

SOCIALISM AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION : THE CERCLE SOCIAL AND THE ENRAGÉS

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“THE revolutionary movement which began in 1789 with the Cercle Social”, Marx and Engels wrote in 1845, “whose main representatives were to be Leclerc and Roux, and which ended in Babeuf’s conspiracy, gave birth to the communist idea which Buonarotti, friend of Babeuf, reintroduced into France after the revolution of 1830”.¹

This view, as it relates either to the Revolution or to the origins of communism seems to have received little or no attention from Marxist historiography.² Nevertheless Marx’s personal debt to Buonarotti, and his friendship with G. J. Harney, Buonarotti’s English disciple,³ must invest the passage with a certain authority for Marxist and non-Marxist alike. It is curious, therefore, that, with the exception of a pioneer study published in 1899,⁴ there has been no serious attempt to assess the influence and significance of the Cercle Social nor, even, a recognition of its place in the development of socialist thought.⁵

It would be difficult to sustain the argument that the Cercle Social gave birth to the idea of communism, or even of socialism, for both ideas were already deep rooted in the concern of eighteenth century thinkers with equality. Towards the close of the seventeenth century Louis XIV’s court preacher, Bishop Bossuet, whose works were required reading for the pious for most of the following century, addressed a stern adjuration to the rich in his *Panégyrique de Saint François d’Assise*. “Si nous voulions monter à l’origine des choses,” he warned, “nous

¹ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Die Heilige Familie* (1845), p. 186.

² Cf. “Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin on the French Revolution of 1789”, *International Literature*, vii (Moscow, July 1939), which ignores the above passage.

³ M. Leroy, *Histoire des Idées Sociales en France*, ii. 90.

⁴ A. Lichtenberger, *Le Socialisme et la Révolution Française* (Paris, 1899).

⁵ Cf. H. Laski, “The socialist tradition in the French Revolution”, *Social and Political Ideas of the Revolutionary Era*, p. 201.

trouverions, peut-être, qu'ils (i.e. the poor) n'auraient pas moins de droit que vous aux biens que vous possédez. La Nature, ou plutôt, pour parler plus chrétiennement, Dieu, le Père commun des hommes, a donné dès le commencement un droit égal à tous ses enfants sur toutes les choses dont ils ont besoin pour la conservation de leur vie. Aucun de nous ne se peut vanter d'être plus avantage que les autres par la Nature; mais l'insatiable désir d'amasser n'a permis que cette belle fraternité put durer dans le monde. Il a fallu venir au partage et à la propriété qui a produit toutes les querelles et tous les procès." ¹ Thus, long before the publication of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* in 1755, the main theme of the *Discourse*, the fall from a primitive, natural state of grace and community had become a convention of French political thought.

There were not a few advocates of Utopian communism, or a return to the state of Nature, in eighteenth century France. To the Abbé Morelly, whose *Code de la Nature* appeared in the same year as the *Discourse on Inequality*, the first and most important law of the ideal society was: "Rien dans la société n'appartiendra singulièrement ni en propriété à personne, que les choses dont il fera un usage actuel", while elsewhere we are assured that "Le monde est une table suffisamment garnie pour tous les convives, dont tous les mets appartient, tantôt à tous, parce que tous ont faim, tantôt à quelques-uns seulement, parce que les autres sont rassasiés, ainsi personne n'en est absolument le maître ni a droit de prétendre l'être." ² Restif de la Bretonne's *Andrographe* sketched an agrarian Utopia, similar to that envisaged in the *Code de la Nature*.³ In his one attempt to create a near-Utopia, the *Project de la Constitution de la Corse*, even Rousseau confessed: "Far from desiring the state to be poor, I should wish, on the contrary, to see all property in its hands and no individual admitted to any share of the common stock, save in proportion to his services" ⁴ and the opening passage from the second part of the *Discourse on Inequality* is a

¹ Gray, *The Socialist Tradition from Moses to Lenin*, p. 54.

² Morelly, *Code de la Nature* (Geuthner, Paris, 1910), pp. 85 and 13.

³ Lichtenberger, op. cit. p. 46.

⁴ *The Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. Vaughan (Cambridge, 1915), i. 108.

constantly recurring theme in revolutionary oratory: "Vous êtes perdus si vous oubliez que les fruits sont à tous, et la terre n'est à personne."¹

The particular significance of the Cercle Social lies in the fact that, of the many political clubs and societies founded by the revolutionaries in the early years of the revolution, it was responsible for disseminating the ideas of the Philosophes in their most "socialistic" aspect.

The club owed its founding to the zeal of Nicholas de Bonneville, freemason, journalist, and member of the Cordelier club, the most advanced of the revolutionary political clubs. Captured by an enthusiasm for the possibilities inherent in the transfer of political power to the people, de Bonneville dedicated himself to educating the masses to seize their opportunity. Since, he wrote, "Le peuple ne veut vivre que le jour dont il est maître . . . il faudrait lui montrer l'avenir et mettre cet avenir sous ses yeux et sous sa main".²

Already, since June, editor of the *Tribun du Peuple*,³ de Bonneville decided, in October 1789, to found a new journal based on these principles, to be known as the *Bouche de Fer*. The projected journal differed from the generality of revolutionary publications in that it was not to be the highly individualistic work of one man, but was to be published by a subscription society, whose members were to join in its editing and to supervise its policy, "Les personnes qui voudront être membres du Cercle Social, et concourir à la censure de la *Bouche de Fer*", it was announced, "se feront inscrire au bureau de l'imprimeur de l'Assemblée Nationale".⁴ The Cercle Social thus originated as a kind of editorial board for the newspaper *Bouche de Fer*. It was intended that it should meet every Thursday at 4 p.m., and de Bonneville planned the first issue of the paper for November. Whether or not his first plans

¹ *The Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. Vaughan (Cambridge, 1915), i, 169.

² *Lettre à M. le Maire et Messieurs des Districts de Paris* (in the John Rylands Library). The pamphlet, a prospectus, is anonymous. De Bonneville admitted authorship in the *Organe du Cercle Social* (in Rylands), Letter i., p. 41.

³ S. Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris*, vii. 561 ff.

⁴ *Lettre à M. le Maire* . . .

succeeded, by January 1790 at the latest, both society and journal were well established in Paris.¹ Encouraged by this success, de Bonneville began to canvass a more ambitious scheme; the founding of a chain of sister societies in each of the departments of France to publish a series of journals for which the Paris organ was to be the model.² In association, it was later suggested, was to be a nation-wide organization of "Tribuns du Peuple" elected for each department, with a watching brief for the people's interests.

At first sight such a project might seem to have affinities with a national, democratic, political party. De Bonneville, however, used to the spirit of the secretive masonic lodge, intended it rather as a society of élite devoted to educating the masses.³

For a long time, despite his original aims, the *Cercle Social* and its journal seem to have been Nicholas de Bonneville, writ large. A study of content and style suggests that a great many of the "letters to the editor" which appear under different pseudonyms are in fact the work of the editor himself. In March 1790, however, direct evidence of the interest and support of the Abbé Fauchet appeared, in the shape of a signed letter in defence of Danton, at that time under threat of imprisonment for his part in organizing the Cordeliers district to resist the arrest of Marat by the Châtelêt authorities.⁴

Fauchet was a cleric who had enjoyed a distinguished career under the Ancien Régime. Born at Dornes in 1744, he was educated by the Jesuits before becoming a seminarist at Bourges.⁵ Thereafter, protected by the Comte de Noailles,⁶ he achieved the high dignity of Prédicateur du Roi, and became Grand Vicaire to Phéliepeaux, Bishop of Bourges.⁷ The Abbé de

¹ *Cercle Social*, Letter i, p. 1 (in Rylands). It is this letter which fixes the date of the original proposal as October, 1789. The writings of the "Bouche de Fer", de Bonneville's editorial pseudonym, were at first published under this head, and are so bound in the Rylands collection. ² *Cercle Social*, Letter vii, p. 42.

³ *Ibid.* Letter xliii, p. 243.

⁴ *Ibid.* Letter xl, p. 213. For this adventure of Danton see Madelin, *Danton*, ch. ii.

⁵ Durieux, *Vainqueurs de la Bastille*, pp. 79 ff.

⁶ Dorimon, "L'Abbé Claude Fauchet, Membre de la Commune", *Revue de la Révolution*, x (1887), 148.

⁷ Durieux, *op. cit.* pp. 79 ff.

Montfort, for such was Fauchet's official title, was so highly esteemed in aristocratic circles as to be chosen by the Marquis de Choiseul as tutor for his children.¹ It was nevertheless the same Fauchet who led one of the besieger's deputations to the Bastille on 14 July 1789.² On 5 August he preached the sermon on the Bastille dead.³ His discourse on this occasion, repeated in the various parish churches of the capital, and printed in pamphlet form both in Paris and at Lyons, laid the foundation for a career of popular preaching in the revolutionary interest which was eventually, in May 1791, to secure the Abbé's election as Constitutional Bishop of Calvados.

On 31 August⁴ and 27 September 1789⁵ the first "discourse on French liberty" was followed by a second and a third, both similarly published as pamphlets. Fauchet became so popular that, in August, Parisians were paying 24 *sols* to obtain a seat at one of his sermons.⁶ The third discourse, that of 27 September, was delivered in the great Cathedral of Notre Dame, before the newly formed National Guard, as an important official occasion. In the meantime Fauchet had secured, on 18 September, election to the General Council of the Commune of Paris, on which both he and de Bonneville sat until 8 October 1790.⁷ At the time of his intervention on behalf of Danton, Fauchet was, in fact, president of the Commune.⁸ As one of the most prominent orators of the revolutionary party, Fauchet was again honoured in July 1790, by being chosen to deliver the public eulogy of Benjamin Franklin, whose death had recently occurred.⁹

Until October 1790, Fauchet's association with de Bonneville does not seem to have been much closer than their common

¹ Aulard, article in the *Grande Encyclopædie*. ² Durieux, loc. cit.

³ *Discours sur la Liberté Française* (Paris and Lyons, 1789), in John Rylands Library French Historical Tracts, referred to below as (Ryl. F.H.T.).

⁴ *Second Discours* . . . (Paris and Lyons, 1789) (Ryl. F.H.T.).

⁵ *Troisième Discours* . . . (Paris, 1789) (Ryl. F.H.T.).

⁶ Goncourt, *Histoire de la Société Française pendant la Révolution*, p. 126.

⁷ Aulard, op. cit. (for Fauchet); Lacroix, op. cit. ii. 9, vii. 561 (for de Bonneville).

⁸ Fauchet was president from 1 to 15 March 1790, inclusive; Lacroix, op. cit. iv. 249, 420.

⁹ *Eloge Civique de Benjamin Franklin* (Paris, 1790) (Ryl. F.H.T.).

membership of the Commune must have dictated. In that month, however, both men, freed from their responsibilities as municipal officers, decided to collaborate in a new venture of the Cercle Social, the founding of the "Confédération Universelle des Amis de la Vérité", composed according to its initial programme :

" 1^o. Du Cercle Social qui en a conçu le dessin, offert les facilités, commencé l'exécution, et de tous les cercles de francs-frères qui lui sont affiliés ", and :

" 2^o. De tous les abonnés du journal de la *Bouche de Fer*, tant en France que parmi les autres nations." ¹

It is by confusion with this event that the date of foundation of the Cercle Social has been universally given as October 1790.

The prime inspiration in the new movement was that of the freemasons. " L'idée d'intéresser tous les francs-frères répandus dans les diverses parties du monde ", enthused Fauchet, " à rallier les hommes aux principes de liberté, égalité, d'union, est l'une des plus heureuses qui peut entrer dans l'esprit humain ".² The new society quickly established international connections. Correspondence was received from Britain, Poland, and the Empire, while books from its allied publishing house, the Imprimerie du Cercle Social (Rue du Théâtre Français, no. 4) were sold, in 1793, in cities as far apart as Philadelphia, Geneva, Utrecht and Genoa.³ Within France the intention was to found a chain of societies in each town and city.⁴ That this project was not entirely a failure is evident from the *Appel aux Françaises*, a reprint of an address delivered by the feminist pioneer, Etta Palm d'Aelders, to the "charitable circle" of the Amis de La Vérité in December 1790. The municipal officers of Creil, a town on the Oise, about thirty miles north of Paris, were so impressed by the discourse that, the following February, mentioning

¹ *Programme du Cercle Social* (Paris, 1790).

² *Bouche de Fer*, no. 4^o, 3 année, " Réponse de Claude Fauchet aux objections de M. La Harpe " (in Rylands).

³ For the correspondence see various letters appearing in the *Bouche de Fer*; a publisher's list of the publications of the Cercle Social press, together with the names of its foreign agents, may be found in the *Bulletin des Amis de la Vérité*, vol. i, " L'an premier de la République " (1793).

⁴ *Bouche de Fer*, ser. i, no. i.

their constant liason with the Amis de la Vérité, they sent the orator a cockade and a medal.¹ Their covering letter, reprinted with the address, is one of several indications of the provincial connections of the Amis.

The founding of the Amis de la Vérité caused a considerable stir in the capital. A contemporary account of the opening session has been preserved in the correspondence of the Breton Comte de Châteaugiron, who received from a Paris agent fairly regular news letters covering much of the revolutionary period.² "La soirée du 13" the agent wrote, in October 1790, "acte remarquable au Palais Royal, par l'inauguration de la Confédération Universelle des Amis de la Vérité. C'est l'Abbé Fauchet qui a ouvert la séance par un discours très éloquent sur la situation des intérêts nationaux, sur l'opinion publique, et sur les avantages de réunir en un seul club tous les clubs de la capitale à fin que l'esprit public soit un, qu'il n'y ait qu'un seul foyer où il puisse venir alimenter son civisme de nouvelles lumières et de nouvelles motifs pour être plus attaché à la révolution et à la constitution. Tous les citoyens de la terre seront, s'ils sont honnêtes, et s'ils le veulent, affiliés à ce club où l'on saura tout ce qui se passe en Europe, où le comité auront soin de vérifier tous les évènements qui y seront annoncés. . . . Il y aura un comité de bienfaisance et cette institution philanthropique servira de secours aux hommes honnêtes et éclairés qui sont dans le besoin."

Despite the broad, magnificent welcome extended to all the citizens of the world, the Amis de la Vérité were, like de Bonneville's Tribunes, conceived of as an élite. "C'est la philosophie, répandue dans la multitude des têtes supérieures", explained Fauchet, "et de là dans la majorité des esprits populaires qui peut seul instituer le vrai code social".³ The annual subscription, according to Châteaugiron's correspondent, was 36 livres, many days' wages for the majority of labourers and

¹ *Appel aux Françaises . . . Par Etta Palm d'Aelders* (Paris, 1791).

² *Gazette manuscrite de René le Prêtre de Châteaugiron*, Rylands French MS. 50.

³ *Bouche de Fer*, ser. ii, no. 7, 14th discourse. Cf. Fauchet's later observation: "Les instructeurs des hommes, les directeurs de l'opinion sont les regulateurs de la société", *Journal des Amis*, xi. 1793.

artisans. Among the "têtes supérieures" who lent their support were Condorcet, Goupil de Prefelne, Chabroux, and Athanase Auger; among the occasional visitors such famous figures as Brissot, Madame Roland, Camille Desmoulins, Thomas Paine, and the Abbé Siéyès.

From the first, the meetings of the Confédération were crowded;¹ 6,000 people collected at the opening session in the Cirque of the Palais Royal,² and Camille Desmoulins, reporting to the Jacobin club, estimated the membership of the Cercle Social at 3,000.³ The first major venture of the society was a series of lectures on Rousseau and the Social Contract, delivered by Fauchet, and reprinted in the pages of the *Bouche de Fer*. The lectures marked a distinct and individual development of the ideas of Rousseau in a socialist direction. The clerical revolutionary argued from a "Christian socialist" position, and his ideal society like that of Bossuet and Morelly was a Christian commonwealth. "Les premiers disciples", he once observed "étaient égaux et libres; leur république devait servir de modèle, dans la maturité du temps, à la république de l'Univers."⁴ As a christian, and, perhaps, also as a mason, Fauchet differed from Rousseau in his concept of the "state of nature". Whereas to Rousseau the family was the only natural association, to Fauchet all men were bound together in a common fraternity by mutual love: "L'homme est un être aimant par nature, et ne peut trouver que dans la fraternité son bonheur."⁵ Society as it existed, based on the oppression of the poor by the rich, denied this principle.⁶ In his eighth discourse the orator inveighed against this "régime infernal" in which while millions were not certain of getting enough to eat although asking for work, a few "riches insolents" who might have everything at their pleasure without working would allow them to eat only in exchange for

¹ The first two sessions on 13 and 22 October, were open to the public. Later a charge was made for non-members. ² Rylands French MS. 50.

³ *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, liv. 61.

⁴ *Frère Claude* (Paris, 1791) (Ryl. F.H.T.). A satirical work by de Bonneville containing extracts from the discourses and writings of Fauchet, after a break between the two men.

⁵ *Bouche de Fer*, ser. i, no. 9, third discourse.

⁶ *Ibid.* ser. i, no. 3, preliminary discourse.

their labour.¹ The best social legislation, the Abbé declared, must be directed towards the destruction of this division of society into plutocrat and proletarian ; it must ensure sufficient of the world's goods to all. Then there would be neither rich nor poor, no man would be coerced into selling his labour, and none would wish to buy it. Without this social revolution, Fauchet felt, political liberty would remain a hollow illusion : “ Si tout homme en tout lieu n'est pas assuré par la constitution de vivre d'une suffisante vie, il n'y a point de constitution, la nature est violée, la liberté n'est pas.”

To secure essential social equality it was necessary to envisage a considerable redistribution of wealth : “ Les plus riches seront imposés par les loix de manière à supplier les moyens des pauvres ”.² Ever since September 1789 Fauchet had been advocating a progressive tax.³ Only recently de Bonneville, in his *De L'Esprit des Religions*, had advocated a system of allowances to the poor, based on need.⁴ Thus the machinery for redistribution was already envisaged. But firstly it was necessary to find some theoretical justification for such an attack on property. For this Fauchet appealed to the basic social contract. “ Tout homme a droit à la terre ”, he argued, “ et doit y avoir en propriété de domaine son existence. Il en prend possession par le travail, et sa portion doit être circonscrite par les droits de ses égaux. Tous les droits sont mis en commun dans une société bien ordonnée ; la souveraineté sociale doit tirer ses lignes de manière que tous aient quelque chose, et qu'aucun n'ait rien de trop.”⁵

The progressive tax appears to have roused little violent opposition. By contrast, another scheme for redistribution dear to the hearts of the members of the Cercle Social, the inheritance tax, called forth enthusiastic denunciation from all quarters.

Even Montesquieu, least revolutionary of the Philosophes, had agreed, in the *Spirit of the Laws*, that “ The order of successions depends on political or civil law, not natural law ”. The

¹ *Bouche de Fer*, ser. i, no. 29. ² *Ibid.* ser. ii, nos. 19 and 20, 18th discourse.

³ *Troisième Discours sur la Liberté Française* (1789).

⁴ Le Harivel, *Nicholas de Bonneville : Pré-Romantique et Révolutionnaire* (Oxford, 1923). ⁵ *Bouche de Fer*, ser. i, no. 22 (missing from Rylands series).

regulation of inheritance by the body politic was thus a quite respectable principle. Nevertheless, in his eighth discourse, Fauchet deemed it necessary to defend himself against the charge levelled against him by Laclos and others at the Jacobin Club, that he was preaching the "Loi Agraire" or the forcible redistribution of land.¹ In reply he directed his attackers to his book *La Religion Naturelle*, in which he had merely suggested that the law should forbid the future formation of estates worth more than 50,000 livres of annual rent, and that on the death of the present owners all inherited estates should be reduced to that size by a tax.² De Bonneville, in less radical mood, restricted his proposals to an attack on primogeniture, declaring that "Le seul moyen possible d'arriver à la grande communion sociale est de diviser les héritages territoriaux en parts égales et déterminées par les enfants du défunt".³

The Cercle Social was careful to deny any sympathy with those peasants who took the law into their own hands, and set about imposing their own "Loi Agraire", by refusing dues, and partitioning the great estates. In the *Programme* of the Confédération des Amis de la Vérité, its author complained: "La Bouche de Fer a dit expressément que les partages de terre, obtenus jusqu'ici par la force n'étaient que les brigandages et l'on nous a accusé de demander la loi agraire",⁴ while elsewhere Fauchet cautioned his followers: "Les propriétés mêmes qui contrarient par leur excès les premiers convenances naturelles et sociales, ne doivent être modifiés que par des progressions attentives."⁵

Within these limits of legality, however, the members appear to have been sincere in their wish for a more equalitarian distribution of property. On 21 October 1791, deploring that in a large society it was impossible to fulfil nature's wish that the earth should be divided equally among its inhabitants, but yet maintaining that some redistribution was both possible and necessary, Athanase Auger submitted to the Legislative Assembly

¹ See *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, vol. liv.

² Lichtenberger, op. cit. pp. 72-3.

³ Le Harivel, op. cit. p. 35, quoting *De l'Esprit des Religions*.

⁴ *Programme du Cercle Social*.

⁵ *Bouche de Fer*, ser. ii, no. 3.

a petition based upon Fauchet's modest proposals.¹ Nothing further appears to have been heard of this petition, which was not allowed to influence the Assembly's policy.

The achievements of the Cercle Social, despite its leading rôle in the republican agitation of 1791, reviewed by Mathiez in his study of the Varennes crisis,² remained theoretical and educational rather than practical. To socialist thought it contributed the progressive tax and the inheritance tax, to which ought, perhaps, to be added Condorcet's projects for a contributory old age pension, and widows' and orphans' insurance,³ and de Bonneville's plan for systematic "national assistance". Some of the ideas born in this milieu were actually applied by the Jacobins in 1793 and 1794. The others, and especially Fauchet's theoretical justification of collectivist measures against private property, influenced a whole stratum of revolutionaries. Thus Goupil de Préfelne is said to have preached the doctrines of the Abbé Fauchet at the Société Fraternelle,⁴ a "popular society" for both sexes which met, from February 1790, at the premises of the Jacobin Club to hear and have explained the decrees of the revolutionary assemblies. Among the more famous members of the club at one time or another were the Duc de Chartres (the future King Louis Philippe), the grammarian Noël, and popular leaders like Hébert, Varlet, Maillard and Fournier L'Americain.

At the beginning of 1793, the editor of *L'Indépendant*, a Parisian revolutionary journal, paid tribute to Fauchet and to his teachings "hasardées à une époque où presque tout le monde faisait son éducation politique", and summed up their significance for his generation in a passage reminiscent of the *Bouche de Fer* itself. "Dans une association fondée sur de bonnes bases", he wrote, "et régie par de sages institutions, les citoyens n'ont pas tous la même fortune, parce qu'ils n'ont pas tous les mêmes bras, la même intelligence, la même économie: mais les

¹ Lichtenberger, op. cit. pp. 74-5.

² Mathiez, *Le Club des Cordeliers pendant la Crise de Varennes* (Paris, 1910).

³ Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de L'Esprit Humain* (Bibliothèque Choisie, Paris, 1829), p. 258.

⁴ Desgenettes, *Souvenir de la Fin du xviii^e Siècle et du Commencement du xix^e* (Didot, Paris, 1836), ii. 240.

disproportions choquantes sont inconnues ; l'oeil n'est point attristé par le contraste du marbre des palais, et de la boue des chaumières, par l'insultante image du malheureux qui meurt de faim, et du riche qui meurt de satiété."

The limitations of the "socialism" of the Cercle Social are also significant. Concerned only with property in land, the members were in no sense opposed to the private ownership of merchant or industrial capital, nor were they indeed anxious to see its use controlled or checked. In his eighteenth discourse, Fauchet declared : " Il ne peut avoir qu'un seul système de bonne législation, celui qui assure la suffisante existence à tous les associés et l'entière liberté à toutes les industries." Thus the Abbé wished on the one hand to arrest the proletarianization of labour by ending the buying and selling of labour power and yet, on the other, to see capital freed from all the checks and restraints which had hindered this very development.

The ideas of the "Friends of Truth" cannot but have been influenced in this connection by the social environment in which they moved. Fauchet and Condorcet would regularly dine with the Girondin leaders Gensonné, Guadet, Ducos and Vergniaud at the Salon of Mme. Dodun, wife of a wealthy director of the Compagnie des Indes. They were also to be found, on occasion, at the Rolands' or the salon kept by the Swiss banker Clavière. The political orientation of the Cercle Social was, in fact, with the Gironde, the party associated with the liberal merchant and banking interest. Its socialism was a socialism of sentiment, without any direct appeal to the masses. Nevertheless, as a foyer for new ideas, its influence must have been immense. For it was in this milieu that there flourished, almost for the first time in their modern context, the concepts of a democratic franchise, equality of the sexes, and of a Republic which would assume the responsibility for the welfare of all its citizens, not as an unpleasant and temporary necessity, but as a matter of principle and policy.

By contrast with the Cercle Social, the Enragés, the revolutionary group with which the names of Roux and Leclerc are associated, have received considerable attention from historians. The Enragés formed, in 1793, first an ultra-revolutionary pressure

group in alliance with the Jacobins, and subsequently a "left opposition" to the government of Robespierre and the Montagne. As such they figure largely in such left-wing studies of the period as Jaurès' *Histoire Socialiste*, and Daniel Guérin's *Lutte de Classes sous la Première République*. Although a specialist treatise has been published on the group by the Soviet historian F. M. Zacker,¹ and a separate biographical sketch of one of its leaders by Maurice Dommanget,² the best readily accessible account of the Enragés is contained in Mathiez' *La Vie Chère et Le Mouvement Social sous la Terreur*, published in 1927.³

In the broadest sense the Enragés are, as Mathiez described them, "The organ of the disinherited classes, a prey to famine and misery . . . popular agitators who proposed, as remedies for the excessive rise in the price and scarcity of foodstuffs and essentials, requisition, 'taxation', or the official regulation of prices, and the repression of speculative hoarding".⁴ In the narrower and now more generally accepted sense they are a Parisian group of such tribunes, acting together with a greater or lesser degree of political cohesion. It would be wrong, however, to regard even the Paris Enragés as a closely organized party. Significantly, even the description "enragé" had no exclusive connotation for contemporaries of the Revolution and was applied to "fanatical extremists" of all tendencies. Nevertheless modern historians, like Marx in 1845, have seen in this sometimes uneasy alliance of individuals the germ of a socialist movement and a socialist ideology.

The Enragés were of diverse origins and experience, although they were all drawn from one section or another of the middle class. There were three men and two women. Two were Parisians, while the three others were provincials, from widely separated parts of France.

¹ *Beshenye* (Leningrad, 1931).

² Jacques Roux, "Le Curé Rouge" (*Cahiers Spartacus*, 2ième série, no. 10, Paris, 1948).

³ Where specific references are not given, material in the following biographical sketches of the Enragés is based either on the accounts cited above, or on a thesis by the writer on "The Enragés and the French Revolution" deposited at Manchester University.

⁴ "Un Enragé Inconnu", *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* (1930), p. 209.

Jacques Roux, generally regarded as the chief figure of the Enragés, was a priest. Born at Saint Cibard de Pransac, near Angoulême, in 1752, he was one of the twelve children of Gratien Roux, at that time Lieutenant of Infantry, and later Judge-assessor to the Marquis de Pransac. After studying at the Seminary at Angoulême, Roux took the tonsure at fifteen, and at twenty was himself teaching there as an auxiliary; he later took over the teaching of Philosophy and Physics. In 1785 Roux appears to have left the seminary for Saintes, where he became, for a while, almoner at the château of the Montlausiers. Shortly afterwards he was appointed to the living of Cozes, a small village of about 1,500 souls. At the outbreak of the Revolution the thirty-seven years old priest was Vicaire of the more important parish of St. Thomas de Cosnac. In 1790, suspected of having, by incendiary preaching, provoked a "jacquerie", or agrarian rising in his village, Roux was driven out by interdict, and made his way to Paris, where he hastened to restore his fortunes by taking the oath of allegiance to the revolutionary constitution, condemned by the Pope, and refused by many of his colleagues. Shortly afterwards he was elected Vicaire of St. Nicholas des Champs. St. Nicholas was one of the twelve ancient cures of the city of Paris, and a slum parish containing about 50,000 inhabitants, many of them crowded, in conditions of squalor, in the densely populated Gravilliers Section. His experiences in the Gravilliers imbued Roux with a burning hatred of social injustice, and of the political tyranny from which, he believed, it sprang. He established a strong political influence in the Gravilliers and Observatoire Sections, and in November 1792 was elected by the Gravilliers to the Paris Commune; one of his duties as a member was to accompany Louis to the scaffold, and report his execution. In 1793 he emerged as a critic not only of the laissez-faire economics of the Gironde, but of the Montagne and their constitution of June 1793, which he blamed for offering no solution to the social and economic needs of his parishioners. His agitation against the Constitution, and his scathing criticisms in the *Publiciste*,¹ a continuation of Marat's journal which he edited, earned Roux

¹ *Publiciste du Peuple Français par l'Ombre de Marat, l'Ami du Peuple.*

the enmity of Robespierre and the Jacobins, and in August he was arrested. In January 1794 he committed suicide to avoid appearing before the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Of the pre-revolutionary career of Jean Francois Varlet, the "theorist" of the Enragés, less is known. He was born in Paris in 1764,¹ and received a University education at the Collège d'Harcourt, the college of Laharpe and Talleyrand. An investigation revealed in October 1793 that, on the death of his mother, a widow, Varlet had inherited an annual income from property of 5,800 livres, so that, apart from duties in connection with a job at the Bureau des Postes, secured in 1792, he appears to have been in sufficiently comfortable circumstances to devote all his time to revolutionary intrigue and agitation. He became famous for his revolutionary orations, delivered from the benches of the Palais Royal, and from a mobile tribune in the Tuileries gardens. Although he failed to secure election to any of the revolutionary assemblies or to the Paris Commune, Varlet was very active in the affairs of his section, the Droits de L'Homme, and in 1793 led the sporadic campaign to assert the rival authority of a federation of the most "enragé" Sections against the Convention itself, based, generally, on delegate meetings held at the Evêché palace, in the shadow of Nôtre Dame, on the Île de la Cité. In a host of pamphlets he elaborated a theme of "direct democracy", expressed in terms of perpetual revolutionary vigilance exercised by the "people" over its delegated representatives. In service of this mystique of "permanent insurrection", Varlet played a part in most of the *grandes journées* of the Revolution from 1791 onward. He was arrested in the reaction which followed the massacre of the Champ de Mars in July 1791, for his part in the preceding campaign for the king's deposition. He was a member of the delegation which, on 20 June 1792 led 20,000 "sans-culottes" from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to petition the Legislative Assembly against the royal Veto, to seize the Tuileries, and finally to force on Louis the cap of liberty. It was Varlet's petition for the king's dethronement, laid on the altar of the fatherland on the Champ de Mars, which helped to inspire the Fédérés on the eve of their assault on the

¹ Martin et Walter, *Catalogue de l'Histoire de la Révolution Française*, iv. 479.

Tuileries on 10 August. Varlet, more than any other single individual was behind the abortive Parisian rising of 9-10 March, 1793; he was president of the Central Revolutionary Committee elected by the Paris Sections to conduct the successful insurrection of 29 May.

Varlet's suspicion of representative assemblies extended to the Convention as well as to its predecessors, and he was inevitably out of sympathy with the Montagne. The postponement of elections under the 1793 Constitution until the peace, and the organization of the Revolutionary Government in September 1793 threw him into open conflict with Robespierre and the ruling party, and he was arrested on 18 September. Released in November he survived the Jacobin régime, only to be imprisoned a year later by the Thermidorian Convention for attempting, with Babeuf, to revive a democratic opposition in Paris. This time he was imprisoned for almost a year before his release in 1795.¹ His name figures among a series of lists of probable supporters seized by the police at the time of the Babeuf plot in May 1796,² but he was not arrested. With other potentially dangerous ex-revolutionaries he was exiled from Paris until June 1797, and his further political career seems to have been restricted to a brief period of activity in 1799,³ when, as a result of a severe military crisis, the Jacobin spirit and the Jacobin club were temporarily revived. He was twice exiled from the capital by Bonaparte, once in 1799, after the Machine Infernale episode, and later, in 1813.⁴ After the revolution of 1830, Varlet, now 72, re-emerged into history at Nantes where he published several slight pamphlets. Nothing is known of his career after 1832.⁵

Jean Théophile Victor Leclerc, the youngest of the Enragés is chiefly notable for his publication, like Roux, of a continuation of Marat's journal in 1793, entitled the *Ami du Peuple*. Born about 1770, at Montbrison, a small town on the Vizézy, about 60 kilometers from Lyons, he was the youngest of

¹ Archives Nationaux, Dossier F⁷⁴⁷⁷⁵⁴⁰.

² *Copie des Pièces Saisies dans le Local que Babeuf occupait lors de son Arrestation* (Imprimerie Nationale, Nivôse, An V).

³ Arch. Nat. AF¹¹¹⁴⁷ Dossier 171 : *Moniteur*, 5 August 1799.

⁴ Arch. Nat. F⁷⁶⁵⁸⁶. (An Acknowledgment is due to R. C. Cobb for this reference).

⁵ Martin et Walter, loc. cit.

the five children of Grégoire Leclerc, Ingénieur des Ponts et Chaussées. In March 1790 Leclerc sailed to join his elder brothers in Martinique, as a merchants' agent. In March 1791 he was imprisoned as a revolutionary agitator by the royalist Admiral Béhague, in the prison hulks, before being returned to France, two months later. After some time at Morbihan, in February 1792 Leclerc made his way to Paris with a company of troops sent home as unreliable by his old persecutor, and constituted himself their spokesman in revolutionary circles.¹ After a brief period of service as a secret agent in Baden, Leclerc spent the winter of 1792 at Montbrison before joining, in February 1793, the Headquarters of the Army of the Alps at Lyons. At Lyons he found himself plunged into the middle of a bitter social and political war, and in March returned to Paris as emissary of the ultra-revolutionary faction, to bring to the Enragé movement there the fierce hatreds and terrorist impulses of the Lyons struggle which surpassed in intensity and bitterness that of any other town of France. Apart from his part in the rising of May 1793 when he helped to seize the Bureau des Postes, Leclerc did not figure largely in the politics of the capital, although he incurred the personal condemnation of Robespierre for his premature insistence on violence. Nevertheless, in the *Ami du Peuple*, he joined the Enragé attack on the Revolutionary Government and the postponement of the Constitution of 1793. About the same time as Varlet's arrest he was forced to suspend publication, and later found it prudent to leave Paris altogether for service against the Vendéean rebels. Even this did not save him from arrest at the time of the purge of the Hébertists, in April 1794, together with his wife, Pauline Léon, and Claire Lacombe, the women Enragé leaders. Released from prison after Thermidor Leclerc rejoined his regiment, apparently finally, for he is not heard of again in Paris.

Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe were the organizers of the militant Société des Femmes Républicaines Révolutionnaires, a Paris women's club which fought for the right for women to play an immediate and practical part in revolutionary politics. It was

¹ *Discours de M. Le Clerc-Doze* (Paris, 1792). This seems to be a variant of Leclerc D'Oze, a form which Leclerc later dropped.

not however a purely feminist organization, and in the summer of 1793 seconded closely the campaign of the Enragés, although without any distinctive individual contribution to that campaign.

Léon, the daughter of Pierre Paul Léon, a chocolate maker (*chocolatier*), was born at Paris in 1768, and on her father's death continued the business. Although she claimed to have helped to build the barricades in 1789, it was in 1791 that she first became active as a revolutionary leader. In February of that year she led a party of women rioters to sack the house at which the Abbé Royou, editor of the *Ami du Roi* was lodging. Like Varlet, Léon was a member of the Cordeliers Club, and of the Société Fraternelle des Deux Sexes, but as early as March 1791 she appears to have organized a separate club of more than 300 women followers, whom she demanded to be allowed to arm and drill.¹ In May 1793, in concert with Lacombe she formed the Républicaines Révolutionnaires, but appears subsequently to have yielded first place in the club to her co-operator. In November 1793 she married Leclerc, and afterwards shared his arrest and liberation.

Claire Lacombe, an actress, was born in 1765 at Pamiers, a small town on the Ariège, near the Spanish frontier, the daughter of Bertrand Lacombe. Of her family circumstances and early career we know nothing. By 1790, however, she had become, at twenty-five, a popular and successful actress in the provinces, and as such was remembered by a German traveller in the part of Semiramis, at Lyons. She was living at Marseilles in July 1791, and was soon afterwards at Toulon, which city she left for Paris at the end of March, 1792. There can be no doubt as to Claire Lacombe's professional ability, for, in 1797, despite prison privations under the terror, she was able to command as much as 5,000 livres in specie for a year's contract at the Grand Théâtre de la République (formerly and subsequently the Odéon.)² On her arrival in Paris, however, she seems to have decided to give all her energies to politics. She helped in propagandizing the Fédérés in preparation for the journée of

¹ P. Léon, *Adresse individuelle par des Citoyennes de la Patrie* (Imprimerie Nationale, 1791) (Ryl. F.H.T.); another copy published by the "Société Fraternelle Séante aux Minimes", in February 1792 (Ryl. F.H.T.).

² Sequestered papers, Arch. Nat. T 100¹⁻³.

10 August. With Pauline Léon she organized armed demonstrations of the *Républicaines* in the streets and at the doors of the Convention during the crisis which preceded the insurrection of 29 May 1793, and during the insurrection itself. Contemporaries regarded the *Républicaines* as a serious force to be reckoned with, and even as a possible danger to the security of the Convention. When, in the autumn of 1793, their leaders began to join the other *Enragés* in demanding the introduction of the Constitution of 1793, the Montagnard government forced the women's club to close. Claire Lacombe herself was arrested in April 1794, for alleged complicity in the Hébertist putsch. She remained in prison until August 1795, and on her release left Paris to return to the stage at Nantes. From 1797 to 1798 she was again in Paris, at the Odéon, and subsequently seems to have found herself without a job.¹ According to one early biographer she was later to be employed by Fouché as a police spy; certainly she played no further important rôle in politics.

The *Enragés* were essentially political activists. Yet two of them, at least, might be expected to have formed some kind of consistent social doctrine: Roux, the priest, and Varlet, the young intellectual, fresh from the Collège d'Harcourt.

It is curious to find Roux's views on property more orthodox than those of the pro-Girondin Abbé Fauchet. It is true that at the time of the agrarian troubles in his parish in 1790, the royal officer charged with investigations reported that Roux was "généralement accusé d'avoir presché la doctrine dangereuse qui annonçait que les terres appartenait (sic) à tous également, qu'on ne devait plus se soumettre au paiement d'aucuns droits seigneuriaux",² but too much importance ought not to be given to a single item of hearsay evidence, for in two tracts published the same year Roux expressed the most moderate convictions on property and the social question. The subversive force of the *Triomphe des Braves Parisiens*³ is limited to a hope that the age of gold is about to be reborn, in which the twin extremes of opulence and poverty will no longer exist, and to the vague demand "qu'un

¹ Arch. Nat. T 1001¹⁻³; Dossier F⁷4576. ² Arch. Nat. Dossier F⁷3664.

³ *Le triomphe des Braves Parisiens sur les Ennemis du Bien Public* (Paris, 1790) (Ryl. F.H.T.).

système d'inégalité fondé sur les préjugés, les opinions et la mauvaise foi, soit délaissé tout à coup". The other pamphlet, *L'Apôtre Martyr de La Révolution*¹ contains as prologue a project for a Declaration of the Rights of Man, article xvii of which states that "Les propriétés étant un droit inviolable et sacré, nul ne peut en être privé, si ce n'est lorsque la nécessité publique légalement constatée l'exige évidemment, et sous condition d'une juste et préalable indemnité". Such an attitude to property reflects nothing more than commonplace moderate liberal thought of the period. Indeed, it is almost identical with the formula of Louis XVIII's *Charte Civile*, published in 1814.² There is little reason to believe that, at least in 1790, Roux's views were any more "advanced" than the fragment of verse which he chose to head the draft Declaration.

"Les mortels sont égaux ; ce n'est pas leur naissance
C'est la seule Vertu qui fait leur différence.
La loi, dans tout état, doit être universelle,
Les mortels, quels qu'ils soient, sont égaux devant elle."

Though we lack any similar statement of doctrine for later years it is apparent that Roux believed then, like Fauchet, in the natural right of man to subsistence. On one occasion in 1793 he spoke to the Convention of "Les denrées de première nécessité et les subsistances auxquelles les hommes ont un droit légal du moment où ils voient le jour".³ On another he wrote of "Les productions de la terre" which "comme les éléments, apartiennent à tous les hommes".⁴

Of the Enragés, Varlet was responsible for the most sustained and serious attempt to frame a social doctrine. The foundation of his system was the Social Contract of Rousseau, a revered oracle. "La politique des prêtres, des grands, des financiers", he wrote in 1792, "fut de vous tenir à l'ombre de l'ignorance . . . Rousseau a paru, les principes, les lumières prévalent".⁵ The

¹ *L'Apôtre Martyr de la Révolution* (Paris, 1790).

² "Inviolabilité de toutes les propriétés. . . . L'état ne peut exproprier que pour cause d'utilité publique, légalement constaté, et avec une indemnité préalable", Dareste, *Histoire de la Restauration* (Paris, 1880), i. 32.

³ *Moniteur*, 11 March 1793.

⁴ *Publiciste*, 28 July 1793.

⁵ *Plan d'Une Nouvelle Organisation de la Société Mère des Amis de la Liberté ; suivie de la Religion de la Philosophie* (Paris, 1792).

occasion of the first important essay was the election of the Convention in the Autumn of 1792. "Quand vous dresseriez les articles du Contrat Social", Varlet advised the deputies, in his own plan for the regeneration of France, "vous vous imaginerez organiser une communauté où chacun ne doit recueillir qu'à proportion de la part qu'il a mise". . . . "Vous cimenteriez le pacte social par des institutions bienfaisantes. Les signes auxquels nous voulons les reconnaître sont l'extirpation de la mendicité, la disparition de la trop grande inégalité des fortunes, la régénération des mœurs, la propagation des lumières, le concours unanime des citoyens aux charges, aux avantages de la société."¹ "Le Contrat Social", he wrote in a second pamphlet published about the same time, "doit spécialement appliquer à défendre l'homme faible de l'homme puissant" . . . "Le droit de possession territoriale a des limites dans la société; sa latitude doit être telle que l'industrie commerciale ou agricole n'en reçoive aucune atteinte. Dans tous les états les indigens forment la majorité; et comme leur liberté, leur sûreté, leurs conservations individuelles sont des biens antérieurs à tous, leur volonté la plus naturelle, leur droit le plus constant, est de se préserver de l'oppression des riches, en limitant l'ambition d'acquérir, et rompant, par des moyens justes, la disproportion énorme des fortunes."²

In a few brief passages of the *Ami du Peuple* Leclerc united Roux's insistence on the natural right to subsistence with Varlet's view of the nature of the social contract. "Tous les hommes" he argued, "ont un droit égal aux subsistances et à toutes les productions de la terre qui leur sont d'une indispensable nécessité pour assurer leur existence".³ "En apportant à la société cette portion de force et de l'industrie qu'il eut employé dans l'état de nature à assurer son existence", he wrote, of a man entering into the social contract, "peut il perdre le droit naturel et indispensable de pouvoir à ses besoins?"⁴

Perhaps the most original contribution of the Enragés to socialist theory was the argument that the Revolution was a class

¹ *Projet d'un Mandat Spécial et Impératif aux Mandataires du Peuple* (Imprimerie du Cercle Social, Paris, 1792).

² *Déclaration Solennelle des Droits de L'Homme dans l'Etat Social* (Paris, 1792).

³ *Ami du Peuple*, 10 August 1793.

⁴ *Ibid.* 20 July 1793.

struggle in which the bourgeoisie, and not, as was generally supposed, the "nation" had worsted the aristocracy and achieved supreme power. "Ce sont les riches qui, depuis quatre ans ont profité de la Révolution", Roux wrote in June 1793, "c'est l'aristocratie marchande, plus terrible que l'aristocratie nobiliaire qui nous opprime". . . . "Les lois ont été cruelles à l'égard du pauvre, parce qu'elles n'ont été faites que par les riches et pour les riches."¹ "On rétablit l'aristocratie des riches, qui est plus terrible que le sceptre des rois",² the *Publiciste* echoed later in the year, "jusqu'à présent la Révolution n'a été favorable qu'à une classe d'hommes qui a opprimé l'autre à l'ombre de la loi".³ In similar vein Varlet had written, at the beginning of March warning that "L'aristocratie de fortune veut s'élever sur les ruines de l'aristocratie nobiliaire . . . la constitution que l'on veut nous donner est un enfant qu'il faut étouffer dans son berceau. Elle est tout en faveur du riche contre le peuple."⁴ He was later to draw a line, for the purposes of revolutionary action between "le boutiquier, l'aristocrate, et l'artisan" and to advocate the disarming of the first two classes.⁵ The class-struggle thesis appears in its most developed form, however, in the pages of Leclerc's *Ami du Peuple*. "A l'aristocratie nobiliaire" the journalist wrote in his second number, "a succédé l'aristocratie bourgeoise et mercantile; cette classe, qui formait en quelque sorte une caste intermédiaire entre la première et le peuple, avait acquis, grâce à ses richesses autant de besoins et par conséquent autant de vices que la classe supérieure. Elle vit dans le principe d'un assez bon oeil une révolution qui la faisait aller de pair avec elle. Mais quand le peuple, fort de sa puissance, de son courage, éclairé sur ses droits, réclama ceux de l'égalité, et fonda la République, alors ces hommes devinrent ses plus cruels ennemis."

¹ J. Roux, *Adresse à la Convention* (Paris, 1793).

² *Publiciste*, 6 August 1793.

³ *Ibid.* no. 266 (undated).

⁴ *Tableau de la Situation Politique de Paris, en Réponse aux Calomnies de Roland*, circulated on 8 March and quoted by *Mercure Français*, no. 68, 9 March. Attribution to Varlet is based on circumstantial evidence.

⁵ *Correspondence Politique*, 24 June 1793, reporting a session of the Cordeliers Club.

It was partly the prevalence of such language which prompted Michelet to write, in the preface to his 1868 history of the revolution, that "Au coeur de Paris même, dans les noires et profondes rues ouvrières (les Arcis, Saint Martin), fermentait le Socialisme, une révolution sur la révolution". It is tempting—and it must have been tempting to Marx—to regard this aspect of the Enragé doctrine as an anticipation of the Communist Manifesto. In reality contemporary class relationships were far more complex, and much less clearly defined than a few such selected quotations might seem to indicate. The class to which Enragé propaganda made its greatest appeal, and which provided the political strength of the Enragé movement was not a proletariat of wage labourers, but the "sans-culottes" consisting predominantly of small masters and their journeymen and apprentices. An analysis of a survey made in 1791¹ reveals that the average proportion of employees to employers in Paris was 16.6 to one. In the Faubourg Saint-Denis the largest concern in Paris, a textile firm, employed 800 workers. In the Ponceau Section two other textile firms employed 500 and 415 workers respectively. Such figures, and similar returns of large building firms are exceptional, however. More typical are the statistics of the Quinze Vingts Section, where forty-five out of fifty-six cabinetmakers and joiners employed less than ten men, and twenty-three of them employed less than four. G. Rudé has shown how, by industrial action and political pressure, the Paris wage-earners managed to maintain, if not to improve their standard of life between 1789 and 1793.² The same was not true of the petit-bourgeois and artisan strata. The collapse of the assignat, under the strain of war scarcities and continual inflation, threatened them with ruin as prices rose and savings and small vested incomes lost their value. "Comment vivront les petits rentiers?" Roux demanded of the Convention in June 1793, "ceux qui ont 2, 3, 4, 600 livres de rentes, mal payées encore, ou une pension viagère sur les caisses publiques?"³

¹ Braesch, "Essai de Statistique de la Population Ouvrière de Paris", *La Révolution Française*, v. 63, p. 289.

² G. Rudé, "Prices, Wages, and Popular Movements in Paris during the French Revolution", *Ec. Hist. Rev.* (1953-4), p. 246.

³ *Adresse à la Convention*.

To this class, and to the Enragés, the villains of the piece were the "agioteurs", or money-speculators, who profited from the situation and helped to aggravate it by their manoeuvres. In June 1793 the Paris Departmental Committee of Public Safety received a report on a group of eight such speculators, allegedly controlling between them the large sum of 3,600,000 livres.¹ At the beginning of August representatives of the Halle au Bled Section confiscated 153,447 livres in specie which they had discovered hidden in a coach belonging to another agioteur.² An allied target for popular and Enragé hatred was the "accapareur", the "cornerer" of scarce supplies of food and raw materials. In no. 269 of the *Publiciste Roux* alleged that one such speculator, Perrain, had made more than 250,000 livres in a month by furnishing cotton for military supplies, on a government contract. Of such origins were the "fortunes rapides et insolentes, ouvrage de l'intrigue et de l'avidité" flailed by Prudhomme in the *Révolutions de Paris*. Protests against the activities of the "cornerers" were frequent. On 6 February 1793, for example, a deputation of journeymen tinsmiths indicted before the Convention "Citoyen Bois, entrepreneur pour le service des armes, d'avoir accaparé toutes les matières de manière que les autres entrepreneurs n'en ont pas, et qu'ils ne peuvent, en conséquence, faire travailler les ouvriers".³ Similarly, on 6 April, a deputation of shoemakers (cordonniers) complained that, as a result of the sudden rise in the price of leather, bought up by speculators, they were unable to supply boots contracted for by the Government.⁴ A year later Charlier remarked bitterly to the Jacobin club, of a similar crisis, "les cuirs ne manquent pas, mais ils sont accaparés par les gros tanneurs qui empêchent par là les petits tanneurs de travailler pour la République".⁵ The protest, by petition and riot, against the machinations of the food "cornerer", a perennial of Sans-culotte politics of the period, forms a large part of the subject of Mathiez' *La Vie Chère*, already mentioned.

The heart of the Enragé agitation consisted of a sustained attack on the two classes of speculators. The note was sounded

¹ H. Calvet, *Un Instrument de la Terreur à Paris* (Paris, 1941), p. 232.

² *Chronique de Paris*, No. 139, 7 August 1793.

³ Jaurès, *Histoire Socialiste*, iv. 1028.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 1050.

⁵ *Moniteur*, 7 March 1794.

by Roux in a sermon preached at St. Nicholas' in May 1792, repeated at numerous public meetings and published as a tract. "Demandez que la peine de mort soit prononcée contre les accapareurs de comestibles", he told his hearers, "contre ceux qui, par le commerce de l'argent, par la fabrication des pièces de monnaie au dessous de leur valeur naturelle discréditent nos assignats, portèrent nos denrées à un prix excessif, et nous font arriver à grands pas au port de la contre-révolution".¹ In another address, delivered to the Observatoire Section in October, the revolutionary priest elaborated his theme: "Il y a de lâcheté", he protested, "à tolérer ceux qui s'approprient les produits de la terre et de l'industrie, qui entassent dans les greniers de l'avarice les denrées de première nécessité et qui soumettent à des calculs usuraires les larmes et l'appauvrissement du peuple . . . tous ceux, qui, par le commerce de l'argent discréditent nos assignats et portent les denrées à un prix excessif".² Varlet conducted a parallel campaign by petition and tract. "Des financiers endurcis au crime", he wrote, in June 1792, "spéculeraient l'usure la plus scandaleuse sur la misère publique".³ On 6 August he demanded of the Convention "des lois sévères contre toutes espèces d'accaparement; l'usure, le monopole sont des assassinats moraux que doivent trouver leur place dans le code pénal".⁴ The ideal constitution must contain laws to forbid that "par l'agiotage, le monopole, l'accaparement, les fortunes particulières se grossissent au dépens de la fortune publique".⁵

Similar phrases recur, almost ad nauseam, in the Enragé oratory and writings of 1793, without sufficient variation to merit further reproduction. They indicate, certainly, a considered revulsion from speculation and a hatred of speculators; but it would be wrong to interpret them as an attack on capitalism and capitalists. Both Roux and Varlet took the trouble to excuse themselves from any such possible imputation. "Lorsque je me déchaîne contre les accapareurs et les agioteurs", Roux

¹ *Discours sur les Moyens de Sauver la France et la Liberté* (Paris, 1792).

² *Discours Prononcé dans l'Assemblée Générale de la Section de l'Observatoire* (Paris, 1792).

³ *Plan d'une Nouvelle Organisation . . .*

⁴ *Voeux formés par des Français libres* (Paris, 1792).

⁵ *Mandat Spécial et Impératif . . .*

explained in June 1793, “ je suis bien éloigné de comprendre dans cette classe infâme un grand nombre d'épiciers et de marchands qui se sont rendus recommandables par leur civisme et par leur humanité ”.¹ “ On n'entend point ici ”, Varlet wrote in similar fashion, “ des grandes propriétés acquises par de belles spéculations, ou des entreprises hardies, ni gêner en rien nos rapports commerciaux avec l'étranger ”. One of the basic principles of the social contract must be “ l'émulation, l'encouragement accordés aux talents dirigés vers l'utilité commune ”.²

The difficulties into which the Enragés were led by the niceties of the distinction between legitimate and criminal speculation were not allowed to escape comment. “ Il faut enfin démasquer ces faux patriotes qui agitent perpétuellement par ces mots d'accaparement et d'agiotage ; qu'ils ne définissent jamais ”, Ducos wrote in the *Chronique de Paris*.³ Hébert, chief figure of the Commune and editor of the *Père Duchesne*, affected to regard the Enragé campaign as misdirected diversionary activity. “ Mais ces accapareurs, où sont ils ? est-ce à Paris ? ” he demanded. “ Non, foutre, mais dans les grandes villes de commerce. C'est là, foutre, qu'il faut aller les chercher, et non pas à Paris, où il n'existe que les détaillants. Les millionnaires de Bordeaux et de Marseille se foutent bien que l'on pille un de leurs bateaux sur la Seine, quand leurs magasins et leurs vaisseaux regorgent de marchandises.”⁴ Although Hébert cannot be classed as a disinterested critic, the practical programme of the Enragés does seem to have been based on political reflex rather than political reflection. “ Peuple, tu souffres la misère au milieu des biens qui t'avoisinent ”, Leclerc told the Jacobin Club in May 1793, “ Citoyens, on vous dit libres, et vous êtes esclaves de la misère . . . sachez que vous ne ferez pas de la révolution sans répandre de sang ”.⁵ “ Elle n'est pas éloignée ”, echoed Roux, “ l'époque où les fripons regorgeront de ce qu'ils ont volé à la classe laborieuse et utile à la société ”.⁶ “ On aurait dû confisquer au profit de la République les fortunes immenses des égoïstes qui, depuis quatre ans ont entassé trésors

¹ *Adresse à la Convention*.

² *Mandat Spécial et Impératif* . . .

³ 1 July 1793.

⁴ No. 252.

⁵ Buchex et Roux, *Histoire Parlementaire*, a. 27, v. 17.

⁶ *Publiciste*, 20 July 1793.

sur trésors. . . . Il faut leur ôter la faculté d'acquérir des propriétés et des immeubles. Il faut qu'ils meurent de faim et de soif au milieu de leurs trésors comme Tantale au milieu des eaux qui ne peut boire." ¹ Violence of expression was simply a screen for lack of policy, however, for the nearest the Enragés approached to any plan for an ordered redistribution was the clause of a draft Declaration of Rights by Varlet which laid down that " Les biens amassés au dépens de la fortune publique, par le vol, l'agiotage, le monopole, l'accaparement, deviennent des propriétés nationales à l'instant où la société acquiert par des faits constans la preuve de concussion ".²

Such language was a great deal less specific than that of the Deputy Carra, who, as a preliminary to the confiscation of large fortunes accumulated since 1740, proposed in February 1793 a law to force all former officials concerned with financial administration, and all bankers and their agents or their heirs to give an account of their wealth.³

There were, however, some positive elements in the Enragé programme. As early as May 1792 Jacques Roux pressed for state purchase and distribution of grain; in June 1793 he demanded of the Convention pensions for the dependents of Revolutionary Volunteers, and a fixed national maximum price for bread. In September 1793 Leclerc advocated in the *Ami du Peuple* the extension of price control to all essential commodities. But all these cries were old politics when the Enragés took them up, and there were many revolutionaries unattached to the group working more effectively for the same measures.

At its best the Enragé philosophy was an application of the social doctrines of the Cercle Social to practical politics; at its worst it was a blind, if sometimes, righteous, fury against the speculators and their protectors in the Assemblies. At either extreme it was very far from Communism, however defined.

A direct connection between the Cercle Social, the Enragés, and Babeuf, such as that implied by Marx, would be difficult to establish, although we have seen that Varlet, one of whose pamphlets was published by the Cercle Social press, was an

¹ *Publiciste*, 28 July 1793.

² *Déclaration Solennelle des Droits* . . .

³ Jaurès, *Histoire Socialiste*, iv. 1050.

associate of Babeuf. It is not necessary, however, to postulate the services of the Enragés as intermediaries between the Utopian Communism of the eighteenth century, and the revolutionary Communism of the Babeuf plot. At the head of Babeuf's famous *Manifeste des Égaux* of 1796 there stands a passage from Condorcet extolling "Égalité de fait, dernier but de l'art social". As early as 1791 Babeuf had exclaimed in favour of "cette loi agraire, cette loi que redoutent et que sentent venir les riches". On his arrest at that time, among his effects was found Dolivier's *Essai sur la Justice Primitive*, a contemporary advocacy of rural Communism by a parish priest. To Babeuf as to Bishop Fauchet the heart of the social question was the inequality of property in land; with this problem the Enragés were concerned not at all. If a historical link between the two men is to be sought, it might perhaps more plausibly be discovered in the works of two of Robespierre's lieutenants on the Committee of Public Safety, Saint-Just and Billaud-Varenes, both of whom wrote to advocate the restriction of land holdings to a maximum size,¹ and in the Ventôse Laws, framed by Saint-Just in 1794, and intended to regulate the redistribution of the property of 100,000 suspects among propertyless "patriots".

¹ L. A. Saint-Just, *Fragments d'Institutions Républicaines* (posthumous, Paris, 1800); J. N. Billaud-Varenes, *Les Elémens du Republicanisme*, 1793.