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REFORMISM AND JULES GUESDE: 1891-1904

"One difficulty with analysis in social science is that it deals with categories, not people."

Daniel Bell,
The End of Ideology

A subtitle of this essay could conceivably read, "a subject in search of a biographer". It examines the motives of Jules Guesde, who introduced and organized Marxism in France, in shifting from revolutionary to reformist, and back to a revolutionary position. In charting these movements I have applied some new evidence, that found in recently available police archives, to an old problem.

Some procedures ought to be made clear.

Reformism is viewed mainly as a question of tactics; most socialists always sought as their objective basic changes in the status of the underprivileged and in the nature of property ownership. In any case, what socialists did is at least as important as what socialists said.

No attempt is made at a structural analysis of the various socialist factions. Maurice Duverger has shown that little institutionalization existed here and that individual leaders enjoyed great personal power and prestige. Some, presumably Guesde, were "very authoritarian and very imbued with their personal power and not much inclined to dilute it." Leaders continued to exert considerable influence after the establishment of institutional frameworks – as that given to the *Parti ouvrier français* in 1890.¹ In his amazingly comprehensive study of the Guesdists, Claude Willard agrees that despite an annual congress and a National Council, Guesde and Lafargue "played a primary role and stamped the party with their imprint".²

Finally, the presentation of recent evidence must abridge in a short paper much that is already familiar. My purpose here, at the risk of creating an imbalance, is to open discussion.

French socialism passed through a crisis at the beginning of the present century and never fully recovered. The reformist or evolutionary tactics followed throughout the 1890's by the factions that comprised

¹ Maurice Duverger, *Les partis politiques*, Paris (Colin) 1951, pp. 207-208.

² Claude Willard, *Les Guesdistes. Le Mouvement socialiste en France (1893-1905)*, Paris (Editions Sociales) 1965, p. 154.

the movement, Marxist-inspired Guesdists, eclectic Independents, revolutionary Blanquists, and municipally-oriented Broussists, were repudiated in favor of the class struggle and intransigent opposition to existing bourgeois society. Guesde's victory over Jaurès at the Second International's Amsterdam Congress in 1904 brought the conflict to an end and indicated its uncompromising resolution.

Despite this imposition of Marxist doctrine the views of Jaurès are seen as having ultimately prevailed; his superior leadership and ability to synthesize diverse sentiments are credited with redirecting the movement into democratic channels and stamping it with his particular brand of idealism. They did, but only to a degree great enough to keep alive the memory of reformism and to allow its occasional practice. This paper tries to demonstrate not only that reformist tactics were largely pursued before the turn of the century but that their rejection stemmed largely from personal enmity, rather than doctrinal discord. That the reaffirmation of Marxism early in the new century would endure in practice as well as in theory throughout the Third Republic must be treated elsewhere. The continued repression after 1904, however, of moderate elements within socialist ranks kept the party from power for over thirty years, prevented effective action when finally exercised, forced Radicals to seek support from their right at the expense of social legislation, alienated and thus weakened the forces of labor, and in repeated purges drove from the party some of its most talented members. Put another way, the legacy left by Guesde was greater than that of Jaurès.

I

Reformists might best be described in terms of what distinguished them from Guesdists in the 1880's. The former held the vote as the chief means to implant socialism; by establishing public services on the municipal level, for the followers of Dr. Paul Brousse; by transforming society not only economically but morally and philosophically, for the disciples of Benoît Malon. It may have been the gradualness of the approach that made for loose, almost non-existent, structures and permitted overtures to all interested parties. Confidence in anticipated election results prompted defense of the Republic against Boulangist opposition. Guesdism, on the contrary, was materialist in doctrine, small and increasingly disciplined in membership. It made light of universal suffrage and the revolutionary potential of organized labor, and expressed neutrality in regard to the defense of republican institutions.¹

¹ Gaëtan Pirou, *Les Doctrines économiques en France depuis 1870*, Paris (A. Colin) 1925, pp. 6-10, 25-27.

It required no great shift, therefore, for moderates to continue their reformist practices in the next decade. Several explanations have been offered for the adoption of a reformist position by Guesdists. For Georges Weill, they came to realize that the likelihood of victory through an act of force had been overestimated.¹ Aaron Noland described the efforts of Guesdist legislators to enact measures of social reform; the policy secured additional votes but increasingly committed the party to work within a capitalist framework.² The specific need to present the majority of Frenchmen, who in 1890 still worked on the land, with an attractive agricultural program was stressed by Carl Landauer.³ Claude Willard cites the Guesdists' superficial assimilation of Marxist doctrine that had led them first to underestimate the usefulness of the vote, then to overestimate it, and consequently to expose themselves to accusations of dogmatism and sectarianism.⁴ These explanations are not contradictory, and to them one might add the electoral advantages anticipated by Marxists from alliances with progressive bourgeois. In any case, Guesde's commitment to reform soon became obvious.

The National Council of the *Parti ouvrier français* (POF), in its appeal to have workers observe the first May Day in 1890, called for the eight hour day and its "corollaries", the abolition of night work and a six day week. The proclamation ended with a reference to the "entirely peaceful struggle which we ask in the name of the Workers Party".⁵ The party program was made increasingly attractive, including demands for a minimum wage and free medical services. In April, 1891 Guesde began his definition of socialism with "social legislation in favor of labor". When controlled by the workers, he went on, the state would permit them to expropriate the holdings of the capitalist class.⁶ The degree to which all this was compatible with Marxist thought is less important than the fact that Guesdists were behaving differently from before. The POF entered into alliances with other political groups and

¹ Georges Weill, *Histoire du Mouvement socialiste en France, 1852-1924*, Paris (Alcan) 1924, p. 308.

² Aaron Noland, *The Founding of the French Socialist Party*, Cambridge (Harvard University Press) 1956, p. 53.

³ Carl Landauer, "The Guesdists and the Small Farmer: Early Erosion of French Marxism", in: *International Review of Social History*, VI (1961), p. 214.

⁴ Willard, *Les Guesdistes*, pp. 28-31, 214. Also "Contribution au Portrait du militant Guesdiste dans les dix dernières années du XIXe siècle", in: *Le Mouvement social*, October, 1960, pp. 62-63, and Jules Guesde, *Textes choisis, 1867-1882* (ed.), Paris (Editions Sociales) 1959, p. 34.

⁵ Conseil National du Parti ouvrier français, *Aux travailleurs de France, Onze ans d'histoire socialiste*, Paris (C. Jacques) 1901, pp. 11-17.

⁶ *Le Socialiste*, April 22, 1891.

started to win legislative representation. French socialism thus began the large-scale involvement with reform that characterized its history in the last decade of the century.

Paul Lafargue, Guesde's chief lieutenant, was elected to the Chamber in 1891, the first Marxist to sit there. Guesdists joined the Socialist Union, a coalition of Socialists and Radicals organized by the Independent, Alexandre Millerand, for the elections of 1893. Almost fifty Socialists were returned. Guesde himself was elected by the Roubaix textile workers and the letter of appreciation sent to his new constituents predicted the eventual attainment of a socialist majority. "Legally, by your will becoming law," he told them, "the social transformation will be accomplished ..."¹ In a letter to Engels, Laura Lafargue noted that the elections had left Guesde in "a state of chronic exhilaration". Engels, on his part, expressed relief that Guesde's reference to Roubaix as "the new Jerusalem of the Nord" had been passed over by the bourgeois press.²

Socialists formed a tightly knit minority in the Chamber of 1893-98 and, allied with Radicals, not only overturned governments deemed insufficiently progressive, but helped to oust a conservative President of the Republic. More positively, Socialist deputies adopted and defended once inconceivable positions. The first all-Radical Ministry of Léon Bourgeois, with a program headed by separation of church and state and an income tax, deliberately sought Socialist support. Socialists not only approved day-to-day requests of the Government but prevented its fall by voting to retain the despised "repressive legislation" (*lois scélérates*) enacted in the wake of previous anarchist attacks. A hostile deputy paid tribute to their influence by regarding Millerand as the "majority leader" of the Bourgeois Cabinet,³ Jaurès was seen as holding a similar position during the time of the Combes Ministry.

Admittedly, Guesde never renounced revolutionary ideas. He came increasingly, however, to view the state as representative of existing legality and wished to put it to the service of the working class. His "statism" during the decade, according to a later critic, was "incontestable".⁴ He submitted legislation calling for the creation of grievance machinery to prevent labor disputes, the establishment of local labor councils, and of a superior labor council.⁵ With every other socialist

¹ Text in Alexandre Zévaès, Jules Guesde, 1845-1922, Paris (Rivière) 1929, p. 121.

² F. Engels and P. and L. Lafargue, Correspondence, Moscow (Foreign Languages Publishing House) 1959-, III, pp. 343, 346.

³ Yves Guyot, La Comédie socialiste, Paris (Fasquelle) 1897, p. 277.

⁴ Hubert Lagardelle, "Les origines du socialisme parlementaire en France", in: Le Mouvement socialiste, September, 1909, p. 174.

⁵ Débats, Chambre, February 8, 1894, p. 162.

group, except for the revolutionary Allemanists, Guesdists approved of Millerand's Saint-Mandé speech in May, 1896. In setting forth the minimum criteria permitting a candidate to receive socialist support, it embodied the reformist and evolutionary view. Guesde hailed the "union without conditions" and stated that there was no need of theoretical accord for the task of republican defense.¹ The few who objected to the program did so in the belief that it was too doctrinaire, not too moderate.² The Socialist group in the chamber approved after assuring itself that no "narrow formulas" would restrict the liberties of the individual socialists and retard the development of the movement.³ Nothing points more clearly to the parliamentarianism of French socialists in the 1890's.

In regard to foreign affairs, Guesde's consistent view of war as the natural outcome of bourgeois conflict and his denunciation of insurrectional means to prevent it were compatible with growing nationalist feeling on the part of reformists. France was to be defended by its proletariat and, accordingly, the forthcoming alliance with czarist Russia, for socialists long the most reactionary regime in Europe, was endorsed. The Eleventh annual Congress of the POF, held in October, 1893, only asked that a distinction be made between sailors and officers at the visit of a Russian squadron at Toulon.⁴ At a ball held in Paris to honor the visitors, M. and Mme Lafargue graced the festivities with their presence. The National Council of the Workers Party – and *français* was now firmly attached to *Parti ouvrier* – declared it "calumny" to maintain that socialists had no country; internationalism in no way implied national degradation or sacrifice. On the contrary, nations constituted the "necessary step towards humanity", and the success of the "French proletariat's historic mission" required "a great and strong France". The proclamation ended with: "France attacked will have no more ardent defenders than socialists of the Workers Party."⁵ Revolutionary Blanquists also defended the Franco-Russian Alliance and their chief, Edouard Vaillant, viewed the pact as a measure to keep the peace.⁶ If socialist criticism of the Alliance developed later in the decade, it stemmed from fears that a total commitment to Russia

¹ Georges Lefranc, *Le Mouvement socialiste sous la IIIe République*, Paris (Payot) 1963, p. 100.

² For example, the letters from the deputy Pierre Richard in *Le Rappel*, June 3, 4, 6, 13, 1896.

³ André Daniel, ed., *L'Année politique, 1896*, Paris (Charpentier) 1897, p. 210.

⁴ *Le XIXe siècle*, October 14, 1893.

⁵ Cited in Compère-Morel, Jules Guesde, *Le Socialisme fait l'homme, 1845-1922*, Paris (Quillet) 1937, p. 391.

⁶ Maurice Dommanget, Edouard Vaillant, *Un grand socialiste, 1840-1915*, Paris (Table Ronde) 1956, p. 222.

would be contrary to French national interests.¹ Closer to home Guesdists had defended the Republic during the Panama scandal; for the election of 1898 the POF asked workers to reaffirm their faith in this "necessary instrument of their emancipation".² Both in domestic and foreign matters, the reformism of French socialists appeared complete.

II

From the account of socialist activity given thus far, one might see only absolute accord within the Movement. That general agreement in fact existed was demonstrated by party-wide support of the Bourgeois Ministry, the Franco-Russian Alliance, the Saint-Mandé program, and proposals for social legislation. The personalities involved, however, were woven of complex emotions and desires. Understanding was not always complete, and when reached, motives not always exalted. The recently available files of the *Sûreté Générale* and Paris Prefecture of Police suggest that the adherence of some former intransigents to a reformist outlook, and their later rejection of it, were in large part a reflection of political opportunism and personal fear. A prime example is the case of Jules Guesde.

Although they must be used with prudence, with fact separated from inference, the usefulness of police reports as a source for socialist activities should not be underestimated. Despite their mounting representation in French legislatures socialists, were still viewed with suspicion as potential enemies of the state. Numerous agents were assigned to cover meetings, befriend party members, infiltrate higher councils, and in every way inform prefects and the central government of their activities. The value of the material gathered and insights acquired is being acknowledged by French historians.³

The evidence filed suggests that Guesde, as distinct from Jaurès, Millerand, and other Independent chiefs was involved not only with the defense of party interests in coming to reformism, but with the strengthening and perpetuation of his position as its leader. If this were true only for the time Millerand served as a member of the government,

¹ Débats, Chambre, November 21, 1896, pp. 1675-77.

² Willard, *Les Guesdistes*, p. 187.

³ Michelle Perrot, "Archives policières et militants ouvriers sous la Troisième République. Un exemple: Le Gard", in: *Revue d'Histoire économique et sociale*, no. 2, 1959, pp. 219-39. Also, "Le problème des sources pour l'étude du militant ouvrier au XIXe siècle, pp. 21-34. Jean Tulard, "La Préfecture de Police et ses archives", in: *Information historique*, no. 4, 1962, pp. 197-98. Willard, *Les Guesdistes*, pp. 127, 219-20 praises at least those reports filed in Paris as "precise" and "truthful". Annie Kriegel, *Aux origines du communisme français, 1914-1920*, Paris (Mouton) 1964, I, p. 20.

or Jaurès as a vice-president of the Chamber, considerable doubt might be raised about the reliability of the archives. Because both men held some measure of power, it could be argued, they were treated favorably and their opponents within the party discredited. The reports, however, are consistent; Guesde's stated motives were challenged when Millerand and Jaurès were only two of a number of socialist deputies and before the police had any reason to discriminate. Moreover, the two rival forces, the Paris Prefecture and the *Sûreté Générale*, both working independently and often antagonistic, arrived at strikingly similar conclusions. Finally, the evidence contained in their files is frequently corroborated by other sources.

Reports to the *Sûreté Générale* on the Workers Party reveal, for example, that Guesde took pride in "forcing" Millerand to commit himself to a collectivist view. "He (Millerand) is ... now outside of any possible ministerial combination until there appears a socialist ministry of which I am a part."¹ The thought, expressed in 1896, illustrates Guesde's foresight in regard to Millerand's future career in government as well as his own ambitions within the socialist world.

Some long available evidence supports the view that Guesde subscribed to reformist practices in part to make use of the Millerands and Jaurès newly arrived in socialist ranks. Alexandre Zévaès, for many years his close assistant, recalled how Guesde "cultivated" Millerand and the Independent socialists maintaining, "Millerand is the man who best knows the Chamber; Millerand is the strongest in it." The wish to annex Independent socialists became Guesde's "fixed policy". He invited them to gatherings in the Department of the Nord and agreed with their principles at Saint-Mandé. He viewed the "respectable" Millerand and Jaurès as "bridges over which the fearful and the timid would necessarily be led to socialism". The POF could enlist directly the support of workers but only indirectly that of artisans, small landowners, and bourgeois. "They still regard me as a bogey," Guesde declared, "I will therefore bring Millerand, Jaurès, and Viviani, who are less frightening, to the floating elements, to pave the way, and in the soil they will have broken I will sow my good grains ..."²

Material from the Paris Prefecture suggests that Guesde's reformism, no matter what its origins, came to be resented by the revolutionary minority within his party. Although the POF presented a united front,

¹ Reports to the Direction de la Sûreté Générale, 4e bureau (hereafter Sûreté), F7 12886 (Parti socialiste, 1894-1901) dossier entitled "Documents confidentiels relatifs au Parti Socialiste-Guesdiste" No. 26, August 13, 1896, Archives of the Ministry of the Interior, National Archives.

² Alexandre Zévaès, *Notes et souvenirs d'un militant*, Paris (Rivière) 1913, pp. 103, 195.

some militants bitterly criticized their leader. Shortly after the formation of the Socialist Union, Toussaint, Dejean, and Avez made clear their disenchantment with evolutionary socialism. At an inner meeting they refused to acknowledge Independents as true socialists and demanded an end to all affiliation with them.¹ Zévaès' memoirs confirm the above in relating that Guesdist deputies in 1895 were criticized for sacrificing principles to expedients in voting against repeal of the *lois scélérates*, and a gap widened between the party and its representatives in the Chamber.² The *Sûreté* account is similar and disclosed that the strongly Marxist Federation of the East "expressed its discontent" with what it termed the POF's evolution toward "state socialism".³

It is notable that Guesde rejoined these dissidents only after the election of 1898, when he lost his seat to Eugène Motte, a prominent industrialist of Roubaix, a practicing Catholic, and the antithesis of all Guesde stood for. The Marxist chief reentered the Chamber in 1906; until then he repeatedly voiced his disillusion with a capricious universal suffrage. "With the end of the legislature of 1893-98," wrote Zévaès, "there ended the reformist and legal period of Jules Guesde."⁴ He returned to his previous revolutionary stand and among the social legislation repudiated were several of his own proposals. There is sufficient evidence to assume that by 1899 he was seeking an excuse to re-ally himself with the more intransigent elements within his party, and that the opportunity was provided by the accession of Millerand to a cabinet post.

The Guesdist seizure of the leading socialist newspaper of the period, *La Petite République*, in 1897 presaged a departure from reformist tactics. For a short time Guesde served as editor-in-chief; the paper ceased its policy of welcoming all socialist opinion and adopted a Marxist line.⁵ Millerand, Jaurès, Gustave Rouanet, and Viviani resigned. According to a *Sûreté* report, "open hostility" flared between Guesde and Millerand at the Palais Bourbon.⁶ By May, 1897, however, harmony was again established. Guesde doubtless appreciated the need for Independent assistance in the approaching election and he had been unsuccessful in finding financial support for the newspaper.⁷ Moreover, he was ill, physically and emotionally, with personal and family

¹ Archives of the Paris Prefecture of Police, Palais de Justice (hereafter, Paris Prefecture), File B a/1472 (Socialisme en France, 1893-96), November 17, 1894.

² Zévaès, Notes, p. 194.

³ *Sûreté*, F7 12885 (Parti socialiste, 1894-1906), no. 79, October 20, 1897.

⁴ Zévaès, p. 196.

⁵ *Revue Socialiste*, February 1897, p. 236.

⁶ *Sûreté*, F7 12886, No. 146, February 4, 1897.

⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 174, April 7, 1897.

problems. A *Sûreté* report (F7 12886, No. 180, June 18, 1897) described his youngest son as “incurably ill”. Report No. 200 stated that the cause was addiction to morphine and that Guesde too was accustomed to taking the drug. This is confirmed by the Paris Prefecture report, B a/1125, dated May 11, 1897. A letter from Guesde in the Liebknecht Archives at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam described the writer in such poor health as to be ordered to avoid all “mental activity” and to rest completely for six months.¹ According to Willard (*Les Guesdistes*, pp. 129-30), his wife was ill and died of cancer in 1900. Three years earlier his son had attempted suicide. Guesde himself suffered from pulmonary congestion, nervous exhaustion, prostate trouble, and diabetes. In February, 1899 doctors feared for his life.

The rift was smoothed over in the Socialist Union but it had revealed fundamental cleavages below the surface – cleavages that reemerged during the campaign of 1898. The police reports then filed stressed Guesde’s fear of losing his seat. “Guesde and Chauvin”, stated one report, “want at any price ont only union with socialists but an alliance with Radical-Socialists, and without conditions. They want to be reelected even if the Party suffers, convinced that once elected there will be time to rebuild ...”² Other reports – which appear to have been written by different agents – declared that Guesde’s anxiety had led him to suggest that a more likely choice run for him as socialist candidate in Roubaix and after the election yield his seat.³ In yet another report he secretly promised some parliamentary socialists not to run POF candidates against deputies seeking reelection. He dared not mention the agreement to the Party’s Council but instead doctored the minutes of the last congress. It then appeared that such compliance would have to be made to the Socialist Union. The writer concluded that “[Guesde] had decided to sacrifice the Party itself to retain his seat.”⁴

Guesde’s fears proved well-founded; both he and Jaurès were defeated and Socialists increased their representation in the Chamber by only about seven seats. Guesde had expected up to 120 Socialists returned; the election shattered hopes of reaching an early majority.⁵ In his and Jaurès’ absence the parliamentary leadership of the party indisputably fell to Millerand. A *Sûreté* report described Guesde as

¹ Guesde to Liebknecht, June 20, 1899, Liebknecht Papers 165/12, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis. See also Guesde to Liebknecht, [July 29, 1900,] *ibid.* 165/37-38.

² *Sûreté*, F7 12886, No. 234, October 8, 1897.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 236 bis, No. 237, No. 241.

⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 219, September 2, 1897.

⁵ Willard, *Les Guesdistes*, p. 197.

“absolutely heartbroken” over his “feelings of rejection” by socialists in the new Chamber. “He believes there is a movement to ‘force him from the party’ and he refuses to attend the celebration at the Tivoli-Vaux-Hall.”¹

The turmoil created by the Dreyfus Affair, and, consequently, the threat confronting the Republic prompted renewed concern over socialist unity. If the initial reaction by Vaillant and Millerand to Jaurès’ proposal for a unified party was considered by the police as “cautious”, than on the part of Guesde was termed “absolute hostility”. The split between Marxist revolutionary and reformist was fact. A Paris Prefecture report quoted the opinion of his lieutenant, Gabriel Farjat; the scheme for unity was “a bauble of Jaurès. No socialist faction supported it except the enfeebled Broussists.” “Guesde, Allemane, and Vaillant”, continued the investigator, “rejected unity ‘at any price’, fully aware that with it went the ‘loss of their personal power’, their ‘abdication’, and the ‘pure sacrifice of twenty years of past efforts to organize their respective factions’.” The sacrifice, moreover, could profit “only the newcomers to socialism” for “it is certain that socialist unity would benefit Millerand, Jaurès, Viviani, and Gerault-Richard, who are presently in the margin of all factions and whose policy in the Chamber is often contrary to that of each.” This opposition, concluded the report, hoped that attempts at unity would be of no avail.² Older leaders thus saw their power and personal position imperiled by party unity.

The movement toward unity, however, was assured when socialists grew convinced that anti-Dreyfusards posed a danger to republican institutions. I have described elsewhere Millerand’s decision to participate in a government of national defense and the subsequent socialist reaction. Ministerial participation was initially viewed as constituting no contradiction to socialist tactics but rather as their logical extension. It was the emotional animosity aroused by the revelation that a socialist chief would sit with the general who had repressed the Paris Commune that provided Guesde, despite considerable opposition from his rank-and-file, with the pretext needed to separate his party from reformism. Millerand’s participation was ultimately called socialist deviation and a retreat from the principle of the class struggle.³ Strike-breaking activity on the part of the new government provided dissi-

¹ Sûreté, F7 12886, No. 336, June 7, 1898.

² Paris Prefecture, B a/1125 (Jean Jaurès), June 30, 1898.

³ “Le Cas Millerand: Une Nouvelle Interprétation”, in: *Revue d’Histoire moderne et contemporaine*, April-June, 1963, pp. 81-104.

dents with additional ammunition and they expressed their hostility to its proposals, including those for social reform.

The persistence and scope of anti-ministerial criticism can only be indicated. Guesdist chiefs revived Marxist ideology, never repudiated, to justify their change in tactics. As early as July 30, 1899 Lafargue denounced the Saint-Mandé program, as well as the entire Socialist Union, as incompatible with socialist objectives. He insisted that at the time he had considered the speech "vague", but had avoided public criticism for fear of alienating possible bourgeois support.¹ The report to the *Sûreté* following the Cabinet's unanimous decision to approve the religious budget spoke of "the hatred of Guesde, Vaillant, and their followers for Millerand", their retention of the "heavy grudge" (*sourde rancune*) caused by Millerand's presence in the Government, and their determination to make every effort to force the latter's resignation.²

Thanks to Jaurès' efforts, and despite their growing hostility, socialist groupings agreed to hold a general congress in December, 1899. Placed high on the agenda were the questions of ministerial participation and party unity. Jaurès defended the participation of a socialist in the government as the natural consequence of socialist participation in Parliament; Guesde rejected it as destroying the international solidarity of the proletariat, as possibly creating not only a French, but an English, Italian, and German Millerand. The delegates voted an ambiguous resolution that neither approved nor repudiated ministerial participation. Then, to avoid a possible Guesdist withdrawal, the Congress went on record as affirming in principle that the class struggle prohibited the entry of a socialist into a bourgeois cabinet.

The delegates next turned to the means of establishing unity. They had a thorny choice between federation or fusion of the various groupings. According to Aaron Noland's account, "some leaders ... with Guesde as perhaps the best example, did not want to sacrifice their dominant positions in the Socialist Movement ..."³ The newly created *Parti socialiste français* was to be a federation but based, despite Guesdist opposition, on the principles of Saint-Mandé. Each faction, however, would retain its identity until the actual establishment of the united party.

The unity was ephemeral; Guesdists were to quit the congress held the following year; Blanquists the one held in 1902, and both formed the basis of the opposition *Parti socialiste de France*. Any explanation of the schism must cover the hostility that had emerged between

¹ *Le Socialiste*, July 30, 1899.

² *Sûreté*, F7 12553 (Notes sur la situation politique, 1899-1904), No. 1469, No. 1472, November 15, 1899.

³ Noland, p. 112.

ministerial socialist deputies and the Party's executive committee. Independents and Broussists supported the deputies; Guesdists and Blanquists the Party executive. The committee on one occasion censured ministerial Socialists for the continued support given to the Government; the resentful deputies justified their behavior in terms of the long-run benefits that would accrue to socialism. Reformists once more were opposed by revolutionaries. *Sûreté* reports had accurately predicted continued dissent and had viewed the unification of 1899 with skepticism. "If union was acknowledged," wrote one agent, "it was done so by the delegates and not by their leaders ... Guesde and Vaillant do not in any way desire the rapprochement just effected and while fully preaching the benefits of union, they do not believe in its realization." The writer estimated that if unity ever came the "old leaders" would necessarily first have disappeared.¹ Events proved him wrong. They did not disappear but obtained unity on almost their own terms.

The socialist world watched with fascination the growth of mutual hostility between the two rival French camps and speculated on the reasons. The Belgian reformist-socialist newspaper, *La Réforme*, on April 3, 1900 declared that

"No question of principle separates Independents from Guesdists ... It is a petty question of personal rivalry which dictates to M. Guesde his violent and hateful opposition to the Independents. What the Pope of Collectivism cannot excuse in M. Millerand and M. Jaurès is their having relegated him to second rank ..."

The police archives cited many conversations attesting the above interpretation. One socialist was quoted as denouncing his colleagues for their concern with office and regarding Guesde as the symbol of a "frantic drive to power".² Another report concluded that "never, even in the time of Méline, have there been such outbursts by Guesdists and Blanquists against a ministry."³ The schism appeared irreparable.

The rest of the story is well-known. The Fifth Congress of the Socialist International met at Paris in 1900 and approved the compromise resolution of Karl Kautsky. It ambiguously condemned in principle the participation of a single socialist in a bourgeois government but acknowledged its usefulness in periods of exceptional circumstances. The question was seen as one of tactics and to be determined only by individual socialist parties. At the Second General Congress of French

¹ *Sûreté*, F7 12496 (Renseignement sur le mouvement socialiste, 1893-1911, dossier entitled "Scission socialiste à la suite de l'entrée de Millerand ... 1899"), December 13, 1899.

² *Sûreté*, *Ibid.*, March 15, 1900.

³ *Ibid.*, February 7, 1900.

Socialist Organizations that followed, Guesdists quit the Party when a majority of delegates moved to vote by delegation rather than mandate and thus ensured a ministerial majority. Vaillant led Blanquists from the Third Congress the following year to join the Guesdists in a new revolutionary party.

The retreat from reformism was also evident in foreign affairs. Anti-ministerialists and some Independent socialists in 1901 took issue with the anticipated visit of Nicholas II. When Millerand resolved to follow the policy approved in 1893, which had welcomed the Franco-Russian Alliance, the autonomous Federation of the Loire and Cher on October 9 demanded his expulsion. The move was defeated but by next January the Allemanists and four autonomous federations, including that of the Seine, had withdrawn from the ministerial *Parti socialiste français*. The commitment to revolutionary method was secured when Guesde succeeded in having the German Social Democratic Party's "Dresden Resolution" made the *sine qua non* for international socialism at the Second International's Amsterdam Congress in 1904. Accordingly, it was made the requirement for membership in a unified French party. Many reformists were persuaded to join on these conditions; some were not.

The adoption of the Dresden Resolution marked the defeat of French reformism and testified to the extent of Guesde's victory. Translated into French terms it meant the withdrawal of Socialist support from the *Bloc des gauches* and the rejection of all means of maintaining the government, including military credits, secret funds, and the Budget itself. The Party would be distinctly revolutionary, although some measures of social amelioration might be pursued. The goal envisaged was the total collectivization of society and irreducible opposition to the established bourgeois order and the state that represented it.¹ The turn to the left by French socialism, started by Guesdists before the turn of the century, was now complete. Jaurès got his unity but in the opinion of those who dissented, the price was too high.

III

The available evidence suggests the following conclusions about reformism in the socialist movement during the Third Republic. Independent Socialists and Broussists had always sought change through legal mechanisms; not until Marxists pursued reformism after 1890 did this tactic become a significant factor in socialist history. In discussing

¹ Declaration of Principles of the SFIO, cited in *Revue Socialiste*, January, 1905, pp. 86-88.

reformism, therefore, one must center on its adoption, use, and rejection by Jules Guesde.

Guesde came to reformism mainly because he had decided on the conquest of political power as the surest means to gain socialist ends. To win the support of progressive bourgeois at the polls, he allied himself with the more moderate, more "respectable", Independent Socialists and began modifying his revolutionary views to accommodate them. The striking socialist victory in the election of 1893, in which Guesde himself was elected for the first time, appeared to justify the new approach and strengthened his commitment to it. Thus, in the next decade, most socialists engaged in social reform, worked to upset hostile governments, supported friendly ones, and in foreign affairs defended what a majority of Frenchmen viewed as the national interest. Guesdist accord, however, was never total; a small, though well-placed, minority denounced reformism and its practitioners as incompatible with socialism.

Guesde's reformism endured until his concern over the rising popularity of the newcomers to socialism gave way to fear that he would lose his position of authority. His campaign and subsequent defeat in the election of 1898, according to police reports and corroborating sources, were decisive in turning him from reformism. Guesde felt "rejected" and feared being ousted from socialism. Anxiety over his future role in the socialist hierarchy, rather than ideological considerations, prevented him from supporting the movement toward socialist unity; the submergence of his organization in a unified party would seal his loss of personal control. He consequently sought *rapprochement* with the militant minority that had never accepted reformism. The Millerand Case provided the opportunity he was looking for.

Guesde repudiated reformist tactics, including his own proposals for industrial conciliation procedures and nationalization of finance and transportation as inconsistent with socialist doctrine. Also relegated to secondary consideration was his former concern with amassing a large popular vote and securing greater parliamentary representation. The Party reverted to its tactics of 1881; elections once more served only propaganda purposes. Reformists gathered 600,000 votes and 37 seats in the election of 1902; revolutionaries received 400,000 but, by rejecting electoral coalitions, only 14 seats.¹ Thanks to its hardened line the POF lost a third of its votes, mostly in the Midi, and won only three seats.² By disregarding the reformist tendencies of some socialist voters, and by effectively disfranchising most of his revolutionary supporters, Guesde demonstrated that his conception of Marxist thought, which

¹ *Petite République*, April 29, 30, May 1, 2, 12, 13, 1902.

² Willard, *Les Guesdistes*, p. 477.

called for strong leadership, and not success at the polls, would serve as the criterion for socialist action. Only further research can determine the extent to which Guesde confused personal needs with party considerations. Thanks in large part to the votes of delegates from non-democratic lands at the Amsterdam Congress, Guesde managed to impose a revolutionary posture on international socialism and on a unified French party.

The latest account of French socialism under the Third Republic has described the consequences of the legacy left by Guesde. Georges Lefranc concluded that only Jaurès held sufficient prestige to prevent the total disappearance of reformist alternatives. After World War I, "neo-Guesdist" leadership prevailed, – and both Paul Faure and Léon Blum are figured in this category.¹ Recourse to nineteenth century revolutionary tactics, as well as doctrine, produced a sterile and rigid socialism, unable to accommodate such twentieth century experiences as the Russian Revolution, fascism, the depression, and the "New Deal".² Those within the SFIO who sought accommodation with a changing capitalism, by having the Party shift tactics and adjust doctrine, received little encouragement. The chief disabilities of French socialism in the later Third Republic, a movement theoretically based on the role of "vast impersonal forces" as the prime movers in history, were largely caused by very understandable, very human, emotions – not the least ironic aspect of its fascinating history.

¹ Lefranc, pp. 161, 266.

² *Ibid.*, p. 393. Willard's closing sentences agree that long after its disappearance as an independent force in the French workers' movement, Guesdism left a heritage claimed by both Socialists and Communists.