

Julian Wright

ABSTRACT

The French socialist movement developed out of an eclectic mixture of ideas and militant groupings in the late nineteenth century. As party unity emerged from 1905 many of the different theoretical positions developed by activists up to that point were sidelined in the interests of an emerging party orthodoxy. The strand of thinking exemplified by the working-class journalist and teacher Eugène Fournière, an advanced form of economic federalism that drew on the writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, found it increasingly difficult to identify itself clearly within the new world of twentieth-century socialism; and yet, this strand has remained a source of fruitful discussion, emerging later in the twentieth century when the party mainstream has come under attack from other libertarian socialists. This article attempts to unpick the relationship between the intellectual history of these forms of socialism and the issues of political identity faced by militants who were attempting to forge a clear identity. Examining Fournière as a case-study for the way the socialist movement has struggled to work with many of its own native socialist traditions, this article suggests that a fresh examination of the political culture of the socialist movement will give a stronger basis for understanding the way in which dissidence and critical questioning of the party mainstream has been a vital strand of socialist militancy and thinking in France.

Le mouvement socialiste français développait au sein d'une nébuleuse d'idées et groupements militants dans le dix-neuvième siècle. Dès l'achèvement du parti socialiste unifié (1905), plusieurs des courants théoriques qui avaient joué un rôle important étaient écartés dans l'intérêt général du parti. Le courant développé par le journaliste ouvrier et professeur Eugène Fournière était un fédéralisme économique centré sur les théories de Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, mais ce courant éprouvait de la difficulté à être identifié dans le nouveau contexte du monde socialiste. Cependant, ce courant a demeuré un important lieu de débat idéologique dans le vingtième siècle, surtout quand l'orthodoxie du parti a été le sujet d'attaques provenant de la gauche libertaire. L'article analyse les relations entre l'histoire intellectuelle de ces socialismes et les problèmes d'identité politique éprouvés par les militants. Le cas Fournière est analysé pour mieux comprendre pourquoi le mouvement socialiste éprouve tant de difficulté à assimiler ses propres traditions socialistes. L'article suggère une nouvelle perspective sur la culture politique du mouvement socialiste pour mieux comprendre les façons dont la dissidence et la questionnement ont fonctionné comme un élément central de l'activité et de la pensée militante du socialisme en France.

MAIN TEXT

Soon after the unification of French socialism in the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière (SFIO) in 1905, the party was attacked by one of its more vocal militants. With impeccable working-class credentials and a respected position as director of the journal *La Revue socialiste*, Eugène Fournière challenged his fellow socialists to focus on the practical education of the working class. He argued that the SFIO was lapsing into a sterile culture of political rhetoric, encouraging workers

simply to wait for revolution, while doing little to engage with the economic changes of the twentieth century. What would happen if socialism's leaders neglected their role as educators, and failed to engage with practical economic problems? "Let us all, radicals, socialists, syndicalists, get back to our work, our duty, which is to make political and economic democracy. If not, we might as well wait for the gendarme, and hope that he doesn't come from abroad."¹ Later generations of French socialists have had many opportunities to ask themselves whether their actions have not indeed left the way open to the right. In Fournière's own day, nationalism and neo-monarchism emerged to seduce potential members of the socialist movement; but similar questions needed to be asked by socialists in 1940, faced with Pétain and Laval, or in the 1950s, struggling over Algeria and playing into the hands of De Gaulle, or indeed in 2002, when Lionel Jospin was defeated in the first round of the presidential elections.²

Voices such as that of Fournière, claiming to have a solution to the ongoing anxieties and internecine quarrels of the left, have often been difficult to hear. As this article will show, deciding who was unorthodox and for what reason was an essential part of French socialist culture. Defining socialist "orthodoxy" detracted from the development of a party base that would give socialism a real connection with the working class. Yet such definitions were also a vital part of political identification, through which voters could recognize individual socialist leaders and the ideas they stood for. This article will explore the problem of political identity and the socialist movement, by focusing on a socialist thinker and militant who found, as the movement evolved, that his own position was constantly the subject of debate. Fournière's historical legacy, which was already being pre-empted by processes of political positioning in his own day, is an example of how the obsession with definitions and identity, has spilled over into the writing of socialist history.

¹ Eugène Fournière, "La course à l'abîme", *Revue socialiste* 47 (Aug. 1907): 157.

² Fournière pursued a lengthy polemic with the French nationalist Jules Soury, in *La Revue socialiste* 36 (July 1902), out of which his sense of the failings of modern socialism grew in intensity. On the socialist party's later crisis of identity: François Bazin, "Le parti d'Épinay est mort" in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 27 Nov. 2008; Jacques Julliard, "Réinventer la gauche", in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 17 May 2007.

The complexity of Fournière's own ideas and activities makes him a useful example for this exploration of the theme of political identity. Read against the story of socialist unification, in which not just theories but also institutional cultures were turned upside down as party unity was forged in the early twentieth century, the analysis reveals important changes in the relationship between ideas and militancy within the socialist movement. The socialist party's abiding mission – to ensure that social values shape the political system and define political power – has been frequently undermined by its failure to connect those ideas to the establishment of a real militant base. Yet these questions about militancy and the shaping of democratic behavior in the future were at the heart of Fournière's work; he understood not just the importance of political theory to the future of the state, but also how a movement or a party needed to build on theory to adopt new militant practices that would in themselves construct social democracy, in the present.

This article further uses the example of Fournière as a window onto an anti-statist, libertarian socialism that has re-emerged in recent years both as a framework for political reflection, and as an inspiration to historians who are interested in challenges to the centralized state in modern French thought.³ Fournière advocated a socialism based on economic federalism. He belonged to a distinctive strand of left-wing thought and activity in France which is difficult to label, but which tended to be suspicious of mainstream "orthodox" Marxism. As he himself described it (Fournière was a historian of socialism as well as a theorist), this strand dated back to the days of Charles Fourier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and was passed on to Fournière's generation through the work of Benoît Malon.⁴ Fournière insisted that socialism needed to pay less attention to high-flown revolutionary rhetoric and abstract economic theory, and more to the emergence of social groupings in the here-and-now. He opposed hard-line Marxist theory, but found it just as difficult to embrace

³ See Pierre Rosanvallon, in *Le modèle politique français: la société civile contre le jacobinisme, de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris, 2004). Rosanvallon has aligned Fournière's intellectual contribution with that of a theorist such as Mosei Ostrogorski. Jacques Julliard has promoted the study of an alternative form of socialism through the *Cahiers Georges Sorel*, founded in 1983 and now entitled *Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, and the journal has maintained its interest in publicizing research into non-Marxist or non-"orthodox" socialist forms.

⁴ Eugène Fournière, *Les théories socialistes au XIXe siècle, de Babeuf à Proudhon* (Paris, 1904); and idem., *Le règne de Louis Philippe* (Paris, 1901), which was vol. VIII of the *Histoire socialiste* directed by Jean Jaurès.

anarchism, because like the self-proclaimed “orthodox Marxists”, supporters of Jules Guesde, many anarchists of his period had adopted a revolutionary rhetoric which he thought was disconnected from the social realities facing the working class.

Fournière’s theories were unfolded in a number of essays which developed this theory of associations and laid out a vision of socialist morality based on engagement with the practical concerns and forms of economic life.⁵ Indeed, Fournière could be said to have given Proudon’s economic theory its natural political extension, by adapting it for use by a political party in a democracy. He sought to persuade other socialists of the central importance for socialism of a message of social liberty delivered through free associations, and was desperate to see the party adapt its structures and its culture to engage more with the sort of social reforms that would encourage this.⁶ In Fournière’s writings, the idea behind this project was eventually encapsulated in the neologism “Sociocratie”, by which he meant an ultra-decentralized state, where communities, trades unions and indeed families were given ultimate responsibility for their social development. “Sociocratie” was the socialization of the State through the growth of free associations that would progressively restore to society its “responsibility for the *res publica*”, as Philippe Chaniel underlines.⁷ Fournière wanted socialists to embrace a vision of society where both the state and political parties would wither away, while economic forces in the locality would emerge as the source of political sovereignty.

⁵ Notably: *L’Âme de demain. Les moyens pratiques du socialisme* (Paris, 1900); *Essai sur l’individualisme* (Paris, 1901); *Ouvriers et patrons* (Paris, 1905); *L’Individu, l’association et l’État* (Paris, 1907); *La Sociocratie. Essai de sociologie positive* (Paris, 1910). Philippe Chaniel argues correctly that to reduce Fournière to the definition of “renegade reformist” that French Marxists lazily tossed at him is to miss the significance of his socialist idealism. He helpfully associates Fournière’s theoretical writings with an attempt to develop and enrich the vision of socialist moralism so dear to earlier nineteenth-century French socialist thought: Philippe Chaniel, *La délicate essence du socialisme: l’association, l’individu et la République* (Paris, 2009), 79-80.

⁶ Philippe Chaniel, “De Benoît Malon à Eugène Fournière, ou *La Revue socialiste* comme laboratoire ‘socio-sociologique’”, in Gérard Gâcon, Claude Latta, Hean Lorcin and René-Michel Bourdier, eds, *Benoît Malon et La Revue socialiste* (Lyon, 2011), 138-9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

Fournière was born in 1857, to a working class family in Paris, and apprenticed to a jeweler.⁸ After initial support for the Marxist of Jules Guesde, he became a devoted follower of Benoît Malon, who had a profound influence on non-Marxist strands of French socialism.⁹ Like Malon, Fournière was self-taught, and during the period that concerns us in this article, his social status as a struggling journalist was an important part of his socialist identity. It was with this working-class identity very much at the heart of his campaign that Fournière won a seat in the 1898 elections, for the department of the Aisne.¹⁰ Having lost the seat in 1902, Fournière concentrated more on his theoretical writings, published in a sequence of essays on society and socialism. His struggle to put bread on the table, writing hundreds of articles for all sorts of publications, keeping up teaching engagements at institutions such as the École Polytechnique or the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, was an important part of his development as a socialist. At a time when middle-class intellectual socialism was building a more solid base within the united socialist party, Fournière, belonging to an older generation of militants, with true working-class roots and a daily struggle for existence, frequently did feel out of place.

As he grew older, Fournière became increasingly frustrated by the course of French socialism. He became a socialist Jeremiah, a loner on the margins of the party. While he remained a member of the unified party until his dying day – highly important when other independent-minded socialists like Aristide Briand and René Viviani had caused controversy by leaving the party and taking up

⁸ Eugène Fournière was studied briefly in the 1950s: Justinien Raymond, "Eugène Fournière", *L'Actualité de l'Histoire. Bulletin trimestriel de l'Institut français d'Histoire sociale*, 25 (1958). He has otherwise received limited attention until recently; Philippe Chanial's extended introduction to the new edition of Fournière's *Essai sur l'individualisme* has helped to correct this. Alongside Pierre Rosanvallon's discussion of Fournière, his conception of history is discussed in Christophe Prochasson, *Saint-Simon, ou l'anti-Marx* (Paris, 2005), 198 ff., and Julian Wright, "Réformisme et historiographie révolutionnaire: Georges Renard et Eugène Fournière, historiens du XIXe siècle", *Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle* (2012).

⁹ The connection between Malon and later generations has been rarely examined, until Sylvie Rémy's recent work (cf *infra*) and the recent collection of essays edited by Gérard Gâcon, Claude Latta, Hean Lorcin and René-Michel Bourdier: *Benoît Malon et La Revue socialiste* (Lyon, 2011). Connections to leading socialist politicians of the turn of the century are examined in Gilles Candar, "Jean Jaurès et Benoît Malon" in *ibid.*, 115-126; and Charles-Henri Girin, "Benoît Malon et Alexandre Millerand", in Claude Latta, Marc Vuilleumier and Gérard Gâcon (eds.), *Du Forez à La Revue socialiste. Benoît Malon (1841-1893), réévaluations d'un itinéraire militant et d'une oeuvre fondatrice* (Saint-Étienne, 2000), 289-301.

¹⁰ On Fournière's 1898 campaign and his working-class appeal: Gustave Rouanet, obituary of Fournière in *La Revue socialiste*, 59 (1914), 110.

ministerial positions – Fournière held a bright and uncomfortable light up to his colleagues from within the party. Back in 1893, the year of Malon’s death, Fournière had been at the heart of a movement that was divided, but where diverse roles and ideas were valued. This intellectual effervescence had allowed Fournière to explore different avenues, from municipal politics in the eighteenth arrondissement of Paris, to ideas for working-class theatre and new projects for essays and theoretical publications, hoping to keep alive the tradition of his mentor. Twenty years later, the political culture of French socialism had changed. Younger socialists increasingly found it difficult to understand the choices made by Fournière. They struck a different balance between intellectual activity and party business, realising that the future of French socialism depended to a greater extent that Fournière could accept on a strong, centralized party.

Up to his dying breath, Fournière believed that socialism was nothing if it was not a libertarian culture that could not be trammled by party structures. The polemics he pursued give us an important insight into the practical, political processes by which a Proudhonian, federalist socialism tried to grow in the difficult soil of early twentieth-century socialism. Of course, with the Russian Revolution around the corner, the socialist movement across Europe was soon to turn away from the decentralized, free-spirited model espoused by Fournière. Yet his kind of socialism has remained significant in France throughout the twentieth century, as an alternative, libertarian critique of the party mainstream. Fournière would have recognized his own frustrations in the arguments of the “deuxième gauche” after the Second World War, or in the journalism of a socialist critic such as Jacques Julliard in recent years.¹¹ Julliard has argued that one of the weaknesses of French socialism in recent years has been its inability to listen to “unorthodox” voices and to open up the party’s political culture to a broader mission to engage with French social developments on the ground.¹² In

¹¹ Vincent Duclert, “La ‘deuxième gauche’ ” in Jean-Jacques Becker and Gilles Candar (eds), *Histoire des gauches en France*, ii. (Paris, 2004, 2005), 175-89; idem., *La gauche devant l’histoire. À la reconquête d’une conscience politique* (Paris, 2009).

¹² For Jacques Julliard’s work on syndicalism: *Autonomie ouvrière. Études sur le syndicalisme d’action directe* (Paris, 1988); for an example of his recent criticisms of French politics and the left: *Le malheur français* (Paris 2005).

some of his pronouncements (though he is much closer to the mainstream of the party leadership than either Julliard or Fournière), the present Education Minister, Vincent Peillon, has shown himself to be similarly concerned that the party focus on social democracy as a mode of political engagement with social reality.¹³ Peillon, a former philosophy professor, is a devotee of late nineteenth-century left-wing thinkers, whom he has promoted through a series of new editions in the “Bibliothèque Républicaine” he leads with the éditions Le Bord de l’Eau. The “Bibliothèque Républicaine” has re-published key texts by Fournière, Charles Andler, Benoît Malon and other socialists of the early Third Republic. Like Fournière (and before him Proudhon), Peillon is fascinated by the question of how individualism and solidarity may be reconciled within left-wing ideology.¹⁴ While the socialist party looks to see what progress can be made under President Hollande, the anxious period of self-examination after Lionel Jospin’s defeat in 2002 may yet return. Has the socialist party really found the answer? Does it know whether it is Marxist or libertarian – both, or neither? And how do these theories relate to the daily practice of the party in its militancy?

This article seeks to use the Fournière case-study to ask why it is that the libertarian, anti-statist strand in French socialism has remained a sort of “Cinderella” within the French left. It does this with a deeper reflection in mind, on the way in which left-wing ideas and political militancy interact. The time-period under investigation is particularly apt for this study. The divided socialist movement of the 1880s and 1890s was fertile ground for the development of new theoretical positions about socialism and society, and a journal such as the *Revue socialiste* exemplified the rich interplay of ideas and politics in an atmosphere where many leading politicians on the left used the articulation of theoretical positions to help them identify themselves in strictly partisan terms. The case-study points to larger questions: have the political definitions of socialism that dominated the twentieth

¹³ Before he developed closer ties to President Hollande, Peillon had been a supporter of Hollande’s former partner, Ségolène Royal. Around the time of his split from Royal, he embraced the difficulties of the socialist party openly, arguing for a deep and cogent critique of where they had lost the support of the working class: Vincent Peillon invité de RMC-BFM TV (5 Jan. 2010), http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xbr8v8_vincent-peillon-invite-de-rmc-bfmtv_news, accessed 13 July 2012. Peillon’s writings on socialism include *Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme* (Paris, 2000).

¹⁴ Vincent Peillon with François Bazin, *Conversations républicaines* (Paris, 2011).

century obscured alternative traditions and ideas that could play a role in French society and politics? What new questions do historians need to develop in order to assess the full richness of the socialist movement?

Looking beyond Fournière, there was, before the First World War, an important intellectual and political space on the fringes of politics where left-wing theorists and activists attempted to keep alive a more politically and culturally diverse socialism than that of the developing party bureaucracy. While this space was increasingly under threat, this zone of intellectual and political exchange remained important and it has begun to attract scholarly interest once more. As Christophe Prochasson has argued, understanding the history of French socialism has to do with grasping its vacillating ideal of moral duty and responsibility, obliging historians to investigate personal relationships and institutional cultures on the fringe of mainstream politics.¹⁵ He points to the social and cultural habits of mind of the socialist movement, not least because those habits have often blinded the movement to “parallel structures” – cooperatives and mutual societies – where a “practical socialism” educated socialist militants.¹⁶ So this article seeks to build on Prochasson’s suggestions by using a biographical case-study, with its complex layers of personal political identity and engagement, to ask bigger questions about the political culture of socialism in France, notably the way in which militancy and theory interacted, and the way a dominant intellectual framework emerged that made it difficult for the party and its historians to grasp the full richness of the socialist movement.

French libertarian socialism, after all, had a more general relevance in the debates about the nation-state and modern society in the late nineteenth century; its leaders, including Fournière,

¹⁵ Christophe Prochasson’s most recent essay, *La gauche est-elle morale?* (Paris, 2010), lays out the arguments for a reappraisal of the history of French socialism and its pertinence to contemporary debates in France. In this, Prochasson goes further than Vincent Duclert, whose *La gauche devant l’histoire* sets out a slightly simpler claim that nineteenth and early-twentieth century socialism addressed questions that have disappeared from left-wing political discussion, but which could be usefully taken up once more. Prochasson reflects more broadly on the theme of the left and its history in *L’empire des émotions. Les historiens dans la mêlée* (Paris, 2008), 179-89. See also Sudhir Hazareesingh, “À la recherche de l’identité socialiste, hier et aujourd’hui”, *Cahiers Jaurès*, 187-8 (2008).

¹⁶ Prochasson, *La gauche est-elle morale?*, 258.

communicated widely with federalist or reformist socialists in Germany, and with pluralist thinkers in America and Britain.¹⁷ But because its proponents were socialist militants, French history has judged them as militants, checking first the party label rather than the depth of the political ideas on offer. This article attempts to break down the distinction, initially by sketching out the essence of Fournière's associationism. We will examine the way socialist history has attempted to make sense of those ideas – sometimes sidelining them within the narrative of French socialist history. The focus then narrows as we examine the context within which Fournière's identity as a militant was formed, that of the *Revue socialiste*. Finally, the question of how a political identity could exist outside the party mainstream will be examined. Ultimately, then, the article seeks to shed light on how the dominance of Marxist thinking, militancy and historiography has distorted our understanding of the French left, and how the activities and interactions of militants need to be reconsidered if we are to understand the processes by which left-wing political culture has evolved in modern France.¹⁸

II

French socialism has long been cast as a struggle between two competing visions, both of the socialist movement itself and of the state. On one side, “orthodox” or “revolutionary” socialism, often associated with Jules Guesde and the self-proclaimed French Marxists, has been seen as a political force that demanded powerful party organization and obedience to hierarchy, the better to organize the socialist movement for a future revolutionary moment. On the other, “reformist” socialism has been seen as a compromise movement.¹⁹ Reformists such as Alexandre Millerand (the

¹⁷ On the international intellectual context for debates about pluralism in France: Julian Wright and Stuart Jones, “Introduction”, in idem. (eds), *Pluralism and the Idea of the Republic in France* (Basingstoke, 2012), 4-8.

¹⁸ In her important study of independent socialism in France, Sylvie Rémy seems unable to go beyond the classic question of how socialists related to political power. The study sheds important light nonetheless on events and developments in the complex socialist nebulae of the 1880s and 1890s: *Jean, Jules, Prosper et les autres. Les socialistes indépendants en France à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2011). The doctoral thesis on which this book is based will be referred to below.

¹⁹ The journal *Le Mouvement social* published a special number “Réformismes et réformistes français” in 1974, presenting some important research on Albert Thomas and Aristide Briand among others – 88 (July-Sept).

first socialist to enter a Third Republic cabinet, in 1899) were often suspicious of rigid party organization, and believed that social change should be achieved by participating with the bourgeois state; but the ends they had in mind have ever been characterized by revolutionary socialists as venal and self-serving.²⁰ The traumatic experience of the French left during and after the First World War, when an older generation of revolutionary socialists supported the participation of socialists in government, only to see a younger generation rebel violently in the establishment of the French Communist Party after the Congress of Tours in 1920, has meant that this dualism has been indelibly imprinted on the minds of French socialists and their historians.

The difficulty is that the dualism has distorted our understanding of French socialism before the Congress of Tours. It does so in one obvious way, but also in a subtler and – in the long run – more important way. At one level, reformists are seen as unworthy of true socialist support and have frequently been neglected by socialist historians. There is a much deeper problem with the dualism, however. What was reformism? Was a socialist like Fournière a reformist? The “revolutionary / reformist” dualism plays to the ideological touchstones of the revolutionaries. It reduces debate to a question of militant identity defined over the issue of participation in government. In other words, the dominance of this dualism has focused attention too much on how socialists respond to questions about power and the state. Because of this, our understanding of how inappropriate either definition was for many socialists of the Third Republic has been greatly impaired. Fournière himself was an anti-statist, of an advanced variety. Thus he was increasingly frustrated that socialists

1974). For a comparative perspective on European reformism: “Le réformisme radical. Socialistes réformistes en Europe, 1880-1930), *Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, edited by Christophe Prochasson (2012). See also Jacques Moreau, *L'espérance réformiste. Histoire des courants et des idées réformistes dans le socialisme français* (Paris, 2007); and especially K. Steven Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism: Benoît Malon and French Reformist Socialism* (Berkeley, CA, 1992).

²⁰ One classic account of twentieth-century socialism sets out a framework for historians based on the repeated struggle within socialism over the use of political power, describing this conflict as the tension between “ambition and regret” within socialist politics: Alain Bergounioux and Gérard Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords: les socialistes français et le pouvoir (1905-2005)* (Paris, 2005); see also Philippe Buton, “La gauche et la prise du pouvoir”, in Becker and Candar (eds), *Histoire des gauches en France* ii., 563-83. Léon Blum examined the ideas of “exercise” and “conquest” of power and the delicate balance between them: Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1998), 29-85.

in his own day were reluctant to consider the proposition that socialism should not be about the state at all; it should be about the building of a new society from the bottom up, developing economic associations.

Understanding the position of Fournière and the other disciples of Malon has never been easy. Malon and his followers, especially Fournière himself, commented extensively on socialism in their own day, partly in order to give a clearer definition of their own variety of libertarian socialism.²¹ The relationship between Fournière and the socialist movement was complex and points to wider problems about how independent-minded socialists were misunderstood both by their own contemporaries and by historians. During the burst of socialist historiographical energy after the Second World War, when the great left-wing historians Jean Maitron and Ernest Labrousse led the journal *L'Actualité de l'Histoire*, precursor to *Le Mouvement social*, Eugène Fournière was remembered as a particularly energetic “militant”, deserving of a special number with a short biographical essay and re-publication of some interesting correspondence. Fournière had an open spirit, a sensitive heart and a strong will, all lit up by a high ideal – the description could have been that of any one of the host of militants then being examined by historians.²² As it happened, this assessment of Fournière did confirm the view of his own contemporaries. For someone whom many labeled (inaccurately) as a reformist, Fournière seemed uncharacteristically idealistic and high-minded. Dick May (the pseudonym of Jeanne Weill, the lively advocate of social education), wrote after his death: “Eugène Fournière was a saint, a secular saint, a very great saint.”²³ The rather standardized tributes of the 1950s, however, may be traced back to the official obituary of Fournière

²¹ Benoît Malon’s compendious *Le socialisme intégrale* (Paris, 1891) was an impressive attempt to provide a synthesis of socialist history in France, locating his own variety of socialism as a natural development in the French labour movement.

²² Raymond, “Eugène Fournière”, 20.

²³ Institut français d’Histoire sociale (hereafter: IFHS) 14 AS 181 (2): Dick May to Mme Fournière, undated (Jan. 1914). This letter is one of a long correspondence in which the independent-minded social educator attempted to console and advise Fournière’s widow after his death. Dick May’s support equalled that of Charles Andler, discussed below; it is interesting that it was two independent-minded teachers, absolutely on the margins of the socialist movement, who were most assiduous in their care for Mme. Fournière. On Dick May: Christophe Prochasson, “Dick May et le social”, in Colette Chambelland (ed.), *Le Musée social en son temps* (Paris, 1998).

published by Jean Longuet in *L'Humanité*. A respected party functionary, Longuet asserted that it was “neither the time nor the place to analyze his works nor to examine critically the philosophical and social conceptions of our friend.”²⁴ As with Longuet, so with later historians, the interest of Fournière’s career lay more in his contribution to early socialist congresses, notably that of Marseille in 1879, in which he supported the “orthodox” or Guesdist current then in the ascendancy. Neither needed to explain that, had Fournière followed other dissident socialists and torn up his membership card, he would have been denied even these rather mundane plaudits. In a later survey of Fournière’s career, his rapid slide into “reformism” inspired by Malon was described as “a retrogression in the socialist movement and a weakening in doctrine”, less interesting to the main flow of socialist historiography.²⁵ Later generations of commentators used “reformism” as a label to hide Fournière’s more complex ideas, and to lace their accounts with rather flat descriptions of his qualities as a militant. These accounts deliberately avoid dealing with his radical views on associations and economic federalism.

Idealist or pragmatist; weak in doctrine or saintly ascetic – behind these characterizations lay a further, complex paradox. For Madeleine Rebérioux, Fournière would be cast as an “old grey boar” (“sanglier grisonnant”).²⁶ This “grizzled” quality was one which Fournière himself occasionally perpetuated, writing to Charles Péguy in 1910 that he was certainly marked by the great tradition of the “old beards” of July and February (referring to the revolutionaries of 1830 and 1848): “this traditionalism which is naïvely but honestly revolutionary, that of an old boy from the Marais, has caught your attention. I do not deny it and you do not find it unsympathetic.”²⁷ The myth of the “old

²⁴ Jean Longuet, “Eugène Fournière est mort”, *L'Humanité*, 6 Jan. 1914. Longuet himself was seeking election that year in a new circonscription in the southern Parisian suburbs, including the commune of Arcueil-Cachan where Fournière was a well-regarded municipal councillor. Longuet had previously made use of Fournière’s experience as deputy in the Aisne, in a failed attempt to get elected there in the 1906 legislative elections: Gilles Candar, *Jean Longuet. Un Internationaliste à l’épreuve de l’histoire* (Rennes, 2007), 56-9, 63.

²⁵ Raymond, “Eugène Fournière,” 17.

²⁶ The “sanglier grisonnant” tag is not provided with a citation. Madeleine Rebérioux, “La Revue socialiste”, *Mil neuf cent. Revue d’histoire intellectuelle*, 5 (1987): 24.

²⁷ Fournière to Péguy, Feb. 20, 1910, in *L’Actualité de l’Histoire*, 25 (1958): 36.

beard” cast a halo of old-world activism about this highly lucid voice within socialism. He was too young, at the age of thirteen, to have been a “vieux barbe de la Commune” – a stock phrase for the older left-wing leaders who had experienced the struggle of 1871; but insofar as this aura surrounded him, it could become a reason for keeping his ideas at arm’s length. Furthermore, the “grizzled” quality, as Fournière himself acknowledged, contained a hint of the “revolutionary tradition”. How could this be married with Fournière’s persistent criticism of the revolutionaries of his own day? This is where understanding the manipulation of different definitions within socialism is so important. In the early twentieth century, “revolutionary socialism” was a term identified with Jules Guesde and the French Marxists. In fact, though he was highly critical of the revolutionary rhetoric of these socialists, Fournière was an idealist who sought inspiration in the French revolutionary tradition, and was interested in re-investigating the socialism that had flourished in France before Marx had become widely influential. He was not a “reformist”, though he shared the reformists’ philosophical suspicion of a revolution adjourned *sine die*; he wanted to reignite the revolutionary flame within French socialism by drawing the focus of the movement closer to hand, to the little revolutions that might take place every day, in cooperatives or trades unions, if these institutions became real agents for social transformation.

Beneath the argument about definitions of socialism, Fournière’s critiques of the socialist movement revealed an analysis of the nature of the socialist movement that was more dynamic than the image of the old greybeard would suggest. In 1902, during a controversy with the nationalist Jules Soury, Fournière agreed that French socialism had failed to understand the importance of properly educating its support-base. Socialist leaders, he argued, had to understand that their violent attacks on government would ultimately provide material for the right-wing “Caesarism” of the nationalists.²⁸ His frankness drew strong support from Millerand – still at this point a member of

²⁸ Eugène Fournière, “Le nationalisme: lettre à M. Jules Soury”, *Revue socialiste*, 36 (1902): 22.

the party.²⁹ Where Fournière thought socialism should have been educating popular opinion, the leadership had resorted to violent revolutionary rhetoric, building a shallow culture of working-class engagement based on fanaticism rather than education. Education was important not just because it would prepare the working class for future economic sovereignty, but because it gave them the capacity to transform society in the present. This idea of education, however, was a long way from inspiring current socialist practice: “Our entire education, Catholic, conformist, Jacobin, helps the [orthodox/Guesdist] current, which de-individualizes men and agglomerates them in a discipline that is rather more military than political,” Fournière argued. “Socialist action [is] enclosed more than ever within the world of politics, where classic formulae replace ideas and where a handful of men... participate in the real action and reduce the mass of the party to being like a crowd at a race meeting, praising their horses when they win and abusing them when they lose.”³⁰

Fournière’s ideas were on many points close to those of Jean Jaurès, especially insofar as both were desperate to make French socialism into something more than an economic theory. Fournière, however, was much more inclined than Jaurès to lace his ideas with anti-Marxism.³¹ Wedded as he was to the associationist idea of the state, he could not follow Jaurès’ careful synthesis of municipal socialism, German social democracy and the French revolutionary tradition.³² Fournière focused on nineteenth-century thinkers such as Fourier and Proudhon in an essay which emphasized, against the synthetic project of Jaurès, the non-Marxist qualities of such thinkers.³³ Not that he rejected Marx entirely; he seemed to want to bring out ideals of justice and liberty from parts of Marx’s work

²⁹ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 1078; Millerand to Fournière, Aug. 4, 1902. Millerand thought Fournière’s faithfulness to a true version of how socialism had evolved had cost him his seat in the 1902 legislative elections.

³⁰ Fournière, “La crise révolutionnaire du socialisme français (suite)”, *Revue socialiste*, 42 (1905): 52-3.

³¹ For Jaurès’ engagement with Marx: Madeleine Rebérioux, *Parcours engagés dans la France contemporaine* (Paris, 1999), 355-91; and more generally, Christophe Prochasson, ‘L’invention du marxisme français’ in Becker and Candar (eds), *Histoire des gauches en France*, i. (Paris, 2004, 2005).

³² Christophe Charle, “La question de l’État de Jaurès à Léon Blum”, *Jaurès et l’État*, 44-57.

³³ Eugène Fournière, *Les Théories socialistes au XIX^e siècle, de Babeuf à Proudhon* (Paris, 1904).

that had not been fully digested.³⁴ Marxists of the early twentieth century were doubly to blame, he believed; they had diminished socialism by using an already narrow understanding of Marx.

Fournière argued that the version of socialist history purveyed by Guesde and his followers gave both Guesde and Marx too great a role as initiators. Guesde, he argued, had formulated his doctrine of class-struggle before even entering into contact with Marx.³⁵ Relativizing Guesde's claim to be the source of all socialist orthodoxy in France was, in Fournière's criticism, a way of creating space within intellectual debate to allow a rediscovery of Proudhon as an alternative formative influence on the socialism of the early twentieth century. By deconstructing the rhetoric of the orthodox Marxists, he hoped to advance a better understanding of the arch-theorist of associations, in this period of burgeoning cooperative and trades-unionist social organization.³⁶ Thus, consumers' cooperatives and trades unions – in 1905, he still spoke of the importance of the *Universités populaires*, the working-class education movement that flourished briefly round the turn of the century – were essential: such organizations taught the working class the practice of economic sovereignty. In so doing, they created room for a libertarianism within socialist thought and activity that was often lacking.³⁷

In his teaching and in his major writings, especially *L'individu, l'association et l'État* (1908) and *La Sociocratie* (1910), Fournière developed his alternative vision of society, finding new space for the idea of liberty within socialist theory. He foresaw that the modern State would ultimately need to retreat before the new organisms – associations, syndicats, cooperatives – which would provide economic liberty for all, an essential step towards full social and cultural liberty. "Socialism must therefore appeal to the individual and declare: I cannot liberate you; free yourself, through me; I am

³⁴ Eugène Fournière, "Fourier et Proudhon", *Revue socialiste*, 40 (1904): 137.

³⁵ Eugène Fournière, "La crise révolutionnaire du socialisme français", *Revue socialiste*, 41 (1905): 668.

³⁶ Eugène Fournière, "Le centenaire de Proudhon", *Revue socialiste*, 49 (1909): 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 53. For the Université populaire movement: Lucien Mercier, *Les Universités populaires: 1899-1914. Éducation populaire et mouvement ouvrier au début du siècle* (Paris, 1986).

not your goal, but your means.”³⁸ Sovereignty needed to be diffused within the modern state; as intermediary economic organisms emerged, they would not impose a new regime of corporatist authority, but rather would liberate the individual, so that democracy would be renewed outside the political sphere. Fournière drew a moral lesson from this discussion of the evolution of society. Thus far, he conceded in *La Sociocratie*, it was understandable that socialist rhetoric had made the ideal of socialism seem further and further removed from present reality. Socialism needed to bring the ideal of the future within the grasp of the worker, and show how this vision could be made real in the present. The conclusion to *La Sociocratie* challenged the worker: hard, sacrificial work in the present held the key to emancipation.³⁹ Read in the light of his own difficult life, the essay is a plea to his fellow socialists to make deep, self-sacrificing commitments to the grassroots associations where social propaganda could be better advanced, away from the central party committees and organs. The plea is the more profound for reflecting his arduous experience in these campaigns.

Behind his belief that the ideal of a changed society needed to be brought closer to the real experience of workers, Fournière articulated a particular definition of revolutionary idealism. He never rejected the idea that society needed radical change; but he criticized the “orthodox” left in the socialist party for attempting to push the time of this change back, while overlaying older French socialist traditions with shallow revolutionary rhetoric. Fournière believed in radical change in the present, through dedicated activity on the part of socialist militants. In 1913, he cast his eye across the English Channel and noted wistfully how fertile Britain was becoming in new socio-economic organizations such as trades unions. French socialists too often ignored trades unions and cooperatives. Describing the way in which revolutionary rhetoric had led French socialism away from a proper appreciation of the role of these organizations, Fournière wrote: “We have ridden star-beams and walked in a blinding light, instead of asking it modestly to light our way through the

³⁸ Eugène Fournière, *Essai sur l'individualisme* (Paris, 1901), 263.

³⁹ Eugène Fournière, *La Sociocratie. Essai de politique positive* (Paris, 1910), 214-6.

uneven terrain of facts.”⁴⁰ Far from a shallow, temporizing reformism, Fournière made reform in the present into a moral mission; this idealism, he believed, connected more profoundly with older revolutionary traditions in France than the “orthodox” revolutionaries of his own day ever could.

III

Socialists such as Fournière and the disciples of Malon believed that the spirit of party dogma was anathema to true socialism. Without the clear focus of a party line, however, they had little hope of developing a counter-balance to the highly organized “orthodox” left of the socialist movement. Fournière and others attempted at least to make the *Revue socialiste*, founded by Malon, as an organ for free, independent socialist criticism. At the end of his career, Fournière’s attempts to maintain the *Revue socialiste*’s independence came under sustained attack from a younger generation of reformists who saw the only future of socialism within an organized party. This argument will be discussed below. But a culture of animosity and personal insecurity had already imposed itself within the tight network of militants who ran the *Revue socialiste*. In our attempt to understand the difficult fortunes of libertarian socialism, a proper appreciation of the individual relationships at the heart of one of the most important centers of socialist activity is vital. Among the disciples of Malon, who succeeded one another as director of the *Revue socialiste* after his death in 1894, the issues of personality, age difference, political status, education and upbringing probably weighed more heavily than disagreements over ideas about the state or the importance of economic associations.

In the 1880s, Malon was a leading voice for moderate socialists. He had dissented from the over-orthodox socialism of the Guesdists, but then fallen out with the other main “moderate” group that emerged around Paul Brousse and Jean Allemane. Sylvie Rémy has argued that this double

⁴⁰ Eugène Fournière, “La coopération et les ‘autres forces’ en Grande-Bretagne”, *Revue socialiste*, 57 (1913): 511.

process of exclusion left its mark on Malon and his “disciples”, Rouanet and Fournière in particular. They would never again have real trust in the structures of a political party.⁴¹ Their *Revue socialiste*, established on a firm footing from 1885, became a gateway for socialist politicians and thinkers from other groups, who may have resisted conversion if they had been obliged to enter through other, more “orthodox” portals. With its spirit of “free research” firmly established, the *Revue socialiste* opened the door to socialism for a new generation of republican intellectuals.⁴²

The atmosphere of the “salle de rédaction” at the turn of the century had a flavor all its own, well described by Jaurès when telling the story of his first encounter with the *Revue socialiste* and its contributors, in the late 1880s. Gustave Rouanet (who would become one of Jaurès’ closest lieutenants), seeing in Jaurès a potential socialist convert, had encouraged him to call on the *Revue* to make contact with Malon. Jaurès later recalled how he had walked up the rue des Martyrs to see if Malon was “at home”. Trembling like a neophyte, he was greeted by one of the editorial board and told that Malon was out; he turned and fled down the stairs, “quickly, but not quickly enough to have missed an immense burst of socialist and revolutionary laughter”.⁴³ The anecdote captures the feeling of exclusivity and familiarity in the closely-knit groups which made up the divided socialist movement in the 1880s.⁴⁴

Under Malon’s influence, the volatile personalities of the committee held together. But after his death, the directorship was disputed by Rouanet and Fournière, who were reasonably close allies; the younger editorial secretary and later deputy of Paris, Adrien Veber; and the older ex-communard, now professor of literature in Lausanne, Georges Renard. The owner of the newspaper, Rodolphe Simon, had his own ideas about how the journal should be run, and he at first appointed

⁴¹ Rémy, “Les Socialistes indépendants,” 173.

⁴² Ibid., 124.

⁴³ Jean Jaurès, in *Revue socialiste*, 51 (1910): 108.

⁴⁴ Rebérioux, “La *Revue socialiste*”, places a very strong emphasis on the bickering of Malon’s disciples; for further discussion of the cultural traits of socialist editorial committees at the turn of the century see Christophe Prochasson, *Les Intellectuels, le socialisme et la guerre* (Paris, 1993), 45-66.

Renard as director, whose literary interests and worldly connections were excellent qualifications.⁴⁵

One of the principal sources of tension under Renard's directorship was the difference in the educational backgrounds between him and his colleagues. Fournière and Rouanet's contrasted strongly with Renard's, a *normalien* whose social circle included the historian Alphonse Aulard and who had been a regular attendee at the salon of Juliette Adam in the late 1880s. On his appointment, Renard went to talk to the other "disciples" and discovered that they resented his promotion. "I understood," he later recalled, "from the black look they threw me that from now on I had two sworn enemies."⁴⁶ The account of Renard's resignation from the journal four years later leaves no doubt that there were difficulties of a personal and cultural nature between him and the other regular contributors.

By 1897, Renard, based most of the year in Lausanne, became increasingly suspicious of his Parisian-based colleagues Veber, Rouanet and Fournière. Beyond this, at a higher level, Renard was convinced that a quiet jockeying for prominence between the moderate leaders Jaurès and Alexandre Millerand was taking place; this was another factor in his increasing suspiciousness and anxiety at the *Revue socialiste*. Renard wondered whether his own close friendship with Millerand was making him unpopular with a number of socialists; Rouanet was implicitly calling into question Renard's socialism. Thus the disciples of Malon covertly took sides between Millerand and Jaurès. In this context, Renard felt outnumbered by his collaborators, who enjoyed regular contact in Paris and had close connections in the political circles of the eighteenth arrondissement. Tensions over how copy was organized for the journal were interpreted by Renard as being a cover for more subtle political moves against him, and he resigned at the end of 1897.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Rebérioux dwells on the correspondence between Veber and Renard, and considers particularly the early period of Renard's directorship in 1894.

⁴⁶ BHVP, MS 2498: *La Revue socialiste*, fo. 69. Georges Renard's memoirs, covering hundreds of pages of manuscript, are an underused source for the history of reformist socialism.

⁴⁷ BHVP, MS 2489 fos. 201-18 describe Renard's rupture with the *Revue socialiste*.

Meanwhile, however, an even more precise tension, specifically between Fournière and Renard, was working itself out during 1897. Several fundamental traits that help to explain Fournière's complex personality as a socialist emerge from this affair. These included Fournière's struggle to write following a disciplined plan; his sense of intellectual inferiority; and a feeling of being at a critical turning point, when he needed to leave behind youthful excursions and concentrate more rigorously on theoretical writing. Fournière had grown accustomed to placing rather rambling articles in the *Revue* whenever he wanted. Renard, meanwhile, had spent three years trying to widen the journal's scope, inviting a better quality of copy from a broader range of authors. While he had been gracious to the closest followers of Malon, he now became impatient with Fournière. That the ensuing argument is not recounted in Renard's memoirs, which are otherwise highly detailed, suggests he was not proud of some of the things that were said. Fournière, begging for a little more time and citing his recent election as a municipal councillor, was greeted with a blast of professorial disdain: "you have the character of a dog, if I dare say so!"⁴⁸ Fournière's reply provides an unparalleled window into his personality and his private insecurities. He expressed a deep-seated tension by no means uncommon within French socialism, between the educated intellectual and the self-taught militant.

Let's leave to one side my dog of a character, please, and avoid judging unless we would be judged ourselves. I am not going to break, brutally or quietly, with the *Revue*; it is the *Revue* which, through you, makes itself desired to the extent that it is inaccessible to those of its founders who have some sense of their own dignity and of their rights in their own home. While purely moral, these rights are no less real and you seem constantly to have ignored this, at least as far as mine are concerned... Could you actually imagine that this lazy bohemian Fournière, this irregular who sometimes shows a bit of talent, could count among the learned and very regular collaborators you have brought together! Obviously not...

⁴⁸ BHVP, MS 2600 fo. 449: Fournière to Renard, Sept. 25, 1897; BHVP, MS 2600 fo. 455: Renard to Fournière (draft), Dec. 1, 1897.

I have broken definitively with what people thought of as inertia but which was only the understandable modesty of someone who was not sure of himself. Strengthened by my previous work, which I am now sure I can bring to fruition, apart from accidents, fixed in my path of study and research, I must assure to my person the same respect that I myself give to my work... Today, I do not change, I complete my character and give my life the unity it needs.⁴⁹

This statement of a desire to give his life a new sense of unity and purpose is important in assessing Fournière's place within socialism more generally; does his relative isolation by 1914 tell of a personal change, or of a change in the movement? Or does it reveal a naive element of inflexibility in Fournière's character? The correspondence with Renard suggests that Fournière had made a conscious decision to improve his standing as a socialist militant and thinker, and had seized on a new ideal of self-discipline and consistency in his work as a vital element of proving himself as a socialist. Having grasped this new sense of personal dedication to the cause, Fournière would have been understandably sensitive towards the harsh words handed down from Professor Renard.

Renard had his own reasons for feeling marginalized. His support for the Paris Commune had earned him exclusion from the main routes to an academic career, and his original appointment at Lausanne had followed an imposed exile. Even after the turn of the century, when he returned to Paris, Renard's academic career was pursued on the margins, at the Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers and then at the Collège de France during a period when this institution was rather in the doldrums.⁵⁰ If Fournière would be seen in later years as a "grizzled militant", it was ironically the worldlier Renard who had actually participated in the Commune and had his career damaged as a result. Renard knew, however, that all three of his colleagues, Fournière, Rouanet and Veber, had

⁴⁹ BHVP MS 2600, fo. 453: Fournière to Renard, Dec. 9, 1897.

⁵⁰ Fournière was nominated by the moderate socialists René Viviani and Aristide Briand (now ministers under Clemenceau) to a chair at the Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers in 1907. Renard's chair at the Collège de France was apparently created so as to leave a space at the CNAM for Fournière; Briand and Viviani were, it seems, Fournière's sponsors for the Conservatoire. BHVP MS 2489, fo. 17.

suffered in their attempts to raise themselves to established positions as socialist militants: “The problem for me was that I had to deal with tormented souls, characters who had been emaciated by their difficult beginnings, by unfair setbacks, by long misery that had been endured courageously.”⁵¹ The ideological marginalization of the Malon tradition within French socialism was as nothing to the personal and private sense of marginalization which the individuals concerned felt, often as a result of their own squabbling, but also when their careers were compared with the easier progress of the middle-class normaliens of different generations: Renard, then Jaurès and ultimately Albert Thomas and his circle.

When Fournière became director of the *Revue socialiste* in 1905, he sought to maintain Malon’s journal as a pole of attraction for reformist and libertarian socialists of different stripes, but outside the unified party. This issue quickly became a bone of contention between Fournière and the younger socialists led by Albert Thomas, whom he invited to bring new ideas to the journal.⁵² In a gesture which reflected both Fournière’s own campaigning for the cooperative movement and Thomas’ recent experiment with a *Revue syndicaliste*, the *Revue socialiste* became the *Revue socialiste, syndicaliste et coopérateur*.⁵³ But how would such a journal relate to the socialist party? Thomas, with a political future that could only take off if he situated himself more closely alongside Jaurès and the SFIO, grew frustrated at having to work with the lonely old campaigner who persisted in wishing to keep the *Revue* independent of the SFIO – while keeping up his personal membership.

In the last years before the First World War, with subscriptions falling and the owners uncertain about its future, the journal needed to find some new basis of support. Thomas and his editorial secretary André Lebey repeatedly pressed Fournière to compromise and bring his journal within the control of the party. As they tried various tactics, all with little success, Lebey even resorted to lacing his letters to Fournière with Masonic abbreviations, perhaps hinting that the

⁵¹ BHVP, MS 2498, fo. 81.

⁵² Prochasson, “Entre science et action sociale,” 144-6.

⁵³ B. W. Schaper, *Albert Thomas. Trente ans de réformisme social* (Assen, 1959), 67-76; Jousse, *Réviser le marxisme?*, 217-38.

Grand Orient of Paris might be called on to judge whether his brother-mason was in breach of his fraternal responsibilities.⁵⁴ Although the struggle was resolved at least partially, and a return to more amicable correspondence ensued from mid-1913, Lebey and Thomas continued to remind Fournière politely that their situation was not tenable in the long-term without some alternative plan.⁵⁵ After Fournière's sudden death, Thomas took the helm but the journal quietly ceased its operations in the summer of 1914.

The fundamental problem that affected Fournière and the *Revue socialiste* was that French reformism was divided, over high problems of theory (we have already established that many who were described as “reformists” – including Fournière – held much more complex positions); over tactics; but also because of personality. The diverse group of independents and reformists, from the cold and austere Millerand to the voluble and passionate Jaurès, from the professorial Renard to the anxious and fervent Fournière, to the young normaliens around Thomas, for all they agreed on many vital issues, were divided over how their independent-minded socialisms could work together and how they should relate to party structures. But Fournière's own lifestyle was also an issue. His exhausting work kept him from taking a strategic view of how the *Revue* might find a new lease of life. He discovered after the turn of the century that by sticking to his chosen role as a prophet who challenged party orthodoxy he had found the makings of a coherent identity within the movement, and thus his polemics gave a certain tone to the *Revue socialiste* that sometimes repelled other socialists of his stripe. All these problems, many of them pre-figured ten years before Fournière took over, during the tenure of Renard, combined to impede the development of the *Revue socialiste* as a successful venture.

⁵⁴ The correspondence with Lebey is in IFHS, 14 AS 181 (2), fos. 853-79.

⁵⁵ IFHS, 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 879: Lebey to Fournière, Nov. 1, 1913; followed not long after by fo. 1413: Thomas to Fournière, Nov. 7, 1913. Both these letters adopt a far more conciliatory tone, but their authors were nonetheless insistent that the journal could not survive without at least aligning itself with the more sympathetic parts of the party.

The concessions which Jaurès had to make when pursuing the cause of party unity frustrated many French socialists; both within and outside France, other dissidents, even those whose precise theoretical views differed from Fournière's, sometimes saw in the beleaguered director of the *Revue socialiste* a sympathetic ear for their struggle with "orthodox" socialists in their own countries. These correspondents included the famous German reformist Eduard Bernstein, who wrote in 1905 to congratulate Fournière on the consistency with which he held his opinions: "I have become convinced that between our ideas and feelings there is a closer affinity than there is between my ideas and those of any other socialist theoretician. May I say that I have often rejoiced at the consistency with which you maintain your opinions. In our days, when so many give themselves to the latest trend, this is a quality that is more and more rare."⁵⁶ Fournière's advanced associationism was not in fact the same as Bernstein's evolutionary socialism, although he would have concurred with Bernstein that many in the German and French socialist parties were neglecting the importance of methods in favor of an obsession with the final goal. It was as much the personal feelings that their positioning within their respective parties inspired in them that caused Bernstein to write so frankly.

Fournière's place within the fractured world of French socialism emerges in more depth through an examination of his discussions with other figures on the non-Marxist wing of socialism, many of whom were going through similar experiences of alienation or uncertainty within the movement. The examples discussed here each present their own cultural contexts, similar to the mutual uncertainty that affected Fournière and Renard's relationship. The key issues revolve around generational difference, the right to free criticism or the importance of toeing the party line, and the difficulty of identifying specific positions within the kaleidoscope of reformism.

⁵⁶ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 135: Bernstein to Fournière, Oct. 22, 1905. After 1905, Fournière was regularly courted by the moderate German journal *Sozialistische Monatshefte* for independent perspectives on the problems raised by the new unified party in France: IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fos. 153 ff; J. Bloch to Fournière, 30 Nov. 1906; June 23, 1907.

Chief among Fournière's sympathizers during the struggle over whether the *Revue socialiste* should be subsumed within the party was the Germanist and Sorbonne professor Charles Andler.⁵⁷ Andler had been a close friend of Lucien Herr, the librarian at the École normale supérieure. Like Fournière and Renard, he favoured federalism in French socialist organization. Andler also however appreciated the hardships which confronted Fournière, far greater than those he himself had faced. The Sorbonne professor empathized with the poorly-remunerated old militant, especially when he was confronted with hard-nosed young politicians determined to advance their reformism strictly within the socialist party. The Andler-Fournière correspondence shows how difficult it was to maintain a position within the intellectual and political space on the margins of socialism, and gives greater weight to the argument that it was the socialist political culture that had changed, not that of some of these libertarian socialists.

By 1913, Andler had lost faith in the unified party, experiencing the rough edge of the party's disapproval for remarks he had made on new "imperialist" tendencies in the German socialist party (SPD). A controversy had blown up in the spring and summer of 1913.⁵⁸ In this, Andler had been set up as a professorial fool who had dared to call into question the bona fides of the French socialist party's closest allies. The attack had been led by young intellectuals, some of whom he had taught himself. Albert Thomas and other colleagues of Jaurès had called into question Andler's intellectual and professional competence.⁵⁹ Once more, a clash of personal cultures can be identified; Andler was not in tune with the rhythms and practices of the socialist party *circa* 1913. Wedded to the little *cénacle* of the late nineteenth century, in which free intellectual exchange was the order of the day,

⁵⁷ Christophe Prochasson, "Présentation" in Charles Andler, *La civilisation socialiste* (Paris, 2010); Jousse, *Réviser le marxisme?* 193-215.

⁵⁸ Christophe Prochasson, "L' 'affaire' Andler/Jaurès. Une analyse de controverse", *Jean Jaurès cahiers trimestriels*, no. 145 (1997).

⁵⁹ Schaper demonstrates that Thomas was able to patch up his relationship with Andler, who had taught him at the École normale supérieure: *Albert Thomas*, 88-9. Andler published a number of documents relating to the argument: *Le Socialisme impérialiste dans l'Allemagne contemporaine. Dossier d'une polémique avec Jean Jaurès (1912-1913)* (Paris, 1918).

Andler found it easy to feel the victim of powerful, machine-like political forces.⁶⁰ The correspondence reveals the pangs of regret and personal anxiety as the modern party was born.

Musing about whether he had a future in the socialist party at all, Andler wrote at length to Fournière in November 1913, advising him at all costs to prevent the SFIO taking over the leadership of the *Revue socialiste*. Using classic terms for denouncing up-and-coming “party men”, Andler attacked the presence of Pierre Renaudel (himself a future socialist dissident) at the editorial committee: “what is a corporal like Renaudel doing there, in a meeting which should be strictly scientific? If those sorts of people, or parliamentarians, predominate, then that will be the end for the right to free criticism.”⁶¹ Andler was unhappy with the general tone of the modern party, where an obsession with political labels and party correctness seemed to be the order of the day. “I recall that [around 1910] certain young deputies said about you: ‘I don’t know if Fournière is a socialist any more’,” wrote Andler. “I found that astonishing, when we’re talking about an older militant such as yourself, of such undoubted service, whose political trajectory has been of such unswerving rectitude... There are people who belong to the party (you and I, for example), and people to whom the party belongs. The regeneration [of the socialist party] can only come from free doctrinal criticism.”⁶²

Andler was increasingly concerned that both their cases revealed a tendency within even more sympathetic parts of the party to shut down free discussion. “It goes without saying for me that we must be free spirits before being socialists, and we must be socialists freely participating in the idea of socialism before being signed-up members of the party. And there can surely be a socialism... that can absorb all the liberty of research and thought, and which might ultimately transform the party itself.”⁶³ The admiration Andler felt for Fournière was demonstrated after the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁶¹ IFHS, 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 23: Andler to Fournière, Nov. 1913.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 21: Andler to Fournière, Aug. 1913.

latter's death, when Andler launched a campaign to rescue Fournière's widow from penury.⁶⁴ He campaigned discretely on her behalf, often writing at length to her to explain how he understood the different political and personal undercurrents in play as he approached socialists and their sympathizers in parliament, in institutions such as the Musée social, or the Conseil d'État. Between the Sorbonne professor who had fallen foul of the younger socialist hierarchy and the self-taught Fournière a real affinity had grown up, based on their personal sense of what was wrong with the culture and social mores of the socialist movement.

It is instructive to contrast the affinity that developed between Andler and Fournière with the tension that existed between Fournière and Andler's old associate Lucien Herr. By 1905, when Fournière was attempting to keep the *Revue socialiste* in its strictly independent vein, Herr had been approached as a potential supporter. But how, Herr must have wondered, could this journal really exist if its director gave himself to such strident attacks on the new unified party? Herr, as part of a publishing group set up by reformist socialists, the Société nouvelle d'édition et de librairie, had considered taking a stake in the *Revue socialiste*.⁶⁵ He now reproved Fournière for the tone of his constant attacks on the decisions made by Jaurès towards socialist unity.⁶⁶ Herr explained: "I think that reserves and regrets are in danger of weakening people's spirits... You know how easy it is to vacillate like Briand [who was already indicating his preference for a role in government, excluding himself from the new party] rather than going courageously ahead like Jaurès and Rouanet."⁶⁷

The reference to Rouanet touched close to Fournière's heart. They were long-standing friends. While Fournière, having lost his seat in 1902, seemed content to sit in the wings of the party and criticize, Rouanet was still a deputy and saw his place at Jaurès' side. Fournière had placed himself in

⁶⁴ Julian Wright, "Les réformistes au secours d'une femme en deuil. Une petite histoire de réseaux et de recherches socialistes à la veille de la Grande Guerre", *Cahiers Jaurès* 200 (Apr.-June 2011), 163-72.

⁶⁵ This publishing project involved Charles Péguy, though he characteristically fell out with the other socialists involved. It was one of the more important projects of intellectual socialism, publishing minutes of major socialist congresses and giving an outlet to socialist Dreyfusards in the years following the Dreyfus Affair.

⁶⁶ Rebérioux, "La *Revue socialiste*," 27-8.

⁶⁷ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 746: Herr to Fournière, Mar. 9, 1906.

a position which Rouanet could not, because of his political commitments. But now Fournière was confronted with the loneliness of his chosen path. Once more we have a surprising insight into the emotional issues raised by Fournière's independence. "The lonely are sensitive and touchy, you know", Fournière explained. "Do you think it amuses me to have to criticize the acts of the party, those of my closest friends... But I dream of a party without *politiciens* and persist in thinking that this could come about one day [*politiciens* carries more pejorative connotations than the English term 'politicians']".⁶⁸ If Fournière saw his role as holding up a mirror to the party, asking it to look more carefully at its own problems, then this was a role he fulfilled at considerable personal cost.

The question of how Fournière should be identified within the socialist movement reflected a wider uncertainty about how to identify correctly the different trends within French socialism. In 1902, it was the young leader of the Université populaire movement Charles Guieysse who found himself on the receiving end of rectifications about where exactly Fournière – and he himself for that matter – ought to be located. Guieysse, close to the Dreyfusard Daniel Halévy and editor of the periodical *Pages Libres*, ought in principle to have shared many ideas with Fournière, given their common belief that working-class education was vital for socialism. In 1902, Guieysse had puzzled Fournière by accidentally leaving his *Essai sur l'individualisme* out of a catalogue of recent books published in *Pages Libres*. He had to protest that he believed Fournière to be "one of the rare men of the party who inspire my confidence; you have real 'intellectual and moral honesty' ".⁶⁹ A year later, Fournière turned again on Guieysse; this time, the editor of *Pages Libres* had left out not just Fournière's works but also those of Renard and Malon. Fournière read into this a sign that Guieysse was moving towards certain Marxist circles associated with the journal *Le Mouvement socialiste*, led by Hubert Lagardelle and Jean Longuet.⁷⁰ "You have made yourself the prisoner of a certain way of

⁶⁸ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 749: Fournière to Herr (draft), Mar. 10, 1906.

⁶⁹ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 684: Guieysse to Fournière, Feb. 12, 1902.

⁷⁰ On Guieysse, Daniel Halévy and *Pages Libres*: Sébastien Laurent, *Daniel Halévy: biographie* (Paris, 2001), 147-56. On *Le Mouvement socialiste*: Marion de Flers, "Le Mouvement socialiste (1899-1914)", *Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, 5 (1987): 49-76. *Pages libres* and *Le Mouvement socialiste* are examined in Christophe Prochasson's *Les intellectuels, le socialisme et la guerre*, 47-60. Prochasson's evidence

thinking and not a scientific method,” insisted Fournière, “unconsciously, you are putting yourself behind the young doctors of the *Mouvement socialiste*, wet blankets and chewers of formulae [pisse-froids et remâche-formules]... May these lines awaken in you the longing for a whole world of ideas on which your spirit has not yet alighted.”⁷¹ These severe sentences reveal, more starkly than in his published work, Fournière’s antipathy towards French Marxism. They also indicate the difficulties of defining ideological positions within the socialist movement. Guieysse, in a gracious reply to this rather pompous put-down, brought the debate back to the issue of identities within socialism. He had simply been struggling to know how to label the disciples of Malon, or “French idealists” as Fournière sometimes preferred to call them.⁷² Guieysse’s final reply attempted cautiously to maintain an even level of politeness. The feeling of a younger colleague walking on eggshells compares with the experience of Albert Thomas, who worked hard to “manage” Fournière, flattering him after their eventual reconciliation in 1913.⁷³ Many younger socialists found the stubborn independent-mindedness of Fournière difficult to understand, especially when he tended to react emotionally if they failed to identify his position correctly.

Fournière found more in common with a young socialist who refused to join the party until the latter part of the First World War. In his correspondence with Joseph Paul-Boncour, Fournière recognized another young politician in search of a clear identity as a socialist. During the ministry of Waldeck-Rousseau, Paul-Boncour and his friends Henry de Jouvenel and Anatole de Monzie tried to bridge the divide between the opportunist republicanism of their master and their personal interest in socialism.⁷⁴ Paul-Boncour’s doctoral thesis, published at this time with support from Millerand and other high-ranking socialists, developed a discussion about the role of the state that Fournière found

demonstrates Fournière must have been ill-informed if he thought Guieysse was leaning towards Longuet and Lagardelle.

⁷¹ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 686: Fournière to Guieysse (draft), May 25, 1903.

⁷² IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 685: Guieysse to Fournière, May 31, 1903.

⁷³ After they had patched up their relationship, Thomas took care to flatter Fournière and even went to the trouble of offering placatory statements about Charles Andler. IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fos. 1405-7: Thomas to Fournière, Apr. 29, 1913; May 5, 1913.

⁷⁴ Louis Guitard, *La Petite Histoire de la III^e République. Souvenirs de Maurice Colrat* (Paris, 1959), 43-6.

highly relevant to his own ideas.⁷⁵ Paul-Boncour's federalism pointed to the new forces of the economy – trades unions and other workers' associations – acquiring status as sovereign legal entities, the founding stones of the state.⁷⁶ Fournière contacted Paul-Boncour through the secretariat of the Ministry of Commerce to tell him that his work was "absolutely remarkable".⁷⁷

The intellectual connection between Paul-Boncour and Fournière was sealed during the decentralization debate launched by Paul-Boncour and Charles Maurras in 1903, to which Fournière contributed enthusiastically.⁷⁸ In his letter of thanks, Paul-Boncour emphasized their shared perspective, echoing Fournière's own sentiments about the limitations of political parties in a social democracy: "The parties are formations that are good for the struggle... But clearly the only way to organize democracy is to liberate and strengthen social groups (as opposed to political groups): trades unions, cooperatives, regions, communes, etc."⁷⁹ Not just in their advocacy of economic decentralization, but in their extension of this to a critique of party politics in the new age of social democracy, Paul-Boncour and Fournière found a genuine intellectual affinity.

In later recollections, Paul-Boncour described how his socialism had been inspired by the tradition of Malon and the *Revue socialiste*.⁸⁰ Paul-Boncour admired Fournière's constancy while the

⁷⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the historic and theoretical roots of Paul-Boncour's federalism, as well as its significance in Third Republic political debate see Julian Wright, "Vision and reality: Joseph Paul-Boncour and the Third Republic", in Stuart Jones and Julian Wright (eds), *Pluralism and the Idea of the Republic in France* (Basingstoke, 2012).

⁷⁶ Joseph Paul-Boncour, *Le Fédéralisme économique: les rapports de l'individu et des groupements professionnels*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1901).

⁷⁷ Archives Nationales (hereafter: AN) 424 AP (papiers Paul-Boncour) 1: unknown secretary of Alexandre Millerand to Paul-Boncour, Mar. 7, 1900.

⁷⁸ Essays by these three and several other commentators from different parts of the political spectrum were published in a collection in 1904: Charles Maurras and Joseph Paul-Boncour, *Un Débat nouveau sur la décentralisation* (Toulouse, 1904). Fournière's article first appeared in *La Petite République* on July 29, 1903.

⁷⁹ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 163: Paul-Boncour to Fournière, undated (1903).

⁸⁰ Paul-Boncour struggled to remind socialists in the interwar years of the place of Malon in socialist historiography: writers such as Saint-Simon, Fourier and Proudhon, he argued, had "for too long been disdained unjustly by modern socialism, with all its Marxist exclusivity... they form the chain between [the French Revolution and their own socialism], as the last of them taught, the shepherd of Forez, Benoît Malon, founder of the *Revue socialiste*... There is a magnificent story, a living tradition, very badly known in our generation and even worse in the new generation – a French tradition where socialism ever appears as the apotheosis of democracy." – Joseph Paul-Boncour, Introduction to *Lamennais* (Paris, 1928), 4. In his memoirs

political constellations of the left had mutated around him: “I knew from your earlier work that federalism had drawn your sympathy. But the pressing necessities of the political battle, or the less honorable failure of memory, have made so many republicans forget the point of the struggle... that it is very comforting to find people like you, who have forgotten nothing and want to abandon nothing.”⁸¹ In 1909, when Paul-Boncour was elected to the Chamber in a by-election in the Loir-et-Cher, Fournière wrote paternally, sending out what almost amounted to an appeal that they should rekindle their intellectual alliance: “Here at last is someone who, without separating himself from democracy, challenges it to surpass itself, to complete itself, to socialize the state by penetrating it with the association. If I did not still have two or three books to write, and my boy to bring up, I could sing the Nunc dimittis!”⁸²

There does not seem to be any further exchange between the two, in spite of the affinity of their political and philosophical views. Something rather poignantly apposite can be seen in Paul-Boncour’s signing-off in one exchange: “Alone I can do little; supported by an old militant like you, my appeal can no longer be without effect.”⁸³ The loneliness of Paul-Boncour would need to be mitigated in order to advance his political career; he allied himself to the independent socialist René Viviani, becoming his chef de cabinet in the new ministry of Labor from 1906, while maintaining close ties to a senior radical politician, Maurice Bertheaux.⁸⁴ The loneliness of Fournière, on the other hand, was largely unmitigated. In the context of the vaguely-defined intellectual world where libertarian and reformist socialism overlapped, intellectual independence and free criticism were often valued; but the pressure of conformity within the unified socialist party made the role of the independent critic increasingly lonely.

Paul-Boncour would reflect: “Neither Marx nor historical materialism... influenced my development. On the other hand, I was seduced, conquered by that idealist, generous socialism – Malon called it ‘integral’ – which took its roots in the long tradition of French socialism...” – idem., *Entre Deux Guerres. Souvenirs sur la III^e République* i. *Les Luites républicaines* (Paris, 1945), 62.

⁸¹ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 164: Paul-Boncour to Fournière, undated (1903).

⁸² AN 424 AP 1: Fournière to Paul-Boncour, Jan. 16, 1909.

⁸³ IFHS 14 AS 181 (2), fo. 164: Paul-Boncour to Fournière, undated (1903).

⁸⁴ Julian Wright, “Joseph Paul-Boncour,” 78.

Unsurprisingly, Fournière and Paul-Boncour's concept of the limitations of the party has struggled to progress within twentieth-century socialism; but it may be all the more important today, in a period when socialism's relevance is widely questioned, to re-examine the conclusions of thinkers such as Fournière. Fournière wove together his theory of activism in grassroots economic and social associations with an almost emotional, passionate belief that party hierarchies should not become the hope of socialism. The fervor with which he subscribed to these ideas puzzled some of his associates; others, however, recognized his consistent moral purpose, in which were woven together his complex theories of society and his own personal struggle as a militant.

V

French reformists and libertarian socialists challenged the dominance of the debate about power in the state; but this challenge came in a variety of different voices and styles, often at odds with one another. Socialists such as Fournière or Andler found that by applying their belief in free criticism as a rule of their political conduct they alienated themselves not just from the left of the party but from potential sympathizers among more moderate socialists as well. Perhaps this was because Fournière's libertarian socialism was really very far from being a moderate sort of ministerial socialism, in spite of the fact that his theory of social reality was so close to reformist ideas. Rebérioux's somewhat high-handed description of the leaders of the *Revue socialiste* as being on the 'right wing' of the socialist party begs the question: is a Proudhonian more or less left-wing than a Marxist?⁸⁵ In the discussion about socialist identities, so much depends on the questions and definitions that are chosen to delineate individual ideological positions. But if the question of identifying non-revolutionary French socialists remains difficult partly because of the dominance of

⁸⁵ The description of these socialists as the "right" of the party is advanced in Rebérioux's extremely useful article on *La Revue socialiste* published in the *Cahiers Georges Sorel* cited above.

“orthodox” intellectual frameworks, the personal histories of libertarians and reformists are just as significant in the complex task of reconceptualizing the history of French socialism.

This case-study of the problems faced by libertarian socialism has opened wider questions about socialism in France, especially its understanding of the relationship between ideas and the personal contexts in which they developed. Fournière attempted to weave together his anti-statist socialism with a moral vision, in which idealism was articulated as a driving force in the present, in a timeframe that could be understood and acted on by ordinary militants. For the historian of socialism, the challenge is to understand how his call was enunciated and why, though it did not fall on deaf ears, it failed to have wider influence. The multi-faceted personalities of socialist militants like Fournière open windows onto a more complex world of ideas, militancy and personal relationships that defined the failure or success of different strands of socialism.

The federalist or Proudhonian path within French socialism was obscured for many years, particularly after the Bolshevik Revolution so dramatically changed the wider political context for French socialism. There are clear historical reasons for French socialists moving away from a theory of socialism based on a radical associationism; in France, *syndicats* and cooperatives would never have the wider social importance they acquired, for example, in Britain. Meanwhile, French socialism has continued to find the debate about state power seductive, to the extent that it has often prevented other questions from being raised. Because Fournière absolutely rejected the primacy of this intellectual framework, it is not surprising that his place in socialist history has been marginal. But there were other reasons for his path not being followed. Neither he, nor Georges Renard nor Charles Andler saw themselves as leaders within their part of the movement, though all three had an impressive mastery of the ideas of libertarian socialism. They were often aligned inaccurately with ministerialist socialism – that of Alexandre Millerand and Aristide Briand. Although Renard himself was a very close personal friend of Millerand, none of these thinkers really approved of the course taken by those reformist socialists, and grudgingly admitted that the compromises of Millerand and

Briand were probably just as alien to their socialism as they were to that of the “orthodox” left. They were also frustrated with the quite different compromises of Jaurès, who devoted so much energy to holding together a coalition between moderate and “orthodox” socialism. And yet few historians have asked “what were the down-sides of Jaurès’ decision to pursue party unity?” The very existence of the unified party has made it almost impossible for socialist historians to grapple with the independent socialist tradition left behind when Jaurès led the way to unity. Yet the road to unity necessarily relegated Fournière and his ideas to a fringe which it has been too easy to describe, inaccurately, as the “right wing” of the party. The difficulty of developing greater cohesion for libertarian socialism can partly be explained by the sheer political weight of Jaurès’ unity movement. French libertarian socialists have struggled with the consequences of this for over a century.

At a deeper level, however, the frustration of Fournière with the seemingly inevitable rise of party bureaucracy arose as much from his own personal experiences and emotional investment in the cause. That his fellow libertarians were bereft of leadership was not entirely the fault of Jaurès. Their questioning of the culture of socialism and party structures was advanced in a manner that was often prickly or anxious. These very struggles continue to define the culture of socialist politics in France today. The role of emotions and personal relationships in the development of successful political partnerships has been never more under scrutiny than in the struggle between Ségolène Royal and the party led by her former partner François Hollande. The juncture between intellectual debate and the culture of generational or gendered political identities likewise remains a vital topic of discussion. Finally, the way in which French socialism selectively reads its history continues to be a source of concern to many left-wing intellectuals in France, as Vincent Duclert puts it: “The critical conception of history has always been lacking on the left; its absence has for long been masked by the success of party machinery, electoral victories or simply the weakness of the right-wing opposition.”⁸⁶ Fournière called for a genuine rediscovery of revolutionary idealism against what he saw as the shallow revolutionary rhetoric of the party faithful. Today, left-wing historians are

⁸⁶ Duclert, *La Gauche devant l’histoire*, 151.

beginning to ask the socialist movement to re-evaluate the idealism of free spirits like Fournière, as the French left seeks to discover a new purpose in the twenty-first century.