

Patriotism, Internationalism, and Anarchy: The Anarchist Response to the Boulanger Affair

By

Max Cameron

Bachelor of Arts, St Mary's University, 2016

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the Department of History

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Robert Alexander, Supervisor

Department of History

Dr. Serhy Yekelchuk, Departmental Member

Department of History

Abstract

In the late 1880s, the Boulanger Affair threatened to bring down the French Third Republic. The Boulangist movement, centered around General Georges Ernest Boulanger, capitalized on ultra-nationalist fervour for revenge against Germany, as well as widespread dissatisfaction with the current government among the French populace, to create a powerful mass-movement which had the potential to bring down the Third Republic. The reaction to this movement on the French Left varied. Some groups saw value in the continuation of the Third Republic and chose to ally with moderates to try and defeat Boulanger electorally. Others saw revolutionary potential in the Boulangist movement and chose to join his ranks. Much like the French left in general, reaction within the anarchist movement was not unified either. A majority of anarchists opposed the Boulangist movement through direct action but made the decision to abstain from electoral politics. Opposing this position were a minority of anarchists, who eschewed the anti-political stance and chose to oppose Boulanger at the ballot box, as they saw value in the continuation of the Third Republic. Additionally, the rise in patriotic fervour during the crisis influenced anarchist rhetoric and highlighted tensions between patriotism and internationalism in French anarchist theory.

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Introduction

In the wake of the repression of the Paris Commune, the French socialist movement was in general disarray. With many of the leaders of the movement of the late Second Empire either dead, imprisoned, or exiled, there was generally little organization or coherent activism until the consolidation of the Third Republic in 1879 and the subsequent clemency for the Communards which allowed their return in 1880. In short order the movement began to organize again and very quickly there surfaced many distinct ideological approaches within the movement. The late 1870s and early 1880s saw three major schisms among the socialist movement, eventually leading to a clear separation of four general groups: the French Marxists (or Guesdists), the Possibilists (led by Paul Brousse), the anarchists, and the cooperativists who still believed in the power of the current capitalist Republic to foster social cohesion. This introduction will begin with a brief discussion of the political history of the Third Republic, including the precarious process that led to its eventual consolidation with the election of Jules Grévy and which allowed for the regeneration of the socialist movement in France in the early 1880s, as well as the Boulanger Affair, which threatened the Third Republic in the late 1880s. Thereafter the historiography of the French socialist movement during the Third Republic will be traced, and several different interpretations of the movement will be explored. Then a brief account of the historiography of the anarchist movement in France during the *Belle Époque* will be given, and, finally, the goals and parameters of this study will be laid out.

The Third Republic was born out of France's catastrophic defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. On September 4th, 1870, only three days after Napoleon III's failure at the Battle of Sedan, a group led by Léon Gambetta and Jules Favre declared the formation of a republic and a

Government of National Defense against the Prussian invasion.¹ After the victory at Sedan, the Prussian armies set their sights on Paris. Though the Empire had fallen, in the opinion of many Parisians the war was not yet over.² On September 19th, 1870, the Siege of Paris by the Prussian armies began. Paris resolutely stood against the Prussian armies until January 28th, 1871, when the Government of National Defence agreed to an armistice with the Prussians. This armistice was signed at the Palace of Versailles and the extremely harsh terms angered many across France, but especially in Paris where the measures imposed by the Prussians were salt in the wound for an already starved and demoralized populace.

After the armistice was signed, the Government of National Defence declared that there would be elections for a new National Assembly that would determine the new government and direction of France. Shocking to many Parisians was the fact that the National Assembly would be located not in Paris, but in Bordeaux. The elections for the National Assembly occurred on February 8th. It was widely acknowledged throughout France that this quick election would overwhelmingly favour reactionary candidates (those who were seen to act contrary to the interests of the working class), as their constituents were the least impacted by the catastrophe that was the Franco-Prussian War. Predictably, the elections resulted in a very reactionary Assembly, much to the outrage of many Parisians. Less than two weeks after the elections of the new National Assembly, Adolphe Thiers, a conservative member closely associated with the Parisian bourgeoisie, was given executive power by the National Assembly.³

In early March, as tensions steadily rose in Paris, Thiers decided to move the National Assembly to Versailles. Reacting to mounting militancy and regular riots throughout Paris,

¹ Alexander Sedgwick, *The Third French Republic, 1870-1914*, (New York: Crowell, 1968), 1.

² John Merriman, *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 33.

³ *Ibid.*, 34-43.

Thiers sent the army of Versailles (also known as the Versaillais) to recover the cannons of the Parisian National Guard, whose loyalty to Versailles could not be counted on, and to restore order throughout the city by whatever means necessary. On March 18th, in the process of entering the city and securing the cannons, the Versaillais came into contact with angered crowds. The Versaillais prepared to fire on the crowds, force them to disperse, and then secure the cannons. However, the ranks of the Parisian National Guard by and large refused their orders to stand down and instead turned on the Versaillais. The refusal of the Parisian National Guard to fire on the Parisian mobs led to the mass retreat of the Versaillais and an outright insurrection in Paris. The Versailles government had lost the last bit of control it had over Paris. The Paris Commune had effectively begun.⁴

The Paris Commune governed the city of Paris for roughly two months. During this point in time, the Communards fought sporadic skirmishes with the Versaillais while attempting to enlist help from around France. On May 21st, 1871, the Versaillais penetrated the outer defences of Paris and moved into the city. By the time the Versaillais were in the city, the fall of the Paris Commune was inevitable. Still, many of the Communards fought to the bitter end, in no small part because they predicted death awaited them regardless of whether or not they surrendered. In what came to be known as Bloody Week, the Versaillais rampaged through Paris, often summarily executing anyone they deemed to be a Communard (often, simply appearing to be a member of the working class was enough to be killed). By the end of Bloody Week, it is estimated that around 20,000 within Paris had been killed by the Versaillais, many as a result of summary execution. The failure of the Paris Commune as well as a significant culling of

⁴ *Ibid.*, 45-54

working-class activists in Paris limited the activity and effectiveness of working-class activism throughout France for the next decade.⁵

The Paris Commune was a movement that was primarily made up of and supported by the working class, with artisans being the most prominent subsection of this working class. Unskilled workers were represented, but not to the same extent as artisans. There was a significant amount of ideological heterogeneity among the Communards, but one common theme among the many disparate (and largely socialist) groups was a feeling of intense patriotic fervor.⁶ This is not surprising as French socialism in the nineteenth century leading up to the Commune tended to have an extremely patriotic tinge, largely due to memory of the French Revolution. Despite the increase in calls for internationalism among French socialists in the decades after the Paris Commune, many of these feelings of either French (or, sometimes more specifically Parisian) patriotism either persisted in ways that would lead to further activism, or were viewed to not be wholly antithetical to internationalism.⁷

In the wake of the Commune, the Third French Republic still faced significant monarchist threats to its existence. Due to Thiers's key leadership role in crushing the Commune, he was essentially accepted by all rival factions as an appropriate temporary President in the early Third Republic's chaotic political environment. Until 1873 the Orleanists were generally the most powerful political force within the National Assembly and their position was bolstered by the fact that, at least at first, Thiers was ostensibly an Orleanist himself.⁸ This position of power within the Assembly would not last, however, due mostly to a split with Thiers. Thiers

⁵ *Ibid.*, 151-270.

⁶ R.D Price, "Ideology and Motivation in the Paris Commune of 1871," *The Historical Journal* 15, no 1 (1972): 77.

⁷ Pamela Pillbeam, *French Socialists Before Marx* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University press, 2000), 201.

⁸ Stephen E. Hanson, "The Founding of the French Third Republic." in *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 43, (2010): 1035.

chose to break with the majority of Orleanists on the subject of a monarchical restoration which would usher in a constitutional monarchy, and instead began advocating for what he called a ‘conservative republic’ because it was the type of government that would ultimately divide France the least. This split between Thiers and the Orleanists ultimately led to a push by the Orleanists to dismiss Thiers from his position as President, which proved successful in May 1873. The Orleanist attack on Thiers, however, compromised their position on the political center as they were forced to ally themselves more closely with the Bourbon legitimists on the right, a move which delegitimized them in the eyes of many who had seen them as representing a measured form of liberalism.⁹

Succeeding Thiers as the President was Patrice de MacMahon, who was elected by the National Assembly on the strength of the Orleanist-led alliance which had previously ousted Thiers. Shortly after MacMahon was elected, the Orleanists pushed through a resolution which would stipulate that MacMahon would serve a seven-year term (the septennate). The primary reasoning behind this seven-year term was to give the still fragile Third Republic time to stabilize and give the forces on the center-right (the Orleanists and conservative republicans) a chance to refine their position in opposition to Bonapartists and the increasingly weak legitimists on the far right and the radical republicans on the center-left. Crafting a widely palatable constitution was looked upon as the most important factor in stabilizing the Third Republic, but when the new constitution was passed in February 1875 by only a single vote, it failed to bring any immediate stability or agreement among the various factions of the Third Republic, and had indeed served to divide the center-right along the question of the strength of the Presidency. Although this constitution of 1875 would become the “most enduring basic law in France’s

⁹ Roger Magraw, *France 1815-1914, The Bourgeois Century* (Oxford: Fontana Paperback, 1983), 11-12.

modern history,” it would be the clear political victory of Gambetta in 1877 which would properly lead to a wider acceptance of the constitution in the French political landscape.¹⁰

The electoral victories of the republicans in 1876, followed by the *seize mai* crisis in May of 1877, led to the first period of true stability for the Third Republic. MacMahon’s decision to dissolve government on the 16th of May in 1877 and call new elections can be understood as the last stand of the royalists in the face of the republican tide.¹¹ In the end MacMahon’s decision failed as the republicans maintained their majority within the National Assembly. In January of 1879 MacMahon stepped down from his position as President two years before his seven-year term was finished; Jules Grévy, a moderate republican (also called the Opportunist faction), succeeded MacMahon as the President of the Third Republic.¹² Grévy’s election was of great significance to the working-class activists of France because it would lead to clemency for Communards in exile and the introduction of limited civil liberties, which would allow for organization and political activity among socialist groups.¹³ It would be in the early 1880s that the French socialist movement would see a significant resurgence, but this resurgence came with a significant amount of schism and contestation within the movement.

The recovery of the French socialist movement directly coincided with the victories of the republicans. In this relatively relaxed political climate French socialists and workers could start to organize publicly and seek to develop shared goals. It did not take long, however, for sharp ideological distinctions to develop within the movement. Between 1879 and 1882, it is commonly accepted that three major schisms developed among what was seemingly a fairly

¹⁰ Hanson, 1041-1046.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1048.

¹² Guy Chapman, *The Third Republic of France, The First Phase, 1871-1894*, (London: Macmillian, 1962), 197.

¹³ David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism*, (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1971): 100-101.

unified socialist movement in the immediate aftermath of the consolidation of the Third Republic. The divide between cooperativists and collectivist positions which clearly came to the fore at the Marseille Conference of 1879 is widely accepted as the first clear schism, even if the significance and long-term meaning of this divide is still debated. Christopher K. Ansell, like most scholars of the French labour movement, maintains the collectivist divide was significant but only in the immediate sense that it largely forced the Radical Republicans out of the larger labour movement for the time being.¹⁴

Two subsequent schisms occurred within the collectivist group. The split between the Guesdists and the anarchist factions of the larger collectivist group occurred primarily over the Minimum Program drafted by Guesdists with the direct aid of Karl Marx. The anarchist factions as well as the more reformist faction of the French labour movement took issue with what they perceived as the Guesdists attempting to centralize the power structures of the labour movement, introduce a rigid dogma from the top of the centralized power structure, and standardize the movement's various apparatuses. The anarchist faction of the collectivists also clearly separated themselves from the Possibilists during this period of time, as they rejected the stance of pursuing limited municipal reforms. This break was significant, as many Possibilists, most notably their apparent leader, Paul Brousse, had formerly belonged to the anarchist Jura Federation during the 1870s. The final schism occurred between the Guesdists and Possibilists in 1882 and was focussed primarily on the lines of how the electoral goals of the labour movement would be pursued. The Possibilists chose to embrace an electoral program that focused primarily on municipal politics and concrete, if sometimes limited, reforms. They also strongly disagreed

¹⁴ Christopher K Ansell, *Schism and Solidarity in Social Movements*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 80-84.

with the Guesdists on the centralization of power and relationship between unions and the larger party of labour. For the Possibilists, the unions and smaller socialist groups were the fundamental unit of organization and should not be subordinated by a larger central structure. Unlike the Guesdists, the Possibilists were also open to electoral alliances with Radicals on the municipal level in order to secure reforms, suggesting continuity with mutualism. These different factions would vie for the support of the working classes in France and attempt to bring about social change according to their specific ideological positions.¹⁵

Despite the Republicans overcoming the threat of monarchist or Bonapartist restoration in the late 1870s, the Third Republic was still not completely safe. A significant challenge was represented by a movement which formed behind General Georges Ernest Boulanger. The Boulangist movement would push for revision of the constitution and, in the minds of many contemporary observers from all sides of the political spectrum, posed a real threat to overthrow the Republic in favour of a dictatorship. Boulanger's rise in French politics started with his prominence as a soldier. On the back of several successes in his military career, Boulanger was appointed War Minister in 1886. In addition to his success as a soldier, it was widely speculated that his appointment was due to Georges Clemenceau's intervention (Clemenceau and Boulanger had attended military school together), as the Radicals of the time thought him to be a man with views sympathetic to their own.¹⁶

Soon after his appointment under the Freycinet government, Boulanger set about reorganizing the war ministry. Boulanger passed several reforms, many of which were meant to curb Royalist dominance of the officer corps and, at the very least, project a picture of a more

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87-97.

¹⁶ Frederic Seager, *The Boulanger Affair: The Political Crossroads of France*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 26.

democratic military. These reforms served to further endear Boulanger to the Radicals. Another feature of Boulanger's first year as War Minister was his insistence on what he called "military readiness." Although it would be a stretch to equate this to Boulanger wanting a conflict with Germany, at least in 1886, Boulanger's comments did alarm many in France and Germany. Boulanger's reforms figured prominently in Otto von Bismarck's attempts to pass a seven-year military appropriations bill. In order to rally support, the German press, at the behest of Bismarck, proceeded to argue that militarism in France was on a steady rise, while describing Boulanger as 'General Revanche'. Back in France, German agitation served to split opinion on Boulanger. Conservative and moderate elements (primarily the French right as well as Opportunist centrists), fearing that France could not possibly win a war against Germany, sought to have Boulanger removed in order to ease tensions. On the other hand, Radicals and sections of the far-left backed Boulanger in the face of rising tensions with Germany. Bismarck was able to pass his bill on March 11th, 1887, and tensions momentarily subsided between Germany and France.¹⁷

Relations normalized for a little more than a month. Both nations were then again thrown into frenzy as a result of the Schnaebelé Affair. Guillaume Schnaebelé, a French frontier official, was arrested in Germany for espionage on April 21st, 1887. Schnaebelé was soon released, but not before many in France became incensed by what they perceived to be yet another act of German aggression. Boulanger wished to mobilize nearly 50,000 troops at the height of the controversy and his wish was stopped only by the intercession of prominent Opportunists within the government. Shortly after Schnaebelé was released, the government led by René Goblet fell and was replaced by a government based on an alliance between Opportunists and conservatives.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-57.

Both groups were firmly opposed to Boulanger, a man whom they then saw as a staunch Radical, continuing to hold his post as War Minister. Boulanger's popularity in Paris had become significant at the time of his dismissal, as evidenced by the great crowd, described as being in the tens of thousands, which turned up to see him off as he traveled by train to his new post as a division commander at Clermont-Ferrand. This popularity was not lost on political observers from all sections of the political spectrum in France, and there would be many parties who would try to harness it for their own agendas over the next few years.¹⁸

Late in 1887 Boulanger was approached by the Bonapartist journalist Georges Thiébaud. Due to a lack of promising Bonapartist successors, Thiébaud was attracted to Boulanger due to his unique position at the time as a man with popular support and military accolades. Thiébaud proposed that Boulanger run in parliamentary by-elections throughout the country in order to rally support, first, for the general's name, and, in time, for constitutional revision. The Third Republic's political system allowed for candidates to put their names forward in as many departments as they wished. The eventual approach developed by Boulangist strategists was to run Boulanger as much as possible as a show of force which would eventually compel the government to capitulate to their demands (which, at this time, were roughly defined by calls for constitutional revision which would change the system to one with a stronger, and directly elected, executive position). Although Boulanger was hesitant at first, the political and monetary support Thiébaud was able to garner from a variety of sources ultimately convinced Boulanger to run. Boulanger did not place highly in the first round of by-elections, but they showcased that his popularity from a year prior had not wholly faded. Boulanger picked up momentum with each by-election and gained success in the heavily working-class north as well as clerical and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58-67.

Bonapartist strongholds as the year 1888 progressed. Finally, in late 1888, a Radical deputy in Paris died, which prompted a by-election to be scheduled for early 1889. This development gave Boulanger a chance to put his name forward in the capital, where he enjoyed his greatest support.¹⁹ Despite a desperately assembled and well-financed campaign which brought Opportunists and Radicals together, Boulanger won a resounding victory. However, Boulanger did not seize the initiative. At a time when most observers acknowledged that Boulanger probably could have toppled the government with the support of the Parisian populace, he hesitated. When rumours surfaced that he was going to be arrested for treason, Boulanger balked and fled to Belgium to be with his mistress. The Boulangist movement mostly collapsed after this crisis, and Boulanger himself would eventually commit suicide on his mistress's grave while still in Belgium in 1891.²⁰

The ultimate failure of the Boulangist movement was seen by supporters of the Third Republic as a great victory for liberal democracy. As evidenced by both a diverse set of allies and enemies, Boulanger represented different things to different people. Within the wider socialist movement in France, Boulanger was also very divisive. His considerable popularity among the working classes of France, especially in Paris, forced a variety of different socialists to recognize both Boulanger and his movement as having genuine mass appeal. Indeed, there were many socialist groups, most notably the Blanquists, who became an integral part of the Boulangist movement and saw in Boulanger real revolutionary potential. Other socialist groups, most notably the Possibilists, saw in Boulanger the threat of military dictatorship and instead sought to ally with republicans to maintain the Third Republic. In studying the French left's

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-192.

²⁰ Sedgewick, 204-205.

reaction to the Boulangist movement, the true heterogeneity of French socialism during the *Belle Époque* can be seen.

Now that the historical context has been established, the literature of French socialism must be considered. Early histories of working-class activism during the Third Republic did, for many years, neglect the role of socialist strands outside of Marxism. In describing the French socialist movement from the death of Proudhon (1865) until the end of the century, Roger Henry Soltau, in his 1931 work titled *French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, asserted that none of the “leaders were in any sense original thinkers, and the theories to which they appeal[ed] were of foreign origin.” For Soltau, “the real history of French socialism becomes that of its varied reactions to Marxism, with the varied policies this implies, and there is little to chronicle for the historian of ideas.”²¹ Echoing this dismissal of the various non-Marxist strands of socialism, in 1943 J.P. Mayer argued that “the history of French socialism from 1871 to the outbreak of the first world war is mainly the history of two leading figures: Jules Guesde and Jean Jaurès.” The role of the likes of Paul Brousse and Benoit Malon is relegated to being ultimately inconsequential opponents of Guesde’s.²² Similarly, in Alexandre Zévaès’s *Histoire du Socialisme et du Communisme en France de 1871-1947* published in 1947, Guesde’s brand of Marxism is again given by far the most prominence within the French socialist movement.²³

This emphasis on the French Marxists (the Guesdists) did begin to face serious revision in time. Daniel Ligou’s *Histoire du Socialisme en France, 1871-1961*, published in 1962,

²¹ Roger Henry Soltau, *French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1931), 430-431.

²² J. P. Mayer, *Political Thought in France from the Revolution to the Fourth Republic* (London: Routledge, 1943), 96.

²³ Alexandre Zévaès, *Histoire du Socialisme et du Communisme en France de 1871-1947*. Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1947.

describes Brousse and the Possibilists. However, the ideological goals of the Possibilists in relation to the rest of the socialist movement are only briefly explored, and their relation to anarchism is almost wholly neglected. Indeed, anarchism does not significantly factor into Ligou's account of French socialism during the Third Republic, and the Possibilists, the Blanquists, Allemanists, and independent socialists (he chiefly identifies Malon among this group) are largely looked at simply in relation to the development of French Marxism.²⁴

The foundational work on the history of French anarchism is Jean Maitron's 1951 book titled *Histoire du Mouvement Anarchiste en France (1880-1914)*. Maitron focuses first on the ideological underpinnings of the anarchist movement from the eighteenth century to Proudhon's mutualism, to Bakunin's brand of anarchism, and then to the Jura Federation. He marks 1880 as the definitive beginning of anarchism becoming a genuine movement with the return of the communard exiles, and the schism with the Marxist-collectivists.²⁵ Maitron then charts the history of the movement from its early stages in the 1880s, to the era of propaganda by the deed, through to the beginnings of anarchist-syndicalism in the late 1890s, focusing primarily on the anarchist press (namely Jean Grave's *Le Révolté* (1879-1885), *La Révolté* (1887-1895), and *Les Temps Nouveaux* (1895-1914); Emile Pouget's *Le Père peinarde* (1889-1902); and Sébastien Faure's and Louise Michel's *Le Libertaire* (1895-1918)). Although this work still stands as a thorough and essential history of the French anarchist movement during the *Belle Époque*, Maitron does not fully address the anarchist reaction, and relationship, to Boulangism.

Georges Lefranc's 1963 study, titled *Le Mouvement Socialiste sous la Troisième République, 1875-1940*, does differ from previous accounts in that the ideological heterogeneity

²⁴ Daniel Ligou, *Histoire du Socialisme en France, 1871-1961*. (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1962), 67.

²⁵ Jean Maitron, *Histoire du Mouvement Anarchiste en France (1880-1914)*, (Paris: Sudel, 1951), 119.

of the movement is more adequately considered. Lefranc, a reformist socialist himself,²⁶ does not frame his account merely around French Marxism and relegate the other forms of socialism as merely reactions to French Marxism. Instead, Lefranc argues that, first of all, the history of French socialism should not be written merely to explain the eventual supremacy of the Marxist brand of socialism among the working class in France. Second, appealing to his own political sympathies, he argues the apparent failure of Marxism in France should encourage historians to approach the history of the movement from a different lens as he writes, “we demand the right to analyze it today according to the test that the subsequent event imposed on the proposed formulas and according to the problems currently posed.”²⁷ Lefranc’s account, then, can be understood as a history that attempts to properly describe and historicize the various non-Marxist movements in their own right.

Two books that challenged the many common assumptions born out of the primarily Marxist historiography of the pre-World War Two period are David Stafford’s *From Anarchism to Reformism* published in 1971 and K. Steven Vincent’s 1992 *Between Anarchism and Marxism: Benoît Malon and French Reformist Socialism* published in 1992. Both of these books focus on major reformist activists and theoreticians, Paul Brousse and Benoît Malon respectively, and argue that their prominence in the French labour movement had been greatly underestimated in the historiography of the movement.²⁸

²⁶ Bernard Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement 1830-1914*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 201.

²⁷ Georges Lefranc, *Le Mouvement Socialiste sous la Troisième République* (Payot: Paris, 1963), 8.

²⁸ David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971.; K. Steven Vincent, *Between Anarchism and Marxism: Benoit Malon and French Reformist Socialism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Bernard Moss's *The Origins of the French Labour Movement 1830-1914: the Socialism of Skilled Workers*, published in 1976, also marks a clear departure from past accounts of French working-class activism by asserting that the French labour movement was primarily directed and shaped by skilled workers.²⁹ This work has been retroactively situated within the confines of the school of new labour history by several historians, partially because it stresses socio-economic conditions as the primary category of analysis.³⁰

Tony Judt's account of French working-class activism in the nineteenth century in *Marxism and the French Left*, published in 1986, however, marks a clear departure from Moss in several clear ways. Instead of putting primacy on socio-economic conditions and their importance in shaping the nature of the French labour movement, Judt points to the specific political culture of France in the wake of the fall of the Second Empire and the Commune as contributing most to France's distinct labour movement. Rejecting a central part of Moss's thesis, which, roughly stated, is that there was a sharp distinction between skilled labourers in France and the factory proletariat, and that the nature of the French labour is reflective of this difference, Judt argues that the evidence shows that this divide was hardly so clear-cut. Eschewing the idea of occupational determinism in the workplace, Judt asserts that among both artisans and factory proletarians there was a great deal of common ground. Instead of the workshop being the prime location where workers acquired their views regarding politics and working-class organization, political culture played a central role in determining the strategy and setup of the French labour movement. Judt's understanding of the progression and schismatic nature of the French labour movement in the years after the Commune necessarily focuses on the

²⁹ Moss, 5.

³⁰ Mira Adler-Gillies, "Cooperation or Collectivism: The Contest for Meaning in the French Socialist Movement, 1870-1890." *French History* 28, no. 3 (2014): 390.

relationship of labour with the political realities of the Third Republic, as well as the collective memory of the movement going back to the French Revolution.³¹

The relationship between anarchists and their ways of remembering and mythologizing the French Revolution is further examined in C. Alexander McKinley's work titled *Illegitimate Children of the Enlightenment: Anarchists and the French Revolution, 1880-1914*. In a similar way to Judt's work, this book explores political culture, discussing how anarchists both in France and abroad interpreted the Revolution, and how these interpretations informed their relationships with a centralized state, the idea of a republic, and, specifically, the Third Republic. The connection of the Revolution and First Republic with the Third Republic contributed, in McKinley's view, to the great range in the labour movement's interactions with the Third Republic and political participation within that Republic. For McKinley, the schism among the reformist and anarchist lines can, in large part, be explained by the way each group related to the French Revolution and the viability of organization along political lines in improving social and economic conditions for the working classes. Although these groups had decidedly similar goals and ideological roots, the way they viewed the French Revolution and potential of the Third Republic led them to pursue very different programs to achieve their goals. The issues of nationalism, its connection to the Revolution, and how anarchists reconciled themselves as simultaneously patriotically French but also internationalist are also explored.³²

Robert Stuart's 2006 book, titled *Marxism and National Identity: Socialism, Nationalism, and National Socialism during the French Fin de Siècle*, is a study of interaction that French

³¹ Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left: Studies on Labour and Politics in France, 1830-1981*, New York: New York University Press, 1986.

³² C. Alexander McKinley, *Illegitimate Children of the Enlightenment: Anarchists and the French Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 25-40.

Marxists had with the concept of national identity and the powerful force of nationalism during the Third Republic. The primary area of examination is political culture through the lens of the Guesdist press. Stuart attempts to characterize the various ways that the French Marxists and their political party, the Parti Ouvrier Français (POF), reacted to nationalist opposition from Republicans and the burgeoning ultra-nationalist right (best represented by Paul Déroulède's Ligue des Patriotes, which was formed in 1882), and how the French Marxists themselves conceived of national identity. Of particular interest to Stuart are the many ways in which the French Marxists navigated certain crises, namely the Panama scandals and the Dreyfus Affair. While he does address the Boulanger Crisis in some regards, he does not provide an extensive study of the Guesdist reaction to the Boulanger affair.³³ Stuart argues that one of the major shortcomings of Marxists in general and the French Marxists in particular was their inability to properly account for the significance of national identity and the attractiveness of nationalism to the working classes during the *Belle Époque*. This book reflects an increase in interest in recent years among scholars in the relationship between socialism and the questions of national identity and patriotism.³⁴ The aim of my study is similar, as will I examine how the anarchists grappled with questions of patriotism and national identity during the Boulanger Affair.

In a related historiographical trend, scholars have examined the relationship between socialism and nationalism in connection with the emergence of the New Right. This avenue of study is directly related to efforts by historians to explain the success and nature of the enigmatic Boulangist movement. One of the most hotly contested issues in the historiography of

³³ More extensive studies of the Guesdist reaction to the Boulanger affair can be found in Patrick H. Hutton, "The Impact of the Boulangist Crisis upon the Guesdist Party at Bordeaux," *French Historical Studies* Vol. 7, No. 2 (Autumn, 1971), pp. 226-244.

³⁴ Robert Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity: Socialism, Nationalism, and National Socialism during the French Fin de Siecle*, New York: SUNY Press, 2006.

Boulangism is whether it was a movement of the left or of the right. In René Rémond's 1966 book titled *The Right Wing in France from 1815 to De Gaulle*, the author identifies the Boulangist movement as being an updated version of Bonapartism.³⁵ However, Frederick Seager, in his 1968 book titled *The Boulanger Affair: The Political Crossroads of France*, argues that ardent Boulangists could be situated most clearly on the left, even if there were elements from all sections of the political spectrum who attempted to exploit Boulanger's popularity in order to attain their political goals.³⁶ Patrick H. Hutton's 1976 article titled "Popular Boulangism and the Advent of Mass Politics in France, 1886-1890" also argues that Boulangism had a considerable appeal to certain sections of the French left, namely the Blanquists. For Hutton, the ultimate result of Boulangism was a reconfiguration of the French left leading some into the camp of the new radical right, while other former revolutionary parties, namely the Guesdists, pursued a more reformist program.³⁷

Zeev Sternhell, in his 1978 book titled *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914 : les origines françaises du fascisme*, argues that Boulangism, at its heart, could be understood as a violent reaction to modernization which fused dissatisfaction from the left with a new and especially virulent nationalism into a wholly new political formation.³⁸ In the English translation of his 1986 book titled *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, Sternhell described Boulangism as the first instance in French history of a "shift towards the right of elements with advanced but fundamentally antiliberal social conceptions... which, on the eve of war,

³⁵ René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France from 1815 to De Gaulle*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 215.

³⁶ Seager, 168.

³⁷ Patrick H. Hutton, "Popular Boulangism and the Advent of Mass Politics in France, 1886-1890," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, no. 1 (1976), 102.

³⁸ Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914 : les origines françaises du fascisme* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1978), 67.

abandoned Marxism for that other form of solidarity, nationalism.”³⁹ Boulangism, for Sternhell, can be understood as a proto-fascist movement which was something wholly different from anything before it in French politics.

In 1989, W.D. Irvine published *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, which contested some aspects of Sternhell’s thesis. While Irvine agrees that the Boulangist movement was undoubtedly novel in many regards and that there were aspects of proto-fascism, he argues that the role of royalists both as actors trying to exploit Boulanger and as active forces constituting the movement itself was greatly underplayed in past accounts, particularly Sternhell’s.⁴⁰ Kevin Passmore’s 2013 book titled *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy* emphasizes the existence of several different Boulangisms. Although Passmore does not wholly repudiate most of the aforementioned theses on the true content of Boulangism, he argues that these authors have focused too closely on individual elements of the greater Boulangist movement to the detriment of a proper understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. For Passmore, Boulanger’s meteoric rise and sudden fall represented a moment of time in France when all the political factions (the majority of which had their own version of Boulangism) attempted to harness the unique historical moment and were in turn fundamentally changed.⁴¹

What has been generally ignored in the historiography, with only limited exceptions, is the reaction of anarchists in Paris to the many forces which made up the Boulangist movement. Building on other works⁴² examining the connection between anarchism and the French literary

³⁹ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 39.

⁴⁰ W.D. Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 20.

⁴¹ Kevin Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 47-72.

⁴² Reg Carr, *Anarchism in France: The Case of Octave Mirbeau* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1977).

community of the *Belle Époque*, Richard D. Sonn's 1989 book titled *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* attempts to identify the *mentalité* of the urban French anarchists in order to better understand the attractiveness of the movement. According to Sonn, very particular "moral, social, intellectual, and aesthetic bonds made French anarchism... something more than the expression of Utopian dreams or terrorist violence."⁴³

Sonn's study represented a divergence in the use of evidence from past accounts of the anarchist movement in France. Instead of focusing on the major anarchist newspapers of the day, Sonn attempts to get into the minds of those who made up the mass movement of anarchism through other means. In particular, this approach leads to some interesting conclusions regarding the relationship between anarchism and Boulangism. While eschewing the views of anarchist orthodoxy (represented by Grave's *La Révolté*), which he briefly represents as generally resistant to Boulangism, Sonn argues that anarchists were intimately involved in the Boulangist movement. He arrives at this conclusion based on several types of evidence, the first being that anarchism generally thrived in similar areas of Paris as Boulangism. The second is that there were several notable writers and intellectuals who readily identified as Boulangists in 1888 and 1889 who either before or after the height of the Boulangist scare could be identified as holding roughly anarchist views. Sonn's third type of evidence consists of a number of police informant reports (Sonn himself reminds the reader that any conclusions formed from these reports should be made with caution) which alleged conspiracies involving anarchists allied with other groups who made up the Boulangist movement, namely Royalists. Although Sonn generally fails to make a wholly convincing case about the intimate involvement of self-identified anarchists with

⁴³ Richard D. Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 2.

the larger Boulangist movement, he does reveal that there likely was a great deal of potential nuance in anarchist reaction to Boulangism. A closer examination of the so-called anarchist orthodoxy (*La Révolté*), which Sonn purposely neglects in his study, can shed light on this nuance.⁴⁴

Another notable work focusing on French anarchism during the *Belle Époque*, which emphasizes the significance of anarchism as a cultural phenomenon deeply interwoven with the artistic community, is Alexander Varias's 1996 book titled *Paris and the Anarchists*. Varias's study focuses on the Parisian anarchist community and the various different ways that anarchist action was manifested. Much like Sonn, Varias attempts to capture the *mentalité* of the average anarchist supporter. Some noteworthy aspects of Varias's study are his ability to reconstruct the environment of Paris during the *Belle Époque* and explain the place of the anarchists within it, as well as his controversial⁴⁵ insistence on the small size of the actual anarchist movement within the city.⁴⁶ Varias does not give much account of the anarchist reaction to Boulangism, aside from roughly re-stating Sonn's own interpretation. However, Varias does emphasize the immense importance of the French Revolution in the minds of the anarchists, and addresses the ways that anarchist intellectuals and artists struggled with its contradictions and failures. The efforts of anarchists to mythologize the Revolution did, in Varias's estimation, bring many anarchists to have conflicting feelings towards a Third Republic that one would assume they would be ideologically opposed to on principle.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

⁴⁵ Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 18.

⁴⁶ Varias's low estimate of actual anarchist activists, which is based primarily on police reports within Paris, was vehemently contested by numerous scholars including Sonn, who, somewhat ironically, argues that the widespread circulation of anarchist journals suggest a much higher number than the roughly 500 argued by Varias.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-85.

As shown, a popular trend in recent works on French anarchism is the pre-occupation that French anarchists had with the French revolutionary tradition, and the ways they tried to situate themselves as representative of the original and pure values of the revolution. Alongside this trend in anarchist historiography, there is an increasing number of studies which focus on the political culture of French socialism to incorporate analysis of the relationship between socialists and questions of national identity and patriotism. In light of these trends, a study on the way that the French anarchist movement responded to an ultra-nationalistic Boulangist movement which effectively captured the allegiance of significant parts of the French working class should provide insight into how French anarchists conceived of the questions of national identity, patriotism, and internationalism. It will be shown that the majority of French anarchists chose to resist the Boulangist movement through direct action in the streets, instead of at the ballot box. The ultra-nationalism that the Boulangist movement harnessed also brought out significant, and uniquely anarchist, patriotic sentiment in the anarchist press. Although the utilization of patriotic rhetoric was partially strategic, it also reflected genuine patriotic fervour among French anarchists, which was consistent with anarchist theory.

Chapter One: Internationalism, Nationalism, or Something Else: Anarchist Theory on Patriotism and the French Revolution in Anarchist Thought

Understanding the theoretical and historical influences that the French anarchists of the *Belle Époque* were responding to will allow for a more thorough explanation of their actions and positions during that era. In this chapter, anarchist theory regarding internationalism, patriotism, and the French Revolution will be explored. Anarchism is often thought of as an ideology diametrically opposed nationalism and patriotism. At the heart of anarchist theory is the rejection of the nation-state, which solidified itself as the primary form of political organization in the nineteenth century. A closer examination of the most influential anarchist thinkers will, however, suggest that the interaction between anarchists and patriotism is far more nuanced than a position of outright rejection. A reflection on the arguments of Pierre Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Peter Kropotkin regarding political formation, patriotism and the state can help explain why the reactions of French anarchists to the crises in the late 1880s, which helped stoke nationalist sentiments and ultimately created the new, ultra-nationalist right, were more complicated than one might assume. The ways in which the French anarchist movement interpreted the French Revolution and the Paris Commune of 1871 proved to be of extreme importance because of their significance regarding French patriotism, the French state, and the possibility of genuine social revolution.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's ideal conception for social organization was one that was the "very reverse of hierarchy and centralized administration."⁴⁸ Proudhon argued that if in the days

⁴⁸ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *The Federal Principle*. Translated by Elisabeth Fraser, (1863), 321. in *Selected Writings of Pierre Joseph Proudhon*. Edited by Stewart Edwards. (London: Macmillan, 1970).

of feudalism the family was the basic element in ordering society, the workshop would become the new basic element of society.⁴⁹ This meant that the place of work was to be the most primary form of ordering society, which was in line with the tremendous significance that he put on labour in his conception of humanity. These small units that Proudhon envisioned as workshops would be loosely associated within greater structures called communes. Most administration and control of matters in this society would occur at the most basic level, with only certain affairs being delegated to the larger organizations called communes. Applying the same idea at a higher level, communes formed even looser associations with other communes in larger federations that handled certain administration at a higher level.⁵⁰ Federations might be formed either for “political reasons... or for economic reasons.”⁵¹ Potential reasons that federations would be formed among communes include: “the protection of commerce and industry, [and] ...the construction and maintenance of systems of communication such as roads, canals, and railways.”⁵² Moreover, federations would “protect the citizens of member states from being exploited by capitalists and bankers either at home or abroad.”⁵³ In this bottom-up system, the decision making power of each formation lessens considerably as the organization becomes larger.

Proudhon’s federalism contributed to his opposition to many of the nationalist movements of his day, such as the Risorgimento, and, quite contrary to the majority of other radicals of his time, Polish independence, which he reasoned would do nothing for poor Poles except replace their Russian oppressors with Polish ones.⁵⁴ It is clear that Proudhon opposed the

⁴⁹ James Joll, *The Anarchists*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), 76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵¹ Proudhon, *The Federal Principle*, 357.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 357.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 357.

⁵⁴ Joll, 78.

nationalism that was found in the major European nation-states of the mid-nineteenth-century. This, however, did not mean that Proudhon dismissed all forms of patriotic bonds; indeed, in many situations they were essential to his conception of social organization. Even if economic bonds served as the primary building block, cultural and linguistic particularities would need to be respected in any federal structure and could not be completely subsumed by economically-determined class bonds.⁵⁵ For Proudhon: “France is everywhere that her language is spoken, her Revolution followed, her manners, her arts, her literature adopted, as well as measures and her money.”⁵⁶ Patriotic bonds, then, were still significant for Proudhon, even if he wholly rejected the top-down imposition of nationalism from nineteenth-century nation-states.

The basis of social organization for Bakunin had many clear similarities to that of Proudhon. Both men believed in small communes voluntarily entering into larger federations as being the ideal process of social organization. Bakunin did, however, differ in his economic ideas as he (an anarchist-collectivist as opposed to Proudhon, who was a mutualist) called for the collectivization of the means of production which would lead to worker ownership. Unlike advocates of subsequent variants of anarchism to follow (namely anarchist-communists), Bakunin did not call for abolition of wages. The significant areas where Bakunin’s anarchism came to differ from that of Proudhon had to do with Bakunin’s anti-political insistence on revolution to enact change, along with his faith in the peasantry as active participants in the social revolution.⁵⁷

In addition to their divergence in economic theory, Bakunin gave more precedence to patriotic bonds in the formation of communal organizations which were the building blocks of

⁵⁵ Rob Knowles, *Political Economy From Below* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 36.

⁵⁶ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea*, 283, quoted in *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁷ Joll, 73.

the larger society. Bakunin's view of patriotism, much like Proudhon's, was heavily tied to the way that he viewed the state. For Bakunin there were two distinct kinds of patriotism. The first, natural patriotism, could be understood as a bottom up form of patriotism and referred to a natural feeling of social solidarity which was heavily tied to an immediate and local population. Instead of being an aid to the creation and sustenance of the state, natural patriotism was seen by Bakunin as something that was in direct opposition to the modern nation-state. Feelings of natural patriotism, then, were crushed by the nation-state and were replaced by the second form of patriotism. This second type of patriotism was a top-down form which reflected the interests of the ruling class. Bakunin called this 'bourgeois patriotism', which can be effectively understood as the nationalism perpetuated by the major European nation-states in the nineteenth century.⁵⁸

Despite Bakunin's disdain for the patriotism propagated by the nation-state, he did view natural patriotism as significant in his conception of social organization. This can be most clearly seen in his support of pan-Slavism.⁵⁹ For Bakunin, 'the fatherland', which was the source of natural patriotism for any given individual, was the primary building block of social organization.⁶⁰ The shared ways of living and thinking of small groups were, for Bakunin, sacred and each of these small groups had an inalienable right to autonomy. National or ethnic character above the level of the commune did, however, become a common theme in Bakunin's writing towards the end of his life, as he often juxtaposed the revolutionary character of the Slavic peoples (namely the peasants) with the statist character of the Germanic peoples.⁶¹ According to

⁵⁸ Richard B. Saltman, *The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 64-65.

⁵⁹ Knowles, 35.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶¹ Michael Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labour Movement: The Idea of the Nation in Socialist and Anarchist Theory* (Old Main: Penn State University, 2010), 26.

Michael Forman: “Throughout his life, Bakunin held to the intuition that nationality was a cultural fact of existence that had undergirded human personality and development since time immemorial. This is not to say that his idea of the nation did not itself evolve; it did. Yet, in the end, his last views on this subject were already present in his early writings.”⁶² The significance that this kind of essentialism played in Bakunin’s thought (as well as in elements of Proudhon’s thought) indicate that the anarchists of the nineteenth century could not always be reduced to either extreme localism, or, on the greater scale, a universal internationalism in the way that they conceived of social organization.

The most prominent anarchist activist and theoretician after Bakunin’s death in 1876 was Peter Kropotkin. By the early 1880s, Kropotkin’s brand of anarchism had begun to diverge from the Bakuninist variety in a few ways. Although Kropotkin’s anarchist-communism had much in common with Bakunin’s anarchist-collectivism, particularly the insistence on decentralization, Kropotkin moved on to advocate for free distribution and the complete abolition of wages.⁶³ This clearly diverged from both Proudhon and Bakunin, who both still saw merit in wages for workers.⁶⁴ Kropotkin also took issue with Bakunin’s lack of clear political-economic theory for his idealized society, as well as general lack of clarity in identifying the content of terms like ‘commune’.⁶⁵ Under Kropotkin’s conception of anarchist-communism, the term commune came to mean more than just a section of territory with a given people, as Bakunin and Bakuninists understood it. Instead, Kropotkin saw the commune as something more complex than both Proudhon and Bakunin had originally envisioned it, arguing that the increasing inter-

⁶² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶³ George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, (Peterborough: Broadview Encore, 1962), 168.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁵ Rob Knowles, *Economic Thought in Communitarian Anarchism, 1840-1914*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 220.

connectedness of industry and agriculture demanded an updated conception.⁶⁶ Increasingly in the late 1870s, the anarchist-communist position became the most prevalent among anarchists across Europe, especially in Switzerland and France, and it would be the predominant ideology of the anarchist movement over the next two decades.⁶⁷

Much like Proudhon and Bakunin, Kropotkin rejected the centralized state in his conception of social organization. Within Kropotkin's framework, though, existed the possibility for coherent nations. True to the anarchist tradition, such nations existed outside the confines of the centralized state, but, much like Proudhon and Bakunin, Kropotkin thought cultural and linguistic commonalities among groups much larger than the local commune were still very significant in social organization. An experience which had a particular influence on Kropotkin's view of the significance of national identity outside of the bounds of the centralized state was his travel through Finland on a geographical expedition in 1871.⁶⁸ Finland, at the time of Kropotkin's travels, had for centuries been subjected to rule by the Swedish monarchy and, over the last half century, it had come under the yoke of the Russian Empire. Despite being subjected to imperial rule for so long, there existed a coherent Finnish national unity which amounted to "a true organism instead of a loose aggregation," according to Kropotkin.⁶⁹ For Kropotkin, there was both a geographical and ethnic quality to the national unity which he observed, and, most significantly, this unity was in no way generated by the state, but came from the people directly.⁷⁰ For all of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Proudhon, then, it is clear that patriotic bonds were

⁶⁶ Knowles, 244.

⁶⁷ Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 170.

⁶⁸ Knowles, 37-38.

⁶⁹ Peter Kropotkin, "Finland a Rising Nationality," *The Nineteenth Century* (March 1885), 528-533, quoted from *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

significant, even if they rejected the top-down nationalism which typified the nation-states of their day.

In addition to this theoretical significance of patriotism across all anarchist thought, there are direct examples of the French anarchist movement taking considerable patriotic pride in the revolutionary events of their past. Looking at the French anarchists of the fin de siècle, it is clear that the Paris Commune of 1871 and the French Revolution had a considerable impact on the way in which they imagined their movement, and how they took pride in a shared heritage.

The Paris Commune was an event which reverberated throughout Europe and played a considerable role in shaping not only the French Left, but the entire socio-political culture of the Third Republic. For French anarchists, the Commune was a source both of great hope in that it represented a moment of genuine social revolution, but also of great sorrow due to the wholesale slaughter during the Bloody Week by the Versaillais. It was also an event which showcased the profound feelings of French patriotism which existed within the French Left, as well as a great sense of betrayal, as the Army of Versailles, representing the French state, had worked with the Prussians in order to crush the Paris Commune. The sense that the French state had betrayed the French people is evident in the “Manifesto of the Paris Commune” published on April 17th, 1871. The latter was the “closest approach to formulating any coherent programme”⁷¹ undertaken by the Communards during the Commune’s brief existence.

In the “Manifesto of the Paris Commune”, the pleas of the Communards clearly illustrate the significant patriotic pride within the movement. Opening the document with a reminder of the dire situation facing Parisians and all of the revolutionaries across France in their fight

⁷¹ Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 330.

against the Versailles government, the Communards declared: “Paris and the entire nation must know the nature, the reason, and the goal of the revolution that is being carried out.”⁷²

Immediately, there is an effort to show that the struggle of the Paris Commune is in common with the struggle of all the other movements, and, indeed, all of the French people who felt wronged in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. This effect is achieved as the Communards charge the Versailles government with “having betrayed France, and deliver[ing] Paris to foreigners.”⁷³ Rallying the support of all the French people, the Communards insist that the Commune “works and suffers for all of France, for whom it prepares, through its combats and sacrifices, the intellectual, moral, administrative and economic regeneration, its glory and prosperity.”⁷⁴ These attempts to rally the support of all of the French to the cause and ideals of the Paris Commune have a distinct air of desperation behind them due to the position that the Paris Commune was in against the combined strength of the Versaillais led by Thiers, as well as the still looming threat of the Prussian forces. The Prussian forces were still seen as a threat in the conflict because of their wishes that the terms that France had been forced to sign after its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War would be abided by.⁷⁵ It was clear that the Communards saw themselves as genuine patriots in contrast to the treacherous Versaillais who actively worked against the French people. For many on the French Left and certainly the French anarchists, then, the state’s interests were, just as Bakunin insisted when he wrote of bourgeois patriotism, aligned not with the French people, but with the bourgeois class.

The Paris Commune of 1871 was not the only insurrection in France’s history that was immensely important in forging the identity of the French anarchists and their relationship to

⁷² “Manifesto of the Paris Commune.”

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Horne, 239.

patriotism during the *fin de siècle*. Like essentially all factions involved in trying to shape French social, economic, and political life, anarchists found themselves constantly appealing to the French Revolution for justification and ammunition for critique of present circumstances. Despite rejection of the French nation-state being a central tenet to anarchist thought and action during the 1880s, anarchists joined in taking great patriotic pride in the French Revolution, the event typically identified with the rise of modern nationalism in Europe.⁷⁶

Anarchist interpretations of the Revolution, however, differed markedly from the most prominent histories of the Revolution to that point in time. While clearly differing in their interpretation from the major conservative and bourgeois historians of the time, the anarchists also viewed the Revolution much differently from many others on the Left. According to Alexander McKinley, in contrast to “their Marxist competitors for whom the Revolution served as a step in the historical evolution of humanity, [the anarchists] viewed it as an instructional guide.”⁷⁷ The key difference was that Marxist historiography saw any attempt at a genuine social revolution in the 1790s as ultimately premature and doomed to failure; this was not the case for the anarchists, who saw a genuine social revolution co-opted by the bourgeoisie. The failings of the Revolution, in the eyes of the anarchists, then, were of direct consequence to the success of meaningful social revolution in the present. Combatting both the Marxist narrative of the Revolution as representing the historical process whereby the feudal order was destroyed and replaced by a system wherein bourgeois hegemony crystallized, and the bourgeois narrative of the French Revolution as a triumph in political rights which was ultimately destroyed by the excesses of the Parisian mob, the anarchists attempted to show that the Revolution represented a

⁷⁶ McKinley, 58.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

genuine uprising of the French people which was co-opted and destroyed by centralizing influences.

A primary distinguishing point in anarchist interpretations of the Revolution was a focus on the 1770s and 1780s. For anarchist historians, peasant revolts and bread riots in urban centers were too often ignored in other accounts. It was these direct and often spontaneous actions from the desperate French people which served as the primary impetus in forcing the Estates-General to be called. In this narrative it was the bourgeoisie who, on the back of the social unrest created by the direct action of the people, seized the initiative in order to bring about a political revolution which would allow them to craft a state which would ensure their hegemony. The French Revolution, then, began as a social revolution which gradually sputtered to a halt as a result of the centralizing forces of the bourgeoisie.⁷⁸

Central to anarchist history of the Revolution was the significance placed on revolutionary factions such as the *enragés*. In the view of the French anarchists, the *enragés* served as the vanguard of the *sans-cullotte* revolution. Both Kropotkin and Grave argued that the *enragés* were the ideological forefathers of the contemporary anarchist movement, and that they inspired and guided the actions of the *sans-cullottes* without enforcing any hierarchical leadership over them. According to McKinley, the anarchists saw the *enragés* and their ability to “inspire the people to seize their own initiative and move in a more revolutionary direction”⁷⁹ as being particularly instructive to their own current role and goals. The essential difference between the *enragés* and other groups which attempted to guide the Revolution was that they were not in any way satisfied by political liberation; the Revolution would not end, for the

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-17

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

enragés, until full economic liberation was also achieved. For anarchists, the significance of the *enragés* in the making of the Revolution allowed them to position themselves as working within the French revolutionary tradition.⁸⁰ The celebration of the Revolution and the celebration of France was, therefore, a celebration of the still unfulfilled social revolution.

The anarchist struggle to claim the Revolution for their own and tie French patriotism to their particular tradition is well illustrated by their efforts during the yearly Bastille Day celebrations. Throughout the 1880s, the French anarchist movement would use the *Fête Nationale* as a platform to denounce the Third Republic, stir up social unrest, and claim the Revolution and uprising associated with the storming of the Bastille as part of their own tradition. According to McKinley, it was the goal of the anarchists to show the French working class that their “ancestors... destroyed the Bastille, burned the château, and carried out the Revolution, but [still found] themselves exploited.”⁸¹ The message was clear: “the only real way to ensure the true promises of the French Revolution, the anarchists believed, was to continue the Revolution.”⁸² It can be said, then, that French patriotism, albeit a very particular brand, was not at all incompatible with anarchist theory and it was alive and well within the anarchist movement during the *fin de siècle*. Indeed, as will be shown later, when confronted with the rising militaristic nationalism associated with the Boulangist movement, the anarchists would deride the Boulangists as false patriots and instead assert that they were the ones with the best interests of the French in mind.

Thus the anarchist tradition had a very nuanced relationship with the concept of patriotism. In order to explore the relationship of the French anarchist movement to the rise of

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 59, 168.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸² *Ibid.*

ultra-nationalism in France during the late 1880s and early 1890s, this thesis will examine the response to the Boulangist movement in the main anarchist papers.

Upon assuming a leading role in the Jura Federation in 1879, Kropotkin saw the need to start a new newspaper after *L'Avant Garde*, the old organ of the anarchist Jura Federation, had been officially suppressed.⁸³ The new paper, *Le Révolté*, was edited by Kropotkin and first published in February of 1879 in Geneva. Kropotkin remained the editor of *Le Révolté* until 1882, when the authorities in Geneva, under pressure from the Russian Government, expelled him.⁸⁴

Kropotkin chose the French anarchist-communist, Jean Grave, to succeed him as editor of the newspaper,⁸⁵ and Grave continued to publish *Le Révolté* in Geneva until the offices were raided in March of 1885. After taking into account that the majority of *Le Révolté*'s readers were in France and that the Swiss state was likely to continue the suppression of the paper, Grave chose to relocate the offices to Paris.⁸⁶ *Le Révolté* and its succeeding journals, *La Révolté* (1887-1895) and *Les Temps Nouveaux* (1895-1914) became the foremost anarchist newspapers in Europe with the largest circulation during the *Belle Époque*. Another major anarchist paper used in this study is *L'Attaque*, which was edited by Guesdist-turned-anarchist, Ernest Gégout.⁸⁷ *L'Attaque* frequently featured well-known anarchists such as Sébastien Faure, Charles Malato, Gustave Lefrançais, and Joseph Tortelier.

⁸³ Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 116.

⁸⁴ Louis Pastouras, *The Anarchism of Jean Grave*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2003), 35.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁷ Maitron, 112.

To this point it has been argued that the relationship between anarchism and patriotism was nuanced, and perhaps even at times contradictory to other internationalist impulses within the movement. A rejection of patriotism sponsored by the nation-state, which was, in the view of Bakunin especially, aligned with the interests of the bourgeoisie, was an essential characteristic of anarchist thought. The significance of a bottom-up patriotism which arose naturally did, however, find a real place in the thought of the major anarchist theorists of the nineteenth century. For the French anarchists of the *fin de siècle*, pride in a distinctly French revolutionary tradition from the peasant revolts and bread riots of the 1770s, which they argued played a formative role in causing the French Revolution, through to the Paris Commune of 1871, was central to the movement's identity. The ways this pride affected the French anarchist movement during a period of rapidly increasing nationalist fervor and the rise of Boulangism will be explored in the next two chapters.

Chapter Two: Anti-Patriots or Patriots: Anarchists and the Rise of Boulangism

The initial successes of Boulanger's electoral campaign came as a shock to many throughout France. Primarily due to widespread dissatisfaction with the Opportunists and eventually an Opportunist-Radical alliance, Boulanger was able to shake the Third Republic to its core, as, in the minds of many on all sides of the political spectrum, he posed a mortal threat to the Republic's continued existence. The split between Opportunist and Radical republicans had occurred during the *seize mai* crisis, due to the irreconcilable views regarding economic and Church policy among those who called themselves republicans. On one side were the moderate republican faction who came to be called Opportunists, and on the other, the Radicals, who distinguished themselves from the Opportunists with their more liberal economic policies, more hardline stance towards the Church, and more aggressive foreign policy with Germany. Throughout the 1880s, even in times of crisis, the Opportunists proved to be the most powerful political force in France, but they were forced to form an alliance with the Radicals to maintain power in 1886. The position of the Opportunists became even more tenuous in 1887 after a corruption scandal, rising tensions with Germany, and a stagnant economy. In this situation, the reputation of the Radicals suffered, too, as they were part of the same government that was seemingly ineffective. Indeed, it would be some Radical politicians and many Radical supporters who would form probably the most important base of Boulanger's support.⁸⁸

From the beginning, Boulanger proved to be a political character who would be attractive to movements on the left and on the right, as he represented a force which could be harnessed to

⁸⁸ Frederic H. Seager, *The Boulanger Affair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 5-42.

further political goals of particular movements. Groups as diverse as Royalists, Bonapartists, Radicals, and socialists found themselves joining the Boulangist movement in hopes of furthering their own political goals. Although it is difficult to draw out individual impulses from such a diverse movement, which could only really be unified by simply being anti-Opportunist, the movement was tinged by a strong nationalism found on both the left and the right in France (and perhaps best exemplified by the Ligue des Patriotes' passionate support for Boulanger). If the rise of the Boulangist movement either caused or coincided with rising nationalism in France (and the German state certainly saw a connection), then how did this development affect socialist groups who, at least on the surface, appeared to identify as internationalist, and at times even called themselves anti-patriots?

In this chapter, the anarchist movement's reaction to the Boulangist movement's beginning until its first major electoral victory in the Nord will be examined. Starting with coverage of the meeting of the Ligue des Anti-patriotes, an avowedly internationalist anarchist group, in September of 1887 and moving through to the Boulangist victory in the Nord in April 1888, the changes in tone of the anarchist press regarding the questions of patriotism and nationalism reveal both a tactical awareness of the hold that nationalism had among the French working class, and a tension and flexibility within French anarchist theory between ideas of patriotism and internationalism. Additionally, the anarchist movement separated itself from much of the rest of the French left in its generally abstentionist approach to the Boulangist threat. While the anarchists, generally, refused to vote to preserve the Republic, the Possibilists sought to form electoral alliances with the Opportunists and Radicals in order to preserve the regime. Meanwhile, the Blanquists largely joined in with the Boulangists, and the Marxists assumed a fluid position which mostly, but not completely, amounted to a position of neutrality.

It was amidst the beginnings of political turmoil in the early 1880s, punctuated by the death of Gambetta and the start of a long economic depression which would span more than a decade, that the Ligue des Patriotes was founded. The Ligue was an amalgamation of many French patriotic organizations along with local gymnastic and rifle associations which had appeared over the last decade. Although the organization originally claimed to be apolitical and only interested in instilling patriotic fervor among the populace, in reality it furthered Gambetta's "left-republican, nationalist-patriotic, [and] neo-Jacobin"⁸⁹ legacy. Indeed by 1884, it was clear that the Ligue stood firmly in opposition to Jules Ferry and the Opportunist republicans, as Paul Déroulède, one of the primary founders and a future president of the organization, began regularly to describe Ferry as pro-German in public. Although the Ligue had originally been hesitant to express their longing for *revanche* publicly, Déroulède's election as president of the organization in 1885, coupled with the rising tensions with Germany in 1886 and 1887 punctuated by the Schnaebele Affair, led to overt public campaigns by many within the Ligue to remind the French people of the injustices levied on France by Germany after the Franco-Prussia War. Leading this ultra-nationalist section of the Ligue, Déroulède came to be closely associated with Boulanger (foreshadowing Déroulède's key role in the Boulangist movement) due to Boulanger's role in escalating the tensions with Germany, which had earned him the title "General Revanche".⁹⁰

With the rise of tensions with Germany and mounting scandals in the Opportunist republican government, Déroulède chose to resign from the Ligue, which was experiencing inner turmoil due to disagreements regarding the organization's role in politics. Through some adept

⁸⁹ Peter M. Rutkoff, *Revanche and Revision* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981), 33.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-43.

political maneuvering, after he had briefly formed his own ultra-nationalist organization, Déroulède was again elected president of the Ligue. With Déroulède's re-election, the organization was re-organized and the Ligue changed its program to include support for revision of the constitution and to follow Boulanger's burgeoning political movement. Revision and *revanche* were intimately connected in the mind of Déroulède, as a revised constitution would give the executive more power over parliament, and allow for decisive action regarding the German threat.⁹¹

In response to both the rise of Boulanger as a force for *revanchism* and the ultra-nationalist turn of the Ligue des Patriotes, an anarchist organization centered in Belleville began calling itself the Ligue des Anti-patriotes in August of 1886.⁹² Clearly organized in opposition to Déroulède's association, the Ligue des Anti-patriotes opposed the rise of ultra-nationalism and militarism while promoting the principles of cosmopolitanism. One of the actions that the Ligue des Anti-patriotes undertook was to collect money in order to entice men to dodge military recruitment.⁹³ Of course, being an anarchist organization, the Ligue des Anti-patriotes was much more than an anti-militarist group, as it saw the cessation of nationalism and militarism as being essential for the emancipation of the working classes from capitalist exploitation. In the second issue of the newly started *La Révolte*, released on September 24th, 1887, a meeting of the Ligue des Anti-patriotes in Paris was covered at length. According to Jean Grave, the meeting was attended by at least 3000 people.⁹⁴ Grave described the attitudes of the speakers and crowds as follows:

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁹² Paul B. Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens: Antimilitarism in France, 1870-1914*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 27.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *La Révolte*, September 24th, 1887.

All speakers, belonging to anarchist groups, to the League of Anti-Patriots, to cosmopolitan groups, are against workers' participation in an international war. All show in all its aspects the necessity of the only war which could interest workers: the war against the boss, the starver; against the official, the oppressor.⁹⁵

The Ligue des Anti-patriotes saw the anti-war campaign as wholly entwined with the greater goal of the social revolution, and that a war between nations represented a considerable obstacle to attaining it. Continuing in this line of thought, Grave poses the question of what would happen if the social revolution was bound within a single nation's borders:

Indeed, what would be the fate of the next Revolution if it stopped at the borders of one nation. If the rebels, after having destroyed their tyrants, looked at each other with hostility because a stream or a mountain separates the ground where they live? In the name of what idea, what principle, would the rebels seek help and solidarity from their brothers of misery if they were divided by hatred of race and language?⁹⁶

To this question, the answer of the crowds was: "No, these hatreds can no longer exist."⁹⁷

Despite the insistence of all speakers on the need to focus on the social war against the exploitation of workers and to refuse to fight against other nations, there were some who remained concerned about the possibility of foreign invasion, particularly from Germany. According to the report of the meeting, there was a speaker, identified as M. Gelez, who spoke with alarm regarding an aggressive German Empire. His concerns, as summarized in *La Révolte*, were: "But if we must be in solidarity with foreign workers, will they be with us? Launched by their masters, will they not come to slaughter us and force us to fight them? If we can rule in principle against war, is it not to be feared that foreign workers will force us to do it?"⁹⁸ The

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

crowds, however, rejected this notion and met M. Gelez's fears with derision. One speaker, replying directly to Gelez's speech, said: "It does not matter to us how our masters will go about fomenting the war. We will not fight our brothers, we will fight our common enemies: the capitalist, the official. Our war is against capital, against authority."⁹⁹ Describing this pervasive belief that the working classes of Europe had moved beyond petty national differences and would not take up arms against each other in the event of another major war between nations, Grave wrote:

The specter of foreign invasion, of the foreign worker "coming to eat our bread", has had its day; it no longer frightens. Another ghost that must be put aside, stored in the museum of antiquities. Workers today understand that our imperfect civilization is the same everywhere; that everywhere men, having the same tools, the same means of production, the same general laws, the same needs, undergo the same exploitation and the same oppression, also suffer the same evils. They know that everywhere the spirit of revolt spreads, attacking the same abuses, proclaiming the same remedy: the suppression of economic inequality, of the power of authority. Such was the declaration of the Parisian people last Sunday.¹⁰⁰

For the Ligue des Anti-patriotes, there was a genuine feeling that the workers of Europe could no longer be forced to go to war with one another. The idea that class consciousness would ultimately supplant any loyalties to the nation if another war between nations were to arise was the predominant idea among the Ligue members less than two decades after the Franco-Prussian War, and less than two decades before the outbreak of the First World War.

The meeting of the Ligue did not, however, go uninterrupted. Workers who supported General Boulanger showed up in the Salle Favié to declare their support for French patriotism and the military. Describing the interruption, Grave wrote: "How many had come into the room, open to everyone, to defend the carnage and the bloody glory of the contemporary Moloch, the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Motherland? They might well have been fifteen workers who, in their simplistic faith, had thought it necessary to utter a few solitary cries of Vive Boulanger! Long live the Motherland!"¹⁰¹ Responding to the speeches condemning French patriotism and celebrating cosmopolitanism, one of the Boulangist workers declared: "I was born French and I love France."¹⁰² Another Boulangist worker posed the question: "are not all the citizens here French?"¹⁰³ Grave records that this question was met with a resounding "no", with one speaker later responding to the Boulangist's question saying: "No, we are not French, we are no longer savages ready to rush on others, on the orders of a master. We are men and as such, all men are our brothers."¹⁰⁴ This was still at an early moment in the rise of the Boulangist movement, and it is abundantly clear where the anarchists stood regarding the ultra-nationalist and militaristic aspects of the movement. The meeting also represented a moment when the anarchists of the Ligue des Anti-patriotes expressed a great deal of optimism regarding the resolve of foreign workers and activists if a major conflict were to break out.

In speech, at the very least, the anarchists appeared to be wholly convinced that class bonds would ultimately supplant national bonds. In the third issue of *La Révolté*, a week after the report on the meeting of the Ligue des Anti-patriotes, Grave commented on a recent incident which involved the shooting of French hunters along the French-German border near Luvigny. Grave was struck by the lack of coverage of the incident, as similar shootings of French hunters in the area had caused a considerable uproar among the press. In his description of the press's coverage of these past incidents, Grave wrote:

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

The press, to whatever side it belongs, declares every day that it does not want war, and yet all occasions are good for it to stoke and excite silly chauvinism. Recently, there was an incident which, had it not been sensationalized, would have gone almost unnoticed. Two hunters who met at the extreme border at Luvigny fired three shots, which killed one and injured the other, a dragoon officer. The author of this assault is a German soldier who had taken these hunters for poachers. Immediately the journalists spread out and tried to make a monster noise around this fact which is important to them only because the two victims are bourgeois.¹⁰⁵

This act, however, was not undertaken by German border-guards shooting French bourgeois poachers, but by French border-guards shooting French peasant poachers:

Only, in these cases, the murderers were gendarmes in the French forest guards, acting in the name of sacrosanct property; the victims were only poor peasant devils who, finding absurd the law that prevents them from touching game, which normally belongs to everyone, go out looking at night without taking into account the law or the guards. We leave the bourgeois newspapers to coin money with their shoddy patriotism, and we reserve all our sympathies for those conscious or unconscious revolts that help clarify the current order of things, - even when at the end of their rifle, instead of game there is one of the property guard dogs.¹⁰⁶

For Grave, the discrepancy in the press's reaction spoke to the hypocrisy of nationalism and, ultimately, the capitalist forces who harnessed nationalist fervor to their advantage. There is also in this passage a brief allusion to the importance of transgressing against the bourgeois order in action, foreshadowing the adoption of the doctrine of propaganda by the deed by the French anarchists.

Boulangier's electoral run began in earnest in February 1888. On February 26th, 1888, his name was entered in seven by-elections across France. Unlike the Paris by-election in May 22, 1887 when Boulangier's name had been entered for the express purpose of keeping him as War Minister in the wake of the Schnaebelé Affair, this new electoral push did not have such explicit

¹⁰⁵ *La Révolte*, October 1st, 1887

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

aims. Indeed, as Seager argues, the vagueness of Boulanger's actual goals in running contributed to his popularity, as he became a lightning rod for any discontent levelled towards the government and the parliamentary system as a whole. Although Boulanger ran behind the Opportunist and Radical candidates in six of the seven departments,¹⁰⁷ he garnered more than 50,000 votes in total. Despite the limited success in individual departments, the mere presence of his name brought a great deal of attention. On March 15th, Boulanger was released from active military duty by the War Minister, François Auguste Logerot. Officially, Boulanger was dismissed due to unauthorized trips to Paris (as a commander of an army corps was not allowed to leave his territory without consent from the War Minister), but many viewed the move as being politically motivated and demonstrations broke out across the country in support of Boulanger. A complete discharge from the military would follow eleven days later, as on March 26th, Boulanger was dishonourably discharged from the army due to his choice to enter his name into the Aisne and Bouches-du-Rhône by-elections.¹⁰⁸

The anarchist reaction to Boulanger's first organized foray into electoral politics is instructive to note. Grave, writing in *La Révolté*, argued: "The fifty thousand votes that Boulanger got in the last election terrify many politicians, but it does little to encourage us."¹⁰⁹ Even this early in Boulanger's campaign, the anarchists saw his success, and, in turn, the eventual implementation of a Boulangist dictatorship, as something which was a very real possibility. Describing the significance of Boulanger's rise, Grave wrote:

¹⁰⁷ The seven departments were: Hautes-Alpes, Côte d'Or, Loire, Loiret, Maine-et-Loire, Haut-Marne, and Marne.

¹⁰⁸ Seager, 92-112.

¹⁰⁹ *La Révolté*, March 17th, 1888.

All conceivable government systems can be classified into three categories: dictatorship, representative system by election or parliamentarism, representative system by exam (Chinese or positivist system). Currently, parliamentarism is “saying its last word”, it struggles with an impotence that is obvious to everyone. The government of experts/intellectuals has very few followers in our country. The dictatorship benefits in large part from the losses of parliamentarism. It may be the enemy of tomorrow, but an enemy who by reaction can lead us quickly to the revolution.¹¹⁰

While Grave clearly views Boulanger as an “enemy of tomorrow,” he does see the decline of parliamentarism as a positive. Indeed, the agitation and subsequent reaction resulting from a Boulangist overthrow of the Third Republic would, for Grave, create conditions more amenable for a genuine social revolution to take place. Although such a position was hardly one of support for either Boulanger or the Boulangist movement, Grave saw potential benefits in Boulanger’s rise and the Third Republic’s fall.

Grave’s reaction was not entirely different from the initial reaction of Paul Lafargue, the foremost French Marxist theorist and propagandist. Lafargue, writing in correspondence with Friedrich Engels, remarked: “Boulanger is the man of the people in opposition to Ferry, Clemenceau, and the parliamentarians... with the people, he does not have the elements of a coup d’état, but of a revolution.”¹¹¹ Lafargue thus affirmed that Boulanger had considerable working-class support, and that in this working-class support there was revolutionary potential. As the momentum of the Boulangist movement intensified into the fall of 1888, Lafargue became even more willing to harness the potential of the Boulangist movement as, again, corresponding with Engels, he wrote: “It is not we, but the Radicals who have created Boulanger; we cannot undo him, for the more he is attacked, the more powerful he becomes. But we can use him; and we would be very stupid to follow the Radicals’ lead, as the possibilists

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Engels and Lafargue o.p. cit., II, 123-124 in Seager, 172.

have done, only to lose favour with the public.”¹¹² In general, the French Marxists never did embrace or even attempt actively to exploit the Boulangist Crisis, as Guesde championed a position of hostile neutrality towards the movement.¹¹³ At Bordeaux, however, the Guesdists embraced the Boulangist movement, and it has been argued that in doing so, they greatly strengthened the position and reputation of the Guesdist Party in the region both during the height of the affair, and after the demise of the Boulangists.¹¹⁴ Regardless, there were clear similarities in the general Marxist attitude towards the Boulangists, although the expressly anti-political nature of the anarchist movement accounts for the difference in the goals of each group. The anarchists clearly wanted to exploit the affair to spark an immediate revolution, whereas the Marxists saw they could strengthen their standing and make gradual gains as a political party if they were ultimately to stay neutral.

The Aisne and Bouches-du-Rhône by-elections on March 25th saw mixed results for Boulanger. Amid great anticipation, Boulanger performed relatively poorly in Bouches-du-Rhône, where he was defeated soundly by the elderly former Communard and Socialist candidate, Félix Pyat. In the Aisne by-elections, however, Boulanger experienced his first significant electoral success as he carried the voting, nearly doubling the second-place candidate. Although this victory proved that Boulanger had the ability to win elections, his campaign was most concerned with the elections in the Nord on April 15th, as the industrialized areas of the Nord were seen as potential hotbeds of support. It was in the Nord that the Boulangist campaign wished to establish the idea that they were a considerable electoral threat, and they were wholly

¹¹² Engels and Lafargue o.p. cit., II, 174, in *Ibid.*, 172.

¹¹³ Patrick H. Hutton, “The Impact of the Boulangist Crisis upon the Guesdist Party at Bordeaux,” in *French Historical Studies* 2 no. 7 (Fall 1971): 226-244.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

successful in doing so, winning the election commandingly. At this point, the Boulangist movement simply could not be ignored.¹¹⁵

If the anarchists were already of the opinion that an eventual Boulangist triumph over the Third Republic was a real possibility before the Nord by-elections, they were nearly wholly convinced afterwards. Responding to the rise of the Boulangist movement, *La Révolte* produced a particularly interesting reaction to what the anarchists clearly sensed as a pervasive nationalism stoked both by a wish for *revanche*, but also, perhaps more importantly, by a fear of invasion among the working class. On the eve of the Nord by-election, Grave first attacks the notion that Boulanger's support came from anyone who did not want merely an improved version of the Second Empire:

But how is it, we are told, that Boulanger is supported by people who cannot be accused of wanting the return of the *Deux-Décembre*? You are not going to treat Decembrists? And why not? Yes, they are Decembrists; because, like the Decembrists, they still want a strong government. Caesarism, it's the basis of their governmental ideal, no matter how much they shouted against Caesarism. They attacked Napoleon the Little because he was not big enough, in their opinion, to be a Caesar.¹¹⁶

The reason why the French people longed again for a "Caesar" was: "They see the German invasion coming, supported by the European coalition. They see the dismemberment of France."¹¹⁷ Boulanger's major appeal was that he could provide what the parliamentarism of the Third Republic could not in the face of invasion. Perhaps surprisingly, though, Grave does not disagree with the conclusion of the Boulangists. Instead of being misguided in their fears of a German-led European invasion, Grave said: "And they are right."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Seager, 112-129.

¹¹⁶ *La Révolte*, April 14th, 1888.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Expanding on his agreement with the Boulangists on the threat of German invasion,

Grave wrote:

Yes, it will be the dismemberment of France, if the avalanche arrives and finds only the grocers Ranc and Ferry, the thieves Bavier-Chaufour and Wilson, to stand up to it. Yes, it will be dismemberment if the avalanche finds in France only the bourgeois republic. The worker is disgusted with the republic of morons and thieves, bankers and exploiters. Yes, it will be dismemberment if the invader finds France newly divided, as in 1871, into owners and workers, in barefoot and petty brawls, in bourgeois countrymen and proletarians of the cities. And if the dismemberment of France took place, it would be the end of the Revolution for fifty years, the sign of the reaction of militarism in the world, the extinction of progress for half a century. ¹¹⁹

For Grave, fear of defeat and the shattering of France would seem to be every bit as present as it was for Déroulède's Ligue des Patriotes. This language, however, is clearly an example of Grave appealing to the tradition of the French Revolution and a bottom-up form of nationalism. There is also the fusion of French revolutionary values (which Grave clearly understood as the values represented by the anarchist movement) and the idea of human progress as a whole, which again shows the fusion of patriotism and internationalism in anarchist rhetoric. Such language can be understood as strategically employed to attract patriotic members of the French working class who would otherwise be put off by calls for internationalism and cosmopolitanism, but it is also not something that is necessarily in contradiction to anarchist theory, as evidenced in the views on patriotism and nationalism of the major anarchist theorists discussed in the first chapter.

Continuing on the issue of France's dire situation in the face of reactionary German aggression, Grave wrote:

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

And yet it will not be a general – even Hoche himself – who will stop the avalanche of millions of soldiers if it ever spills out on the plains of France. Hoche would have been nothing without the strength of the armies of sans-culottes, and these armies were united. Together, they walked for the Revolution. And it will be only the army of the Social Revolution that will stop the avalanche, which will prevent it from approaching the borders.¹²⁰

Again, with an overt appeal to the revolutionary tradition of France, Grave is making the case that the only way to defeat France's enemies and to maintain the values of the revolution is to again undertake revolution. France's great successes in the face of invasion had come not due to the ingenuity of individual generals, but from the bottom-up revolutionary élan of the French people. Grave, of course, makes the distinction that in order to save France again, this revolution must not merely be political, but social in character. Building on this point, Grave wrote:

But – Revolutionary army and strong government – are two terms that contradict each other. The Revolution is the absence of a strong government. Maniacs in governmentalism – whether they call themselves revolutionaries or Orleanists – they lie, they lie to you, workers, when they tell you that the Convention stopped Europe because it was a strong government. The Revolution awoke the forces of France. It brought up Hoche, and more than Hoche, the sans-culottes, the great unknowns who saved France, civilisation. It awoke the French genius, and by this genius it shook Europe.¹²¹

In Grave's interpretation, it was not the centralizing, top-down forces of government which brought sweeping French victories and ensured the survival of the Revolution. The bottom-up character of the revolution and the importance of the people, before all else, as the prime actors in the Revolution, are stressed by Grave. Such an interpretation is hardly surprising from an anarchist such as Grave, but it also clearly shows how the anarchists attempted to present an alternative to the top-down nationalism espoused by many ultra-nationalists in order to appeal to

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

the most patriotic sections of the French working-class. It also represents a tremendous departure from, or perhaps even a complete abandonment of, the optimistic internationalist rhetoric heard from the Ligue des Anti-patriotes, which was represented in wholly positive terms less than a year before in *La Révolte*. This change shows not only the anarchists being politically and strategically mindful of their current situation, but also the very real tensions or even contradictions within the anarchist movement regarding the questions of the nation, patriotism, and internationalism.

In the April 14th issue of *La Révolte*, Grave, keeping in line with the typical position of the French anarchists towards the Third Republic and the threat of Boulanger, repudiated any attempts by other socialist groups to preserve the Third Republic in the face of the Boulangist challenge. Responding to an article published in *Le Prolétariat*, the official organ of the Fédération des travailleurs socialistes de France (FTSF) or “Possibilist” party, Grave wrote:

We have just read the Manifesto of the Workers’ Party, published by *Le Prolétariat* – and we cannot believe it. Yes! The French workers would declare that they are “ready to forget for a moment the sixteen years during which the French bourgeoisie betrayed their hopes.” They would declare that they are “ready to defend, and to preserve, the weak germ of our republican institutions against every sabre which threatens them.” Defend the bourgeois republic against a sabre, in the interest of Ferry’s black frock coat, when the tower already collapses, when the word Commune is already being uttered, when the time comes to deliver the final blow to the bourgeoisie and to embark on the future of the social revolution! To declare oneself ready to fight on the barricades with no other ideal than to preserve the puny germ of the liberties of the bourgeois republic? Forgetting that the bourgeoisie betrayed “the hopes of the people.” But it is not just the hopes it betrayed. It betrayed the French people. It is ready to deliver it to the first invader, ready to remake 1871.¹²²

Grave’s ridiculing of the Possibilist position, which urged a defense of the Third Republic, mirrors a tension within the French left with regards to the question of nationalism and the

¹²² *Ibid.*

symbolic importance of the republic as an institution. While the French left was broadly nationalistic, the ways in which this nationalism emerged could vary among sects.¹²³

The anarchists, as much as any group on the French left, argued that a defense of French republican ideals was of crucial importance, but a divergence in opinion emerged regarding just what those values were, and whether the current iteration of the French republic embodied those values. This was the source of great disagreement between the anarchists and Possibilists, which can be traced back to their schism in 1882. For the anarchists, the core values of the Revolution could not be represented by the Third Republic as it currently existed. The Possibilists, however, as their name suggested, could see possible avenues for reform while working within the system of the Third Republic, and therefore saw its continued existence as something worth fighting, perhaps even dying, for. This crucial divergence informed the difference in their response to the Boulanger Crisis and led to vicious criticisms of the Possibilists by various French anarchists, as the anarchists saw no value in defending the Third Republic, even against a potential dictator whom they despised. Grave, ever optimistic in the judgement and determination of the French people, argued that, contrary to fighting to save an institution which did nothing to serve them, the French workers would instead pursue the social revolution and destroy both the Third Republic and the Boulangist threat:

They will not forget anything; they will not forgive anything. They will rise against the new Decembrists. And they will save the puny germ of conquered freedoms, not by being killed for Ranc or Clemenceau, but by doing more: by inaugurating the social revolution. The Republic was saved seventeen years ago by the Commune. It is no longer a question of restarting the rescue. It is time to move on, to save the fruit of previous revolutions.¹²⁴

¹²³ Vincent, 116.

¹²⁴ *La Révolte*, April 14th, 1888.

Despite how fanciful Grave's dream of a social revolution to crush both the Third Republic and Boulanger may seem, he simply could not reconcile supporting the Third Republic with core anarchist ideology, regardless of how significant the Boulangist threat was.

If the anarchists were vocal about the importance of the moment and abundantly adamant as to their true feelings toward the Third Republic and the Boulangist threat on the eve of April 15th election in the Nord, they were even more so in the aftermath of Boulanger's impressive victory. As far back as February many anarchists, most notably Grave, had thought Boulanger toppling the Third Republic was a distinct possibility, or perhaps even a likely outcome. Now, after the stunning victory in the Nord, the anarchists began to treat such an outcome as a near certainty. They began analyzing the situation and comparing it to past instances in France's history. Immediately, in *La Révolte*, comparisons to 1848 were made:

History does not repeat itself. But similar conditions lead to similar results. And that's what we see today; 1848 is forty years in the past, and once again we have Bonapartism, Caesarism, on hand. In 1848, the proletarians of Paris gave months of misery to the service of the bourgeois republic. And at the end of these three months, seeing nothing come, disgusted by radicals who were almost socialist, some seized the rifle against the bourgeois republic; while the other – the crowd, the desperate mass – cheered for the Caesar who promised him governmental socialism or, at least, victories outside, and work inside. If at that time there had been a party serious enough to have an idea more advanced than the republic of universal suffrage, if a greater idea had been launched, those who let the insurgents of June be slaughtered and shouted Vive Bonaparte along the boulevards would have rallied for the movement. The revolution began.¹²⁵

In the anarchist interpretation of 1848, the ultimate cause of the failure of the revolution was to be found in a lack of concrete revolutionary options. There were no alternatives provided to the French proletariat by an organized socialist movement, and in lieu of any appropriate options, the masses seized upon the promises of conquest and social reform given by Napoleon III, the

¹²⁵ *La Révolte*, April 21st, 1888.

Caesar. For the anarchists, 1848 was analogous to their current situation, with an ineffective parliamentary system either incapable or unwilling to bring any meaningful social reforms, and a Caesar winning the support of the working-class by promising *revanche* and vague guarantees regarding social reforms. For the anarchists, it was clear; either a real revolutionary program promising the social revolution and a real defense against the German threat be provided, or the embarrassment of the Second Empire would repeat itself.

In less than a year, *La Révolte*, the voice of anarchist orthodoxy in France, and perhaps the most influential anarchist publication in the world, had gone from arguing for a strict and exceptionally optimistic internationalism, to arguing that the threat of the German Empire was real and imminent, and could only be crushed by a complete social revolution within France. The interjection of ultra-nationalism and cries for revenge into the center of French political discourse no doubt had a significant impact on this change in tone from the anarchists, but it can also be argued that such a stance was consistent with anarchist theory, as well as the particularly French anarchist movement's tendency to view itself as a continuation of the French Revolutionary tradition. With Boulanger's success in the Nord, there was no one left in France who could not take the Boulangist movement seriously, and a clear desperation in anarchist rhetoric stressing the importance of an immediate social revolution became evident in the aftermath of the victory. April 15th, however, marked just the beginning of the ascent of the Boulangist movement, and the anarchist reaction to its rise towards its zenith in January 1889 before its abrupt fall will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Ballot or the Bullet: Anarchist Resistance to Boulangism

After Boulanger's first electoral successes, the anarchists were quick to articulate their positions relative to the Boulangist movement and the Third Republic. An abstentionist view, which saw Boulanger and the Third Republic as equal evils who could ultimately be opposed only through revolutionary action, would win out as the official stance of the two major anarchist newspapers, as well as the majority of anarchist activists and theoreticians. Still, there was no complete consensus. A minority view, which supported an electoral alliance with the Radicals and Opportunists, did exist. It was justified by arguing that the ineffectiveness of the Third Republic had allowed the anarchist movement to flourish, and that a strong Boulangist government would ultimately crush all the progress that the movement had made. This position, which was in line with that of other socialist groups, most notably the Possibilists, ultimately lost out to the abstentionist position, which was widely disseminated in anarchist publications until Boulanger's flight on April 1st, 1889. Afterwards, the anarchists did not perceive either him or his movement as an immediate threat.

Among those who held the majority abstentionist position throughout the Boulanger Crisis, there was always a push to convince French workers that any benefits they saw in following Boulanger were illusory, and that only the social revolution could benefit them. Indeed, much like the Possibilists and Republicans, the abstentionist anarchists did fight against Boulanger, but these fights were more literal and occurred at public speeches and in the streets, as anarchists took direct action against Boulangists as a form of propaganda by the deed. Another way that anarchists of all factions appealed to workers while discrediting both Boulanger and the

Republicans was by attacking French colonialism. By critiquing French colonial projects as being directly against the interests of the French people and only beneficial to the capitalist and military elite (who were represented, respectively, by the Republicans and Boulanger), anarchists sought to represent themselves as the true French patriots.

In the aftermath of Boulangist success in the elections of the Nord, anarchists again felt the need to affirm their devotion to abstentionism. In the April 28th edition of *La Révolte*, Grave clarifies the anarchist position on abstention and parliamentarism as a whole:

The first reason we are abstentionists is that, being determined opponents of authority, we do not have to take part in a comedy which aims to consecrate it by making the governed believe they are free because they are given the choice of who is to enslave them. What is more absurd than arguing over the choice of a master? What do those who make the laws matter to us if we are forced to comply once they are made?¹²⁶

Staying very much true to the anti-political position that had typified the anarchist stance towards the Third Republic from the very beginning, Grave maintained that parliamentarism would always fail to serve the needs of the working class simply because bourgeois institutions could not ever be truly turned against the bourgeois interests. More than that, even those who were elected and had the best intentions for the working class at heart could not be trusted:

They are our enemies if they make promises to us that they know they cannot keep; they are still our enemies if they are sincere, because then they are fools who do not know what they are and they are fools who do not know what they say, because they should know that the reforms of which they deceive us, even if granted, would be rendered illusory by the ill-will of those who are the true masters of power, that is to say the haves, since the whole social organization is based only on the defense of the haves against the claims of the have-nots, and that those that could be effective can only be obtained by force, by a revolution.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ *La Révolte*, April 28th, 1888.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

The other socialist groups that wished to enter the electoral system to gain legitimacy, enact reforms, and then strive towards a revolution at an ill-defined later date were wholly deluding themselves in Grave's eyes, as they would be working within a system which was inherently structured in such a way as always to benefit its architects: the bourgeoisie. As noted before, none of this amounts to a novel position from Grave, but it is important to note that even as the Boulangist threat had become reality, the general anarchist position did not immediately change. However, within a few weeks, competing positions within the anarchist movement began to emerge.

As a rule, French anarchists were against the parliamentarism of the Third Republic, and many did see the chaos associated with its upheaval, in the event of the continued success of the Boulangist movement, as potentially beneficial to the ultimate goal of the social revolution. After Boulanger's victory in the Nord elections, however, some anarchists began to revise their position and wonder if the continuation of the Third Republic might in fact be beneficial to the anarchist movement in the long run. After the Nord election, a correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, an English newspaper, conducted an interview with one of Boulanger's top advisors and supporters, René Le Hérisse. This interview was covered briefly in *La Révolte* in the May 12th issue, and introduced in this way:

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, always in search of sensational news, had sent a special correspondent to follow the election of the Nord and the Boulangist movement. This correspondent has lately had a conversation with M Hérisse, and M. Hérisse formulated Mr. Boulanger's intentions in the following conversation. Then the correspondent went to Mr. Boulanger and asked him if this conversation summed up his intentions. Mr. Boulanger answered with one word: Perfectly! Here are the intentions of the beloved candidate of Mr. Déroulède and Mr. Rochefort. Note that neither Mr. Hérisse, nor Mr. Boulanger, nor Mr. Rochefort have denied the conversation. It can therefore be said to be true.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ *La Révolte*, May 26th, 1888.

The unnamed writer of this article in *La Révolte* was, then, prepared to take what Hérissé said as a true reflection of the direction of the Boulangist movement.

The interview, as recounted in *La Révolte*, began: "I asked Mr. Hérissé - said the correspondent - if the program of the General contains the campaign against "parliamentarism." Certainly, Mr. Hérissé replied, in the sense that he wants a complete change in the present parliamentary system, and it is in this sense that he hears the campaign against parliamentarism."¹²⁹ When asked to clarify what he meant by "parliamentarism", Hérissé replied:

In England, your parliament has grown with the nation; it is associated with the most brilliant times in your history. In France, it is different. We have tried the parliamentary system since 1871, and the trial has not succeeded. In what respect? Especially in the relationship between the ministers and the House. Today the ministers are too much at the mercy of the clique of deputies. What we want is ministers appointed by a responsible head of state, as in America and England, and I do not need to tell you that we want Boulanger to be this head of state.¹³⁰

The Boulangist program, as stated by Hérissé, then, called for a centralization of power around a stronger head of state. Continuing, Hérissé clarifies the role of this new head of state and the structure of their newly proposed republic:

Whether he is called Consul or President, or anything else, he must be accountable to the country, he must be elected by the votes of the whole nation. It is in this sense that the Boulangist party demands the revision of the Constitution. We do not accept the competence of the congress, composed of the House and the Senate, which, alone, has today the right to revise the Constitution. We want dissolution as a prelude to revision. We want a new House to be elected with a special mandate to revise the Constitution. And when the revised Constitution is drafted, we want it to be submitted to the nation, for its approval or disapproval by "yes" or "no".¹³¹

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

The Boulangist answer to the ineffectual parliamentarism of the Third Republic was, according to Hérissé, the significant expansion of executive power in the selection and operation of government. There is also the element of the plebiscite, which would no doubt have brought to mind the practices of the Bonapartist Empires for many in France, particularly those on the left who had felt betrayed by Napoleon III.

Responding to the program put forward by Hérissé, with a mind to the fears of many throughout France, the interviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette* pressed Hérissé on the potential dangers of a vaguely defined expansion in executive power for a government which was to be led by Boulanger, asking: “Do you have any idea about the duration of powers that would be conferred on the Head of State?”¹³² Hérissé’s response was: “It will depend on the article of the new Constitution ... We could put seven years, or ten. It does not matter.”¹³³ From there, the rest of the interview is summarized by Grave, with a healthy amount of editorial flair, as unfolding as follows:

The rest of the conversation rests on this: According to Mr. Hérissé there is no danger of military dictatorship in France. The country is too democratic for that. And, needless to say, according to Mr. Hérissé, “General Boulanger has not the slightest idea of doing this thing.” Then come peaceful protests in the genre of the famous “The Empire is peace.” Questioned by the same correspondent to determine if the statement of Mr. Hérissé accurately represents his ideas, Mr. Boulanger replied “Perfectly.” And now, we ask *l’Intransigeant*, who will probably not answer us, what do they think of such a clear program?¹³⁴

It is clear that Grave saw Hérissé’s statements as mere posturing, and that the first steps of the centralization of power would inevitably lead to an all-out dictatorship at some point.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

Response to this interview would mark the first clear point of a schism within the anarchist movement in regard to the best ways to approach the Boulangist phenomenon. To this point in *La Révolte*, the position taken had been one of abstention. At some points, feelings of optimism regarding the potential for chaos and a rise of revolutionary fervor in the event of the fall of the Third Republic could also be detected among the anarchists. Response to Hérissé's interview, however, revealed a new attitude. In the May 12th issue of *La Révolte*, the same issue in which Hérissé's interview was covered, an unnamed author wrote:

What we think, we will say it outright: He disgusts us. And here's why: it's fashionable to say today that workers have nothing to do with this quarrel. Paul Grandet, for example, assures us that the people have nothing to do with this argument for "the plate with butter."¹³⁵

In this quotation, the unnamed author is describing the standard anarchist position to that point, which was that a fight among the bourgeoisie did not concern the workers, as concrete improvements to the station of workers could not be achieved through parliamentarism anyway.

Such a characterization of the Boulangist movement and its threat to the Third Republic was, however, in the mind of this unnamed author, both wrong and potentially disastrous for the French worker:

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Well, it's not the plate of butter about which we argue. It's a little more than that. It is initially three billion of the budget to waste, to use to buy consciences, to fill favours or to persecute. It is the right to name prefects, judges, gendarmes, Andrieux, Lagrange, and all the pack of those who govern us. It is the right to suppress any expression of thought: meetings, press. It is the right to send to the noose, to guillotine, to lock up those who dare decry the dictatorship. It is the right to make war or peace. It's the right to stultify our children in the school and the barracks. It's the right to shoot strikers. It is the right to prepare Sedan, to dismember France and to prevent the people from rising to maintain national integrity. In a country as centralized as France, it is the right to do almost everything you want, to paralyze, to demoralize the country for twenty years. And we call it "the butter plate!" Heavy plate, good lord, that one, plate that carries a million bayonets and two million employees obedient to the "Head of State."¹³⁶

According to the author, the potential power of the centralized French state was such that the anarchists could not simply sit back and look at who controlled it with indifference. Boulangism represented a political current which would serve to centralize power to an even greater extent and allow state power to proliferate unchecked. The dangers of such a powerful state led by a man such as Boulanger could, according to the author, be devastating for the resurgent French left, including the anarchists. Indeed, the relative weakness and indecisiveness of the Third Republic could be looked upon as a blessing for the anarchist movement:

So far, since 1871, no "strong government" could be formed, and that was the happiness of France. These ministries lived three months on average, and hastily enjoyed the "three months of power"; this has allowed France to live its own life without feeling governmental rule as heavily as it felt it in the days of Napoleon. These ephemeral governments, forced to stagger between the people who demand liberty and socialism, and the bourgeois who dream of shooting the people, forced to procrastinate, to make glances here and there, to smile at the strikers and to salute Rothschild, to tolerate rebel municipal councils and insolent journalists, these heads of power who lodge in the ministerial palaces as if in a hotel, have had to leave to the press a certain freedom; they helped disorganize the constituent powers; they allowed France to breathe, to meditate on great questions, to learn.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

The author stresses the point that the relatively weak and ephemeral governments of the Third Republic created precisely the environment that allowed the revolutionary left to regroup in the aftermath of the Commune and operate without an omnipresent fear of complete repression. In contrast to the Second Empire under Napoleon III, there was a measure of press freedom and significantly less active repression for leftist groups, largely due to the balancing of so many competing and disparate powers.

According to the author's view, the current operation of the Third Republic led to indecision and proved ultimately ineffective in steering France on a clear path, but this could be understood as being to the benefit of the anarchists:

This absence of government, these continual changes, have been precisely what has allowed France to make immense progress in terms of the revolutionary idea. A strong government, supported by the plebiscite and concentrated in the hands of a head of state, would be the end of this interregnum that finally allowed us to think, to instruct, to regroup, to clear the ground. That the bourgeois want this strong government is natural. They are in their role. But to let the worker let it go and let this government come together, that would be too stupid. The bourgeois has his preferences when he shouts against "governmental anarchy and disorder."¹³⁸

The weakness of the Third Republic allowed the French left and French workers to regroup after the Commune, and the continued weakness of the Third Republic would, for this author, only continue to strengthen their position. A strong government could only serve the interests of the bourgeoisie and suppress the interests of the workers. Therefore, allowing Boulanger to overthrow the current system and craft a much stronger and more centralized state (which would presumably take the form of a dictatorship) was something that could only hurt the interests of the anarchists. Abstaining from the electoral process in this instance, then, could not be justified.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Finally, the author addressed perhaps the point of greatest significance regarding Boulanger's popularity, and in this instance, the opinion of the author was in line with the abstentionist position:

And do not come to talk to us about possible war. It is not M. Boulanger and Déroulède who are head hunting the German armies if they come. The rebellious people are the only barrier to opposing the invasion that the Boulangists call for, hoping to form the strong government they keep dreaming of.¹³⁹

In the same fashion as Grave, the author believed that the possibility for victory in the face of German invasion was the social revolution within France.

Despite an increase in nationalist fervour associated with the rise of Boulangism that even the internationalist anarchists attempted to capture, the internationalist character of the anarchist movement could still readily be detected. Internationalism was on clear display when Les Groupes Anarchistes de Marseille released, in *La Révolte*, a denunciation of recent violence against foreign workers in the city:

Of all the questions which fascinate workers, that of foreigners is the most important. We usually have a negative opinion of a man who, not being able to live at home, comes to try to fight with others, hoping to find there the bread which his country refuses him. All the most offensive qualifiers are spit in his face by the ignorant fraction of the proletarians who, full of contempt for him, consider him as an outsider, who has nothing in common with them.¹⁴⁰

The reflexive position of distrust and anger of French workers against foreign workers was, according to the anarchists of Marseille, misguided, as the workers from different states were the

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

same in that they were both exploited. Indeed, the anarchists of Marseille argued that those who were truly foreign were not the workers of other states:

Workers, whatever the soil on which they were born, are not strangers to each other. Their ills are the same and they must unite to fight against the common enemy: the capitalist who is the true foreigner, because he forms a separate caste which, in practicing the exploitation of his fellow man, gets all the enjoyments, has all the privileges, and does not consider himself the equal of those who produce for it. The stranger to the people is not the foreign worker, but all those who consider themselves to be above him: Finance, the Clergy, the Army, the Judiciary.¹⁴¹

It is clear, then, that the internationalist rhetoric of the anarchist movement still survived the rise of ultra-nationalism that accompanied the popularity of Boulangism, even if the anarchists still tried to harness the feelings of nationalism within the French working-class in order to increase support for their program.

Boulangier's newfound position as a Deputy for the Nord prevented him from running in any other by-elections for fear of betraying his heavy base of support in the area. When a vacancy arose in the Charente, Boulangier encouraged Paul Déroulède, a native of the department, to run. Boulangier publicly endorsed Déroulède, stating: "A vote for Paul Déroulède is a vote for me."¹⁴² Several advisors to Boulangier, as well as the political organizers behind the larger Boulangist movement, saw the election in the Charente as a way of showing the French public that Boulangism was a fully-formed political movement and not just a cult of personality around a charismatic military leader. In the lead-up to this election, the Possibilists called on workers to support the Opportunist opponent of Déroulède in order to stifle Boulangist momentum, and maintain the Third Republic as it currently existed. This move particularly

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Seager, 144-145

angered the expressly anti-political sections of the anarchist movement, as they viewed the Possibilists as being wholly hypocritical in their stance:

So, it's done. What we had planned for a long time has become a *fait accompli*. The leaders of the workers' party made an alliance with the opportunist leaders, and the "socialist principles" are put in the pocket to bring out the "principles of 1789". Gambetta had not done anything else. The leaders of the party, after having said, preached, cried out, that the principles of 1789 were only the retreat of the nascent revolution for the benefit of the bourgeoisie, are now trying to make the workers believe that these principles contained all socialism.¹⁴³

This, again, highlights the significance of the French revolutionary tradition in the minds of the anarchists. For them, the "principles of 1789" represented the bourgeois side of the French Revolution. These principles were those of the purely political revolution which marked the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie over the feudal order, and the coopting of the social revolution. For the anti-political anarchists, the position taken by the Possibilists to align with the Opportunists, even if such a move was purely strategic, represented a complete betrayal of all the socialist and revolutionary values which briefly united much of the French left in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

Continuing on the subject of the Charente election, the un-named author of the piece further criticized anyone who would consider themselves a socialist and participate in electoral politics:

Workers will now understand why anarchists have always "kept to themselves". From the day the workers' party began its electoral propaganda, we knew that it would eventually fall in the arms of the bourgeoisie. Should we, too, speak of socialism and revolution, to fall in the arms of Mr. Ranc? This alliance, by the way, will have a good side. Workers will now know what to say about the socialism of the parties that have included electoral politics in their programs.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ *La Révolte*, June 16th, 1888.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

This condemnation also carried the implication that any anarchist who would support participating in the election to prolong the Third Republic for strategic reasons was a hypocrite and traitor to the movement. For the author, all the other self-described socialist groups in France, and by implication, any anarchists who would pursue electoral politics, were heretics to the essential socialist doctrine. Necessarily then, the author concluded: “The task of keeping up the flag of socialism - which is that of expropriation and can be nothing else - therefore remains with the anarchists alone.”¹⁴⁵

In the Charente election, it turned out that even Boulanger’s endorsement could not overshadow the fact that D roul de’s virulent anti-German rhetoric and obsession with *revanche* alarmed many voters who might otherwise have been attracted to aspects of the Boulangist platform, or Boulanger as a charismatic leader. D roul de was defeated; this revealed that although there might have been much popular discontent with the Third Republic, and support for revision of the constitution and *revanche* against Germany, the attraction of Boulanger as a charismatic leader was still essential for the movement’s continued success.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, this fact would be borne out when the Boulangist movement foundered in the aftermath of Boulanger’s infamous flight to Belgium in 1889.

Boulanger would finally appear in the Chamber of Deputies to represent his constituency on July 12th, 1888. In what would prove to be a week of setbacks, Boulanger implored the Chamber to vote for its own dissolution. Not surprisingly, his pleas were ignored, and he decided to resign while still in the Chamber. In the process, he had an extremely heated exchange with Charles Floquet, the President of the Council and Minister of the Interior. This exchange led to a

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Seager, 145-47.

duel two days later, which Boulanger got the worst of, almost dying in the process. In the immediate aftermath of this farcical set of events, the reputation of Boulanger as the brave and charismatic warrior suffered significantly, as he had lost a duel to a civilian with reputedly poor eye-sight. The impact was evidenced by his electoral defeat (he was now able to run again without betraying the interests of his constituents as he had resigned) in the Ardèche, which occurred on July 22nd, only eight days after his duel with Floquet.¹⁴⁷ Interestingly enough, the reaction to Boulanger's July embarrassments was almost non-existent in the anarchist press. Indeed, with Boulanger's significance seemingly on the wane in July and early August, criticisms of the Third Republic and Floquet's ministry in particular were re-doubled, with little mention of the Boulangist movement.¹⁴⁸

There was, however, one significant exception. *La Révolte* covered a debate hosted by the Boulangist deputy Charles-Ange Laisant¹⁴⁹ where Boulangist, anarchist, Possibilist, and Radical Republicans were invited to speak. The most prominent anarchist speaker at the meeting was a widely respected anarchist trade-unionist named Joseph Tortelier.¹⁵⁰ Tortelier's speech at the debate was described as follows:

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 148-150.

¹⁴⁸ *La Révolte*, July 14th, 21st, 28th, 1888; L'Attaque July 18th, 25th, August 1st, 1888

¹⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that Laisant, at that time one of the most prominent Boulangists who was adamantly opposed to the anarchist speakers, would go on to, at the behest of his son, become a devoted anarchist-communist in 1893 and was one of the signatories of the famous Manifesto of the Sixteen during the First World War.

¹⁵⁰ Cahm, 259. Tortelier was perhaps the most vocal supporter of the general strike in France and laid the foundations within the French anarchist movement for the push towards anarchist-syndicalism in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

The companion Tortelier takes the podium. He declares that, according to him, the Boulangist movement has some good in it, that it is inspired only by the disgust of the parliamentarian and by the inaction of the governors before the reforms so much promised and never given. "I'm not from Cadet Street," [reference to the location of the Société des droits de l'homme which was associated with the Radicals] he says, responding to an interruption, "because I'm anarchist and we have no alliance with the bourgeois parties, I'm a revisionist, but my revision is for the suppression of the presidency of the Republic, Chamber of Deputies, and the Senate. I would like that the president, deputies and senators were in the Seine." (Before Tortelier spoke, he was shouted down by the Boulangist crowds, but after hearing his attitude, they end up silent). Then, making a lawsuit against the bourgeois class, he declares that the real enemy is Capital and that the workers will not be freed until they have suppressed it.¹⁵¹

Tortelier's sympathy, regardless of how rhetorical or limited it may have been, is instructive to note. It is clear that he was in complete agreement with the anti-parliamentarian impulses of the Boulangist movement, and in the same vein as other anarchists (or Marxists like Lafargue), he saw some revolutionary potential among Boulangist supporters. Tortelier's approach to electoral politics would also be wholly hostile to the minority anarchist position which saw the Third Republic as creating an environment in which the anarchist movement could flourish.

Tortelier's scorn for the electoral movement against Boulanger caused many within the larger socialist movement to brand him as a Boulangist. Tortelier, however, did not revise his stance or soften his rhetoric against socialists who saw salvation within the electoral system of the Third Republic. Writing in the September 29th issue of *La Révolte*, Tortelier voiced his indifference at being called a Boulangist by the Possibilists:

¹⁵¹ *La Révolte*, August 4th, 1888.

The note published in the issue of the *Parti Ouvrier* accuses me of being a "Boulangist and a deceiver." Those who wrote this know better than anyone who I am, because we fought together. We have since diverged in position. Since then, I have always gone forward with the movement, while they have moved back to make an alliance with Clemenceau and Ranc. All those who, like me, did not want to follow them in their direction, they will never forgive. In Paris, their slander can only serve to bring us new members.¹⁵²

Tortelier was stating that ever since the Possibilists had broken with the anarchist movement in the early 1880s due to their insistence on pursuing a reformist program, they had been intent on slandering the anarchists and misrepresenting their positions. The Possibilist insistence on allying with the Radicals and Opportunists in their opposition to Boulanger had, in Tortelier's view, weakened their support among the working class, and had forced Parisian workers into finding other sources for radical solutions; some went to the anarchists, but many had gone to Boulanger. Regarding being called a Boulangist, Tortelier wrote: "We can be called Boulangists. When we are enemies of the army and the reaction, we do not care."¹⁵³

Boulanger's disastrous July emboldened the government to schedule three by-elections to fill vacant departments for August 19th, one of which was the department which Boulanger had recently vacated. In an all-or-nothing gamble to rescue his reputation and the hopes of the entire Boulangist movement, Boulanger put his name forward in all three departments.¹⁵⁴ Comfortable in the knowledge that he had won the Nord with a strong majority in April, Boulanger devoted all his attention to the Somme and the Charente-Inférieure. A well-financed campaign and appeals by the Boulangist leaders to make common cause with other factions against the Floquet ministry then led to Boulanger winning in all three departments.¹⁵⁵ Reaction to Boulanger's

¹⁵² *La Révolte*, September 29th, 1888.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ The departments were: the Nord, the Somme, and the Charente-Inférieure

¹⁵⁵ Seager, 150-158.

victories was varied. In the anarchist periodical *L'Attaque*, Ernest Gegout, the editor, expressed exasperation at the considerable worker support that led to Boulanger's triple victory:

There is no doubt that the proletariat, despite the efforts of the militants, gives the Boulangist army the greatest and strongest part of its contingent. Where to find the reasons for this lack of consciousness! Highlighting the general dissatisfaction, the disappointment of the voters who thought to find in their representatives more energy and dedication, this explains the failure of Ferry and the rigor of Floquet; this does not explain Boulanger. Alleviating the increasingly intense misery of the workers, this explains the electoral debacle of the parties in power; this does not explain Boulanger. To rely on the need to have an army capable, by its organization and its leaders, of resisting an enemy invasion, explains the need to have good generals; that itself can only explain Boulanger. And yet, in the minds of all his constituents, Boulanger, and Boulanger alone, responds to this triple goal. Boulanger is the only reformer; Baker is the only socialist; Baker is the only and future winner. Ask why, we cannot not answer you. It's faith, mysticism. We find ourselves in the presence of a pathological case, of a ridiculous and dangerous madness of hope in a man!¹⁵⁶

Gegout, at this time, had mostly adopted a completely anti-political view on electoral politics, but he still frequently featured writers who adhered to a variety of different strands of socialism, such as the reformist socialists Eugène Fournière and Benoît Malon. His exasperation, then, makes some sense along electoral lines as Boulanger garnered more working-class support than several socialist candidates. From a purely anti-political standpoint, though, Gegout was shocked and disheartened because the working class was so obviously going against its own interests by supporting a candidate who would only strengthen the forces of reaction. This exasperation is evident in his statement that: "Under [Boulanger's] protectorate, or should I say his reign, the Church will be treated as well as it ever has. Governmental power will be centralized, and political and social repression will be worse than ever."¹⁵⁷ As much as Gegout thought the Third Republic was wholly broken and that only the social revolution could bring about meaningful positive change, the lack of class consciousness among the French working class worried him.

¹⁵⁶ *L'Attaque*, August 22nd, 1888.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

By November, Gegout's position on Boulangism, and as a result, the dominant position voiced in *L'Attaque*, had crystallized. It was a position which was fervently anti-Boulangist, but also abandoned any resistance through electoral politics. In *L'Attaque*, Gegout wrote:

L'Attaque is an open forum where all the revolutionaries, without distinction of school, have the free field to state their opinions or to defend their theories. For the last few weeks we have published in our columns polemics, both interesting and useful, on the attitude of all socialists towards the political movement embodied in a soldier... But this independence left to our collaborators gives the right to the founders of *L'Attaque* to make their opinion clear. We do not understand the socialist neutrality regarding Boulanger any more than we would have understood neutrality when Gambetta threatened to empower himself through the plebiscite. We do not understand the socialist neutrality regarding Boulanger, a reactionary, any more than we would have understood it during the threatening candidacy of Ferry for the presidency of the Republic. We did not say then: We are not for Gambetta! we are not for Ferry! We said: We are against Gambetta! we are against Ferry! We are against Boulanger, just as we are against the Radicals and Opportunists. We will oppose Boulanger not through voting, but through the revolution.¹⁵⁸

In the two major anarchist publications in Paris, the official stance was, by November 1888, clearly against pursuing electoral politics as a way of saving the Third Republic, but also staunchly anti-Boulangist. Instead, the primary concern of both publications leading up to the by-election on January 27th, 1889, and then continuing to the time of Boulanger's flight to Belgium on April 1st, 1889, was to convince the working class that Boulanger was a charlatan who would do no more than the Radicals or Opportunists to help their plight.

With Boulanger's triple election, the Boulangist campaign could again set its sights on securing a victory in Paris. There was much hope in the Boulangist camp that he could capture a seat in Paris with a heavy majority because the movement was best organized in the capital. It took several months before an opening in a Parisian department materialized, but on December 23rd, 1888, a Radical Deputy in the department of the Seine died, leaving a vacancy. A by-

¹⁵⁸ *L'Attaque*, November 24th, 1888.

election was soon called for January 27th, 1889 and Boulanger wasted little time announcing his candidacy. His primary opponents were the Radical Republicans, but the Radicals, caught off guard by the death of their old deputy, took almost two weeks after the by-election was called to put forward their candidate. With a considerable political machine buoyed by an eclectic band of financiers and a prolific group of propagandists, Boulanger won the department comfortably. Although his triumph did not come as a great shock by the time the election was held, both the margin of victory and the areas in which he excelled were a significant cause of alarm for the current government; Boulanger had dominated old Radical strongholds. There was also considerable concern in Paris among the militant left who opposed Boulanger (as has been mentioned, there was a significant contingent of the militant left who had fallen in with the Boulangists), as Boulanger enjoyed his greatest successes with the Parisian workers.¹⁵⁹

In the months leading up to the January vote, the most notable anarchist theorists of the day levelled relentless condemnations of Boulanger, as well as the Opportunists and Radicals who opposed him. As has been noted, the intensity of the attacks on Boulanger increased even after the editors of *La Révolte* and *L'Attaque* both articulated their positions not to oppose Boulanger electorally. Instead, the anarchist papers focused on wresting away worker support for Boulangism by convincing them of the movement's insincerity while stressing that only organization and pursuit of revolutionary action could bring genuine change.¹⁶⁰ The increasing frequency of these attacks brought anarchists and Boulangists into conflict on the streets of Paris in late 1888 and early 1889. Anarchist writers in both *La Révolte* and *L'Attaque* encouraged

¹⁵⁹ Seager, 189-203.

¹⁶⁰ *La Révolte*, November 25th, 1888; December 2nd, 1888; *L'Attaque*, November 17th, 1888; December 1st, 1888

other anarchists to confront Boulangist speakers and supporters around Paris, which led to violent clashes, such as the one recounted in the November 25th edition of *La Révolte*:

There have recently been two meetings in Paris, organized by the Bonapartists and the Boulangists, which anarchists have attended. Naturally, they were unable to speak and had to content themselves with violently protesting the absurd remarks of our aspiring governors. They fought, and many blows were landed. This is very good, but one must ask themselves, why is it not Boulanger himself who has received the blows?¹⁶¹

Not only is violence against the Boulangist supporters seen as an ideal practice of anarchist activism, violence against Boulanger himself is encouraged. This policy of fighting Boulangism not at the ballet box, but in the streets, would persist in the two major anarchist journals until the Boulangist movement eventually foundered.

The ever-present tensions between France and Germany flared again around the time of Boulanger's victory in the department of the Seine. In response, Wilhelm Liebknecht, a Social Democrat member of the Reichstag (and father of the Spartacist revolutionary, Karl Liebknecht), made a speech assuring the German public that Social Democrats would support the defense of Germany against France, with particular mention of defending Alsace-Lorraine, at all costs.¹⁶² The rhetoric employed by Liebknecht was, in the opinion of French anarchists in both *L'Attaque* and *La Révolte*, far too militaristic and patriotic, and mentioned nothing about tactics (such as a general strike) to oppose German militarism, or solidarity with the French working-class.¹⁶³ The increasingly militaristic and patriotic character of the Social Democrats was, for the anarchist Alexandre Cohen, "due to their increasing concern with parliamentarism and indifference towards a truly socialist program."¹⁶⁴ For the anarchists, a turn towards militarism and patriotism

¹⁶¹ *La Révolte*, November 25th, 1888.

¹⁶² *L'Attaque*, January 5th, 1889.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

(within the French anarchist context, this could always be understood as bourgeois patriotism) was a natural consequence of working within the bourgeois system instead of pursuing revolution. Further commentary on Liebknecht's speech from the Italian anarchist and Communist, Amilcar Cipriani, was particularly critical of German socialism in general, citing its inherently centralized and patriotic nature.¹⁶⁵ Cohen had further criticisms of the Social Democrats for their lack of objection to, and, in some instances, even support for, Germany's burgeoning colonial projects.¹⁶⁶ Such criticism was emblematic of a growing trend in anarchist papers of denunciations of European colonialism, and the patriotism used to justify it. The popularity of the trend during this period can be partially explained by its effectiveness in attacking both Boulanger (due to the fact that he represented the military leadership which facilitated the colonial projects) as well as the Opportunists and Radicals (who represented the bourgeoisie that enriched themselves to the detriment of the native populations and the French workers).

An example of when the anarchists attacked the French colonial adventures in Indochina can be found in the March 31st edition of *La Révolte*. In reaction to the recent unveiling of a bronze statue of Jules Bobillot, a young soldier who had died in 1885 in the Franco-Chinese War, Jean Grave wrote a critique of the colonial mission in Southeast Asia, as well as the patriotism used to justify it to the French people. To begin, Grave points to the absurdity of the argument that the men were defending France in Southeast Asia:

¹⁶⁵ *L'Attaque*, January 12th, 1889.

¹⁶⁶ *L'Attaque*, January 5th, 1889.

Tonkin is situated about three thousand leagues from France; it takes nearly three months of work to get there; and in this country, whose inhabitants do not even know the existence of the French, Sergeant Bobillot and his comrades-in-arms went to defend the country. Our brave army, with superior materiel, advanced rifles, thundering artillery, masked behind inaccessible cuirasses, is going to bomb harmless cities. Our soldiers carried devastation and looting in a peaceful country. Through the fires and the carnage, they sowed death to make the locals tributaries and slaves for the benefit of a bourgeoisie. This is called heroism and patriotism.¹⁶⁷

After wholly disposing of the idea that the mission could have had anything to do with defending France, or that it involved anything other than brutality and the complete subjugation of the locals, Grave attempted to ascertain what was actually gained in the colonial adventure:

What matters is to know the results obtained by so much patriotism and heroism. Oh! it is very simple: 25,000 of our people, dead by arms or fever; some hundreds of millions of expenses and wastes. But there were also millions extracted, as well as stolen from Tonkinois, which came by a miracle of financial chemistry to be condensed and funnelled into the hands of our bourgeoisie; the bourgeoisie who are delighted to have 16 million Tonkinese slaves to join the 35 million French slaves they already own and exploit. Here are the effects of patriotism!¹⁶⁸

In this analysis, the militarism of the state, represented by the colonial veteran and candidate of war, Boulanger, and the bourgeoisie, who financed and profited from the war and were represented by the Opportunists, now firmly in control of power with Tirard's ministry, are shown to be part of the same destructive process, co-dependent on one another. Patriotism, in this instance and according to anarchist theory, necessarily represented only the interests of the bourgeoisie, and not the French people.

¹⁶⁷ *La Révolte*, March 31st, 1889.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

In the years after the demise of the Boulangist movement, it was widely suggested that the movement failed because Boulanger refused to seize the initiative and stage a *coup d'état*. It is hard to dispute the belief that a coup in the immediate aftermath of his victory would have had a significant chance of, at the very least, short-term success because the police and Garde Républicaine were thoroughly Boulangist. The idea that a *coup d'état* was ever seriously considered by Boulanger or any of the senior Boulangists on January 27th is not, however, supported by any contemporary sources, regardless of the concerns of the government. Still, this win did represent the zenith of Boulanger's popularity, and even if neither Boulanger nor any other Boulangist leaders considered a *coup d'état*, there is ample evidence that many other groups in France, including the government, did fear one. After January 27th, the government employed a different policy to deal with the Boulangist threat. Previously, the government had planned on simply beating Boulanger electorally, assuming that the impetuous general would ultimately fail to lead a cohesive and successful movement. When such a policy was obviously failing, Floquet, fearing for the continued survival of his ministry, decided that the proper course of action was actively to repress the movement.¹⁶⁹

Ultimately, the limited measures that Floquet took were not enough to save his ministry; it fell in February, as his fragile alliance of Radicals and Opportunists fell apart. Succeeding Floquet's ministry was one led by Pierre Tirard, an Opportunist. This ministry, instead of being an alliance of Opportunists and Radicals, almost completely consisted of Opportunists, but the policy of repressing the Boulangists persisted. Indeed, repression intensified as several organizations that had pledged the Boulangist movement support received an array of sanctions. The most notable of these groups, Déroulède's Ligue des Patriotes, faced a variety of trumped up

¹⁶⁹ Seager, 205-218.

charges in late March 1889. It was amidst this climate of repression that Boulanger, to the shock of most of France, including other prominent Boulangist leaders, chose to flee to Belgium with his mistress on April 1st. The General's flight effectively doomed the Boulangist movement.¹⁷⁰

Anarchist reaction to the flight of Boulanger was largely one of derision and vindication.

In *L'Attaque*, Ernest Gegout wrote:

Boulanger, that filthy rascal that some revolutionaries, some socialists even, refused to denounce, fled before Prudhomme's martinet. The danger to him was imaginary. It was enough, however, to scare him and the band of filthy scavengers who felt the fear of repression. How could any follow this butcher, this slaughterer of women and children? The ferociousness of these people is exceeded only by their cowardice!¹⁷¹

In *La Révolte*, the threat of Boulangism was similarly ridiculed, and the anarchists felt themselves vindicated in their refusal to join an electoral alliance with the Republicans in opposition to Boulanger.¹⁷² Although Boulangism was not yet wholly dead (it would take their sound defeat in the August general elections for the movement effectively to lose relevance in the French political landscape), the movement was no longer treated as a credible threat or meaningful phenomenon in anarchist papers.

There were two general attitudes towards Boulangism represented in the anarchist press after Boulanger's victory in the Nord. The first position, which was held by the majority of anarchists, and which would become the official position of the editors of the two major anarchist papers, was abstentionist. It called on workers to oppose Boulangism directly, instead of at the ballot box. The minority position advocated a program similar to the one pursued by

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 218-221.

¹⁷¹ *L'Attaque*, April 6th, 1889.

¹⁷² *La Révolte*, April 7th, 1889.

reformist socialists, most notably the Possibilists. It was justified on the grounds that the Third Republic was worth saving because it created favourable circumstances for the flourishing of the anarchist movement. According to this line of argument, if Boulanger succeeded in setting up a strong government, the anarchist movement would face severe repression and risk being crushed. After Boulanger's victories in August, the majority position became even more prevalent in the movement, and the position of abstaining at the polls while fighting Boulangism in the streets intensified, peaking in the months of December and January, as Boulanger vied for a seat in the department of the Seine, and continuing until Boulanger's flight in April of 1889. While anarchists fought Boulangism on the streets, anarchist writers attempted to draw connections between Boulanger's movement and the Republicans in power. This strategy was achieved through criticism of French colonialism, which, in the minds of the anarchists, unified the bourgeoisie and military elite in a project of exploitation which left the French workers and the native populations of Southeast Asia subjugated. Genuine French patriotism, then, would call for an upending of the bourgeois order (the intersection of the military, capital, and finance), instead of a celebration of the colonial project.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the anarchist reaction to the Boulangist movement has been examined, and it has been shown that theoretical considerations, historical understanding, and political expediency played significant roles in shaping the response of French anarchists to Boulangism. Although anarchists almost universally opposed Boulangism, animosity towards parliamentarism and the institutions of the Third Republic prevented most anarchists from entering electoral alliances with republicans to oppose Boulanger at the ballot box. The dissenting opinion, which, generally stated, was that the Third Republic marked an end to repression of anarchists, and that a Boulangist dictatorship would mean a resumption of extreme government repression, ultimately failed to gain widespread traction in the movement. In this sense, a strict anti-parliamentarism in line with anarchist theory won out over limited political gains in the opinions of most anarchists.

The ultra-nationalism and revanchism commonly associated with Boulangism did, however, sometimes bring out seemingly contradictory reactions from anarchists. While strong internationalist positions were regularly stated in *La Révolte* both before and during the height of the Boulangist phenomenon, fervently patriotic positions were also regularly seen. Indeed, Grave, on more than one occasion, agreed with ultra-nationalists regarding the existential threat posed by German invasion. For Grave, only the social revolution could galvanize the French people, as it had done nearly a century earlier when France fought off foreign invaders during the Revolution, and saved it from dismemberment at the hands of the Germans. While Grave obviously differed from the ultra-nationalists on just about everything, including his solution to the German menace, his articulation of the German threat and the necessity for French action could only be described as deeply patriotic. As was seen in the first chapter, the active tension

between internationalism and patriotism was never completely resolved in anarchist theory, making Grave's simultaneous French patriotism and optimistic internationalism not wholly unexpected. In one sense the patriotism showcased by the anarchists was strategic, as they vied for support from a working class which was very patriotic. Even though it was strategic, it was still very much in line with French anarchist theory and not merely a cynical play for working-class support.

Aside from anarchist theory, political culture can also help explain this tension between internationalist and patriotic rhetoric among French anarchists. Almost all French political groups sought to root their movements in historical traditions that began with the French Revolution. Anarchist emphasis on the role of the masses, rather than the state, in saving the Revolution served several purposes. This emphasis distinguished the anarchists from the rest of the French Left as well as bourgeois republicans, while also informing their actions in their current context. In both regards, it was the bottom-up model that placed primary importance on the French people, which informed anarchist action and revolutionary goals.

The tension between internationalism and patriotism, particularly in the Franco-German context, also played out on a much grander and consequential scale about a quarter of a century after the Boulanger Affair, at the outbreak of the First World War. In that instance Kropotkin, probably still the most prominent anarchist in the world, and the leading French anarchists, Grave among them, chose openly to support the Entente against the Central Powers. This step

sent shockwaves across the movement and led to a significant schism between interventionists and non-interventionists, the most notable being Errico Malatesta.¹⁷³

Kropotkin's support for the Entente surprised many in the international anarchist movement for a few reasons. In line with conventional anarchist thought, Kropotkin was a fiery critic of the rising militarism in European states during the fin de siècle. Indeed, Kropotkin was perhaps the most eloquent theorist within the anarchist movement in regard to criticizing the synthesis of state, military, and economic powers. This position was well evidenced in his derisive rejection of the rising ideas of the day expressed by Norman Angell in his 1909 book titled *The Great Illusion*. Angell believed that the European nation-states, which could be effectively reduced to individual rational actors, would no longer engage in large-scale warfare with each other since it was not in the interest of economic prosperity. For Kropotkin, however, it was clear that war could in fact suit the elites who, with a few exceptions, almost all deemed war to be structurally necessary to further their own prosperity due to the interrelation of state, military, and economic interests into a military/industrial complex. Such a view was adopted essentially as orthodoxy by prominent anarchists across the world, including Jean Grave and Charles Malato in France. Given that Kropotkin and the most prominent French anarchists were all exceptionally critical of the rise of state militarism, how can the choice of Kropotkin and the French anarchist movement wholly to support the war effort (on the side of the Entente) be explained?¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Peter Ryley, "The Manifesto of the Sixteen: Kropotkin's Rejection of Anti-War Anarchism and his Critique of the Politics of Peace," in *Anarchism, 1914-1918: Internationalism, Anti-Militarism, and War*, ed. by Ruth Kinna and Matthew S. Adams (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 49.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

Kropotkin's argument for support of the Entente in the First World War was straightforward. First, Kropotkin insisted that he was fervently against state militarism and the military/industrial complex. Second, he acknowledged that a collective uprising by the European working class against the war was unlikely, and that any limited insurrection or resistance to the war would ultimately be crushed. Third, since an international revolution against state militarism was impossible, opting for pacifism would only serve to support the aggressive and most starkly militarist state (in Kropotkin's estimation, this was Germany). Logically then, support of those opposing the more destructive forces, essentially siding with the lesser of two evils, was the most reasonable and moral decision for Kropotkin.

The argument that the German-led Central Powers were distinctly worse than the Powers of the Entente, and therefore must be opposed, relied on some essentialist characterization. This point was quickly made by Kropotkin's critics after he first came out in support of the Entente. Malatesta stated that Kropotkin showed a distinct "Franco-Russian patriotism"¹⁷⁵ and other anarchist critics argued that if there was a difference between the German state and those of the Entente, it was merely one of degree rather than kind.¹⁷⁶

Belief that the German state was particularly dangerous, and that there was something uniquely good about French culture, was an essential part of Kropotkin's argument. Kropotkin had long argued that France was the heartland of revolution, and he openly dismissed the German social democrats as enemies to meaningful social revolution. According to Constance Bantman and David Berry, an association between Germany and a proclivity towards statism and militarism can, to some extent, be detected in Kropotkin's work. Such arguments were, as has

¹⁷⁵ *Freedom* XXVIII.308 (December 1914) quoted in *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

been discussed earlier in this thesis, not however new within the anarchist tradition, as Bakunin also closely associated the Germanic peoples as a whole with statism and militarism.

Although Kropotkin supported the Entente generally, he was most vocal in support of France. The root of this affiliation can be found in Kropotkin's fascination with the French Revolution and view of the French people as being uniquely receptive to revolution and social change. Kropotkin's attachment to French history and culture had a considerable impact on his decision ultimately to support the Entente during the war, and such an example is instructive when examining how many of the same anarchists responded to the rising feelings of nationalism during the late 1880s.¹⁷⁷

It should also be noted that the choice of Kropotkin and the anarchists to support the Entente mirrored the decision of essentially the entire French labour movement. The Confédération générale du travail (CGT), which had significant anarchist-syndicalist influences, wholeheartedly supported the war effort and had several leaders who were overt Germanophobes. Indeed, both the French and German working classes, and labour organizations that claimed to speak for them, did not come close to behaving as the Ligue des anti-patriotes had imagined they would back in 1887.¹⁷⁸

It is clear that even a quarter of a century after the Boulanger Affair, the tensions within anarchism between internationalism and patriotism had not fully been resolved. Nevertheless, during the Boulanger Affair French anarchists had defined patriotism in a way that complemented their attack on the 'bourgeois' nation state. Moreover, by their refusal to enter into

¹⁷⁷ Constance Bantman and David Berry, "The French Anarchist Movement and the First World War," in *Anarchism, 1914-1918: Internationalism, Anti-Militarism, and War*, ed. by Ruth Kinna and Matthew S. Adams (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 162-164.

¹⁷⁸ Jolyon Howorth, "French Workers and German Workers: The Impossibility of Internationalism, 1900-1914," *European History Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1985): 71-97.

electoral politics they had distinguished themselves from most of the French Left, and their emphasis upon direct action and union organization foreshadowed the subsequent development of anarcho-syndicalism. Anarcho-syndicalism would become the primary mode of French anarchist activism by the turn of the century and for the first several decades of the twentieth century. One of the primary motivators for the shift towards syndicalism was the state-sponsored repression that the anarchist movement experienced in the wake of anarchist-inspired bombings done in accordance with the doctrine of 'propaganda by the deed' in the early 1890s.

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