

## REPORTS and CORRESPONDENCE

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### Two Years of Working-Class History in France

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Le Mouvement Social

Perhaps it is better that this brief report appear every two years rather than annually—not only for the writer, but also for the readers. In two years, trends become less hazy and the door still remains open to flights of fancy. Quite fanciful in fact, when one considers the incredible difficulties of all kinds which research encounters in France and (despite some exemplary struggles) the protracted social agony of the last two years: this provides poor nourishment for studies in the history of workers. Yet historians, both men and women, have continued to work. Even if the books which have appeared reveal what research is going on only after the fact, one can extricate the principal orientations.

The “new research,” has not by any means stifled work of traditional styles—in reality often very new in the field of history—which bears upon the political organizations of the workers’ movement. To the contrary, the full dignity of labor history affirms itself proudly there, in a domain where its legitimacy has long been challenged. To begin with, editions of source materials have proliferated. This trend has been led by the congresses, those great institutional moments propitious for collective enthusiasm and at times for decisions. The *Editions Minkoff* published in Switzerland has reprinted the basic materials for the history of the Second International. Here in France, the scholarly edition of the Congress of Tours has appeared,<sup>1</sup> with its 915 pages, its “card index” of all socialist France on the eve of the great split [1920] and its biographies which encroach upon the new series of the *Dictionnaire biographique*, directed by Jean Maitron. Henceforth, one will understand better the deep divisions that divided members of the majority down to the last minute, and the hope that united them; one will no longer be able to say that it was peasants, not workers, who carried the decision. In short, few things will still be as they were before.

A similar goal, though one which is less forcefully elaborated because of the human space covered, informs the fat volume of documents published under the direction of Pierre Broué, whose outline takes shape as the prehistory of the second congress of the Communist International, the real founding congress, at the time when the Communist movement sought its own identity amid many currents, each confident of the impending revolution.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the texts which emanate from the Executive Committee, created in March, 1919, we find here particularly those of the Western European Secretariat in Berlin and those of the East European Bureau at Amsterdam. The bulk of these have not been published in French.

There also have been published under the direction of Pierre Broué four new volumes of the *Works* of Trotsky. These cover the years of the rise of the Popular Front and the strategy of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International (April, 1934 to December, 1935).<sup>3</sup> Certainly their tone is not always calm, but a broad international collaboration has permitted retouching and precision to be brought to bear on this effort, including the texts already published in *Le mouvement communiste en France*.

One of the reasons these last mentioned editions might be of interest to American historians, who are better stocked with Trotsky's texts than the French, is that they are rooted in an effort, new to France, to consider objectively the most difficult periods of the workers' movement. For the PCF in the 1920s, there are the works of Philippe Robrieux and Danielle Tartakowsky.<sup>4</sup> These are two very different books, however. That of Robrieux offers a very well informed chronicle of the "inner history" of the PCF, although it remains doubtful that simply recounting the specific features of the party is adequate. Tartakowsky's research considers the attempted social, political, and cultural renewal, notably through the organization of schools, into which the Communist International led the first French communists. And when Michel Bilis, in a very good academic effort, fires off a book which seeks for the first time to understand the wave of pacifism which led a certain number of Socialist (SFIO) militants to the side of Pétain, even to Hitler,<sup>5</sup> when Jacqueline Pluet chooses to study the similarly very complex attitude of French Trotskyists during the Second World War,<sup>6</sup> when a group of Germanists take on the German and Austrian emigration to France and to the camps, where they were interred until they were handed over to the Germans by Vichy,<sup>7</sup> each of them penetrates to the heart of behavior which the French public (and political opinion) still cannot admit occurred. The official refusal to show a film like "The Sorrow and the Pity" for the millions of television spectators [for whom it had been made—DM] prevents them from losing their infantile delusions.

In the first report which ILWCH asked of me [No. 14/15] I reported on the new paths which, in my view, French research in working-class history was taking. The last two years have essentially confirmed these scholarly directions. On the methodological level, first of all, debate has focused in journals and in various conferences, on the significance and the techniques of oral history. Philippe Joutard opened wide the discussion by presenting a general catalogue of experi-

ments in progress for *l'Histoire*. These were discussed at a meeting organized in November, 1980 by the *Institut d'Histoire du temps présent*. Does this interest in oral history reflect some sort of group identification? Or delusive convivial celebration? Or a turning inward to individual life and away from the political? A risk of abandoning, out of fascination with the novel, the essential rules of historical criticism? To these fundamental questions—P. Thompson and L. Niethammer are no longer alone in posing them—there were different responses, from Isabelle Berteux to Yves Lequin, from Michel Popy to Jean Penneff. At the same time the discussion is now rooted in research: metal workers of Givors or of Nantes, miners of Sallaumines or of the Tarn, Parisian printing workers, bakers, sandal makers and hatters. Attention has been directed toward ways of dealing with working-class autonomy—indeed working-class culture—with the end of the Second Empire offering testimony as suggested by the recent preface of Alain Cottereau to the long-awaited new edition of *Le Sublime*—a portrait of his (former) comrades by a Parisian metalworker who had become a small employer.<sup>8</sup>

The capital is no longer at the pinnacle of research and debate. The shifting of historical work toward the provinces and the suburbs is not something new, to be perfectly honest, but it has been pointed in a new direction. In contrast to a book like that of J. Sagnes,<sup>9</sup> who studies the strong traditions of the workers' movement in provincial France through the example of the Hérault, a land of vineyards where the movement pivots on large-scale cultivation, the new research is oriented toward the cities. It points toward the urban and community practices that were at times purely working class, inserted into the space of the old city center or else in emerging neighborhoods. Rémy Cazals has demonstrated in a book which merits separate review, how in 1909, during the great strike in Mazamet (the Southwest's center for scraping wool from hides) the workers laid siege to the total urban space,<sup>10</sup> and Jean-Luc Pinol has just studied the neighborhoods of Lyons characterized by trades and industries, natives and immigrants, during the time of the Popular Front.<sup>11</sup> The A.T.P. of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, for "continuous observation of social and cultural change," has served and continues to serve as a vehicle for the study of the working-class presence in the city, that "ensemble of signs." And the review *Milieu*, which the Ecomusée of Creusot has just created, could perhaps serve, together with another new birth *Urbi*, as a cross-roads for work in progress.<sup>12</sup> The more classical thesis of Jean Paul Brunet, of which Hachette has published one thick volume under the title *Saint Denis la ville rouge*, raises hopes for a second volume, announced by another publisher, which will permit an appreciation of the problems of municipal socialism and communism, a fundamental issue for the understanding of French workers' history, but one which until now has been treated principally by articles which are very interesting but are not based upon significant research.<sup>13</sup>

*Ouvriers, travailleurs*—between these two concepts the difference in what is at stake is considerable. The shifting of research toward the latter, already evident for several years, has been accentuated. Consider, for example, the recent studies of women. We have the wet nurses and the house-maids of the very bourgeois

nineteenth century,<sup>14</sup> the first women journalists of the Saint Simonian years and the "forty-eighters."<sup>15</sup> And, in testimony to the meeting of history and ethnology, or rather to the profit which history can extract from ethnology, we see the woman who washes the newborn and the dead, the seamstress and the cook of the village of Minot in the *Châtillonnais*.<sup>16</sup> Are women wage earners [*les ouvrières*] truly absent? Margaret Maruani has insisted upon the intersection of unionism and the women's movement in the evolution of the CGT and the CFDT.<sup>17</sup> And the woman worker all the same occupies a small place in the special number of *Le Mouvement social* dedicated to women's work and in the rather uneven book where the nineteenth-century woman is presented as advancing "wretched and glorious"—another way of saying that, for women, history is "without ranks."<sup>18</sup> Already, however, one has the feeling that the editors, once seduced, retreat to a presentation of the mother, the family, and ultimately the child, suddenly displaced by the changing nature of work.<sup>19</sup>

At least, women can be besieged on all sides. It is not the same, for the moment, with those social strata linked to the first and second industrializations for whom class relations with the factory workers pose so many problems. In considering the employers, Maurice Lèvy-Leboyer has shown that one must distinguish, inside and outside of France, the questions posed by the opening of opportunities—required skills tend to grow at the expense of networks of solidarity, but are the latter really eliminated?—and those that are raised by collective demands which are themselves functions not only of the dissemination of the media, but also of struggles.<sup>20</sup> And the attention of researchers has begun to focus on the company staff whose "political and syndical universe" has been studied through questionnaires.<sup>21</sup> Sociologists stepped in first, but the call for an historical perspective has been raised almost immediately, as Luc Boltanski emphasizes in revealing the anti-proletarian connotation of the concept "cadres" when it emerged in 1936. Are engineers the cadres? A first attempt to reply was made at the suggestion of Boltanski during the first colloquium which was devoted to them at Creusot in October, 1980.

Salaried employees: such are workers and engineers (leaving aside the lively tensions which have set them against each other and, as one can imagine, would continue to do so, if they were unionized in the same confederation). As salaried employees they have acquired a certain number of rights, and particularly the right to health-care, administered by Social Security. The history of this great lady [social security] almost totally neglected and yet so representative of social policy in the second half of the twentieth century, has been the undertaking of a committee—le comité d'histoire de la Sécurité social—founded March 9, 1973 by decree of the ministry of social affairs and presided over by Pierre Lazoque, one of the founders of the institution. The committee has undertaken as its first task the assembling of a bibliography of the prehistory and history of social security from 1789 to the present.<sup>22</sup> This fundamental objective will undoubtedly also allow us to estimate the number and role of societies of mutuality and solidarity, which have accompanied the union movement rather than replacing it.

These new problematics send us back, in conclusion, to three essential problems:

The chasm: the loss which we have suffered with the sudden disappearance of Georges Haupt, one of the very rare historians (perhaps the only one) who was capable of integrating problems of class relations in France into an international framework.<sup>23</sup>

A question: to what degree will the CNRS (Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques) succeed, on the level of new institutional measures, in making a place for working-class history? One must hope for the initiatives of the Institut d'histoire du temps présent (René Rémond, François Bedarida and others) and the efforts to create, in a country where it has always been considered somewhat suspect, a GRECO of workers' history.

An orientation: that of the editorial committee of *Le Mouvement social*,<sup>24</sup> which has decided to give priority, among manuscripts of equal quality, to those dealing with the last thirty years, to initiatives of a comparative type and to the convergence that is taking shape between workers' history in the strict sense and the sociology of work, ethnology, urban studies, and archaeology.

Considering the history of the organization of work and the manner in which it has been and is lived, with its implications for daily life outside the realm of wage-earning, with the past and present consequences of technological innovations (all problems of the order of the day), historians know that they can no longer work alone, and moreover, that others have, often before them, posed problems to which an historical perspective might allow an awareness of new dimensions.

This is a vast program. What remains is to fulfill it, and that depends not only on the researchers, but also on editors, whom the present crisis strikes in its way just as it strikes that nursery of French researchers, the university.

Translated by John Merriman and David Montgomery

#### NOTES

1. *Le Congrès de Tours*, critical edition, edited by J. Charles, J. Girault, J. L. Robert, D. Tartakowsky, C. Willard, (Paris: Editions sociales, 1980), 915 pp.

2. *Du premier au deuxième congrès de l'Internationale communiste*, documents published under the direction of P. Broué, with the cooperation of the CNRS, (Paris: EDI, 1979), 510 pp.

3. L. Trotsky, *Oeuvres*, published under the direction of P. Broué, with introduction and notes by P. Broué and M. Dreyfus, (Paris: EDI, volumes 4, 5 and 6, 1979, and volume 7, 1980).

4. See D. Tartakowsky, *Les premiers communistes*, (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1980), 212 pp.; and P. Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du PCF*, (Paris: Fayard, 1980, volume I), 583 pp.

5. M. Bilis, *Socialistes et pacifistes 1933-1939, ou l'impossible dilemme des socialistes français*, (Paris: Syres, 1979), 372 pp.

6. J. Pluet-Despatin, *Les Trotskystes et la guerre, 1940-1944*, (Paris: Anthropos, 1980), 250 pp. On the efforts to publish *l'Humanité* legally during the summer of 1940, cf. the essay of D. Pechanski, "La demande de parution légale de 'l'Humanité'" (17 Juin 1940-27 août), *Le Mouvement Social*, 113 (Oct.-Dec., 1980), 67-90.

7. G. Badia, F. Joly, J. B. Joly, C. Laharie, J. Lederer, J. P. Mathieu, H. Roussel, J.

Rovan, B. Vormeier, *Les Barbelés de l'exil*, (Grenoble: Presses Universitaire de Grenoble, 1979), 443 pp.

8. D. Poulot, *Le Sublime*, preface by A. Cottereau, (Paris: Maspero, 1980). I would also remind historians of the problems posed for them by life histories, biographies, and autobiographies, which have multiplied since two years ago.

9. J. Sagnes, *Le mouvement ouvrier du Languedoc, Syndicalistes et socialistes de l'Hérault de la fondation des Bourses du travail à la naissance du PC*, (Toulouse: Privat, 1980), 320 pp.

10. R. Cazals, *Avec les ouvriers de Mazamet dans la grève et l'action quotidienne 1909-1919*, (Paris: Maspero), 350 pp.

11. J. L. Pinol, *Espace social et espace politique: Lyon à l'époque du Front populaire*, (Lyon: Presses Universitaire de Lyon, 1980), 214 pp.

12. *Milieus*, quarterly review of the Centre de recherches sur la civilisation industrielle, no. 1, April, 1980. Annual subscription from abroad: 100 francs, Ecomusée du Creusot, Château de la verrerie, 71202 Le Creusot.

13. Notably in *Faire* and in issue number 19 of the *Cahiers de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*.

14. Cf. F. Fay-Sallos, *Les nourrices à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Payot, 1980), 284 pp.; and A. Martin-Fugier, *La place des Cannes, La domesticité à Paris en 1900*, (Paris: Grasset, 1979), 377 pp.

15. See L. Adler, *A l'aube du féminisme: les premières journalistes, 1830-1855*, (Paris: Payot, 1979), 232 pp.

16. These traditional personalities, who have hardly disappeared, are studied by Y. Verdier, *Façons de dire, façons de faire*, (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque des sciences humaines, 1979), 345 pp.

17. The sociologist M. Maruani casts the look of a true historian on *Les syndicats à l'épreuve du féminisme*, (Paris: Syres, 1979), 271 pp.

18. That is the title of the book by C. Dufrancatel (and others), *L'Histoire sans qualités*, (Paris: Galilée, 1979). The studies collected by J. P. Aron in *Misérable et glorieuse, la femme du 19eme siècle*, appeared in Paris; Fayard, 1980.

19. Y. Knibiehler and C. Fouquet, *L'histoire des mères du Moyen Age à nos jours*, (Paris: Ed. Montalla, 1980), 365 pp.

20. "Le patronat de la seconde industrialisation," *Cahier du Mouvement social*, no. 4, (Paris, Ed. ouvrières, 1979), 320 pp.

21. G. Grunberg and R. Mouriaux, *L'univers politique et syndical des cadres*, (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1979), 230 pp.

22. Volume I of this *Bibliographie pour servir à l'histoire de la sécurité sociale de l'assistance et de la Mutualité en France de 1789 à nos jours* appeared in 1980 at Bordeaux: Société des Bibliophiles de Guyenne, 370 pp.

23. Les éditions Maspero published in 1980 under a title which Georges Haupt had chosen, *L'historien et le mouvement social*, a collection of his articles. In homage to G. Haupt, *Le Mouvement social* collected international and French contributions in a special number: *Georges Haupt parmi nous*, no. 111 (April-June, 1980).

24. Cf. M. Rebérioux, "Nos priorités," *Le Mouvement social*, Jul.-Sept., 1980, pp. 3-4.