剑桥政治思想史原著系列（影印本）

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

反思暴力

Reflections on Violence

Sorel 索列尔

Edited by
JEREMY
JENNINGS

中国政法大学出版社

乔治士·索列尔

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

反思暴力/(法)索列尔著.—北京:中国政法大学出版社,2003.5
剑桥政治思想史原著系列(影印本)
ISBN 7-5620-2418-9
Ⅰ.反… Ⅱ.索… Ⅲ.暴力—研究—英文 Ⅳ.D03
中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2003)第 052771 号

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书　　名	《反思暴力》
出 版 人	李传敢
经　　销	全国各地新华书店
出版发行	中国政法大学出版社
承　　印	清华大学印刷厂
开　　本	880×1230mm　1/32
印　　张	11.125
版　　本	2003 年 7 月第 1 版　　2003 年 7 月第 1 次印刷
书　　号	ISBN 7-5620-2418-9/D·2378
印　　数	0 001-2 000
定　　价	25.00 元
社　　址	北京市海淀区西土城路 25 号　　邮政编码　100088
电　　话	(010)62229563　(010)62229278　(010)62229803
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网　　址	http://www.cupl.edu.cn/cbs/index.htm

Introduction

Sorel's early writings

Born in 1847, Georges Sorel came late to writing about politics. A provincial and bourgeois upbringing was completed by an education in Paris and then by over twenty years working as a civil engineer for the French State. Most of that time was spent in the southern town of Perpignan, far from the intellectual and political excitement of Paris. Yet it was here that Sorel began to write.

Sorel's first articles appeared in the mid-1880s. For the most part these were concerned with obscure scientific subjects, but many were devoted to studying the impact of the French Revolution upon the Pyrénées-Orientales region where he worked. Then, in 1889, came the publication of two books: *Contribution à l'étude profane de la Bible* and *Le Procès de Socrate*. Both dealt only indirectly with politics, but where they did so they conveyed a message of moral conservatism. The France of the Third Republic was thought to be in a state of moral decline. To reverse this process, Sorel recommended the values of hard work, the family and those of a rural society.

Sorel's retirement from government service in 1892 and move to the suburbs of Paris coincided with his first interest in Marxism. Upon the basis of a limited acquaintance with the texts of Marx, Sorel initially saw Marxism as a science. This, however, was quickly to change as he perceived the inadequacies of the economic determinism associated with Marxist orthodoxy. Accordingly, Sorel undertook a fundamental reinterpretation of Marxism, calling for a

return to what he described as 'the Marxism of Marx'. Denying the veracity of the so-called 'laws of capitalist development', he deprived Marxism of the certitude of ultimate victory, replacing the idea of an economic catastrophe facing capitalism with that of a moral catastrophe facing bourgeois society. 'Socialism', Sorel wrote, 'is a moral question, in the sense that it brings to the world a new way of judging human actions and, to use a celebrated expression of Nietzsche, a new evaluation of all values.' This momentarily brought him close to an endorsement of political democracy and reformism, only for his allegiances to shift again with the new century.

The context of Sorel's *Reflections*

Two movements serve to explain this new stance and form the immediate backdrop to the argument of *Reflections on Violence*. The first is the rise of the French syndicalist movement, committed to the tactics of direct action by the working class. Sorel had been following these developments since the late 1890s, producing a series of texts that sketch out the potential of the *syndicats* or trade unions,[1] and he had been especially impressed by the efforts of his friend Fernand Pelloutier to forge the *bourses du travail*[2] into organizations of proletarian self-emancipation; but it was after 1902, when the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) launched a series of spectacular strikes, that syndicalism came to the forefront of Sorel's attention. In 1906 the CGT adopted the 'Charter of Amiens', announcing that it 'brings together, outside every political school of thought, all those workers conscious of the struggle necessary to obtain the disappearance of wage-earners and employers'. As such, syndicalism was 'le parti du travail'; it scorned politics, the Republic and patriotism, and, in its regular clashes with employers and the State, denounced what it termed the

[1] See especially 'L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats', *L'Humanité nouvelle* 2 (1898), pp. 294–307, 432–45; 'L'histoire du trade-unionisme anglais', *L'Ouvrier des deux mondes* 2 (1898), pp. 337–40; 'Les grèves', *La Science sociale* 30 (1900), pp. 311–32, 417–36; 'Les grèves de Montceau-les-mines et leur signification', *Pages libres* 9 (1901), pp. 169–73.

[2] The *bourses du travail* were originally conceived as labour exchanges but in Pelloutier's scheme figured as centres of working-class life and education.

'government of assassins'. Through strikes it intended to bring capitalism to an end, replacing it not by State socialism but by a society of producers. Sorel did not create or even inspire the syndicalist movement, nor was he ever fully in agreement with its ideas (he never endorsed its use of industrial sabotage, for example), but he did believe that it embodied what was 'truly true' in Marxism, giving substance to its central tenet of class struggle leading to a 'catastrophic' revolution. Moreover, observation of its activities revealed to Sorel that 'the normal development of strikes has included a significant number of acts of violence' (p. 39) and it was this that led him to conclude that 'if we wish to discuss socialism seriously, we must first of all investigate the functions of violence in present social conditions' (p. 39).

The Dreyfusard movement provides the second context for these reflections. In 1898 Sorel had rallied to the cause of the Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus, wrongly imprisoned for treason. In this he shared the conviction of many that more was at stake than the fate of Dreyfus himself. For Sorel, the defence of Dreyfus followed from what he regarded as the ethical impulse that defined socialism, an impulse that meant that the notions of 'morality and justice' informed socialist conduct. Sorel, like many of his friends who frequented the bookshop of Charles Péguy, was to feel deeply betrayed by the outcome of Dreyfusard agitation. On this view, with the victory of the Bloc des Gauches in 1902 the slogan of 'republican defence' was turned into an excuse for careerism and political advancement by politicians only too ready to abandon their principles and to adorn themselves with the privileges of power. Yet this alone cannot explain the sheer venom that is directed by Sorel against these Third Republic politicians, most of whom have been long since forgotten. From 1901, with the 'law of associations', the government passed a series of anticlerical laws, culminating in the separation of Church and State in 1905. These laws, to Sorel's disgust, were applied vindictively against the religious orders of the Catholic Church. This, however, was not all. Under Prime Minister Combes, the government began the process of purging the higher ranks of the army and in doing so used the Masonic Lodges to provide information about the religious and political loyalties of its officers. When the scandal broke, it provided damning evidence of an intricate system of spying and delation. For Sorel, this was final

proof of the corruption of the Republic and of its politicians. This disgust is evident throughout Sorel's text.

Philosophical influences

If syndicalism and the Dreyfus affair provide the immediate political context for *Reflections on Violence*, then it is Sorel's immersion in the broader intellectual environment of his day that gives the text its vibrancy and its originality. Sorel received one of the best educations that the French State could offer, yet he regarded himself as self-educated. This was true to the extent that he was a voracious reader, consuming books on a daily basis, usually for review. He was, however, also a great listener (regularly attending Bergson's lectures in Paris), conversationalist (especially before his many young admirers) and letter writer (with correspondents all over Europe). No subject was out of bounds, and all were dissected by Sorel's penetrating intelligence. The footnotes of *Reflections on Violence* alone make for fascinating reading. What they show is the mind of a man who was equally at home with science, history, politics, philosophy and theology, who could move easily from discussing the early history of the Christian Church to contemporary tracts on psychology. In *Reflections on Violence*, references to the virtually unknown Giambattista Vico are found alongside those to Blaise Pascal, Ernest Renan, Friedrich Nietzsche, Eduard von Hartmann, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, John Henry Newman, Karl Marx, Alexis de Tocqueville and countless other intellectual luminaries of the Third Republic, as part of an argument designed to focus our attention upon the possibility of attaining an 'ethics of sublimity'.

There are at least three of Sorel's conclusions or perspectives that need to be highlighted. To begin, Sorel was amongst the first in France to read Marx seriously. The interpretation that underpins much of the economic argument of *Reflections on Violence* is that Marxism is a form of 'Manchesterianism' (i.e. classical liberal economics). Marxism believed, therefore, that the capitalist economy should be allowed to operate unhindered, without interference from the State and without concern for the welfare of the workers. In this way not only would capitalism surmount all the obstacles before it but the workers would prepare themselves for the final

struggle for emancipation. When capitalism did not follow this path – due, for example, to a concern to foster 'social peace' or class 'solidarity' – the result was 'economic decadence' and, as a consequence, the non-attainment of the intellectual, moral and technical education of the proletariat. This is why Sorel believed that the workers should respond with 'black ingratitude' to the benevolence of the employers and to the propagators of what he contemptuously refers to as 'civilized socialism'.

Secondly, as an assiduous reader of the works of Max Nordau, Théodule Ribot and Gustave le Bon, as well as Henri Bergson, Sorel became acutely aware of the non-rational sources of human motivation. This was a major preoccupation at the end of the nineteenth century. Human beings, Sorel tells us, 'do nothing great without the help of warmly coloured images which absorb the whole of our attention' (p. 140). It is this that informs Sorel's rejection of what he dubs the 'intellectualist philosophy' and which he associates most of all in this text with the great nineteenth-century critic and Biblical scholar, Ernest Renan. A sceptic such as Renan, like all those who believed that 'eventually everything will be explained rationally', could not understand why an individual, be it a Napoleonic soldier or a striking worker, would perform a selfless and heroic act.

Thirdly, Sorel dismissed the nineteenth-century 'illusion of progress', scorning its optimism in favour of an undisguised pessimism. This is a theme that can be found in Sorel's very earliest writings (where, like Nietzsche, he castigates the 'optimism' of Socrates), but in this text it owes much to his reading of Eduard von Hartmann and the seventeenth-century religious philosopher, Pascal. It is from the latter that he takes the idea that the 'march towards deliverance' is narrowly conditioned both by the immense obstacles that we face and by 'a profound conviction of our natural weakness' (p. 11). On this view, happiness will not be produced automatically for everybody; rather deliverance – if it is ever obtained – will be the outcome of heroic acts, secured with the help of 'a whole band of companions'. It is this emphasis upon the difficulties to be encountered on the journey ahead that allows Sorel to regard the wandering Jew, 'condemned to march forever without knowing rest', as 'the symbol of the highest aspiration of mankind'. Similarly,

it encouraged him to believe that the pessimist is not 'subject to the bloodthirsty follies of the optimist driven mad by the unforeseen obstacles that his projects meet' (p. 11).

Style and methodology

If Sorel regarded himself as self-educated, so too he was acutely aware that the way he presented his argument in *Reflections on Violence* did not conform to 'the rules of the art of writing'. As the introductory 'Letter to Daniel Halévy' reveals, he was unapologetic about this, informing his readers that 'I write notebooks in which I set down my thoughts as they arise' (p. 5). Into those notebooks went only those things that he had not met elsewhere. There was, however, more to this than stylistic idiosyncrasy. As a methodology, it was suited to what Sorel described in one of his essays on syndicalism as 'the fluid character of reality' and, indeed, Sorel was appalled at the idea of producing a perfectly symmetrical and coherent body of knowledge. To do so would be to pander to those content with 'the impersonal, the socialized, the *ready-made*' and it is to avoid this that Sorel, in the appendix entitled 'Unity and multiplicity', outlines his concept of *diremption* as a method of investigation providing 'a symbolic knowledge' of what he characterizes as 'the chaos of social phenomena'.[3] The explanations disclosed by this process would be at best partial and incomplete.

Similarly, Sorel had no desire to provide a closed philosophical system that could readily be put to use by any disciples. Rather, he saw philosophy as 'only the recognition of the abysses which lie on each side of the path that the vulgar follow with the serenity of sleepwalkers' (p. 7). His aim, therefore, was to awaken 'within every man a metaphysical fire'. This commitment to 'the spirit of invention' impacts upon the argument of *Reflections on Violence* in a whole series of ways. If Sorel shared Bergson's hostility towards the prevailing scientism of their day, it is important to realize that Sorel believed that he himself was 'proceeding scientifically'. It was the opponents of syndicalism who were out of touch with the discoveries of modern science and philosophy. Thus, for example, it

[3] See G[eorges] Sorel, *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat* (Paris, Rivière, 1921), pp. 6–7.

is central to Sorel's argument that he should dismiss the 'bourgeois conception of science' that sees the latter as 'a mill which produces solutions to all the problems we are faced with' (p. 132) . In the same way he constantly disparages the purveyors of the 'little science' who believed that the 'aim of science was to forecast the future with accuracy'. All confuse science with clarity of exposition.

Amongst those purveyors were the Intellectuals (a noun Sorel always capitalizes). These, Sorel tells us, 'are not, as is so often said, men who think: they are people who have adopted the profession of thinking' (p. 156). They have done so for an 'aristocratic salary' and also because they intend to exploit the proletariat. To that end they sketch out a utopia, an 'intellectual product' that as 'the work of theorists' directs 'men's minds towards reforms which can be brought about by patching up the system' (pp. 28–9).

Myths

This leads to the development of one of Sorel's most controversial ideas: the importance of myths. Myths, as 'expressions of a will to act', are the very antithesis of utopias. Again Sorel addresses this issue in his introductory 'Letter to Daniel Halévy', precisely because it informs so much of his subsequent argument. 'The mind of man', Sorel tells us, is so constituted that it cannot remain content with the mere observations of facts but wishes to understand the inner reason of things' (pp. 24–5). Moreover, it is Bergson's philosophy that helps us to understand this. Bergson, Sorel tells us, asks us to consider 'the inner depths of the mind and what happens during a creative moment' (p. 26). Acting freely, we recover ourselves, attaining the level of pure 'duration' that Bergson equates with 'integral knowledge'. This new form of comprehension was identified as 'intuition', a form of internal and empathetic understanding, and it was precisely this form of intuitive understanding that Sorel believed was encompassed by his category of myth. Sorel had been working towards this conclusion for sometime, concluding in his essay *La Décomposition du marxisme* (1908) that Marx had 'always described revolution in mythical form', but in the main body of *Reflections on Violence* it is the general strike that features as a myth, precisely because it provides an 'intuitive' understanding and 'picture' of the essence of socialism. More than this, those who

live in the world of myths are 'secure from all refutation' and cannot be discouraged. It is therefore through myths that we understand 'the activity, the sentiments and the ideas of the masses as they prepare themselves to enter on a decisive struggle' (p. 28).

Class struggle and violence

What is the purpose of this decisive struggle? In the final chapter of his text Sorel describes what will be 'the ethic of the producers of the future' and in doing so he confirms that the 'great preoccupation' of his entire life was 'the historical genesis of morality'.[4] The particular morality described is an austere one, owing much to the severe moralism of Proudhon and not diverging substantially from that set out in Sorel's early pre-socialist writings. It is also a description couched in terms of Sorel's only extended discussion of the ideas of Nietzsche. Sexual fidelity, grounded upon the institution of the family, is at its heart. Having earlier told us that the world will become more 'just' to the extent that it becomes more 'chaste', Sorel now argues in this text that 'Love, by the enthusiasm it begets, can produce that sublimity without which there would be no effective morality' (p. 236).[5] But, at another level, it is to be a morality that rejects 'an ethics adapted to consumers', an ethics that devalued work and overvalued pleasure, an ethics that gave pride of place to the parasitic activities of the politician and the intellectual. In its place was to be a morality that turned 'the men of today into the free producers of tomorrow, working in workshops where there are no masters' (p. 238). A new morality of selfless dedication to one's work and one's colleagues would, in other words, be attained through participation in what amounted to a new set of self-governing industrial institutions. Yet there was more to this 'secret virtue' than a distinct proletarian morality. Work in the modern factory, Sorel believed, demanded constant innovation and improvement in the quantity and quality of production, and it was through this that 'indefinite progress' was achieved. This striving for perfection ensured not only that industrial work attained the

[4] 'Lettere di Georges Sorel a B. Croce', *La Critica* 26 (1928), p. 100.
[5] On this important theme, see F[rançoise] Blum, 'Images de "la Femme" chez Georges Sorel', *Cahiers Georges Sorel* 4 (1986), pp. 5–25.

status of art but also that the factory would become the site of an 'economic epic' to rival the Homeric epic of the battlefield.

Sorel also makes it clear that this new morality will emerge at the expense of the 'total elimination' of the bourgeoisie. It will, moreover, be brought about by a class working 'subterraneously' within society, 'separating itself' from the modern world. Sorel locates the entire argument of *Reflections of Violence* in the context of a situation where the possibility and nearness of decline is ever present, thus again continuing a theme found in his earliest essays. The bourgeoisie, as the title of one chapter makes clear, are seen as being decadent, 'destined henceforth to live without morals'.[6] Their decadence, however, is also economic: no longer are they willing to function as the bold captains of industry, driving the economy forward to greater heights. Here, Sorel believed, history presented us with a clear historical precedent. By locating his argument within the framework of Vico's ideal history of *corsi* and *ricorsi* (see pp. xxxiii–xxxiv, below), he felt himself able to demonstrate the consequences of a social transformation carried out in a period of moral and economic decadence: the victory of Christianity over the Roman Empire showed that 'at least four centuries of barbarism had to be gone through before a progressive movement showed itself; society was compelled to descend to a state not far removed from its origins' (pp. 83–4). The same descent into barbarism would occur if the proletariat, itself corrupted, secured its ends by dispossessing a humanitarian and timorous bourgeoisie of its possession of a degenerate capitalism.

Sorel's conclusion was unambiguous: the workers must maintain divisions within society, distancing themselves from the corrupting processes of bourgeois democracy and forsaking social peace in favour of class struggle and confrontation: 'everything may be saved if the proletariat, by their use of violence, manage to re-establish the division into classes and so restore to the bourgeoisie something of its energy' (p. 85). This followed from Sorel's account of Marxism as a version of 'Manchesterianism': violence, 'carried on as a pure and simple manifestation of the sentiment of class struggle', would disabuse philanthropic employers of their paternal concern for their employees, teaching them to devote themselves to securing

[6] See also 'La Crise morale et religieuse', *Le Mouvement socialiste* 22 (1907), p. 35.

the progress of production and nothing more. This, in turn, would restore the *fatalité* of capitalist development, thereby allowing capitalism to attain its 'historical perfection' and to establish the material foundations of a future socialist society. On this account, proletarian violence appears 'a very fine and heroic thing', serving 'the immemorial interests of civilization'.

The revolutionary tradition

This, then, was Sorel's shocking conclusion: violence would save the world from barbarism. But what sort of violence was it to be? Here we come to the heart of so much of the subsequent misunderstanding (as well as misuse) of his ideas, for Sorel was adamant that a distinction had to be drawn between the violence of the revolutionary proletariat and the force deployed in the name of the State by politicians and intellectuals.

As Sorel made clear in his essay 'Mes raisons du syndicalisme',[7] he did not come to syndicalism via Jacobinism, nor did he share the 'veneration' for the men who made the French Revolution. Moreover, this distaste for the 'terrorists of 1793' can be traced back to his very earliest writings. A letter of 1872, for example, highlights his aversion to 'la jésuitière rouge',[8] whilst his writings prior to his conversion to Marxism in 1892 likewise detail his hatred of the Jacobin tradition, its bourgeois adherents and their passion for dictatorial State power.

In his mature writings – and especially in *Reflections on Violence* – his criticisms of the Revolution and its supporters can be distilled into three specific claims. Firstly, if Sorel recognized that Rousseau was not responsible for the Terror and the actions of Robespierre, he did believe that certain key Rousseauian notions had been passed on into democratic theory. Specifically, Sorel considered that the concept of the general will had been used to justify the idea of 'government by all the citizens', despite the fact that the whole thing was nothing but a 'fiction'. The reality had been that during the Revolution every *salon*, and then every Jacobin club, believed

[7] 'Mes raisons du syndicalisme', in *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, p. 248.

[8] P[ierre] Andreu, 'Une lettre de Sorel en 1872', *Cahiers Georges Sorel* 2 (1894), pp. 93–107.

that it possessed the secret of the general will, thereby justifying their limitless authority; passed down to the democrats of contemporary France, this conceit was now entertained by a class of intellectuals who had turned themselves into the people's masters.[9]

Secondly, Sorel believed that contemporary socialism had embraced a whole set of the Revolution's most reprehensible attitudes. First among these was the idea of 'Parisian dictatorship'. 'Even today', Sorel wrote, 'many socialists believe that if power were to fall into their hands it would be easy to impose their programme, their new morals and new ideas upon France.' More damning still was Sorel's contention that the Revolution was fundamentally inegalitarian in inspiration. Thus, Sorel wrote, it was clear that those socialist politicians 'imbued with the spirit of the Revolution' wished to preserve 'the principle of hierarchy'. So we find that in *Reflections on Violence*, not only does Sorel endorse Tocqueville's conclusion that there was no radical break between the political structures of pre- and post-revolutionary France but he also contends that, for contemporary socialists, revolution can be reduced to a change of government personnel.[10]

It is the theme of continuity between the *ancien régime*, the Revolution and contemporary socialism that underpins Sorel's third major criticism of the ideology and practice of 1789–93. 'One of the fundamental ideas of the *ancien régime*'. Sorel writes in what is arguably the key chapter of *Reflections on Violence* (chapter III, 'Prejudices against violence'), 'had been the employment of the penal procedure to ruin any power which was an obstacle to the monarchy' (p. 96). The aim had been not to maintain justice but to enhance the strength of the State and thus 'negligence, ill-will and carelessness became revolt against authority, crime or treason'. The Revolution, Sorel argued, 'piously inherited this tradition', giving immense importance to imaginary crimes, guillotining those who could not satisfy the expectations aroused by public opinion, and producing in the classic piece of 'Robespierre's legislation', the law of 22nd Prairial, a law whose definitions of 'political crime' were so vague as to ensure that no 'enemy of the Revolution' could escape.

[9] See 'L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats', in *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, p. 118 and *Les Illusions du progrès* (Paris, Rivière, 1921), p. 106.

[10] See especially 'Le Socialisme et la Révolution française', *Le Pays de France* 1 (1899), pp. 220–8.

Here, raised to pre-eminence, was the 'doctrine of the State'. Stripped of its prestige, therefore, all that remained of the Revolution were 'police operations, proscriptions and the sittings of servile courts of law'.

Little, Sorel indicates, has changed. 'By cruel experience', he tells us, 'we know now, alas! that the State still had its high priests and its fervent advocates among the Dreyfusards' (p. 101). No sooner was the Dreyfus case over than Combes and the government of 'republican defence' began another 'political prosecution'. Jaurès and his friends could not bring themselves to condemn the system of spying introduced into the army. Ultimately, however, one is led to conclude that for Sorel the key piece of evidence was provided by Jaurès' equivocation in his *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française* when faced with the need to account for the Jacobins. Such people, Sorel tells us, 'are worthy successors of Robespierre', they 'preserve the old cult of the State; they are therefore prepared to commit all the misdeeds of the *ancien régime* and of the Revolution'.

The general strike

The point of all this is to establish that 'the abuses of the revolutionary bourgeois force of [17]93' should not be confused with 'the violence of our revolutionary syndicalists'. Syndicalism conceived the transmission of power not in terms of the replacement of one intellectual elite by another but as a process diffusing authority down into the workers' own organizations. Those organizations, unlike a system of political democracy replete with Rousseauian baggage, provided a pattern of genuine and effective representation. Most importantly, the violence employed by the proletariat in the course of the general strike bore no relationship to the ferocious and bloodthirsty acts of jealousy and revenge that characterized the massacres of the French Revolution.

Here, therefore, Sorel goes to great pains to define what he means by violence. If the object of State force was to impose a social order based upon inequality and exploitation, the purpose of proletarian violence was 'the destruction of that order'. Secondly, such violence would be inspired by a conception of war drawn from the ancient Greeks: it would be unselfish, heroic, disciplined, devoid of all material considerations. It would be informed by ethical values

engendering 'an entirely epic state of mind'. The proletariat, Sorel writes, 'longs for the final conquest in which it will give proof of the whole measure of its valour. Pursuing no conquest, it has no need to make plans for utilizing its victories' (p. 161).

Sorel, in fact, pays little attention to the details of the general strike, preferring to emphasize that it will be 'a revolt pure and simple' in which the proletariat engages upon 'serious, formidable and sublime work'. On one point, however, he is clear: 'It may be conceded to those in favour of mild methods that violence may hamper economic progress and even, when it goes beyond a certain limit, that it may be a danger to morality' (pp. 177–8). Too much violence would be a threat to civilization. There is, though, little danger of this from the proletariat. Drawing again upon historical parallels, Sorel points out that although there were few Christians martyrs their martyrdom served to prove the absolute truth of the new religion; in the same way, for syndicalism there would in reality be 'conflicts that are short and few in number', yet these would be sufficient to evoke the idea of the general strike as being 'perfectly revolutionary'. It would be accomplished 'by means of incidents which would appear to bourgeois historians as of small importance'. 'We have the right to hope', Sorel therefore concludes, 'that a socialist revolution carried out by pure syndicalists would not be defiled by the abominations which sullied the bourgeois revolutions' (p. 108).

Lenin and the Russian Revolution

It was precisely because in the years after 1909 the syndicalist movement appeared to effect a compromise with the forces of parliamentary socialism that Sorel withdrew his support from it, engaging in a series of publishing enterprises with figures drawn from the antiparliamentary Right. The latter act has been seen as an indication of Sorel's support for the restoration of the monarchy. This was not so, although it is the case that Sorel's writings in the years immediately prior to the First World War consist almost totally of a series of unforgiving attacks upon virtually every aspect of France's republican political system: its decaying democracy, corrupt administration, superficial art, poor morals and shallow religion. Controversially, his loathing of politicians and bourgeois intellectuals now

focused upon the form of the messianic and rootless Jew as the antithesis of everything that had brought greatness to France.[11] Given this shift of emphasis towards an unremitting attack upon the whole culture of the Third Republic, it is important to note that in his 'Foreword to the third edition', written in 1912, Sorel proclaims himself 'more than ever convinced of the value of this philosophy of violence'.

It was this scorn of the bourgeois and democratic Republic that ensured that Sorel could not rally to the *union sacrée* that brought France's political forces together in 1914. He poured scorn on pronouncements calling for the workers as 'citizens' to relive the days of 1793, to organize a 'levée en masse'. In time, he concluded, 'this war will be regarded as execrable above all because of the reawakening of the Jacobin spirit it promoted'. 'All socialist thought', he wrote to Mario Missiroli in August 1914, 'has become Jacobin', the recent dismal events showing that 'the old Jacobin tradition remained alive, a tradition formed of frenzied envy, pride and puerile imaginings'.[12]

There remained for Sorel, however, one final episode which seemed to indicate that socialism might be able to free itself of the State force of Jacobinism: the 'extraordinary events' of the October Revolution and Lenin's seizure of power. Sorel's enthusiasm for the Bolsheviks was such that he added a new section voicing his approval not just to *Reflections on Violence* but also to *Les Illusions du progrès* and *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*. He also wrote for *La Revue communiste*. What Sorel actually knew of Lenin and the Russian Revolution was slim indeed, but importantly he saw Lenin as the very antithesis of a Russian Jacobin and he believed that the Revolution itself had been carried out on syndicalist lines. Note, too, that Sorel again makes a distinction between different types of violence. If he admits that Lenin is not a candidate for a 'prize for virtue', he will succeed thanks to the 'heroic efforts' of the Russian proletariat rather than through 'a war of cowardice' that

[11] 'Quelques prétentions juives', *L'Indépendance* 3 (1912), pp. 217–36, 277–95, 317–36.

[12] 'Lettres à Mario Missiroli', in [Georges Sorel] *Da Proudhon a Lenin e L'Europa sotto la tormenta* [ed. Gabriele de Rosa] (Rome, Edizioni di storia e litteratura, 1974), pp. 500–14.