

The Rhetoric of Revolution and Reality:  
Boulangism and Mass Politics in France

An honors thesis for the Department of History

David Lerer

Tufts University, 2011

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
The Rise and Fall of General Boulanger	3
From Boulangism to the Twentieth Century	7
The Decline of the Revolutionary Tradition and the Rise of Mass Politics	11
<b>Chapter 1 – Electoral Innovation</b>	15
Bonapartist Antecedents and Innovations	16
A Propagandizing Mission	19
Posters, Photography and Beyond	24
The Cult of Boulanger?	29
Changing the Rules of the Game	35
<b>Chapter 2 – The Rhetoric of Revolution</b>	40
Boulanger’s Revolutionary Reception	44
The Period of Troubles Begins	49
Revolutionary Rhetoric in Full Swing	55
Victory without Revolution	65
The Rhetorical Tide Shifts	69
<b>Chapter 3 – The Revolutionary Legacy and the Rhetoric of Reality</b>	75
Examining the Revolutionary Legacy	76
Revolution and Revision	80
Who Cares For Boulanger?	82
Celebrating the Fête Nationale	86
The Elections Approach	89
The Death of Boulangism	95
<b>Conclusion</b>	102
<b>Bibliography</b>	108

## Introduction

“Other peoples have had revolutions more or less frequently; we have revolution permanently.”<sup>1</sup> So lamented a parliamentary inquiry into the insurrection of March 18, known to history as the Paris Commune, shortly after its sanguinary suppression in 1871. Even with Paris recaptured, the Commune crushed and its remaining partisans exiled or extinguished against the wall of the Père Lachaise cemetery, French politicians harbored no illusions that this revolution would be the last. After all, the political history of the previous century in France had been one in which, paradoxically, the only constant was change and the only enduring tradition that of revolution. Since the French Revolution so violently thrust the country out of centuries of monarchical rule, France had been governed as a republic, then an empire, then a restored monarchy, then a more liberal monarchy, then a second republic, and finally a second empire. In the narrative of history, the Commune was simply the latest manifestation of this turbulent cycle, which could be perhaps postponed but never concluded. As the guns quieted over the besieged capital, the renowned novelist Edmond de Goncourt remarked that “such a purge, by killing off the combative part of the population, defers the next revolution by a whole generation.”<sup>2</sup> In light of the cyclical, almost predictable and seemingly inevitable series of upheavals that had befallen the country approximately every twenty years, Goncourt was both patterning the past and prophesying the future of France.

In the wake of the blood-stained Commune, the Third Republic would emerge as the new government of France. Yet, the specter of revolution remained on the minds of all political actors of the era, feared by the Republic’s supporters and eagerly awaited by its opponents. The

---

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Roberts, « La Commune considérée par la Droite: dimensions d’une mythologie, » *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 19, 2 (April-June 1972): 190.

<sup>2</sup> Edmond de Goncourt, *Paris under Siege, 1870-1871: From the Goncourt Journal*, ed. George J. Becker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 312.

regime seemed especially ripe for insurrection and dismemberment given the rather disagreeable nature of its origins. A solitary republic surrounded by the authoritarian states of Europe, it had been born out of shameful defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, erected upon the corpses of Communards, and initially conceived by a royalist majority as a springboard for monarchical restoration. As such, the Republic had fierce enemies all along the length of the political spectrum, to whom another exhibition of that historic insurrectionary tradition would have been an absolute delight.

During the second half of the 1880s, the rise of General Georges Ernest Boulanger and the nebulous movement that bore his name promised to these malcontents an opportunity for another formative revolution. Nevertheless, Goncourt's prediction would be proved only half-true; Boulangism would indeed stoke the possibility of upheaval but eventually disintegrate in the face of a strengthened regime. Despite its chronic political volatility, the Third Republic would seemingly annul the revolutionary cycle, surviving not only Boulangism, but also the Dreyfus Affair and the catastrophe of World War I, before eventually succumbing to defeat against the Nazi war machine in 1940. It would transcend the time-tested tradition of insurrectionary politics that had defined the previous century, substituting in its place a new system of mass politics suited to the republican institutions of universal suffrage and representative democracy. The Boulangist episode would be the last time that the Republic faced a legitimate threat of internal revolution and it would reveal to French politicians and political aspirants the bankruptcy of the revolutionary tradition in this new mass political landscape.

### *The Rise and Fall of General Boulanger*

For the majority of his life, Boulanger had been a courageous and illustrious soldier, serving with equal distinction under the Second Empire and the Third Republic. He fought in Italy, in China, in the Franco-Prussian War and even participated in the recapture of Paris from the Commune, although he was wounded before its most infamous episode, the “bloody week” that eradicated the remnants of Communard resistance. For his bravery and the wartime injuries that resulted, he received decorations such as the *légion d’honneur* and rose in the ranks of the French military establishment. During the early 1880s, promotions placed him in command positions from which he could engage in military reforms that made him popular among infantrymen. As a paragon of soldierly discipline, he considered his allegiance to France alone and refrained from displaying any hint of political ambition.

Nevertheless, Boulanger soon entered politics at the start of 1886 as Minister of War under the aegis of the Radical Georges Clemenceau, a contemporary (they attended the same high school) who saw in the general a rare republican military man, distinguished from the conservatism prevalent in the armed forces. While the majority of seats in parliament were held by the center-left faction known as the Opportunists, they had recently begun allying themselves with the more leftist Radicals at the expense of conservatives, who often harbored monarchist or imperialist sympathies. In his new post, Boulanger rapidly introduced popular military reforms, standardizing usage of new rifle technology and expelling members of France’s royal families from the armed forces, thereby bolstering his popularity among republicans. He also enacted more trivial reforms, such as modifying uniforms and allowing soldiers to grow beards, which greatly increased his appeal. When a miner strike erupted in Decazeville, he refused to send the army to repress it, attracting the favor of socialists. He restored the tradition of the Longchamps military review during the Fête Nationale (also known as Bastille Day), which served as the most

tangible display yet of his burgeoning popularity. He was the star of the show, receiving more applause than the president and inspiring the popular tune “En Revenant de la Revue,” which along with other Boulangist kitsch (such as portraits of the general and mythologized histories of his life) was rapidly circulating the country.

Boulangier’s allure derived from his patriotic image and ardent nationalism, which increasingly translated into a hard-line stance of revanchism, or revenge against Germany for the humiliating defeat it had delivered to France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Buoyed by his popularity and assured of political support, Boulangier ramped up bellicose rhetoric and militarized the border. His warmongering may have earned him the affectionate name “Général Revanche” among the masses, but it increasingly worried the government, who knew that another conflict with superior German forces would be as foolish as it would be disastrous. Indeed, Bismarck responded by reinforcing his own military, and war almost broke out during the Schnaebélé Affair in April 1887, in which a spy surreptitiously commissioned by Boulangier was arrested by German officials on the border. Although war was averted through the cautious negotiations of the government, the public felt that Bismarck had acquiesced out of fear of the gallant Boulangier.

This time, however, his ever-increasing popularity almost precipitated catastrophe for the Republic. His dangerous potential was further recognized by the regime when he received 100,000 protest votes in an election for which he was ineligible as a military officer, coordinated by the socialist polemicist and Communard sympathizer Henri Rochefort without the knowledge of the general. He was promptly removed from the ministry and reassigned to the distant post of Clermont-Ferrand. On the day of his departure from the Gare de Lyon in Paris, a fawning crowd numbering in the thousands showed its solidarity with the beloved general, even lying down on

the train tracks to prevent his leaving. By this time, Opportunists and most Radicals unequivocally denounced him, but “Boulangism” as a political movement was just getting started.

At the end of 1887, revelations that the son-in-law of the president Jules Grévy was trafficking in military decorations led to the scandal of the Wilson Affair, forcing Grévy’s resignation and the formation of a new ministry. Boulangists clamored that the general be reappointed as Minister of War, and in the infamous “historic nights” during the crisis, Boulanger met with the heads of radical and monarchist opposition to the Opportunists in the hopes of striking some sort of deal. He had demonstrated his readiness to collude with politicians from left and right, but he was not taken into the new government. His subversive aspirations became more explicit in subsequent visits and communications with the Bonapartist and monarchist pretenders in exile, who merged their interest in seeing the Republic destroyed with his revolutionary potential to make it happen. Spurred on by the initiatives of a Bonapartist journalist named Georges Thiébaud, Boulanger was presented as a candidate in a few departments in early 1888, although he was still technically barred from political office due to his military status.

On account of his electoral activity, the government revoked his military standing, which ironically made him henceforth eligible for office. All those seeking the demise of the parliamentary Republic rallied to his movement, making for an opportunistic coalition of diametrically opposed ideological tendencies whose only shared goal was revolution and regime change. Monarchists, Bonapartists, staunch nationalists, anti-Semites, far-left Radicals and socialists made strange bedfellows as they united under Boulanger’s banner. To capitalize on the general’s anti-establishment image, candidates began to append “Boulangist” to their political

affiliation. By this time, Boulangism had acquired a purely negative electoral platform: the demand for dissolution of parliament and revision of the constitution, to be followed by a national referendum to determine the new constitution's content. Of course, nobody knew what "revision" entailed, and any clarification on this point would surely have dissipated the ambiguity of the movement, and by consequence, its broad web of support. Most important, however, were Boulanger's own plebiscitary campaigns, in which his name was presented on the ballots of numerous departments all across the country that resulted in many electoral victories. When he presented himself in parliament, his proposals for revision were categorically rejected. In protest, he resigned his seat and continued to wage his plebiscitary tactic throughout 1888, abdicating immediately after each successive victory to demonstrate how universal suffrage sided with him rather than the government. Essential to his electoral endeavor was the coordinated proliferation of unprecedented amounts of Boulangist propaganda that permeated every corner of France, fusing political exhortations against the government with his already deeply ingrained popular image.

The zenith of Boulanger's influence came in January 1889, when the death of a legislator in Paris gave him the opportunity to run for the vacant parliamentary seat against the republican candidate, Édouard Jacques. In the frenzied electoral campaign that ensued, Boulanger triumphed with a decisive margin. He had won elections in both the provinces and in Paris, and with a huge crowd of supporters cheering him on, many expected a Boulangist coup d'état that would displace the republican regime. Yet, at the end of that frantic night, Boulanger chose instead to retreat into the arms of his mistress, confident in the knowledge that his movement would definitively and legally condemn the government in the following elections in September. The government hastily sprang to action, changing electoral law so that a candidate could no

longer present himself in more than one district at a time. At a banquet at Tours in March, Boulanger affirmed his utmost loyalty to the Republic while simultaneously reorienting his platform so as to accommodate conservative and Catholic voters whose republican enthusiasm had been historically lacking. This mattered little to the regime, which issued a warrant for his arrest on trumped-up charges of treason, prompting the general's hurried flight to Brussels and then London. The High Court accused and convicted him *in absentia* of plotting against the state. Emasculated by the departure of its leader and further delegitimized by the festivities associated with the centenary of 1789 and the Exposition Universelle, Boulangism was soundly defeated in the autumn elections, spelling the end of its political viability. Boulanger would never return to France, and in 1891, disconsolate at the death of his mistress, committed suicide on her grave with a bullet to the head.

### *From Boulangism to the Twentieth Century*

The tale of Boulanger and the ill-fated movement that developed around his persona seems to possess all the vital elements of a compelling cinematic narrative: strong character personalities, clashing worldviews, shifting alliances, backroom intrigues, and an emotionally-charged suicidal denouement. Indeed, the early historiography of Boulangism limited itself to a theatrical focus on the general himself. Historians heavily utilized contemporaneous memoirs and recollections of those involved in the Boulangist saga, preserving many of the biases, preconceptions, and factual errors within those accounts. Just as so many voters were seduced by the popular public image of Boulanger, so did the first wave of historians devote most of their attention to the general rather than the underlying movement and its political implications.<sup>3</sup> With

---

<sup>3</sup> Among the studies that can be faulted for simplifying the complex confluence of political currents within Boulangism to the political journey of Boulanger himself, see Alexandre Zévaès, *Au temps du boulangisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1930); Adrien Dansette, *Le Boulangisme* (Paris: Fayard, 1946); Bruno Weil, *Glück und Elend des Generals Boulanger* (Berlin: Walther Rothschild, 1931). The last of these works, in drawing facile parallels between

the parameters of historical study limited to the machinations of one man, it was easy to label Boulangism merely as a failed attempt to overthrow the government and a tragicomedy of botched political aspirations that reached its ignominious end with the suicide of the tragic hero.

Scholarship during the second half of the twentieth century began to overcome this limited perspective in shifting the emphasis from Boulanger the man to Boulangism the movement. Jacques Néré's pioneering 1959 study endeavored to link the movement's electoral support to the economic crisis and labor protests of the early 1880s, thus revealing the filiation from Boulangism to modern socialism.<sup>4</sup> Historians began to examine what exactly constituted the appeal of the movement and its significance in the scheme of French fin-de-siècle politics. Some worked backwards from the phenomenon of fascism, tracing its roots to the nationalist and populist appeals that characterized Boulangist propaganda.<sup>5</sup> Some followed Néré's lead in convincingly demonstrating its leftist origins, casting doubt on previous assumptions that Boulangism can be entirely explained as a monarchical or imperial conspiracy against the Republic.<sup>6</sup> Others investigated the influence and impact of Boulangism on the subsequent realignment of socialist movements in France.<sup>7</sup> Recent scholarship has in turn reappraised the depth of royalist collusion in the Boulangist movement, whose failure extinguished any lingering hopes for a monarchical restoration and guided many such supporters into a new nationalist and

---

the general and Hitler, contributed to prevailing Boulanger-centric scholarship while foreshadowing later interpretations of Boulangism as a proto-fascist movement.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Néré, *La Crise économique de 1882 et le mouvement boulangiste* (Ph.D. diss., University of Paris, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Davies, *The Extreme Right in France, 1789 to the Present: From De Maistre to Le Pen* (London: Routledge, 2002); Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914: les origines françaises du fascisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998); Michel Winock, "Populismes français," *Vingtième siècle. revue d'histoire* 56 (Oct.-Dec. 1997): 77-91; Paul Mazgaj, "The Origins of the French Radical Right: A Historiographical Essay," *French Historical Studies* 15, 2 (Autumn 1987): 287-315.

<sup>6</sup> Frederic H. Seager, *The Boulanger Affair: Political Crossroads of France, 1886-1889* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969); Philip G. Nord, *Paris Shopkeepers and the Politics of Resentment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864-1893* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Thomas Moodie, "The Reorientation of French Socialism, 1888-90," *International Review of Social History* 20 (1975): 347-369; Jolyon Michael Howorth, "The Myth of Blanquism under the Third Republic (1871-1900)," *The Journal of Modern History* 48, 3 (Sept. 1976): 37-68.

anti-Semitic idiom.<sup>8</sup> A brief survey of the historiography of the affair thus illustrates a plethora of proposed interpretations of Boulangism, which are distinguished by the focus given to specific political groupings and affiliations.

In reality, all of these arguments possess some degree of truth and historical value, ultimately demonstrating the wide range of ideological and political affiliations that rallied under the banner of Boulanger in his movement against the Third Republic as it stood. The Boulangist impetus to revise the 1875 constitutional laws of the Third Republic derived directly from analogous demands of leftist republicans at least a decade earlier, who accurately condemned the constitution as the work of monarchists. Political actors hailing from right and left expounded doctrines of anti-parliamentarism that constituted the *modus operandi* of Boulangist principles. While remaining wary of the pitfalls of historical anachronism, it can certainly be contended that Boulangism possessed proto-fascist qualities; its populist language, calls for national unity, emphasis on class collaboration rather than class struggle, reverence for the leader, and occasional dabblings in anti-Semitism mark the movement as an important evolutionary stage in the development of the new right. Boulanger's rhetoric also possessed a certain socialist tinge, reflecting his radicalism as Minister of War, which foreshadowed the noxious blend of nationalism and socialism that would come to define far-right ideology in France and elsewhere in Europe. Nevertheless, many of the patriotic appeals uttered by Boulangists tended to be firmly anchored in the Jacobin tradition of nationalism, which was historically a province of the republican left. Moreover, Boulanger's plebiscitary campaigns harkened back to the Bonapartist affinity for a direct consultation of the nation's electors. The substantial funding for Boulanger's massive propaganda campaigns came primarily from the copious coffers of royalists, who were

---

<sup>8</sup> William D. Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Philippe Levillain, *Boulanger, fossoyeur de la monarchie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982).

not averse to entering into an alliance of political expediency with the movement. The ease with which Boulangism recommends itself to many different understandings reflects its heterogeneity and suggests that it was indeed a crucial moment of political and ideological reorientation in France.

It is, of course, an entirely healthy and necessary historical exercise to attempt to seek out retrodictive explanations for contemporary phenomena like far-right movements, fascism, populism, modern socialism and so on. Nevertheless, the historian's tendency to search for origins and root causes so as to situate Boulangism in the grand continuum of French politics requires that present political norms and behaviors be grafted retrospectively onto those of the past. It assumes the entrenchment of a structure of mass politics within which such twentieth-century movements evolved. In this sense, "mass politics" denotes a democratic order, framed by universal suffrage that equalizes the votes of all citizens, thus compelling rival candidates and parties to compete for votes on the national, regional and local level. It is the incorporation of the masses into the political process as electoral agents, which results in an increasing politicization of society. To interpret the Boulanger Affair in hindsight from the twentieth century is to overlook the fact that Boulangism arose within a nascent mass political culture while simultaneously influencing its development. Such a manner of approach can also gloss over the significance of contemporary perceptions of such changes during the political episode itself.

*The Decline of the Revolutionary Tradition and the Rise of Mass Politics*

Boulangism has been recognized as a transitional moment in the development of French mass politics,<sup>9</sup> and its historiography, as noted above, has investigated the resulting realignments of political groupings in France. I hope to lend cohesiveness to these findings by recontextualizing them as reactions to the transformation of French political culture from the insurrectionary politics of the preceding century to the mass politics of the Third Republic and beyond. In doing so, I posit a tension between the rhetoric of the Boulangist experience, which expressed a common belief in the continued relevance and vitality of the revolutionary tradition, and its actual innovation as an electoral competitor within the incipient democratic institutions of the Republic, which militated against any insurrectionary upheaval of the state apparatus. Most studies have neglected to examine this opposition through a critical analysis of the rhetoric of the day, which, thanks to liberal press laws and minimal censorship, serves as a comprehensive barometer of political opinion and perception.<sup>10</sup> By relying heavily on primary sources from the affair, namely newspapers and electoral propaganda, I propose to demonstrate how the Boulangist experience compelled both republicans and their opponents to change their political rhetoric and behavior to accommodate the electoral exigencies of a new mass political landscape in which revolution had become more fantasy than reality. I also examine how the revolutionary legacy was critically reinterpreted and recast by those on the left and the right, including the republican regime itself, in reaction to these changes.

This is by no means to argue that Boulangism, in and of itself, created the democratic political culture of the Third Republic. History does not occur in a vacuum, especially in regards

---

<sup>9</sup> Patrick H. Hutton, "Popular Boulangism and the Advent of Mass Politics in France, 1886-90," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976): 85-106; James Leaning, *To Be A Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Néré, *Le Boulangisme et la presse* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1964), a survey of the press during the Boulangist years, is a very useful resource that clearly grasps the central importance of rhetoric in the affair. However, it lacks thematic coherency, opting to use the press to trace the straightforward narrative of Boulangism without elucidating any implications for mass political culture.

to such a gradual process as the democratization of political life. At least since the creation of the regime in 1870, the structural forces of universal suffrage and parliamentary representation that enabled the rise of participatory democracy were in place. Some scholars have rightfully delved into the latter days of the Second Empire to locate the roots of democratization in the public sphere.<sup>11</sup> Structurally, the Boulangist experience was a product rather than a cause of this process. Nevertheless, rhetoric during the affair continued to express the insurrectionary impulse foretold by Goncourt and the parliamentary inquiry into the Commune. Even as it played by the electoral rules of the republican institution, Boulangism was richly imbued with subversive connotation. The curious dissonance sprang from the manner in which it concurrently drew on the rhetorical language and imagery of the revolutionary legacy at the same time that it cultivated new strategies for electoral competition in a post-revolutionary Republic.

Chapter 1 examines how Boulangism pioneered a modern methodology of electoral politicking, suited to the new world of mass politics, which was unparalleled in France up to that time. The movement intensely politicized French civil society through the employment of propaganda on an unprecedented scale, and it injected politics into both traditional channels of contact and new phenomena of mass communication and consumption. In waging a campaign that was national in scope and ambition but capable of adapting to local circumstances, Boulangism revealed the possibilities of modern party organization. Its innovations altered the practice of electoral politics for its republican opponents as well, who had no choice but to meet the Boulangist challenge on its own terms. Chapter 2 analyzes the rhetoric of Boulangists, anti-Boulangists, and neutral actors up to the moment when Boulanger fled France out of fear of arrest in April 1889. It highlights the ubiquitous theme of revolution which defined political

---

<sup>11</sup> See Philip G. Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Sudir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

discourse about Boulangism as well as the few occasions in which an insurrectionary situation seemed destined to become reality. After the movement reached its peak with the triumph in Paris in January 1889, rhetorical patterns began to downplay revolutionary invocation and emphasize electoral imagery instead. Chapter 3 follows these discursive transformations to the Boulangist defeat in the autumn elections of 1889, paying close attention to perceptions of the centenary of the French Revolution and the Exposition Universelle, which took place in the interim. These events served as a legitimizing boon to the besieged government, but nevertheless forced it to reevaluate the rhetorical connection to its revolutionary heritage.

Because many newspapers and political actors are referenced in the chapters, a quick introduction to the recurring ones will help alleviate confusion. Most of the journals cited were printed and distributed in Paris, although many came to be sold in the provinces during the 1880s.<sup>12</sup> Among the numerous Boulangist papers, the most read were *L'Intransigeant*, headed by the influential Boulangist Henri Rochefort, *La Cocarde* and *La Presse*. Monarchist journals included *Le Gaulois*, edited by Arthur Meyer with frequent articles by J. Cornély, and *Le Soleil*. Ideologically linked with the royalist cause were the Catholic papers, *La Croix* and *L'Univers*. The intransigent Bonapartist Paul de Cassagnac headed his own imperialist journal, *L'Autorité*. The Opportunist journals, such as *Le Temps*, *Le Matin*, *Le Siècle*, and *La République française* were resolutely anti-Boulangist, as were the Radical journals *La Justice* and *La Lanterne*. The moderate republican periodicals, *Revue des deux mondes* and *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, as well as the satirical *Le Grelot* and the conservative *Le Figaro*, were generally anti-Boulangist but were equally disposed to criticizing the Opportunists and Radicals. Lastly, of the

---

<sup>12</sup> Marc Angenot, *Le Centenaire de la révolution, 1889* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1989), 58.

various socialist papers, *La Revue socialiste* rallied against Boulanger, while *Le Cri du peuple* debated within its pages the desirability of an alliance with the Boulangists.<sup>13</sup>

## Chapter 1 – Electoral Innovation

---

<sup>13</sup> The archives of the majority of these newspapers are available on Gallica, the digital library that serves as an online repository of the holdings of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Newspapers of this period generally divided along strictly partisan lines, and their editors were often politicians or commentators with clearly-defined political affiliations. For a general history of the French press during this time, see Claude Bellanger, et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française – tome III: de 1871 à 1940* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972).

Although Boulangism ultimately met with failure and disintegration in the face of a strengthened Republic, the French experience with the short-lived movement marked a defining moment in the development of modern electoral politics. Born out of the popular celebrity of Boulanger, the movement bearing his name developed into a full-fledged national organization that deftly adapted to the new political landscape of mass politics. Propaganda and electoral appeals of all kinds were disseminated on a national scale through an effective mobilization of local resources in both city and country. At its height, Boulangism linked the nascent culture of mass consumption with that of mass politics; political appeals permeated everything from religious iconography in small, rural villages to luxury products in chic Parisian shops. The movement effectively expanded the parameters of electoral competition and compelled parties in opposition, as well as the incumbent administration, to reorient their approaches to political representation. This revolution in electoral methodology, comprehended by contemporary observers with both reference to the past and speculation on the future, significantly influenced the practice and perception of politics in the Third Republic.

In examining the unparalleled proliferation of Boulangist propaganda, it is of paramount importance to keep in mind the distinction between official, authorized electoral material and independently-manufactured kitsch. Boulanger-related trinkets and knick-knacks flourished throughout the country as early as 1886, when the general was appointed to the post of Minister of War, often without his permission or consent. Given his immense popularity even before he became an electoral candidate, it is unsurprising that entrepreneurial merchants readily seized upon the profitable production of such goods. Once Boulanger's ties to the government were severed and his oppositional status affirmed, Boulangism rapidly developed into a bona fide political movement that proceeded to engaged in the creation and dissemination of propaganda

on a national scale. As such, the real innovations of its approach to electoral propaganda stem from the intentional, concerted tactics of the Boulangist party apparatus. Nevertheless, it is impossible to separate the broad popular allure of the general from his careful packaging and promotion through targeted propaganda, and indeed they inevitably blended together during his campaigns. This suggests that structural factors in France at the time, such as the nascent culture of mass consumption in urban areas and new technological means for large-scale distribution of information, were essential elements that enabled the Boulangist propaganda explosion to occur. Boulangism thus did not create the conditions for a highly politicized society, but as we shall see, it unleashed the possibilities of electoral outreach in a mass political landscape and indeed greatly politicized civil society.

#### *Bonapartist Antecedents and Innovations*

The origins of Boulanger's innovative plebiscitary campaign, which gave electoral expression to his political challenge against the regime, sprang in large part from the initiative of a Bonapartist journalist named Georges Thiébaud. Although, in 1887, Rochefort had already launched a local protest vote for the general in Paris, Thiébaud jumpstarted the Boulangist electoral machine for the rest of the country at the start of 1888. His endeavors illustrate the curious link between classical Bonapartist plebiscitary aspirations and the development of modern party organizations that actively adapted their electoral appeals to varying local landscapes. In the context of the Third Republic, Bonapartism refers to the political movement that advocated the restoration of the empire under the rule of the Bonaparte dynasty. Ideologically, it supported a strong and centralized state united by popular support for an authoritarian ruler. Historically, Bonapartist strategy, from Napoleon I to the more recent

example of Napoleon III, revolved around the national plebiscite as a means of legitimating an imperial claimant who could then justify a seizure of political power. With its emphasis on the universal suffrage of the masses and its sanctification of the “appeal to the people,” Bonapartists were better equipped ideologically for a purely electoral challenge with the Third Republic than snobbish high-society royalists or obdurate socialists whose principles ruled out any participation in the bourgeois instruments of government.

Thiébaud very much adhered to this traditional Bonapartist rhetorical mold, in that he conceived the electoral process as a tool for substantiating a coup d'état. As such, it was difficult to conceal any imperial hopes that he harbored for a triumphant Boulanger. He did not shy away from comparing Boulanger's popularity to that of Louis-Napoleon during his rise to prominence in 1848.<sup>14</sup> He lauded the providential reception of the general during his campaigns and recounted witnessing “messianic scenes” of solidarity from working class supporters.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most telling exposition of Thiébaud's Bonapartist conception of the electoral process was attributed to him by Maurice Barrès in his *L'Appel au soldat*, a retrospective dramatized examination of the Boulangist episode. In it, Thiébaud concisely summarizes the *raison d'être* of Boulanger's plebiscitary enterprise: “The important thing is not to be elected, but rather to have votes everywhere.”<sup>16</sup> This remark, while elucidating the Bonapartist awareness of the formative power of the vote, exposes its essentially antidemocratic paradox of using the existing electoral process to legitimate an imperial pretender with the goal of a coup d'état that would nullify that very process. Indeed, shortly after Boulanger's flight from France, Thiébaud would abandon the movement in which he had invested so much.<sup>17</sup> Deprived of the physical presence

---

<sup>14</sup> Gaston Calmette, « La Campagne Boulangiste », *Le Figaro*, Feb. 28, 1888.

<sup>15</sup> « J'ai vu de mes yeux, au cours de nos voyages avec le général dans les régions ouvrières, des scènes messianiques... », Georges Thiébaud, « Un épisode du Boulangisme », *Le Figaro*, Oct. 4, 1889.

<sup>16</sup> « L'essentiel n'est pas d'être élu, mais d'avoir des votes partout. », Maurice Barrès, *L'Appel au soldat*, (Paris: Nelson, 1900), 112.

<sup>17</sup> Seager, *The Boulanger Affair*, 223.

of the magnetic general and the electoral capacity that was so inextricable from his persona, Boulangism ceased to be a useful political tool for Thiébaud.

While Thiébaud's rhetoric may have betrayed his Bonapartist sympathies and imperial nostalgia, his initiatives at the head of Boulanger's campaign in the provinces demonstrated a marked prescience in relation to the nascent culture of mass politics. They provide a revealing distillation of the tactical changes in electoral methodology that were starting to take hold during the affair. His approach, blending the old Bonapartist proclivity for the plebiscite with the new possibilities of massive propaganda distribution, hinted at a new political culture in which civil society, even in remote rural areas, became increasingly politicized. Often described by others and perhaps by himself as the "inventor of Boulangism," he played a pivotal role in harnessing popular enthusiasm for the general into a coordinated regional organization before any centralized Boulangist apparatus had developed in the provinces.<sup>18</sup> After posing Boulanger's candidature in seven partial elections early in 1888, he clarified in an interview with *Le Figaro* that his activities were not the result of a top-down mandate from the general, envisioned to be running the campaign from on high. Rather, Thiébaud opted for a grassroots approach, "a spontaneous manifestation, made with the help of local resources and sympathies." He further elucidated his self-styled role in this process as a sort of makeshift campaign manager, who "visited these seven departments, organizing conferences, seeing people from everywhere... inquiring into the sentiments of the country, preparing as well the pertinent details, the electoral lists, the groups, the distributing agents [of ballots]..."<sup>19</sup> Although Thiébaud propagated the

---

<sup>18</sup> « L'inventeur du boulangisme... », « L'ordre dans la rue », *Le Figaro*, Jan. 24, 1898 ; « Inventeur de la première candidature de M. Boulanger... », *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, Sept. 20, 1889. Meyer dubbed him the "sower" of Boulangism in his memoir, *Ce que mes yeux ont vu*, 69. Rochefort wrote that Thiébaud "modestly called himself the 'founder' of Boulangism" in « Le Candidat Alibert », *L'Intransigeant*, Sept. 20, 1889.

<sup>19</sup> « Il fallait le consentement formel du général... il fallait ensuite une grosse somme pour suppléer au manque de temps et faire face aux dépenses... Nous y avons renoncé, préférant de beaucoup une manifestation spontanée, faite avec l'aide des ressources et des sympathies locales... Je suis parti le 25 janvier et j'ai visité les sept départements, en y organisant des conférences, en voyant des personnes de tous les mondes, qui étaient favorables à mon travail,

traditional Bonapartist rhetoric in paying lip service to the sovereignty of the masses, he understood full well that the Boulangist legend could not sell itself, and that a locally variable propaganda campaign was paramount to success at the polls.<sup>20</sup> As a result, Boulanger obtained considerable quantities of votes in many districts without even being an official or eligible candidate, stunning incumbent republican politicians who had hitherto taken their own electoral support for granted. In his attempt to legitimate a new Bonaparte through politicking and propaganda, Thiébaud challenged the elitist apathy that characterized rural politics in many places and forced local politicians to defend themselves electorally in the field of mass politics.

#### *A Propagandizing Mission*

Thiébaud's grassroots efforts influenced Boulangist tactics as the movement transformed itself into a major political force, which maintained his emphasis on local strategy while elevating the distribution of Boulangist propaganda to an industrial scale and national scope. Boulanger had undoubtedly grasped the potential of his popularity upon his arrival to the post of war minister, shortly after which he established a press bureau to publicize his exploits.<sup>21</sup> Although his popularity up to that point had freely developed without the aid of a centralized organization, such a national apparatus indeed coalesced as his political promise ripened in 1887. Through deals with printers and newspaper editors that spanned the whole of France, this official organization rapidly orchestrated an explosion of national propaganda. Of course, the ultimate resources enabling this propagandizing mission were the generous contributions from wealthy

---

en me renseignant sur les sentiments du pays, en préparant aussi les détails matériels, les listes électorales, les bandes, les agents distributeurs... », Gaston Calmette, « La Campagne Boulangiste », *Le Figaro*, Feb. 28, 1888.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Thiébaud's first stop in one region was at a royalist press office, where he convinced the editor to print 25,000 brochures and 4,000 posters in support of Boulanger's candidacy. The electoral materials were hastily printed overnight for immediate distribution. See William D. Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 99.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic: Sorel, Barrès & Maurras* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2010), 29.

royalists and conservatives, the most significant of which were Arthur Dillon and the Duchesse d'Uzès, who supplied approximately five million and three million francs, respectively.<sup>22</sup>

Bolstered by such considerable financial reserves, the Boulangist experience was witness to the first propaganda campaigns in which press, poster, image and leaflet were jointly employed at the national level.<sup>23</sup> By the time of Boulanger's plebiscitary campaigns, this momentum heralded nothing less than the inundation of politics into every corner of French society, from the rural church community to the new department stores of cosmopolitan Paris. In 1889, five million Boulangist posters and seven million ballots were circulating in Paris, and millions more had swept the countryside.<sup>24</sup>

Boulangist propaganda displayed remarkable malleability as it traversed urban centers, provincial towns and peasant villages, capable of both harkening to traditional and religious imagery in the countryside and adapting to budding patterns of mass consumption in cities. The inspiration for a comprehensive propaganda campaign came from Thiébaud but also from Dillon, whose experience as a manager of a French-American telegram company in New York had exposed him to modern American advertising methods.<sup>25</sup> Boulangist propaganda was certainly marketing the general to the populace and its local disseminators knew that different constituencies would respond to diverse appeals. In areas that had voted heavily for Louis-Napoleon, portraits of Boulanger that resembled the emperor were propagated.<sup>26</sup> Farmers' almanacs that combined agricultural know-how with Boulangist propaganda gave the impression of political neutrality while broadcasting the general's persona to toiling peasants.<sup>27</sup> Popular

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Bellanger, et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française – tome III*, 256, note #1.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics: Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair, 1886-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 60.

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, *Ce que mes yeux ont vu*, 70-71.

<sup>26</sup> Néré, *Le Boulangisme et la presse*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Burns, *Rural Society*, 61.

histories of Boulanger highlighted his patriotic military service and ardent nationalism to capitalize on revanchist sentiment in eastern France, while downplaying bellicose invocations in regions farther from the “blue line” of the Vosges.<sup>28</sup> In areas more inclined to the left, propagandists whitewashed Boulanger’s involvement in the suppression of the Commune in 1871.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Boulanger’s zealously militaristic image, which lay at the core of his initial popularity, was easily glossed over in electorally inexpedient circumstances. It even managed to foster national disunity; in Dunkirk, his bilingual posters in both French and Dutch attracted the support of Flemish irredentists who vehemently repudiated even the slightest hint of French identity.<sup>30</sup> As a testament to both its flexibility and ambiguity, one Boulangist poster concurrently appealed to workers, peasants, “bourgeois and employers,” and the “intellectual élite of the nation,” as well as affirming that “Boulanger stands for peace!” even as “his hand on the hilt of the sword of France...will make it understood to those who threaten us that the time of timid submissions is past...”<sup>31</sup> In this manner, Boulangist propaganda could articulate both specific appeals to local communes and sweeping, national generalities in the quest for votes.

Many appeals in rural areas were based in religious imagery that extracted the messianic prophecies of Christianity and recontextualized them into political and nationalist settings. *Colporteurs*, peddlers of religious books and tracts in the countryside during previous decades, now brought Boulangist iconography into peasant communities.<sup>32</sup> Although distributed locally by itinerant merchants, this popular propaganda often took the form of *images d’Épinal* which

---

<sup>28</sup> Burns comprehensively details the mutations in Boulangist propaganda of the sort as it came under the influence of local politicians in various rural areas of the country; see chapter 4, “The Rural Legacy.”

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, note #4, 196.

<sup>30</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 100.

<sup>31</sup> Further demonstrating its desire to appeal to as many voters as possible, the poster began with a litany of simplifications and catchphrases: “Boulanger stands for Employment! Boulanger stands for Liberty! Boulanger stands for Honesty! Boulanger stands for Justice! Boulanger stands for the People! Boulanger stands for Peace!” It is reprinted as Document 2.12 in William Fortescue, *The Third Republic in France, 1870-1940: Conflicts and Continuities* (London: Routledge, 2000), 43-45.

<sup>32</sup> Burns, *Rural Society*, 70.

were increasingly mass-produced in other parts of the country.<sup>33</sup> In one leaflet, a martyred Boulanger hangs crucified on a cross as Bismarck smirks with pleasure, evidently overlooking the piece's title: "He will rise from the dead."<sup>34</sup> Religiously-tinged references to the general as the providential "savior of France"<sup>35</sup> and a "national deliverance" abounded in press and propaganda, even finding their way into the lexicon of Boulanger himself, who framed one of his electoral victories in 1888 as "a genuine deliverance" from the regime.<sup>36</sup> When, in 1887, he posed too great a political menace to the government, it reassigned him to a distant military post, sparking a profusion of messianic posters emblazoned with the slogan, "he will return!"<sup>37</sup> Before the autumn elections of 1889, Boulanger even represented himself in a letter to the deeply devout tsar Alexander of Russia as the choice of Providence, demonstrating that his opportunistic faculty for self-promotion knew no national bounds.<sup>38</sup>

Although much of this propaganda began to be commissioned by the general's political organization after his resignation from the post of war minister, some histories of the period decline to mention that his prior fame, which had been increasing rapidly since his ascension to that office, had already manifested itself in the popular media. For example, an anonymous biography of Boulanger sold about 100,000 copies in 1886, despite having no official affiliation

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. *Images d'Épinal* were popular prints of religious and historical illustrations that were first produced in the early years of the nineteenth century. Often characterized by Napoleonic imagery, they were indeed utilized by both Napoleon I and III to shape their personas in rural areas. By the time of the Boulanger Affair, such prints were circulating France on a previously unmatched scale, thanks to both the technological advances in printing and the Boulangist eagerness to saturate the country with propaganda. For a history of *Images d'Épinal*, see Henri George, *La Belle histoire des images d'Épinal* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> « Il Ressuscitera », the image is reprinted in Burns, 78.

<sup>35</sup> Booklets entitled "Le Sauveur de la France," for example. See Emile Thirion, *La Politique au village* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1896), 328.

<sup>36</sup> « La journée du 15 avril marquerait pour le pays la date d'une véritable délivrance. », Jules Ferry, *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry, tome 7*, ed. Paul Robiquet (Paris: Armand Colin, 1898), 110.

<sup>37</sup> « Il reviendra ! », Edmond Le Roy, « Départ du Général Boulanger », *Le Gaulois*, July 9, 1887.

<sup>38</sup> Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic*, 27. Soon to visit France and its leading politicians, Alexander ignored the letter.

with or authorization by the general.<sup>39</sup> As more producers realized that Boulanger was as much a market as a man, entire industries sprang up to supply the demands of the masses. Nowhere was this combination of the political and the commercial more evident than in urban centers like Paris. Boulanger literally became a brand as his name appeared on pipes, eyeglasses, soaps and numerous other products.<sup>40</sup> One advertisement for a child's toy figure announced that it hops "with energy... a popular emblem of a France respected and the Republic saved."<sup>41</sup> Sets of playing cards naturally honored Boulanger as the king of hearts.<sup>42</sup> One variety of liqueur prided itself on containing no German ingredients, in keeping with the general's staunch nationalist pride.<sup>43</sup> This commercial fascination with all things Boulanger remained a novelty after his death, as evidenced by an upscale Parisian antique shop that, fifty years after the fact, displayed the glass from which he had drunk on the fateful day of the Gare de Lyon protest.<sup>44</sup> While this retail fetishism remained largely confined to urban vicinities, some knick-knacks penetrated rural areas.<sup>45</sup> One Marseillais newspaper reported in early 1887 that the German police in Metz had confiscated Boulangist pipes made in Marseilles<sup>46</sup>; such trinkets were traversing the latitude of France even before institutionalized propaganda distribution had begun. The nascent world of

---

<sup>39</sup> Donald English, *Political Uses of Photography in the Third French Republic, 1871-1914* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 115-116. Charles Chincholle, journalist and friend of the general, would later identify the actual author and printer of the work, confirming that it was indeed an independent commercial endeavor. See Charles Chincholle, *Le Général Boulanger* (Paris: Albert Savine, 1889), 19-20.

<sup>40</sup> Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic*, 28.

<sup>41</sup> D. W. Brogan, *France Under the Republic: The Development of Modern France* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 191.

<sup>42</sup> Jean Garrigues, *Le Général Boulanger* (Paris: Olivier Orban, 1991), 94.

<sup>43</sup> In principle, Boulanger's revanchist attitude towards Germany was a chief element of his appeal. In practice, his political organization had no qualms in secretly recruiting the service of German printers to pump Boulangist propaganda into France. See Bertrand Tillier, *La RépubliCature: la caricature politique en France, 1870-1914* (Paris: CNRS, 1997), 49. This was known and mocked even during the time; see the satirical anti-Boulangist song which pilloried the general's costly commerce with Germany, « Les Portraits du Général » in Maurice Millot, *La Comédie boulangiste: chansons & satires* (Paris: J.-B. Ferreyrol, 1891), 189-190. Socialists likewise derided the connection; see Robert Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity: Socialism, Nationalism, and National Socialism during the French Fin de Siècle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 138.

<sup>44</sup> Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic*, 28, note #9.

<sup>45</sup> Burns, *Rural Society*, 64.

<sup>46</sup> *Petit Marseillais*, March 11, 1887, quoted in Néré, *Le Boulangisme*, 43. For an image of a pipe designed with the head of Boulanger, see p. 46.

mass consumption had, at least for the time being, found its market in the incipient culture of mass politics.

### *Posters, Photography and Beyond*

During election periods, urban enthusiasm intensified into energetic campaigns for and against Boulanger that engulfed cities in a deluge of political propaganda. Nowhere was this hyperactive electoral culture more pervasive than in Paris during the election of 1889. Political appeals took cues from product advertisements in a fury of billposting, pamphleteering, and popular activity.<sup>47</sup> *Le Gaulois* described the walls of Paris as “covered with an average of forty layers of posters,” appealing to every segment of society.<sup>48</sup> The pictorial cover of a Parisian journal depicted statues of the Place de la Concorde covered in rivaling Boulanger and Jacques posters, as if to point out that public monuments were no longer distinguishable from billboards in this no-holds-barred electoral contest.<sup>49</sup> *Le Figaro* ironically lauded as “l’homme du jour” not Jacques or Boulanger, but the “billposter” who required only a few days to transform the drab capital into “a dazzling Alhambra.”<sup>50</sup> Where there was no room left for partisans to post, they painted, as evidenced by the “Jacques” daubed on the lion statue on the terrace of the Orangerie. When there was no space left at all, young men recruited by Dillon marched through the streets, distributing pamphlets and singing Boulangist songs.<sup>51</sup> *L’Intransigeant* contributed to this

---

<sup>47</sup> *Le Temps*, Jan. 11, 1889. The journalist considered this campaign as the first contest in Paris in which electoral posters bore more than just the candidate’s name and political designation, opting instead to supplement them with succinct (and simplistic) catchphrases.

<sup>48</sup> « Sur les murs de Paris, recouverts d’une moyenne de quarante épaisseurs d’affiches, s’étalent des appels à tous les groupes de corps social ! », Arthur Meyer, « Aux Braves Gens », *Le Gaulois*, Jan. 27, 1889.

<sup>49</sup> « L’Election du 27 janvier », *L’Illustration*, Jan. 26, 1889; Feb. 2, 1889. These representations are reprinted in James Lehning, *To Be a Citizen*, 172, 178.

<sup>50</sup> « Huit jours lui ont suffi pour faire de Paris, de la ville grise et bleue, un éblouissant Alhambra. », Le Colleur d’Affiches », *Le Figaro*, Jan. 26, 1889.

<sup>51</sup> Garrigues, *Le Général Boulanger*, 221-222.

propaganda saturation in offering its readers the “free bonus” of a portrait of the general.<sup>52</sup> The autumn elections of 1889 were no less restless; one journalist noted that the massive production of political posters had depleted all the colored paper in Paris.<sup>53</sup>

Like the barrage of Boulanger products, this explosion of electoral posters and placards can be contextualized within developing cultures of mass consumption and publicity. Although the evolution of the commercial advertising industry can be traced through laws and regulations beginning in the 1840s, the liberalizing press law of 1881 stands as the landmark legislation that ushered in a golden age of press, printing and billposting activity in France. The law greatly simplified the bureaucratic requirements needed for commercial billposting, but more significantly opened this burgeoning industry to the political possibilities of publicity.<sup>54</sup> Even before the law, an 1880 merger of three billposting agencies created a centralized enterprise that possessed a complete census of all the electors of Paris and other principal cities, thus hinting at the potential for targeted political campaigning.<sup>55</sup> During the January election in 1889, Boulangists put up a million and a half posters in the seventh arrondissement alone, much to the glee of printing businesses for whom politics now translated directly into profits.<sup>56</sup> Boulanger’s urban campaigns further synthesized the resulting innovations in mobile advertising. Sandwichmen, carriages, omnibuses, and other automobiles served as versatile politicking tools in an increasingly industrialized society.<sup>57</sup> The exploitation of this new politico-commercial

---

<sup>52</sup> « Tous nos lecteurs (abonnés et acheteurs en numéro) du département de la Seine – Paris et banlieue – recevront AVEC LE PRÉSENT NUMÉRO, à titre de prime gratuite, un magnifique portrait du Général Boulanger. Nous prions nos acheteurs au numéro de réclamer cette prime à leurs marchands. », *L’Intransigeant*, Jan. 27, 1889. For analogous pairings of Boulangist press and photographs in other communes, see Burns, *Rural Society*, note #41, 194.

<sup>53</sup> « Il n’y a plus à Paris de papier de couleur : les affiches antérieures ont tout consommé. », Charles Chincholle, « La Journée Electorale », *Le Figaro*, Sept. 23, 1889. White paper was reserved exclusively for administrative decrees.

<sup>54</sup> H. Hazel Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 143, 155.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-147.

<sup>56</sup> Brogan, *France Under the Republic*, 206.

<sup>57</sup> Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity*, 156.

confluence often blurred the lines between the two. For some entrepreneurs, Boulanger became more a marker of publicity than political grievance; the marketers of the notoriously trendy Géraudel Cough Drops, for instance, recognized and exploited the intrinsic promotional potential of his likeness and persona.<sup>58</sup> Whereas previous regimes had prohibited political posters and regulated commercial advertising more stringently,<sup>59</sup> the Third Republic's liberalization of press and publicity facilitated this novel mélange of mass consumption and mass politics.

Boulanger's use of the burgeoning technology of photography constituted another decisively modern aspect of his propaganda campaign. Although Louis-Napoleon had previously made use of photography with propagandistic intention while in power, technical advances now enabled an oppositional candidate such as Boulanger to explore its possibilities without the advantage of state control.<sup>60</sup> The rapid spread of photographic portraits of the general began with his nomination as minister of war, continued through his plebiscitary campaign in 1888, and persisted after his flight to Brussels. The insatiable public demand for them was observable from the very beginning; *Le Matin* estimated that two-thirds of the sales of the aforementioned anonymous biography derived from the single cover photograph of the general.<sup>61</sup> The iconic *Portrait du Général Boulanger*, shot in 1888 by the famous photographer Eugène Pirou (before his more notorious pioneering of the pornographic film some years later), typified the solemnly heroic image of Boulanger in full military regalia. Serni's *La tunique du Général Boulanger*, which depicted the bloodied uniform in which Boulanger had been wounded

---

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-158. The first phase of the Second Empire in the 1850s was characterized by political repression and strict laws of surveillance and oversight over potentially subversive advertising appeals. The Empire's "liberal" period in the 1860s incorporated a new leniency towards commercial billposting in the interest of free enterprise, but continued to heavily persecute the press. In the same vein, during the crisis of May 16, 1877, the monarchist president MacMahon systematically suppressed republican propaganda.

<sup>60</sup> English, *Political Uses of Photography*, 81.

<sup>61</sup> Tillier, *La RépubliCature*, 48-49.

as a young soldier in 1859, illustrated the evocative power of this new medium that achieved startling emotional effect without tangibly representing the general himself.

The Boulangist apparatus recognized that the propagandistic power of photography had become all the more crucial once Boulanger was no longer physically present in France. Indeed, following his self-imposed exile, devotees increased the distribution of photographs to sustain his visibility and facilitate his martyrization.<sup>62</sup> Upon his arrival in Brussels, the general entered into contact with the former Communard and innovative photographer Émile Aubry.<sup>63</sup> His most explicit use of photography to shape his political image, however, took the form of an extensive “photographic interview” printed by *Le Figaro* in November 1889 after the disappointing autumn elections. Twenty-four handpicked photographs of Boulanger in a posh London salon, interwoven among the text of the interview, drew attention away from his composed reassurances of his movement’s continued political relevance. If the general’s words were less attractive than his image, it was the photographs that truly sought to impress readers. Boulanger was depicted in numerous poses, sitting and standing, gesturing passionately and reflecting calmly, reading and writing, fulfilling the role of the confident leader and the erudite political theorist, all within the confines of a three-page spread.<sup>64</sup> Aware of the novelty of this engagement and the public ridicule it could inspire, the general confidently welcomed its publicity value: “...it pleases me to collaborate on a truly original idea and to facilitate the progress of journalism. In spite of the abuse [from rival newspapers]... the press has served me well and I can refuse it nothing.”<sup>65</sup> Behind this poised display of Boulanger’s thick skin lay a buried admission that his successful self-promotion emanated from such use of photography.

---

<sup>62</sup> English, *Political Uses of Photography*, 112.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>64</sup> « Entrevue Photographique », *Le Figaro: supplément littéraire*, Nov. 23, 1889.

<sup>65</sup> « ...il ne me déplait pas de collaborer à une idée vraiment originale et de faciliter un des progrès du journalisme. Malgré ses injures... la presse m’a assez servi pour que je n’aie rien à lui refuser. », *Ibid.*

As predicted by the general, the political subtext of this spectacle was quite evident at the time and aroused much criticism. One satirist illustrated his own series of images that depict the general engaging in physical feats that quickly degenerate from the spectacular to the pathetic. He lifts weights, swings on the trapeze and plays the bass drum, eventually undressing to show the feeble corporeal reality of a man easily misrepresented by the manipulative potential of photography.<sup>66</sup> After Boulanger's suicide, *Le Grelot*, whose satire was matched in its heavy-handedness perhaps only by its morbidity, depicted the general with a gun to his head, pausing only for his photographer to set up the camera.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the use of photography, Boulangism displayed a modern awareness of the need for nationally standardized propaganda forms. Even though many different photographs of Boulanger proliferated (some depicted him as a vivacious soldier, others as a venerable retired general or a well-dressed bourgeois), they were all distributed on a large scale and in uniformized format during his plebiscitary campaigns.<sup>68</sup> Even if electoral appeals varied according to location and demographics, official Boulangist propaganda aspired above all to create a national identity around the general that could challenge the legitimacy of the government in Paris. To this end, propaganda co-opted and institutionalized mediums that had previously been reserved exclusively to the administrative sphere of the regime. Boulanger regularly employed his signature in written materials in a fashion similar to the president of the Republic. In November 1888, the police seized a small card, the dimensions of which corresponded to contemporary identity documents, which portrayed the current Prime Minister Floquet; in daylight, however, Boulanger's outline appeared on the opposite side, effectively

---

<sup>66</sup> Charles Gilbert-Martin, « Ne bougeons plus! », *Le Don Quichotte*, Nov. 30, 1889.

<sup>67</sup> Pépin, « La dernière pose », *Le Grelot*, Oct. 11, 1891.

<sup>68</sup> Nicolas Mariot, « 'Propagande par la vue': Souveraineté régaliennne et gestion du nombre dans les voyages en province de Carnot (1888-1894) », *Genèses* 20 (1995): 34.

taking the place of the republican politician.<sup>69</sup> Even Boulangist currency was fashioned by partisans and agents of the general's political organization. *Le Gaulois* noted that metal coins featuring Boulanger's face were being sold in the streets during the protest at the Gare de Lyon in July 1887.<sup>70</sup> Although these imitated money rather than replacing it, in some areas shopkeepers accepted "Boulangist" coins as valid tender. In a particularly telling maneuver to inculcate Boulangist fervor in the long run, agents distributed free biographies of the general in primary schools in every commune of France.<sup>71</sup> The totality of Boulangist propaganda seeped into mundane life in the hopes of creating a national identity that displaced the government from its established realms of authority and undercut its legitimacy.

### *The Cult of Boulanger?*

The wide variety of Boulangist propaganda certainly sustained and augmented an equally substantial number of popular mythologies concerning the general. During Boulanger's plebiscites in 1888, the socialist Jules Joffrin untangled the plethora of farfetched legends that had attached to him:

"To the maritime population, they say that Boulanger, before being a general, was a sailor who fished at Newfoundland; to others, they say that he was a natural son of Napoleon III; still to others, they describe him as the grandson of Napoleon I, and this is how it happened: an aged miner named Boulanger was part of the Grande Armée [of Napoleon I], and obtained a high rank and became a close friend of the Emperor. Having had a child with a Russian princess, the Emperor asked Boulanger to recognize it and give it his name. It was this Boulanger, in reality the child of Napoleon, who was the father of our brave general... Better yet, they distribute almanacs foretelling, according to the signs of the Zodiac, that Boulanger will vanquish the Germans on May 7, 1890 and that he will be proclaimed president of the Republic in 1891."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> « ...ce sont des pièces de métal, imitant l'argent, frappées à l'effigie du général Boulanger... », Edmond Le Roy, « Départ du Général Boulanger », *Le Gaulois*, July 9, 1887.

<sup>71</sup> Tillier, *La RépubliCature*, 48. See also Haute Cour de Justice, *Affaire Boulanger, Dillon, Rochefort, procédure – déposition des témoins* (Paris: P. Mouillot, 1889), 120.

<sup>72</sup> « ...à la population maritime, on dit que M. Boulanger avant d'être général, a été marin, et qu'il est allé faire la pêche à Terre-Neuve; aux autres, on dit que c'est un fils naturel de Napoléon III; à d'autres encore, on raconte qu'il est le petit-fils de Napoléon 1er, et voici comment: un ancien mineur nommé Boulanger aurait fait partie de la Grande Armée, il y aurait acquis un grade supérieur et serait devenu l'ami intime de l'Empereur. Celui-ci, ayant eu un enfant d'une princesse russe, il aurait prié l'officier Boulanger de le reconnaître et de lui donner son nom. C'est

This collection of folk myths demonstrates the pure adaptability of Boulanger's appeal. In tapping into such diverse sentiments as coastal working-class solidarity, Bonapartism, nationalism and revanchism, Boulanger was represented as all things to all men.<sup>73</sup> In the same vein, the royalist Cornély lamented the creation of an "absurd legend" of revanchism that "silly public opinion" cultivated around the general.<sup>74</sup> For the fervently Catholic *La Croix*, it was necessary to anathematize the growing "religion of Boulangism" that thrived on propaganda.<sup>75</sup> The sociologist Gustave Le Bon observed how every village inn possessed its own image of Boulanger, who succeeded in activating "the religious instincts of the masses" which attributed to him "the ability to remedy all injustice" and "right all wrongs."<sup>76</sup> The socialist Fournière likewise linked the durability of the Boulangist legend, what the republican police administrator Louis Lépine called a "popularity of bad taste,"<sup>77</sup> to the proliferation of "naïve posters, primitive images, vacuous songs, mystical adulations, and stupefying gossip."<sup>78</sup> In the eyes of contemporary observers, Boulangist mythology derived its potency from the variegated appeal of Boulangist propaganda.

Supporters of the general, naturally having a stake in the continued allure of his image, preferred to attribute his reputation to personal charisma and patriotic devotion, but even they

---

ce boulangier, en réalité le fils de Napoléon 1<sup>er</sup>, qui aurait été le père de notre brave général... Il y a mieux encore : on distribue des almanachs prédisant, d'après les signes du Zodiaque, que Boulanger sera vainqueur des Allemands le 7 mai 1890 et qu'il sera proclamé président de la République en 1891. », *Le Progrès de Lyon*, April 14, 1888, quoted in Néré, *Le Boulangisme*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> For a list of some Boulangist literature published in Paris that mythologized the life of Boulanger, see Hutton, "Popular Boulangism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976): 104, note #15.

<sup>74</sup> « ...l'opinion publique, très bête, fera de lui une victime de M. de Bismarck. C'est qu'autour de lui une légende absurde se créera, c'est qu'il personnifiera les idées de revanche... », J. Cornély, « Trop Tard ! », *Le Matin*, Jan. 24, 1887.

<sup>75</sup> *La Croix*, August 2, 1887.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Michel Winock, "Socialism and Boulangism, 1887-89," in *The Development of the Radical Right in France*, ed. Edward J. Arnold (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>77</sup> « ...cette popularité de mauvais aloi. », Louis Lépine, *Mes souvenirs* (Paris: Payot, 1929), 68.

<sup>78</sup> « ...placards naïfs, d'images primitives, de chansons niaisées, d'adulations mystiques, de racontars stupéfiants... », Eugène Fournière, « Physiologie du boulangisme », *La Revue socialiste* 41 (May 1888): 510.

were hard-pressed to deny the marked advantages of extensive propaganda. While acknowledging that popularity is “often a folly,” the Bonapartist and Boulangist Jules Delafosse insisted that “it cannot be forced” and that “propaganda develops it but is powerless to create it.”<sup>79</sup> The royalist Arthur Meyer agreed that Thiébaud’s local agitation in favor of the general “did not create the current” but rather “revealed it.”<sup>80</sup> Both rationales, although unwilling to wholly credit Boulanger’s success to the effects of propaganda, display an awareness of its mobilizing potential and a fairly explicit endorsement of such techniques on a national scale. Some journalists pointed out the historical continuities between Boulangist kitsch and that of past politicians like Gambetta and Thiers, whose likenesses had appeared on pipes and bottles.<sup>81</sup> Predictably, Boulangist propaganda had its precursors, but it broke new ground in both its unmatched magnitude and the privileged importance ascribed to it. This was clearer to no one than the general himself, who tended to attribute his electoral failures to a lack of propaganda, rather than social and political trends, in the regions in question.<sup>82</sup> Through the Boulangist experience, both its proponents and opponents recognized the power of such propaganda campaigns in the electoral arena of mass politics.

The unprecedented magnitude of the Boulangist propaganda and mythology that circulated in France, combined with the tendency of historians to seek retrodictive explanations for the development of totalitarian politics in twentieth-century Europe, has led to the claim that a veritable “cult of personality” developed around the figure of Boulanger.<sup>83</sup> This assertion, like

---

<sup>79</sup> Jules Delafosse, *A travers la politique* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1889), 138.

<sup>80</sup> Meyer, *Ce que mes yeux ont vu*, 69.

<sup>81</sup> *La Lanterne d’arlequin*, quoted in Néré, *Le Boulangisme*, 41-42. The prominent socialist Paul Lafargue also compared Boulanger’s popularity to that of Gambetta in *Le Socialiste*, July 23, 1887.

<sup>82</sup> Georges E. Boulanger, *Mémoires du général Boulanger* (Paris: G. Edinger, 1890), 159-160. He demonstrated a patent awareness of the value of propaganda in the international sphere as well; consider his request to several prominent Russians to launch a campaign of opinion on his behalf in the Russian press, in Andreas Dorpalen, “Tsar Alexander III and the Boulanger Crisis in France,” *The Journal of Modern History* 23, 2 (June 1951): 132.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, Stephen J. Lee, *Aspects of European History, 1789-1980* (London: Routledge, 2003), 129, and David Welch, *Modern European History, 1871-2000: A Documentary Reader* (London: Routledge, 1999), 13.

any that bases itself on anachronism, demands qualification. Boulangism, although predating the creation of modern cults of personality, did indeed draw much of its mystique from its formation of an all-encompassing, idealized image of a faultless leader. Nevertheless, Boulanger was an oppositional figure imbued with revolutionary connotation, in many ways an “outsider” politician; he lacked access to the official instruments of government through which to propagate a homogenous, state-sponsored image. Indeed, although the regime did resort to extralegal censorship and confiscation in combating the torrent of Boulangist propaganda (although with little success given the degree of saturation),<sup>84</sup> the liberal libel laws of the era ensured that no reputation would remain undefiled and certainly precluded any germination of the *Führerprinzip*. As mentioned above, one must remember that some part of the propagandistic explosion surrounding Boulanger developed outside of his control, spurred onwards independently by opportunistic manufacturers of all kinds of products. Surely, the extensive Boulangist use of propaganda in a myriad of forms, written as well as illustrated, physical as well as photographic, hinted at the dangerous potentialities of mass media control; yet, these were necessary rather than sufficient conditions for personality cults to develop. Boulangist innovation in the realm of propaganda thus appears less as a harbinger of such cults and more as a demonstration of the means by which advances in communicative media and mass distribution led to an increasing politicization of civil society.

Disregarding any scholarly quarrels over the proper way to define it, the cultish obsession with Boulanger’s persona was very much perceived in its own time with reference to the historical experience of Bonapartism. The general’s rising influence, culminating in his plebiscitary campaigns, raised the specter of the Second Empire that had been consolidated in

---

<sup>84</sup> Tillier, *La RépubliCature*, 49. See also instances in Robert Justin Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1989), 239-247.

similar fashion by Louis-Napoleon in 1851; for many contemporary observers, Boulangism was in essence the same Caesarism, simply revived Bonapartism with a new face. Boulanger's communication with the exiled Napoleonic pretender, as well as his support from the imperialist Thiébaud, certainly raised suspicions at the time. In 1887, Ferry articulated his disgust with "this legend that hatches spontaneously and spreads suddenly, this sudden infatuation, this need to create an idol" that seemed to constitute an "old national disease which has twice in one century delivered this country to dictatorship."<sup>85</sup> Arthur Meyer dubbed Boulangism as "Bonapartism that failed."<sup>86</sup> Even Friedrich Engels, apparently overlooking the working-class support for Boulanger in Paris, dismissed his victory in January 1889 as "nothing but the expected stirrings of that tendency to Bonapartism which is inherent in every Parisian."<sup>87</sup> By falling back on the historically available explanation of some vague, monolithic French affinity for a Caesarian savior, political observers blinded themselves to the real innovations of Boulangism, which was inundating the country with massive amounts of malleable propaganda while fostering local initiatives for political organization.

As Boulangism ran out of steam after the height of its triumph in Paris, the inclination to simplify it into a trite reenactment of Bonapartism seemed to overlook the novelty of the movement. Some observers began instead to grasp the significance of its new invigoration of electoral propaganda. After the first round of the autumn elections of 1889, *Le Matin* reflected on the changes that the movement had inaugurated since the campaign frenzy in Paris at the start of the year. It asserted that "Boulangism made a revolution in political advertising" in January, when "it began to successfully apply to its candidacy the practice of publicity and posters

---

<sup>85</sup> « ...cette légende qui éclôt spontanément et se propage tout à coup...ce besoin de créer une idole...un retour...de la vieille maladie nationale, qui a livré, deux fois en cent ans, ce pays à la dictature. », « Conférence au Cercle ouvrier républicain de Saint-Dié, du 2 octobre 1887, » *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry*, 95.

<sup>86</sup> Meyer, *Ce que mes yeux ont vu*, 97.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Michel Winock, "Socialism and Boulangism, 1887-89," 5.

commonly used up to that point by certain manufacturers...” The journal recognized that Boulanger obtained many votes through this intensive approach.<sup>88</sup> What Floquet had called the “Americanization” of the Boulangist campaign<sup>89</sup> was bemoaned by the historian Gabriel Monod as a degradation of politics into “a commercial enterprise, an enterprise of puffs and quackery.”<sup>90</sup> One Opportunist journal sought initially to disparage this new technique of political propaganda, implicitly associated with the United States, by publishing stories of how American electoral campaigns used party coffers to buy votes.<sup>91</sup> In 1890, the Boulangist Mermeix would attribute the transformation of politicking to Dillon, who “changed politics by introducing new practices...of advertising and yankee soliciting hitherto unknown in France.”<sup>92</sup> Even the high court that prosecuted Boulanger for treason after his flight from France condemned his massive distribution of political kitsch as “a keen commercial enterprise.”<sup>93</sup> After a Boulangist coup failed to materialize in January, commentators began to look beyond the movement’s Caesarian face to evaluate its novel electoral machinery and apply its techniques for the benefit of their campaigns.

### *Changing the Rules of the Game*

---

<sup>88</sup> « Le boulangisme a fait une révolution dans la publicité politique. Le 27 janvier dernier, il avait commencé à appliquer au succès de sa candidature les procédés de réclame et d’affichage usités jusque-là par certains industriels... », « La Journée Electorale », *Le Matin*, Sept. 23, 1889.

<sup>89</sup> Meyer, *Ce que mes yeux ont vu*, 71.

<sup>90</sup> Gabriel Monod, “Contemporary Life and Thought in France,” *Contemporary Review* 52 (June 1888): 910, quoted in Seager, *The Boulanger Affair*, 186.

<sup>91</sup> *La République française*, Feb. 11, 1889. Boulangists attempting to invalidate such “yankee” calumnies would occasionally compare Boulanger to the well-respected George Washington, although astute opponents countered that the American republican did not want power and had to be convinced to run for the presidency against his own wishes, as in Emile Thirion, *La Politique au village*, 335.

<sup>92</sup> « Il a...changé la politique en y introduisant des procédés nouveaux...de publicité et de puffisme yankee inconnus jusqu’ici chez nous. », Mermeix, « Couloisses du Boulangisme », *Le Figaro*, Oct. 22, 1890.

<sup>93</sup> « entreprise commerciale d’enthousiasme », Haute Cour de Justice, *Le Procès du général Boulanger, Rochefort-Dillon devant la Haute Cour de Justice : compte rendu, jugement, condamnation* (Paris: Librairie Française, 1889), 122.

Armed with propaganda and an aggressive willingness to cultivate local support throughout the country, Boulangism forced republican incumbents to follow its lead and adopt similar tactics in the electoral battlefield of mass politics.<sup>94</sup> In response to the populist, anti-regime sentiments cultivated by Boulangist propaganda and the increasingly popular national image accruing to the figure of Boulanger, republicans were motivated to engage in their own image creation. For example, one republican candidate fought back against the powerful Boulangist propaganda network by personally visiting every canton in his region.<sup>95</sup> In Paris, Boulangists created a hierarchy of committees in each arrondissement with subcommittees in each neighborhood, compelling republicans to follow suit with the formation of anti-Boulangist committees along similar organizational lines.<sup>96</sup> Even the explosion of republican propaganda advertising the Exposition Universelle of 1889 can be understood as a political response to the national saturation of Boulangist propaganda. It took many similar forms, such as popular brochures, almanacs, *images d'Épinal* and miniature posters.<sup>97</sup>

Perhaps the most revealing tactical reorientation on the part of the regime was its recasting of the public role of the president. Sadi Carnot, assuming office at the end of 1887 when Boulanger's challenge was maturing into a serious threat, was determined to shift the presidency from a purely operative institution in the upper echelons of the administration to a public representation of state grandeur. Prompted by the success with which Boulanger had personalized himself to the electorate through appearances in person and in propaganda, Carnot realized the urgent need to engage in this "combat of representation" for the hearts and minds of

---

<sup>94</sup> Many local political struggles between Boulangists and sitting politicians are described in chapter 4, "The Rural Legacy," of Burns, *Rural Society*.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

<sup>96</sup> Hutton, "Popular Boulangism," 93.

<sup>97</sup> Angenot, *Le Centenaire*, 42. This propaganda effort was also closely linked with the rising culture of mass consumption; the best-selling trinkets at the exposition were miniature models of the Eiffel Tower fashioned by Parisian artisans. See Debora L. Silverman, "The 1889 Exhibition: The Crisis of Bourgeois Individualism," *Oppositions* 8 (Spring 1977): 90, note #28.

voters in the provinces.<sup>98</sup> Shortly after Carnot's executive ascension, *Le Figaro* reported his plans for a "tour of France" that would constitute a "veritable ceremonial." The paper noted that the previous president, Jules Grévy, had never attempted any trip of the sort.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, in visiting 73 towns during his tenure, Carnot both established the presidential precedent of the provincial tour and set a record number of voyages unsurpassed by any other president before the First World War.<sup>100</sup> His first trips were always presented by contemporaries in opposition to those of Boulanger.<sup>101</sup> In prompting a conscious redefinition of the role and visibility of the president, Boulangism had demonstrated the potent power of its populist and nationalist appeal when coupled with modern mass political propaganda.

These official visits to the provinces sought to define an appropriate national identity against Boulangist appeals, establish the limits of political authority and confer legitimacy upon the Republic. Official and Boulangist events of this sort utilized some similar techniques. Both Carnot and Boulanger understood the capacity of spectacle to mobilize the masses and foster legitimacy. Their visits were loud and exciting affairs, organized with local resources while promoting the impression of a robust national identity. Foreshadowing the themes of technological modernity that permeated the Exposition Universelle, presidential visits exalted the marvel of electricity; pyrotechnics, fireworks, and other awe-inspiring manifestations of luminosity linked scientific progress to the grandeur of the Republic. This "propaganda by sight," as one scholar called it, supplemented more tangible forms, including portraits of Carnot and miniature flags distributed to children.<sup>102</sup> As these events become more and more

---

<sup>98</sup> Mariot, « 'Propagande par la vue' », 26-27.

<sup>99</sup> « A Travers Paris », *Le Figaro*, Jan. 1, 1888.

<sup>100</sup> Rosemonde Sanson, "La République en représentation: À propos des voyages en province des présidents de la Troisième République (1879-1914)," in *La France démocratique (combats, mentalités, symboles): mélanges offerts à Maurice Agulhon*, ed. Christophe Charle et al. (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), 372.

<sup>101</sup> Mariot, « 'Propagande par la vue' », 31.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 35.

industrialized, they transformed into veritable holidays for local populations; entire villages would be cleaned and decorated in preparation, private enterprises were recruited to produce republican propaganda, and workers often received a paid day off.<sup>103</sup> In reaction to the Boulangist approach to mass politics, these festivals attempted to refashion the relationship between the distant government and the provinces, enabling the political to subsume the quotidian and converting the local into a stage for the national.

Yet, although official and Boulangist events aspired to the same objective of cultivating national unity and electoral favor, their underlying approaches could be quite disparate. The provincial tours of past rulers such as Louis-Philippe and Louis-Napoleon had expressed the inherent connection between regime and monarch or emperor; the Republic, however, was “impersonal” in principle and rejected the personification of power in one man.<sup>104</sup> Whereas this clearly did not pose a problem for Boulanger’s image, Carnot had to tread a careful line in exalting the Republic but not the president tasked to vicariously glorify it. In fact, the republican fear of a powerful executive had made Carnot’s own ascension to the presidency possible, at the expense of the political veteran Jules Ferry.<sup>105</sup> This obliged the use of impersonal republican symbology during provincial trips, such as Marianne, the Marseillaise and the tricolor.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, in order to compete with the personalized nature of Boulangist kitsch, republican propaganda did take on similar forms. Portraits of Carnot were largely diffused to increase the regional visibility of the president as an avatar of the Republic. In one city, for instance, Carnot

---

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>104</sup> Sanson, « La République en représentation », 371-372.

<sup>105</sup> Maurice Agulhon, *Coup d'état et République* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1997), 64-65. He notes the unwritten rule that barred “grands hommes” from the presidency during the Third Republic, citing the defeats of Ferry in 1887, Georges Clemenceau in 1920 and perhaps even Aristide Briand in 1931. He also mentions the successful campaigns against politicians suspected of harboring a desire for excessive power, such as Casimir-Perier in 1894 and Alexandre Millerand in 1924.

<sup>106</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 272-273.

visited a factory where a unique ornamental feather bearing his likeness, a “plume Carnot,” was manufactured.<sup>107</sup> Evidently, Boulanger was not the only political figure who could be marketed as both a man and a commodity. Portraits of Carnot sometimes made their way into municipal buildings, prompting debates among town councilors over the principle of republican impersonality.<sup>108</sup> Spurred by the aggressive promotion of Boulangist imagery, the administration discovered the electoral necessity of establishing a personalized, politicized and propagandized link between citizen and government, even if some aspects conflicted with republican ideology.

Boulangism, in its curious capacity as an aggregation of entirely disparate political outlooks and tactics, thus effectively provided a template for the modern, electorally-engaged mass movement. The mobilizing impulse for Boulanger’s plebiscitary campaigns, initially provided by the forward-thinking imperialist Thiébaud and the entrepreneur Dillon, updated Bonapartist activism into an immense propaganda endeavor that organized locally and aspired nationally. As propaganda and electoral appeals flooded France, they assumed both traditional and innovative shapes in the mediums of press and photography, posters and products.

Boulangism adroitly adapted to the new worlds of mass politics and mass consumerism developing within the Third Republic in the twentieth-century while also, in many ways, being born out of them. The Boulangist experience redefined the way in which electoral democracy was practiced by the politicians and perceived by the people.

---

<sup>107</sup> Mariot, « ‘Propagande par la vue’ », 35.

<sup>108</sup> Tillier, *La RépubliCature*, 50-51.

## **Chapter 2 – The Rhetoric of Revolution**

Although Boulangism revolutionized the material reality of electoral politics and foreshadowed the growth of the mass political parties of the twentieth century, rhetoric during the episode was preoccupied with a more recognizable sort of revolution, familiar to every Frenchmen who cared to read a history of the tumultuous nineteenth century. Most of the players in the Boulangist saga, living through the fall of the Second Empire and the Commune revolt, had witnessed the latest iteration of the apparently eternal cycle of revolution that distinguished French political life. This conception of rapid and successive upheavals, justified through history, immortalized through heroes and legends, mythologized through bloodshed, carried various meanings along the diverse political spectrum. While it went by many different names—revolution, reaction, coup d'état—it was for everybody the primary fixture of historical

memory, as much an emblem of hope as a specter of fear, that permeated the rhetoric and indeed the conscience of French politics.

Revolutionary rhetoric during the early Third Republic proliferated to an even greater degree than under previous regimes on account of the liberal press and libel laws enacted in 1881, which enabled political opinion to flourish with minimal fear of censorship.<sup>109</sup> As such, dissent and even revolutionary invocation against the government came to be explicitly manifested in writing and speech, shifting the historically stigmatized space for discussion of political change from the hushed tones of subversive secrecy to the front pages of major press outlets. However, as can be observed from a cursory glance at any newspaper during the Boulangist episode, the liberalization of the press did not in itself beget a redefinition of discursive convention or a reorientation from revolution to republican participation. On the contrary, legalizing the unfettered airing of political opinion ironically facilitated the proliferation of anti-government rhetoric on an unprecedented scale.

An analysis of the press can thus gauge the essential rhetorical conflict of the Boulangist experience, the continued relevance of the revolutionary tradition in French political life, and trace the changes in its understanding as the affair progressed. Appeals to history and national memory feature prominently in the polemics and orations of political actors, and French rhetoric during this time was no exception; rich in historical reference and laden with symbology, the simple mention of a date, name, or place could instantly conjure up singular images in the French imagination. While supporters of Boulanger's revolutionary challenge hailed from disparate locations on the political spectrum and as such appealed to different episodes and interpretations of history, their rhetoric shared an endorsement of a vibrant and wholly intact revolutionary

---

<sup>109</sup> For more information on the landmark legislation and its transformation of press culture, see chapter 3, « L'Apogée de la presse française (1880-1914), » in Bellanger, et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française – tome III*.

tradition that was to be resumed and preserved through Boulangism. They pointed to the continuity of revolutions that had defined the history of the last century. Anti-Boulangist rhetoric repudiated this appeal with a cynical eye towards political upheaval, alleging that revolutions in history could lead to dangerous radicalization, instability, war, and the abridgement of political liberties. Anti-Boulangists instead advocated electoral representation and participation in the democratic institutions of the Third Republic as the proper channel for addressing political grievances. The rise of Boulangism up to its zenith in Paris at the beginning of 1889 was characterized by the opposition between these two positions. After the Parisian triumph, during which an actual revolution was expected but conspicuously absent, the oppositional rhetoric against the Republic began to move away from its previous fixation on preserving the integrity of the revolutionary tradition and adjust to the necessity of cultivating electoral support to achieve parliamentary participation.

The contested status of the revolutionary tradition was the source of much debate between defenders of the Republic and its rivals before Boulanger rose to prominence. The Opportunists endeavored above all to maintain a secure, parliamentary, democratic system of governance, the achievement of which necessitated the termination of revolution. The political institutions of the Republic were intended to hallow the progressive values embodied by the French Revolution while simultaneously rendering the insurgent aspects of its legacy obsolete, with the goal of spawning a stable climate for gradual, democratically-achieved improvements in the realm of social and economic reform. Opportunist journals spent much of their time admonishing the revolutionary tendencies of the Republic's antagonizers and making the case for their legal opposition within the system. This is what *Le Temps* did early in 1886, before Boulanger had made his splash on the political scene:

“Is it necessary, to satisfy [their policy demands], to substitute a new regime in place of the one that has functioned for sixteen years? With universal suffrage, with parliamentary government, with a freedom of the press, of speech and of action almost without limits, an excessive freedom... is it so difficult, is it impossible to bring to Parliament a majority of sensible and practical men capable of repairing the mistakes which have been made and inaugurating better times?”<sup>110</sup>

This invitation to republican involvement defined the position of most Opportunists and Radicals: any political upheaval aiming for regime replacement was not only deleterious for the body politic but also superfluous in a liberal democracy which offered legal avenues for policy reform.

Yet, these appeals to accept the Republic met with little success among its many enemies, whose abhorrence for the regime can be traced back to its origins. Monarchists, still reeling from their defeat during the Seize Mai crisis, were incensed at the anticlerical policies of the regime.<sup>111</sup> Bonapartists had ruefully watched the evaporation of the Second Empire and believed that France’s return to glory required that it “strangle the slut,” the imperialist term of affection for the Republic. Even after amnesty for the Communards was granted in 1880, inveterate socialists came to distrust the bourgeois government which seemed unconcerned with seriously alleviating the lot of the working class. Government officials were not blind to the reality of the regime’s precarious position amidst the revolutionary dissenters from the left and the right. In 1885, the French diplomat Paul Cambon gloomily declared that “the general impression is that the Republic is at the end of its rope. Next year, we will have revolutionary excesses, then a violent

---

<sup>110</sup> « Est-il indispensable, pour y satisfaire, de substituer un régime nouveau à celui qui fonctionne depuis seize ans ? Avec le suffrage universel, avec le gouvernement parlementaire, avec une liberté de presse, de parole et d’action presque sans limites, une liberté excessive... est-il si difficile, est-il impossible d’amener au Parlement une majorité d’hommes sensés et pratiques, capables de réparer les fautes commises et d’inaugurer des temps meilleurs ? », *Le Temps*, Feb. 27, 1886.

<sup>111</sup> During the constitutional crisis of May 16, 1877, tensions between the royalist president and the republican parliament resulted in an executive dissolution of parliament and new elections, which secured victory for the republicans. Dissolution would never again occur during the Third Republic, although it was an essential component of Boulanger’s platform. For a study of the prewar political conflicts over church and state during the Third Republic, see, for example, John McManners, *Church and State in France, 1870-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

reaction. What will come out of it? Some kind of dictatorship.”<sup>112</sup> While some minorities within oppositional parties did make efforts to become integrated into the parliamentary institution in the 1880s (the abortive attempt to establish a rightist constitutional faction,<sup>113</sup> the debates within socialist blocs in the first half of the decade<sup>114</sup>), only after Boulanger’s victory in Paris and especially following the conclusive defeat of the movement in the elections of autumn 1889 did opponents of the regime begin to seriously reorient their political images, tactics, and rhetoric to compete electorally within the democratic format.

### *Boulanger’s Revolutionary Reception*

Boulanger first aroused a buzz of revolutionary rhetoric during his rapid explosion of popularity as war minister in 1886, epitomized by his éclat at the Longchamps military review on Bastille Day of that year. The image of the hyperpatriotic general on horseback had been quite intimately ingrained into French memory in the past, and it is unsurprising that Bonapartists swiftly grasped the revolutionary potential of this neo-Napoleonic idol. The former journalist and Bonapartist deputy Jules Delafosse felt compelled just four days after the Fête Nationale to herald the general’s burgeoning popular appeal as the people’s way of bestowing upon him a sovereign mandate to engage in a coup d’état. Legal restrictions against such a seizure of power were fruitless, he asserted, as the people had been “edified by an uninterrupted succession of revolutions and coups d’État” over the course of the last century. While he was accurate in his

---

<sup>112</sup> « L’impression générale est que la République est au bout de son rouleau. Nous aurons l’an prochain des excès révolutionnaires, puis une réaction violente. Qu’en sortira-t-il? Une dictature quelconque. », quoted in Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Les Débuts de la IIIe République, 1871-1898* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), 166.

<sup>113</sup> See Jean el Gammal, « Un pré-ralliement : Raoul-Duval et la droite républicaine, 1885-1887, » *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 29, 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1982): 599-621.

<sup>114</sup> Howorth, “The Myth of Blanquism”; Moodie, “The Reorientation of French Socialism”

speculation that the cry of “Vive Boulanger... [is] not yet seditious but smells of sedition,” the form that this sedition would take was unknown. He affirmed that Boulanger possessed the “liberty to choose between Brumaire and Fructidor,” between a renewal of empire and a leftist radicalization of the Republic.<sup>115</sup> In either case, however, revolution was perceived to be imminent. By arguing for the continued relevance of the insurrectionary tradition and rejoicing in the thought of a forthcoming revolution, Delafosse exemplified the discursive model that would characterize the rhetoric of Boulangists of all stripes in the lead-up to the election in Paris.

This rhetorical appeal to the revolutionary tradition would be updated by monarchist Louis Teste at the end of 1886, when he infused it with an explicitly historical character to justify his preferred political upheaval, a royal restoration. On the occasion of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the « Deux-Décembre »<sup>116</sup> and given the phenomenon of Boulanger’s immense popularity, he took the opportunity to offer his readers a history lesson in miniature on the ubiquity of the coup d’état in French political life: “all parties can speak with impartiality about coups d’état, because all have engaged in them.”<sup>117</sup> Monarchists, Bonapartists, and republicans alike had formed administrations on similarly illicit foundations, and in fact every government had been built upon them; as such, Teste could affirm that “coups d’état are henceforth a part of

---

<sup>115</sup> Delafosse, *A travers la politique*, 138-146. On September 4, 1797 (the 18th of Fructidor according to the revolutionary calendar), members of the Directory staged a coup d’état with the support of the military (including Napoleon Bonaparte) that purged moderate and royalist deputies from the recently elected legislature. On November 9, 1799 (the 18<sup>th</sup> of Brumaire), Napoleon engaged in his own coup that overthrew the Directory and established the French Consulate. It consolidated his authority and laid the groundwork for the foundation of the First French Empire in 1804. For more on the coups of Fructidor and Brumaire, see, for example, William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>116</sup> December 2<sup>nd</sup> was a symbolically loaded date in French national memory. On that day in 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte established the First French Empire and became Napoleon I. On the same day in 1851, his nephew Louis-Napoleon initiated a coup that dissolved the legislature, modified the constitution and consolidated his authority. On December 2<sup>nd</sup> of the following year, he established the Second French Empire and was coronated as Napoleon III. For a detailed narrative of Louis-Napoleon’s seizure of power, see David Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime: An Extravaganza* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

<sup>117</sup> « ...tous les parties peuvent parler avec sérénité des coups d’état, parce que tous en on fait...Les coups d’état font désormais partie des moyens politiques pratiques et admis, on pourrait presque dire du droit politique français... la République se trouve-t-elle entourée d’ennemis de plus en plus nombreux qui, tôt ou tard, seront amenés à lui sauter à la gorge...le chemin de la légalité aboutit tout de même au coup d’état. », Louis Teste, « Le Deux-Décembre », *Le Gaulois*, Dec. 3, 1886.

practical and admissible political means, one could almost say of the rights of French politics.” Governments should therefore be judged not on the legality of their origins, but on their virtues. He proceeded to criticize the Third Republic for its lack of said virtues before adding in a menacing tone that it “finds itself surrounded by more and more enemies who, sooner or later, will go for its throat.” In asserting that “the path of legality leads, all the same, to the coup d’état,” he expressed not only his conviction that another revolutionary experience was impending, but also that it had become inscribed as an inevitable historical fact. Although no supporter of Boulanger at this juncture (as the general was very much situated in the Radical camp), Teste’s understanding of political realities compelled him to second Delafosse’s inference that Boulanger could profit from his popularity and respected military position to hypothetically “aspire to a plebiscite” and instigate a new upheaval.

Among opponents of the Republic, support for the revolutionary aura imputed to the general was by no means monolithic, and indeed the rash of anti-Boulangist rhetoric emanating from conservative corners made Delafosse’s enthusiasm the exception rather than the rule. Delafosse was the first to admit that a Boulangist revolution could just as well take a radical or imperial form, but the Radical tendencies of the general frightened most on the right enough to condemn his behavior as dangerously authoritarian. Almost two weeks after his enthusiastic reception during the Fête Nationale, *Le Figaro*, in a front-page piece with the menacing headline “Boulanger, c’est la guerre!” gave a sense of the tense atmosphere: “one can no longer open a newspaper or listen to a conversation without being struck by words of coup d’état, of the 18<sup>th</sup> of Fructidor, of military dictatorship, as on the eve of sudden changes in history.”<sup>118</sup> The paper feared the establishment of a “socialist and military dictatorship” with Boulanger at its head.

---

<sup>118</sup> « ...on ne peut plus ouvrir un journal ni écouter une conversation sans être frappé des mots de coup d’état, de 18 Fructidor, de dictature militaire, comme à la veille des brusques changements de l’histoire. », Ph. de Grandlieu, « Boulanger C’est la Guerre », *Le Figaro*, July 25, 1886.

Many conservatives worried that Boulanger's firm revanchist stance was intended to provoke war, enable his seizure of power and even recreate a Communard government.<sup>119</sup> In November 1886, the conservative and Catholic *La Croix* warned that Boulanger's speeches "continue to excite enthusiasm in his favor, and as some have pointed out, the coup d'état is developing."<sup>120</sup> The general's endeavor to fulfill the longstanding Radical project of "republicanizing" military service added further fodder to conservative anti-authoritarian rhetoric.<sup>121</sup> *La Croix* asserted that "there are facets of a coup d'état in this manner of proceeding; one feels a touch of Brumaire and can sense that the man aspires only to place himself above the laws of his country."<sup>122</sup> In aligning Boulanger's ambition with Napoleon's seizure of power almost a century earlier (and by extension, Louis-Napoleon's more recent coup), the journal both demonstrated the breadth of its memory and appeared to condemn the practice of the coup d'état that Delafosse and Teste had sought to justify.

The imperialist rhetoric directed against Boulanger's perceived authoritarian tendencies is particularly indicative of the awkward position occupied by reactionaries during this period; they accused the general of aiming for an extralegal usurpation of power while simultaneously encouraging another coup more amenable to their political leanings. This two-fold condemnation and endorsement of the revolutionary tradition did not strike them as cognitively dissonant because it followed strict partisan lines. A Parisian banquet of imperialist committees in August 1886, convened to legitimize the Napoleonic pretender Prince Victor's right to ascend

---

<sup>119</sup> Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, 32-34, 37-38.

<sup>120</sup> « Les appréciations sur le discours Boulanger, à l'Hippodrome, continuent à exciter l'enthousiasme en sa faveur, et, comme certains le font observer, le coup d'État mûrit. », *La Croix*, Nov. 17, 1886.

<sup>121</sup> Radicals had long desired a standardization of three years of military service to make it egalitarian across all social classes. Boulanger's bill deprived seminarians of their exemption, which no doubt incensed conservatives and Catholics who were already fed up with the anticlerical impositions of the Third Republic.

<sup>122</sup> « Il y a des façons de coup d'État dans cette manière de procéder ; on sent comme un souffle de brumaire, et on devine l'homme qui n'aspire qu'à se mettre au-dessus des lois de son pays. », « A Propos de M. Boulanger », *La Croix*, March 18, 1887.

the throne, resounded with equal cries of “vive le coup d’état!” and “à bas Boulanger!” For them, an upheaval of the current government was “necessary and just” insofar as it restored the Napoleonic lineage to the throne.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, appended to *La Croix*’s apprehensive insinuation of an approaching Boulangist Brumaire was a scathing critique of the general, provided by Paul de Cassagnac, the intransigent Bonapartist who would later unabashedly devote all his energy to supporting Boulanger during his plebiscitary campaigns in the hopes that he would overthrow the Republic. For now, however, he condemned the military reform as a “revolutionary upheaval of the army” and its proposer as a “harmful, dangerous man, who far from being able to ever be useful to France, constitutes for her a permanent peril.”<sup>124</sup> In printing Cassagnac’s vituperation, the newspaper endeavored to demonstrate that even an avowed Bonapartist could resist the seduction and comprehend the danger of an immensely popular general. Ironically, as more opponents of the regime, including Cassagnac, became seduced by Boulanger’s revolutionary potential, the anti-authoritarian rhetorical framework inaugurated by them to attack the general was adopted by defenders of the Republic to serve the same purpose.

In spite of Boulanger’s republican origins, Opportunists and Radicals anxiously debated the latent risks associated with his sway over the masses and his subversive potential. After only a few months with Boulanger as Minister of War and even before the Longchamps review, Jules Ferry privately denounced him in a letter as an “audacious demagogue, a seductive orator, a self-infatuated politician, and a dangerous comedian.” The Opportunist leader saw in the general “a rare intelligence in the service of an ambition without limits,” and perhaps attributing too much credit to Boulanger, believed that “he has a consistent and well-conceived plan” to ensure his rise

---

<sup>123</sup> *Le Temps*, Aug. 17, 1886.

<sup>124</sup> « la tentative d’un bouleversement révolutionnaire de l’armée...un homme néfaste, dangereux, qui loin de pouvoir jamais être utile à la France, constitue pour elle un péril permanent. », « A Propos de M. Boulanger », *La Croix*, March 18, 1887.

to power.<sup>125</sup> Clemenceau, having brought Boulanger into the government, naturally defended him against accusations that he harbored intentions for a coup d'état, affirming that "he performs and will only ever perform his duty as a republican minister."<sup>126</sup> Other noted Radicals like Camille Pelletan extolled Boulanger's patriotic reinvigoration of the Fête Nationale and likewise supported him unconditionally until it became clear in 1887 that his movement was committed to revolution rather than Radical reform.<sup>127</sup> After all, in 1886 Pelletan could simultaneously back Boulanger and expound that "if radicalism has one raison d'être, it is precisely to exclude any use of force, demanding instead peaceful reforms... Otherwise France will remain condemned to a series of revolutions and reactions."<sup>128</sup> Even if Boulanger appeared to be the epitome of republican discipline in 1886, by the end of the following year Radicals would reject him in accordance with their principled refusal of revolutionary agitation.

Nevertheless, if most of the Radical rhetoric in 1886 tended to obfuscate the dangerous dimensions of Boulanger's burgeoning popularity, it was still obvious on the left that the general was becoming more than just a cabinet minister. Alongside Clemenceau's defense of Boulanger against indictments of a planned coup was that of Rochefort, who provided a more honest assessment of Boulanger's revolutionary potential. Unlike Clemenceau, he did not deny that a Boulangist revolution was impossible, but rather that if it did happen, it would not be to the benefit of the monarchists!<sup>129</sup> Indeed, Rochefort's support for the general would only increase as his seditious connotation became more apparent. By then, with the possibility of a revolutionary

---

<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Frédéric Monier, *Le Complot dans la République : stratégies du secret de Boulanger à la Cagoule* (Paris: La Découverte, 1998), 28-29.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Charles Chincholle, « Boulanger jugé par les siens, » *Le Figaro*, July 26, 1886.

<sup>127</sup> Judith Stone, *Sons of the Revolution: Radical Democrats in France, 1862-1914* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 133-135.

<sup>128</sup> Camille Pelletan, « L'Union des républicains, » *La Justice*, Sept. 4, 1886.

<sup>129</sup> Charles Chincholle, « Boulanger jugé par les siens, » *Le Figaro*, July 26, 1886.

overthrow of the Republic ostensibly close at hand, the major collusion between Boulanger and royalist donors had ceased to bother him.

### *The Period of Troubles Begins*

During the tumultuous year of 1887, the insurrectionary face of Boulangism came into full view as the government severed ties with the warmongering general. Aspiring revolutionaries from the left and the right began to tailor their own modes of rebellious rhetoric to Boulanger, whose wellspring of popularity had mutated from patriotism into protest. At the start of the year, before the government's reassignment of Boulanger to Clermont-Ferrand failed to take him out of the picture and succeeded in making him a martyr, Rochefort set the tone with a threat that if the general was not returned to his ministerial post, "twenty-thousand men would march down the boulevards shouting 'down with the traitors!' and 'vive Boulanger!'"<sup>130</sup> This was issued as a warning, resembled blackmail and ultimately became a reality in the massive public demonstration at the Gare de Lyon, the station from which Boulanger was scheduled to leave for his new assignment. Louis Lépine, then secretary general of the Prefecture of Police, recalled the protest as the first of three opportunities for a Boulangist coup d'état and recognized in its aftermath that "the period of troubles had commenced."<sup>131</sup>

The riotous protest forced conservative supporters of upheaval to reconsider the role of the masses in their revolutionary rhetoric. It bolstered the possibility of a coup d'état but also animated images of popular street revolution. Indeed, after the demonstration, Teste would reprint almost verbatim his historical justification of the coup d'état, broaching the unavoidable question: "...would he still do it?" Given the "current state of skepticism and listlessness" of the

---

<sup>130</sup> « les meneurs...peuvent être sûrs que vingt mille hommes parcourraient les boulevards en criant: 'A bas les traîtres !' et 'Vive Boulanger !' » », Henri Rochefort, « Bâtons dans les roues », *L'Intransigeant*, Jan. 21, 1887.

<sup>131</sup> Lépine, *Mes souvenirs*, 69.

government, Teste envisioned a rebellion erupting as much in the street as in the corridors of administrative power, when the young people crying Boulanger's name "would take their turn to try their hand at the barricades."<sup>132</sup> Delafosse redoubled his support of a Boulangist takeover by formulating his own apology for the coup d'état, blending Teste's arguments and Bonapartist lip service to the sovereignty of the masses: "the coup d'état is the natural outlet of the malaise, irritation, and disgust of a people who desires at any cost to emerge from an intolerable situation...it explodes invincibly when the exasperation of the people combines with the popularity of a man..." Nevertheless, as a true imperialist, his conception of political upheaval necessitated an authoritarian seizure of power from above rather than below, enabling him to insist that while "the present belongs at times to the unruly; the future belongs only to those who know how to wait."<sup>133</sup> Significantly, Delafosse's article was printed in the moderate republican *Le Matin*, illustrating the currency and wide exposure of such seditious exhortations at this time.

The rhetorical conflict between man and movement stimulated by the Gare de Lyon protest would also provide the backdrop for a new phase of insurrectionary rhetoric from the far left. Socialists who had previously ignored Boulanger during his association with the bourgeois parties of government were now confronted with a convincing display of seemingly spontaneous street protest that corresponded to their notions of popular revolution. One young revolutionary recalled no longer being able to "refrain from envying Boulanger and thinking with many others...[that] with a bit of organization, knowledge and luck, we could make a revolution that would succeed..."<sup>134</sup> Although rival socialist factions in France would be bitterly divided over

---

<sup>132</sup> Louis Teste, « Coup d'État », *Le Gaulois*, August 4, 1887.

<sup>133</sup> « Le coup d'État est l'exutoire naturel du malaise, de l'irritation, du dégoût d'un peuple qui veut à tout prix sortir d'une situation devenue intolérable...il éclate invinciblement lorsque l'exaspération du peuple se combine avec la popularité d'un homme...Le présent est parfois aux turbulents ; l'avenir n'appartient qu'à ceux qui savent l'attendre. », Jules Delafosse, « Les Coups d'État », *Le Matin*, Aug. 2, 1887.

<sup>134</sup> « Aussi le soir de la gare de Lyon j'avoue que je ne pus me défendre d'envier Boulanger et de penser avec bien d'autres :... 'avec un peu d'organisation, de science et de chance, on en ferait une révolution qui réussirait...», Michael Morphy, *Mon rôle dans le boulangisme* (Paris: 1891), 6. Testifying to both the revolutionary aspirations of

questions of political strategy and separate into Boulangist, anti-Boulangist, and neutral camps, their rhetoric uniformly shared an emphasis on the insurrectionary impulse of the masses, affirming that underneath the unparalleled adulation of the propagandizing general lay a “revolutionary demand”<sup>135</sup> and “an enormous and spontaneous effort of the people.”<sup>136</sup> Even moderate socialists skeptical of Boulanger’s own intentions interpreted his movement as a “torrential eruption of all the discontent, all the disappointment, all the anger, all the hopes that fermented among the masses.”<sup>137</sup> While socialists disagreed on whether the general was a true friend of the working class, a deceiving reactionary pretender or a farcical self-promoter, they all attempted to preserve the integrity of the revolutionary tradition by ascribing a proletarian pulse to his burgeoning movement.

At the end of the year, precipitated by the Wilson Affair and the subsequent ministerial crisis, political opposition from all sides menacingly assailed the Republic with aggravated revolutionary threats. Ferry, perhaps the most hated man in government at the time, detested by Radicals, socialists and royalists alike for his Opportunist politics and colonial adventures, was expected to replace the dishonored Grévy as president. One republican deputy recalled correctly that a vote in Ferry’s favor “risked provoking an insurrectional movement,” noting that Radicals in Paris were contemplating resistance in the case of his election.<sup>138</sup> Leading socialists Paul

Lafargue and Jules Guesde convened their partisans for a revolutionary pep-talk,<sup>139</sup> while a

---

socialists and the importance of subtle rhetorical terminology, he recounted one Boulangist demonstration during the Fête Nationale of 1888 that was planned to culminate in a street insurrection. As such, it was to be heavily propagandized as an “energetic” and “conclusive demonstration.” However, after Boulanger sustained severe injury in a duel the day before and could therefore not present himself at the rally, the young activist rushed to the printers to change the poster’s wording to “display of sympathy and peaceful demonstration.” See page 13.

<sup>135</sup> « Le boulangisme, élément mal défini d’une revendication révolutionnaire », *Le Cri du peuple*, July 14, 1888.

<sup>136</sup> « ...un effort énorme et spontané du peuple... », *La Cocarde*, Aug. 31, 1888.

<sup>137</sup> « En réalité nous sommes en présence de l’irruption torrentielle de tous les mécontentements, de toutes les déceptions, de toutes les colères, de toutes les espérances qui fermentaient dans les masses. », Benoît Malon, *La Revue socialiste* 41 (May 1888).

<sup>138</sup> Louis Andrieux, *A travers la République* (Paris: Payot, 1926), 328.

<sup>139</sup> Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 13.

comrade raised the specter of the Commune, warning that Parisian guns would go off single-handedly if Ferry took office.<sup>140</sup> The Blanquists, whose doctrine was total revolution, took great pains to turn the crisis into a popular insurgency. They stockpiled guns and explosives in their headquarters, planned to occupy the city hall of Paris and instructed sympathetic factions in other cities to await the signal for revolution.<sup>141</sup>

This revolutionary rhetoric and behavior naturally blended into the prevailing currents of subversion accruing to Boulanger, even though his attempts at backroom negotiations with opposition leaders were then unknown to the general public. The zealously nationalist and revanchist Paul Déroulède and his League of Patriots joined socialists in large street protests to sing old revolutionary songs like “Ça Ira” and to distribute pamphlets entitled “Boulanger Généralissime.”<sup>142</sup> The Marquis de Breteuil, a royalist deputy soon to become a Boulangist, shared the intuition that the presidential crisis was not just a routine instance of republican instability, but in fact its last gasp; it was only a matter of time before “the institution falls in the mud and it won’t be a new president who will refurbish its virginity. Boulanger... will perhaps fulfill his ambitious dreams.”<sup>143</sup> The prefect of police during this time even claimed that he was tapped to form a “coup d’état ministry” with the general, but refused the offer.<sup>144</sup> After the crisis was overcome by the nomination and election of the noncontroversial Sadi Carnot in place of Ferry, the Blanquists covertly rallied to Boulanger.<sup>145</sup> In the turbulent climate engendered by the

---

<sup>140</sup> John Labusquière, *Le Cri du peuple*, Nov. 19, 1887. For other deprecations of Ferry from the Radical, socialist and Boulangist press, see Néré, *Le Boulangisme*, 60-61. One of the most vitriolic condemnations came from the famous socialist activist Séverine, who censured “Ferry-the-defeat, Ferry-the-lie, Ferry-the-shame” and “Ferry the killer of people!” in *Le Cri du peuple*, Dec. 2, 1887.

<sup>141</sup> Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition*, 147.

<sup>142</sup> Jean Garrigues, « Le Général Boulanger et le fantasme du coup d’état, » *Parlement[s]* (2009): 44.

<sup>143</sup> Garrigues, *Le Général Boulanger*, 116.

<sup>144</sup> Garrigues, « Le Général Boulanger et le fantasme du coup d’état », 44.

<sup>145</sup> Patrick H. Hutton, “Popular Boulangism,” 104.

Gare de Lyon protests and the ministerial fiasco, a seditious discourse increasingly centered on his anti-establishment persona, even though 1887 did not culminate in revolution.

With the Republic falling further into popular disrepute and the insurrectionary threat of Boulangism legitimized, the rhetoric within France gave way to opportunistic posturing from the exiled imperial and monarchical pretenders, Prince Victor Napoleon and the Count of Paris. The Bonapartist claimant denounced any conservative illusions about parliamentary participation and paid lip service to the authority of universal suffrage, much in the same way as Louis-Napoleon had done decades earlier. He called for the formation of Bonapartist committees in all departments of France with the undisguised motive of preparing the way for a successful plebiscite.<sup>146</sup> Thiébaud would indeed initiate a cascade of plebiscitary elections in this Bonapartist mold during the following year, but with Boulanger as the pretender, rather than the Napoleonic heir.

A few days after Victor's manifesto was released, the Count of Paris, recognized by most French monarchists as the genuine claimant to the throne, penned his own statement. Accustomed to the periodic episodes of violent upheaval in French history, he affirmed that "the country thinks little of legal and legitimate transformations in its political condition." France was ripe for the final iteration of its revolutionary tradition, in which the monarchy would be reconstituted to replace the unstable parliamentary Republic once and for all. Taking a page from the Bonapartist playbook, the Count argued that a royal restoration would be achieved either through a constituent assembly, or preferably, a "popular vote."<sup>147</sup> His vision of a contemporary monarchy, adapted "to the modern institutions...of our democratic society," would thus best be achieved through the electoral process of a plebiscite, even if he avoided employing

---

<sup>146</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, ed., *Les Droites françaises de la Révolution à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 343.

<sup>147</sup> Philippe d'Orléans, Comte de Paris, « Instructions du Comte de Paris aux représentants du parti monarchique en France », *La Monarchie française: lettres et documents politiques (1844-1907)* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1907), 153-164.

the word itself.<sup>148</sup> Royalist and Bonapartist rhetorics had merged, advocating democratic means to achieve their overtly undemocratic objective of revolution and regime change. Conservative hopes logically fixed on Boulanger, who (in addition to the obvious advantage of his physical presence in France) had become an immensely popular symbol of resistance to the government.

### *Revolutionary Rhetoric in Full Swing*

In the face of Boulanger's ominous popularity and the burgeoning insurrectionary coalition developing around him, defensive republican rhetoric coalesced into its final form, which would remain essentially unchanged up through the 1889 election in Paris. Where the general had previously figured in republican discourse, at the most, as a rare liberal military man, he would from now on be represented, at the least, as a dictatorial threat. Shortly after the Gare de Lyon incident, *Le Petit journal* condemned his acquiescence in "letting himself be monopolized by the representatives of revolutionary politics" and the ambiguous duality of his popular allure, which encompassed "at once, patriotic passion, republican exaltation and individualism that would easily become autocratic."<sup>149</sup> The Radical *La Justice* echoed this sentiment in clarifying the incompatibility of Boulanger's persona with the impersonal Republic: "Whatever the services a man has rendered, regardless of those he is capable of rendering, republicans have as their primary duty to never exalt an individual to this extent. It is to the idea,

---

<sup>148</sup> Indeed, a preliminary draft of his manifesto used the word "plebiscite," but his advisors convinced him to remove it. Despite the lip service paid to universal suffrage, the Count's private constitutional sketches expose his decidedly undemocratic designs for the monarchy, replete with considerable disenfranchisement of the working class and limitations on press freedom. See Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, 44-46. Nonetheless, his image was distinctly more contemporary than the previous pretender, the Count of Chambord, who had refused even to adopt the tricolor as the national flag of France!

<sup>149</sup> « ...dans ce cri [Vive Boulanger], il y a tout à la fois, de la passion patriotique, de l'exaltation républicaine et de l'individualisme, qui deviendrait, sans peine, autocratique. Le général Boulanger, qui a eu le grand tort, selon moi, de se laisser accaparer par les représentants de la politique révolutionnaire, n'est évidemment pas hostile à la popularité. », Thomas Grimm, « Le Départ du Général Boulanger », *Le Petit journal*, July 10, 1887.

the idea alone that they owe their respects.”<sup>150</sup> This anti-Caesarian and anti-monarchic tone would develop from speculation on Boulanger’s intentions into overt attacks on his character.

Ignoring Boulanger’s regular affirmations of republican loyalty, Opportunists and Radicals tapped into the vast reservoir of French historical memory, permeating their anti-Boulangist rhetoric with allusions to the authoritarian excesses of Napoleon I and Napoleon III in order to warn against the political worship of a single man. A typical Opportunist polemic flatly declared in its first sentence that “Boulanger represents coup d’état, dictatorship and war.”<sup>151</sup> Another made the same position clear from its title: “Boulangism and Bonapartism, or the Masked Reaction.”<sup>152</sup> Criticism often combined historical reference with comic derision, epitomized in Ferry’s rebuff of Boulanger as a “Saint-Arnaud de café-concert,” a laughable version of the general who organized Louis-Napoleon’s coup in 1851.<sup>153</sup> Floquet jeered to his face that “at your age...Napoleon was already dead,” which probably carried additional offense given that he had miscalculated by a few months.<sup>154</sup> Opportunist Joseph Reinach alleged that “this man writes no line that hasn’t been copied from the proclamations and circulars of Napoleon III,”<sup>155</sup> while his colleague Waldeck-Rousseau railed against “ferments of dictatorship mixed with ferments of revolution.”<sup>156</sup> Radicals (including Clemenceau, the original promoter of Boulanger) established the *Société des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*, whose objective was “the

---

<sup>150</sup> « Quels que soient les services qu’un homme ait rendus, quels que soient ceux qu’il puisse rendre, des républicains ont pour premier devoir de ne jamais exalter à ce point un individu. C’est à l’idée, à l’idée seule, qu’ils doivent leurs hommages. », *La Justice*, July 9, 1887.

<sup>151</sup> Yves Guyot, *Le Boulangisme* (Paris: 1888), 3.

<sup>152</sup> P. Cordier, *Boulangisme & bonapartisme, ou la réaction masquée* (Paris: Mayer, 1889).

<sup>153</sup> Jules Ferry, « Discours d’Epinal du 24 juillet 1887 » from *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry*, 76.

<sup>154</sup> “Statesmen of Europe: France, Part II,” *The Living Age* Vol. 189 (June 1891): 683. The sulling of reputations was not limited to verbal abuse. The exchange of barbs between the two men precipitated a duel, as was common during the era, in which the aging statesman inflicted a grave wound on the general that almost killed him. The event is described in « Le Duel d’Hier », *Le Figaro*, July 14, 1888.

<sup>155</sup> « Cet homme n’écrit pas une ligne qui ne soit copiée dans les proclamations et circulaires de Napoléon III. », *La République française*, March 29, 1888. A trilogy of Reinach’s articles denouncing Boulanger was assembled under the title of *Les Petites catilinaires* (Paris: Harvard, 1889).

<sup>156</sup> Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau, « Banquet du Cercle Républicain de Lyon, le 10 novembre 1888 », *Discours parlementaires* (Paris: Charpentier, 1889), 571.

defense of the Republic through the merciless struggle against all reactionary and dictatorial ventures.”<sup>157</sup> The uniformity of defensive rhetoric extended to anti-Boulangist student associations as well, which implored that “it is no longer permissible to be indifferent...History warns us to not wait to struggle when there is little time left.” For them, the lessons of history demanded concerted action to “dash Caesar’s desire to succeed.”<sup>158</sup> The weight of historical memory in anti-Boulangist rhetoric extended even to youth who had never known the dictatorships of the past.

From the time Boulanger’s plebiscitary campaign began in earnest to its culmination in the Paris election of January 1889, and despite or perhaps in response to accusations of authoritarian intentions, self-proclaimed Boulangists on the left connected their revolutionary rhetoric to the Revolution of 1789 which birthed the republican project in the first place. They saw no contradiction in the movement that affirmed itself simultaneously as both republican and revolutionary, and proclaimed the necessity of another radical upheaval to complete the unfinished oeuvre of the Revolution so willfully sullied by ineffectual Opportunist parliamentarism.<sup>159</sup> Francis Laur advocated in unembellished terms “a nearly revolutionary act” to break this deadlock. He expounded the notion that Boulangists alone “had revived the tradition of 1789” and that only they would commence a historical “republican renewal” and initiate a “necessary republican transformation.”<sup>160</sup> Mermeix, who would gain additional fame in

---

<sup>157</sup> Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Le Bilan Boulanger aux électeurs républicains* (Paris : Publication de la Société des droits de l’homme et du citoyen, 1888).

<sup>158</sup> « il n’est plus permis d’être indifférents...L’histoire est là qui nous avertit de ne pas attendre pour lutter qu’il n’en soit plus temps. De l’hôtel du Louvre aux Tuileries, il n’y qu’un pas : ôtons à Césarion l’envie de le franchir. », *Le Réveil du quartier*, May 20, 1888.

<sup>159</sup> These leftists generally identified themselves with the Jacobin tradition that had played a pivotal role in the radicalization of the French Revolution. Initially composed of moderate republicans in the early days of the revolution, the Jacobin faction entered a more extreme leftist phase under the leadership of figures like Robespierre and instituted the Reign of Terror. By 1889, Jacobinism was pejoratively associated with revolutionary republican extremism, especially when referred to by conservatives and moderates. This did not, however, prevent many leftist Boulangists from proudly applying the label to themselves.

<sup>160</sup> « on ne peut sortir, en effet, de l’impasse où nous sommes que par un acte presque révolutionnaire...il sent que seuls nous avons repris la tradition de 1789 et que de nous seuls viendra le “renouveau républicain”...tout:

1890 upon publishing his scandalous exposé on the collusion between Boulanger and the monarchists, was entirely committed to the movement before its decline and likewise avowed that it “placed itself solely in the true revolutionary tradition.” He denounced as false revolutionaries the “oligarchy of parliaments who, recruited from the upper classes, possess conservative instincts underneath their Jacobin guises.”<sup>161</sup> A Boulangist pamphlet written by an anarchist, fittingly titled “The Revolutionary Republic,” eagerly adhered to the belief that insurrection against the “allegedly republican parliamentarism” was just around the corner. Because “all the political parties are equally discredited in public opinion,” the author asserted that “the next revolution is brewing under better auspices.”<sup>162</sup> Maurice Vergoin, a prominent Boulangist in Paris, concurred that the movement was “only the first step on the Revolutionary path, the last of which remains open to people whose governments have betrayed them!”<sup>163</sup> Although the Boulangist mantra of “dissolution, revision, consultation” remained a vague construct, couched in legalistic terminology that did not explicitly entail such subversive undertones, *La Cocarde* threw subtlety out the window in underlining that “it is not a constitution that must be revised nor a government which must be patched up, it is a society that needs to be redesigned.”<sup>164</sup> These insurgents on the left linked Boulangism not to reactionary despotism but to the genuine advancement of the Jacobin project.

Rightist rhetoric promoted a revolutionary understanding of the Boulangist movement just as clearly, if not more so. After one of Boulanger’s crucial electoral victories in a northern

événements extérieurs, actes politiques, duels, tout convergera vers ce point unique “la transformation républicaine nécessaire.” », Francis Laur, « Suites d’une Blessure », *La Presse*, July 17, 1888.

<sup>161</sup> « [Les boulangistes] se replaçaient seulement dans la vraie tradition révolutionnaire...l’oligarchie des parlements qui, recrutés dans les classes supérieures, ont sous toutes leurs apparences jacobines des instincts conservateurs. », quoted from Raoul Girardet, *Le Nationalisme français* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983), 139.

<sup>162</sup> « La révolution prochaine s’annonce sous de meilleurs auspices. Tous les partis politiques se sont également déconsidérés dans l’opinion publique. », F. Duhamet, *La République révolutionnaire* (Paris: Ghio, 1889), 382.

<sup>163</sup> Maurice Vergoin, « Basiles ! », *Démocrate de Seine-et-Oise*, Jan., 20, 1889, quoted in Bertrand Joly, *Vie de Maurice Vergoin, député boulangiste* (Paris: Champion, 2005), 51-52.

<sup>164</sup> « Ce n’est pas une constitution qui est à réviser, un gouvernement qui est à rafistoler, c’est une société qui est à refaire », *La Cocarde*, Aug. 31, 1888.

department, the conservative *L'Univers* interpreted “popular aspiration...[as] searching for a man who would renew...the 18<sup>th</sup> of Brumaire and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December.” It alleged that support for a coup was not a preoccupation of upper-class elites, but rather an “idea to which the voting masses adhered more or less deliberately,” thus fusing an electoral rationale to the argument for a confiscation of state power.<sup>165</sup> In the wake of even greater triumphs later that year, Cassagnac could not abstain from declaring premature victory in expectation of a seizure of the reins of power: “The Republic is dead, this is the death knell!”<sup>166</sup> During the lead-up to the Paris election, he justified his unconditional support of the general with alacritous simplicity: “In the circumstances, it is unnecessary to solicit from General Boulanger any guarantee whatsoever... we want [Boulangism] to topple a despicable and unbearable political system that we are powerless to derail with our efforts alone. It is an instrument, it is a tool, it is a vehicle.”<sup>167</sup> Arthur Meyer, editor of *Le Gaulois*, employed similar martial imagery to convey the same point: “the General is the best weapon forged against the government; let us take hold of it without inspecting the hilt.”<sup>168</sup> Although acknowledging that Boulanger professed republican loyalty, he felt assured that “between the Republic...which we know all too well and that of General Boulanger which we do not know, we cannot hesitate” to vote for the symbol of drastic change. In justifying a vote for “the unknown against the too familiar,” Meyer confidently imputed to Boulanger’s campaign a willingness to engage in revolutionary activity, no matter how arbitrary such an upheaval might be.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>165</sup> « Aujourd’hui, l’aspiration populaire...cherche un homme qui, renouvelant...le Dix-Huit Brumaire et le Deux-Décembre...Voilà l’idée à laquelle obéit plus ou moins sciemment la masse électorale. », Eugène Vuillot, « L’élection du Nord », *L’Univers*, April 17, 1888.

<sup>166</sup> « La République est morte...c’est un glas! », *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry*, 113.

<sup>167</sup> « Dans la circonstance, il n’y a pas lieu de demander au général Boulanger aucun gage, quel qu’il soit... Nous voulons que [le boulangisme] serve à bousculer, à renverser un système politique odieux, insupportable, qu’avec nos seuls efforts nous sommes impuissants à mettre par terre. C’est un instrument, c’est un outil, c’est un engin. », *L’Autorité*, Jan. 4, 1889.

<sup>168</sup> Quoted in Brogan, *France Under the Republic*, 202.

<sup>169</sup> « Entre la république...que nous connaissons trop, et celle du général Boulanger, que nous ne connaissons pas, nous ne saurions hésiter...nous défendons énergiquement...l’inconnu contre le trop connu. », Arthur Meyer, « Ce

Socialists, at this time constituting generally poorly organized and ideologically discrepant factions, could agree only on the existence of this revolutionary situation. Some rallied to the Republic and employed the anti-authoritarian rhetoric of moderate republicans, others assembled under the general's banner and lauded the rebellious heritage of 1789 in similar fashion to leftist Boulangists, while many refused to participate in the affair at all, hoping for the regime to destroy itself and pave the way for social revolution. On one extreme were the Possibilists, who were committed to the achievement of "possible" reforms within the existing regime. They rallied to the anti-Boulangist camp, collaborated in the formation of the *Société des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* and articulated a vigilant stance against reaction: "we are ready to defend and conserve, by all means, the meager seed of our republican institutions against any sword that desires to threaten it."<sup>170</sup> The prominent Possibilist Paul Brousse highlighted the historical kinship of socialists and republicans, who were "after all...in various respects, the sons of the French Revolution," and urged a provisional union to combat what appeared to be impending dictatorship.<sup>171</sup> In a celebrated study on the "physiology of Boulangism," Eugène Fournière agreed that Boulangist revolution would in fact be reaction, despite any intuition to the contrary given that many workers took to his cause. Auguring the ideational shift away from dogmatic theories of inevitable revolution, he urged against understanding Boulangism by "applying formulae that serve as theoretical classification" as they have "become inapplicable in the political and social struggle."<sup>172</sup> This article appeared in the Possibilist *La Revue socialiste*, published by the likeminded Benoît Malon, who believed that the

---

qui se passe », *Le Gaulois*, Jan. 16, 1889.

<sup>170</sup> « nous sommes prêts à défendre et à conserver, par tous moyens, le chétif germe de nos institutions républicaines contre tout sabre qui voudrait à la menacer. », Declaration of Le Parti Ouvrier, from Lissagaray, *Le Bilan Boulanger*.

<sup>171</sup> « Après tout...nous sommes, à titres divers, les fils de la Révolution française. », *Le Prolétariat*, May 12, 1888. In similar fashion to the Opportunists and Radicals, Brousse compared Boulanger to Louis-Napoleon. For more on his stance and the dissension it fomented among Guesdists, Blanquists, and even other Possibilists, see David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 210-213.

<sup>172</sup> Eugène Fournière, « Physiologie du boulangisme », 521.

Boulangist challenge could “put in peril our republican liberties and perhaps even the integrity of our great and dear French fatherland.”<sup>173</sup> Anti-Boulangist socialists ultimately determined that it would be a reactionary step backwards, but they detected a proletarian insurrectionary impulse in Boulangism and esteemed some of its leftist members. As such, Possibilism did not preclude revolutionary rhetoric even from moderates like Gustave Rouanet, who warned that, in France, “the homeland of the Revolution,” “when the ruling classes have closed the doors to progress, the people have always responded by breaking them down!”<sup>174</sup>

In opposition to the Possibilists were the Blanquists and Guesdists, whose enthusiasm for revolution, whatever its form, prevented them from coming to the aid of the bourgeois Republic they detested so much. The Blanquist faction, an essentially covert organization without program or press organ that was dogmatically committed to the goal of total political and social reorganization, had already tried to precipitate an insurrection during the ministerial crisis in 1887. Some of its members had rallied to Boulanger’s subversive coalition after that failed, although other Blanquists faithfully believed in an inevitable insurrection to such a degree that they saw no need to “intervene and to take part in the oratorical fistfight” to ensure its realization.<sup>175</sup> The official line of the Guesdists prescribed an analogous strategy of abstentionism from any electoral participation in bourgeois politics, crystallized in their leader Jules Guesde’s infamous injunction, “One does not choose between cholera and the plague...One

---

<sup>173</sup> Benoît Malon, letter to Fournière on April 22, 1888, introducing « Physiologie, » from *ibid.*, 507. For more background on Malon’s Possibilism, see K. Steven Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism: Benoît Malon and French Reformist Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>174</sup> Gustave Rouanet, « Les Lois sociales au parlement, » *La Revue socialiste* (July 1888): 69.

<sup>175</sup> « Nous n’avons nulle envie d’intervenir et de prendre parti dans ce pugilat oratoire... », *L’Homme libre*, July 14, 1888.

says no to the one and no to the other.”<sup>176</sup> Nevertheless, various Guesdists rejected their leader’s instructions and joined with some Blanquists to enter into open alliance with Boulangists.<sup>177</sup>

The disunity in the Blanquist and Guesdist camps during the affair paints a picture of French socialism in the midst of a fundamental identity crisis over political and revolutionary strategy. The correspondence between Paul Lafargue, Karl Marx’s son-in-law, and Friedrich Engels, Marx’s colleague, epitomizes this divide. Lafargue ignored Guesde’s sanction and flirted with the movement, insisting that “for a great number of workers and petit-bourgeois, Boulanger embodies the Revolution.” Engels could not deny his sentiment that “we are heading for revolution, no one is in any doubt about that,” although he was more convinced by the Possibilist warning that Boulangism would culminate in despotism.<sup>178</sup> Lafargue enunciated the common understanding of a century of history, “that since 1815, every twenty years a revolution has broke out. We are approaching the deadline of a revolutionary crisis,” but felt confident that only on the condition that the true revolutionary endeavor failed would a despotic government, feared by Engels, rise in its wake, as was the case for Napoleons I and III. A stance taken in a Guesdist newspaper likewise saluted the revolutionary impulse inherent in the movement, albeit while maintaining a safe distance from any partisan support of the general, “this new soldier of the Revolution” who “will be capable of weakening or betraying. He is perhaps unaware of what he does.” The journal cautioned him to proceed only in the proper, socialist direction, lest he relinquish their support: “Go then, adventurer, on your adventure! The revolutionaries watch you – ready to march with you or against you.”<sup>179</sup> Although these socialists were far from any

---

<sup>176</sup> Quoted in Leslie Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Flowering of French Socialism, 1882-1911* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 62. To prove socialist aversion to both Boulanger and the Republic, Guesde instructed voters to cast ballots for the general’s horse instead.

<sup>177</sup> Moodie, “The Reorientation of French Socialism,” 356-358.

<sup>178</sup> Quoted in Winock, “Socialism and Boulangism,” 5.

<sup>179</sup> « Ce soldat nouveau de la Révolution pourra faiblir ou trahir. Il est peut-être inconscient de ce qu’il accomplit... Pars donc, aventurier, pour l’aventure ! Les révolutionnaires te regardent – prêts à marcher avec toi ou contre toi. », *Le Cri du peuple*, April 18, 1888.

unanimity on how to handle the Boulangist crisis, they were certainly participating in the rhetorical battle over the relevance of the revolutionary tradition through their insistence on the inevitability of a socialist insurrection. While they agreed on this, their ambivalence towards direct participation in the political contest foreshadowed substantial realignments in their electoral strategy in the aftermath of the Boulanger crisis.

The rhetorical battle lines between the Boulangist coalition of malcontents and the establishment manifested themselves most clearly and notoriously during the frenzied campaign in Paris in January 1889. The former appealed to a century of active revolutionary history while the latter denounced the latent danger of continued revolt and upheaval. The Jacquist strategy continued to propagate the idea that Boulanger was an overly ambitious neo-Bonaparte, a Caesarian incarnation destined to lead the country down an all too familiar dictatorial path. It consisted almost exclusively of spreading accusations against Boulanger's character and apprehensions of his supposed ulterior intentions. Jacques' appeal to Parisian voters equated the Republic with gradual and progressive reformism and Boulangism with "a return to personal power." He warned them not to go to the polls to "demand a master."<sup>180</sup> The proliferation of short catchphrases such as "pas de dictature!" and "pas de Sedan!" directly associated Boulanger with the autocracy and military failure of Louis-Napoleon.<sup>181</sup> The title of Jules Simon's anti-Boulangist pamphlet similarly posed to voters the loaded question, "Do you remember December 2<sup>nd</sup>?" before drawing comparisons between Boulanger and Louis-Napoleon.<sup>182</sup> The republican appeal to voters did not broach questions of economic or social reform, or any

---

<sup>180</sup> « Les hommes qui se sont unis sur mon nom représentent des nuances diverses de l'opinion républicaine. Mais tous sont d'accord pour reconnaître que la République, c'est l'accroissement progressif et puissant de la justice sociale ; tous sont d'accord pour déclarer que le retour au pouvoir personnel, c'est l'abdication de la nation, le déshonneur, la déchéance de la patrie... Vous n'irez pas aux urnes pour réclamer un maître. Que chacun de vos bulletins crie à la France : Vive la République », quoted in Néré, *Le Boulangisme*, 143.

<sup>181</sup> *L'Intransigeant*, Jan. 12, 1889 ; *Le Gaulois*, Jan. 11, 1889 ; *Le Temps*, Jan. 11, 1889.

<sup>182</sup> « Souviens-toi du Deux-Décembre ? », *Le Matin*, Jan, 24, 1889.

question of policy for that matter; rather, it dictated the stakes of this electoral contest as the very existence of the Republic itself. The Radical *La Lanterne* concisely summarized this tactic in declaring that “Boulangism lives only in ambiguity...it is necessary to be clearly for or against the Republic. It is no longer possible for Boulangists to declare themselves for the Republic.”<sup>183</sup>

The simplicity of this rhetorical approach was designed to play on voters’ genuine fears of political turmoil, although it just as clearly betrayed republican panic in the face of Boulanger’s vigorous campaign in Paris. Two weeks before the election, the *Revue des deux mondes* observed the disorganization of the government, “thrashing about in confusion... fluctuating ceaselessly between force and powerlessness before an infuriated nation, pushed to the limit and in its impatience capable of anything.”<sup>184</sup> Confronted with intimidating rhetoric from all sides, the various strains of republican opinion assembled on the only common ground they could find, the necessity of defending the existing institution. Jacques was ultimately picked not because he possessed the political credentials with which to combat the appeal of the general, but rather to serve as an inoffensive and noncontroversial banner of the Republic that would not engender any fatal division in the republican camp.<sup>185</sup> The republican candidate was announced on January 6, only three weeks before the election, testifying to the disarrayed state of republican defense and the purely nominal character of its campaign.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, the campaign would likely have adhered to the same rhetorical strategy regardless of its choice of candidate. Simon had even publicly supplied a rare confession of the Republic’s weakness, asserting that “nothing, except a coup d’état, a street riot or foreign war” could dismantle the republican

---

<sup>183</sup> « Le boulangisme ne vivait que d’une équivoque... Il faut être nettement pour ou contre la République. Se déclarer pour la République, ce n’est plus possible aux boulangistes. », *La Lanterne*, Jan. 3, 1889.

<sup>184</sup> Charles Mazade, « Chronique de la Quinzaine, » *Revue des deux mondes*, Jan. 15, 1889.

<sup>185</sup> Seager, *The Boulanger Affair*, 198-199.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

institution.<sup>187</sup> Republican strategy therefore linked Boulanger to all three, promising that a vote for him was the endorsement of an illegal seizure of power, a revolution in the streets, and another disgraceful defeat against Germany.

### *Victory Without Revolution*

The announcement of Boulanger's victory and the large demonstration of support in front of Café Durand generated a climate of panic among republican politicians and a genuine expectation that Boulangist revolutionary rhetoric would become reality. Clemenceau feared the imminent deportation of republicans, himself included, to New Caledonia, a French territory in the Southwest Pacific that served as a notorious penal colony for political prisoners.<sup>188</sup> Floquet declared himself ready to resign.<sup>189</sup> Freycinet would later reflect in his memoirs on the opportunity that presented itself to the general on the night of the election: "[had] he marched to the Élysée at the head of the League of Patriots, followed by the torrent of his supporters, who can say that he would not have swept away any obstacles?" Keepers of public order were paralyzed and in a state of shock, as Freycinet noted.<sup>190</sup> Lépine felt equally helpless as he "circulated through the crowd, distressed, stunned by my inability to prevent anything" in the face of the crowd's cries of "À l'Élysée."<sup>191</sup> A police captain who had been dispatched to the restaurant to make a possible arrest concealed himself behind his scarf out of fear of being recognized by the restless crowd.<sup>192</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> « A Travers les Journaux, » *La Croix*, May 3, 1888. In listing his anxieties, Simon unwittingly prophesized the final fate of the Republic; it would persevere in the face of continuous domestic unrest but collapse in defeat at the hands of the Germans in World War II.

<sup>188</sup> Michael Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic*, 30.

<sup>189</sup> *Le Gaulois*, Jan. 28, 1889.

<sup>190</sup> « Si le soir même de l'élection, il s'était porté sur l'Élysée à la tête de la ligue des patriotes et suivi du flot de ses partisans, qui peut dire qu'il n'eut pas balayé les obstacles ? », Charles de Freycinet, *Souvenirs: 1878-1893* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 420.

<sup>191</sup> « Je circulais à travers le groupe, désemparé, confus de mon impuissance à rien empêcher et la multitude de crier sur tous les tons : 'A l'Élysée.' », Lépine, *Mes souvenirs*, 71.

<sup>192</sup> Garrigues, *Le Général Boulanger*, 229.

In addition to the intimidating throngs of partisans filling the streets, the government's anxiety was stoked by the prospect of defection by police and army officials. When Floquet arrived at the ministry of the Interior, he found the building deserted, implying that much of the police and republican guard had abandoned their posts and rallied to Boulanger. There were rumors that the Blanquist Georges de La Bruyère had offered to escort the general to the Élysée with the help of noncommissioned officers.<sup>193</sup> The duchess of Uzès would later claim that an officer posted at the Élysée, one of her friends, had intended to facilitate bringing a coup that “everyone expected” to fruition.<sup>194</sup> The threat seemed real enough that, during an emergency meeting convoked by Carnot around midnight, some anxious deputies called for the immediate arrest of Boulanger<sup>195</sup> and one even proposed to have him shot.<sup>196</sup> These ideas were quickly rejected, however.

Nevertheless, in defiance of the revolutionary opportunity and the entreaties of some members of his entourage, Boulanger did not attempt to seize power on the night of January 27. He was, at heart, a republican who waved off the pleas for sedition by averring that “the Empire died of its origins.”<sup>197</sup> Those who regarded Boulangism precisely as a means of accomplishing such a coup were devastated by his lack of action. Thiébaud's famous midnight admonition, typically rendered as “12:05, messieurs! For five minutes, Boulangism has been in decline!” articulated without ambiguity his revolutionary conception of the movement.<sup>198</sup> He had initiated Boulanger's plebiscitary run for the sole purpose of creating an opportunity to overthrow the government and install a neo-Bonapartist regime, and the chance had been squandered.

---

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Duchesse d'Uzès, *Souvenirs de la Duchesse d'Uzès* (Paris: Plon, 1939), 89.

<sup>195</sup> Freycinet notes in his *Souvenirs* (p. 419) that “the most extraordinary motions” were put forth at this time. *Le Gaulois* (Jan. 28, 1889) named a few ministers who proposed to take Boulanger into custody.

<sup>196</sup> Garrigues, *Le Général Boulanger*, 229. *Le Gaulois* (Jan. 29, 1889) supplied the apocalyptic statement of one Radical who bemoaned the failure to shoot Boulanger and lamented that “the Chamber is now finished.”

<sup>197</sup> “L'Empire est mort de ses origines,” quoted in Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic*, 30.

<sup>198</sup> « Minuit cinq, messieurs! Depuis cinq minutes, le boulangisme est en baisse. », Barrès, *L'Appel au soldat*, 216.

Déroulède had also supported a march on the Élysée and was more than ready to give the order to his leaguers.<sup>199</sup>

Despite the lack of immediate action after the ballot results filtered in, the Boulangists were riding high on their tremendous success, emboldening supporters from all sides to intensify their rhetoric. Shortly after the election, La Bruyère published an article in his Boulangist mouthpiece *La Cocarde* which unequivocally expounded the dichotomy between the regime's unflinching legalism and his eagerness to engage in a new revolution. He first quoted Reinach's post-election warning in the Opportunist *La République française*, "the will of the people is the fountain of a drunken pasha if it purports to go against the law." La Bruyère proudly affirmed the contrary stance that "the people are not subjected to the law – they make it. Their will surpasses all and reigns over all." He summoned the memory of "the *illegal* revolutions of 1789, 1830, 1848, and 1870" and alleged that "in order to stay loyal to our origin and coherent in our conduct," Boulangists must proclaim the sovereignty of the will of the people.<sup>200</sup>

The Monarchist press treaded a bit more carefully and avoided the overtly menacing insinuations of La Bruyère, but nevertheless could not restrain its jubilation at the electoral result and the revolutionary implications that it seemed to comprise. Arthur Meyer posed the frank question that if Jacques was the candidate of the Republic, "do we not have the right to say that, in voting against Jacques, Paris voted against the Republic?" The journal carefully phrased its expectations for the future with a degree of subtlety: "We will be careful not to say, as too many people expect, that the Republic is dead, but we will affirm that...Paris showed that it desires to

---

<sup>199</sup> Henri Galli, ed., *Paul Déroulède: raconté par lui-même* (Paris: Plon, 1900), 85.

<sup>200</sup> « La volonté du peuple est la fontaine d'un pacha ivre...si elle prétend aller contre la loi. », « Mais nous pensons, nous, en notre foi républicaine qui se réclame des révolutions *illégales* de 1789, de 1830, de 1848, de 1870, que, pour rester fidèle à nos origine et logique en notre conduite, nous devons proclamer ceci : Le peuple ne subit pas la loi – il la fait. Sa volonté prime tout, domine tout. », *La Cocarde*, Jan. 29, 1889.

live and to live a new life. We will help it to do so.”<sup>201</sup> Another royalist took a more direct approach and raised the specter of revolution by declaring that if the regime did not submit to the will of the people, it had better “beware of civil war! Beware of these huge crowd demonstrations, before which governments fall, like ripe fruit or dry leaves before the hurricane.”<sup>202</sup>

Anti-Boulangist rhetoric likewise attained a forceful directness in expectation of revolution and distilled its own admonitions of history to their most frightening implications. Pelletan’s response to the election result was laden with historical imagery and fear. He shamed the city of Paris which “had elected, with joviality, a third-rate Caesar,” “the soldier who had gunned down Parisians, shot prisoners, filled the streets with corpses” during the recapture of the city almost thirty years before. He compared the vote to the 1848 election that brought Louis-Napoleon into office when “the ardent masses of the great city voted for the autocrat of tomorrow.”<sup>203</sup> Pelletan accused Parisian voters of “sullyng the anniversary of 1789” and beseeched republicans to be vigilant during this perilous time.<sup>204</sup> Perhaps the most explicit treatment of republican fears was a heavy-handed illustration in the satirical *Le Grelot* entitled “The centenary of 1789.” It depicted hopelessly submissive and faceless figures marching under Boulanger’s whip while bearing a sign declaring “Again, again...always! Our fathers endured fifteen centuries of beating. We are the worthy sons of our fathers,” as if bound by some

---

<sup>201</sup> « N’aurions-nous pas le droit de dire que, en votant contre M. Jacques, Paris a voté contre la République ? », « Nous nous garderons bien de dire comme trop de gens s’y attendent, que la République est morte, mais nous affirmerons que, hier, Paris a montré qu’il voulait vivre et vivre d’une nouvelle vie. Nous l’y aiderons. », Arthur Meyer, « Le Plébiscite des brave gens », *Le Gaulois*, Jan. 28, 1889.

<sup>202</sup> « Mais, si ce groupe veut résister, gare à la guerre civile ! Gare à ces grandes manifestations des foules, devant qui tombent les gouvernements, comme des fruits mûrs ou des feuilles sèches devant l’ouragan. », J. Cornély, « Se soumettre ou se démettre », *Le Gaulois*, Jan. 29, 1889.

<sup>203</sup> *La Justice*, Jan. 28, 1889.

<sup>204</sup> *La Justice*, Jan. 29, 1889.

masochistic impulse to willingly renew the revolutionary cycle and resubmit to the despotism of past generations.<sup>205</sup>

As this revolutionary agitation subsided without a political upheaval, the most intractable and anxious supporters of a Boulangist takeover endeavored to take this intimidating language to the next level. Skeletal worker syndicates in Paris continued for several weeks to laugh off the possibility of a legal ascension to power and counted on Boulanger for a coup.<sup>206</sup> Thiébaud announced to a journalist that Boulanger would take power on February 24, the anniversary of the fall of Louis-Philippe's government in 1848. Blanquist and Guesdist delegates from the syndicates tagged along in delivering an ultimatum to the Chamber, vowing to return on the 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>207</sup> Of course, these were empty threats that did not materialize, illustrated the desperation of those who saw the window for rebellious action rapidly closing, and provided a pretext for governmental prosecution of prominent Boulangists.

### *The Rhetorical Tide Shifts*

The anticlimax of the general's Parisian triumph and the government's subsequent initiation of legal proceedings against his entourage necessitated a careful response calculated to maintain both the movement's credibility and its electoral support. An invitation from the clerical royalist Jules Delahaye to bring Boulanger to Tours for a grand political banquet provided the party apparatus with an opportunity to confidently refine its position and assuage any lingering fears of insurrection. Boulanger's speech at the event on March 17 renewed criticism of the government but sought first and foremost to affirm his commitment to the Republic: "Nobody, among the conservatives who follow me, would slander me in supposing

---

<sup>205</sup> *Le Grelot*, Feb. 3, 1889.

<sup>206</sup> *Paris*, Feb. 12, 1889.

<sup>207</sup> Néré, *Le Boulangisme*, 154-156.

that I affirm the Republic in order to destroy it...I have faith in the republican idea.” He also made clear that he had no intention of restoring a purely authoritarian model: “an imperial or royal restoration would leave the nation as divided, if not more divided than it is now.”<sup>208</sup> This unequivocal profession of republican loyalty may have displeased Delahaye, but the audience’s shouts of protest that met the not-so-subtle intimation during his introduction of the general that “I do not know if it will be the Republic or the Monarchy that will profit from our common efforts” made clear the necessity of rhetoric firmly in reconciliation with the Republic.<sup>209</sup>

However, Boulanger’s republican affirmation was not the only objective of the Tours gathering. He proceeded to articulate a forceful condemnation of the government’s policies of secularization. In taking this strong stance against anticlericalism, his speech overtly offered an olive branch to conservatives and Catholics in exchange for their votes. By staking out a position on a tangible and electorally-sensitive issue, the Boulangists desired to negate the stigma of the protracted Paris campaign that had been dictated almost entirely by revolutionary rhetoric at their expense. Indeed, the terminology of Boulanger’s Tours speech drew on the revolutionary legacy to accuse the government of playing the revolutionary role while exonerating his movement from such charges. The general demanded that the current regime repudiate its “Jacobin heritage”, in reference to the religious persecution perpetrated by the Revolution a century earlier. With this rhetorical play, linking the current government’s policies of secularization to the revolutionary tradition that spawned the Terror, the Boulangists hoped to exorcise the insurrectionary demons associated with their movement and throw them upon the administration. Additionally, by referring to the “old royalist and imperialist parties” in the past

---

<sup>208</sup> « Personne, parmi les conservateurs qui me suivent, ne me fait l’injure de supposer que j’affirme la République pour la trahir...J’ai foi en l’idée républicaine », « une restauration impériale ou royale...laisserait la nation aussi divisée, plus divisée peut-être qu’elle ne l’est à cette heure. », « Le Général Boulanger à Tours », *Le Figaro*, March 18, 1889.

<sup>209</sup> « Je ne sais si ce sera la République ou la Monarchie qui profitera de nos efforts communs. », *Ibid.*

tense, Boulanger implied that he had tamed their revolutionary aspirations and subsumed them into his legitimately republican movement.<sup>210</sup>

Other Boulangist supporters and sympathizers perceived the need to adjust their rhetoric away from revolutionary invocations as well, to deal with what the opportunist press delighted in dubbing “the rather unexpected republican zeal of Monsieur Boulanger.”<sup>211</sup> Déroulède lauded the general’s oration as “clearly republican” and felt that “the ambiguity is dissipated” in regard to any rumors of monarchical conspiracy. To spell out that Boulanger’s intentions were loyal rather than rebellious, he made a direct historical analogy to a republican general during the Revolution: “One of the noblest titles of Hoche was to have been *the pacifier of the Vendée*. The most glorious ambition of General Boulanger is to be *the pacifier of France*.”<sup>212</sup> For Déroulède, ever the staunch republican nationalist, Hoche’s termination of bloody civil war and counterrevolution in order to stabilize the young Republic could be compared with an imputed desire of Boulanger to consolidate current republican institutions. Yet, the fact that Déroulède responded to a banquet designed to attract conservative support by evoking the War in the Vendée illustrated that Boulangism was still the common vessel of diametrically opposed ideologies and scattershot political tendencies.<sup>213</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Catholics were emboldened by the Tours speech because it explicitly imparted a Boulangist bulwark of support to their longstanding remonstrations against the anticlerical policies of the regime. Their press organs accordingly aimed to lend legitimacy, not revolutionary clout, to the movement. The previously steadfast Legitimist Eugene Vuillot could

---

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *Le Temps*, March 21, 1889.

<sup>212</sup> « Un des plus beaux titres de Hoche est d’avoir été *le pacificateur de la Vendée*. La plus glorieuse ambition du général Boulanger est d’être *le pacificateur de la France*. », « Le Général Boulanger et la Ligue des Patriotes », *Le Gaulois*, March 19, 1889.

<sup>213</sup> The Vendée region in Western France was the site of a royalist and Catholic counter-rebellion during the French Revolution. In the wake of its violent and often ruthless “pacification” by republican forces, the revolt came to occupy a hallowed position in conservative memory.

not ignore the republican affirmations of the general and as such espoused a clerical rapprochement with the Boulangists as the best means of achieving a reform of anticlerical policies. He traced the evolution of their movement from a “fantasy, almost a farce” to an “indeterminate instrument of opposition” to its current stage, a “party of government.”<sup>214</sup> Boulangism could no longer be sustained as a political force through revolutionary incitement; rather, its continued survival necessitated an emphasis on its willingness to work within the republican system.

Some Catholics applied this notion to its logical extreme and recommended the mobilization of an independent and electorally capable clerical party. *La Croix*, recognizing that the Tours gathering had rendered “a great tribute...to Catholic ground,” insisted that “we must name Catholic deputies with a Catholic program and trust only them.”<sup>215</sup> *L’Univers* lamented that Catholics in neighboring nations were “so well organized from an electoral point of view” in relation to their French counterparts who constituted “a mob without leaders.” It repudiated the insurrectionary aura of the “crowd” that had supplied Boulangism with so much of its mystique and menace, opting instead for the establishment of a unified political apparatus that could take advantage of Boulangist sentiment to achieve electoral success at the local level.<sup>216</sup> The prescience of these proposals would be confirmed by the papacy’s encyclical letter *Au milieu des sollicitudes* of 1892, which urged French Catholics that an acceptance of the Republic and legal political organization within it would offer the most effective means of realizing their desired reforms.

Perhaps the most telling indication of the rhetorical changes engendered by the Republic’s encounter with Boulangism thus far came from Francis Laur, himself a resolute

---

<sup>214</sup> Eugène Veillot, « La Manifestation de Tours », *L’Univers*, March 19, 1889.

<sup>215</sup> Le Moine, « Terrain Catholique », *La Croix*, March 20, 1889.

<sup>216</sup> Eugène Veillot, *L’Univers*, March 20, 1889.

Boulangist who had employed unabashedly revolutionary language during the period of Boulanger's plebiscitary successes in the summer of 1888. However, the political zeitgeist had since shifted. The general's election in Paris did not produce a revolution and his speech at Tours stressed his republican fidelity and strictly legal intentions. The official prosecution of the League of Patriots and high-profile supporters of the general had compelled Boulangists to accuse the regime itself of overstepping the bounds of legality. Cognizant of this changing dynamic, Laur confidently concluded an article in the Boulangist organ *La Presse* that prophetically announced at once the end of the revolutionary tradition in France and the newfound resilience of the republican institution:

I want to make this argument which has never been made in History: that with the Republic and universal suffrage, there is no longer need for revolution, because it is enough for a party to have with it the public opinion – that is to say, to win it over through good sense, honesty and political probity – to receive the mandate to apply its doctrines in power.<sup>217</sup>

Contrasted with his rhetoric from the previous year, Laur's discerning insight undoubtedly revealed an understanding of the transforming political culture of which he was a part. Of course, the assertion is only as good as the politician uttering it; Laur's methodology for winning over voters often revolved around his vehement anti-Semitic diatribes.<sup>218</sup> Unfortunately for him, public opinion in the upcoming elections of 1889 would unequivocally reject the Boulangist movement, and it was after this decisive electoral defeat that the inescapable implications of an ineffaceable republic began to truly dawn in the minds of political revolutionaries of all stripes. The principal reason for this failure at the polls was a simple one: less than twenty-four hours

---

<sup>217</sup> « Je veux faire cette démonstration qui n'a jamais été faite dans l'Histoire: c'est qu'avec la République et le Suffrage universel, il n'y a plus besoin de révolution, car il suffit à un parti d'avoir avec lui l'opinion publique – c'est-à-dire de la conquérir par le bon sens, l'honnêteté et la probité politique – pour recevoir le mandat d'appliquer ses doctrines au pouvoir. », Francis Laur, « La Débâcle », *La Presse*, April 1, 1889.

<sup>218</sup> Laurent Joly, « Antisémites et antisémitisme à la Chambre des députés sous la IIIe République, » *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54, 3 (July-Sept. 2007): 65.

after Laur's revelation appeared on the front page of *La Presse*, on April Fool's Day, a disguised Boulanger boarded a midnight train to Brussels, destined never to return to his beloved France.<sup>219</sup>

Laur's negation of the historical tradition of revolution in favor of a democratic approach towards political agitation typifies the pronounced changes in rhetorical strategy that transpired in the period from Boulanger's entrance into government to his victory in Paris and beyond. Through their rhetoric, Bonapartists and monarchists on the right and socialists on the left initially encouraged an understanding of Boulangism as a valid revolutionary movement that possessed the right to transcend republican legalism to replace the regime. Their appeals to history emphasized the recurring state of insurrection that had characterized the last one hundred years as the driver of political activity and reform. Defenders of the Republic renounced this attitude as dangerous for the maintenance and progress of civil society and marshaled historical memory to warn against a reengagement with the revolutionary tradition. The general's peaceful election in the capital dramatically altered the context of revolutionary invocations and demanded a new discursive mode of rhetoric aimed at suffrage rather than subversion. The political reality of an entrenched republican institution would become more apparent to its antagonizers during the coinciding Exposition Universelle and centenary of 1789, followed by the legislative elections at the end of the year, which would witness the defeat of Boulangism and provoke enduring political realignments towards new strategies of mass politics.

### **Chapter 3 – The Revolutionary Legacy and the Rhetoric of Reality**

---

<sup>219</sup> Seager, *The Boulanger Affair*, 222.

The shift away from revolutionary invocation that had characterized much of the political rhetoric during the run-up to Boulanger's triumph in Paris became more pronounced as the year went on. Weighted down by the stigmatizing rhetoric of republican defenders, the movement had announced its intention to focus on the important legislative elections that would take place in autumn. Unfortunately for the Boulangists, the period between these elections coincided with the centenary of 1789 and the Exposition Universelle, events that were full of legitimating content for the regime. The exposition swung the spotlight away from internal political divisions to instead glorify internationally the technological marvels of modernity and the cultural spectacles of empire. The government's treatment of the centenary sought to similarly reduce domestic strife and delegitimize the revolutionary impulse inherent in Boulangism. Paradoxically, it was during this period of commemoration of the French Revolution that French rhetoric came to shun direct appeals to the revolutionary tradition; Boulangists subordinated the historical imagery of the Revolution to contemporary electoral realities, conservatives emphasized their aversion to any cult of insurrection, and even the government itself critically reviewed the revolutionary legacy. With the end of the exposition came the legislative autumn elections, which would prove a resounding victory for the Republic and a wake-up call to its opponents to apply the lessons of the Boulangist failure and organize lawful, electorally-viable opposition to advance their political aims.

Alexis de Tocqueville had said, fifty years before in a different context, that “in a revolution, as in a novel, the most difficult part to invent is the end.”<sup>220</sup> Although referring to insurrectionary events in 1848, Tocqueville’s warning remained a problematic truism for the politicians of the Third Republic who desired to close the book on a century of revolution. The most obvious way to do this was to emphasize a direct progression from the ideals of the Revolution to their sanctification in the republican institutions of the current regime. During the commemoration of the centenary at Versailles, after paying homage to the principles of liberty and democracy embodied within 1789, President Carnot declared that “the foundation of this Republic is the culmination of the imperishable oeuvre that began here a century ago.” The current form of government was “the result achieved from one hundred years of political effort.”<sup>221</sup> As such, the Third Republic had not only rightfully inherited the revolutionary legacy but also perfected it, rendering any attempts to overthrow the regime as contrary to the spirit of the Revolution. This did not, of course, insinuate that further reform was unnecessary; on the contrary, the Prime Minister Tirard would give a speech after Carnot in which he affirmed that the “work of ’89 is not finished” but could only be realized with “all our patience and the help of time.” The attainment of “secure and enduring” reform must be “slow and progressive,” he argued, precluding any solution that involved “rapid and violent” revolution.<sup>222</sup> According to this rhetoric, the Third Republic had established the logical political organization bequeathed by the Revolution, fulfilling the revolutionary tradition and therefore nullifying any further manifestation of it, substituting in its place a lawful framework for continued reform.

Despite this assured rhetoric, paying deference to the glory of a revolution that had itself been notoriously gruesome was not an easy political task. To deal with the awkward obligation

---

<sup>220</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 71.

<sup>221</sup> « Discours de M. le Président de la République », *La Justice*, May 6, 1889.

<sup>222</sup> « Discours de M. Tirard », *Ibid.*

to celebrate the centenary of the seminal act of subversion while attempting to downplay the revolutionary tradition itself, the government adopted a moderate, conciliatory tone in its official promotion of the event. Carnot's speech urged "the reconciliation of all French people in the common passion of the public good."<sup>223</sup> He opened the exposition on a similar note by declaring its achievement not as the "work of a party, but the work of France."<sup>224</sup> While calling for the nation to transcend partisan divisions, he still opted to take a jab at Boulanger in condemning the notion of consolidating "the personal power of one man, whatever title he takes" as the antithesis of "the law, deliberated by the elected representatives of the people."<sup>225</sup> Yet, Carnot's dichotomy between the dangers of radical political change and the security afforded by a legalistic understanding of government, itself a republican trope repeated throughout the Boulangist crisis, clearly demanded qualification as he spoke to the nation from the once-private residence of a king who had been beheaded to the roars of a furious mob. Therein lay the conundrum facing a regime compelled to both stigmatize the insurrectionary force of Boulangism and pay homage to its own revolutionary origins.

This tension necessitated a more even-handed reflection on the events of the French Revolution. Official literature commissioned by the government for the centenary commemoration did not abstain from describing the brutal excesses of the Terror. *L'Album du centenaire*, a popular illustrated history of the Revolution co-written by a historian and a member of the ministry of public education, simultaneously expounded the exceptional nature of the revolutionary experience in 1789 while unequivocally denouncing the less savory aspects of 1793 and 1794. It openly affirmed a didactic objective to empower "the current generation and those that follow [to] deliberately continue its work, in avoiding a descent into its faults and its

---

<sup>223</sup> « Discours de M. le Président de la République », *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> « ...l'Exposition n'est pas une œuvre de parti, mais l'œuvre de la France... », « L'Ouverture de l'Exposition », *Le Figaro*, May 7, 1889.

<sup>225</sup> « Discours de M. le Président de la République », *La Justice*, May 6, 1889.

acts of violence.”<sup>226</sup> The book notably distinguished itself from other laic works of the time through its unapologetic condemnation of the revolutionaries’ persecution of Catholics. Moreover, it did not limit its historical survey to a memorial of the victims, but also critically assessed the extremism of numerous republican rebels. If Boulanger was to be charged for demagoguery in stirring seditious instincts among the people, then a revolutionary like Marat, who had proven himself quite competent at rousing popular fury and fear, deserved equal disparagement. Other republican works of the time remained silent on the defects of these characters and the benevolence of some Vendéen counter-revolutionaries.

In its totality, *L’Album du centenaire* regarded the Revolution as an essential moment in the progress of French society; nevertheless, its willingness to censure the innate immoderation of the insurrectionary impulse substantiated the moderate republican agenda to discredit any appeals to renew the revolutionary tradition.<sup>227</sup> In voting for the publication of a new edition of the renowned historian Michelet’s *Histoire de la Révolution française* on account of his anti-Jacobin outlook, the legislature sent a similar message.<sup>228</sup> Contemporary philosopher Paul Janet would conclude his own history of the Revolution, written for the centenary, with the advice to “approve the goal which is good, and condemn the means which were bad...it is necessary to be loyal to the spirit of the Revolution while reproving the revolutionary spirit.”<sup>229</sup> This summation encapsulated the strategic approach of the regime, which represented the centenary and the

---

<sup>226</sup> « que la génération actuelle et celles qui suivront puissent continuer sciemment son œuvre, en évitant de tomber dans ses fautes et dans ses violences », quoted in Christian Amalvi, « L’Impossible consensus autour de la Révolution : L’album du centenaire édité en 1889 par Désiré Lacroix et Augustin Challamel, » in *La France démocratique (combats, mentalités, symboles): mélanges offerts à Maurice Agulhon*, ed. Christophe Charle et al. (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), 260.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-264.

<sup>228</sup> Alice Gérard, *La Révolution française, mythes et interprétations (1789-1970)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), 69-70.

<sup>229</sup> « Il faut savoir à la fois approuver le but qui est bon, et condamner les moyens qui ont été mauvais. C’est ainsi qu’il faut être fidèle à l’esprit de la Révolution, tout en réprochant l’esprit révolutionnaire. », quoted in *Ibid.*, 70. Opportunist journals tended to enforce this distinction as well; see, for example, the article of J. Lemoine in *Le Matin*, May 6, 1889, where he acknowledges that “certainly, in honoring ’89, we must lament ’93.”

opening of the exposition as a nonpartisan celebration of the end of revolution rather than as an endorsement of any more of them.

This officially sanctioned centrist representation of the Revolution and its legacy was itself a source of controversy within the republican camp, which had to balance the aforementioned themes of internal reconciliation and national unity with the external political constraints of a mostly non-republican Europe, full of crowned heads and authoritarian rulers. The radical division of republicans, whose influence in the Paris municipal council was particularly strong, pushed for more explicit consecrations of their rebellious heritage. It demanded a permanent museum and monument dedicated to the Revolution to be constructed in the Tuileries Garden.<sup>230</sup> Radicals sought additionally to politicize the international exposition and proposed designs for its central edifice that included a massive guillotine and a stone pyramid replete with revolutionary figures and episodes.<sup>231</sup> The government rejected all these projects, understanding clearly that unconditional worship of the Revolution and veneration of regicide would both sour any attempts at domestic unity and offend foreign governments. Indeed, ambassadors and representatives from European nations were nevertheless conspicuously absent from the centenary celebration.<sup>232</sup> The choice of the Eiffel Tower fit the moderate agenda in representing only the technological revolutions of modernity that the Republic desired to broadcast to Europe and the world, while remaining devoid of any notable political subtext. In this way, the exigency of foreign relations provided an additional motivation for the government, emerging shaken but still sturdy from Boulanger's Paris triumph, to temper representations of the insurrectionary tradition that was its own historical birthright.

---

<sup>230</sup> Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 19.

<sup>231</sup> Roland Quinault, "The Cult of the Centenary, c.1784-1914," *Historical Research* 71, 176 (Oct. 1998): 317.

<sup>232</sup> Charles de Mazade, « Chronique de la Quinzaine », *Revue des deux mondes*, May 14, 1889.

### *Revolution and Revision*

As the regime deemphasized the divisive elements of the Revolution, monarchists, clericals, and other conservatives engaged in their own revision, refashioning themselves as the inheritors of a strictly legal, reformist tradition that had been foiled by the recklessness of republican revolutionaries. Long before the formation of the Third Republic, many monarchists, especially legitimists, had declared their categorical contempt for the entire oeuvre of the Revolution, casting it as the destruction of social harmony that had been preserved by the *ancien regime*.<sup>233</sup> This stridently anti-republican stance had already begun to appear quite outmoded before the Republic's popular image was further legitimized by the initial failure of Boulangism and the dual onset of the centenary and exposition. By the time of the commemoration, however, conservative journals felt compelled to maintain their own relevance by arguing that a lawful monarchical movement for reform in 1789 had in fact been usurped and corrupted by revolutionaries into the bloody tragedy of the Terror.

It was in this spirit of historical reinterpretation that *Le Gaulois* could qualify its blanket declaration on the eve of the Paris election that “the Revolution destroyed social virtues in this country,”<sup>234</sup> into an assessment on the centenary that “the movement of 1789 was a good movement, it is agreed; but 1789 engendered 1793...”<sup>235</sup> *Le Figaro* elaborated that the civil liberties introduced by the Revolution were “transformations on which everyone was agreed and for which the monarchy, clergy, and nobility faithfully took the initiative,” and it was only after “these peaceful achievements, necessary and irrevocable” that revolutionaries sullied the

---

<sup>233</sup> See Martin Simpson, “Taming the Revolution? Legitimists and the Centenary of 1789,” *English Historical Review* 120, 486 (April 2005): especially 340-344.

<sup>234</sup> « ...la Révolution a détruit en ce pays les vertus sociales... », « Aux braves gens », Arthur Meyer, *Le Gaulois*, Jan. 27, 1889.

<sup>235</sup> « Le mouvement de 1789 était un beau mouvement, d'accord ; mais 1789 engendra 1793... », Jean Véric, « Les Ambassadeurs », *Le Gaulois*, May 5, 1889.

endeavor and sank the nation into violence and terror.<sup>236</sup> Several conservative newspapers underlined their commitment to this means of legal reformism by publishing lists of grievances pertaining to current policy that imitated the structure of the *cahiers de doléances* presented in the Estates-General, some of which were welcomed by otherwise skeptical Opportunist journals.<sup>237</sup> It was necessary to rejuvenate, through such *cahiers*, “one hundred years later, the liberal reforming movement of 1789... which showed no hostility against the monarchy,” in the words of the royalist *Le Soleil*.<sup>238</sup> *La Croix* reported on regional manifestations of “the true centenary,” in which assemblies were convened to chronicle Catholic grievances against current policy.<sup>239</sup>

The bishop Freppel, in a work penned on the occasion of the centenary, expounded a blatant apology for the *ancien régime*, repeatedly underscoring not only the grisly behavior of republican revolutionaries but also the willingness of the monarchical establishment to enact political reforms through peaceful and legal means. With considerable reactionary nostalgia for the monarchic reign, he avowed that “never, in any time or any country, had one seen on the part of a government or political order as much generosity and good will for the peaceful transformation of a social state.” Yet, he harbored no illusions as to the stability of the Republic and did not call for a restoration. Instead, he chastised the cult of the Revolution that constituted much of French historical memory, urging the nation to “break resolutely with the Revolution

---

<sup>236</sup> « Mais, après ces transformations sur lesquelles tout le monde était d'accord, et dont la monarchie, le clergé, la noblesse prenaient loyalement l'initiative ; après ces conquêtes pacifiques, nécessaires et irrévocables, que d'erreurs, de déviations et d'échecs ! », Ph. de Grandlieu, « Centenaire et Exposition », *Le Figaro*, May 5, 1889.

<sup>237</sup> *Le Temps*, May 11, 1889. It is telling that conservative journals opted to dismiss the actual tensions that existed between the monarchy, clergy, and aristocracy in 1789, creating instead the illusion of a cohesive conservative order that was diplomatic and reformative.

<sup>238</sup> « Les Cahiers de 1889 », *Le Soleil*, May 10, 1889.

<sup>239</sup> « Le Vrai Centenaire », *La Croix*, March 20, 1889. Meetings of this kind took place in conservative areas all over France during the year of the centenary. For more descriptions of explicitly Catholic gatherings, see, for instance, *L'Univers*, May 16, 1889.

and pick up again with wisdom and steadfastness the reforming movement of 1789.”<sup>240</sup> This rhetorical approach even penetrated the centenary commemoration proceedings themselves in the speech of the bishop of Versailles. In addressing Carnot, he stated that “our fathers of the clergy...shared this desire for reform that seized the entirety of France. It did not take long for them to become the victims...”<sup>241</sup> In adopting this discourse, conservatives affirmed a resistance to the destabilizing revolutionary tradition and a capacity for political change through legalistic and reformatory means. In doing so, they hoped to signal their own continued importance in a regime committed to ending the insurrectionary cycle of the last century.

### *Who Cares For Boulanger?*

While conservatives tailored their image to this seemingly post-revolutionary reality, the coincidence of the centenary and exposition with the Boulangist threat afforded the republican press ample rhetorical currency with which to laud the legitimacy of the Republic and highlight the modern bankruptcy of the revolutionary tradition. *Le Temps* reported that public attention appeared to be bypassing politics and instead concentrating on the exposition, and admonished those who would ignore this magnificent spectacle and instead opt to “reopen the era of revolutions that we hoped to be closed forever.”<sup>242</sup> Pelletan took the opportunity to virulently attack Boulangists, declaring it “stupefying to think that there are people who dream of celebrating the centenary of 1789 by the abdication of the country in favor of one man.”<sup>243</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> « Jamais, à aucune époque ni dans aucun pays, on n’avait vu, de la part d’un gouvernement ou d’un ordre politique, autant de générosité et de bonne volonté pour la transformation pacifique d’un état social... Il faut rompre résolument avec la Révolution, et reprendre avec sagesse et fermeté le mouvement réformateur de 1789. », Monseigneur Freppel, *La Révolution française à propos du centenaire de 1789* (Paris: A. Roger et F. Chernoviz, 1889), 10, 110.

<sup>241</sup> « Nos pères du clergé de France étaient, il y a cent ans, à l’ouverture des Etats généraux, partageant ce désir de réformes, qui s’était alors emparé de la France entière. Ils ne tardèrent pas à en devenir les victimes... », « Paris au jour le jour », *Le Figaro*, May 7, 1889.

<sup>242</sup> « Allez-vous rouvrir l’ère des révolutions, que nous espérions fermée à jamais ? », *Le Temps*, May 12, 1889.

<sup>243</sup> Camille Pelletan, « Le Centenaire », *La Justice*, May 5, 1889.

Charles de Mazade, a regular contributor to the *Revue des deux mondes* and a vocal criticizer of Opportunist politics, would cynically write a few days before the opening of the exposition about the ultimate failure of the Revolution, which had “effectively established nothing” and “created only an indefinite revolutionary state in which our country still struggles, oscillating endlessly between all regimes.”<sup>244</sup> Yet, it only took the experience of a few days of the festivities to oblige Mazade to recant his previous skepticism and aver that “if something can prove, after one hundred years, that the revolution is finished, that the passions that claim to continue it still are from now on fictitious, it is the calm with which everything happened” at the exposition. The journalist confidently asserted that “in reality, it is certain that the mass of the population, even in Paris, is not for revolutionary demonstrations or attempts to rehabilitate sinister times.”<sup>245</sup> The pacifying influence of the event on domestic affairs would by no means eliminate dissent against the Republic (Mazade and many others would remain outspoken antagonists of policy), but it clearly lent credibility to the regime and deflated much of Boulangism’s subversive thrust.<sup>246</sup>

Although Boulangist invective against the regime did not abate during the opening ceremonies of the centenary and exposition, their rhetorical attacks could not conceal the fact that their political exposure was indeed diminishing in the face of the international spectacle. An American reporting on the exposition, rejoicing in the contagious exuberance of Paris, asked hypothetically, “Who cares for M. Ferry or General Boulanger? Hurrah! For the Eiffel Tower!”<sup>247</sup>

---

<sup>244</sup> « elle n’a rien fondé réellement, elle n’a créé qu’un état révolutionnaire indéfini où notre pays se débat encore, oscillant sans cesse entre tous les régimes... », Charles de Mazade, « Chronique de la Quinzaine », *Revue des deux mondes*, April 30, 1889.

<sup>245</sup> « ...si quelque chose peut prouver, après cent ans, que la révolution est finie, que les passions qui prétendent encore la continuer sont désormais factices, c’est le calme avec lequel tout s’est passé...En réalité, il est certain que la masse de la population, même à Paris, n’est pas aux manifestations révolutionnaires, aux tentatives de réhabilitation des époques sinistres. », Charles de Mazade, « Chronique de la Quinzaine », *Revue des deux mondes*, May 14, 1889.

<sup>246</sup> Silverman, “The 1889 Exhibition,” 78. After the autumn election results had come in, contemporary observers would link the republican triumph to the massive success of the exposition. Even its commissioner, the Radical Édouard Lockroy, admitted that “the Exposition contributed in a large measure to the success in the 1889 elections.”

<sup>247</sup> These were the words of American writer Edyth Kirkwood, quoted in Jill Jonnes, *Eiffel’s Tower: And the World’s Fair Where Buffalo Bill Beguiled Paris, the Artists Quarreled, and Thomas Edison Became a Count* (New York:

Yet, tourists were not the only ones to note the distractive element of the proceedings.

Bonapartist-*cum*-Boulangist Albert Verly recalled his frustration in the countryside, where the voters “forgot even the name of Boulanger, caring only for the marvels of the centenary of the Revolution.”<sup>248</sup> A friend of the general noted similarly that Boulanger’s media presence had dwindled, as “the newspapers, completely absorbed by the wonders of the Exposition, no longer speak of him.”<sup>249</sup>

In this light, the rhetorical stress on a final judgment to be delivered by the voters in autumn served to gloss over the marginalized position of the Boulangists in the present. Their utter contempt for the regime, it seemed, could not be truly realized until this massive display of the Republic had concluded and the legitimate space for political change, the elections, had been initiated. While *L’Intransigeant*, struggling to maintain relevance on the eve of the centenary, unconvincingly asserted that “the government is very much to be pitied, indeed, on account of the continuous troubles aroused against it by Boulangism,”<sup>250</sup> the prominent Boulangist Alfred Naquet confirmed that “France will avoid troubling the Exposition.”<sup>251</sup> The diehard Déroutède, vigilant to preserve France’s prestige among its European allies and enemies, called for a temporary truce and announced that his league would celebrate the centenary and “refrain, until the legal opening of the next electoral period, from any demonstration that could compromise the success of the Exposition Universelle.”<sup>252</sup> The Boulangist claim was now entirely staked on the

---

Viking, 2009), 200.

<sup>248</sup> « Dans les campagnes que je traversais on oubliait jusqu’au nom de Boulanger, pour ne s’occuper que des merveilles du centenaire de la Révolution... », Albert Verly, *Le Général Boulanger et la conspiration monarchique* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1893), 78.

<sup>249</sup> « Les journaux, tout aux merveilles de l’Exposition, ne parlent plus de lui. », Marie Quinton (pseudonym of Chincholle), quoted in Garrigues, 274.

<sup>250</sup> « Le gouvernement est bien à plaindre, vraiment, à cause des tracas continuels que lui suscite le boulangisme, et cela, à la veille de la célébration solennelle du Centenaire de 1789. », « A La Suite », *L’Intransigeant*, May 5, 1889.

<sup>251</sup> « La France évitera de troubler l’Exposition », Alfred Naquet, « Le Centenaire », *La Presse*, May 8, 1889.

<sup>252</sup> « Les patriotes de la Ligue fêteraient quand même le centenaire de la Révolution française et s’abstiendraient, jusqu’à l’ouverture légale de la prochaine période électorale, de toute manifestation de nature à compromettre le succès de l’Exposition universelle. », « A Travers la Presse », *Le Gaulois*, May 5, 1889.

decisive autumn elections, while in the meantime the eyes of the world turned to the spectacle unfolding in Paris.

Boulangist rhetoric during this moment thus balanced appeals to the insurrectionary spirit of the Revolution with calm assurances that democratic vindication of their cause would arrive legally once the exposition was concluded. Naquet encapsulated the approach in claiming first that “we are much more than them the sons of 1789” and then that “it is not today that France truly celebrates the Revolution. That will be in October with the defeat of the parliamentarians.”<sup>253</sup> This method of directly correlating the continuation of the revolutionary project to the electoral process was ubiquitous in Boulangist rhetoric. Another prominent Boulangist affirmed that France “passionately wants the Republic but will not accept an oligarchic Republic,” and as such, “the voters will soon march to the ballot” to pronounce their verdict.<sup>254</sup> *L’Intransigeant* warned sitting politicians that they would have “their own Estates-General, but in October,” when “France will enunciate through her representatives” her dissatisfaction with the regime.<sup>255</sup> By analogizing Boulangists to the Estates-General that had convened a century before, the journal sought to simultaneously imbue the movement with revolutionary enthusiasm and electoral methodology while clearly delineating a truce until the elections. For a public too preoccupied for politics amidst the commencement of the extraordinarily attended exposition, this was a wise move.

### *Celebrating the Fête Nationale*

---

<sup>253</sup> « Ce n’est point aujourd’hui que la France célèbre vraiment la Révolution. Ce sera en octobre, par l’écrasement des parlementaires... », Alfred Naquet, « Le Centenaire », *La Presse*, May 8, 1889.

<sup>254</sup> « Elle veut passionnément la République, mais elle n’accepte pas une République oligarchique... les électeurs marcheront bientôt au scrutin... », A. Laisant, « “Constance” et Vertu », *La Presse*, May 5, 1889.

<sup>255</sup> « Ils auront, eux aussi, leur États généraux, mais en Octobre, et la France leur fera dire par ses mandataires... », Edmond Bazire, « Le 5 Mai », *L’Intransigeant*, May 6, 1889.

Another republican centenary embedded in the exposition, that of the storming of the Bastille on July 14, again posed the problem of revolutionary representation to the government, which sought to tone down its historic status as a day of bloody revolution in order to delegitimize further insurrectionary activity. This process had already been set in motion in 1880 when the event was officially proclaimed as a national holiday, codifying its commemoration as a sanctioned manifestation of pageantry and patriotism rather than revolution.<sup>256</sup> Initially, the regime observed the day with a modest military celebration for units stationed in Paris. It was in fact Boulanger who had transformed it in 1886 into a full-scale review and parade in the imperial style, bringing units from all of France to the Longchamps stadium for an enormous display of consecrated pomp.<sup>257</sup> The review of 1889, following this precedent, now worked against his political cause; the military ceremony emphasized national pride and solidarity while reducing the discursive space for appeals to the seditious impulse that had actually informed the events of July 14, 1789. The Opportunist press lauded the legitimacy conferred by the celebration upon the government, which had recently appeared “to be on the verge of giving up its precious achievements” to Boulangist subversion after “so many struggles and painful convulsions.” In light of the massive reception of “the crowd, so large and so reverent,” however, confidence in the Republic had been assured and strengthened.<sup>258</sup> Republicans who had scorned the unruly mobs of Boulangist supporters in the past could readily pay lip service to the legitimating influence of the masses in this state-endorsed context of national jubilation.

---

<sup>256</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 271. For more information on the official establishment of the holiday, see Rosemonde Sanson, *Les 14 juillet, fête et conscience nationale, 1789-1975* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976).

<sup>257</sup> Albert Boime, *Revelation of Modernism: Responses to Cultural Crises in Fin-de-Siècle Painting* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 66-67.

<sup>258</sup> « Est-ce que notre France, est-ce que notre démocratie, enfin maîtresse d'elle-même après tant de luttes et de convulsions douloureuses, serait sur le point de renoncer à tant de précieuses conquêtes?...et c'est pour manifester la même confiance républicaine qu'une foule si nombreuse et si respectueuse se pressait sur le passage de M. Carnot... », *Le Temps*, July 15-16, 1889.

The Boulangist apparatus and journals had to work within this framework by affirming the national character of the event and emphasizing their respect of democratic institutions, all without mitigating their harsh criticisms of the regime. *L'Intransigeant* extolled the symbolic glory of the holiday and insisted that it “will eclipse all its precursors.”<sup>259</sup> Understanding full well that to undermine the celebration would be to appear anti-patriotic, the journal pledged that “this fourteenth of July promises to be...peaceful. Paris has no motive...to disturb order and turn the Fête Nationale into an insurrection or at the very least a riot.” It called for patience until the autumn elections and affirmed that “the ballot is a more dependable weapon than the gun.”<sup>260</sup> The coincidence of the celebration with the government’s interdiction of multiple candidatures (which effectively foiled Boulanger’s ability to stage another plebiscite) disheartened Laur, who lamented that “the ballot, this sacred voting paper that should replace the revolutionary cartridge” was being dismantled by the regime.<sup>261</sup> Polemicists now seemed hesitant to overtly glorify insurrectionary action; when they did, it was always accompanied by qualifications of peaceful and legal protest, as in Rochefort and Laur’s channeling of the martial imagery of insurgency into the lawful act of voting.

The proceedings of a meeting of high-profile Boulangists on July 14<sup>th</sup> illustrated how the movement’s attempt to legitimate itself to voters required a legitimization of the electoral milieu in which it was competing as the only acceptable sphere of political action. A letter from Boulanger, read aloud to the attendees, confirmed that “the struggle is peaceful” and that voters desired “legal and peaceable reform of parliamentary institutions.” He repudiated any imputed

---

<sup>259</sup> « ...est-il permis de croire que la fête éclipsera « toutes ses devancières. », Ph. D., « La Soirée du 13 juillet », *L'Intransigeant*, July 15, 1889.

<sup>260</sup> « Cette journée du 14 juillet s’annonce comme devant être ce qu’elle a été les années précédentes, c’est-à-dire pacifique. Paris n’a aucun motif...à troubler l’ordre et à changer la Fête nationale en insurrection, ou tout au moins en émeute...le bulletin de vote est une arme plus sûre que le fusil. », « Mesures policières », *L'Intransigeant*, July 15, 1889.

<sup>261</sup> « ...le bulletin de vote, ce bulletin sacré qui devait remplacer la cartouche révolutionnaire n’aura plus aucun sens suivant la latitude... », Francis Laur, « La loi de la peur », *La Presse*, July 17, 1889.

revolutionary aspirations of his movement by asserting that France “wants to close this century of unrest by the establishment of a national Republic,” and that the termination of this unstable insurrectionary tradition necessitated the ousting of those currently holding power, “men of order who applaud revolutionary measures and tribunals of exception.”<sup>262</sup> Déroulède’s declaration that “they have placed us outside the law, but we will stay within the law” likewise sought to dissipate the stigma of sedition that continued to weigh heavily on the Boulangist effort.<sup>263</sup> Revolutionary language, however, had not entirely disappeared from the rhetorical playbook, as demonstrated by George Laguerre’s wishful contention that “the French Revolution is not yet finished, its cycle is not yet accomplished...we are on the eve of a new government.” Yet, even this explicit call to a renewal of insurrectionary fervor was clearly bounded by “the rising torrent of universal suffrage” that would rectify the situation without violence. Far from advocating street riots or other revolutionary maneuvers, Laguerre opted to “let the good citizens say nothing. Let them only vote.”<sup>264</sup>

While Boulangist orators emphasized legitimacy and legality, they clearly pined for the popularity and dynamism that characterized the heyday of the movement. It was in this spirit that the band followed “La Marseillaise” with “En revenant de la revue,” that famed sing-along which had immortalized Boulanger’s widespread appeal at the Fête Nationale three years prior.<sup>265</sup> No stranger to the mobilizing power of spectacle, the general staged his own banquet in London on the eve of July 14<sup>th</sup>, complete with military music, the flight of a hot air balloon and even an

<sup>262</sup> « Mais la lutte est pacifique...hommes d’ordre qui applaudissent aux mesures révolutionnaires et aux tribunaux d’exception...un million de suffrages a donné le mandat de poursuivre la reforme légale et pacifique des institutions parlementaires...elle veut clore un siècle de troubles par l’établissement d’une République nationale... », « Banquet de Belleville », *L’Intransigeant*, July 15, 1889. His allusion to the “revolutionary measures” of the government refers to the official condemnation *in absentia* of Rochefort, Dillon, and himself for treason.

<sup>263</sup> « On nous a mis hors de la loi, nous resterons dans la loi ! », « Manifestation révisionniste », *La Presse*, July 15, 1889.

<sup>264</sup> « La Révolution française n’est pas terminée, son cycle n’est pas achevé...Nous sommes à la veille d’un nouveau gouvernement...Mais le flot montant du suffrage universel emportera tout cela. Que les bons citoyens ne disent rien ; qu’ils votent seulement. », *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

exhibition of monkeys.<sup>266</sup> Absent from France and eclipsed by the exposition, Boulanger nonetheless took the opportunity to present his name in 80 constituencies (multiple candidatures of a single candidate still being permitted at this time) during the passing elections of July 23. Elected in only twelve of these districts, the maneuver exposed the weakness of his movement and served as a prelude to the greater defeat in the general elections.<sup>267</sup>

### *The Elections Approach*

The final months of the exposition heralded the autumn elections, during which the spectacle's influence on the populace continued to be exploited by the government and grudgingly acknowledged by Boulangists and other electoral opponents. About a month before the polls opened, the regime organized a massive banquet that hosted approximately 15,000 mayors from various regions of the country.<sup>268</sup> In unifying the elected mayoral body in Paris, republicans hoped to highlight the discrepancy between their image of a thriving representative democracy and Boulangist accusations of an elite parliamentary cabal. One Radical christened the banquet as a "triumph of democracy" and evidence that the Republic was "a vigorous provincial democracy," capable of reform to "create a new order."<sup>269</sup> It was no coincidence either that the last public manifestation of the centenary was scheduled for the day before the elections.<sup>270</sup> On this occasion, a statue entitled *Triumph of the Republic* was unveiled at the Place de la Nation, yet it was still a preliminary plaster model; the regime evidently had little desire to

---

<sup>266</sup> Garrigues, 276.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>268</sup> Angenot, *Le Centenaire*, 33. For a pictorial depiction of the scope of the event, see *L'Illustration*, Aug. 21, 1889.

<sup>269</sup> « une triomphe de la démocratie », Lissagaray, *La Bataille*, Aug. 18, 1889; « une vigoureuse démocratie provinciale capable de créer un ordre nouveau », *La Bataille*, Aug. 19, 1889.

<sup>270</sup> Pascal Ory, « Le Centenaire de la Révolution française : la preuve par 89 », in *Les Lieux de mémoire: 1. la République*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 524.

wait for the finished product and squander this opportunity.<sup>271</sup> The statue's announcement of republican victory was also premature and its propaganda content was recognized and criticized by rival journals. *L'Intransigeant* continued to throw the mantle of illegality upon the regime in lamenting that "the centenary of the great Revolution has been altered by their hands into an instrument of combat against democracy, and this sacred heritage has become the prey of political peddlers." Yet, it held out hope that the inauguration of the statue "will inevitably lose its august significance by transforming into an electoral demonstration."<sup>272</sup> *Le Figaro* readily perceived the motive for the statue, noting that it "appears at a critical moment" for the Republic.<sup>273</sup>

Everybody understood the crucial nature of the elections, from the Boulangists who had been patiently waiting for their arrival throughout the centenary and exposition to the many republican commentators who perceived their subtext as a definitive referendum on the republican form of government. This was not a new rhetorical strategy for Opportunist and Radical journals that had drawn a similarly categorical line during the January election between Republic and reaction. "Everyone is in agreement," *Le Matin* declared, that a republican victory would be "a popular consecration that would impose upon the country the government of the Republic for a long time." On the other hand, a Boulangist victory would "without a doubt, result in the rise of a new order of things and would be the signal of a reaction."<sup>274</sup> Radicals

---

<sup>271</sup> Gildea, *The Past in French History*, 19. For a physical depiction of the statue, see the front page illustration of *Le Petit Parisien*, Sept. 22, 1889.

<sup>272</sup> « Le Centenaire de la grande Révolution s'est transformé entre leurs mains en un instrument de combat contre la démocratie, et cet héritage sacré est devenu la proie des vendeurs de la politique...L'inauguration du monument de la République, avec de tels hommes, perdra fatalement son auguste signification en se transformant en une manifestation électorale. », « Inauguration Électorale », *L'Intransigeant*, Sept. 22, 1889.

<sup>273</sup> « ...l'inauguration du monument se présente dans un moment critique... », Albert Wolff, « *Courier de Paris* », *Le Figaro*, Sept. 20, 1889.

<sup>274</sup> « Tout le monde est d'accord, en effet, que s'il donne la victoire au parti républicain, dans les circonstances actuelles, ce sera pour la République, de la part de la nation, la consécration la plus éclatante – sorte de 'sacre' populaire qui imposerait pour longtemps au pays le gouvernement de la République...le résultat du scrutin d'aujourd'hui aurait sans doute pour conséquence l'avènement d'un nouvel ordre de choses et serait le signal d'une réaction...cette lutte électorale homérique... », « Avant la Bataille », *Le Matin*, Sept. 22, 1889.

likewise approached this “Homeric electoral struggle”<sup>275</sup> with militant enthusiasm, granting that contemporary parliamentary institutions were far from perfect but clarifying that “voters are first going to choose between the Republic and the reaction.”<sup>276</sup> Other observers who harbored less loyalty to the present administration also admitted that the elections implied a kind of final judgment. *Le Figaro* understood them to be a threat to the Republic.<sup>277</sup> The fervent royalist reporter Auguste Boucher considered the vote an appraisal not only of individual politicians but of the political establishment as a whole, and contended that “we shall know on the evening of September 22 [the first round of elections] whether the Republic has survived.”<sup>278</sup>

Boulangists and other opponents of the regime sought to avoid this familiar republican tactic of insurrectionary stigmatization, and thus propagated campaign rhetoric that first and foremost affirmed the Republic and their desired legal means to reform it. Mermeix belittled the anti-Boulangist rhetoric so unabashedly employed against his cause, assuring voters that “whatever the Opportunists and ex-Radicals say, the existence of the Republic is not at issue.”<sup>279</sup> Other Boulangists shifted their principal focus from appeals to revise the constitution to tirades against the current administration.<sup>280</sup> Déroulède, along with other high-profile Boulangists, published an appeal to members of the now-defunct League of Patriots, urging that “the day of September 22 must be a great day of peaceful revolution, legal protest and popular emancipation.”<sup>281</sup>

---

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> « Les électeurs vont d’abord choisir entre la République et la réaction. », Paul Degouy, « Coup d’œil d’ensemble », *La Justice*, Sept. 20, 1889.

<sup>277</sup> « Demain, vingt-quatre heures avant les élections qui menacent la République... », Albert Wolff, « Courrier de Paris », *Le Figaro*, Sept. 20, 1889.

<sup>278</sup> Auguste Boucher, “Chronique politique,” *Le Correspondant*, CLVI (Sept. 10, 1889), 985, quoted in Seager, 233.

<sup>279</sup> *La Cocarde*, Sept. 7, 1889.

<sup>280</sup> Seager, *The Boulangier Affair*, 233.

<sup>281</sup> « Il faut que la journée du 22 septembre soit une grande journée de révolution pacifique, de protestation légale, d’émancipation populaire. », « Appel aux anciens membres de la Ligue des Patriotes », *L’Intransigeant*, Sept. 23, 1889.

Conservatives of various affiliations echoed this rhetoric of appeasement and reconciliation. Meyer affirmed in *Le Gaulois* that the country was “weary of revolutions” and yearned to “legally arrive at a restituting government.”<sup>282</sup> In the days leading up to the 22<sup>nd</sup>, *Le Figaro* editor Francis Magnard repeatedly stressed that conservatives must dispense with revolutionary fantasies in favor of lawful opposition, concisely reminding them that “this is about making an evolution, not a revolution.” Regardless of the electoral verdict, he insisted that “it is peacefully, legally, that conservatives... will be able to attempt to regain lost ground” in the Republic.<sup>283</sup> The *Union libérale*, a grouping of conservatives and moderate republicans formed only a few months earlier, represented a tangible iteration of this strategy; in appealing to “all those who are weary of unrest, revolutions and crises,” its election manifesto repudiated compromise with revolutionary instigators and advocated constitutional opposition on republican grounds.<sup>284</sup> *Le Gaulois* was able to shelf, at least temporarily, its devout monarchical convictions to express solidarity with this “republican concentration.”<sup>285</sup> Even the intractable Cassagnac’s rhetoric, like that of many others associated with the Boulangist cause, had been effectively emasculated since the movement attained its apogee in January. He felt compelled to suppress his revulsion of the republican form by averring that “our concern is not with the Republic itself but with the men of the Republic”<sup>286</sup> and repudiating the “revolutionary” label foisted upon him by republican journals.<sup>287</sup>

---

<sup>282</sup> « ... parce qu’elle est lasse des révolutions et qu’elle veut arriver légalement à un gouvernement réparateur. », Arthur Meyer, « Le Rôle de M. Carnot », *Le Gaulois*, Sept. 21, 1889.

<sup>283</sup> « ... il n’est pas inutile de répéter qu’il s’agit aujourd’hui de faire une Evolution et non une Révolution. », Francis Magnard, « Échos », *Le Figaro*, Sept. 22, 1889.

<sup>284</sup> « ... [que] tous ceux qui sont las des agitations, des révolutions et des crises, y puissent trouver leur place. », « Bulletin du Jour », *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, Sept. 20, 1889.

<sup>285</sup> « Que la concentration républicaine commence ! », « A Travers La Presse », *Le Gaulois*, Sept. 21, 1889.

<sup>286</sup> *L’Autorité*, Sept. 20, 1889, quoted in Seager, *The Boulanger Affair*, 233.

<sup>287</sup> « Les journaux de ce matin », *Le Matin*, Sept. 20, 1889.

As the seditious impulse associated with Boulangist rhetoric faded in the face of this ubiquitous lip service to the Republic, strategies of electoral mobilization curiously juxtaposed revolutionary imagery and voting mentality in their appeals to poll-goers. Ranging from written entreaties in journals to popular songs and anecdotes, these means of “getting out the vote” channeled the memory of past insurrectionary dissent into the political and institutional parameters of a mass electoral system. Rochefort wrote that he recalled hearing voters in Toulouse march to the ballot box to cries of the old revolutionary slogan, “down with the thieves!”<sup>288</sup> During the campaign preceding the elections, Boulangist street peddlers crooned the “Marseillaise boulangiste”: “To the polls, citizens! Let’s vote for one name! Let’s vote for Boulanger!”<sup>289</sup> An illustration in the satirical Boulangist journal *La Bombe*, appearing on the day of the Fête Nationale, portrayed Boulanger leading a charge on the “parliamentary Bastille,” but with his cannon emblazoned with the words “universal suffrage.” Underneath the hopeful auspices of a radiant rising sun labeled “Elections of 1889,” Boulanger orders his troops: “Forward, voters, forward!”<sup>290</sup> *Le Gaulois* printed “songs of the candidate” on its front page, which exalted the singular power of the vote and the duty of the responsible citizen to cast his ballot, all within the bounds of rhyming four-line stanzas. “Shame to he who will not vote,” the sing-along declared, as “posterity watches you closely.” The last verse concluded on a seemingly seditious note:

“Not to vote is blasphemy;  
voting is the crowning achievement.  
So vote always, and vote truly  
to raze the government!”<sup>291</sup>

<sup>288</sup> « Décapitation », *L’Intransigeant*, Sept. 25, 1889.

<sup>289</sup> Garrigues, *Le Général Boulanger*, 298.

<sup>290</sup> « La Prise de la Bastille », *La Bombe*, July 14, 1889. On the same day, a similar drawing appeared in another Boulangist journal, *Le Pilon*, with the same words of “universal suffrage” engraved in the general’s cannon.

<sup>291</sup> « Honte à qui n’aura pas voté ! La postérité vous épie, Songez à la postérité ! Ne pas voter, c’est le blasphème ; Voter, c’est le couronnement. Votez donc toujours et quand-même, Pour raser le gouvernement ! », Pif-Paf, « Les Chants du candidat », *Le Gaulois*, Sept. 20, 1889.

The journal, by deftly and directly linking the Catholic and monarchical underpinnings of counter-revolutionary imagery to the legal right and duty to vote, sought to mobilize its clientele and reduce abstentions. The royalist Cornély, who in the wake of Boulanger's victory in Paris had threatened street riots against the government from the front page of *Le Gaulois*, now employed a maritime analogy in which his vote-casting was akin to "putting [his] hand on the rudder of France herself" to steer her away from political mismanagement. His warning that "a voter is guilty when he doesn't vote"<sup>292</sup> was a common one, appearing in other journals such as the Opportunist *La République française*, which transformed the right to vote into a responsibility: "no abstentions! No one has the right to lose interest in the struggle, no one has the right to desert."<sup>293</sup> *La Justice* implored Paris to "signify by its choices that it has stayed loyal to its old revolutionary past," at once evoking the historical and ideological heritage of republican memory in the capital while affixing it to the obligation to vote.<sup>294</sup> All these appeals to vote, divested of genuine insurrectionary incitement and yet aimed at the citizens of a country in which revolution had essentially been the status quo for a century, thus blended the imagery of revolt with the reality of contemporary electoral politics.

### *The Death of Boulangism*

The undeniable victory delivered to the republicans in both tours of the election provided them with a platform to declare the demise of Boulangism and the revolutionary instincts of its adherents, while simultaneously emphasizing the space for legal opposition within the Republic.

---

<sup>292</sup> « ...en serrant dans mon portefeuille ma carte électorale qui va me servir tout à l'heure, que je mettais la main sur le gouvernail de la France elle-même...j'estime qu'un électeur est coupable quand il s'abstient. », J. Cornély, « Ma Carte Électorale », *Le Matin*, Sept. 22, 1889.

<sup>293</sup> « Surtout, pas d'abstentions ! Personne n'a le droit de se désintéresser de la lutte, personne n'a le droit de désertier. », « Les journaux de ce matin », *Le Matin*, Sept. 21, 1889.

<sup>294</sup> « ...de signifier par ses choix qu'il est resté fidèle à son vieux passé révolutionnaire. », S. Pichon, « Aux Parisiens », *La Justice*, Sept. 21, 1889.

*Le Journal des débats* revealed a palpable sense of republican relief at the result, speculating that had votes gone the other way, “we could have been thrown into full-fledged revolution,” into “a period of mayhem, anarchy, civil war.”<sup>295</sup> The re-elected Yves Guyot saluted the voters of his arrondissement for upholding the Republic against its enemies and advocating “politics of order and progress” and “abidance by the law for all.”<sup>296</sup> Ferry, who had in fact been defeated by a Boulangist, could still applaud the defeat of the movement of “radical ideas and revolutionary passions.”<sup>297</sup> “Boulangism is dead,” announced Pelletan; now, “we can look back and write its history.”<sup>298</sup>

However, unsatisfied with solely scoring political points against Boulangist opponents, republican journals also affirmed their electoral triumph by entreating adversaries of the regime to reject revolutionary ambitions and instead organize legal opposition within the Republic. *Le Temps* asserted that “the only means for a sincere conservative to engage in conservative politics is to make himself republican” and jettison “the dynastic element that has by necessity become a revolutionary element.”<sup>299</sup> *Le Matin* likewise chastised rightists, those who had “stood outside republican law” and thrown in their lot with the diverse insurrectionary tendencies of Boulangism. If they would only task themselves to develop constitutional opposition, “they could some day aspire to make law within the Republic.”<sup>300</sup> Pelletan stressed the need for

---

<sup>295</sup> « Elle aurait pu nous jeter en pleine révolution...le point de départ d’une période de troubles, d’anarchie, de guerre civile. », Jules Dietz, « Élections Législatives de 1889 », *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, Sept. 24, 1889.

<sup>296</sup> « Vous avez...affirmé sur mon nom votre volonté de maintenir la République contre la coalition de tous ses ennemis. Vous voulez une politique d’ordre et de progrès...vous voulez, avec l’immense majorité de la France, le respect de la loi pour tous... », « Chronique Electorale », *La Justice*, Sept. 27, 1889.

<sup>297</sup> « ...en apparence au profit d’idées radicales et passions révolutionnaires...Le boulangisme...est écrasé. », « Paris au jour le jour », *Le Figaro*, Sept. 29, 1889.

<sup>298</sup> « Le boulangisme est mort...nous pouvons regarder en arrière, et faire son histoire. », Camille Pelletan, « Demain », *La Justice*, Sept. 26, 1889.

<sup>299</sup> « ...cette vérité qu’aujourd’hui le seul moyen pour un conservateur sincère de faire de la politique conservatrice, c’est de se faire républicain, c’est-à-dire d’éliminer de sa politique l’élément dynastique, devenu, par la force des choses, un élément révolutionnaire. », *Le Temps*, Oct. 2, 1889.

<sup>300</sup> « Ils se tenaient hors de la loi républicaine ; s’ils sont sages, ils peuvent aspirer un jour à faire la loi dans le République. », Henri des Houx, « Qui Perd Gagne », *Le Matin*, Sept. 26, 1889.

republican reforms in the upcoming parliament to assuage the discontent that had spawned the multifaceted movement in the first place.<sup>301</sup> It was in this post-election climate that the conciliatory sentiments articulated by Carnot at one of the final ceremonies of the exposition, in which he called “concord between citizens” to realize “practical and fruitful politics,” took on new relevance as instruction to would-be revolutionaries.<sup>302</sup>

Although *L’Intransigeant*, *La Presse*, and other devoted Boulangist journals also claimed victory in whatever terms they could muster, nobody was fooled, least of all those on the right whose rhetoric followed the republican example. In some cases, this rallying to the Republic and commitment to lawful opposition stemmed from an earnest desire to break with the dynastic determinism and obstinacy of monarchism and Bonapartism. *Le Figaro* ran a front-page article entitled “Let’s profit from the lesson,” in which even the author, self-described as “the most monarchist and most reactionary of men,” stated the unpleasant truth that “the people are attached to the Republic, we must come to terms with it.”<sup>303</sup> Magnard interpreted the election as proof of the nation’s “hesitation to throw itself into the unknown” and repeated his calls for a new strategy that “obviously involves a de facto submission to the Republic.”<sup>304</sup> Mazade criticized conservatives for supporting insurrectionary adventures and called on them to “become themselves once again...to simply be conservatives” on legal grounds which would make a moderate parliamentary alliance possible.<sup>305</sup>

---

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> «...avec la concorde entre les citoyens, une politique pratique et féconde. », « Les Récompenses de l’Exposition », *La Justice*, Sept. 30, 1889.

<sup>303</sup> « C’est dur, mais que voulez-vous, le peuple tient à la République, il faut en prendre notre parti... je suis non seulement le plus monarchiste, mais le plus réactionnaire des hommes. », St-Genest, « Profitons de la Leçon », *Le Figaro*, Sept. 25, 1889.

<sup>304</sup> « ...son hésitation à se lancer dans l’inconnu...qui impliquerait évidemment la soumission de fait à la République. », Francis Magnard, « Echos », *Le Figaro*, Sept. 27, 1889.

<sup>305</sup> « Le moment est venu pour eux de redevenir eux-mêmes...d’être simplement les conservateurs... », Charles de Mazade, « Chronique de la Quinzaine », *Revue des deux mondes*, Sept. 30, 1889.

Yet, the more telling enunciations of acquiescence to republican politics came from those who had been among the diehard Boulangists during the zenith of the movement. Boucher confessed that “universal suffrage has not favored the Conservative party. The Republic has been given a second chance.”<sup>306</sup> Delafosse, an early partisan of the general and supporter of a Boulangist coup, now insisted that he had “said many times that the only effective and logical policy consists for the Right to enter into the Republic...in order to reach a position of governance.”<sup>307</sup> Thiébaud, who essentially invented Boulanger’s plebiscitary campaign in the first place, had since left the movement and now depicted himself as “having adhered to the Republic and having found myself in the presence of a peril to the Republic” which he could no longer support.<sup>308</sup> He even paid homage to Raoul Duval,<sup>309</sup> who denounced “with his heated and honest eloquence the utterly fatal influence of reactionary salons on the representatives of the conservative spirit.”<sup>310</sup> The devout royalist Ph. de Grandlieu felt the election result obliged the right to “change its attitude,” reject association with revolutionaries and “honestly study the character, traits, and elements [of the electoral situation] to develop a new politics.”<sup>311</sup> The Marquis de Castellane listed the two conditions for future conservative success: “Adherence en masse to the republican form” and “a program of government.”<sup>312</sup> This attitude of reconciliation

---

<sup>306</sup> Auguste Boucher, « Chronique politique », *Le Correspondant* CLVII (Oct. 10, 1889), 179, quoted in Seager, *The Boulanger Affair*, 239.

<sup>307</sup> « J’ai dit plusieurs fois ici que la seule politique efficace et logique consiste pour la Droite à entrer dans la République...afin de parvenir à la gouverner. », Jules Delafosse, « La Chambre Nouvelle », *Le Matin*, Oct. 1, 1889.

<sup>308</sup> « Ayant adhéré à la République et me trouvant en présence d’un péril pour la République, il m’était impossible de rester attaché à une politique devenue...contraire à mon adhésion. », « Chronique Electorale », *Le Temps*, Oct. 2, 1889.

<sup>309</sup> Duval was a conservative deputy who had spearheaded a bungled attempt in 1886 to form a constitutional party of the Right in the Chamber. His attempt died with him in 1887.

<sup>310</sup> « Raoul Duval mit le doigt...en dénonçant avec sa chaude et loyale éloquence l’influence absolument funeste des salons réactionnaires sur les représentants de l’esprit conservateur... », Georges Thiébaud, « Un épisode du boulangisme », *Le Figaro*, Oct. 4, 1889.

<sup>311</sup> « ...il en faut étudier loyalement le caractère, les traits, les éléments, pour en dégager une politique nouvelle...il demande aussi à la droite de changer d’attitude », Ph. de Grandlieu, « Le Lendemain », *Le Figaro*, Sept. 28, 1889.

<sup>312</sup> « Les conditions du succès sont : 1. Une adhésion en masse à la forme républicaine ; 2. Un programme de gouvernement. », Marquis de Castellane, « Le Parti Conservateur », *Le Figaro*, Oct. 10, 1889.

with the established parameters of legitimate political activity within the Republic became notably prevalent in conservative journals after the collapse of Boulangism in the elections.

As the political influence of Boulangism as a revolutionary medium vanished and participation within the republican system became the only viable strategy, it is unsurprising that some of the conservatives most committed to the movement lamented this new constraint of mass politics. The romanticized image of the “coup manqué”, of the wasted opportunity on the night of January 27 to overthrow the Republic, developed in the immediate aftermath of the elections and endured for decades in the French right-wing nationalist tradition.<sup>313</sup> Cornély claimed that Boulanger’s flight from France had disappointed voters who “judged him ready to shake everything up” and desired that he shatter the status quo.<sup>314</sup> Cassagnac’s despair at the failure of the movement likewise turned against the general: “It is the fault of General Boulanger that we did not succeed...and why? Because he intended to act only *legally*...legality is a vain word, an absurdity, when the matter was to save one’s country.”<sup>315</sup> Delafosse concurred that “the man was too little for the cause that he bore.”<sup>316</sup> The best-selling anti-Semitic author Édouard Drumont would look back further into the affair to uncover other missed insurrectionary opportunities and allege that Boulanger should be criticized most for “having not marched on the Élysée on the day of the demonstration at the Gare de Lyon and being too slow to draw his sword.”<sup>317</sup> The monarchist *Le Soleil* similarly traced the defeat of Boulangism to the general’s inaction during crucial moments of potential rebellion while simultaneously acknowledging the

---

<sup>313</sup> See Garrigues, « Le Général Boulanger et le fantasme du coup d’état ».

<sup>314</sup> « ...il le jugeait un homme prêt à tout bousculer. », J. Cornély, « Récompense Nationale », *Le Matin*, Sept. 29, 1889.

<sup>315</sup> « C’est la faute du général Boulanger si nous n’avons pas réussi...Et pourquoi? Parce qu’il n’entendait agir que ‘*légalement*’... La *légalité* est un vain mot, une absurdité, lorsqu’il s’agit de sauver son pays. », *L’Autorité*, Oct. 14, 1889.

<sup>316</sup> « Mais l’homme était trop petit pour la cause qu’il portait... », Jules Delafosse, *Psychologie du député* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1904), 211.

<sup>317</sup> « ...ce qu’on reproche le plus au général Boulanger, c’est de n’avoir pas marché sur l’Élysée le jour de la manifestation de la gare de Lyon et d’être un peu long à tirer le sabre. », Édouard Drumont, *La Fin d’un monde* (Paris: A. Savine, 1889), 316.

increasing difficulty of instigating such an upheaval: “short of a bold stroke that did not seem to be in his temperament and which today would have little chance of success, [Boulangier] will cease bit by bit to be in the picture and even the trace of his influence will fade...”<sup>318</sup> If, in affirming the legitimacy of the Republic during the campaign but lamenting the missed insurrectionary prospect afterwards, the most intransigent monarchists and Bonapartists had revealed only the flexibility of their rhetoric, the era of mass politics inaugurated by Boulangism was beginning to force them to demonstrate the flexibility of their principles as well. In many ways, these rueful commentaries were correct to assert that the contingent factor of Boulangier’s agency could very well have enabled a successful coup d’état, yet expressed as they were in retrospect, appeared as quixotic fantasies, equally obsolescent and improvident when compared with serious conservative efforts at political organization.

The electoral fiasco of Boulangism was also a failure for the various socialist factions and kindled similar ruptures in their camp over questions of political and revolutionary strategy. It pitted the ideological commitment to the revolutionary tradition against the tactical need for party organization and electoral mobilization to achieve reforms within the republican institution. This conflict would play out notably in the early 1890s, but signs of the trend towards electoral pragmatism were visible even during the elections. In one example, Parisian socialists aligned with Boulangist revisionism declared their program as “bequeathed to us by the French Revolution” but also explicitly discarded “the baneful doctrine of class struggle.”<sup>319</sup> This simultaneous retention of revolutionary memory and rejection of dogmatic and deterministic ideological elements exemplified the shift towards a pragmatic, reformist socialism within the Republic. The possibilist Joffrin, one of the few socialists to be elected (however

---

<sup>318</sup> « Quant au général Boulangier, à moins d’un coup d’audace qui ne parait pas être dans son tempérament et qui aurait aujourd’hui bien peu de chances de succès, il cessera peu à peu d’être en vue et la trace même de son influence s’effacera... », *Le Soleil*, Oct. 8, 1889.

<sup>319</sup> Quoted in Seager, *The Boulangier Affair*, 234.

controversially, as he won by default after the nullification of Boulanger's votes in his arrondissement), stressed that he "was elected *legally*." In averring that "the laws are applicable to everybody...the worker's party submits to them like all others," he seemed to direct this justification at his socialist brethren who perhaps still insisted on the feasibility of social revolution.<sup>320</sup> In the wake of the election, the reformist rhetoric of organs like *La Revue socialiste*, which demanded that socialists "organize, without compromises or danger to the Republic, a truly worthwhile opposition," appeared to be vindicated.<sup>321</sup> Changes in the socialist electoral approach were already taking place in regions like Bordeaux, where, in preparation for the autumn elections, Guesdists had allied with Boulangists and established local party committees, in addition to utilizing the popular press and rallies to mobilize voters.<sup>322</sup> The Blanquist faction that had previously defined itself solely in terms of revolutionary action fractured permanently. One of its chiefs, Edouard Vaillant, had formed his own party in the lead-up to the elections with the intent of experimenting with new electoral tactics and dismantling the cultish Blanquist worship of the barricades.<sup>323</sup>

Antagonists of the Republic drew similar conclusions from the lessons of the autumn elections and the experience of the Boulanger Affair in general. The movement had begun as a repository of entirely disparate revolutionary hopes sharing in common only a desire to level the current government. The rhetoric of its diverse adherents thrived upon insurrectionary invocations against a regime that appeared unstable and illegitimate. Yet, none of the numerous revolutionary situations precipitated by the movement came to fruition and it instead chose to

---

<sup>320</sup> « Je suis élu *légalement* par 5,500 voix...Les lois sont applicables à tout le monde...le parti ouvrier les subit comme les autres. », *La Lanterne*, Sept. 27, 1889, cited in « Les journaux de ce matin », *Le Matin*, Sept. 27, 1889.

<sup>321</sup> « ...organiser sans compromissions et sans danger pour la République, une opposition vraiment utile aux intérêts qu'ils représentent. », A. Veber, « Le Mouvement social en France et à l'étranger. », *La Revue socialiste* 58 (Oct. 1889): 484.

<sup>322</sup> Patrick H. Hutton, "The Impact of the Boulangist Crisis upon the Guesdist Party at Bordeaux," *French Historical Studies* 7, 2 (Autumn 1971): 242.

<sup>323</sup> Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition*, especially 148-149.

employ democratic means suited to mass politics to achieve success. This proto-modern electoral methodology that emphasized universal suffrage, along with republican rhetoric in defense of the government and the immense legitimating power of the centenary and exposition celebrations, all combined to powerfully stigmatize any further manifestation of the revolutionary tradition. The Boulanger Affair thus caused opponents of the Republic to reconsider the reality of mass politics after a century of recurring revolution and to develop legal opposition within the established framework of government. The imagery of revolutionary history and memory, ineradicable from the French psyche, continued to find expression in political rhetoric, but it had indeed become just that: rhetorical. When Third Republic politicians and political aspirants glorified past episodes of subversion, they were concerned with suffrage in the present. When they evoked the barricades, what they really sought was the ballot.

### **Conclusion**

With the republican triumph in the autumn elections, the Boulangist drama was concluded. The ambiguous movement that so easily defied definition and description, that rallied around a general even when he was not there, that cultivated an electoral propaganda campaign that was at once nationally focused and locally oriented, that united such disparate personas as Catholic monarchists with atheist socialists and even brought together mortal enemies like Cassagnac and Rochefort,<sup>324</sup> died as rapidly as it had been born. Despite its brevity and anticlimactic termination, as the bulky historiography of the movement demonstrates, the Boulangist experience was a defining moment of realignment that shaped new political and ideological tendencies that would come to the fore in the Dreyfus Affair ten years later. What is less clear is why these tendencies arose at this time. This thesis has sought to answer the

---

<sup>324</sup> In the latter days of the Second Empire, Cassagnac accused Rochefort of slandering Joan of Arc and challenged him to a duel. Rochefort barely survived when Cassagnac's bullet struck a medal of the Virgin Mary that his mistress had allegedly sewn into his clothes. See Ross King, *The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism* (New York: Walker, 2006), 259.

question through an examination of the ways in which Boulangism delegitimized the revolutionary tradition that had figured so prominently in French rhetoric in the past century and unleashed the vast possibilities of political organization in the new mass political landscape of the Third Republic. The Boulanger Affair forced an internalization of this reality of mass politics and compelled political actors ranging from socialists to royalists to develop new strategies for achieving political success, which now depended on electoral support.

From this perspective of the adaptation to mass politics, the subsequent impact of Boulangism on modern French socialism is readily apparent. As explained above, socialists were sharply divided over the Boulangist question during the affair. When Boulangism disintegrated, Guesdists rapidly filled the electoral void by completely reversing the policy of abstentionism that their leader had advocated during the zenith of Boulanger's influence. The 1890s were a prolific time in this regard, witnessing the formation of platforms for municipal and agricultural reform, a newfound willingness to ally for electoral expediency with nonsocialist factions that had previously been anathema to the principled revolutionary, and the development of a national political identity.<sup>325</sup> This tactical reorientation reaped many benefits, enabling the rise of trade-union organizations in some urban centers and making socialists viable electoral competitors on both the local and national scene.<sup>326</sup> Indeed, with socialist demands now legally circulating about the legislative sphere, moderate republicans rushed to support greater government efforts to provide welfare and social relief in the years after Boulangism.<sup>327</sup>

Blanquism, the most doctrinaire version of French socialism with its sacrosanct cult of revolutionary action, had been rendered irrelevant and rapidly fragmented in the shadow of

---

<sup>325</sup> Moodie, "The Reorientation of French Socialism," 366-367. These profound changes were noted as early as May 1890, when a police informer reported that the socialists had "made a sort of evolution... a total transformation of tactic" and that Guesde had banned "revolutionarism" within the party.

<sup>326</sup> Hutton, "Popular Boulangism," 97, 99-100. See also Hutton, "The Impact of the Boulangist Crisis," 244.

<sup>327</sup> Seager, *The Boulanger Affair*, 259. In reality, these reforms only ended the most egregious industrial abuses and made little substantive difference in the lives of workers.

Boulangism's failed insurrectionary enterprise.<sup>328</sup> Political liberty had already been conquered, as the Possibilist Malon declared in 1890, bestowing upon the current generation the duty to “shatter social iniquities, not with shots of cannon but with strokes of reform.”<sup>329</sup>

By the time of the Dreyfus Affair ten years later, this reconfiguration of socialist strategy and rhetoric had profoundly changed the face of the left. Socialists had become well acquainted with parliamentary politics and no longer had the option of abstention from the controversy, instead rallying almost unanimously in defense of the Republic, no matter how “bourgeois” it was.<sup>330</sup> Perhaps the most telling indication of how much the conception of revolution had changed since Boulangism came from the mouth of Guesde himself, who had once preached popular insurrection during the 1887 crisis; now, he lauded Zola's “J'accuse,” a daring article penned by the first public intellectual, as the “greatest revolutionary act of the century.”<sup>331</sup> By this time, the roots of the social democratic party in France were growing: socialist Alexandre Millerand entered the government as a cabinet member and Jean Jaurès even contended that social revolution was possible through the ballot box, rendering the barricades obsolete and unnecessary.<sup>332</sup>

The monarchist and imperialist right also underwent a transformation in the wake of Boulangism's revelations on the realities of mass politics. As has been shown, after the

---

<sup>328</sup> See Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition*, Chapter 7, esp. 150-152.

<sup>329</sup> « Nos pères ont conquis la liberté ; à nous de la fonder sur l'égalité sociale et la fraternité universelle. Pour cela, il nous reste à briser les iniquités sociales, non pas à coups de canon mais à coups de réformes. », *L'Eclairer de l'Est*, July 15, 1890, quoted in Sanson, *Les 14 juillet*, 61.

<sup>330</sup> Surely, during the Dreyfus Affair, socialists were motivated to support the Dreyfusards just as much by political posturing as by ideological aversion to anti-Semitism and ultranationalism. For an excellent study of socialist interaction with currents of anti-Semitic and nationalist thought during the period, see Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity*.

<sup>331</sup> Leslie Derfler, *The Dreyfus Affair* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), 113. Zola's front page polemic in *L'Aurore* directly accused the military and the government of obstruction of justice and anti-Semitism in the case against Dreyfus.

<sup>332</sup> Raymond Huard, “Political Association in Nineteenth-Century France: Legislation and Practice,” in *Civil Society Before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Nancy Bermeo and Philip Nord (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 148.

Boulangist disappointment, the conservative and Catholic press was full of entreaties to change tactics by accepting the Republic and fostering parliamentary participation. The first concrete step toward an abandonment of subversive dynastic aspirations came early in 1890 with the formation of a parliamentary group called the “Constitutional Right,” which included conservative politicians who had previously backed Boulanger with revolutionary hopes.<sup>333</sup> However, the most influential force in cementing this *Ralliement* was the pope, who gave the go-ahead to a prominent French cardinal to controversially offer a toast to the Republic at the end of 1890. In his speech, the cardinal declared the necessity of “adhesion without ulterior motive to this form of government.”<sup>334</sup> The papacy would release an encyclical, *Au milieu des sollicitudes*, in 1892 that explicitly called for the organization of legal Catholic opposition within the republican institution as the best way to combat anticlerical policy. Although the right remained wracked by internal divisions in the years following the Boulanger Affair and the postmortems were often bitter,<sup>335</sup> it was inevitably forced to adapt a new strategy of realism and electoral pragmatism within the Republic.<sup>336</sup>

The lessons of Boulangism were equally imbibed by a wide variety of political actors who would fashion a new and modern right, an ideological mix of nationalism and socialism suited to the new demands of mass politics. The populist approach that aroused Boulangist support against the government and its call to nation above class, as well as its occasional flares of anti-Semitic rhetoric, had revealed the mobilizing power of such electoral tactics. Maurice

---

<sup>333</sup> Irvine, 162-163.

<sup>334</sup> The entirety of Cardinal Lavignerie’s speech is reprinted in Olivier Wieviorka and Christophe Prochasson, *La France du XXe siècle: documents d’histoire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), 97-99.

<sup>335</sup> For example, some newspapers published old letters written by the cardinal some twenty years earlier that showed him to be vigorously advocating for a monarchical restoration. Whether meant to defame the cardinal as a hypocrite, belittle his republican commitment or even send the message that royalist restoration hopes were definitely futile, the dispatches only demonstrated the current necessity to fall in line with the Republic. See *La Croix*, Dec. 2, 1890.

<sup>336</sup> On this trend, see Alexander Sedgwick, *The Ralliement in French Politics: 1890-1898* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

Barrès, a seminal intellectual influence on French fascism, had seen in Boulangism a genuine “revolutionary means” that whetted the insurrectionary appetite of Bonapartists and Blanquists alike, not to mention his own.<sup>337</sup> Yet, after the Boulangist demise, he could issue an appeal to recruit “revolutionary personnel” that had little to do with insurrection itself. As he put it hypothetically: “Dine with the ruling class, vote with the people! Is that the rule of life for a revolutionary who holds the ballot today?” He chastised Boulangism because it idealistically expected revolutionary upheaval on the spot, when the reality was that mass political changes take time.<sup>338</sup> After all, his political career began with his 1889 election as a Boulangist in the region of Nancy, where he realized the mass electoral potential of a platform based on nationalism, socialism and anti-Semitism.<sup>339</sup> Some old-line conservatives, like aristocratic monarchists, were attracted as well to the galvanizing power of anti-Semitic appeals, which offered a platform easily digested by the masses.<sup>340</sup>

Despite this reorientation en masse towards electoral organization, Boulangism obviously did not signify the end of illegal conspirations against the Republic. During the Dreyfus Affair, some intransigent royalists tried to secure promises of a coup d’état from conservative generals to no avail.<sup>341</sup> Déroulède would attempt a feeble coup in 1899 that failed miserably.<sup>342</sup> Anarchist terrorism would reach unparalleled levels in the 1890s and take the life of Carnot in 1894. Nevertheless, these conspiratorial endeavors displayed the political weakness rather than the strength of those committing them. They were, in many ways, a behavior of defeat and an admission of the inability to sell an electoral message in the marketplace of mass politics.

---

<sup>337</sup> Barrès, *L’Appel au soldat*, 204.

<sup>338</sup> Maurice Barrès, « Du recrutement d’un personnel révolutionnaire », *Le Figaro*, April 2, 1890.

<sup>339</sup> Zeev Sternhell, « Barrès et la gauche : du boulangisme à la cocarde (1889-1895) », *Le Mouvement social* 75 (April-June 1971): 78-80. For an intellectual and political biography of Barrès, see C. Stewart Doty, *From Cultural Rebellion to Counterrevolution: The Politics of Maurice Barrès* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976).

<sup>340</sup> Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, 171.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-167.

<sup>342</sup> For a history of conspiracies against the Third Republic, see Monier, *Le Complot dans la République*.

“Propaganda of the deed” sufficed where actual electoral propaganda supporting an extreme cause such as anarchism was ineffective. Much of history, of course, is determined by contingent events; a Boulangist coup could very well have succeeded and substantially altered the French political landscape. Nevertheless, the movement failed to produce a revolution and precluded the serious possibility of any more in France. The enemies of the regime had hoped to use Boulangism to celebrate the birthday of the First Republic with the funeral of the Third. Instead, the movement profoundly strengthened the democratic institution, heralded a new culture of mass politics and definitely rendered the revolutionary tradition obsolete, even as the turmoil of the twentieth century loomed over France.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources – Newspapers and Periodicals

*L'Autorité*  
*La Croix*  
*Le Figaro*  
*Le Gaulois*  
*Le Grelot*  
*L'Intransigeant*  
*Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*  
*La Justice*  
*La Lanterne*  
*Le Matin*  
*La Presse*  
*Le Petit journal*  
*La République française*  
*La Revue socialiste*  
*Revue des deux mondes*  
*Le Temps*  
*L'Univers*

### Primary Sources – Memoirs, Accounts, Documents

Andrieux, Louis. *A travers la République*. Paris: Payot, 1926.  
Barrès, Maurice. *L'Appel au soldat*. Paris: Nelson, 1900.  
Boulanger, Georges E. *Mémoires du général Boulanger*. Paris: G. Edinger, 1890.  
Chincholle, Charles. *Le Général Boulanger*. Paris: Albert Savine, 1889.  
Cordier, P. *Boulangisme & bonapartisme, ou la réaction masquée*. Paris: Mayer, 1889.  
Delafosse, Jules. *A travers la politique*. Paris: E. Dentu, 1889.  
Delafosse, Jules. *Psychologie du député*. Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1904.  
Drumont, Édouard. *La Fin d'un monde*. Paris: A. Savine, 1889.

- Duc d'Orléans, ed. *La Monarchie française: lettres et documents politiques (1844-1907)*. Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1907.
- Duchesse d'Uzès, *Souvenirs de la Duchesse d'Uzès*. Paris: Plon, 1939.
- Duhamet, F. *La République révolutionnaire*. Paris: Ghio, 1889.
- Ferry, Jules. *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry, tome 7*. Edited by Paul Robiquet. Paris: Armand Colin, 1898.
- Monseigneur Freppel, *La Révolution française à propos du centenaire de 1789*. Paris: A. Roger et F. Chernoviz, 1889.
- Freycinet, Charles de. *Souvenirs: 1878-1893*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1973.
- Galli, Henri, ed. *Paul Déroulède: raconté par lui-même*. Paris: Plon, 1900.
- Goncourt, Edmond de. *Paris under Siege, 1870-1871: From the Goncourt Journal*. Edited by George J. Becker. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969.
- Guyot, Yves. *Le Boulangisme*. Paris: 1888.
- Haute Cour de Justice. *Affaire Boulanger; Dillon, Rochefort, procédure – déposition des témoins*. Paris: P. Mouillot, 1889.
- Haute Cour de Justice. *Le Procès du General Boulanger, Rochefort-Dillon devant la Haute Cour de Justice : compte rendu, jugement, condamnation*. Paris: Librairie Française, 1889.
- Lépine, Louis. *Mes souvenirs*. Paris: Payot, 1929.
- Lissagaray, Prosper-Olivier. *Le Bilan Boulanger aux électeurs républicains*. Paris: Publication de la Société des droits de l'homme et du citoyen, 1888.
- Meyer, Arthur. *Ce que mes yeux ont vu*. Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1911.
- Millot, Maurice. *La Comédie boulangiste: chansons & satires*. Paris: J.-B. Ferreyrol, 1891.
- Morphy, Michael. *Mon rôle dans le boulangisme*. Paris: 1891.
- Reinach, Joseph. *Les Petites catilinaires*. Paris: Harvard, 1889.
- Thirion, Emile. *La Politique au village*. Paris: Fischbacher, 1896.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, Translated by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos. New York: Macmillan, 1896.
- Verly, Albert. *Le Général Boulanger et la conspiration monarchique*. Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1893.
- Waldeck-Rousseau, Pierre. *Discours parlementaires*. Paris: Charpentier, 1889.

### Secondary Sources

- Agulhon, Maurice. *Coup d'état et République*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1997.
- Amalvi, Christian. « L'Impossible consensus autour de la Révolution : L'album du centenaire édité en 1889 par Désiré Lacroix et Augustin Challamel. » in *La France démocratique (combats, mentalités, symboles): mélanges offerts à Maurice Agulhon*, edited by Christophe Charle, Jacqueline Lalouette, Michel Pigenet, and Anne-Marie Sohn, 259-265. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998.
- Angenot, Marc. *Le Centenaire de la révolution, 1889*. Paris: La Documentation Française, 1989.
- Baguley, David. *Napoleon III and His Regime: An Extravaganza*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000.
- Barrows, Susanna. *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century*.

- New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.
- Bellanger, Claude, Jacques Godechot, Pierre Guiral, Fernand Terrou, eds. *Histoire générale de la presse française – tome III: de 1871 à 1940*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972.
- Boime, Albert. *Revelation of Modernism: Responses to Cultural Crises in Fin-de-Siècle Painting*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008.
- Brogan, D. W. *France Under the Republic: The Development of Modern France*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940.
- Burns, Michael. *Rural Society and French Politics: Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair, 1886-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Curtis, Michael. *Three Against the Third Republic : Sorel, Barrès & Maurras*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2010.
- Dansette, Adrien. *Le Boulangisme*. Paris: Fayard, 1946.
- Davies, Peter. *The Extreme Right in France, 1789 to the Present: From De Maistre to Le Pen*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Derfler, Leslie. *The Dreyfus Affair*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002.
- . *Paul Lafargue and the Flowering of French Socialism, 1882-1911*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Dorpalen, Andreas. "Tsar Alexander III and the Boulanger Crisis in France." *The Journal of Modern History* 23, 2 (June 1951): 122-136.
- Doty, C. Stewart. *From Cultural Rebellion to Counterrevolution: The Politics of Maurice Barrès*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976.
- Doyle, William. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- English, Donald. *Political Uses of Photography in the Third French Republic, 1871-1914*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984.
- Fortescue, William. *The Third Republic in France, 1870-1940: Conflicts and Continuities*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Gammal, Jean El. « Un pré-ralliement : Raoul-Duval et la droite républicaine, 1885-1887. » *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 29, 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1982): 599-621.
- Garrigues, Jean. *Le Général Boulanger*. Paris: Olivier Orban, 1991.
- . « Le Général Boulanger et le fantasme du coup d'état. » *Parlement[s]* (2009): 43-48.
- George, Henri. *La Belle histoire des images d'Épinal*. Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 1996.
- Gérard, Alice. *La Révolution française, mythes et interprétations (1789-1970)*. Paris: Flammarion, 1970.
- Gildea, Robert. *The Past in French History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Girardet, Raoul. *Le Nationalisme français*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983.
- Goldstein, Robert Justin. *Censorship of Political Caricature in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1989.
- Hahn, H. Hazel. *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Hazareesingh, Sudir. *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

- Howorth, Jolyon Michael. "The Myth of Blanquism under the Third Republic (1871-1900)." *The Journal of Modern History* 48, 3 (Sept. 1976): 37-68.
- Huard, Raymond. "Political Association in Nineteenth-Century France: Legislation and Practice." In *Civil Society Before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe*, edited by Nancy Bermeo and Philip Nord, 135-153. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- Hutton, Patrick H. *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864-1893*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
- . "The Impact of the Boulangist Crisis upon the Guesdist Party at Bordeaux." *French Historical Studies* 7, 2 (Autumn 1971): 226-244.
- . "Popular Boulangism and the Advent of Mass Politics in France, 1886-90." *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976): 85-106.
- Irvine, William D. *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Joly, Bertrand. *Vie de Maurice Vergoin, député boulangiste*. Paris: Champion, 2005.
- Joly, Laurent. « Antisémites et antisémitisme à la Chambre des députés sous la IIIe République. » *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54, 3 (July-Sept. 2007): 63-90.
- Jonnes, Jill. *Eiffel's Tower: And the World's Fair Where Buffalo Bill Beguiled Paris, the Artists Quarreled, and Thomas Edison Became a Count*. New York: Viking, 2009.
- King, Ross. *The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism*. New York: Walker, 2006.
- Lee, Stephen J. *Aspects of European History, 1789-1980*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Lehning, James. *To Be A Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Levillain, Philippe. *Boulangier, fossoyeur de la monarchie*. Paris: Flammarion, 1982.
- Mariot, Nicolas. « 'Propagande par la vue': Souveraineté régaliennne et gestion du nombre dans les voyages en province de Carnot (1888-1894). » *Genèses* 20 (1995): 24-47.
- Mayeur, Jean-Marie. *Les Débuts de la IIIe République, 1871-1898*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973.
- Mazgaj, Paul. "The Origins of the French Radical Right: A Historiographical Essay." *French Historical Studies* 15, 2 (Autumn 1987): 287-315.
- McManners, John. *Church and State in France, 1870-1914*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- Monier, Frédéric. *Le Complot dans la République: stratégies du secret de Boulanger à la Cagoule*. Paris: La Découverte, 1998.
- Moodie, Thomas. "The Reorientation of French Socialism, 1888-90." *International Review of Social History* 20 (1975): 347-369.
- Néré, Jacques. *Le Boulangisme et la presse*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1964.
- . « La Crise économique de 1882 et le mouvement boulangiste. » Ph.D. diss., University of Paris, 1959.
- Nord, Philip G. *Paris Shopkeepers and the Politics of Resentment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- . *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Ory, Pascal. « Le Centenaire de la Révolution Française : la preuve par 89. » In *Les Lieux de mémoire: 1. la République*, edited by Pierre Nora, 523-560. Paris: Gallimard, 1984.

- Quinault, Roland. "The Cult of the Centenary, c.1784-1914." *Historical Research* 71, 176 (Oct. 1998): 303-323.
- Roberts, J. M. « La Commune considérée par la Droite: dimensions d'une mythologie. » *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 19, 2 (April-June 1972): 187-205.
- Sanson, Rosemonde. *Les 14 juillet, fête et conscience nationale, 1789-1975*. Paris: Flammarion, 1976.
- . « La République en représentation: À propos des voyages en province des présidents de la Troisième République (1879-1914). » In *La France démocratique (combats, mentalités, symboles): mélanges offerts à Maurice Agulhon*, edited by Christophe Charle, Jacqueline Lalouette, Michel Pigenet, and Anne-Marie Sohn, 371-378. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998.
- Seager, Frederic H. *The Boulanger Affair: Political Crossroads of France, 1886-1889*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969.
- Sedgwick, Alexander. *The Ralliement in French Politics: 1890-1898*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Silverman, Debora L. "The 1889 Exhibition: The Crisis of Bourgeois Individualism." *Oppositions* 8 (Spring 1977): 71-91.
- Simpson, Martin. "Taming the Revolution? Legitimists and the Centenary of 1789." *English Historical Review* 120, 486 (April 2005): 340-364.
- Sirinelli, Jean-François, ed. *Les Droites françaises de la Révolution à nos jours*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992.
- Stafford, David. *From Anarchism to Reformism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.
- Sternhell, Zeev. « Barrès et la gauche : du boulangisme à la cocarde (1889-1895). » *Le Mouvement social* 75 (April-June 1971): 77-130.
- . *La Droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914: les origines françaises du fascisme*. Paris: Gallimard, 1998.
- Stone, Judith. *Sons of the Revolution: Radical Democrats in France, 1862-1914*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996.
- Stuart, Robert. *Marxism and National Identity: Socialism, Nationalism, and National Socialism during the French Fin de Siècle*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Tillier, Bertrand. *La RépubliCature: la caricature politique en France 1870-1914*. Paris: CNRS, 1997.
- Vincent, K. Steven. *Between Marxism and Anarchism: Benoît Malon and French Reformist Socialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Weber, Eugen. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976.
- Weil, Bruno. *Glück und Elend des Generals Boulanger*. Berlin: Walther Rothschild, 1931.
- Welch, David. *Modern European History, 1871-2000: A Documentary Reader*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Wieviorka, Olivier, and Christophe Prochasson, *La France du XXe siècle: documents d'histoire*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994.
- Winock, Michel. "Populismes français." *Vingtième siècle. revue d'histoire* 56 (Oct.-Dec. 1997): 77-91.

---. "Socialism and Boulangism, 1887-89." In *The Development of the Radical Right in France*, edited by Edward J. Arnold, 3-15. London: Macmillan Press, 2000.

Zévaès, Alexandre. *Au temps du boulangisme*. Paris: Gallimard, 1930.