

ANTI-JEWISH TRENDS IN FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM*

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Recent manifestations of Jew-hatred behind the Iron Curtain, may appear as a new phenomenon to those who are unacquainted with the history of leftist movements. To those, however, who have studied the subject, they are less surprising. Manifestations of leftist Judeophobia occurred more than once in the past and, what is no less interesting, not only in the East but also in the West. French Revolutionary Syndicalism offers a good example of how antisemitism can penetrate even into the most radical leftist circles.¹

It may be recalled that Revolutionary Syndicalism was a strong movement in France at the beginning of the twentieth century.² This movement was opposed to "politics" in general and to parliamentary tactics in particular. It fought against capitalism, and advocated a régime in which the trade unions would own the means of production. It recommended "direct action," sabotage, and the general strike as the most effective weapons of the proletarian struggle.

* On the subject of antisemitism in the Socialist and labor movements, see Silberner, E., "Was Marx an anti-Semite?," in *Historia Judaica*, vol. xi (1949) 3-52; *idem*, "Proudhon's Judeophobia," *ibid.*, vol. ix (1948) 61-80; *idem*, "Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the Socialist International," in *Judaism*, vol. ii (1953) 117-22; *idem*, "Charles Fourier and the Jewish Question," in *JEWISH SOCIAL STUDIES*, vol. viii (1946) 245-66; *idem*, "The Attitude of the Fourierist School Toward the Jews," *ibid.*, vol. ix (1947) 339-62; *idem*, "Friedrich Engels and the Jews," *ibid.*, vol. xi (1949) 323-42; Szajkowski, Z., "The Jewish Saint-Simonians and Socialist Antisemites in France," *ibid.*, vol. ix (1947) 330-60; *idem*, *Antisemitism in der frantseizisher arbeter bavegung fun Fourierizm bizn soif Dreyfusaffere, 1845-1906* (New York 1948); Mayer, B., "Early German Socialism and Jewish Emancipation," *JEWISH SOCIAL STUDIES*, vol. i (1939) 409-22; Bloom, S. F., "Karl Marx and the Jews," *ibid.*, vol. iv (1943) 3-16; Duker, Abraham G., "Polish Emigre Socialists on the Jewish Problem," *ibid.*, vol. xiv (1952) 317-42; and Spiro, George, *Marxism and the Bolshevik State. Workers Democratic Government versus National-Burocratic 'Soviet' and Capitalist Regimes* (New York 1951) p. 681-793 (Ed.).

¹ The author found very useful indications in Yurii M. Steklov's "The Latest Trends in French Anti-Semitism," in *Sovremennyi Mir* (November-December 1912). Some pertinent details are also contained in S. Frydman's *Di professionele bavegung tsvishn di yiddische arbeter in Frankreich biz 1914* (Paris 1937).

² An excellent bibliography on Syndicalism is given in Egbert, D. D., and Persons, S., (Ed.), *Socialism and American Life*, vol. ii (Princeton 1952) p. 73-77, 223-24.

Emile Pouget, one of the distinguished leaders of Revolutionary Syndicalism, once asserted that this movement was free from antisemitism.³ But his assertion is couched in such a language that it conveys the feeling of hypocrisy and double-talk. "In order to avoid any false interpretation," said Pouget, "and so that the sensitive epidermis of our Jewish comrades does not tremble anew, let it be well understood that among us there is and can be neither blind philosemitism nor masked antisemitism."⁴ Yet in spite of this declaration there is incontrovertible evidence proving the existence of anti-Jewish bias in Revolutionary Syndicalism.

Apart from Robert Louzon, a militant syndicalist, who—without being in the strict sense a racialist—denounced "Semitism,"⁵ at least three important syndicalists were more or less antisemitic: Georges Sorel, the theorist of the movement; Emile Pataud, secretary of the electricians' union; and Emile Janvion, editor of *Terre libre, organe syndical d'action directe*. Both Pataud and Janvion had Anarchist leanings, and could in fact be dealt with either under the heading of Syndicalism or under that of Anarcho-Syndicalism.

I. Pataud and Janvion

In the Spring of 1911, Pataud and Janvion announced by posters "a great anti-Jewish and anti-Masonic meeting" in Paris.⁶ It took place on April 3, 1911, and was chaired by Pataud, one of the most popular agitators of the General Confederation of Labor. The main speaker, Janvion, was acclaimed by an audience of some 1800 people,⁷ among whom the *Camelots du Roi* were quite numerous. Some shouted: "A bas les Juifs!" Others screamed: "A bas les jésuites!"⁸ Some sang the International, others the antisemitic chanson *La Youpignole*⁹ A Russian present at the meeting felt as if he were among the pogromists of his native country.¹⁰

According to the stenographic record of his speech, Janvion attacked only rich Jews and Freemasonry, "the international shield of cosmopolitan Jewry."¹¹ On the other hand, Pataud declared that it was not his fault if

³ On Pataud, see André Tridon, *The New Unionism* (New York 1917) p. 63, 86-88.

⁴ *La Guerre sociale* (January 3, 1912) 2.

⁵ Louzon, in *Mouvement socialiste*, vol. xix (1906) 193-99.

⁶ *Archives israélites*, vol. lxxii (1911) 109.

⁷ According to Pataud, in *Humanité* (April 11, 1911) 2.

⁸ *Temps* (April 5, 1911) 2.

⁹ *Libre parole* (April 4, 1911) 3, and *Guerre sociale* (April 12, 1911) 2.

¹⁰ *Humanité* (April 4, 1911) 3.

¹¹ Janvion, in *Terre libre* (April 15, 1911) 4.

ninety-five percent of the capitalists that he was attacking in connection with labor conflicts were Jews.¹² His statement that he bore "no ill will towards little Jews" was accompanied, however, by shouts from all sides: "*A bas tous les Juifs, petits ou gros!*"¹³ Before closing the meeting, Pataud moved a resolution which was accepted by the audience. The resolution condemned Freemasonry for its efforts to corrupt the trade unions. It also stated that the citizens present at the meeting put on record, "without therefore being antisemites," the complicity of the principal Jewish capitalists with Freemasonry.¹⁴ Thus, according to the official records neither Pataud nor Janvion seem to have made any specifically antisemitic pronouncements during the meeting. (It is quite clear that attacking Jewish capitalists is not necessarily an antisemitic act). Moreover, after the meeting, Pataud and Janvion declared in open letters to the press that they were not antisemites.¹⁵

Yet, no one in Socialist and Anarchist circles seemed to believe them. Both Socialists and Anarchists were horrified at the open co-operation of the two leaders with royalists and reactionaries. The antisemitism of the two men was denounced by Jean Longuet in *L'Humanité*,¹⁶ and by Gustave Hervé and Sébastien Faure in *La Guerre sociale*.¹⁷ It also provoked indignation among Jewish trade-unionists, who, on April 6, 1911, held a protest meeting at the Bourse de travail. At this meeting Jean Longuet recalled what Jewish revolutionaries had done for the cause of the international proletariat. The Bundist Liber condemned in a Yiddish speech the "antisemitic declarations" of Pataud, who was present at the meeting and thereupon protested once more that he was not an antisemite.¹⁸ Pataud did not, however, succeed in convincing the audience, which passed a motion urging the members of his union not to make common cause with their secretary.¹⁹

The question may be raised, of course, whether Pataud and Janvion were genuine antisemites, or whether they were only accused of antisemi-

¹² *Libre parole* (April 4, 1911) 3.

¹³ *Humanité* (April 11, 1911) 2.

¹⁴ Full text of the resolution in *Humanité* (April 11, 1911) 2.

¹⁵ Pataud, *ibid.*; Janvion, in *Action française* (November 23, 1912) 1; and in *Bataille syndicaliste* (January 4, 1913) 2.

¹⁶ *Humanité* (April 4, 1911) 3; (April 11, 1911) 2.

¹⁷ *Guerre sociale* (April 5, 1911) 1; (April 12 1911) 2.

¹⁸ *Temps* (April 8, 1911) 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* The union of electricians never took any action against their secretary Pataud because of his anti-Jewish stand. It expelled him, however, in 1913, after he, Janvion and a few other friends, had made an armed attack on the editorial staff of the *Bataille syndicaliste*. Cf. *Bataille syndicaliste* (February 4, 1913) 1; (February 20, 1913) 2.

tism because of their association, for one reason or another, with antisemitic elements outside the trade union movement. There is enough material available to answer the question. Pataud himself declared publicly that he was neither a philosemite nor an antisemite, but "simply an asemite."²⁰ At best this could mean that in his hostility towards the Jews he did not go so far as the antisemites. That he was, however, hostile to them in principle is hardly surprising if one recalls that he was convinced—as he said in a letter to Rothschild—that "Jew is synonymous with inhuman."²¹

As for Janvion, his antisemitism was even stronger than that of Pataud. Janvion's paper, *Terre libre*, published a great number of articles directed not only against the bourgeoisie but also against Jewish immigrant workers in France. Philosemitism in France was condemned by the paper, for the very obvious reason that in a country dominated by the Jew it is "a crime against the revolutionary spirit."²² This domination, asserted Janvion's paper, was not due to a chance. In their march towards Canaan, he argued, cosmopolitan Jewry was carrying out, particularly in France, a centuries-old plan to invade all the nations of the world.²³ "The Judaized gang of Jaurès,"²⁴ were, according to *Terre libre*, examples of how deeply this domination penetrated even into the Socialist movement.

French workers, according to the same paper, were suffering not only from Jewish capital but also from Jewish labor. "Internationalism is an excellent doctrine! Excellent above all for the kikes (*youtres*) and the Moldo-Walachians who take away jobs from Frenchmen."²⁵ French workers were thus beginning to realize the consequences of "the Jewish invasion."²⁷ Arguing that the "Semitic infiltration" into workshops, stores and offices, lowered the standard of living and increased the unemployment of Frenchmen,²⁸ *Terre libre* approved "the economic movement directed

²⁰ Pataud, in *Guerre sociale* (April 12, 1911) 2.

²¹ Pataud as quoted in *Humanité* (April 11, 1911) 2. His letter to Rothschild, says Hervé, "pue l'antisémitisme à plein nez." Cf. *Guerre sociale* (April 12, 1911) 2.

²² Janvion, in *Terre libre* (February 15, 1911) 1. In 1900, Janvion wrote: "Je dis que ceux qui ont déchainé dans l'anarchie cet invraisemblable mouvement de philosémitisme (le droit d'être juif, etc.) ont encouru la plus lourde responsabilité. C'est entre ces deux pôles: philosémitisme et antisémitisme que nous devons rester." *Temps nouveaux, Supplément littéraire*, vol. iii (1900-02) 235.

²³ Anon., in *Terre libre* (September 1, 1911) 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.* (March 1, 1911) 3.

²⁵ Riquier, Marius, in *ibid.* (November 15, 1910) 1.

²⁶ Anonymous leading article, *ibid.* (October 15, 1911) 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Pringault, François, in *ibid.* (January 1, 1912) 2.

against the "kikish 'jaundice'" (*'jaunisse' youpine*).²⁹ What disturbed the Syndicalist paper and its editor, Janvion, was not merely the competition of Jewish workers, but also the fact that they organized themselves into separate unions. They were thus accused of being "Jewish nationalists" and of interposing themselves between French workers and "Jewish capitalism."³⁰ A warning was given to them by the syndicalist comrades of *Terre* antisemites. We are satisfied, for the moment, to act as *men*. Try, therefore, to conduct yourselves as *men*, and not as *Jews*. Otherwise, you will soon have facilitated by your outbursts of an unwelcome nationalism, the explosion which you dread."³¹ Quite a curious proclamation by people who, *for the moment*, were neither philosemites nor antisemites!³²

II. Georges Sorel

Sorel (1847-1922) wrote much on a variety of subjects, but—prior to the last years of his life—hardly anything about the Jewish problem. All he had to say about it before 1910 was that antisemitism must not be considered as an ephemeral phenomenon, and that it could be eliminated only by elevating the moral level of society, and by securing satisfactory reforms for those classes which furnish the greatest contingent of antisemites.³³

In 1910, he expounded his views on the problem to one of his younger friends, who recorded them carefully in a notebook revised by Sorel himself. The Jews, he said, are an old and quite a philosophical race. They have been driven into commerce not by any natural inclination, but by economic discrimination. They are as assimilable as any other people, and it is only due to their persecution and discrimination that they have not as yet been fully assimilated. Therefore, antisemitism, particularly that of Drumont, is basically wrong. Jews, and more specifically French Jews, have their faults. Unaccustomed as they are to political liberty, they abuse it. In particular, they show the tendency to exaggerate the dangers to which they are exposed. They manoeuvre in favor of a certain license in political life. Had they remained quietly in their place, antisemitism as a so-called doctrine would perhaps never have been born. They are also imprudent, perhaps, in going politically too far to the left.³⁴ Numerous as these criticisms were,

²⁹ Pringault, in *ibid.*

³⁰ Anonymous editorial, "Aux prolétaires juifs," *ibid.* (April 15, 1911) 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Terre libre* is full of other antisemitic articles which the author does not intend to list here.

³³ Sorel, "L'Eglise et l'Etat," *Revue socialiste*, vol. xxiv (1901) 407.

³⁴ Variot, Jean, *Ed.*, *Propos de Georges Sorel* (Paris 1935) p. 146-53.

Sorel did not draw from them any antisemitic conclusions. On the contrary, they were made in a rather friendly spirit.

Within two years, however, Sorel changed into an antisemite. It must be noted in this connection that this change is not due to his abandonment of Revolutionary Syndicalism. In fact, he never renounced the Syndicalist ideology. True, in 1910 he became convinced that the Syndicalist *movement* had become corrupt, and consequently broke with it. But he never broke with the Syndicalist *ideology*. Even later, after having established a close relationship with the right nationalist circles of Maurras and the *Action française*, he was not converted to their ideology.³⁵ He did not become a "traditionalist",³⁶ nor, still less, a precursor of Fascism.³⁷ Yet, however different from his new friends he may have remained, his new antisemitism did not differ much from theirs.

Sorel expounds his new stand on the Jewish problem in an apology for Urbain Gohier, who, after having left the Socialist movement, obtained some notoriety as an author of numerous antisemitic writings. Like Gohier, Sorel asserts that Frenchmen must defend their state, their customs, and their ideas, against the Jewish invaders who want to dominate everything.³⁸ He also quotes,³⁹ not without implied agreement, a passage from Daniel Halévy (a grandson of Léon Halévy, the well-known Jewish collaborator of Saint-Simon): "Antisemitism is a very plausible attitude, and to a certain extent a prudent one."⁴⁰ And, indeed, in view of his new outlook, antisemitism must have been considered by him as plausible and prudent. The Jews, he now asserts, have contributed powerfully to the maintaining of the West in barbarism.⁴¹ In their present struggle against the church, they show no less desperate eagerness than their ancestors who filled the court of Pilate with their blood-thirsty clamor against Jesus. They occupy a prominent place in the world of demagogy, where, without any outlay of intelligence, it is easy to find good positions. Jewish agitators are exploiting for their own purposes the anti-clericalism of the masses. The wealthy Jews

³⁵ See Dolléans, Edouard, "Le Visage de Georges Sorel," *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, vol. xxvi (1940-47) 97-112; and particularly Sorel's letter to Dolléans of October 13, 1912, *ibid.*, p. 106-07.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See Posse, E. H., in *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. xv (1930) 161 ff.

³⁸ Sorel, "Urbain Gohier," *Indépendance* (January 1, 1912) 320.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Luttes et problèmes* (Paris 1911) 99.

⁴¹ Sorel, "Quelques prétentions juives," *Indépendance*, vol. iii (1912) 234.

encourage them, in the belief that in difficult times those radical agitators will lead the masses to the rescue of the Jewish plutocracy. Jewish parvenus, devoured by their ostentatiousness, believe that money entitles them to lasciviousness, and therefore fight against the church and the Christian rules of behavior. Nearly all of them encourage obscene literature.⁴²

No one among us would think of regarding the Jews as enemies of our country, if they would consent to live as ordinary citizens, following any honorable trade, performing their religious activities, and contributing to general culture as much as possible; but unfortunately the Jewish intellectuals consider themselves little Messiahs, and their nation thinks itself obliged to support them in their expeditions. In order to have the right to call themselves architects of great transformations, the Jewish writers fight stubbornly against the spiritual heritage of the society into which they have been admitted by the accident of migration. Such undertakings can not fail to arouse justified anger. A people so abject that it would out of sheer wantonness sacrifice to the Jewish spoofers (*ironistes juifs*) the depository of its traditions, would obviously deserve to suffer the worst catastrophes.⁴³

The Jews, according to Sorel, show eagerness in conquering "social citadels": the university, where French traditions had been so well preserved, is now their property; they are becoming preponderant in the army; they patronize the modernists, now so numerous in the church. Those who do not want to submit to their control are vilified. All this causes a strong reaction on the part of the French. The defense of their culture by men such as Charles Maurras (and his *Action française*) may endanger indeed the position of the Jews if they themselves do not muzzle their own intellectuals.⁴⁴

From all that has been said Sorel draws a practical lesson for the benefit of the Jews. They should realize the anti-Jewish character of the recent changes which had occurred in French minds. They would act wisely if they limited themselves to peaceful mercantile pursuits, instead of aspiring to lead humanity to Messianic lands.⁴⁵

A biographer of Sorel mentions in passing that during the few years which preceded World War I his hero became "violently antisemitic."⁴⁶ He

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 290-91.

⁴³ Sorel, "Quelques prétentions juives," *ibid.*, p. 332-33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 335-36. With his usual wit, Sorel mentions the two *littérateurs* by the name of Natanson, "two Jews who came from Poland to regenerate our poor country so unhappily contaminated by Christian civilization." "Aux temps dreyfusiens," *ibid.*, vol. iv (1912-13) 52.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56. Sorel does not seem to have examined Zionism; in a passing remark (*ibid.*, p. 43), however, he considers its adherents as fanatics.

⁴⁶ Pirou, Gaëtan, *Georges Sorel* (Paris 1927) 50.

also recalls that in making a eulogy of Lenin, "Sorel elegantly reconciles antisemitism and bolshevism,"⁴⁷ by crediting Lenin with the constructive side of the Communist Revolution and by blaming the Jews for its acts of terrorism.⁴⁸ Whether or not this reconciliation is elegant is a question of opinion and personal taste. But whether elegant or not, it is of greater significance that Sorel—the great theorist of Revolutionary Syndicalism—found it possible at all to reconcile his social philosophy with a rather vulgar antisemitism.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence*, 4th ed. (Paris 1919) 450.