makes. The Saint-Just of the Convention is less Utopian and more bitter ; but loathing of the rich apart, there is nothing positively extreme in what he has to say. And this is, in general, the temper of his colleagues. The right of the poor to property, the danger of excessive wealth, the duty of the State to confiscate that excess for the general benefit, these are the themes of a thousand speeches. Violent class-war is, of course, widely preached, especially by some of the representatives on mission. Lecomte Saint-Michel's phrase that the rich are " the mortal enemies of the Republic " is typical of innumerable others. Billaud-Varenne calls them " the bane of ordered states " ; but it is significant that he should add that property is " unfortunately the necessary foundation of civil society." But when, with them, or such journalists and pamphleteers

as Prudhomme, Harmand, Desgrouas, we have exhausted the terminology of vituperation, we come back inevitably to a positive theory on the lines of Robespierre's doctrine. When Boissy d'Anglas, in his exposition of the Constitution of the Year III, said that " un pays gouverné par les propriétaires est dans l'ordre social," he was not far from the Jacobin ideal; the owner must not be rich and all must be owners. That is the distinguishing feature of Jacobin theory.

I would emphasise again the fact that all this is not socialistic innovation, but the inheritance of the criticism of property made by the eighteenth century. Political equality, it had taught, is nothing without economic equality; men like Turgot, Siéyès, and Condorcet had said so incessantly. " Equality in fact," said Condorcet, " is the final aim of social technique, since inequality in riches, inequality of condition, and inequality of education, are the main cause of all evils." And alongside this notion was the full realisation that a State composed of the two nations of rich and poor is bound to conflict. " There has never been, nor will there be," says a pamphlet of 1789, "any but two really distinct classes of citizens, the owners of property and those who have none; the first have everything, the second nothing." Jacobinism is simply these ideas applied to a critical period in which danger sharpened the antagonism between classes, and made the idea of equality and simplicity seem a definite measure of public safety. It was neither a theory nor a method of thorough-going social transformation. Rather was it a demand that the surplus of the rich be deliberately used by the State for the mitigation of popular suffering.

IV

Before I turn to Babeuf and his conspiracy, it is worth while to spend a little time on one or two of his precursors. It is probable that ideas which may vaguely be termed communist began as early as 1789; for we are told by Baudot that the " acrimony and bitterness " of the Girondins was due to " fear of seeing the ideas of the Communists predominate." The sense continually grew that any society in which men, as Billaud-Varenne said,

" existed upon a direct but not mutual dependence upon some other human being," was in fact in a condition of slavery. In 1793 and 1794 there were among the sections, and notably in the Club des Cordeliers, men to whom Jacobin doctrine seemed needlessly conservative. We get hints of secret societies, suggestions of plans like the credit schemes of Proudhon, demands that the profits of banking revert to the State. In men like Jacques Roux, Varlet, Dolivier, Boissel, Lange, there is a clear stream of doctrine looking towards a communist solution of social problems.

Thermidor destroyed whatever hopes and prospects these men may have cherished; after it there came signs of what a police-spy, one hopes ironically, called " a profound and universal peace." But these men had their dreams, and it is worth while to note their substance. For they show how, even in the gravest moments of the Revolution, the incurable optimism of men was still prepared to make all things new. They had no clear idea of how their views could be realised; and I think it probable that they had no sort of sympathy with the methods Babeuf was later to propose. They saw all the fallacies of *laissez-faire*, and their desire was to realise that equality of fact of which I have spoken. We know, alas, too little of most of them; one would give much, for instance, for a detailed biography of Rose Lacombe, who must be very nearly the first woman Communist. But what we do know suggests simple-minded and honest men, honoured by the masses for the high character of their ideals.

Among them, perhaps, Jacques Roux is worthy of particular mention. He had been a priest, and was, perhaps, one of those who had been freed by the Revolution from that burning indignation which still lives for us in the bitter pages of the Abbè Meslier. He was always poor, and we have a picture of a lonely figure, whose sole companion was a dog, preaching a simple communism in the working-class quarters of Paris. There is Chalier, of Lyons, a mystic, whom Michelet has noted as an extraordinary man, and Lange, in some sort the precursor of Fourier. Important, too, is Varlet, a Parisian workman, about whom our ignorance is complete, and the curé of Mauchamp, Pierre Dolivier, whose book was published

for him by his fellow-citizens of the commune of Anvers. All of them are typical of an outlook not without wide support in those days of agony. They desire the limitation of land-holding, forced loans to feed the people, the confiscation of all property due to speculation, national workshops, and the public control of the food-supply. They differ from the Jacobins in that they do not pay regard to the rights of property. They consider the urgency of the position too great for measures of conciliation to be desirable. They see quite definitely in the rich and the comfortable the deliberate enemies of the poor, who will not hesitate to take advantage of public misery for private profit. They are mostly, again differently from the Jacobins, in favour of the agrarian law, though with definite leanings to a national control of its operation. Thermidor left them exasperated, largely because they saw, in the disappearance of Robespierre, the failure of their hope for drastic economic legislation. But they could not go so far as Babeuf, because they definitely respected a democratic system. "Dictatorship," said Roux, "is the annihilation of liberty"; and there is in most of them, especially in Dolivier, a marked trend towards anarchism.

Their ideas, on the whole, are seen most clearly in the pamphlet, published in 1789, by Boissel, a Jacobin of the extreme left who was active throughout the Revolution.[1] Bitterly attacked in the Assembly, it seems to have exercised some influence, especially after 1793, and it is certainly an interesting link between ideas like those of Mably before 1789, and of Babeuf afterwards. It begins with a passionate attack on organised society as the nurse of all evil. It examines, and rejects, property, marriage and religion as the expressions of the worst impulses of men. Property is simply an instrument of oppression, and the root of a discord which the invention of money merely increases. The business of society is to respond to our true instincts, which are naturally good. This can be done if we recognise that God is the only true owner, and that we have the right to nothing save in terms of need. We must reform education, nationalise industry, and train men in the spirit of a collective ownership with a view to the introduction of complete commun-

[1] *Le Catéchisme du Gere Humaine.*

ism. Here, clearly, his trust is in an educational system which will one day make men ready for the new order. By 1793 he was insisting to the Jacobins that the fruits of the earth belong to the poor by natural right and may be taken by force, for property is an usurpation of the inalienable right of man to subsistence. But beyond that vague sense of the duty to use the law, Boissel, like his fellows, has no clear notion of how the change he desires may be definitely effected. With him, as with Dolivier,[1] a society can be reconstructed on the principles of a communism somewhat like that of the Russian *mir* and the right of each man to the whole product of his labour. And much of their outlook is determined by the clear perception that the real result of the Revolution has been to establish the farmer and the merchant in the seat of power. They realise that the aristocrat has been dethroned in the interest of the middle classes. They insist that anything short of communism must mean of necessity the retention of a class-structure in society.

But they do not really know how communism is to be attained. I agree with Kropotkin that an analysis of this early philosophy anticipates much of the principles of 1848, that little of what was elaborated by Fourier and Owen and Proudhon cannot be found in pamphlets and speeches and local decrees of the period. They had an ideal but not a method. The importance of Babeuf and his colleagues lies in the fact that not only did they envisage this ideal with some particularity, but they had quite definite notions of how to seize power for its attainment. It is probable enough that few of the two or three thousand people who seem definitely to have been influenced by the conspiracy knew or shared in their views with any precision; they may have known the battle-cries without thinking through the programme. That is not, I think, particularly important. All revolutions are the act of a minority; they depend for their success on sympathy for their general end rather than for their bill of particulars. Babeuf and his fellows knew how they proposed to proceed; and the strategy they invented has provided ever since the methodology of revolutionary socialism at least in its large outline.

I have already noted that Babeuf was a communist

[1] *Essai sur la justice Primitive.*

from the outset of the Revolution. I need not here detail his later career. Though his *Système de Dépopulation* shows that, at one time, he was both anti-terrorist and anti-egalitarian, he was one of those who saw in the fall of Robespierre the end of what was beneficent in the Revolution. Always in want, often in prison, rash, enthusiastic, self-confident, single-minded, he was just the man to lead a desperate attempt upon the conquest of power. The Conspiracy seems to have been formed during one of his terms fo prison. A few fellow-prisoners were initiated into his ideas; the group grew steadily, and became the Society of the Pantheon, which the government did not fail to watch and proclaim. It had two wings: at the very centre were the real communists, and, closely affiliated, but remote from the heart of the affair, a number of ancient Jacobins to whom the abrogation of Robespierre's constitution was a bitter memory. The scheme was linked together by a secret committee of direction, to which its publications were almost certainly due. Among them were some extraordinary men, Darthe, Sylvain Maréchal, Germain, and Buonarroti, who was to survive them all and to be their historian. They had contacts with some former members of the Convention, with the army and the police, even with the underworld. I need not add that from their early days they were honeycombed with spies, one of whom was, unknown to them, introduced by Buonarroti and Darthe to the very heart of the affair. They never had any real chance of success. Their plans were known, almost from their inception, to the Directory; it needed less honest and zealous men than they to elude the cold-blooded machinations of Barras. Everyone, moreover, was tired of bloodshed and misery; the police reports and the diplomatic correspondence show clearly that the revolutionary spirit was exhausted. The leaders were arrested and tried by a special tribunal. Babeuf and Darthe, after a vain attempt at suicide, were executed; other important conspirators, including Buonarroti, were imprisoned or deported. Those who lived on became the depositaries of a tradition which, after 1830, they found the new generation eager to cherish.

I shall discuss, first, the programme of Babeuf, and then his strategy. Neither is a very easy thing to do, partly because some of the evidence, being produced by spies at the

trial, is suspect, and partly because not a little of what we have is clearly not in its final redaction. Yet the literature, checked by the narrative of Buonarroti, and, even more, by the valuable discoveries of Advielle, enables us to see pretty clearly what was involved. And this can, I think, be put in a single sentence. There is no real innovation in doctrine, which is the eighteenth-century tradition, clarified and made precise by the profound experience of seven revolutionary years ; there is a definite innovation in method, which opens an epoch of decisive importance in the history of socialism.

Let us start with two significant sentences used by Babeuf in his trial. " My companions and I," he told his judges, " have groaned over the unhappy results of the Revolution . . . it has merely replaced a band of ancient scoundrels by a band of new ones." For the object of society is the realisation of the common happiness. That is impossible without the rule of equality, which is the clear implication of natural law. This does not mean the agrarian law, which is not equality at all. All men have a permanent right to a continuous share in the social product. To recognise private property and differences of fortune is to admit theft to the heart of society. Inheritance is unjust, respect for the superiority of talent is dangerous. All work has the same value, and all capacity should be equally rewarded. Communism is the only way by which this can be realised. It means the common ownership of land. It means the socialisation of industry and universal and compulsory labour. Education, too, should be equal and common. The theory differs from what has gone before in that earlier thinkers demanded relative equality. The Babouvistes insist that this is more difficult to achieve and to maintain than equality in the full sense of the term. Any society in which less than this exists is built upon civil war and is bound to mean the exploitation of the poor, of that is, the mass of the community. There can be no justice unless the only recognised differences in the State are those of age and sex. To put the whole wealth of society at the disposition of the people is to assure the maximum of virtue, justice, and happiness. Envy and hate disappear. Each can recognise that his well-being is intimately related to that of his neighbour. To serve society in such an order is to serve oneself. The reign of equality

will be the last revolution necessary to the well-being of man.

This body of doctrine was developed in the most diverse and ingenious ways; in the art of literary propaganda, the Babouvistes had certainly nothing to learn from their generation. Careful doctrinal analyses, as in the famous *Analyse de la doctrine de Babeuf*, a brilliant short programme, as in the *Manifeste des Egaux*, drawn up by Sylvain Maréchal, songs, poems, newspapers, special literature for the army and the police, placards, memoranda, slogans, invective, all the typical devices of modern publicity are there. It is easy to see how their eloquent denunciation of existing conditions would appeal to the unemployed, for they set out with simplicity the experience through which the working-classes had passed. It is even probable that their emphasis upon the failure of the Revolution, their attacks upon the rich, their hatred of the Directory, their impassioned defence of the honesty and greatness of Robespierre, commanded wide sympathy. The programme, clearly, as Babeuf himself would have recognised, is simply a careful restatement of Rousseau and Mably, of Diderot and Morelly. It is both bolder and more precise than its predecessors. It has none of their faith in the possibility of changing men's hearts in an individualist society. It is much more bitter against the rich, much more insistent that they are "brigands," for whose destruction all patriots must hope. The Babouvistes are more optimistic than their predecessors, in that they think the essential revolution is capable of immediate achievement. But in the general contour of their objective there is nothing essential to distinguish them from a half-score of thinkers in the pre-revolutionary epoch.

That is not, as I have said, the case with their strategy, where there is genuine and important novelty. This can best be analysed in two ways. On the one hand, there are the definite steps they took in the organisation of their conspiracy up to the time of their arrest; on the other, there is the theory of what was to be its conduct after they had seized political power. At the head of the affairs was the small central committee, with Babeuf at its head. This was the brains of the whole conspiracy. It met in secret, practically every night, always alone, and not

seldom changing its headquarters to avoid any possible suspicion. It dealt with day-to-day business, the actual conditions under which the insurrection was to take place, the legislative measures to be taken on the morrow of the insurrection, and the future institutions of the new republic. It was responsible not only for the overt propaganda, but also for stimulating the activities of its local agents, to whom the personnel of the committee remained unknown. Its individual members had relations with the agents, but rather as themselves officers of liaison than as chiefs. The agents, most of whom were chosen with great care, were of the essence of the plan. Tried revolutionaries, they were the contact between the central committee and the masses. They reported on the feeling of the population, its grievances and aspirations. They supplied, therefore, that knowledge upon which the leaders could build successful propaganda and action. Linked with them were local committees in the districts of Paris, who made their impress upon the workers, put up placards and distributed leaflets, addressed meetings in the workmen's clubs, talked in cafés and factories, and spread as widely as possible the volume of discontent, the hope that one final effort might make all things new. Women, also, played their part, and it was hoped, particularly, to employ the services of the demi-monde to neutralise any hostility in the army.

To the latter special attention was paid. The leaders had carefully chosen military agents, to each of whom a definite task was allotted. General Fyon was in charge of the Invalides ; Germain took care of the police ; Massey controlled the detachments at Saint-Genes ; Vanneck was given the task of infecting the remaining troops in Paris. Agents were obtained in each barracks to work on the minds of the soldiers ; others, sometimes women, frequented their cafés. Sophie Lapierre, whose beauty was well known in Paris, declaimed the proclamations of the Central Committee and sang its songs. The evidence at the trial suggests that no mean success attended these efforts. They were paralleled by similar attention to the police. Information was also obtained about *agents provocateurs* from sympathisers in the force ; and in several cases the head of a police section was in close contact with the conspirators.

Through these means every sort of step was taken

which might injure the government and create the expectation of some great impending event. Every rumour likely to injure the Directory was widely spread. Complaints were broadcast, meetings held, sympathisers from the provinces brought to Paris to create the illusion of a national movement, assemblies of street-mobs were organised. The Laws of the 27 and 28 Germinal, by which the government took power to dissolve all political meetings, shows that the importance of the movement was realised. Insubordination among the troops, the punishment of which revealed unrest in the police, is further proof that the danger was real. But the fact that Barras actually negotiated, probably dishonestly, an attempt at an alliance with Germain of the secret committee, shows both that the Directory was alarmed, and that it was, probably throughout, cognisant of the plan. When the Committee, after discussions of military plans, was waiting for the critical moment, the Directory swooped upon them. It was estimated at that time that, the masses apart, the Insurrectionists could count upon 17,000 men, of whom 9,500 were regular troops. These were to march upon the arsenals and the seat of government, while others were to hold the streets of Paris and repulse all hostile attack. The plan was never put into action, as Barras was the first to strike his blow ; but it is, I think, evidence of the hold the conspirators had obtained that some seven hundred men should have marched to Grenelle and sought to excite the troops there to revolt and rescue their leaders. They were only dispersed by military attack and numerous arrests. After that, the conspiracy was at an end.

Clearly enough, as a piece of organisation, the plans of the Babouvistes were remarkably conceived. Not less interesting was their conception of the methods to be used in the event of success. Here their views were built upon the theory of class war. Society, for them, was divided into rich and poor, and neither had any interest in common with the other. The rich depended for their position upon their power to keep the poor in subordination ; the latter could conquer their rights only by the dethronement of the rich. In a society in which overt civil war was the main feature, it was unthinkable that power could be conquered by the poor, save by violent means, for the rich would

never abandon their privileges without fighting for them. This, they felt, was the real lesson of 1789; it was the lesson of 1793; it was the lesson implicit in the experience of Thermidor. It meant that when the political State had been captured, a period of rigorous dictatorship would be necessary as the prelude to communist democracy. Only in this way could the people be withdrawn from influences hostile to equality, and given that unity of will essential to the adoption of republican ideas. "It was evident," wrote Buonarroti thirty years later, "that the inherent necessity of things, even the success itself of our enterprise, meant an interval between the fall of aristocratic power, and the final establishment of popular democracy." An assembly was impossible since it left the success achieved to the hazard of a popular vote. The revolution had not been made merely to change the form of administration; its object was to change the nature of society itself. This could not be left to the people who had been trained to habits which ignored the natural order of things. The revolutionary government must therefore act on behalf of the people. It must, as Buonarroti wrote, "snatch from the natural enemies of equality the means of deceit and fear and division." What was required was "an extraordinary and necessary authority which would restore its liberty to the nation, despite the corruption which was the consequence of its ancient slavery, and, despite the attacks of those enemies, within and without, sworn to its destruction." It is the doctrine of permanent revolution by dictatorship in the name of the proletariat.

To seize power is, therefore, only the first step; it does not end the revolution. Parliamentarism and democracy are impossible because they risk the whole purpose of the insurrection; the people is not yet fit to be entrusted with a power which counter-revolutionaries might seize from them again. "What was necessary," wrote Babeuf, "was men whose doctrines and manners, whose whole life was in full harmony with the spirit of the institutions which they were called to create." Liberty must be denied at the outset lest it be lost for ever. What was to be done was in accord with natural law. It was what the people would itself desire when it came to understand the egalitarian State. The Dictatorship was thus, in effect,

the general will of the proletariat. It lost its freedom only the more fully to find it.

The institutions and measures this Dictatorship would create are extraordinarily significant in the light of our recent experience. The central committee had at first considered the idea of appointing a single person as dictator; but this idea was rejected in favour of the government of the committee itself, advised by an assembly composed of one democrat chosen by each of the departments from a list of suitable persons submitted to them. This had, however, to be modified after discussion with their Jacobin allies; and the final form of assembly was to consist of some sixty former members of the Convention and a hundred other democrats nominated by the people from safe candidates. The Committee retained the right to initiate legislation, together with full executive powers. Beneath it, there was to be created commissars in each department, with great authority. Their business was to speed the successful revolution. They were to make propaganda for its ideas, create local societies for its completion, deal with counter-revolutionaries, and assist all active democrats in the provinces. Before appointment they were to declare their financial position, and a special tribunal was created to examine their accomplishment of their task. Further, to strengthen the new order, there was to be created a kind of revolutionary academy, a *seminaire normal*, " where citizens from each department would be sent, in a predetermined order, to learn the principles of the new revolution, and to be imbued with the spirit of the reformers." To complete the structure of the Dictatorship, the Babouvistes decided to recreate all local institutions, including the revolutionary commissions, as they existed before the fall of Robespierre in Thermidor.

I cannot even attempt here to analyse in detail the actual measures by which the central committee proposed to accomplish its task. But it is, I think, worth while briefly to indicate the principles upon which those measures were based. All healthy persons were to work, and no idle person was to possess political rights. The homeless and the poor were to be housed in the houses of all who had conspired, or might conspire, against the Revolution. The people was to be armed, and all " parasites " disarmed. The press was to be controlled to prevent the spread of false

news or attack. Special taxes were to be levied on all not sympathetic to the new régime with a right, at need, of complete confiscation. The old defenders of the Revolution and the unfortunate were to be given the use of new possessions. Anyone who had emigrated or rebelled was to lose his property; and confiscation was also visited upon the negligent farmer, the public servant enriched by the exercise of his office, and any who were judicially condemned. The sale of national property was suspended; and, inheritance being abolished, all private estates, on death, were to revert to the State. Machinery was to be developed, and uncultivated land brought into use; to this end state-shops were to be opened in each commune, and an economic council, representing the different professions, was to aid the local authorities in the provision and organisation of work. Education, with the necessary vocational bias, was to be common to all, and so developed that the average man might hope to play his full part in the life of the State. Foreign trade was to be a state-monopoly, while money and wages were abolished for internal purposes. There was to be assistance for the old, and free medical service for the sick; and the treatment of criminals was to be entirely reformed. Whatever its weakness as a practical scheme, it is obvious that Babeuf and his colleagues had arrived at a clear perception of the programme they wished to achieve.

[The modern theory of social revolution is naturally the outcome of a profounder study of historic conditions than it was open to Babeuf and his colleagues to make. Yet anyone who compares their analysis with the *Communist Manifesto*, on the one hand, or the writings of Lenin and Trotsky upon the other, can hardly doubt the original source of their inspiration. The line of affiliation, indeed, is a direct one; for Buonarroti was the master of that generation whose words and acts were the basis of Marxian strategy. The class-war, the failure of reform, the necessity of dictatorship, the insistence on a social revolution, the ultimate significance of the economic question, the realisation that insurrection is an art, the careful prepara-

tion of the measures it is to entail, the insistence on the proletariat as the sole revolutionary class, the perception of the importance of education and propaganda, the sense that intellectual theories are born of the methods of economic production, all these the Babouvistes clearly understood. All these, also, became part of the essential Socialist tradition of the nineteenth century. " It is nearly forty years since Babeuf died," wrote Charles Nodier, in 1836, " and his party is still living . . . he recognised truths which no government has deigned to accept, truths which can never die." Of the socialism of the Revolution, indeed, Babouvisme is the one element destined to permanent influence. Voyer d'Argenson, Teste, Raspail, Louis Blanc, Leroux and Blanqui in France, Belhasse and Potter in Belgium, Bronterre O'Brien in England, have all borne testimony to the part it played in their lives through contact with Buonarroti. Weitling's work in the canton de Vaud brought him into direct contact with it also ; and it is worth remembering the part that the League of the Just played as an instrument of early Marxism. And it is worth remembering also that one of the Communards of 1870 was the grandson of that Clémence who had sat with Babeuf in the Central Committee. It was with reason that Count Albert de Mun should, in 1896, in the Chamber of Deputies, have accused the French socialists of being the descendants of Babeuf. That is, in fact, their real and effective origin.

We must not, indeed, exaggerate their insight into the technique the modern Marxian has developed. They had practically no conception of socialism as an international force ; it needed the impact of the Industrial Revolution to emphasise the limits of nationalism in revolutionary strategy. There was not enough realisation of successful revolution as grounded in a set of objective economic conditions, and not merely born of determined organisation at a premature moment. There were many of those elements in the theory of Babeuf which, in 1847, Marx stigmatised as " Utopian socialism "—the belief in an ultimate natural law, the conception of an original endowment of human impulse which was definitely good and merely obscured by evil institutions, something, at least, of the acceptance of insurrection for its own sake, upon the dangers of which Lenin has written so brilliantly. The latter's phrase,

indeed, that "Babeuf was a Jacobin who leaned on the working-classes" has a real truth in it; for he never sufficiently perceived the danger of the alliances he was prepared to make for the end he had in view. Nor did he realise at all how much in advance of effective possibility was his programme. A social revolution cannot be successful on the falling tide of a political revolution. Babouvisme was doomed to failure before it got under weigh.

Yet, it must be emphasised, the depth of its insight is remarkable. Anyone who reads its voluminous literature with attention, and compares the habits it postulates with the operations of Bolshevism, cannot help being impressed by the resemblance. Elsewhere I have pointed out[1] that the strength of communism lies in its effort to effect a complete transvaluation of values in terms of a great ideal passionately cherished. I have pointed out the strength given by faith in that ideal to its adherents, their profound sense of its exclusive truth, their willingness to sacrifice themselves to its principles, their insistence that the end is so great that the means adopted to it are, whatever their cost, justified. The detailed resemblances between the programme of Babeuf and that of the Russian Communist are remarkable enough; but even more remarkable is the similarity of ultimate temper which runs through the two movements. There is the same exhilaration of spirit, the same bitterly-drawn distinction between friend and foe, the same urgency that all things be made new, the same power relentlessly to dissect the weaknesses of contemporary society, the same capacity for self-confident optimism, the same genius for propaganda and invective. Lenin, so to say, is the Babouvistes writ large; and the architect of the November Revolution was greatly indebted to men who, if they saw less clearly than he, envisaged a civilisation upon the same pattern he sought to build.

VI

What results from this analysis? The French Revolution, in a narrow perspective, must, I think, be regarded as primarily individualist in character; the real expression of its effective outcome is the Civil Code, in no sense a

[1] *Communism* (1927), p. 138 f.

socialist document. Its real result was to transfer power from the aristocracy to the peasant and middle classes. The impress made upon them by the socialist tendencies of the period, especially by their extreme translation in the Conspiracy of Babeuf, was to make the idea of private property more sacred, and less susceptible to attack, than it was held to be at any time in the eighteenth century. If it attacked the property of the old régime, it consolidated that of the new upon a wider basis; and the era of change and confiscation only made men more eager to suppress the possibility that titles could be called into question. We must not forget that the abolition of feudal rights and corporate privilege was made in the name of the individual; that, where confiscation took place, it was done in the name of public safety and could thus be regarded as essentially a transitory measure. Most of the attacks upon the rights of property which did take place were rather the inevitable accompaniment of civil war than an expression of any wide desire for social transformation. Given political liberty, a constitutional state, and equality before the law, and most men were content to abstain from speculative innovation. A state was created which lay at the service of the hard-working peasant and the active entrepreneur. No condition is more favourable to classes whose power is a function of the property they possess.

On a longer view, however, the French Revolution is a capital event in the history of Socialism. It is so, I suggest, for four reasons. Before 1789 there was not, in the modern sense, any social problem. Men asked how the poor were to be relieved, not, as afterwards, what part they were to play in the State. The Revolution began that awakening of a social consciousness in the proletariat of which universal suffrage is merely a partial, and by no means the ultimate, consequence. Every radical party thenceforward has found that it must reckon with the wants, indistinct, indeed, and but half-formulated, of the poor; and every state has discovered that the growth of economic organisation sooner or later transforms the incoherent mass of the poor into a movement ultimately capable of organisation upon the classic lines of party conflict.

This birth of the social question has a special importance for another reason. Before 1789 socialist ideas were

simply moral theories which lived in a vacuum and had no chance of effective realisation. After 1789 they were in a different position. Men had seen the deliberate introduction of proposals the purpose of which was to legislate for equality. The fixation of maximum prices, the abolition of feudal privilege, the confiscation of Church property and the possessions of those hostile to the Revolution, the attempts at progressive taxation and the control of inheritance, these, as experiments, have an importance it is impossible to over-estimate. Doubtless they usually failed; doubtless, also, they were often suggested without conviction and, more often still, applied without sincerity. This is less significant than the fact that men became accustomed to the perception that the State might be made the tactical instrument of those who possessed its machinery. It is less significant, also, than the fact that the Jacobins, not least their representatives on mission, schooled the masses to the understanding that distinctions of wealth are legislative creations, and that, where crisis demands it, egalitarian innovation may be deliberately attempted.

A third reason is outstanding in the impact it has made upon subsequent history. Before 1789 society was divided into privileged and unprivileged; since 1789 it has been divided into rich and poor. The distinction is a notable one. The pre-revolutionary division was the expression of an age-long tradition rooted in the psychology of habit and custom; its landmarks were as mentally familiar to men as the house into which they were born. To the new division the sanction of tradition was no longer attached. Men could see change before their eyes. They could see that the attainment of riches meant food and shelter, clothing and security; they knew that its absence meant hunger and suffering. They learned not only that law could make and unmake the wealthy; they learned also that these opposed such changes in the law as involved sacrifice upon their part. They grew to think of the division as an antagonism of interest, a necessary hostility which could only be bridged by an attack upon the rights of property. From 1793 the life of the Republic was, until the execution of Babeuf, something not unlike a war against the rich in the interest of the poor. The Jacobins waged it, no doubt, for the preservation of the Republic.

The poor who supported them did so, no doubt as well, because they were miserable and hungry, and not because they were socialists. But it was waged, also, with the idea in the background that equality is an ideal, and that the rich are the enemies of equality. The notion permanently remains therefore that great riches are always illegitimate; and, with the class-conscious worker, the more general view that the weaknesses of society are the outcome of class privilege. This feeling bit the more deeply because of wide disappointment with the results of the Revolution. After the fall of Robespierre the sense was wide-spread that the Revolution which was to benefit the whole community had, in fact, merely aided the bourgeoisie to the detriment of the worker. The latter's revolution, it was felt, was still to come; it was inherent in the nature of things. In this sense, as the principles of 1789 begin to impregnate the consequences of the factory system, revolutionary socialism became an inevitable part of nineteenth-century ideology.

The final outcome was the definition, with invincible clarity, of the problem of equality in all its aspects. Here I shall not venture to rely upon my own diagnosis, but attempt only to ask some questions. If a people seeks to improve its situation by the alteration of political institutions, and is dissatisfied either with the result itself, or the slowness with which its benefits accumulate, will it be satisfied to remain inactive in the economic sphere? Will it not ask itself, as Tocqueville suggested, whether the privileges of property are not the main obstacle to equality among men, and assert that they are neither necessary nor desirable? If it asks the question, will it not seek to experiment with the possibility of response? Will a new Napoleon be discovered to put a term to their inquiries? But to examine these possibilities would take me far beyond the boundaries of the French Revolution. It must suffice here to say that these questions have been raised, and that the happiness of mankind depends upon the way in which we seek to meet the grave issues they involve.

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