

Reform or Revolution: Benoît Malon and the Socialist Movement in France, 1871-1890

Mira Adler-Gillies

Nine years after the terrible drama of 1871 the Marxist theoretician and polemicist Paul Lafargue described the Paris Commune as ‘the most brilliant expression of class conflict’ which tore at the fabric of capitalist society.¹ This “exclusively proletarian” insurrection, Lafargue wrote, marked a departure from its revolutionary antecedents in 1831 and 1848: the socialist workers of 1871 seized state power, demonstrating for the first time the necessity of proletarian political action. The “insurrectionary movement,” though “vigorously supported” by the provinces, demonstrated above all the necessity of a proletarian revolution that would be “neither local, nor national”: Lafargue declared, “it will be international or it will not be at all.”² According to this first explicitly Marxist reading, the Commune heralded the beginning of the end of the associationist, federalist tradition that had defined the nineteenth-century labor movement.

Less than a decade later, according to the Guesdists, the Workers’ Congress of Marseille in 1879 definitively sealed its fate. When the Guesdist journal *Égalité* reappeared in 1880, a “new epoch” was breathlessly proclaimed: the Congress of Marseille had finally “broken with the conservative and cooperative tradition, not only of the Congresses of Paris and of Lyon of 1876-77, but of the French International of 1866-70.”³ The French proletariat, which had for so long been “prisoner of a double illusion, of its political emancipation through the development of republican institutions and of its economic emancipation through the practice of a *coopération impossible*,” had finally embraced the “only scientific socialism,

Mira Adler-Gillies is a research assistant at the University of Melbourne. She has published on the history of socialism in nineteenth-century France.

¹ “La lutte des classes,” *Égalité* (2 June 1880). Although the article is not signed, it is assumed to have been written by Paul Lafargue. See Leslie Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism (1842-1882)* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 175; and Jacques Girault, “Les Guesdistes, la deuxième *Égalité* et la Commune,” *International Review of Social History* 17 (1972): 426.

² “Le Parti ouvrier et l’état capitaliste,” *Égalité* (11 August 1880).

³ “14 juillet 1878 – 21 janvier 1880,” *Égalité* (21 January 1880).

revolutionary collectivism.”⁴ The labor delegates at the Marseille Congress, who had voted in favor of the collectivization of the land and the means of production, and had established the first working-class political party, the Fédération du Parti des Travailleurs Socialistes de France (FTSF), “affirmed ... the principles for which [the Communards] had fought and suffered.”⁵ For the Guesdists the significance of this historical moment could not be overstated.

The ideological triumphalism that accompanied the collectivist victory resonated in early accounts of the founding of the French socialist party. The traditional narrative told a story of dramatic rupture in which a conservative labor movement, breaking with its mutualist origins, embraced a revolutionary collectivist doctrine; the Marseille Congress of 1879 was deemed the pinnacle of this triumph.⁶ The history of the beginnings of French socialism and the creation of the Parti Ouvrier (PO) was subsequently read as the struggle between two antagonistic propositions: revolutionary collectivism on the one hand and the old federalist associative socialism on the other. The identity of socialist militants depended on which side of this divide one stood and left-wing political culture was increasingly characterized by this bipolarity. Reform or revolution became an obligatory choice for socialists and,

⁴ “14 juillet 1878 – 21 janvier 1880,” *Égalité*.

⁵ Address quoted in Léon Blum, *Les Congrès ouvriers et socialistes français, vol. 1, 1876-1885* (Paris, 1901), 40. Although Fédération du Parti des Travailleurs Socialistes de France was the official title, it was usually called the Fédération des Travailleurs Socialistes de France but more commonly referred to as the Parti Ouvrier (PO) during the early 1880s. FTSF became the name of Paul Brousse’s possibilist or reformist party after 1882 and the Guesdist party, initially named the PO, became the Parti Ouvrier Français (POF) in 1893. In this article I will use PO to refer to the political organization of the labor movement from 1879 to 1882.

⁶ This rendition of the origins of modern French socialism derives from the first Guesdist account outlined in the *Égalité* and elaborated most explicitly in Guesde and Lafargue’s *Le Programme du Parti Ouvrier: ses considérants et ses articles* (Lille, 1899). This account held that having defeated the movement’s cooperatist (and indeed anarchist) tendencies the Guesdists then faced Malon and Brousse’s possibilist challenge, ultimately leading to the split of what Friedrich Engels called “irreconcilable elements” at Saint-Étienne in 1882. The Guesdist party, established at Roanne in opposition to Brousse’s “opportunist” Possibilist FTSF was, according to its proponents, the only true socialist working class party of France: see the letter from Engels to Eduard Bernstein, “Friedrich Engels to Eduard Bernstein in Zurich,” *Marx/Engels Library: 1882*, 20 October 1882, https://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82_10_20.htm. Citing letters from Engels to Eduard Bernstein from 1882, David Stafford argues that it was “above all” Engels who was responsible “for the establishment of this orthodoxy”: David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism: A Study of the Political Activities of Paul Brousse within the First International and the French Socialist Movement 1870-90* (London, 1971), 312, n1.

The Guesdist narrative that described a dramatic rupture with the cooperative tradition in 1879, through repetition, acquired an apparent inevitability. Accounts that followed failed to interrogate the substance of the shift, some suggesting instead that the events at Marseille were in fact predictable: “How could we be surprised,” Léon Blum asked, that the “majority of delegates proclaimed the [collectivist ideal] at Marseille? None of these resolutions” should be surprising, Blum reasoned, if one had followed “the progressive erosion of the cooperative ideal”: Blum, *Les Congrès ouvriers*, 42. Such early accounts established a consensus that continued to inform subsequent histories of the origins of socialism in France for decades to come. See, for example, Alexandre Zévaès, *Le Socialisme en France depuis 1871* (Paris, 1908); Alexandre Zévaès, *Histoire des partis socialistes en France, vol. 2, De la semaine sanglante au Congrès de Marseille (1871-1879)* (Paris, 1911); Samuel Bernstein, *The Beginnings of Marxian Socialism in France* (New York, 1965); Aaron Noland, *The Founding of the French Socialist Party, 1893-1905* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956); Maurice Moissonnier, “Le Congrès de Marseille a Cent Ans,” *Cahiers d’histoire de l’Institut Maurice Thorez* 32-33 (1979): 198-234; Lucien Gaillard, *La Naissance du Parti Socialiste: Marseille il y a cent ans* (Marseille, 1980); and Gabriel Mermeix, *La France socialiste: notes d’histoire contemporaine* (Paris, 1886). See also Léon de Seilhac’s description of Marseille as the “congrès-apothéose” in *Les Congrès ouvriers en France: de 1876 à 1897* (Paris, 1899), 29.

according to the historiographical orthodoxy, in 1879 the labor movement resoundingly chose the latter.

How are we to make sense of such a sudden ideological shift? Throughout most of the nineteenth century the practice of associative trade socialism dominated the French labor movement. The objective of this movement, as Bernard Moss has defined it, was the “creation of producers’ associations or cooperatives for the emancipation of trades from the wage system, cooperative trade socialism.”⁷ The associative project had expanded rapidly after the 1830s and by 1848 the associative model was central to socialist theory and practice. The exercise of direct communal democracy under the Paris Commune in 1871 gave this long-standing tradition its most radical expression. So the question must be asked: how and why does a movement that, in 1876 declared “before we are workers, we are cooperators” come, by the end of the decade to reject cooperative socialism as ‘conservative’ ineffectual and apolitical?⁸ The narrative underpinned a historiography that reflexively marginalized both the relevance of the associative socialist tradition based on communal autonomy and its ideological resonance and its political force. The problem raises a number of questions: what was the nature of the conflict between the associative labor tradition and the revolutionary collectivist doctrine? Did any traditional forms of socialist organization, action and solidarity survive the encounter? What categories and definitions have been employed to tell this story of ideological antagonism and rupture?

This article seeks to answer some of these questions through a study of an independent socialist tradition whose proponents grappled with precisely these ambiguities. Central among these ‘independent’ socialist writers, thinkers and militants was Benoît Malon. An examination of Malon’s role in the early years of the Parti Ouvrier and, in particular, his project at the *Revue socialiste* illuminates some of these problems associated with late nineteenth-century socialist political and ideological identity.

In the second half of the twentieth century historians began to challenge the mythology surrounding 1879 by focusing (often exclusively) on the ambiguities of the French Marxist doctrine and the intellectual weaknesses of its theoreticians.⁹ However, the question of the ideological and political character of the French socialist movement during this foundational period is broader than the rhetorical permutations

⁷ Bernard Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914* (Berkeley, 1976), 3.

⁸ Speech by Charles Chabert, quoted by Jules Guesde, “Grévistes et coopérateurs,” *Égalité* (17 March 1878). The characterization of cooperation as reactionary or apolitical can be found both in contemporary and subsequent historical accounts. See, for example, “14 Juillet 1878 – 21 Janvier 1880,” *Égalité*; Samuel Bernstein, “Jules Guesde, Pioneer of Marxism in France,” *Science and Society* 4 (1940): 30.

⁹ See Claude Willard, *Le Mouvement socialiste en France (1893-1905): Les Guesdistes* (Paris, 1965); George Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France* (New York, 1966); Neil McInnes, “Les Débuts du marxisme théorique en France et en Italie (1880-1897),” *Cahiers de l’Institut de science économique appliquée*, Série S, 102 (1960): 5-52; Michelle Perrot, “Les Guesdistes: controverses sur l’introduction du Marxisme en France,” *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 22 (1967): 705-6. Robert Stuart rejects the traditional view that identifies 1879 as the birth year of Marxist socialism in France, arguing that not only was the infant PO of 1879 an “amorphous movement which included few recognizable Marxists,” its leadership and its organ, the *Égalité*, remained “carefully eclectic” in these early years: Robert Stuart, *Marxism at Work: Ideology, Class and French Socialism During the Third Republic* (Cambridge, 1992), 32. For the non-Marxist eclecticism of the early *Égalité*, see Michelle Perrot, “Le Premier journal marxiste français: ‘L’Égalité’ et Jules Guesde (1877-1883),” *L’Actualité de l’histoire* 28 (1959): 1-26; and Margaret Manale, “La Constitution du ‘Marxisme,’” *Études de Marxologie* 18 (1976): 813-39.

of Guesdism.¹⁰ More recent work in this area suggests that the story of the socialism and indeed the left in France has only been partly told. Recent studies have signaled a significant historiographical shift by bringing new approaches and insights to long-standing questions about socialism, socialist actors, socialist politics and political power.¹¹ They have also brought new priorities, abandoning ideological definitions and categories that for so long dominated political histories of the left.¹² This expansion of historiographical boundaries has seen a renewed interest in alternative forms of socialist thought. Beginning with Steven Vincent's study of Malon, now over twenty years old, historians have increasingly turned their attention to the role of the non-Marxist, anti-statist tradition in France. More recently the interventions of Philippe Chaniel, Jacques Moreau, Julian Wright, Christophe Prochasson and others have opened up new lines of inquiry into the reformist tradition.¹³ These contributions have started to erode the idea that a fundamental difference in "*nature*" divides two socialist cultures, "one attached to the idea that revolution was the only really workable mode of social change, the other, convinced that revolution, understood as civil war, would lead at once to ruin and tyranny."¹⁴

Notwithstanding the importance of Vincent's study of what he calls the pluralistic left or its libertarian currents, as embodied in the work and thought of Benoît Malon, his approach has certain limitations. Although the argument that historical inattention to the ideological diversity of the left has limited our

¹⁰ Bernard Moss's study went further than most in its attempt to broaden the scope of enquiry by identifying a theoretical continuity within the diverse ideological tendencies of the labor movement. Moss rejected the traditional reading of Marseille as a "specifically Guesdist triumph" not because Guesdism was a "vulgar" or inauthentic rendition of Marxism as many others have claimed; rather, he argued Guesde's revolutionary collectivism was simply the reintroduction of the federalist trade socialism that had grown out of the cooperative labor movement: Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement*, 29, 91-92.

¹¹ See, Alain Chatriot, Odile Join-Lambert and Vincent Viet, eds, *Les Politiques du travail (1906-2006): acteurs, institutions, réseaux* (Rennes, 2006); Alain Bergounioux and Gérard Grunberg, *L'Ambition et le remords: les socialistes français et le pouvoir (1905-2005)* (Paris, 2005); Jean-Jacques Becker and Gilles Candar, eds, *Histoire des gauches en France*, 2 vols (Paris, 2004). The latter is a particularly important collection that has opened up new avenues of debate in the political, cultural and social history of the French left.

¹² Julian Wright explores these works in relation to this question in his "Historiographical Essay: The State and the Left in Modern France," *French History* 21, no. 4 (2007): 450-72.

¹³ Among the first of these was K. Steven Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism: Benoît Malon and French Reformist Socialism* (Berkeley, 1992). Vincent also laid out the argument in favor of a deeper examination of alternative forms of socialist thought in response to Tony Judt's *Marxism and the French Left*, arguing that Judt's "reduction of French socialism to a variety of 'statism'" served to obscure and indeed denigrate the relevance of the Proudhonian or federalist tradition in French socialist history: "Penser la gauche française," *History of European Ideas* 9, no. 5 (1988): 597-600. More recent studies in this area include: Philippe Chaniel, *La Délicate essence du socialisme: l'association, l'individu et la République* (Latresne, 2009); Jacques Moreau, *Les Socialistes français et le mythe révolutionnaire* (Paris, 2003); and Jacques Moreau, *L'Espérance réformiste: histoire des courants et des idées réformistes dans le socialisme français* (Paris, 2007). An important contribution to the understanding of the work and the thought of Georges Renard and Eugène Fournière is by Julian Wright, "Réformisme et historiographie révolutionnaire: Georges Renard et Eugène Fournière, historiens du XIX^e siècle," *Mil neuf cent: Revue d'histoire intellectuelle* 30 (2012): 21-38. For a more general examination of socialist reformism, see Christophe Prochasson, "Nouveaux regards sur le réformisme," *Mil neuf cent: Revue d'histoire intellectuelle* 30 (2012): 5-20. See also Sylvie Rémy, *Jean, Jules, Prosper et les autres: Les socialistes indépendants en France à la fin du XIX^e siècle*, Collection Histoire et civilisations (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2011), which is a significant study of independent socialists who, aside from a few rare and notable exceptions, have been otherwise sidelined.

¹⁴ Prochasson, "Nouveaux regards," 8.

understanding of its theoretical 'core' has merit, the way Vincent and many after him have sought to correct the imbalance is problematic. Recent enquiries into the 'reformist' tradition (many of them biographical), whether Vincent or Chaniel on Malon, Wright on Fournière or Rémy's ambitious attempt to write a history of the post-Commune independent socialist movement as a whole, have tended to emphasize and often valorize independent socialists as dissenting voices – their great contribution having been to provide a reformist alternative, a counter-proposition to an intellectually impoverished and authoritarian French Marxism. Reform and revolution therefore continue to operate as the defining poles of socialist militant identity and contemporary studies of the reformist tradition seem no more able to escape the dualism than the Marxist analyses that preceded them. The great contribution of an independent socialist like Malon was not, as Vincent suggests, in his articulation of a reformist program or his repudiation of the revolutionary paradigm – it was rather in his willingness and ability to think the two together.

Despite the enlargement of historiographical priorities and notwithstanding the significance of these recent contributions, studies of the reformist or revolutionary traditions in isolation have too often served to entrench a binary framework for the understanding of socialist identity and political culture. In both cases the nuances of the theoretical character of the French socialist party and the doctrinal tendencies of its militants is obscured. The movement of the 1870s and 1880s was the product of a complex network of ideas, factions and political traditions. During this period militants sought to negotiate legacies of the past and new repertoires of collective action. Accounts aimed at demonstrating either the authoritarianism of the revolutionaries or the perfidies of reformists often missed the nuances of the encounter. This process of theoretical negotiation found its most potent expression in the work of independent socialists such as Benoît Malon and in the journal the *Revue socialiste*. This paper will therefore focus on the work and thought of Malon who sought to reconcile the associative ideal and its federalist, communalist impulse with an increasingly urgent need for revolutionary social transformation.

By the end of the 1880s French socialism was divided into five distinct political factions: the Guesdists in the POF; the possibilists in the FTSF, led by Paul Brousse, who advocated a reformist municipal socialism – a faction that, despite its early success, would decline rapidly during the 1890s, tainted by the suggestion of opportunism; the Blanquists in the Comité Révolutionnaire Central (CRC), led by Édouard Vaillant, whose doctrine was based on the insurrectionary tradition and for whom the revolution was to be an act of force led by a conspiratorial elite; and the Allemanists in the Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Révolutionnaire (POSR), formed in 1890 by Jean Allemane, distinguished by an anti-centralist impulse, a strong workerist temper and a growing aversion to political participation, advocating a federalist form of revolutionary trade socialism. Finally there were 'independent' socialists who did not adhere to any one faction and who were often associated with particular organs of the left-wing press – Malon at the *Revue socialiste*, Alexandre Millerand at the *Lanterne* and Jean Jaurès at the *Petite République*. In 1882 the great, unified PO toward which all hope had been directed was deeply fractured and the socialist movement was split across various ideological lines.

While the possibilists, the Guesdists and the Allemanists met with varying degrees of success during the 1880s and early 1890s, either at the ballot box or in party enrolment, none was able to create an enduring synthesis between two socialist

'mentalities'.¹⁵ The Guesdists, swinging violently between ultra-revolutionary dogmatism and municipal reformism, never managed to produce a 'harmony' between the two. Brousse's agenda of municipal reform and his willingness to enter political alliances to gain electoral advantage increasingly undermined his professed commitment to the revolutionary struggle. The Allemanists, combining insurrectionary strike action with trade socialism, abandoned the electoral path, subsequently pursuing their own agenda through the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). The factionalism and internecine struggles of the left during this period, while certainly indicative of dynamism, often militated against unity and broader electoral success.

A divided movement entrenched a dualism that obliged unequivocal partisanship. There were, however, voices during this period calling for a more sensitive interaction between theory and political action. These independent socialists, as they came to be known, some joining the party, others refusing, shared a commitment to the development of socialism in a free and democratic context and a deep aversion to any form of political centralism and perceived party dogma. Beginning in the 1880s, the only coherent and effective articulation of a synthesis between the revolutionary goal and a reformist path to it (encompassing the federalist, communalist mentality that had characterized the labor movement), was offered by the socialist writers and theoreticians at the *Revue socialiste*, in particular by its editor, Benoît Malon.

To trace Malon's intellectual and political development is to trace the history of the French socialist movement itself. A self-taught militant, dye-worker, Communard, exile and journalist, Malon "l'immortel" is a prism through which to observe the evolution of French socialism in the late-nineteenth century.¹⁶ Following his death in 1893 Malon's contribution was roundly acknowledged by socialist leaders from Jaurès to Blum, affirming their intellectual debt to him. Writing in 1927, Blum noted the significance of Malon's efforts to, "on the one hand, seek conciliation between Marxism and the French revolutionary tradition, on the other, to extend socialism to a universal doctrine, or, to use his epithet, an 'integral' [doctrine]."¹⁷ He recognized the profound effect Malon's ideas had on great socialist militants, particularly on Jaurès ("always nourishing his thought and his action"), who himself paid tribute to Malon's socialism, one that was "not presented as a strict faction, but as humanity itself; where socialism seemed to be the image of humanity and of eternity."¹⁸ Given the extent of Malon's influence and the role he played in the socialist movement, the relatively late appearance of serious studies devoted to this "proletarian hero" is remarkable.¹⁹ In the collection published following the 1999

¹⁵ The term was employed by Madeleine Rebérioux who argued that the divisions within the movement during the 1880s were less a question of doctrine but rather reflected a difference in the *mentalité* of socialist militants: Rebérioux, "Le Socialisme français de 1871 à 1914," in *Histoire générale du socialisme*, vol. 2, *De 1875 à 1918*, Jacques Droz, ed. (Paris, 1974), 155.

¹⁶ Madeleine Rebérioux, "La Revue socialiste," *Cahiers Georges Sorel* 5 (1987): 16.

¹⁷ Léon Blum, "Une Belle figure du socialisme: Gustave Rouanet," *Populaire* (13 February 1927).

¹⁸ Jean Jaurès, quoted in Alex Devaux Pelier's preface to *Du Forez à La Revue socialiste: Benoît Malon (1841-1893): Réévaluations d'un itinéraire militant et d'une oeuvre fondatrice*, Claude Latta, Marc Vuilleumier and Gérard Gâcon, eds (Saint-Étienne, 2000), 15.

¹⁹ Léon Blum's preface to François Simon's *Une Belle figure du peuple: Benoît Malon, sa vie, son oeuvre* (Courbevoie, 1926), 5. As late as 1987 Madeleine Rebérioux described Malon as the "méconnu des historiens" to whom "no serious biography has yet been dedicated": "La Revue socialiste," 16. Steven Vincent's study, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, offered an important insight into the life and thought of Malon, who, as David Stafford earlier argued, had been hitherto "undeservedly neglected": Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism*, 2. Since then some significant work has been

conference “Colloque Benoît Malon de Montbrison et Précieux”, Alex Devaux Pelier asked why his great-uncle, the “author of around twenty erudite works in economics and politics, the promoter of cooperatives and worker mutualities, theoretician of socialism, inspiration of Jean Jaurès, faded from memory in France.”²⁰ The question could equally be posed in relation to a number of other independent socialists who for so long have been neglected in the historiographical narrative of the evolution of French socialism.²¹ The past decade has, however, undoubtedly witnessed a renewal of interest in the ‘reformist’ strand of French socialism represented by independents such as Malon, Georges Renard, Gustave Rouanet and Eugène Fournière.²²

Malon’s political education took place under the Second Empire in the Proudhonian socialist movement of the 1860s. Following the Paris Commune Malon had escaped to Switzerland where he was involved in the dispute within the International between the London General Council and the ‘antiauthoritarian’ Jura Federation. If a pattern of socialist division and factionalism was established during this decade so too was Malon’s role as a conciliator.²³ While he sought unity, endeavoring to navigate an independent course through the competing factions, Malon’s sympathies were instinctively with the libertarian tendencies of the anarchists. The anti-statist, communalist aspects of the anarchist project appealed to Malon, who was increasingly wary of Jacobinism and the tendency of some socialist factions toward political centralism. However, Malon remained resolutely independent. Despite the early influence of Bakunin, Malon ultimately rejected a Bakuninist approach that demanded “a unique path with a despotic and uniform program.”²⁴ Rather, Malon wrote, he preferred to “frequent all the parties, democratic, radical, Proudhonian, positivist ... collectivist ... Fourierist cooperatist ... etc.”²⁵ This intellectual and philosophical eclecticism together with a desire to foster a culture of independent thought would be the basis for the establishment of the *Revue socialiste*.

Despite his centrality in the establishment of the PO, by the early 1880s Malon had broken with both the Guesdists and the Broussists. Malon’s “voluntary

dedicated to Malon and his disciples at the *Revue*. See the collections published by Michel Cordillot and Claude Latta, *Benoît Malon: Le mouvement ouvrier, le mouvement républicain à la fin du Second Empire* (Lyon, 2010); and the collection of papers published by Gérard Gâcon et al., eds, *Benoît Malon et la Revue socialiste: une pensée en débat* (Lyon, 2011).

²⁰ Pelier, *Du Forez à La Revue socialiste*, 14.

²¹ Notable exceptions beginning in the 1870s include a special edition of *Le Mouvement social* entitled “Réformismes et réformistes français,” 87 (1974), which included a brief study by Madeleine Rebérioux and Patrick Fridenson, “Albert Thomas, pivot du réformisme français,” 85-97. A study by Jacques Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d’action directe* (Paris, 1971) illuminated one of the central figures of the revolutionary syndicalist tradition. See also Leslie Derfler’s *Alexandre Millerand: The Socialist Years* (The Hague, 1977).

²² Two of the most recent contributions in this area have been by Julian Wright and Philippe Chaniel. Wright’s “Réformisme et historiographie” and “Socialism and Political Identity: Eugène Fournière and Intellectual Militancy in the Third Republic,” *French Historical Studies* 36 (2013): 449-77 have shed new light on the role of Fournière and the strand of socialism he continued to represent. Recent work by Chaniel has also expanded our understanding of Fournière and the intellectual milieu at the *Revue socialiste*. See his introductory essay to the new edition of Fournière’s *Essai sur l’individualisme*, “Le Socialisme, un libéralisme d’extrême gauche? Eugène Fournière, la question individualiste et l’association” (Paris, 2009); and “De Benoît Malon à Eugène Fournière, ou *La revue socialiste* comme laboratoire ‘socialo-sociologique’,” in Gâcon et al., *Benoît Malon et La Revue*, 127-44.

²³ In August 1872 Malon wrote: “since my arrival in Switzerland I have not ceased preaching conciliation, which has led to being very badly treated in both camps.” Letter from Malon to Mathilde Roederer, quoted in Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 50.

²⁴ Benoît Malon, quoted in Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 13.

²⁵ Benoît Malon, quoted in Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 14.

marginalization” from the party following the Congress of Saint-Étienne and the independent critique he would offer in the *Revue socialiste* were as much a reaction to the bitter divisions within the movement as they were a reflection of his desire for a more rigorous elaboration of the party program. For Malon, the *Revue* would be a space of intellectual freedom. From its inception Malon insisted it was an organ that belonged “neither to a man nor a sect, nor even a party”; it was to be a space in which “all ideas of reform and of social transformation” would converge.²⁶ Malon sought to rid socialism of “all the old personal rivalries, particular ambitions, fanaticisms ... which so hinder it today.” For Malon, the democratic character of the *Revue* would foster a culture of tolerance, offering all socialists, “be they moderate or violent, autonomists or authoritarians, pacifists or revolutionaries, mutualists or communists, positivists or collectivists,” a voice.²⁷

From 1885 until World War I, the *Revue socialiste*, “la plus vieille dame du socialisme français,” was one of the most significant journals in Europe.²⁸ Its success would outlast its founder, who died in 1893, but it was Malon who set the intellectual tone of the journal for its first three decades; its initial success can, in part, be attributed to his professional experience. From the 1870s Malon had launched a number of journals, both in exile and following his return, including the *Socialisme progressif* in 1878, the first *Revue socialiste* in 1880 and the short-lived failure that was the *Émancipation* in the same year.²⁹ Malon established the *Revue* with Fournière and Rouanet, two militants and theoreticians in their own right, who, following the death of their “venerable master,” would consider themselves his disciples.³⁰ Malon’s intellectual impact on his successors, such as Rouanet, Fournière, Renard and indeed on the milieu at the *Revue*, cannot be overstated: in Rebérioux’s words the *Revue* was “nourished unceasingly from the Malonian memory.”³¹ Despite generational differences, there was a certain shared experience among some of its contributors and editors.³² Malon’s separation from both the Guesdists and the Broussists left a legacy of considered marginalization, one that would continue to define the position of many independent socialists at the *Revue*.³³ The pervasive sense of isolation which

²⁶ Malon, “Entrée en Ligne,” *La Revue socialiste* (January-June 1885), 1.

²⁷ Malon, “Entrée en Ligne,” 1.

²⁸ Rebérioux, “La Revue socialiste,” 15.

²⁹ Marc Vuilleumier has done significant work on the origins of the *Revue socialiste* and the journalistic path Malon travelled from 1877 until its creation. See “Aux origines de *La Revue socialiste* (1877-1882),” Gâcon et al., *Benoît Malon et La Revue*, 23-95.

³⁰ See Rebérioux’s discussion of the occasionally cult-like following Malon attracted from his disciples who regarded the “prescriptions” of their “common master” as “sacred.” Rebérioux cites a private letter from a young, audacious, Adrien Veber who evoked the image of “le grand Bouddha Malon”: Rebérioux, “La Revue socialiste,” 17-18.

³¹ Rebérioux, “La Revue socialiste,” 17-18.

³² For a detailed examination of the intellectual and cultural milieu at the *Revue*, see Wright, “Socialism and Political Identity,” 466-68. Wright’s study of the relationships and personalities of independent socialists, such as Gustave Rouanet, Fournière, Veber, Georges Renard, Albert Thomas and Charles Andler, sheds light on some of the intellectual and political questions as well as generational differences at play following the death of Malon. The study illuminates the intellectual diversity among many of these independent socialists. Equally significant was the diversity in their social, economic and political backgrounds. Wright uses the example of Fournière, the self-taught militant, and the well-educated intellectual Renard. His examination of their correspondence reveals the existence of an enduring and deeply personal tension between middle-class socialist intellectuals and their proletarian militant counterparts. This was a crucial and often overlooked aspect of late-nineteenth century socialist identity.

³³ Rémy suggests that Malon’s early exclusion would have an enduring impact on his successors who inherited a mistrust of doctrines and party structures: *Jean, Jules, Prosper et les autres*, 173-74.

characterized the political and intellectual lives of Malon and many of his followers, while undoubtedly the source of some bitterness, was also the basis for the spirit of independence, intellectual rigor and free, democratic thought.³⁴

Over two decades Malon developed and refined his conception of socialism, which he called “integral socialism,” informed at once by the French republican socialist tradition and a contemporary Marxist economic and historical analysis. For Malon, the Marxist analysis was, on its own, “incomplete.” Socialism as pure materialism, he argued, was an “amputated” form of socialism, cut off from “all sentimental impulses, all philosophical and fraternal aspirations which had constituted half of its strength.”³⁵ Malon thus sought to endow Marxist materialism with idealism and moral content. Or, as Fournière put it, Malon sought to “reintroduce into the socialist concept what might be called metaphysics. The school of Marx, too simplistically materialist, sees only necessity. Malon added the notion of justice.”³⁶ For Malon, socialism, whose “roots plunged into all human suffering, into all intellectual and moral progress, into all the maturations of history,” required a broader vision than the “partisans of class struggle” could offer.³⁷ Integral socialism was an attempt to expand the intellectual, philosophical and moral horizon of nineteenth-century French socialism.

Such a broad conception of socialism thus appeared less systematic, less coherent and less programmatic than the Guesdist doctrine. It is possible, however, to determine a number of key characteristics and to discern coherence in Malon’s synthetic approach. His work has been characterized by two distinctive theoretical features: “integral socialism” and the theory of municipal public services.³⁸ The theory of public services, first articulated by the Belgian socialist César de Paepe in the 1870s, was to be a means by which to achieve reforms and improvements in the working-class condition in the short term, while preparing for the long-term

³⁴ Countless examples can be found of the challenges associated with maintaining an attachment and an intellectual commitment to the development of socialism outside, or at least on the margins of, socialist party structures. Although the conflict between Brousse and Malon, and Guesde and Lafargue, preceded a truly unified party from which ‘independents’ might have found themselves excluded, it nevertheless demonstrates the challenges that existed early on of dissenting from the orthodox collectivist ‘line’ and the deeply personal conflicts that would often ensue. Brousse’s criticism of the authoritarian tendencies of Guesde and Lafargue had elicited a bitter, personal attack from Lafargue in the *Égalité*. This was a pattern that continued to characterize the experience of independent or ‘dissident’ socialist figures. In 1902, for example, Alexandre Millerand, writing to Fournière following a controversy in which Fournière had criticized the socialist party for failing to educate and properly organize its base and subsequently losing his seat in the 1902 election, said “you have paid with your seat for your fidelity to the truth”: Institut Français d’Histoire Sociale (hereafter IFHS), 14 AS 181 (2), Millerand-Fournière correspondence, 4 August, 1902. Almost a decade later, in a letter from Charles Andler, professor at the Sorbonne, to Fournière, the culture within the socialist movement continued to ensure the marginalization of its critics. Having being condemned for voicing opposition to the ‘imperialist’ tendencies of the German Socialist Party, Andler wrote to Fournière: “We must be free spirits before we are socialists, and socialists freely engaging in the debates of socialism before being party members. Surely there is a socialism today ... capable of absorbing all the freedom of thought and of research, which could transform, little by little, the party itself”: IFHS, 14 AS 181 (2), Andler-Fournière correspondence, August, 1913.

³⁵ Malon, *Le Socialisme intégral*, 2 vols (Paris, 1890-91), 1:23.

³⁶ Eugène Fournière, “La Mort de Benoît Malon,” *La Revue socialiste* (July-December, 1893), 423. Fournière insisted, however, that Malon’s conception of justice had nothing to do with mysticism but rather was a corrective to what he perceived to be the fatalism of the Guesdists.

³⁷ Malon, *Le Socialisme intégral*, 1:25.

³⁸ Jean Lorcin, “Benoît Malon: du ‘Socialisme intégral’ au ‘Socialisme municipal,’” in *Du Forez à La Revue socialiste*, Latta, Vuilleumier and Gâcon, eds, 255-71.

revolutionary transformation³⁹ De Paepe had wanted to limit collectivization to ‘general’ services – that is, services like energy, health and transport. The socialization of such services would, according to Malon, then transform into authentic ‘public services’ that would serve the interests and improve the condition, not only of the working classes, but also of the middle classes, including artisans and small producers. Malon, like de Paepe before him, sought to avoid, as far as possible, state control over the individual. He therefore emphasized ‘municipalization’ in which the control and administration of public services would be in the hands of workers’ associations and cooperatives operating on a local level. Nationalization would be limited to large services, such as mines and railways, while all other public services would be administered by the local commune.

Malon’s theory of municipal socialism, based as it was on the commune as the ‘natural’, primary unit of society after the family, reflected a long federalist tradition. Malon believed the commune to be the basis of a future socialist society. It was not utopian, he argued, to conceive that in a society freed from “international wars and social iniquities, [that] the commune would be transformed into the political centre, the literary and artistic foyer while at the same time being a powerful economic organism: in short, the pivot of future social life.”⁴⁰ The municipalization of public services, therefore, was the crucial first step toward revolutionary social transformation.

In the socialist concept, the local community ... acquires great political and economic importance and becomes the genuine social unit The community will be a powerful aid in the general transformation of human relations, and when it has attained its greatest effectiveness, the role of the state will be reduced to the administration of national public services, conforming to the pact of federation [among the communes].⁴¹

The collectivization of public services was, for Malon, inextricably bound to the notion of communal autonomy. Giving the commune responsibility for administering basic public services would be a transformative and instructive exercise in direct socialist democracy. The “absolute autonomy of the commune” proclaimed by Malon and his fellow Communards in 1871 thus continued to be at the heart of his conception of socialism.⁴²

Underpinning Malon’s municipal program and his conception of socialism more broadly was a concept of what he called a “social morality.” Malon’s attempt to reintroduce ‘morality’ into socialist thought was unique among his French contemporaries and reflected the legacy of an intellectual tradition dating back to early socialist theoreticians. Malon saw a society in moral and spiritual decline. “Compressed into the bourgeois mould,” limited to the philosophy of “each for himself,” human thought and creativity were reduced to “cruelty, greedy egoism,

³⁹ César de Paepe first articulated the theory of public services at the Brussels Congress of the International in September 1874: *Compte-rendu officiel du VII Congrès général de l'Association Internationale des Travailleurs, Bruxelles, 1874*. His report was entitled 'De l'organisation des services publics dans la société future; Mémoire présenté au Congrès de Bruxelles au nom de la section bruxelloise' (Brussels: Brismée, 1874), 74-102

⁴⁰ Malon, *Précis historique, théorique et pratique de socialisme* (Paris, 1892), 288.

⁴¹ Malon, *Le Socialisme réformiste*, quoted in Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 123.

⁴² Quoted in Lorcin, “Benoît Malon,” 261.

corruption, violence and dishonesty.”⁴³ For Malon, the “individualist struggle for survival or for domination” was corrupting a society in which human activity had only one driver: “egoism – the anti-moral motif par excellence.”⁴⁴ He argued that socialism, containing as it did an intrinsically moral quality, was the only corrective. His concept of social morality informed and structured much of his thought, nowhere more so than in his *La morale sociale*, described by Jaurès as a “sketch” of a broader vision of socialism in which Malon attempted to reconcile the antagonism between the “idealist and the materialist conception of the world and of history.”⁴⁵

Malon’s project has been read as part of a broader dynamic. Analyses of his work often apprehend revolution and reform as polarities, with historians attempting to position him clearly at one end or the other. Most of the historiography places Malon in the ‘reformist’ camp in order to designate (and at times denigrate) alternative and ‘unorthodox’ forms of socialist thought. Reformism, in this sense, has often been viewed with a certain suspicion, associated with “treason, deviation, compromise, even cowardice.”⁴⁶ However, the ‘reformist’ label is equally abused by those who embrace the independent socialism of Malon, using it to distinguish free thinkers from those deemed to be doctrinaire, realists from utopians, those who genuinely sought improvement in the condition of the working class from ‘ultras’ who were simply attracted to the promise of revolutionary violence and upheaval. Neither of these analytical modes serves well for an understanding of Malon’s thought and its place in the theoretical elaboration and evolution of French socialism.

Malon wrote that “we are revolutionaries when circumstances demand it and reformists always.”⁴⁷ The question is, what did Malon mean by ‘reformist’? And what did “reformist always” signify in relation to proletarian organization and action? Many historians who have sought to champion Malon’s non-Marxist independence have, I argue, misrepresented him. Some have suggested that, while until the end of the 1870s Malon believed revolution was the necessary means by which to arrive at

⁴³ Malon, *La Morale sociale* (Paris, 1895), 6.

⁴⁴ Malon, *La Morale sociale*, 6.

⁴⁵ Jaurès, preface to Malon, *La Morale sociale*, i, xxiii.

⁴⁶ Prochasson, “Nouveaux regards,” 10. See, for example, Rebérioux’s characterization of the editors at the *Revue* as being on the ‘right’ of the socialist party: “La Revue socialiste,” 23. Such descriptions have contributed to a persistent view that ‘reformism’ represents something of a betrayal, that its proponents, on the party’s ‘right’ were in the wrong. Prochasson rejects such characterizations, writing that “the ‘right-wing’ of socialism, ‘reformists’, ‘revisionists’, and critics of Marxism have been left in a twilight of disapproval”: “Nouveaux regards,” 6. He quotes Daniel Lindenberg who in 1984 concluded that the term ‘reformism’ remains “suspect in our political culture, designating more a perversion of social movements, a malady of the revolutionary understanding for some, a congenital pusillanimity for others, than a current of thought worthy of examination”: Lindenberg “Réformisme et révisionnisme en France de 1890 à 1914,” in François-Georges Dreyfus, ed., *Réformisme et révisionnisme dans les socialismes allemand, autrichien et français* (Paris, 1984), 149.

⁴⁷ Malon, *Précis historique*, 167. This expression might be read as an inversion of the Guesdist formulation “reforms yes, reformism never”: Stuart, *Marxism at Work*, 256. When the Guesdists revised their original and absolute opposition to social and economic reforms (having argued that reforms could not change the “unique source of working-class misery, capitalist property”: Jules Guesde, “Poursuites imbéciles,” *Socialiste* (1 July 1891)), they did so on the basis that “the more the worker conquers the means of action, the more he will reduce the misery which depresses him today, the more he will be strong and energetic for the supreme struggle”: From Jules Guesde’s speech at Lille, 12 December 1891, quoted in Willard, *Le Mouvement socialiste en France*, 57. Willard provides an important discussion of the distinction between reforms and reformism. The difference between the two has often been read in the refrain: Malon, “reformist always”, Guesde, “reformist never.” The force of the distinction, however, is substantially rhetorical.

social transformation, by 1882 he began “expressing new doubts.”⁴⁸ It is argued that, together with Brousse, Malon condemned the Marxist program of collectivization, reproaching it for its “brutality,” dependent as it was on the “precondition of seizing power by force, by revolution, and not by election” and opposing the dictatorship of the proletariat, which would take place “at the expense of not only the bourgeoisie but the middle-classes, the petite bourgeoisie.”⁴⁹ Malon was undoubtedly concerned with broadening the party’s social base and, like Brousse, viewed the Guesdists’ abandonment of artisans, skilled laborers and small proprietors – that is, the non-industrial proletariat – as politically catastrophic. Both supported alliances between the PO and the Radicals. Malon specified the nature of the engagement, writing that while the PO should not “reject socialist allies from other classes,” those allies “must go to [the party] to fight in its ranks and not call [the party] to them in the name of some school, of some self-proclaimed, infallible master.”⁵⁰

However, Malon did not object to revolution in and of itself. That Malon, survivor of the barricades who witnessed the bloodshed and brutality of 1871, sought to avoid violent conflagration is hardly surprising.⁵¹ His view that “the blood of the worker had flowed too much for nearly a century without any result,”⁵² his anticipation of the horrors that revolution might bring in the “long, inevitable and terrible crisis of transition and of general misery,” and the “irreparable sacrifice of human life,” were the sentiments of a man indelibly marked by the memory and the trauma of the Commune.⁵³ But his preference for a more peaceful revolutionary transformation does not, as some have suggested, amount to a disavowal of revolution itself.⁵⁴ Quoting Jules Guesde, Malon agreed that “whether through the ballot box or the gun ... there will be a revolution.”⁵⁵

In a chapter of *Le Nouveau Parti*, entitled “Réformes et Révolution”, Malon insisted that the great error of the left was to “present reform and revolution as antagonistic propositions.” He condemned the logic of those he called “pure

⁴⁸ Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 107.

⁴⁹ Lorcin, “Benoît Malon,” 255.

⁵⁰ Malon, “Un Premier Mot,” *La Revue socialiste* 10 (1880): 423-24.

⁵¹ The fact that Malon did not share in what Marx described as Lafargue’s “infantile” eagerness for “future revolutionary horrors,” and the differences more generally between Malon and Guesdists such as Lafargue, might also suggest that a difference in what Rebérioux described as *mentalité* or, as Prochasson has more recently argued, in social and cultural attitudes, was as important a factor in late-nineteenth century socialist identity as political and ideological considerations: See Rebérioux, *Parcours engagés dans la France contemporaine* (Paris, 1999), 39. This is also explored in recent work by Prochasson, in *La Gauche est-elle morale?* (Paris, 2010).

⁵² Malon, *Le Nouveau parti* (Paris, 1881), 78.

⁵³ Malon, *Le Socialisme intégral*, 2: xvi-xvii.

⁵⁴ Vincent, for example, uses Malon’s own hypothesis in which he imagined the possibility of revolution emerging “from a decisive electoral victory” that would enable the proletariat to seize power and therefore “proceed legally to the economic revolution that would emancipate it.” While here Malon maintained that revolution was still “probable,” Vincent suggests that such statements “implied” a shift in Malon’s position and a rejection of the revolution “thesis”: *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 107. Malon’s statements, however, contain neither a negation of revolution nor a condemnation of revolutionary violence. Vincent’s argument that Malon spoke “less and less of revolution and more and more of reform” does not amount to a critique of revolution and to read such a fundamental shift into silences and omissions is a (possibly ideologically motivated) distortion. In his *La Morale Sociale* Malon argued that the revolutionary struggle would take place in one of two ways: “The duty of the proletariat is ... to organize in class parties, in distinct socialist workers’ parties for the struggle ... against capitalist exploitation and for the conquest, be it gradual, by a series of reforms, be it violent, by a victorious revolution, of public powers,” 367.

⁵⁵ Malon, *Le Nouveau parti*, 78.

revolutionaries” who rejected reforms as illusions that resolve nothing and simply delay the revolution. If this were true, Malon reasoned, “the most miserable people, that is those who have achieved the least reforms, would be the most revolutionary. But nothing is less true.”⁵⁶ For Malon, an historical analysis of the proletarian condition in relation to instances of revolution suggested the inverse and he used a number of such historical examples to demonstrate that “in modern times, the revolutionary spirit occurs in direct proportion to the level of economic security and reforms achieved.”⁵⁷ The “anarchists,” he argued, were wrong: “excessive misery [does not] inspire revolution, it inspires only the resignation of despair.” For Malon, any amelioration in the working-class condition, any improvement in proletarian wellbeing, “in developing thought, in enlarging desires” would make workers more conscious of “the injustice of the situation” and would ultimately push them toward what he called “integral emancipation.” The achievement of even minimal reforms through collective action would, Malon insisted, contribute to the moral and material strength of the labor movement. In this sense he viewed reforms as “the mothers of revolutions.” However, Malon insisted on a crucial distinction (one which Guesdists themselves made): reforms should be limited to “collective improvements, obtained by all and for all” because individual improvements simply “develop the bourgeois instinct *each for himself*.”⁵⁸

If he condemned the ‘pure revolutionaries’, he was no less dismissive of those he called ‘pure reformists’. The argument that the achievement of reforms would ultimately undermine the *raison d’être* of the revolution was, Malon insisted, “no less false and no less contradicted by history” than the revolutionist logic.⁵⁹ For Malon, the reduction of the working day was the most important reform, the most “assured means by which to revolutionize the working class.”⁶⁰ This would not only provide immediate relief to workers but its effects would be far more enduring: such reform would “improve the dignity and the intellectual strength of the proletariat ... in a word [it would] increase and strengthen the socialist army.”⁶¹ Malon saw the potential of such reforms to inform, direct and bolster the revolutionary energies of the laboring classes. Rejecting outright a tension between reform and revolution, Malon instinctively sought to elaborate a synthesis between the two.

Malon’s insistence on the importance of reforms meant that he regarded the Republic, albeit a bourgeois Republic, as the most conducive framework through which to achieve reforms and improve the social and economic condition of the working class. Jean Lorcin has argued that it was this reformist impulse which “drove [independent socialists] to affirm, faced with German socialism, a French socialism in the French revolutionary tradition.”⁶² Malon and his colleagues at the *Revue* certainly recognized the benefits of the republican regime to the socialist cause and they appealed to their readers to remain loyal: “Socialists consider that the Republic is the only terrain for socialist action and ... we must, if circumstances demand, defend it.”⁶³ The ‘reformism’ of Malon, however, was not the only driving force behind his commitment to the Republic. Malon was the child of a republican socialist tradition

⁵⁶ Malon, *Le Nouveau parti*, 74.

⁵⁷ Malon, *Le Nouveau parti*, 77.

⁵⁸ Malon, *Le Nouveau parti*, 77.

⁵⁹ Malon, *Le Nouveau parti*, 77-78.

⁶⁰ Malon, *Le Nouveau parti*, 89.

⁶¹ Malon, *Le Nouveau parti*, 89-90.

⁶² Lorcin, “Benoît Malon,” 256.

⁶³ “Declaration,” *Revue socialiste* (July-December, 1885): 865.

and his devotion to the *République sociale* was as much a product of that history as it was a practical and political strategy. The legacy of the democratic republican tradition, with its emphasis on egalitarianism, citizenship and virtue, is everywhere apparent in Malon's work.

Malon sought to integrate this tradition with Marxism. He wrote about what he called the "République fédérative," first a national, then an international republic, resting on the power of social communes in which "all citizens would be, through the collectivist organization of labor, delivered from servitude, from insecurity and from the deprivations of the wage-earning system."⁶⁴ But while maintaining a commitment to parts of the republican socialist tradition, Malon rejected others. He condemned the cooperative program that had for so long structured the socialist movement. Cooperation, he argued, was really only effective in the form of consumers' cooperatives, although even they were subject to the effects of "parasitic capitalism."⁶⁵ In most cases, he wrote, producers' cooperatives were impotent in the context of modern industry that necessitated capital well beyond the savings of cooperatives. Malon's theoretical objection to the cooperative strategy did not lead him to dismiss cooperatives and their adherents entirely. Cooperatives were "excellent preparation for social reforms." Cooperators and socialists were "militants of the same innovative oeuvre; the work of one, the struggles of the other are mutually complementary and their union will bring the day of human emancipation, desired by all, closer."⁶⁶ Cooperatives, Malon argued, at the same time as pursuing immediate reforms, must have "as their objective the administrative education and organization of the proletariat," that is, to prepare the worker for the revolutionary struggle.⁶⁷

Malon recognized the importance of the associative ideal as a historically powerful force within the socialist movement. He did not seek to eliminate cooperative societies but rather to integrate them into a much broader communalist vision. Quoting the cooperatist Louis Bertrand, Malon acknowledged a common interest and common end: "Never forget above all that the final goal is not to benefit the workers by giving them a few francs a week or a month ... we always must have the supreme goal in sight: the complete emancipation of the working class by the suppression of the wage earner and by the application of socialist doctrines."⁶⁸ Malon, having had his political education in the associative socialist movement of the 1860s, understood instinctively the desire at the heart of the cooperative movement to give workers an "aisance."⁶⁹ While he understood that this alone was inadequate, that the cooperative movement alone could not and would not be the vehicle for proletarian emancipation, he nevertheless recognized and held onto the dignity, solidarity and faith in communal autonomy that was at its heart.

Integral socialism, as Malon formulated it, has been characterized as the encounter between contemporary Marxism and a native republican socialist tradition.⁷⁰ The originality of Malon's thought lies in the synthesis between two seemingly antagonistic propositions: he was able to integrate the idealism of the early utopian socialists with the practical 'possibilism' of the reformists and a rigorously

⁶⁴ Malon, *Le Socialisme intégral*, 2: xviii.

⁶⁵ Malon, *Le Socialisme intégral*, 2: 65- 67.

⁶⁶ Malon, *Le Socialisme intégral*, 2: 67.

⁶⁷ Malon, *Précis historique*, 236-37.

⁶⁸ Louis Bertrand, *La coopération, ses avantages, son avenir*, quoted in, Malon, *Le Socialisme intégral*, 2: 67.

⁶⁹ Malon quoted in Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 9.

⁷⁰ Malon quoted in Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 100.

scientific Marxist economic analysis. As Jaurès wrote, “he reconciled respect for the revolutionary tradition with an appreciation of the daily work for reform and progress,” while at the same time affirming “the need for a social morality.”⁷¹ The significance and originality of Malon’s contribution is, however, often lost in attempts to categorize his work as belonging on one side of an entrenched ideological divide. He has been described as the “creator” of reformism’s “intellectual and spiritual foundations.”⁷² Those who have sought to champion an anti-Marxist ‘dissident’, during a period in which the orthodox narrative tells us Marxist collectivism began to take hold in France, have looked to embrace Malon and independent socialists.⁷³ This distorts the originality of his contribution.

Integral socialism cannot be categorized as inherently reformist or revolutionary but should be understood as an attempt to bridge a seemingly intractable gulf. Malon’s was an expansive vision that sought to transcend the schisms, the petty personal and ideological rivalries that plagued the early socialist movement. His socialism was the product of a long and rich nineteenth-century debate at the heart of which was a unifying ideal. His intellectual journey paralleled that of the movement to which he had devoted his life: from Proudhonian mutualism, to Bakuninism, to the ‘uncertain’, bloody revolution of 1871, through to revolutionary collectivism. Malon sought to unite various ideological threads and the resultant theoretical synthesis reflected a process of negotiation. His work, particularly in the *Revue socialiste*, was part of this process. An examination of his contribution offers an insight into the tensions that existed throughout the nineteenth century continually threatening to separate socialists from each other and from their political objectives. His integral socialism is evidence of continuity in the French socialist intellectual tradition, one that is sometimes neglected and often overwhelmed by more powerful, or at least more strident, voices.

Despite Malon’s centrality in the debates of the 1870s and 1880s, the history of French socialism after his death in 1893 suggests that the theoretical reconciliation he articulated and his call for socialist unity went largely unheeded by entrenched combatants. If the synthesis Malon promulgated was taking place – as indeed it was in the reformist practice of municipal Guesdism, in early possibilist attempts to contain the tension between their reformist municipal electoral program and the revolutionary aspirations of its working class base, even in the federalist, trade socialism of the revolutionary Allemanist party in the 1890s – it was a reality that the ideological warriors could not acknowledge. His contribution, however, remains crucial to an

⁷¹ Jean Jaurès, quoted in Carl Landauer, “The Origin of Socialist Reformism in France,” *International Review of Social History* 12 (1967): 105.

⁷² Jaurès, quoted in Landauer, “The Origin of Socialist Reformism in France,” 104.

⁷³ This began with Vincent who cast Malon as instrumental in the development of a “modern reformist socialist movement,” who helped the “republican socialist left shed its revolutionary associations”: *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 6. Malon’s project was, however, a far more radical proposition. Vincent’s characterization of his contribution as “intellectually accommodating socialism to the Republic” seems a more accurate description of the compromised ministerialist socialism of Millerand and Aristide Briand. Since Vincent, more recent work on independent socialists including Malon, Fournière, Georges Renard and Charles Andler has, broadly speaking, endorsed a view that the significance of the independent socialist tradition and the great contribution of its proponents like Malon was the rejection of a revolutionary paradigm. This is often accompanied by an implied criticism of the ‘revolutionary dogmatism’ of the ‘orthodox’ Left. For example, in Julian Wright’s illuminating study, Fournière’s contribution as an independent “free thinker” is contrasted with the “shallow revolutionary rhetoric” of his Guesdist counterparts. Fournière’s idealism is pitted against the doctrinaire formulations of the “self-proclaimed orthodox Marxists” who were “disconnected from the social realities facing the working class”: “Socialism and Political Identity,” 453.

understanding of the origins and evolution of French socialist theory and political practice.

Historiographical accounts of the origins of French socialism have tended to privilege one tendency over another, often in an attempt to distinguish between the treachery or the cowardice of reformists and the heroism of the revolutionary militant, or vice versa, between the authoritarianism of the ‘Marxist’ orthodoxy and the reasoned, heroic independence of those that resisted it. Such accounts obscure rather than illuminate the ways in which the forces of reform and revolution interacted during this formative period.

This dialectic still drives the politics of the left. Ever since the collectivist ‘triumph’ in 1879 there has been a marked disjunction between the language deployed by socialist parties and the rather more prosaic reality of their political practice. François Mitterrand, in his speech in 1971 at the Congress of “socialist unity” at Épinay, addressed the delegates:

Reform or revolution? I want to say ... yes revolution ... violent or peaceful, revolution is above all a rupture. He who does not accept the rupture ... he who does not consent to the rupture with the established order ... cannot be a member of the Socialist Party There is not, there will never be a socialist society without collective ownership of the great means of production, of exchange and of research.⁷⁴

Almost a century after the POF established as its goal the collectivization of the means of production through the revolutionary action of the proletariat, the revolutionary paradigm appeared to retain its rhetorical force.⁷⁵ And yet socialist parties in France have remained reformist. The affirmation and reaffirmation of a revolutionary militant identity has functioned to obscure a less galvanizing political identity. Mitterrand’s reflexive rhetorical gesture is symptomatic of a definitional tension from which the left is still struggling to escape.

The ‘end’ of the Marxist analytical framework by the 1980s and the ‘unshackling’ of French historiography from its theoretical syllogisms has undoubtedly opened up new insights into the origins of the socialist movement; as Julian Wright writes, it has “made it possible to return to the history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with new questions and intellectual priorities.”⁷⁶ These new priorities, however, have too often displayed retributive polemical intent, unable to detach themselves from the backlash that produced them. Even Tony Judt, whose own work was often overtly polemical acknowledged the extent of this trend, writing that “in the space of less than a decade it became fashionable to be not just non-

⁷⁴ François Mitterrand, “Speech to the Socialist Party Congress,” 13 June 1971, in François Mitterrand, *Politique*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1977), 531-42.

⁷⁵ Jacques Moreau argues that this “myth of revolution” endured until 1990 when the party “discreetly” adopted a new declaration of principles, abandoning the traditional notion of absolute rupture and instead placing “reformism at the service of revolutionary hopes”: Moreau, *Les Socialistes français*, 13. See Moreau’s discussion of what he calls the “cycles” of French socialism, which rather than beginning by “doctrinal revision,” in fact reflect a “remarkable continuity”: “the opening of each cycle has been the occasion of a strong affirmation of the revolutionary identity of the party.” From the “first cycle,” Moreau argues, when the POF was formed at Marseille in 1879 up until 1971 at Épinay, reforms have been reduced simply to “preparatory means” for the impending total revolution: *Les Socialistes français*, 24-26.

⁷⁶ Wright, “Historiographical Essay,” 453.

Marxist but anti-Marxist.”⁷⁷ Today the eagerness of historians of the left to triumphantly proclaim the “end of the communist *arrière-pensée*” and to locate their work within the post-Soviet intellectual framework prefaces so many studies that have appeared in recent decades.⁷⁸ The debate thus continues to reflect ideological priorities and this dualism continues to frame the historical narrative.

Almost half a century ago Michelle Perrot posed the question: the “first meeting between a French [socialist] culture and Marxism deserves to be told: does it not have exemplary value?”⁷⁹ While historiographical priorities have since expanded, the question remains urgent, and the story, largely incomplete. The encounter between the nineteenth-century federalist associative tradition of the labor movement and a Guesdist rendition of Marxist socialism or revolutionary collectivism is above all a story of negotiation. This dynamic is lost in historical accounts that tend to focus on one socialist doctrine or another, accounts that are often partial, even teleological as they abstract the doctrine from the context in which it operated.

This paper has sought to demonstrate that Malon’s attempt to reconcile the ‘reformist’ and ‘revolutionary’ modes of action articulated the process of negotiation that shaped French socialism in the 1870s and 1890s. Despite the oratorical heat and rhetorical battles that accompanied the factionalism of the early years of the PO, its formation was not the result of a theoretical rupture. Rather, this period saw a dynamic interaction between a native socialist tradition and evolving forms of organization and struggle. In this encounter the forces of reform and revolution, as Malon sought to demonstrate, were complementary and mutually supportive.

⁷⁷ Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left: Studies in Labour and Politics in France, 1830-1981* (Oxford, 1986), 170. Judt’s own work, particularly *La reconstruction du Parti socialiste*, and its preface by the ex-communist Annie Kriegel, contributed significantly to this ideological trend which was, in the 1970s, only just emerging in France: *La Reconstruction du Parti socialiste, 1921-1926* (Paris, 1976).

⁷⁸ Wright, “Historiographical Essay,” 453.

⁷⁹ Perrot, “Les Guesdistes,” 707.