

CHAPTER IX

SYNDICALISM

Quarrels amongst Socialists—The old Guilds—Revolutionary Syndicalism—Outcome of Anarchy—The General Strike—Georges Sorel—Syndicalism *versus* Socialism—Guild Socialism—"New Australia."

WHILST Socialism in England was thus pursuing a laborious course and still remained almost exclusively confined to drawing-rooms, the same doctrines met with continued and active hostility from the French peasants.

Mr. Hyndman in his *Reminiscences* describes M. Clemenceau as expressing his opinion that Socialism could never make way in France in his day.

Looking only at the towns you may think otherwise, though even there I consider the progress of Socialism is overrated. But the towns do not govern France. The overwhelming majority of French voters are country voters. France means rural France, and the peasantry of France will never be Socialists. . . . Always property, ownership, possession, work, thrift, acquisition, individual gain. Socialism can never take root in such a soil as this. North or South it is just the same. Preach nationalization of the land in a French village, and you would barely escape with your life, if the peasants understood what you meant.¹

It is strange how frankly Socialists at times admit that, for all their talk of democracy, their plans for the people's welfare are diametrically opposed to those of the people themselves. Mr. Hyndman goes on to relate that M. Paul Brousse, when consulted on Clemenceau's "pessimist opinion" of the French peasants, agreed that "to preach nationalization in the villages would be suicidal," but

¹ *Reminiscences*, p. 321.

seemed to think the peasants might be tricked into Socialism all the same.

The word Socialism need never be used at all; but the ideas of natural and communal organization and administration would soon find their road into his mind. In this way the peasant's conception of the sanctity of private and the curse of public ownership would gradually be shaken, and he would be on the path to practical Socialism before he knew what was going on.¹

Mr. Hyndman remarks that he thought this idea quite admirable.

But while the Socialists were making plans for "educating the people up" to their own lofty ideals the Socialist camp in France was itself divided into at least three warring factions—the Guesdists, the Broussistes (or Possibilistes), and the Blanquistes—which continued "to excommunicate each other."² In fact, as Mr. Hyndman goes on to inform us, the conflict became at times so bitter that the Guesdists and the Broussistes "could not meet in one hall without the certainty of bloodshed, or at any rate of severe contusions, following. A spirit of fraternity so marked by brotherly hatred had about it something of the ludicrous."

When therefore an International Socialist Congress took place "to bring about the unity of the workers of the world" it was found necessary to assemble in "two separate Halls purposely chosen at some distance from one another to avoid the possible consequences of fraternal greetings."³

The two points on which these opposing factions differed the most violently were the necessity for the class war and the domination of German Social Democracy. On the first question the Broussistes held more moderate views, believing in the possibility of immediate reforms whilst preparing the way for Socialism by evolutionary methods; the Guesdists, however, as consistent Marxists, adopted for their fundamental principle "the doctrine of the class struggle, a doctrine," says Laskine, "imported from

¹ *Reminiscences*, p. 326.

² Mermeix, *Le Syndicalisme contre le Socialisme*, p. 90.

³ *Reminiscences*, p. 441.

Germany and profoundly foreign to the spirit of French Socialists." ¹

In ranging himself under the banner of Marx, Jules Guesde had executed a complete *volte-face*; at the time of the Socialist revolt against the domination of Marx after the Commune, Guesde in a letter to the *Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne*, published on April 15, 1873, had denounced "the Marxist proconsuls" and "the infamous rôle of the founding of power by Marx and the General Council" (of the Internationale),² but after a five years' sojourn in Switzerland—whither he had fled to escape imprisonment—Guesde returned to France an enthusiastic Marxist.

The methods by which Guesde and other French Socialists were won over by the subtler German Jews to the Marxian camp is thus referred to in a significant sentence by Marx himself:

"I need not tell you," Marx wrote to Sorge on November 5, 1880, "that the *secret strings* by which the leaders from Guesde and Malon to Clemenceau have been set in motion must remain between ourselves. We must not speak about them."³

According to Laskine it was Hirsch—a German Jew—who had brought about the conversion of Guesde; at any rate from 1876 onwards the Guesdists became simply the French branch of German Social Democracy.

This policy naturally estranged them from the French workers to whom the principles of bureaucratic Communism had always been repellent. Still, as in 1862, it was to Proudhon rather than to Marx that the more revolutionary elements inclined, whilst the great mass of French workmen saw in peaceful corporative association the true path of progress. It was the junction of these various currents that towards 1895 brought about a further development in the revolutionary movement—Syndicalism.

"Syndicalism," Mr. Ramsay Macdonald observes, "is

¹ Laskine, *L'Internationale et le pan-Germanisme*, p. 218.

² *Ibid.* p. 122.

³ *Ibid.* p. 167, quoting *Briefe an Sorge*, p. 170. Laskine points out that Marx was mistaken in thinking that Clemenceau had gone over to the Marxist camp.

largely a revolt against Socialism.”¹ That such a revolt should have taken place is hardly surprising. For over a hundred years the working-men of Europe had seen the middle and upper class men who constituted themselves their champions living in luxury—sleeping in the gilded beds of the Tuileries in 1794, housed in safety and comfort whilst the people perished on the barricades of 1848, enjoying pleasant trips to Switzerland as delegates of the Internationale, drawing continual subscriptions from the pockets of the workers in support of “congresses” or “leagues” or associations devised to benefit Labour—and now the time had come to ask: “What have we gained from all our sacrifices? What have these men done in return for the confidence we placed in them?”

Not unnaturally, therefore, the theory of Syndicalism, consisting in the immediate control of industry by the worker themselves, seemed greatly preferable to the tedious and doubtful method of electing Socialist deputies to represent them in Parliament. Moreover, in the Syndicalist ideas entertained by many of the French workmen there was nothing essentially revolutionary; their conception of reorganized industry approached more to the old idea of “guilds” and “corporations” than to the aggressive combines advocated by revolutionary Syndicalists. They thought regretfully of the days of the Old Régime before the introduction of cut-throat competition when men worked peacefully at their trades, bound together by ties of comradeship under *patrons* who showed some concern for their welfare. Wherever he belonged “the *compagnon* was almost certain, by virtue of his corporative privilege, to find employment. The regulations provided that he should not find competitors amongst his comrades. The knowledge of his trade, recognized after the tests through which he had passed, constituted a capital for him of which the revenues were almost certain. And if this *compagnon* wanted to make a tour of France he found help and relief. Provided that he justified his claim as member of a corporation, he was welcomed and a place found for him. Defective and imperfect like all human things, the economic

¹ Ramsay Macdonald *Syndicalism* (1910), p. 6.

organization of the Old Régime was nevertheless beneficent, and how much preferable to the want of organization into which the régime of liberty had brusquely precipitated the working-men after the Revolution." ¹

The suppression of the "corporations" by the law of 1791—confirmed by further laws under the Terror, and in the Code of Napoleon I.—had dealt the death-blow to the guild system, and when at last Napoleon III. in 1864 removed the ban on trade unions, and the workers once more saw their chance of coalescing in defence of their common interests, the German Social Democrats of the first Internationale had turned the whole movement to the advantage of Communism—a system inherently repugnant to the French workers. As far as they were concerned the Syndicalist movement was thus in its origins an attempt to get back to the freer ideas of friendly corporations, just as in England the co-operative system inaugurated by the Rochdale Pioneers took an ever firmer hold on the minds of working-men.

It was in order to meet these demands that, after the death of the Internationale, a general Union des Chambres Syndicales was formed under the leadership of Barbaret in 1873, a wholly pacific organization which aimed at industrial harmony, and in 1876 a general congress of French workmen met in Paris, at which seventy unions and twenty-eight workmen's clubs from thirty-nine towns, with a membership stated to number a million workers, were represented by more than 800 delegates. "At the opening of the Congress it was expressly insisted on that not principles of social politics but the purely economical and practical interests of the working-men would engage the meetings," ² and real improvements in the industrial system formed the subject of discussion.

But as in the case of the Internationale the World Revolutionists succeeded in obtaining control over the movement; Broussistes, Guesdists, but above all Anarchists ended by invading its ranks and blocking the path of peaceful progress.

¹ Mermeix (G. Terrail), *Le Syndicalisme contre le Socialisme*, pp. 62, 63.

² Zacher, *Die Rother Internationale*.

It is no figure of speech to say that Syndicalism is simply a further development of the creed of Anarchy, for it rests on the same basis—negation of the State. Its earliest exponents were avowedly Anarchists; in America the terms were in fact synonymous. Moreover, it was Proudhon, the "Father of Anarchy," who had first formulated the whole theory of Syndicalism: "According to my idea, railways, a mine, a manufactory, a ship, etc., are to the workers whom they occupy what the hive is to the bees, that is at the same time their instrument and their dwelling, their country, their territory, their property." For this reason Proudhon opposed "the exploitation of the railways whether by companies of Capitalists or by the State."¹

Syndicalism is, therefore, government by trade unions, and must inevitably lead to anarchy. For not only are the workers to run industries but the whole country "on their own," and with no State to act as umpire it is obvious that chaos must result. The miners might raise the price of coal, the bakers the price of bread, and the rest of the community would have no means of redress, for in the conflict that would ensue between the different groups of workers the key industries alone could exercise any real authority. For the power of each industry would be in exact ratio to its ability to hold up the country, and since society cannot get on for a day without bread, coal, or transport, the miners, the railway-men, and the food purveyors would have an immense advantage over the workers engaged in such trades as boot-making, tailoring, or upholstery, who might strike in vain against extortion. Women-workers would of course have no voice at all.

It is not, however, the system of Syndicalism but the method by which it is to be brought about that constitutes its principal claim to be ranged in the category of anarchy. This method is the *General Strike*.

Now, as Mermeix has pointed out, there are three kinds of General Strike: (1) the Corporative General Strike of the workers, (2) the Parliamentary General Strike of the Socialists, and (3) the Revolutionary General Strike of the Syndicalist leaders. Let us deal with these one by one.

¹ Proudhon, *La Révolution au XVIIIe siècle*, p. 249.

(1) The Corporative General Strike as conceived by the workers was not originally a measure of violence. Strikes throughout the early history of the Labour Movement had been the workers' only method of obtaining redress from exploitation, and no one but a Robespierre or a Lenin would deny the worker's right to lay down his tools if the conditions of his labour appear to him unjust.

The Corporative General Strike was simply a development of this time-honoured method of expressing discontent which, carried out on a larger scale, would enable workers in all industries to bring an effective support to the demands of their oppressed comrades. As Mermeix points out, the working-men's conception of the way in which the plan would work was very naïve :

Some day one would stay at home ; one would not go to the workshop. The *bourgeois* who fattens on the sweat of the people would waste away because the people would cease to sweat, it would be " a strike of folded arms " ; one would not go down into the street in tumultuous crowds, one would not expose oneself to the brutalities of the police and the guns of the soldiery. One would walk out in a family party, to lunch on the fortification, in the woods of Vincennes, in the Bois de Boulogne or even further in the smiling suburbs where the exploiters have their country houses. Would not this method be much better than that of the Socialist politicians who first of all advised one to vote for them, their electoral success being the first stage on the way to final victory, and who, once elected, would think only of their re-election ? The general strike would be the revolution carried out as a huge joke. One would divert oneself with the expressions of the employers growing day by day more disconsolate. One would watch them grow pale, yellow, distorted, and their rage would be powerless against the brave proletarians who would simply make use of their right to idleness—the right of Man, a natural and sacred right which the *bourgeois* has so long selfishly enjoyed alone. When it had had enough of it the class of leeches would ask to capitulate. The proletariat would dictate its conditions : " Give me back what you have stolen from me, that is to say, give me back everything and we will become good friends again. I will go back into your workshop to work not as one exploited for your profit, but to work as a free social producer." And the bourgeoisie could not do otherwise than subscribe to this treaty.¹

¹ Mermeix, *Le Socialisme contre le Syndicalisme*, pp. 135, 136.

That in reality the worker would grow pale, yellow, would in fact be dead before the employer reached the ends of his resources, did not enter into the reckonings of the "brave proletarians," nor does it still to-day when the plan of the general strike is placed before them.

(2) The Parliamentary General Strike, as approved by certain Socialists, aims at quite a different *dénouement*; it is not to end in improved relations between the workers and employers or in an *entente* between the workers and the Government, but in the overthrow of the political party which holds the reins of power in favour of the Socialists themselves. A general strike conducted on these lines would not "dispossess the Socialist party of the command which it has arrogated to itself over the working-classes," on the contrary it would confirm this command, and leave to it the rôle it has chosen of "business man to the proletariat."¹

Even Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, arch-opponent of the revolutionary general strike, admits the expediency of the political variety. "The general strike," he observes, "can be declared for two purposes. It can be used to secure some specific demand—say an extension of the franchise, the resignation of the Government, or the defeat of a war party. . . . As a last resort, as a *coup de grâce*, it may be justifiable, and need not be unsuccessful."²

In order, therefore, to place Mr. Ramsay Macdonald and his friends at the helm of the State, to overthrow a Government that retains an insular prejudice against foreign invasion, and to paralyse national defence, it may be necessary to bring upon the country the immense suffering caused by a general strike, which, when carried out by Syndicalists, as Mr. Macdonald himself remarks, "hits the poor people heaviest, the middle-classes next, and the rich least of all."³

For revolutionary Socialists to-day, as in 1793, "tous les moyens sont bons."

(3) But the Revolutionary General Strike, the form of general strike advocated by the Syndicalists and that now forms the programme of extremist trade union leaders,

¹ Mermeix, *Le Socialisme contre le Syndicalisme*, p. 142.

² J. Ramsay Macdonald, *Syndicalism*, p. 61.

³ *Ibid.* p. 62.

aims neither at a reorganization of industry nor at a change of government in the political sense, but at the complete destruction of constitutional government by violence of the most frightful kind. It is here that we come back to the connection between Anarchy and Syndicalism; not only is the Syndicalist system a development of the creed of Anarchy, but its method for inaugurating it comprises the exact programme of the earlier Anarchists.

Now it will be remembered that the idea of "useful larceny" had first been suggested by Weishaupt, a principle applauded by Brissot and put into practice by Marat when he urged the populace to pillage the shops. Babeuf, though a Communist, had carried on the same tradition in his plan of the "Great Day of the People," when the people were to rise as one man and lay violent hands upon property. From Babeuf onwards the scheme had been logically abandoned by Communists—since Communism aims not at mob rule but at bureaucracy—but continued along the line of Anarchy. Proudhon in his revival of Brissot's axiom "Property is theft," Bakunin in his glorification of robbery, and finally Kropotkine in his theory of "The Great Expropriation," all followed out the same idea, namely, that of a "Great Day" of revolution when the maddened multitude, driven by want and desperation, should rise against all wealth and property in one overpowering onslaught. Had not Bakunin and Netchaïeff indicated this design in an illuminating sentence: "We must increase and heighten the evils and sorrows so as to wear out the patience of the people and drive them to insurrection *en masse*." By this means only, the social revolution could be accomplished and civilization, obnoxious civilization, wiped out at one stroke.

But how were the people to be driven to this pitch of exasperation? Obviously by hunger. The want of bread alone, as the Orléanistes of 1789 had clearly perceived, can be depended on to produce popular insurrection, and in the eighteenth century famine had been easy enough to engineer by buying up supplies, waylaying waggons of corn, or throwing sacks of flour into the river. But a hundred years later improved means of transport and the complicated modern system of food distribution had made such primitive

methods impracticable. How, then, were want and hunger to be brought about? Only by some gigantic *coup* that would paralyse the whole country and lead to the Great Expropriation dreamt of by the Anarchists. Syndicalism now provided the weapon by which this was to be accomplished—the *General Strike*.

Let us examine the programme of the revolutionary General Strike as resumed by Mermeix from the declarations of its advocates, and we shall see how exactly the "Grand Soir" of the Syndicalists corresponds with the Anarchists' idea of the Great Day of Revolution.

First of all, a series of isolated strikes is to take place in various industries by way of partially paralysing Capital and of unsettling Labour.

Then at a given signal the workers, roused to violence by want and idleness, are to invade the workshops, mines, factories, etc., and take possession of them. At this stage, of course, the Government will be obliged to call in the aid of the police and soldiery, and the fight will begin. The revolutionaries will cut the telegraph and telephone wires; railway lines will be torn up to prevent the transport of troops or provisions; at the same time it is hoped that a number of the soldiers will go over to the side of the revolution. By this means the capital will be starved out, the markets will be empty, and the inhabitants rendered savage by hunger may be expected to turn on the Government—and also on the *bourgeoisie*.

Of course there is always the possibility that the population, instead of turning on the Government, will turn upon the revolutionaries, but "this last prospect does not disconcert the partisans of revolution by the General Strike. The Parisians will fight amongst themselves; well, then, things will go all the better. *Everything that will make confusion worse would be an advantage.*" And in the end, if the revolutionaries fail to overthrow the Government, the havoc they will work will be irretrievable. Before evacuating the workshops the Syndicalists will resort to sabotage; all the instruments of labour will be destroyed. The railways will remain unusable; the ruin of the capital will be complete.¹

¹ Mermeix, pp. 153-156.

What then? After that frankly the apostles of Syndicalism promise nothing; their conception ceases with this final climax—"a series of atrocious scenes, of burnings, of ruins, of murders, of terror," carried out by "tramps, poachers, marauders, with terror rising from below and ending in a fearful mêlée."¹

One must read for oneself the work of M. Georges Sorel to realize that this idea, well characterized by Mermeix as "the dream of a neurasthenic negro king,"² can seriously enter into the calculations of a man outside a lunatic asylum. But to M. Sorel the prospect offers nothing alarming; on the contrary, whilst admitting that the General Strike will be "a catastrophe of which the process baffles description,"³ the leading apostle of Syndicalism regards it as the goal towards which all agitation should tend. "*Syndicalists*," he declares, "*concentrate all Socialism in the drama of the General Strike.*"⁴

It is, in fact, as a drama, as a spectacle, that M. Sorel looks upon the final cataclysm, or rather as a gigantic cock-fight of such sanguinariness and of such dimensions that one can die happily after witnessing it. For what is to happen afterwards—the *lendemain de la révolution*—one must take no thought; it will be enough to have lived to see "a tidal wave passing over the old civilization."

It will thus be seen, not as a matter of surmise but of fact, that the General Strike as now advocated by the extremist leaders is simply the prelude to the Great Expropriation.⁵

By allying the latter plan with the workers' idea of a corporative General Strike the Syndicalists have evolved the scheme of "The Day" which is to overthrow civilization. Of course the workers themselves have no conception of

¹ Mermeix, p. 159.

² *Ibid.* p. 232.

³ *Réflexions sur la violence*, p. 202.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 161.

⁵ See the pamphlet called *The Social General Strike* by the British Syndicalist Jack Tanner, which admits this design. "Expropriation," which is to be brought about by the General Strike, means "taking back what belongs to the working-class," and the author goes on to say: "The need for food and the necessaries of life would force the people to help themselves. Hunger forces even the most timid to take what they are entitled to." From the point of view of the people themselves it is appalling to imagine what this system of food distribution would lead to.

the real design, and each time that a General Strike is attempted doubtless imagine it to be a brilliant inspiration on the part of their leaders in view of a sudden emergency. "The miners are striking for a higher wage. Let us stand by them! Happy thought—let all workers present a solid front to the oppression of Capitalism! One—two—three—all together—strike!"

Thus playing on the simple *camaraderie* of the workers, and urging them to solidarity in the interests of Labour, the Syndicalists hope to drive them onwards into the *mêlée* which is to end in no amelioration of the workers' lot, but simply in the destruction of the existing social order.

What is to avert the catastrophe? Only greater knowledge on the part of Labour. The first thing, then, is to dispel the illusion that the General Strike is a modern and progressive measure. The workers should be told not only its real purpose but its history; they should be shown that, instead of being the outcome of any present emergency, it is an old scheme that has been going on for at least fifty years and has been turned down as impracticable by all intelligent groups of workers. Let us now follow the vicissitudes of the idea throughout the last half-century.

As a revolutionary method Mermeix suggests that the idea of the General Strike may be traced to the phrase of Mirabeau: "This people whose mere immobility would be formidable."

Now Mirabeau, as we know, was an Illuminatus. Had then even the plan of the General Strike as the weapon wherewith "to deal the deathblow to civilization" entered into the "gigantic conception" of Weishaupt? In a vague sense this is possible, but in its details the General Strike is, as I have shown, essentially a measure adapted to modern conditions.

The plan was first definitely proposed at the Congress of the Internationale in Brussels in 1868, when the declaration was made that "if production were arrested for a certain time the social body could not exist, and that it was only necessary for producers to cease to produce in order to make the personal and despotic enterprises of

Government impossible.”¹ From this date the idea of the General Strike was current, and in 1873 the Belgian section of the Internationale invited the other sections of the association to prepare for the attempt to bring it off, but the Congress of Geneva declared it to be at present impracticable.

In 1884 the Government attempted to arrest class warfare by founding “Bourses du Travail,” or Labour Exchanges, which should not only provide work but maintain harmony between employers and employed. But the Bourses, like the Chambres Syndicales, soon became hotbeds of revolutionary intrigue, and in 1888 the plan of the General Strike was pressed with renewed vigour by the Anarchist carpenter Tortelier.

After achieving some success in the faubourgs of Paris, Tortelier this same year came to London, where he preached his gospel before a Labour Congress. But “the apostle of the General Strike,” with his thick-set figure, bull’s neck, hoarse voice, and slovenly attire, whose aspect suggested that of a satellite of Marat, was not taken seriously by British working-men and met with scant success.

In France, however, the cherished scheme of Tortelier found increasing favour. “The idea of the General Strike,” says Mermeix, “charms the working masses because it is so simple.” And in France there are always the anarchic elements who crave to *faire sauter le bazar*. Thus at a congress of members of the Syndicates and of the Bourses held at Nantes in 1894 the policy of the General Strike was definitely adopted by 65 votes against 37. In the following year the formidable association known as the Confédération Générale du Travail was founded by the extremists with the General Strike as the principal plank in its platform. From this date, 1895, onwards a seven years’ war was waged between the C.G.T. and the Bourses, until in 1902 the Bourses were finally extinguished and Syndicalism was left in triumphant possession of the field.

Several attempts have already been made to bring about the revolutionary General Strike—in Spain in 1874, in Belgium in 1902, in Sweden in 1909, in South Africa in 1911,

¹ Mermeix, p. 131.

in France in 1920, but so far the firmness of governments and the resistance of the community at large have averted the climax of the "Grand Soir" dreamt of by the Syndicalists, and the principal sufferers have been the strikers themselves. But this fact in no way deters the advocates of the General Strike from pursuing their purpose, which has now become the accepted policy of the C.G.T. At the same time other revolutionary measures have been adopted with a view to fretting away the foundations of Capital. Thus after 1889, when the dockers of Glasgow enforced their demands for higher pay by "going slow," the policy of Ca' Canny became a definite part of the Syndicalist programme.¹ In 1897 sabotage, which had hitherto been regarded as a measure of violence to be employed in the open warfare of revolution, was introduced as a method of passive resistance. Railwaymen had discovered that with a pennyworth of a certain ingredient engines could be put out of working, and the bright idea of applying this method to other instruments of labour met with an enthusiastic response at the Congress of Toulouse in 1897. Pouget, one of its most ardent advocates, describes this incident as "the baptism of *sabotage*."²

One variety of sabotage known as "Obstructionism," introduced in 1905, consists in following out regulations to the letter—"accomplishment of duty with excessive care and no less excessive slowness." Pouget gleefully describes the inconvenience to which railway travellers may be put by this plan.³ For it should be remembered that the methods of Syndicalism are directed not merely against the Government or employers but against the whole community. It is therefore perfectly accurate to distinguish between Syndicalism and Socialism, because the policy of Syndicalism is avowedly anti-social and oligarchic, whilst Socialism at least professes concern for the welfare of the majority.

The plan of the General Strike further emphasized this division between the Socialists and Syndicalists. For although, as we have seen, Socialists are not unwilling to

¹ Émile Pouget, *Le Sabotage*, pp. 6-8.

² *Ibid.* p. 17.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 55-64.

consider the idea of the parliamentary General Strike which will bring them into power, they have always continued to prefer the ballot-box as a method of procedure. As to the revolutionary General Strike, this was opposed throughout even by the followers of Marx, represented in France by the Guesdists. "I only wish some one would explain to me," said Jules Guesde, "how breaking street lamps, disembowelling soldiers, and burning down factories can constitute a means of transforming property. We ought to put an end to all this war of words calling itself revolutionary. No corporative action, however violent, partial strike or general strike, would be able to transform property."¹

Thus although the Marxians were at one with the Syndicalists in wishing to bring about the grand catastrophe, they differed only in the manner by which it was to be effected. The Syndicalists said: "The catastrophe will be caused by the General Strike. It is the General Strike that will be the catastrophe. This catastrophe is distinguished from that which is awaited by the Marxists, the Socialist politicians, in that it will not be brought about by chance, it will arise when the workmen wish it. Syndicalism disciplines the catastrophe which the Socialists await with the fatalism of *marabouts*."²

But according to Georges Sorel the Marxians have entirely misinterpreted their master's meaning, which in reality excluded "any hypothesis constructed on future Utopias"; in fact, Sorel represents Marx to have actually declared that "*whoever has a programme for the future is a reactionary*."³

Now, of course, if Marx really said this the whole theory of Marxian Socialism is founded on a fallacy and is proved to be a system in which Marx himself never believed. But to do him justice we must recognize that there is some truth in Sorel's contention that Marx never pretended to have devised any definite system for "the organization of the proletariat," that he merely made use of the "enormous

¹ Paul Leroy Beaulieu, *Le Collectivisme* (1909), p. 650.

² Mermeix, p. 122.

³ *Réflexions sur la violence*, pp. 185, 191.

mass" of ready-made material which he found in the British Museum for his great work on Capital,¹ and that it was his disciples who read into it ideas for the reconstruction of the social system.

On these grounds Sorel is able to claim Marx as his ally, that is to say, as a pure destructionist—not as a Syndicalist, for nowhere in Marx's writings could one find any hint of the Syndicalist theory of industrial organization; but above all it is as the great promoter of the class war that Sorel finds in Marx his true affinity. To this one point the apostle of Syndicalism is ready to sacrifice all other considerations. "The scission of classes," he declares, "is the basis of all Socialism";² the one thing to be avoided is social peace.

Indeed, Sorel's one fear is that modern nations, "stupefied with humanitarianism (*abruties par l'humanitairisme*)"³—the phrase might be taken straight from Nietzsche—may prevent the conflict.⁴ To guard against this danger every effort must be made to keep up the class war, not only by inciting Labour to attack Capital, but by stiffening the resistance of Capital to the demands of Labour. "The more ardently Capitalistic the *bourgeoisie*, the more will the proletariat be filled with a war-like spirit confident in its revolutionary force, the more will the movement be assured."⁵

It is necessary, therefore, by violence "to force Capitalism to occupy itself solely with its material rôle," so as "to give back to it the warlike qualities it once possessed."⁶ Employers of labour must be made to understand "that they have nothing to gain by works of social peace or by democracy."⁷ "All then," Sorel concludes hopefully, "can be saved if by violence it (the proletariat) succeeds in consolidating class divisions and in restoring to the *bourgeoisie* something of its energy; that is the great aim towards which must be directed the thought of all men

¹ *Réflexions sur la violence*, pp. 185, 191.

² *Ibid.* p. 257.

³ See Sorel's whole chapter on "La Décadence bourgeoise et la violence," i.e. the disinclination of employers to fight labour. *Ibid.* pp. 91-121.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 105.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 110.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 110.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 109.

who are not hypnotized by the events of the day but think of the conditions of the morrow." ¹

Such, then, is the aim of Syndicalism as set forth by its chief exponent, Georges Sorel. At first sight the one merit it seems to possess is frankness. Hitherto revolutionary writers, to whichever faction they belonged, had always professed that their system would conduce in some degree to human happiness; even the Anarchists appeared to derive enjoyment from the prospect of their lunatic dreams of the future. But Sorel promises nothing; "Utopias of easy happiness" he openly derides; even on the system of Syndicalism he has practically nothing to say—the only thing that matters is to keep up revolutionary ardour. Yet, after all, we find that Sorel is not much more honest than his predecessors, for whilst denouncing the visionary Socialists who lead the proletariat towards a mirage, Sorel goes on to admit that the General Strike, which, like *Der Tag* of the Germans, must ever be held before the eyes of the people, is in reality a *myth*. It will probably never come off, but just as the early Christians maintained their religious ardour by looking forward to the second advent, so the people must be taught to centre all their hopes on the coming cataclysm. Thus the idea of the General Strike will serve the purpose of continually unsettling industry and fretting away the foundations of Capital.

To the normal mind the theory of Sorel as set forth in the foregoing pages must of course appear unbelievable; the incredulous should therefore read his book for themselves in order to be convinced that such views can be seriously put forward. Is Sorel, however, sincere, or is he secretly an agent of reaction? The hypothesis is not beyond the bounds of possibility. At any rate if the author of *Réflexions sur la violence* had been put up by the Government to discredit the whole Socialist movement by working it out to a *reductio ad absurdum*, he could not have stated his case more ably or have offered sounder arguments for the defence of the existing order against the encroachments of so-called democracy. "Experience shows," says Sorel, "that in all countries where democracy can develop its

¹ *Réflexions sur la violence*, p. 120.

nature freely the most scandalous corruption is displayed without any one considering it of use to conceal its rascalities,"¹ and after a scathing indictment of democratic government in America and elsewhere he ends with the words: "Democracy is the land of plenty dreamt of by unscrupulous financiers."²

But it is for the parliamentary Socialists that Sorel reserves his bitterest scorn. The sole object of these people—"Intellectuals who have embraced the profession of thinking for the proletariat"³—is to bring themselves into power. In reasoning on social conflicts "they see in the combatants only instruments. The proletariat is their army, which they love with the love a colonial administrator may feel for the bands which enable him to subject a great many negroes to his caprices; they concern themselves with leading it on because they are in a hurry to win quickly the great battles which are to deliver up the State to them; they keep up the ardour of their men, as the ardour of the troops of mercenaries has always been kept up, by exhortations to coming pillage, by appeals to hatred, and also by small favours which already permit them to distribute a few posts."⁴ But in reality it will not be the proletariat who will share the spoils, for the prospect on which the leaders' eyes are fixed is "the day when they will have the public treasure at their disposal; they are dazzled by the immense reserve of riches which will be delivered then to pillage; what feastings, what *cocottes*, what satisfactions to vanity!"⁵ Then, then, at last "our official Socialists can reasonably hope to achieve the goal of their dreams and sleep in gorgeous mansions."⁶ After that "it would be very naïve to suppose that people profiting by demagogic dictatorship would easily give up their advantages."⁷

As to the "dictatorship of the proletariat" advocated by the Socialists but "on which they do not much care to give explanations,"⁸ Sorel declares that this would be a return to the Old Régime, a plan for feudalizing Capital,

¹ *Réflexions sur la violence*, p. 320.

² *Ibid.* p. 186.

³ *Ibid.* p. 112.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 236.

² *Ibid.* p. 321.

⁴ *Ibid.* (1910), p. 233.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 101.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 234.

and he quotes Bernstein in saying that it would end simply in the dictatorship of club orators and littérateurs.¹ Who, he asks, is to profit by such a government? Certainly not the country, which would be ruined, "but what does the future of the country matter as long as the new régime provides a good time for a few professors who imagine they invented Socialism and a few *Dreyfusard financiers*?"²

In the opinion, therefore, of the great Syndicalist, Jewish finance is largely interested in the triumph of State Socialism.

The inconsistency of Jaurès and other French Socialists on the question of Dreyfus is shown up in Sorel's book by a parallel drawn from the first French Revolution, of which he ruthlessly shatters the legends and destroys the prestige of "the great revolutionary days,"³ and he asks why Danton, of whom Jaurès in his great history of the Revolution had made a hero, but whose conduct during the sad days of September "was not very worthy of admiration,"⁴ should be defended on the score of acting in the interests of national defence, when Jaurès himself took part against the anti-Semites who also believed they were acting in the interests of national defence in the matter of the *Affaire Dreyfus*. The revolutionaries were represented by Jaurès as "sacrificing immediate human tenderness and pity" for the success of the cause, but then Sorel inquires: "Why have you written so much on the inhumanity of the tormentors of Dreyfus? They too sacrificed 'immediate human tenderness' to what seemed to them the salvation of the country."⁵

Not only Jaurès and Clemenceau in France but the Socialists of England become in turn the butt of Sorel's pleasantries:

Sidney Webb enjoys a very exaggerated reputation for competence: he had the merit of compiling uninteresting *dossiers*, and the patience to compose one of the most indigestible compilations on the history of Trade Unionism, but he is one of the most *borné* minds which could only dazzle men little accustomed to think. The people who introduced his glory

¹ *Réflexions sur la violence*, pp. 234, 235.

² *Ibid.* pp. 124-130, 238, 239.

³ *Ibid.* p. 146.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 102.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 147.

into France did not understand a word of Socialism, and if he is really, as his translator asserts, in the first rank of contemporary authors of economic history, the intellectual standard of these historians must be very low.

And Sorel adds that, in the opinion of Tarde, Sidney Webb was simply "a blotter of paper" (*un barbouilleur de papier*).¹

In order to appreciate the antagonism between the opposing camps of Syndicalism and State Socialism it is only necessary to read Sorel's book in conjunction with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's little work on Syndicalism, where "the fantastic programme of revolution produced by the Syndicalist" is admirably shown up. "If," the British advocate of Socialism concludes, "the grand programme of Syndicalism is a mere delusion, its immediate action is mischievous. Sabotage, destruction of industrial capital, perpetual strikes injure the workers far more than any other class, and rouse in society reactionary passions and prejudices which defeat the work of every agency making for the emancipation of labour. They put labour in the wrong. The Syndicalist might be an *agent provocateur* of the Capitalist, he certainly is his tool."²

But in this feud between Syndicalism and Socialism—the mere continuation of the old conflict between Anarchy and Communism—it would be folly to see any security for society. The rival revolutionary camps may be—and are—bitterly antagonistic in their aims, but both will stand together for the overthrow of the existing social order, and only when the country has been reduced to chaos by revolution, or to bankruptcy and ruin by Socialist administration, will the leaders of the opposing forces take each other by the throat in a life-and-death struggle.

Although, as we have seen in the preceding pages, the root idea of Syndicalism—organization and control of industry by independent groups of workers—has somewhat been lost to sight by Syndicalist writers, who have concentrated their attention more on the revolution than on its morrow, a more constructive phase of the same theory has

¹ *Réflexions sur la violence*, p. 163.

² J. Ramsay MacDonald, *Syndicalism*, p. 67.

been inaugurated in recent years by the movement known as *Guild Socialism*.

Now Guild Socialism is nothing new. To any one familiar with Socialist literature the task of embarking on the gospel of Guild Socialists, as set forth in the writings of Mr. G. D. H. Cole, must appear something like sitting down to read through a *Dictionary of Famous Quotations*. But this is an experience to which the patient student of Socialism must resign himself, for since by the middle of the last century everything that could be said on the subject had been said already, further exponents of the creed can only dish up the cold remains left by their predecessors. The process is, however, frequently very successful; nothing is easier than to gain a reputation as a brilliant Socialist writer by simply rearranging the same theories, the same phrases, and the same catchwords in a different manner to tempt the jaded palate. Yet never have the chefs of Socialism produced a galantine to compare with that of Mr. G. D. H. Cole! Here a little bit of Louis Blanc, there a scrap from Vidal, but, above all, solid slabs of Marx and Sorel. And all this concealed by a cunning glaze of modernity!

In reality Guild Socialism is simply Syndicalism with the addition of a State. But the State is not to exercise authority, only to act as a municipal body, also as a banker to the workers, and occasionally as umpire in industrial disputes. National finance would be decided by "a Joint Committee representing equally the State and the Guild Congress. The State would own the means of production as trustee for the community: the Guilds would manage them, also as trustees for the community, and would pay to the State a single tax or rent."¹

The assurance of Guild Socialists that the Guilds would always honourably act up to their part as trustees is based on "confidence in man," although we note that a large portion of the human race, the present employing class, is to be regarded with the blackest suspicion. Apparently the fact of becoming a "Guildsman" miraculously does away with all such characteristics as greed and self-interest.

¹ *National Guilds, an Appeal to Trade Unionists*, p. 13.

All this is pure Buchez, and we have only to turn back to page 109 of this book to see Guilds where "every man is a master" in operation, whilst Louis Blanc's "associations of working-men," financed by the State, demonstrate the precise system of Guild Socialism—and incidentally its failure in the past.

Unhappily it is not in the spirit of Buchez or even of the fanatic Louis Blanc that Guild Socialists set about their task. For all its professions of spirituality and love for humanity, Guild Socialism is avowedly revolutionary. "To Revolutionary Trade Unionism the Guild idea looks,"¹ its aim is "the realization of Industrial Unionism, the building up of the whole body of Labour into one fighting force."² Borrowing Marx's phraseology on the doctrine of "wage-slavery," it sets out to promote class hatred of the most virulent description and advocates strikes to overthrow the Capitalist system. In its denunciations of State Socialism the influence of Sorel is clearly detected.

The only point, then, in which Guild Socialism shows itself superior to Syndicalism is that, instead of concentrating solely on destruction and the General Strike, it makes some plans for the "morrow of the revolution."

In its conception of guilds of busy workers co-operating in a spirit of fraternity to make a success of their trade, it takes us back to the original idea of Syndicalism—Proudhon's old simile of the hive where we see in imagination the swarms of happy bees flitting through the summer sunshine laden with honey for the comb, full of joy in their labours.

Yet all that is to be said in favour of the industrial system that Guild Socialism advocates can equally be said of Co-operation. Co-operative industry exemplified by such schemes as profit-sharing, co-partnership, etc., is simply Guild Socialism without its economic fallacies—and also without revolution. This is precisely why co-operation finds in Socialists and Syndicalists alike its bitterest opponents.

But there is also a further difference between Co-operation and Guild Socialism. Co-operation is an honest movement, for it has always been willing to put its theories to the test

¹ *The Guild Idea*, p. 14.

² *National Guilds*, p. 19.

by inaugurating industries on a co-operative basis. Sometimes these experiments have failed, sometimes they have triumphantly succeeded. Co-operation has not been proved a failure.

But it will be noticed that neither Syndicalists nor Guild Socialists ever propose to start industries on the lines they advocate, but always to "expropriate" by violence those already in existence and hand them over to the workers. In this respect their record compares unfavourably with that of Socialists. The earlier Socialists, whose sincerity we cannot doubt, did attempt to carry out their schemes by means of Communists' Settlements; Syndicalism ventures on no such experiments. This is the more significant in that the reason given by Socialists for their failures in the past does not apply to Syndicalism. For if one is tactless enough to question Socialists on these abortive efforts one is inevitably met with the stock reply: "Oh, of course Socialism cannot exist in isolated communities; in order to test its efficacy it must be adopted by the State." Now although we know that it was not through outside opposition or competition but from internal disintegration that these settlements went to pieces, it is nevertheless obvious that *State* Socialism can only be practised by a Socialist State. This condition, however, is quite unnecessary to the existence of Syndicalism, since the system it advocates is to consist of autonomous groups of workers independent of State control. There is therefore no reason why these should not exist under the present régime. What is there to prevent a syndicate of miners from taking over a mine, or of factory workers buying a factory, and running it on Syndicalist lines? The huge funds of the Trade Unions would surely be better spent in an outlay of this kind than in strikes that deplete their exchequer to no purpose. For not only would a successful experiment on these lines satisfy the aspirations of all the workers who took part in it, but would proclaim to the world the efficacy of the Syndicalist theory. Henceforth only Syndicalist industries would attract workers, and employers who continued to maintain the old system of wage payment would find themselves denuded of employees.

Thus without any violence, without the shedding of a drop of blood, the whole industrial system could be revolutionized.

Why is this not done? Simply because the leaders of Syndicalism know that it could not succeed. They are well aware that an industry which adopted the principle of control by all the workers would come to grief as surely as a ship that adopted the plan of navigation by all the crew. In a word, they do not believe in the theories they teach.

One experiment founded to a certain extent on Syndicalism may, however, be quoted. This was the settlement inaugurated by William Lane in Paraguay at the end of the last century. Lane, an English journalist who had settled in Australia, appears to have been a perfectly honest man who had become deeply imbued with the doctrines both of Karl Marx and of Syndicalism. Hence he believed that "the factory-hand was the rightful owner of the factory, that the sheep-shearer was entitled to the full profits of the shearing industry, that the legal owners of all forms of property were robbing the manual workers of their dues."¹ Lane, therefore, entered whole-heartedly into the great Syndicalist strikes which at this date of 1890 were paralysing the trade of the country. But perceiving the futility of this method of warfare—which had the effect of reducing the high wages of Australian workers to the level of forty-five years earlier—Lane decided to found a workers' paradise in another land. Accordingly at the end of 1892 he set sail with 250 faithful followers for Paraguay, where he started a colony under the name of "the New Australia" a few miles from Asuncion.

The subsequent adventures of the settlers have been vividly described by Mr. Stewart Grahame in a narrative which is much more amusing than *Three Men in a Boat*, and has the additional merit of being true. It should be read by every one interested in Socialistic ventures, for only a brief résumé can be given here.

At first everything promised well; the colonists entered

¹ *Where Socialism failed*, by G. Stewart Grahame (John Murray, 1913), p. 5. In view of the above quotation it would perhaps have been more accurate to name the book *Where Syndicalism failed*. But the generic term of Socialism is frequently used to include Syndicalism.

into possession of 350,000 acres of the very finest land in Paraguay, with pasturage sufficient to keep at least 70,000 head of cattle, and since all were filled with "communal ardour," and also with the warmest confidence in their leader, there seemed no reason why a flourishing settlement should not result. But precisely the same experiences befell William Lane as had befallen Étienne Cabet forty-four years earlier. The colonists before long took turns in quarrelling amongst themselves and in accusing Lane of tyrannizing over them. "The man who worked arduously for eight hours in the vegetable garden envied the more fortunate fellow who spent his day riding about the pastures herding cattle. The cowboy, on the other hand, considered that the schoolmaster had a considerably easier job, and he was perhaps moved to compare his lot with that of the colonist whose principal duty appeared to be to blow the dinner horn."

Inevitably "bitter charges of favouritism were levelled at the head of Lane and at the heads of the foremen in charge of every industry." "We have surrendered all civil rights and become mere cogs in the wheel," wrote one of the colonists who had come to New Australia to find joy in "work by all for all." "In fact a man is practically a slave. Lane does the thinking and the colonists do the work. Result, barbarism."

At the end of fourteen months Lane found himself obliged to expel a number of malcontents; in the following year (1894) no less than a third of the colony seceded of their own accord. "We came," said one, "to found Utopia and we have succeeded in creating a Hell upon Earth." But on the arrival at this juncture of 190 new-comers, who had been attracted to the New Australia by delusive reports, Lane was himself deposed, and started off at the head of a few followers to found another settlement, which he named Cosme.

For a few years the two colonies struggled on in misery, but finally in 1899 Lane abandoned his experiment at Cosme and returned to Australia. By dint of employing native labour on the hated wage system they had set out to destroy, the Cosmians partly succeeded in restoring their

shattered fortunes ; but before long the Socialist principle was recognized as a failure and abandoned by both settlements in favour of Individualism.

From this moment the energy of the colonists revived. " In an incredibly short space of time houses shot up surrounded by well-tilled kitchen gardens. . . . Very soon the grass lands were once more dotted with cattle . . ." ; in a word, New Australia became " an average community of sane, sober, hard-working, self-respecting farmers, living at peace with one another and taking for their motto : ' What we have we hold ! ' "

The experiment of New Australia offers an interesting demonstration of Proudhon's theory of the hive and the bees when carried out to its ultimate conclusion. For in New Australia, as in all other communal settlements, the principal difficulties encountered were the lack of public spirit and the inclination to " slack." " There is absolutely no regard for common property," one member of the colony wrote to the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Moreover, " it was freely alleged by almost every colonist against some other that the latter was working less vigorously for the benefit of ' all ' than he would have done in his own interest." Mr. Stewart Grahame goes on to show us how this lack of energy would be overcome in a Socialist State, and by a curious coincidence he illustrates the fate of " won't works " under Socialist administration by the same simile as Proudhon in a description of the massacre of the drones, quoted from Maeterlinck's *La Vie de l'abeille* :

One morning the long-expected word of command goes through the hive, and the peaceful workers turn into judges and executioners. . . . Each one is assailed by three or four envoys of justice. . . . Many will reach the door and escape into space, . . . but towards evening, impelled by hunger and cold, they return in crowds to the entrance of the hive to beg for shelter. But there they encounter another pitiless guard. The next morning, before setting forth on their journey, the workers will clear the threshold, strewn with the corpses of the useless giants.

On closer inspection the industrial system of the hive is thus seen to be less peaceful than it had been represented

by the Father of Syndicalism—Proudhon. Yet all the more it demonstrates the manner in which alone Socialist or Syndicalist administration can be carried out on a large scale.

In isolated settlements of the kind, idlers or objectors can be banished, but once the system has been made universal the refusal to do the share of work allotted to one can only be punishable by death. The text adopted by militant Socialists as their battle-cry, "If a man will not work neither shall he eat!" must be literally carried out by a Socialist State, and the proletarian disciples of Ca' Cannv, no less than the "idle rich," as also those workers for whom no employment can be found, will find that the law of the hive can be even more ferocious than the hated government of "Capitalism."

Mr. Stewart Grahame has well said that "few, even amongst Socialists, realize the ferocity of Socialism." They imagine that "that classic pattern of Socialist administration, the Reign of Terror," was an accident that need not recur if the experiment of Socialism is repeated. But we have only to examine the writings of Socialists to recognize that the Reign of Terror was simply Socialism carried out to its logical conclusion. Thus we find even a Socialist of such reputed moderation as Mr. H. M. Hyndman writing these words :

The whole noble array of barristers, solicitors, accountants, surveyors, agents, and about ninety-nine hundredths of the present distributors would be wholly useless in a properly organized society. They live upon the existing *bourgeois* system. . . . They will *disappear* with the huckster arrangements on which they thrive.¹

Since there is at present no way of making human beings "disappear" it is obvious that they must be killed off, for, as Robespierre perceived, they cannot all be absorbed by "work of essential utility," and can therefore only be left to die of starvation. So all Socialist roads lead back to the old system of depopulation, and it is questionable whether the guillotine was not the humaner method.

¹ H. M. Hyndman, *The Historical Basis of Socialism* (1883), p. 461.

Syndicalism at any rate does not conceal its intentions in this matter. The massacre of the drones—and of those whom overcrowding of the hive forces to become drones—forms an essential part of the programme that Mermeix has well described as “a Neronic dream.”

In the exultations of Georges Sorel over the coming death struggle between Capital and Labour, we seem to hear a Roman Emperor rejoicing in anticipation over the collision between two racing chariots that is to strew the arena with the mangled remains of men and horses and drench its sand in blood.

Syndicalism as formulated by Georges Sorel is the plan of the World Revolution stripped of its illusory wrappings and revealed in all its naked deformity. It is avowedly anti-patriotic, anti-religious, anti-democratic; it is, in the words of one of its own advocates, Pouget, “the negation of the system of majorities,” and its sole aim is rule by force and violence. Far more than Socialism, it is the direct continuation of the programme of the Illuminati. Can we not see Weishaupt smiling in his grave as we read the words of Sorel: “It is impossible not to see that a sort of irresistible wave will pass over the old civilization”?

[Since writing the above chapter I have been informed on good authority that M. Georges Sorel has definitely gone over to the Royalists. I wonder how many youthful Syndicalists are told of this incident in the life of their prophet.—AUTHOR'S NOTE.]