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Response to William Doyle's review of **Henry Heller**, *The Bourgeois Revolution in France 1789-1815*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006. ix + 172 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$60 U.S. (hb). ISBN 1-845545-169-4.

Response by Henry Heller, University of Manitoba.

William Doyle opens his review with the exclamation "Henry Heller hates me." I was tempted to dismiss this outburst as a case of the new historical subjectivity run amuck. But instead when I go to a conference at the University of Bristol this summer I will try to seek Professor Doyle out to reassure him. Bumptious North American that I am, I am going to try to visit with Professor Doyle, shake his hand, smile and converse in a civilized way, and assure him that I do not hate him.

It is his politics and the revisionism that flow from them that I do not like. Of course he already knows this. The third paragraph of his review is an excellent summary of my view of the politics of revisionism. Indeed, he appears to be convinced of the linkage between revisionism's eclipse of Marxism and capitalism's triumphant offensive against Soviet-style communism. He confirms this when already in his second paragraph he notes that my book "reminds us that Marxism and the interpretations of the Revolution which it has engendered constitute a challenging and dazzling body of thought which deserves to be taken more seriously than students in a post-Communist world can all too often be persuaded to do."

I welcome Professor Doyle's acknowledgement of the link between the evolution of politics and the writing of history. Among other things, history is a privileged form of political argument. In no field has this been truer than in the study of the French Revolution. In the case of the Revolution, political passions have inspired not merely controversy, but an extraordinary level of historiographical achievement. My critique of revisionism then is admittedly sparked by politics. But it is also inspired by an intellectual impatience with the inertia of a still dominant school of thought whose ideas I believe are untenable in the light of current research and which at this point borders on an irrational orthodoxy. It is this impatience which led me to write the book reviewed by Doyle.

It is true that Professor Doyle is mentioned five times. But he could hardly expect otherwise. He is after all the leading champion of revisionism in the English-speaking world against which this book is mainly directed. As to why I mention only one of his works readers will understand that my preoccupation with sustaining the Marxist view led me to stress the socio-economic rather than the political perspective which preoccupies him. Contrary to Doyle, it will be noted that I cite Chartier with respect (p. 58, n. 63)) and take Maza seriously (p.18-19). As for my criticism of poor George Comninel, (pp. 5, 21, 45-6, 50) a revisionist and Marxist, all that I can say is that Marxists for some time have waited for an answer to his revisionism which I think I have provided- I am sorry to have deprived Doyle of an ally to the left. Doyle claims that I have accused revisionism of rejecting social history. As others have noted before, I merely observe that François Furet and Mona Ozouf turned their back on social history (p. 17). Social history in fact looms large in that variety of revisionism inspired by the *Annales* (which I duly consider (p.19). Doyle's review fails to register the comprehensiveness of my discussion of revisionism in the first chapter of my book as well as *passim*.

Indeed, it is important that a reviewer explain to readers what is covered and intended by a book under review. Doyle fails to do this not only in regard to the opening chapter devoted to revisionism, but with

respect to the main content of the work. He suggests that my book is in fact little more than a recycling of Lefebvre and Soboul. If time stood still perhaps there would be some truth to this remark. But a generation or more has rolled by since the heyday of these great historians in the course of which we have seen an immense tide of new research. As part of this wave, there have been many studies inspired by revisionism. Indeed, Doyle admits that my work “brings together a formidable amount of material on the economic history and structure of France both before and during the revolutionary and Napoleonic period.” It is to the analysis of this ocean of new research in the light of Marxism that my book is dedicated. True I share Lefebvre’s and Soboul’s view that the Revolution was a bourgeois and capitalist revolution. Yet it ought to be noted that Doyle mentions neither my disagreement with Lefebvre’s view that the peasant revolution was antithetical to capitalism nor Soboul’s tendency to view workers as entirely subordinate to the *sans-culottes* movement. More significantly whereas Lefebvre and Soboul stressed the role of the people in the Revolution, my work lays emphasis on the bourgeois class as director of the Revolution. But his principal failing is that he does not explain to readers to what end I have assembled a massive number of books and articles published post-Lefebvre and Soboul. My goal in fact has been to show that taking this new research into account that theoretically and empirically a Marxist analysis most fully captures the causes and meaning of the Revolution

Beyond vague reference to Marxist theoretical contortions on my part, Doyle fails to engage with the new perspectives on the Revolution my book brings forward. He appears confused by my stress on the agrarian roots of French capitalism and the bourgeoisie, omits reference to my highlighting an emergent working class created by capitalism and the link between bourgeois control of the post-revolutionary state and the subsequent development of the power of this class. He ignores my rehabilitation of the economically progressive elements of the Jacobin Republic and of the Directory. Indeed, in his review Doyle notably fails to mount any kind of sustained theoretical objection to my overall assertion of a Marxist interpretation.

His review instead becomes a nit-picking exercise in hopes of undermining would-be readers’ confidence in my synthesis. Based on Denis Woronoff, I note the enthusiasm of the *maîtres des forges* for the Revolution and the subsequent concentration of ownership in the iron and steel sector of the economy (p.73, 129).^[1] In a *non sequitur* that betrays a lack of understanding of the relationship between profitability and the conditions for productive investment, Doyle then complains about the *maîtres des forges* economic conservatism. According to him, capitalists especially post-revolution have to be productively investing to be capitalists! Concentration of ownership (takeovers) and increased production will not do. He insists that I have not taken the colonial trade and its fiscal ramifications sufficiently into account. Its critical importance is repeatedly pointed to (pp. 33-34, 69-70, 83-85, and 120).

He is also unhappy that I do not explain the relationship between war and high tariffs and the French economy. The impediments to *laissez-faire* in external trade and the necessary resort to tariff walls and war faced with British competition is a principle theme in my account of the pre-revolutionary and especially the revolutionary period (pp. 34, 40, 54, 69-70, 84, 88, 90-91, 118, and 127). I take note of the importance of the expropriation of noble and ecclesiastical land to strengthening the bourgeoisie (p. 90). Far from bourgeois investment in land being sterile, as Doyle suggests, I point out its new role as capital and the principal source of credit under Napoleon (pp. 127-28, 132). Doyle notes my stress on the rural bourgeoisie, yet complains that I don’t define it. Early on I make it clear that what distinguishes this stratum is that it derives a significant part of its income from profit as against rent or usury (p. 31). Faced with the bibliographical references I deploy is Doyle still suggesting such a rural bourgeoisie did not exist? Why can’t I point to more agricultural dynamism following the Revolution Doyle wonders? I can’t as available research on the state of the post-revolutionary rural economy is still limited. I did point out the continued significance of rent and landlordism as a constraining influence on productive investment (p. 103). Moreover, I cite the pioneering research of James Livesey on Languedoc which suggests more dynamism than previously known.^[2] I can’t go beyond what is known.

I am accused of arbitrarily favoring Anatoli Ado's counter-factual arguments while discounting those of Florin Aftalion's. As a historian I plead guilty to preferring a methodology which is based on class to one which ignores it in favour of methodological individualism and economism. Moreover, I show that Ado's speculations were shared by members of the Directory (p. 102). I am surprised at his surprise at my assertion that the Revolution was not inevitable (p. 65). As if to say why isn't Heller a cruder Marxist? My mention of the rural notables of the Napoleonic era is cited as somehow undercutting the existence of rural capitalists. It would profit Doyle to read Pierre-Louis Roederer's *Mémoires sur quelques points d'économie publique lus au Lycée en 1800 et 1801* if he wishes to better understand the link between the regime of notables and the class of capitalist farmers in the Napoleonic period.[3]

Doyle is unhappy that I don't fulfill my aspiration to be comprehensive failing to take religion and politics into account. He suggests that this is due to my Marxist bias toward the socio-economic. That a revisionist should regret my lack of a comprehensive or totalizing vision is somewhat ironic. In any case in the introduction I make it clear that a Marxist should not reduce religion and politics to the socio-economic, but rather seeks to link them together and see these different factors as parts of a whole (p.23). My reason for stressing the social and economic was to counter the tendency of some to insist that there is no relationship between political and religious change and the socio-economic. I am not responsible for my publisher's use of the *fleur-de-lys* as a typographical mark. The Phrygian bonnet apparently is out of fashion.

Doyle cites factual errors as putting my work in question of which he cites nine among the thousands of facts I adduce. Of course I apologize to readers for my errors. I regret misspelling Allard as Allaire, but Doyle perhaps should be more forgiving as he mistakes the page on which this error occurs.(p. 88 not 89). He chastises me for saying that Barnave was a Huguenot while I merely said that he came from such a family background (p. 75). In my account of the Directory which is scarcely heterodox, I point out that the new regime needed to curb a runaway inflation. Accordingly, its principal early initiative was a deliberate deflation of the economy (p. 117). In the face of this, Doyle insists that inflation was rampant and that my contention that the government of the Directory began with a policy of deliberate deflation is somehow wrong. The number of pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie and nobility and the notion of aristocratic reaction are still contentious. Whatever the number of nobles and bourgeoisie does not change the fact that the number of nobles represents a small fraction of the millions who were bourgeoisie. Contrary to Doyle, I consider Lemarchand more than a credible authority.

Doyle's failure to mount a serious critique of the main lines of my neo-Marxist account of the Revolution reflects not merely a personal failing, but that of a school which thrives on fragmentation and a detestation of synthesis in a way that links it to the increasingly irrelevant postmodernism. Revisionism began as a political and intellectual reaction against a Marxist interpretation which admittedly had some important lacunae and had become a kind of orthodoxy. Its stress on political culture and its interest in the persistence of tradition especially among the rural population proved fertile. On the other hand, its unrelenting hostility to Marxism hardened into an orthodoxy which has itself become a barrier to new points of view and effective synthesis.

My work attempts to break through this intellectual logjam by showing that a new synthesis of the Revolution based on Marxist assumptions is possible. Am I trying to impose a new orthodoxy? On the contrary, I made it clear that my synthesis like all others will be superseded by new research and perspectives which undoubtedly will open still new vistas (p. 23). I am looking for opening up rather than the ideological closure and insularity which revisionism embodies. Marxism ought to be as acceptable as a method of research in the study of the French Revolution as it is in Latin American, United States or South Asian history. Its pertinence to the comprehension of contemporary imperialism or egregious class inequality *in which we are all enmeshed* needs no defense.

NOTES

[1] *L'industrie sidérurgique en France pendant la Révolution et l'Empire* (Paris, 1984).

[2] "Material Culture, Economic Institutions and Peasant Revolution in Lower Languedoc 1770-1840," *Past & Present* 182 (2004): 143-73.

[3] *Mémoires sur quelques points d'économie publique: lus au Lycée en 1800 et 1801* (Paris, 1840) (Gallica)

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