Chapter 4

The Pacifist Tradition of French Anarchosyndicalist Teachers And their Congress in Chambéry in 1912

by Francis Feeley

According to statistics provided by *The War Times Journal*, during the course of the First World War 11% of France's entire population were killed or wounded. Eight percent of Great Britain's population were killed or wounded, and 9% of Germany's pre-war population were killed or wounded. The United States, which did not enter the war until 1917, suffered one-third of one percent (0.37%) of its population killed or wounded.(1)

I. <u>On Intellectual Motivations: A Personal Testimony.</u>

My earliest interests in France stemmed from my undergraduate reading on the French Enlightenment. I still have the book of excerpts from the writings of Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, and Condorcet, with brief biographies. Reading this book, I remember, was exhilarating. It stirred the imagination of the young man who had grown up in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

I first visited France, in July 1965, I was 19 years old and was on my way by auto-stop to southern Germany, with a copy of James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* in my backpack. My project that summer was to "perfect my German." I had studied German as a foreign language at a small university in Texas for two years, and I had hoped to fulfill my deceased mother's ambition and return to Texas fluent in "the language of Goethe," her second language. I failed this project, but as she had died ten years before I was saved from disappointing her.

However, it was another project, totally unforeseen at the time, that captured my attention. Between my arrival at Shannon Airport in Ireland and my destination at Hof-am-Saale, north of Nuremburg in Bavaria, I had passed through Paris, and here I was struck by many new experiences, among them the ubiquitous sight of little old women dressed in black –the war widows, I was told-- and the strange signs on public transportation –busses and subways with front-row wooden seats and small bronze plaques which read: ***réservée aux mutilés de guerre***. I was struck by these constant reminders of war, the stubborn presence of the victims themselves and their defenders; it was a humbling experience….

I had grown up an orphan and quickly felt at home in a nation of orphans and widows, as I had perceived France on that first visit in 1965. My later studies in French history would bring to my attention the rich complexity of French traditions and its proud culture. There was, I discovered, much, much more to learn from this society than the superficial appearances which I had encountered at the age of nineteen. It was much more than a nation of orphans and widows.

At the time, however, during this first brief visit to France, I could only sense that there was something important happening here, something beneath the surface of gaiety; that this nation had lived a painful experience and that it had somehow survived to see better days. There was a joy of life here unlike anything I had experienced elsewhere.

Coming from Texas, I suppose, where macho sentiments produced a stoic view of life, I felt an immediate relief on my first visit to France, where different sentiments played an important role in communication and mutual understandings. The collective experience of war and of death in large numbers seemed to have deepened an appreciation for life.

I returned to Texas that fall and changed my major from literature to history and my foreign language study from German to French. With the help of a sympathetic French professor, who had spent one memorable year studying in Lyon, I put together my own study abroad program and enrolled myself in a school at Aix-en-Provence the following year. I was twenty-one years old then, and I was in love with France.

Eventually, I landed in Madison, Wisconsin for graduate studies in history. It was by studying social history in the University of Wisconsin Ph.D. program that I better informed my feelings for France with information and an epistemology that opened many new doors of perception.

I entered the History Department at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in fall 1968, during the period of the Vietnam War and following the May/June events in America and France. I began in earnest my studies among activists and radicals in a history department where the search for root causes of phenomena, whether in past events or in contemporary actions, was a daily practice. It was an exciting experience where intellectual courage and honesty in the face of corporate indifference and political hostilities was a constant challenge.

At Wisconsin I began to read on the French revolution and the subsequent histories of democratic movements that are woven into the collective consciousness of the nation, up to and beyond the resistance movements during the Second World War. The social philosophies of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, of Albert Camus, and Henri Lefevre were required reading in my graduate school studies, to be supplemented later by the works of Claude Levi-Strausse, Louis Althusser, Giles Deluze and Félix Guattari, and Michel Foucault. I never really became sectarian –an existentialist, or a structuralist, or post-stucturalist, or a post-modernist, etc…. But I did find these debates useful in developing my own epistemology for studying social relationships, both past and present.

Soon, my studies in social history brought me back to France, where I spent four years working in archives and libraries conducting research on the Third Republic. The topic I chose to investigate concerned primary school teachers before the First World War, and specifically those who were attracted to socialist ideologies. I intended to do a phenomenological study of social class consciousness among these teachers to determine what in their daily lives at work and in the community where they lived had drawn them by the thousands to join the CGT and to read the analyses and opinions published in revolutionary anarchist journals, like *La Vie Ouvrière*, *L'Ecole Emancipée*, *La Voix du Peuple*, etc….

Very little had been written on this subject and virtually nothing from the vantage point of anarcho-syndicalist teachers. My research took me back to Paris in 1972, where I spent the next four years working in the archives and libraries and, of course, was influenced by my own daily life in that cosmopolitan city.

II. <u>On Historical Patterns: An Investigation.</u>

In the late summer of 1912 Chambéry hosted an anti-war conference, which like our own conference in 2006 was attended by dozens of pacifists. Also, like our own meeting, this first conference was scheduled for more than one day, and it was also attended by school teachers, only they were teachers from French elementary schools. These teachers who gathered here at Chambéry in 1912 met in a different historical context: the First World War was approaching and they had come to discuss the effects this was having on their environment, their families, and their work.

These French primary school teachers were about to engage in war resistance and they sought practical information on effective tactics that would serve in their resistance against what they knew to be the inexorable path to mass murder. The date was August 16, 1912, and some 46 representatives of the Federation Nationale des Syndicats des Instituteurs et des Institutrices (FNSI) had gathered for their annual congress, where the agenda included discussions on sexism, militarism, and alienation in the public school system and in French society in general. On their agenda was also the question of how to strengthen their ties to the French labor movement to prevent war.

These teachers had met in Marseille the year before to discuss pedagogical reforms in primary schools, and the following year, after their Chambéry Congress, they met in Bourges, but this time the only item on their agenda was to discuss their own survival as an association. Why had the 1912 meeting at Chambéry detonated such a powerful explosion within the state bureaucracy?

In Chambéry on the last day of the 1912 conference, the 46 teachers' delegates, who represented several thousand teachers in schools across France, had voted to support a colleague named Rousset, who, as an elementary school teacher himself, had defended the human rights of another teacher named Aernout. Aernout had been fired from his job for openly criticizing militarism in the school where he taught. (2)

In addition to the expression of professional solidarity and social class consciousness, these FNSI delegates represented a still greater threat to the traditional forces of order. At the conclusion of their conference, they had voted in favor of the *sou du soldat* (literally "pennies for soldiers") in support of anti-war tactics by subsidizing the distribution of pacifist literature in the French Army, so that conscripted primary school teachers could continue to read their professional periodicals, such as *l'Ecole Emmanicpée* and *l'Emancipation et l'Instituteur* - both of which expressed regularly strong anti-militarist sentiments. In the minds of many school administrators, such a vote was outright treason against the state.

In this paper, I will try to demonstrate why the fierce state repression against these French pacifist teachers was necessary as early as 1912. The threat they represented to the international capitalist order was *not* imaginary, and their analysis of the real causes of war represented a true danger to pro-war interests, for it threatened to turn the world upside down and establish a new hierarchy of values where nature, society, and human life ranked above jobs, profits, and corporate interests. These teachers represented an authentic revolutionary culture, complete with strategies, tactics, and logistics.

The young French intelligentsia in the early Third Republic had received a secular education. This was due partly to the infamous *Dreyfus Affaire* at the end of the 19th Century, when a Jewish captain in the French Army had been made a scapegoat by the predominantly Roman

Catholic officer corps, some of whom were actually guilty of selling military secrets to Germany. But another reason for this anti-religious thinking was that these thousands of newly trained primary school teachers were the heirs of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. They had been taught that *Reason* must replace superstition, and that intellectual inquiry was superior to blind obedience. What they acquired, in preparation for becoming teachers of future French citizens, was a quality which some might argue has been largely lost today in modern education, namely the method of discovering *patterns which connect* particular parts to a total configuration, so that the proverbial *forest* and the *trees* can be perceived at one and the same time. In other words, they were educated to produce an intellectual activity that stems from an unalienated identity with nature and society and which allows one to perceive oneself as part of a whole structure, which by definition must have a beginning, a middle, and an end –and hopefully a distant end.

How was it possible that these teachers who met at Chambéry possessed the ability to perceive in no uncertain terms dangers what others could not, or would not see, and to take the necessary measures need to resist the encroaching imperialist war? What were the sources of this exceptional courage that enabled them to look reality in the face, and to intuitively understand the logical consequences of the social and political trends they observed daily about them?

In this essay, we will argue that the answer to the first question is that there unusual perceptions were facilitated by their knowledge of past and their understanding of its connections to the future.

The second question, we believe, can be answered by looking at the strong affective relationships these teachers had in the classroom with their students, whose intellectual and spiritual potentials they sought to cultivate and protect against specific dangers that they perceived, one of which was *militarism*.

Is it possible that this corps of teachers, creations of the early Third Republic, represent still today, the embodiment of an advanced political culture, in a social context that more often rewards intellectual conformity and obedience, and a different kind of mental activity, where precision, technical jargon, and quantitative calculations are given priority over accuracy, successful comprehension, and qualitative understanding of relationships between constituent parts of a given gestalt?

We will argue that the answer to this question is that anarcho-syndicalist teachers developed the art of *dialectical thinking* in abstract terms which encouraged systemic thinking and permitted them to connect specific parts to the whole system in which they saw themselves (in a non-teleological way). This way of thinking is distinct from *analytical thinking*, which remains the hallmark of most academic institutions. The methods and theories which were adopted by teachers associated with the anarcho-syndicalist movement at the turn of the last century represent a legacy that many scholars and activists still find useful in order to construct a counter-balance to the non-dialectical thought of logical positivism which fails to address systemic relations in transition and instead deals only in partial terms of cause-and-effect within a static state. When used exclusively, *analytical thinking* ignores important human needs and, indeed, as it always has, represents a danger to society and the wider environment. The pedagogy of revolutionary syndicalism addressed this problem, and it was necessarily a pedagogy based on praxis.

In Part III of this essay we will examine the anarcho-syndicalist culture during the Third Republic and the influences on thousands of pacifist at the time of the First World War.

In the first section of this essay, “the past as present,” we will attempt to describe historical patterns of behavior and show how past events influenced the contemporary thoughts and actions of these teachers who gathered in Chambéry in 1912. We will look first at the kind of historical knowledge that guided these pacifist teachers, as educated men and women in the early 20th Century whose job it was to pass on their culture to a future generation and to assure the past had a future.

In section b below, “the present as future,” we will explore briefly the presuppositions of these pacifist teachers, in order to explain the quality of their commitment to a future without war. To better understand the unusual degree of courage that existed behind their convictions we will move from their projections of a socialist future, backwards in time toward their present involvement in the anti-war movement, to give the future a new design.

Then in section c, “the future as probability,” we will briefly look at structural trends in the political economy that took France into war, against the will of pacifists. We will suggest a pattern exists connecting these economic and political relationships beyond the First World War.

And finally, in section d of this essay, we will take a look at the epistemology of these anarcho-syndicalist school teachers and try to determine their hierarchy of values (compared to liberal egalitarianism) and its relationship to their commitment to *social democracy* (compared to the more limited concept of *political democracy* contained in capitalist cultures). This we have called the future as possibility.

III. On Anarcho-syndicalist culture among French pacifist teachers at the time of World War I: A Discovery.

a. The Past as Present : War Orphans and Widows.

Allons enfants de la Patrie
Le jour de gloire est arrivé...(3)

In 1914, every school child knew that Napoleon had had very little trouble assembling nearly 600,000 men to invaded Russia at the end of June 1812. His “Grand Army” arrived in Moscow on 14 September. He ordered a retreat from Moscow on October 19, after negotiations with the Russian government failed and the city was wasted by fire. His troops were ravaged by the Russian winter, and he suffered heavy losses when crossing the Berezina River 26-28 November. On December 5, Napoleon abandoned his troops and fled for Paris, and on December 14, according to Stanford University Professor Gordon Wright, and Marshal Ney “marched in good order across the border into Poland with 350 half-frozen, half-starved men” -this was all that remained of Napoleon’s Grand Army. In less than six months, more than half-a-million soldiers in his invading army met death by disease, cold, or hunger. It was the turning point in Napoleon’s career.

Despite this catastrophe, by late spring 1813 he succeeded again in recruiting another quarter of a million soldiers, mostly Frenchmen, and in October of that year his troops were again decimated in the "Battle of the Nations" near the city of Leipzig. The Prussians had joined the English and the Russians in opposition to Napoleon, and they would soon be reinforced by troops from Austria, from Span, and even the Dutch. On March 30, Paris capitulated and a few days later most of Napoleon's marshals informed him of their intention to surrender. The rest is history….(4)

"Bleating like sheep led to slaughter..."(5)
in April 1917
http://www.richthofen.com/ww1sum/

One hundred years later, a new war produced predictably new charismatic military leaders with promises of grandeur and stunning victories --ideas which secured for them the power of life and death over hundreds of thousands of credulous young Frenchmen. New ambitious leaders like Foch, Joffre, Petain and Nivelle viewed the common soldier as simply a means to an end, and perhaps an opportunity for promotion. General Ferdinand Foch, the architect of the notorious *Plan 17*, calculated that large numbers of his soldiers were expendable and that a high level of casualties among his troops was accepted as part of his tactical "l'offensive à outrance" to overpower the enemy once their ammunition was spent. This was the French tactics at the First Battle of the Marne, in September 1914, where General Foch led the Ninth Army, under the command of Généralisime Joffre. The 1.5 million German troops had swept south from Belgium pushing back 1 million French troops, reinforced by more than 100,000 British soldiers. The orderly retreat came to a halt when the Allies attacked a gap in the German line at the Battle of the Marne on September 6. Within 30 minutes of Paris, General Joffre rushed French soldiers out of Paris to the River and attacked the advancing German army. After three days, between 6 and 9 September 1914, over half a million men were killed or wounded, and the Germans withdrew northward to a defensive position on the Aisne River.(6)

Despite the heavy casualties suffered at the Battle of the Marne, in October 1914 General Foch was promoted to Joint Commander-in-Chief of the French Army with Généralisime Joffre, and soon these men placed General Pétain in charge of the defense of Verdun.

Military Strategy

Verdun was at the head of an awkward and useless salient in the French line; from any detached point of view the French position would have been stronger without it. Nor was it any longer a fortress. The rapid fall of Liège and of Namur at the beginning of the war had convinced Joffre that the fortresses were useless; and Verdun had been stripped of its guns. The French people did not know this. For them Verdun was still a cornerstone of their defense, barring the road against the Germans.

The strategy of the German Command was to defeat England, Germany's "enemy," her industrial rival and, "the heart of resistance" against German expansion. Eventually, it was believed, unrestricted submarine warfare would do the job, but Germany had not yet enough U-boats. The German tactic in early 1916 was to deprive the British of the Continental ally.

German Commander Erich von Falkenhayn proposed to "bleed the French white." It was a not a military strategy to secure a location where victory would bring a strategic advantage. It was a "policy of attrition" which the Germany army had adopted, to kill as many French soldiers as possible, while suffering a minimum of German casualties. The famous fortress of Verdun served this symbolic purpose. Months before, the French had already removed the large guns from this useless fortress.

On 21 February 1916 a fourteen inch shell exploded in the Archbishop's Palace at Verdun. It was the signal for the German attack, and the first of the tremendous bombardments which were to characterize 1916. The French troops suffered high casualties from the first days of the attack, and General Joffre was disinclined to send reinforcements, as victory would bring no strategic advantage. This changed, however, on the night of February 24, when Prime Minister Briand arrived from Paris. At the officers' quarters he simply told the Staff officers, including Joffre, "You may not think losing Verdun a defeat, but everyone else will. If you surrender Verdun, you will be cowards, cowards, and I'll sack the lot of you."(7)

Verdun was of no military importance, but a French defeat would have political repercussions, and Briand knew that his government would fall as a result. In the first four months of this famous battle, the French suffered 315,000 casualties and the Germans lost 281,000, between 21 February and the end of June 1916.(8)

Just as it was impossible to convince the French that Verdun was not worth saving, so it became impossible to convince German public opinion that Verdun was not worth taking. What began as a German policy to slaughter as many Frenchmen as possible by artillery fire, at a minimum cost to German troops, soon became an heroic struggle. The Germans imagined that they were fighting for a great prize and ceased to count the cost as they were fed into the cauldron of destruction. Verdun was the most senseless episode in the First World War: both sides fought only for the sake of fighting and killing one another. There was no prize to be gained or lost, only "glory" and death. But again, despite the many casualties within the French army during the first months at Verdun, the commander of the defensive troops, Pétain, who was a colonel at the beginning of the war, would later become a Marshal of France. and ultimately head of the French State, as a result of his "successful" command at the defense of Verdun.(9)

Généralisime Joffre and his British allies planned to divert German forces away from the attack on Verdun with a British offensive at the Somme River. Ironically, the Battle of the Somme became the scene of an even greater human catastrophe than Verdun. During the first day of the attack, on 1 July 1916, the British sustained 60,000 casualties, with 20,000 killed outright. It was the heaviest loss ever suffered on a single day in World War I. By the end of this infamous battle, five months later, on 13 November 1916, the British had lost 420,000 men, the French nearly 200,000, and the Germans approximately 450,000.(10)

Strategically, the battle of the Somme is considered by military historians to have been a defeat for the Allies. It was suppose to have worn down the spirit of the German army, and that it did --but not to the point of crippling it. And great losses had worn down the British and French troops as well. The war had lost its strategic sense. It had become an industrial production process: the mass production of human suffering. The bodies of men were sacrificed for no strategic purpose, and by the end of 1916, the war was quickly loosing public support. It was at this time that the French pacifist movement began to gain a new breath of live.

On 19 December the Germans abandoned their attacks on the symbolic prize of the Verdun fortress. After ten months of fighting the total number of casualties exceeded 700,000, with 120,000 French soldiers killed on the field of battle, and 100,000 of their German counterparts met the same fate.(11)

The next scene of carnage, the following spring, beginning on 16 April 1917, would be the famous Chemin des Dames, near the town of Soissons, where General Nivelle, as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces suffered 40,000 casualties on the first day. Four weeks later the allies cound some 350,000 casaulties and no territorial gains.

This series of massive sacrifices of human lives were at the origins of the mutinies of 1917. Nivelle was judged incompetent would be sent to North Africa in disgrace, while the dissident soldiers would be disciplined by their new commanding officer, General Petain.(12)

It was Généralisisme Joffre who had selected Robert Nivelle back in April 1916 to replace Petain as commander at Verdun. Petain, a specialist in defensive tactics, had failed to impress his Commander-in-Chief during his first two months of command at Verdun. Unlike Petain, Nivelle was a disciple of the Foch's military doctrine of "l'offensive à outrance." Nivelle was a younger man, said to have been a handsome man and equally eloquent in both French and English. He enjoyed good press coverage and was increasingly popular among law makers in both London and Paris. He was colorful, charming, persuasive; and he was particularly favored by the Prime Ministers Lloyd George and Aristode Briand.

Thus, for a brief period Marshal Robert-George Nivelle became one of the charismatic French leaders in the war. After leading the "victory" at Verdun, Nivelle became a national hero. His popularity continued to grow, and eventually he was selected to replace General Joffre as Commander-in-Chief of the French army. Then, with ardent backing from Prime Ministers, Lloyd George, and Aritide Briand, General Nivelle was promoted to "Supreme Commander on the Western Front," with military authority over British generals, including Field Marshal Douglas Haig, the British Commander-in-Chief.

In April 1917, General Nivelle was invited to address the lawmakers directly in the Parliaments of London and Paris, where he announced that he had "discovered the secret of victory" (Taylor, 158-166)(5). In his memoirs, Winston Churchill later referred to Neville's "experiment" at Chemin des Dames, which, before it was over in May 1917, cost the lives of 220,000 men. In this period of slaughter, there appeared, according to Churchill, a "deeply disquieting" event among the French troops: resistance and disobedience became evident. "One French regiment went to the front bleating like sheep led to slaughter," according to witnesses of this pathetic attempt to protest. (Taylor, 177)(6). Mutinies, desertions and mass surrenders became common events within both German and French regiments. (13)

General Pétain replaced Nivelle toward the end of April 1917 and restored order using the customary technique of executing the leaders of the resistance movement, while offering a few privileges of greater comfort for many of the troops. The French military tribunal convicted 3,427 soldiers accused of mutiny. Five hundred and fifty-seven were condemned to death. Petain refused to pardon any of them. (14)

b. <u>The Present as Future : The anti-war movement among primary school teachers.</u>

The « Union Sacrée » was announced in a speech by President Raymond Poincare on 4 August 1914, immediately after the declaration of War. It was in response to a virtual tsunami of ineffable force which swept the French nation into a world of class collaboration and nationalist war with an untoward gaiety, which bespoke of relief from the endless tension of waiting for the inevitable. On the floor of the Chamber of Deputies, Edouard Vaillant, a Communard in 1871, and Albert de Mun, an officer in Thiers's troops that destroyed the Commune shook hands for the first time in their political careers. But in the midst of the mass hysteria there was another culture, a counter-culture with forces actively gathering that would oppose the war. One center of this force was found among pacifist primary school teachers, who were now prepared to resist the pro-war element that had permeated French society from top to bottom. (15)

Early in their careers the leaders of the Third Republic had created legislation that had established compulsory secular education throughout the French nation. By 1914, there were some 121,000 primary school teachers in France whose job it was "to turn peasants into Frenchmen," but of this number some 3,000 were affiliated with the anarcho-syndicalist labor union, the CGT, which had adopted the express goal of creating "international solidarity" within the working classes. These more cosmopolitan teachers taught mainly, but not always, in the large urban areas. They were among the best informed and most critical sector of French society, and they were organized. Their national teachers' Federation had received formal recognition in 1905, and each year more local unions affiliated with the national federation, until in 1914 there existed more than 46 syndicats attached to both the Federation Nationale des Instituteurs et des Institutrices (FNSI) and the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). (16)

In 1912, delegates from 46 unions met at the Federation's national congress which was held that year in Chambéry. Typically, they discussed and voted on the most radical questions of the day: sexist discrimination by public school administrators, greater economic equality in the school system, a greater degree of democracy in the workplace and political justice. But the most explosive decision taken by these primary school teachers at the Chambéry Congress was their vote on 17 August to endorse the *Sou du Soldat* initiative which was already active in the Bourse du Travail. This vote by the Federation des Instituteurs et des Institutrices de France was labeled in the popular press, *le Scandale de Chambéry*.

Within days, the Minister of Education, M. Guist'hau, announced, on 23 August, in an official circular addressed to all the préfects in France :

> « Il ne faut pas qu'une minorité turbulente continue plus longtemps à faire le jeu des ennemis de l'école, à jeter le discrédit le plus injuste sur son enseignement et, puisqu'il est maintenant avéré que les syndicats d'instituteurs deviennent des centres d'agiation politique, des foyers de désagrégation nationale, un gouvernement républicain, soucieux des intérêts de l'école républicaine, se doit à lui-même de les supprimer sans retard. L'intolérable ne peut être toléré.

> « Vous voudrez bien, Monsieur le Préfet, inviter le syndicat ou la section syndicale qui pourrait exister dans votre département à se dissoudre avant le 10 septembre prochain. Passé cette date, vous aurez à m'aviser de la décision des intéressés afin que le Gouvernement puisse prendre sans délai les mesures nécessaires. » (17)

The Chambéry meeting of teachers set off a campaign in which the nationalist pro-war press joined government officials in attacking anarchosyndicalist teachers for the anti-militarism. The socialist press, notably Jean Jaurés in *L'Humanité* and Léon Jouhaux in *La Bataille syndicaliste* came to their defense :

« Dans les écoles militaires, a écrit Jaurés en 1913, une discipline étouffante, une discipline de hiérarchie qui ne convient pas à former des esprits libres pour l'armée vraiment populaire d'une démocratie en movement. Dans ces écoles, le professeur est avant tout un chef, un supérieur …. Entre ses subordonnés et lui, il n'y a pas cette familiarité, cette liberté de causerie qui seules permettent l'éveil idées. Jusque dans le travail de l'intelligence intervient une discipline mécanique, automatique, qui pèse toute la vie sur les habitudes de pensée. » (18)

Years earlier, in 1905, Georges Yvetot, secretary of the Fédération des Bourse du Travail, had defended the right of teachers to join the revolutionary labor movement, "It is primary school teachers who truly have the syndicalist spirit which we love. It is they who speak out openly, like us. What is the red syndicalist who would not open his ranks to such elements?" (19)

c. <u>The Future as probability : Historical Patterns in Political Economy.</u>

There is no shortage of charts, graphs and tables computing French losses in World War I. Over 1,310,000 Frenchmen lost their lives or disappeared on the front, and another 1,100,000 were permanently mutilated. Add to these numbers the several thousand civilians who deteriorated from undernourishment, turberculosis, the "Spanish flu" and other epidemics caused by the war; and demograpjhers estimate French war casualties and wounded at the figure around 2,500,000. These statistics have been refined, classified and, in general, have provided much work for students of the war. They tell us that in 1914 there were 3,000,000 young men in France between 20 and 30 years old, and of this number 27 percent never returned form the war. France became an unhealthy place to live as male life expenctance dropped from 48.9 years in 1914 to 39,5 years in 1918. (20)

Statisticians tell us that the different professions shared unequally in war casualties. While the "docile, credulous" peasants constituted almost half of the war dead, the liberal professions sacrificed over twice their proportional numbers to the war. (Only 2.3% of the active male population worked in liberal professions before the war, and 5.5% of this group did not return.) The working class sacrificed 7% less than their "equal share" for the Union Sacrée.

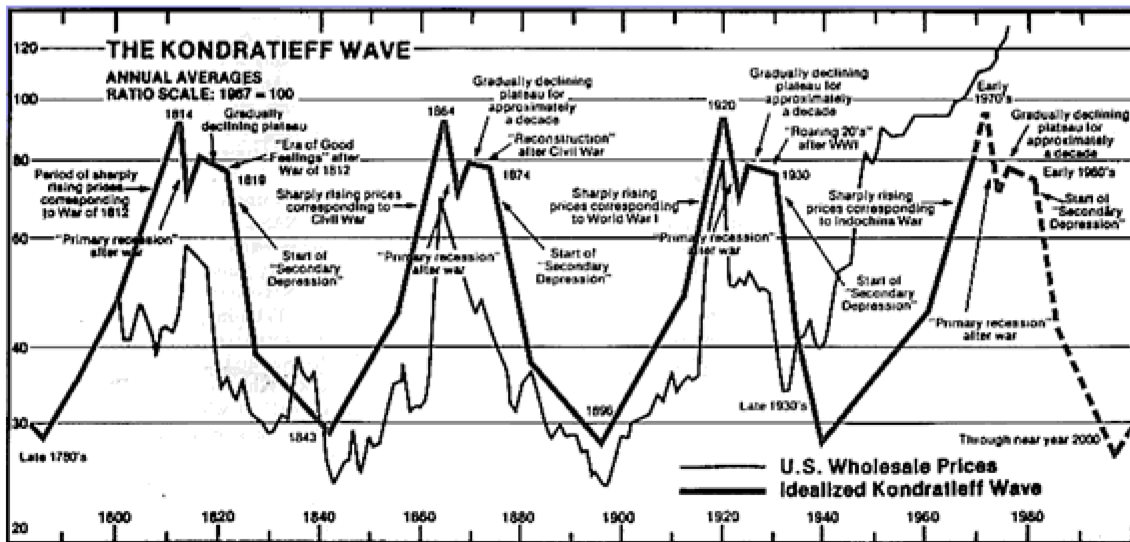
The economic consequences of the war have been analyzed as well. In international exchange value, the French franc-U.S. dollar ratio went from 5 : 1 to 11 : 1 during the war. By April 1920, the exchange ratio had risen to 17 : 1. (21)

Within France the picture of inflation was no less dramatic. The cost of living index, based on the retail price of 45 common commodities, rose from 100 in 1914 to 147 in 1916, and individual buying power between 1913 and 1921 fell by more than 20%. The general index of industrial production fell from 100 in 1913 to 57 in 1919, and lower still to 55 in 1921. France was in an economic crisis toward the end of the war when a delegation headed by Viviani, in April 1917 obtained an immediate loan of 200 million dollars and promised a monthly sum of 160 million dollars beginning in July. (22)

As usual, it was not the "nation" which suffered, but rather its citizens, and those of the lower classes suffered most. While the number of French millionaires increased during the war, the poor lost their means of support, were displaced and went hungry. The firt month of war was 52% of Paris enterprises closed and 600,000 Parisians unemployed. Almost 2,000,000 workers were without income in France at the end of August 1914, and this does not include families of mobilized soldiers. This hardship is contrasted against the life of wealthy Parisians, such as Pechiney, whose chemical empire grew from a value of 10,000,000 to 80,000,000 francs between 1914 and 1917. Nor did investors in the Saint-Gobain chemical company suffer when their capital rose from 3,500,000 francs in 1914 to 22,800,000 francs in 1916. "They enter in the logic of an economic system," wrote one economist of the rich, "in which the war is a motor of economic progress at the same time that it is a means of enrichment." Leon Jouhaux was also impressed by the astronomical growth of certain sectors of the economy during the war. He told his followers at the C.G.T. Congress of Lyon in 1919 pf "the economic revolution" (by which he meant economic expansion), which he judged "superior [to socialist revolution]; that's what I want to work for in cooperation with everyone…." The promise of more money was the "logic" of corporatism, but everyone did not approve of this system, nor of Jouhaux's dictum that "the duty of the working class is to help reach the maximum of production, the goal of everyone…." (23)

The idea of a supposedly rational economic system being dependent on destruction goes against common sense. Such a system must surely be inhuman --unless, of course, you have been taught that human beings are born evil, born sinners. Major and minor scientists and certian religions have done much to make Original Sin popular, but there's no good evidence that the problem of imperial war is an individual, genetic, or 'sociobiological' matter. In contrast, the evidence against the modern economic system --both capitalist and state-capitalist-- is simply damning.

Kondratieff Wave



In the above diagram an idealized K-wave is superimposed over actual US wholesale prices since the 1780s. The pattern of the K-wave is as follows: (1) a 20-to-30-year period of rising prosperity and prices ending in a major war (e.g. the period 1843-64); (2) then a period of about ten years consisting of a brief 'primary recession' after the war, a short recovery, and then a slowly declining 'plateau' (e.g. 1864-74); and finally (3) a long decline in prosperity and prices (the 'secondary depression') ending in another war (e.g. the Spanish-American War of 1898). Kondratieff, who first published his findings in the 1920s (he died soon after, purged by Stalin), argued that the 'peak' wars, bigger and more violent than the 'trough' wars, in contrast, smaller and cheaper, help the system to recover from its long decline. (The three longest and worst depressions in the US all came 8 to 10 years after the peak, in 1825-29, 1874-79, and 1929-33, each followed by a further period of deflation.) In US economic history the peak wars are the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1789-1815), the Civil War (1861-65), World War One (1914-1918), and the escalated Vietnam War(1965-74). The trough wars are the Mexican War (1846-48), the Spanish-American and Philippine Wars (1898-1906), and World War Two (1941-45) --the latter coming a little early than the pattern strictly suggests. This pattern suggests that war is an essential component of the long-term business cycle under capitalism, state and private. (24)

d. <u>The Future as possibility : Pacifist Strategies and Tactics at the Time of WW I.</u>

No amount of official optimism could hide the fact that the path for individual mobility under capitalism was narrow, opportunistic and divisive. The dire conditions in France during the First World War provided the context for social revolt. It was a revolt against the oppressive logic of the corporate state, against the politics of the "union sacrée", and it regenerated the politics of social class consciousness, the necessity of dialogue and debate. Ruling class interests in France had represented their interests as the universal interests of mankind, the only rational means to achieve the necessary ends of progress and economic development.**(25)**

In contrast with the new reformist majority, militant syndicalists spoke in a new tone of urgency. In December 19198, Jouhaux could declare that "the C.G.T. must not live in the past, it must consider its actions for the future," but by that date scores of pacifist teachers had been the victims of repression, ranging from government reprimand to imprisonment. *Ce qu'il faut dire*, an anti-war newspaper edited by Sebastien Faure between April 1916 and December

1917 was a periodical to which many teachers subscribed and for which some wrote articles. It alerted its readers to existing repression in May 1916:

"When, during months and months, people remain silent, when they cease to think as well as speak, when they agree to censor their critical sensabilities and cease to utilize their faculties of observation, these people are suffering from intellectual repression."

In reaction to the Ministry's August circular demanding the dissolution of the teachers' unions and their national Federation of unions, the FNSI, Emile Glay wrote in an article published in *L'Humanité* on 28 August 1912 :

"M. Guist'hau ne peut pas, de son autorité, dissoudre les syndicats ! Les sections syndicales relèvent uniquement de la loi de 1901. »

In *La Bataille syndicaliste*, on 29 August, André Chalopin, secrétaire du Syndicat de la Seine, began a series of daily articles encouraging resistance to the government decree that the teachers' unions dissolve. This call for resistance was echoed in the local press, as well. In Main-et-Loire the union secretary Laiyet was interviewed in Anger by the local newspaper, *L'Ouest*, and was reported as saying that teachers must not obey this ministerial decree:

"Je ne crois pas trop m'avencer en déclarant qu'ils (les camarades) ne voteront pas leur dissolution, c'est-à-dire leur propre mort…. Nous avons une tâche, nous n'y faillirons pas. »

In early September teachers issued their famous "Manifeste des Instituteurs syndiqué". The entire text was published on 16 September in both La Bataille syndicaliste and in L'Humanté:

"On a tant parlé de nous dans les journaux de toutes nuances depuis le fameux Congrés de Chambéry, on a accumulé de si grossières inexactitudes et de telles contradictions, que nous jugeons indipsensable de lettre les choses au point. Une déclaration nette, loyale, sera de nature, espérons-le, à désarmer les personnes consciencieuses dont le jugement seul nous importe. »

The public scandal revolved around three votes taken the month before at the Chambéry Congress: 1) Sou du Soldat :

"Afin de maintenir les relations existantes entre les camarades syndiqués soldats et leur groupement; il est institute dans chaque sundicat une oeuvre spéciale, dite Sou du Soldat, destine à leur venir en aide moralement et pécuniairement.

« Dans les Bourses du travail, où existe le Sou du Soldat, les syndicats devront adhérer à cette organisation ».

2) Pour la C.G.T. :

« Dès l'ouverture de sa séance publique, le Congrès des syndicats d'instituteurs adresse aux camarades ouvriers, goupés dans la C.G.T., l'expression de sa vive sympathie pour l'effort sz libération et d'éducation qu'ils poursuivent. Les instituteurs suivent avecx une qttention pqssonnée la lutte quotidienne menée par la classe ouvrière pour améliorer son sort et défendre sa dignité : partageant ses angoisses et ses espoirs, ils sont fiers de militer dans ses rangs et se déclarent une fois de plus solidaires de tous les salariés unis sous le drapeau de la C.G.T. »

3) Pour Rousset, president de la Fédération des Amicales :

« La F.N.S.I. réunie en Congrés à Chambéry envoie son salut fraternel à l'héroïque Rousset ainsi qu'à toutes les victimes enfermées dans les geôles capitalistes et déclare approuver entièrement la généreuse campagne entreprise par le Comité de Défense sociale. »

The Manifesto went on to declare that organized teachers had the right to express the solidarity with their conscripted colleagues now serving in the French army.

"Nous avons créé le 'Sou du Soldat' pour server nos bulletins professionnels et quelques trop rares pièces de cinq francs à nos camarades sous les drapeaux. Il s'agissait d'une œuvre de solidarité, et non d'une manifestation antipatriotique, ni même antimilitariste. Si nous le répétons, ce n'est nullement dans la crainte de prendre nos responsabilités, mais parce que nous voulons dire ce qui est vrai. »

On the question of « patriotism » the Manifesto stated unequivocally the pacifist sentiments of French teachers:

> Si être patriote, c'est vouloir une France toujours plus humaine et plus juste, et bien, nous sommes résolument patriotes ! Mais notre patriotisme n'est pas fait de jactance, de fanfaronnade. Et nous pensons que dans les autres nations, il y a, comme chez nous, des hommes de bonne foi et d'esprit droit qui sont patriotes à notre façon ; il y a partout des ouvriers qui peinent, qui pâtissent, mais qui rêvent, comme les ouvriers français, d'un avenir meilleur pour l'humanité tout entière. Aussi sommes-nous résolument pacifistes : nous croyons tout proche le moment où les conflits internationaux se règleront sans effusion de sang, de par la volonté souveraine contre des peuples intéressés. Et nous ne saurions trop protester contre les excitations chauvines et les manœuvres de politiciens et de financiers qui risquent à chaque instant de provoquer un conflagration générale.

Toward the end of the Teachers' Manifesto, is found an explicit statement linking their anti-militarist views to their professional experiences:

> Mais ces questions –Sou du Soldat, addresses de sympathie—n'ont pas empêché le Congrès des Syndicats d'instituteurs de se consacrer à l'étude des questions professionnelles qui figuraient à l'ordre du jour. Car, malgré nos traitements dérisoires –à peine cent francs par mois pour un grande nombre d'entre nous—nous aimons notre métier par-dessus tout. Et ce ne sont pas les criailleries des réactionnaires qui nous empêcheront de nous y consacrer corps et âme. Les enfants du peuple ont droit, tout colle les petits bourgeois, à un enseignement vivant et vrai : tous nos efforts tendent à le leur donner.
>
> Mais, encore une fois, nous ne pouvons être des éducateurs, au sens élévé du mot, que si notre liberté d'homme et de citoyens demeure entière. La phrase de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, dont nous avions fait notre devise, nous revient à la mémoire : « Souvenez-vous, disait-il, qu'avant d'oser entreprendre de former un homme, il faut s'être fait homme soi-même ». Nous avons voulu être des homme et nous entendons être traité en hommes.

> Voilà pourquoi –le seul prétexte invoqué pour nous poursuivre,
> l'antipatriotisme, étant d'ailleurs inexistant—nous n'avons pas
> à nous émouvoir de l'ordre ministériel de dissoudre nos Syndicat
> et Sections.**(26)**

Conclusion.

My intellectual odyssey into social history has created a "double identity" with the United States and France. The trajectory of my mental development took me from a racist society in south Texas, to a rigorous Calvinist training at a small university in north Texas, then on to a revolutionary socialist milieu at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where I received my Ph.D. in 1976.

When I first approached the study of anarcho-syndicalism among French primary school teachers at the time of the First World War, I looked for relationships between the past experiences of the French nation and the contemporary social movements in which I participated, as a young anti-war activist living in Paris during the Vietnam War, and as a member of a teachers' union at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, where I taught as a l*ecteur* while finishing my thesis.

The cosmopolitan culture of which I was a part while living in Paris during the decade of the 1970s had its roots in the early French socialist movements, especially anarcho-syndicalism at the start of the century. It was a sophisticated culture that looked for internal contradictions and sought opportunities to advance its cause for political justice and economic equality through context analysis. This democratic tradition has remained an important part of French political culture to this day.

Endnotes

1. "The Western Front: A World War One Summary," in *The War Times Journal*, 15 June 2006, http://www.richthofen.com/ww1sum/, visited 15 June 2006. See, also, Gabriel Kolko, *Century of War, Politics, Conflicts, and Society Since 1914* (New York: The New Press, 1994), pp.102-105.
2. Louis Bouët, *Trente Ans de Combat syndicaliste et pacifiste* (Blainville-sur-mer: L'Amité par le livre, nd), pp.49-60.
3. *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem, was composed in one day, on April 24, 1792, by Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle, a captain of the engineers and amateur musician stationed in Strasbourg in 1792. Originally entitled Chant de guerre de l'armeé du Rhin (*War Song of the Army of the Rhine*), the anthem became called La Marseillaise because of its popularity with volunteer army units from Marseilles. The Convention accepted it as the French national anthem in a decree passed July 14, 1795. La Marseillaise was banned by Napoleon during the Empire, and by Louis XVIII on the Second Restoration (1815), because of its revolutionary associations. Authorized after the July Revolution of 1830, it was again banned by Napoleon III and not reinstated until 1879.
4. Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), pp.72-73.

5. A. J. P. Taylor, The First World War, an illustrated history (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1980), p.177. See, also, "The Western Front, a World War I Summary" in *The War Times Journal* at http://www.richthofen.com/ww1sum/, visited on 20 August 2006.
6. These three days of fighting in September 1914 produced more than half a million casualties: approximately 250,000 of which were Frenchmen (including some 80,000 killed in battle). There were about 13,000 British casualties (including 1,700 battle dead). Also, see John P. McKay, et al., *A History of World Societies*, vol. II (New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1988).
7. Taylor, *op. cit*., p. 122.
8. Pierre Miguel, *Les Chemin des Dames*, Paris: Librairie Académique, Perrin, 1997, p.13.
9. Taylor, *op. cit*., pp.123-126.
10. *Ibid.* p.140.
11. "Battle of Verdun," op. cit.
12. Wright, *op.cit*., pp.303-304.
13. Taylor, op. cit., p.177. [The American anti-war film by Stanley Kubrick, *Paths of Glory*, gives an accurate account of this disorder on the Western Front in 1917, as does Jean Renoir's classic 1938 film, *La Grande Illusion*.]
14. Over 100,000 French soldiers were court-martialed during the First World War, of which 23,000 were found guilty, and 432 were sentenced to death, while Petain took necessary precaution to restore order by doubling leave privileges, and improving the quality of food for the troops. Above all he conveyed the message that there would be no more great offensives; his new tactic by May 1917 was : "Squat, do little, and keep the losses small. We must wait for the Americans and the tanks." See Taylor, op. cit., p.176 and Wright, *op. cit*., p.304. *BBC* reported on 16 August 2006 in an internet article, "Shot at dawn, pardoned 90 years on," that British Defence Secretary Des Browne had announced that more than 300 British soldiers who were shot during World War I for military offences were to receive formal pardons. See BBC News, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/4798025.stm, visited 26 August 2006.
15. .Wright, *op. cit*., p.302
16. Francis Feeley, *Rebels with Causes, a study of revolutionary syndicalist culture among the French Primary School Teachers between 1880 and 1919* (New York, Peter Lang, 1989), p.2.
17. Bouët, *op. cit*., p.153.
18. Maurice Dommanget, *Les Grands Socialistes et L'Éducation* (Paris, Librairie Armand Colin, 1970), p.443.
19. Feeley, op. cit., p.9.
20. *Ibid*., p.170.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid*., p.170-171.
23. *Ibid*., p.171.
24. Anthony Wilden, *The Rules Are No Game, The Strategy of Communication* (New York : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p.34-35. For an excerpt from Wilden's book and his discussion of the Kondratieff Wave, visit the CEIMSA Archives at http://dimension.ucsd.edu/CEIMSA-IN-EXILE/archives/ and read Bulletin N°228, April 9, 2006.
25. Feeley, op. cit., p. 171.
26. All of the quotes found in Section d., "The Future as Possibility," are taken from Bouët, *op. cit*., pp.149-170.