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THE RADICAL PARTY AND THE ARMY IN FRANCE, 1899-1905

by

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INTRODUCTION

During the course of a nation's history there occurs a crisis that severely tests its political institutions. The Watergate affair is the most striking contemporary example of this phenomenon. In France at the end of the nineteenth century, it was the Dreyfus Affair. L'Affaire, as it came to be known, caused an enormous political turmoil in France leading to a succession of governments each trying to put a lid on the volcano. By the time the eruption was over, a new political landscape had been created and some beliefs which had become axiomatic had been altered.

The greatest loser in the Dreyfus Affair was the army. Since 1870, it had been the darling of France. Millions of francs were lavished on it. It was glorified and indulged. The result was a certain smugness on the part of the army.

The army was never really able to cope with the affair. It never understood what was going on, nor did it comprehend what the stakes were. It always felt that it was its integrity that was being questioned. In fact, in the earlier phase of the affair only its infallibility was attacked. Only when certain officers acted illegally

was the army's integrity brought under fire.

As if the army's political problems were not serious enough, it was also faced with severe internal problems. Thirty years of peace had led to a serious case of boredom within the army. As in all peacetime armies, promotion was agonizingly slow. Many a fine mind was wasted in the dull duties of garrison life. Nor was the remuneration great enough to soothe the troubled ego. No one entered the army for the pay. It was status and the opportunity for glory which lured men. But no war meant no glory and the Dreyfus Affair severely damaged the army's class position within French society.

The need for the existence of the army was also questioned. With the long years of peace it was wondered aloud whether the enormous sums of money spent on defense were really necessary. Perhaps progress, that god of the nineteenth century, had made war a thing of the past and armies obsolete. And what of those years spent in uniform by the nation's youth? Were they really required? Could they not be better spent? The only answer the army could offer was to point to the east, toward the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, and to Germany. But thirty years had dulled the memory as well. The generation serving after 1890 had not even been born when the provinces were lost. The army seemed to have become an anachronism, and a potentially dangerous one at that.

The questioning of the army's raison d'être was not just a matter of intellectual discussion. Direct action was

taken by the responsible powers to "modernize" the army by reducing the length of conscription, indoctrinating officers in the concept of social action, and attempting to make the army into a school for the nation. The army opposed these reforms for definite military reasons. But in doing so, they presented themselves as the opponents of progress, which eroded their position even more.

If the army was the principal loser in the Dreyfus Affair, the biggest winner was the political group known as the Radicals. The name itself is rather vague. It actually consisted of two political parties, the Radical Party and the Radical-Socialist Party.¹ They were fond of tracing their lineage from Jacobins of the French Revolution. In fact, their most direct influence was Léon Gambetta and his Belleville Program.² Their constituency was firmly based in the petite bourgeoisie and reflected their beliefs and prejudices.

The Radicals were violently anticlerical, and hostile to any manifestation of privilege. Ardent republicans, it was their strongly held belief that the Republic had been threatened by the Church and the clerical monarchist officers of the army. These groups had only narrowly been defeated and it was the duty of the government to render these elements incapable of threatening the Republic again.

It was the Dreyfus Affair which catapulted the Radicals to power. The steadily increasing weight of evidence pointing to an army coverup, and the inability of the government to cope with

¹The two parties are not formally united until 1901.

²In an election speech of 1869 Gambetta called for various reforms in the direction of popular democracy.

the situation gradually put the Radicals into a position where they were able to dominate policymaking. They were clearly the dominant parliamentary power during the government of the moderate René Waldeck-Rousseau (1899-1902), but with their decisive electoral victory of 1902, they became the dictators of government policy.

The Radicals came to power with a complete body of doctrine concerning the composition, organization and role of the army. These doctrines were often based on half truths and were more concerned with political than military considerations. Yet in many instances they reflect the needs of the period as seen by the Radicals. While some may have been vengeful, the more constructive members of the party were clearly more concerned with the closer integration of the army within a changing society.

It is easy to overestimate the strength of the Radical position and the weakness of the army's political position. But there was always the factor of popular opinion. The majority of Frenchmen voted Radical in 1902, but that does not mean that they were universally hostile to the army. They flocked in great numbers on Bastille Day to see the military parades. Regimental band concerts remained popular. The officer was still a respected figure in many circles. Relatively few young men refused to serve in the army. Only the Socialists were overtly antimilitaristic. For the most part, the French still took pride in their army. They would not stand for its humiliation.

Still the Radicals had it very much their own way after

1900. The key to their efforts was the Minister of War General Louis André. He was unquestionably devoted to the Republic and was unscrupulous enough to use any means at his command to implement his policies. But by the same token, it was General André's overzealousness that comprised the entire Radical position.

The dates chosen for this study (1899-1905) were chosen because they represent the peak of Radical ascendancy and the nadir of the army's political power. Before the retrial of Dreyfus, the army was still in possession of an important segment of France's political leadership and populace. In addition, they were confronted with a weak divided government unwilling to take it to task for its errors. With the advent of Waldeck-Rousseau and General Gaston de Gallifet, civil authority was more vigorously asserted. It peaked with the ministry of Emile Combes and General André and then fell to pieces with the revelations of the Affaire des Fiches. The army was further aided by the First Moroccan³ Crisis of 1905 which brought the first premonitions of war. After 1905, therefore, the conditions for the continued reform of the army along the lines drawn by the Radicals no longer existed and a gradual return to the army's power and prestige began.

The documentation for much of this struggle is uneven. Many of the participants left little in the way of documents

³ In 1905 Germany and France clashed over the creation of a French protectorate in Morocco.

that were available to this writer. In addition two wars and an embarrassed Minister of War destroyed many potentially helpful pieces of information. As a result some of this work is based on two usually less than totally reliable sources, memoirs and newspapers. Both sources proved quite adequate, however, due to their great number. There were approximately a dozen major newspapers in Paris at this time representing every conceivable range of opinion. It was possible by reading them to develop a narrative of the major events. Then by cross checking these newspaper accounts and combining them with the available memoirs plus an examination of the parliamentary actions of the various individuals and the edicts issued by the Minister of War, it was possible to interpret these events as well.

In addition to these sources, many of the actions taken were announced by ministerial decree. Each of these decrees was preceded by a statement of why the decree was needed. Very often they were quite revealing of the motive for the action. The more controversial decrees were followed up in parliament by interpellations, which proved to be rich sources for analyzing motives. By the use of this method of cross checking available materials, it is felt that a balanced account can be made despite the lack of more traditional documents.

CHAPTER I

THE DREYFUS AFFAIR

The Dreyfus Affair is one of the most significant episodes in modern French history. During its course many of the conflicts in French society and politics were laid open for all the world to see. It was a political upheaval that changed the structure of French political power.

History could scarcely have chosen a less likely candidate for such an upheaval than Captain Alfred Dreyfus. An Alsatian Jew, he entered the Ecole Polytechnique in 1882, and swiftly rose to the rank of captain in 1889. A rather formal, cold technician, he had few friends. Nevertheless, his ability resulted in his appointment as a learner to the General Staff in 1893. This position required his passing through all of the various bureaus of the General Staff, learning the procedures of each.

By chance, French military intelligence discovered a list of military information that had been passed on to the German military attache in Paris, the so-called bordereau. Dreyfus immediately fell under suspicion for several reasons; he had access to all of this information and his handwriting had a superficial resemblance to that of the author of the bordereau. Just as important, however, was the fact that Dreyfus was an outsider. He was a Jew, his family lived in Germany, and he was not very friendly with anyone on the General Staff. He seemed to be the most likely prospect for a spy.

Historians have devoted reams of paper analyzing the bordereau and proving that not only could Dreyfus not have written it, but the secrets that it contained were hardly secrets at all. Unfortunately, the intelligence section of the General Staff did not devote a great deal of time to the detailed analysis of the document.

Dreyfus was charged with the crime of treason and duly courtmartialled. Yet the evidence was meager. At this point the first of a myriad of characters that would have a major impact on the affair entered, Major Hubert Henry and Colonel Mercier du Paty de Clam. Socially, the two men could hardly have been more different. Henry was a peasant who had risen from the ranks to his position as a Major in the intelligence section. Du Paty de Clam was from an old aristocratic family and had had the classic military education. But at this point in time they found themselves charged with the investigation of Dreyfus. They sincerely believed that he was guilty and were determined that a lack of evidence would not prevent Dreyfus from being convicted. They carefully went through the files of the counter-intelligence office and removed every document, both relevant and irrelevant, to add weight to the case. This was the famous Secret File. They presented this file to General Auguste Mercier, Minister of War. He too was convinced of Dreyfus' guilt, but realized that the file could hardly be considered a legal dossier. In order to prevent leaks to the press, Mercier ordered

that the trial be held in camera.

The trial itself was a legal travesty. None of the judges on the panel had any legal education whatsoever. The army presented its case, but it was less than convincing. The officers on the panel expressed some doubt as to the validity of the charges brought against Dreyfus. It was at this point that Mercier ordered that the prosecution present the Secret File to the judges without letting the defense see it. The file persuaded the judges that Dreyfus was a traitor. He was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devils Island.

By the time of the first courtmartial, the public had already been informed of the arrest of Dreyfus. The news had been leaked to the antisemitic journal La Libre Parole which declared that the traitor would probably never be brought to trial because the Jewish Syndicate would prevent it.¹ The press exploded with articles on the case. Then before the trial was held, the Minister of War, General Auguste Mercier, stated in Le Figaro that there were clear proofs of Dreyfus' guilt.²

Within the first two months of the affair, the general outline of the battle had been drawn. Supporters of Dreyfus were to be suspected of being in the pay of Drumont's imaginary Jewish Syndicate. There were to be officers in high places, even though they believed him guilty, knew that the conviction

¹ La Libre Parole, 1 November 1894.

² Le Figaro, 28 November 1894.

of Dreyfus had been based on highly doubtful evidence. General Mercier from the beginning was to commit not only his own honor, but the prestige of the army to Dreyfus' guilt. Any revelations therefore would destroy the careers of the men who controlled the army.

But in December of 1894, there was little to fear from the supporters of Dreyfus because there were none. Dreyfus was publicly degraded in January of 1895. The mob outside the courtyard of the Ecole Militaire insisted that Dreyfus be shot, not exiled. When he boarded the ship to Devil's Island, it seemed as if the case was closed.

In July of 1895, Lieutenant-Colonel Marie Georges Picquart became the head of intelligence on the General Staff. In an interview with General Raoul Franco Charles le Mouton de Boisdeffre, Chief of the General Staff, he was given the task of continuing the investigation of Dreyfus. Boisdeffre was rather uneasy about the proofs of Dreyfus' guilt and felt that a continued search would turn up more evidence and construct a stronger case. It was while conducting this investigation that Picquart became convinced that not only was Dreyfus innocent, but the real spy, Major Marie-Charles Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy, was still active. Picquart confronted Boisdeffre's deputy, General Charles Arthur Gonse with the information. When Picquart insisted that a new trial was necessary Gonse replied "The case cannot be reopened. General Mercier and General Saussier are involved."³ When Picquart continued to press Dreyfus'

³Guy Chapman, The Dreyfus Trials, (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), p. 80.

case, he was shipped off to North Africa. Picquart, after narrowly avoiding death, sent a letter to his lawyer presenting Dreyfus' case.

Meanwhile, Dreyfus' brother Mathieu had been desperately trying to get the case reopened. No one was interested. His brother was convicted by the army of treason and there was no reason to believe him innocent.

For three years he made almost no progress. But he was undeterred. Slowly he gathered several prominent politicians and writers to his side. Yet the early dreyfusards, as they came to be known, had very little tangible proof of Dreyfus' innocence. Only Picquart, his lawyer and Senator Auguste Sheurer Kestner had definite knowledge of the proofs, and Picquart had sworn them to secrecy.

Towards the end of 1897, the Dreyfusards began to make progress in their attempt to reopen the case. They obtained facsimiles of the bordereau and were able to reopen debate on the case. Finally they were able to bring charges against Esterhazy, and he was brought to trial. From the time of the Esterhazy trial in January of 1898 until January of 1900, the affair was to be at the center of French politics.

Esterhazy's trial was nearly as bad a judicial farce as Dreyfus'. The army was determined to acquit him, even though most of the officers considered him a scoundrel. He was charged with being the author of the bordereau, but the officers were not

going to let the evidence convince them that a mistake had been made. To do so would be to undermine the army's position. Esterhazy was acquitted; in effect, a second condemnation of Dreyfus.

It was after the Esterhazy trial that the real bomb exploded. On January 13, 1898, L'Aurore published an open letter to the president of France from Emile Zola. Entitled J'Accuse, the letter presented all of the evidence on hand and named those members of the army ~~whom~~ he was convinced had conspired to convict Dreyfus. The publication split France in two, one group who believed in Dreyfus' innocence and the others who were just as convinced of his guilt.

Zola's letter led to further trials. Picquart was brought before a court of enquiry on the grounds that he had committed a grave breach of discipline by releasing to his lawyer the Dreyfus files. The outcome was inevitable. It was recommended that he be dismissed from the army.

But it was the trial of Zola on the charge of libeling the army that was the most sensational. All of the participants in the original investigation and trial of Dreyfus appeared. They all either lied or told the court what they believed, not what they knew. There were also veiled threats by the officers that if the accused was not found guilty there would be grave consequences. The most notable case of this occurred during Boisdeffre's testimony. Concluding his statement he said, "You, gentlemen are the jury; you

are the nation. If the nation has no confidence in its Army's leaders, in those responsible for the national defense, they are ready to leave the heavy task to others. You have only to speak."⁴ Zola was convicted. To avoid imprisonment, he fled to London.

The Zola and Esterhazy trials had aroused public opinion, but had settled nothing. Later that year, a new Minister of War appeared, Godefroy Cavaignac. He decided that the time had come to end the uncertainty surrounding Dreyfus' guilt by personally examining the file. By this time the dossier was enormous, thanks to the diligent work of Major Henry who took it upon himself to forge documents in order to strengthen the case against Dreyfus. On July 7, 1898, Cavaignac appeared before the Chamber of Deputies and announced, "I am completely certain of Dreyfus' guilt."⁵ He then proceeded to read aloud those documents that he felt proved the case beyond a shadow of a doubt. The only problem was that the documents were forgeries.

Cavaignac was nothing if not thorough, and he ordered that both the Esterhazy and Dreyfus cases be investigated further. What he wanted was a complete reconstruction of both cases. During the examination, it was discovered that Major Henry had forged important pieces of evidence in the file on Dreyfus. When confronted with the discovery, Henry committed suicide. The discovery of the forgery

⁴Ibid., p. 141.

⁵Ibid., p. 155.

burst the dam that prevented revision of the case.

Yet the government did nothing. Prime Minister Henry Brisson could not summon the courage to order a review of the case. To compound the problem he was faced with a diplomatic crisis with Great Britain over Fashoda. There were 20,000 construction workers on strike as well as a railway workers strike. France seemed to be on the brink of a revolution.

In February of 1899, just when the tension had climbed to the breaking point, the President of the Republic, Félix Faure died. Some anti-dreyfusards felt that this was the moment to seize power. While the troops from Faure's funeral cortege marched back to their barracks, Paul Déroulède rushed up to the general leading the column, Gauderique Roget, and urged him to march to the Elysée Palace. Roget ignored him. When Déroulède persisted, he was half dragged into the barracks, and after some hesitation on Roget's part, was arrested. Thus ended the only attempt to seize the government by the anti-dreyfusards.

On June 3, 1899, the Court of Appeals handed down a decision that there was sufficient reason to order a retrial of Dreyfus. The next day the new President of France, Emile Loubet, appeared at the racetrack at Auteuil. There he was attacked by some anti-dreyfusard toughs, one of whom struck him with a cane. A week later, the cabinet was forced to resign, being charged with neglect of protecting the President. A new cabinet was formed headed by René Waldeck-Rousseau.

Dreyfus' second trial was held at Rennes. It began in

August 1899 and lasted for a month. Little that was new was brought to light. The review of the Court of Appeals had revealed all of the evidence. For a month a parade of witnesses appeared. The newspapers were filled with nothing but trial reports. In spite of the evidence to the contrary, the seven officers sitting as judges voted five to two that Dreyfus was guilty. But just to add a touch of absurdity to the decision, it was agreed that he was guilty of treason with extenuating circumstances.

Waldeck-Rousseau decided that the time had arrived to break the endless cycle of the case. On September 19, 1899, he requested that President Loubet pardon Dreyfus and commute his sentence. It was a move that the country was ready for. For five years, it had dragged on. For two years it had been at the center of french life. Boredom had set in. Despite the condemnation of the pardon from the most passionate dreyfusards and anti-dreyfusards, the verdict was accepted.

In order to understand why there was such a turmoil over the Dreyfus case, it must be remembered that the army held a special place in France since 1870. France had been humiliated during the Franco-Prussian War as she had never been humiliated in her history. Not only had her armies been destroyed by Prussia, but for the first time since the end of the Thirty Years War, she was no longer the pre-eminent power in Europe. She vowed to take revenge. The instrument of that revenge, the instrument of her resurrection would be her army. She had been humiliated on the field of battle, she would be redeemed on the field of battle.

But France was also left fearful by her defeat. The horrors of the Commune, the chaos of invasion and the enormous indemnity were nightmares that must not be repeated. Only the army could prevent such turmoil.

The army became the redeemer and avenger of the nation after the Franco-Prussian War. Its reputation was greatly enhanced by its merciless suppression of the Commune during La Semaine Sanglante.⁶ By its restoration of order, it reassured the badly frightened bourgeoisie. Thus the army could not only restore France to her proper place in the sun, but it could insure domestic tranquillity as well.

For the ensuing thirty years, the army received virtually all that it desired. A new army organization and conscription was voted even before the form of government had been decided upon. Funds were lavished on the military establishment and desired legislation was swiftly passed.

The army responded to this adoration such as a precocious child responds to pampering, it became used to having its own way. It accepted all of the praise heaped upon it and became a model of devotion and hard work. But it never let the country forget that it was worthy of praise and must be left to its own devices to maintain itself.

This last point is an essential element in understanding both the army's side of the affair and what transpired after the affair. The fact is that for thirty years after the Franco-Prussian War, the army was an autonomous body within France. It had its

⁶Literally Bleeding Week. It refers to the period from May 21 to May 23, 1871 during which the Paris Commune was suppressed.

own law codes, its own courts, customs, hierarchy, and educational system. It was only nominally under the control of the civilian authorities. For the most part, the Ministers of War were army officers devoted to the interests of the army. The only exception was Charles de Freycinet, a civilian, who proved to be more sympathetic to the army than any previous Minister of War. From 1871-1899, there was no Minister of War who took the doctrine of civilian authority seriously.

Autonomy, however, cut two ways. It did protect the army from the evershifting sands of Third Republic politics. Consequently the army was able to maintain a continuity of command and doctrine essential for its proper functioning. But this autonomy also proved to be isolation. The army lost contact with the rest of France. The rapid evolution of the nation was not noticed. The progressive democratization of France escaped it. The steady slippage in the power of the aristocracy and the authority of the church was not perceived. The army, and especially the high command, disproportionately drawn from the provincial nobility, did not adjust to the changes in French society. When the awakening did occur, it proved to be quite rude.

The Dreyfus Affair was very much the result of this isolation. More than eighty years after Dreyfus' arrest, it can be clearly seen that the Dreyfus Affair was no more a military plot than it was a conspiracy by the "Jewish Syndicate." The army committed an error in its condemnation of Dreyfus. It was a miscarriage of justice, but not necessarily any worse than those other judicial errors that occur

from time to time. Had the highest commanders of the army, who had reason to believe Dreyfus innocent, not been so afraid of the stain on the army's honor that such a disclosure would have engendered, there would have been no affair. General Gonsans is the perfect example. Confronted by Picquart with the proofs of Dreyfus' innocence, he preferred to permit the verdict to stand rather than dishonor the army.

While the vast majority of officers believed Dreyfus to be guilty, there were a small number who had their doubts. These men never spoke up, not because they believed in the infallibility of court-martial but rather because they did not wish to see their careers ruined. For those who did support Dreyfus, isolation and the scorn of their fellow officers were their reward. Finally, when the entire truth was revealed, many officers felt deceived and humiliated by their superiors. Deep rifts developed in the army for the first time.

The army never realized that there could be those in France who would put justice for a lowly captain above the honor of the army. The army's entire ethical system rejected such a notion. It never realized that there could be people who would question the honesty and competence of a superior. When those who believed in Dreyfus' innocence accused the army of treachery, the army became even more intransigent. Trapped by an error, compounded by the attempts of subordinates to cover up the error, rendered helpless by being forced to enter into a world it did not understand, the army staggered and stumbled through the affair.

Under attack, the army accepted support from almost any source. It is here that its unfamiliarity with its environment showed most glaringly. The army drew much of its support from those institutions which were losing power in France, the church and the monarchy (in the person of the Pretender). In addition, the army accepted the support offered by the nationalists and the antisemites as well as those who had never accepted the Republic. Thus the army committed the error of tacitly allying itself with those elements and involving itself in national politics, a violation of its determination to keep out of the political turmoil of the Third Republic.

The army became the symbol of these groups as well as their rallying point. Thus, what began as a miscarriage of justice ended as a continuation of the battle between the two traditional warring sections of France: those who believed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and those who believed in order. It was the army which became the battlefield and the army, along with the Church, would receive the deepest, if not the longest lasting, wounds.

The army never realized the significance of the affair. All it could see was that its work of defending France was being endangered. Its leaders were called liars and fools. Its traditions were scorned, its sacrifices ignored.

For the army, the affair was a question of honor. For the civilians, it was more than that. The political groupings that composed the dreyfusard and anti-dreyfusard causes were very heterogeneous. The motives behind their actions were just as varied.

The dreyfusards were an amalgam of parties and interests. There were the Radicals, who were defiantly proud of their Jacobin heritage. There were the moderate socialists who rallied around Dreyfus because they saw in him a symbol of the injustice suffered by the working man. Finally there were those liberals who believed that if the state could commit an injustice against one man, if the state could fail to protect one man, it could not be trusted to protect anyone.

The anti-dreyfusards were also an amalgam of many groups. There were the monarchists, who saw in the army the last institution which could preserve the respect for social authority. There were the nationalists who saw the army as the guardian of the nation and the agent for national regeneration. There were those men whose philosophy of conservatism simply could not accept the sacrifice of the entire nation for a single man. There were the antisemites who saw the army as the last defense against Jewish domination. Finally there was the Church, bound to the army by an intricate web of relationships, which saw the army as one of its last bastions of power.

To the dreyfusards, the army became the symbol of the opposition to the Republic. Composed of a high percentage of nobles, the officer corps became a source of suspicion. L'Aurore, for example, wrote: "It is a question of whether the nation will counter the sedition of the military power or if the military power will force the nation into its yoke indefinitely."⁷ La Revue Blanche wrote:

⁷ L'Aurore, 21 January 1898.

"The generals will suppress us if we do not suppress the generals."⁸ Even the more sedate Le Figaro wrote, "The military society and the civilian society are at odds with each other; the battle will end in several years with the domestication and the submission of one of the two rivals."⁹

The Dreyfus Affair disrupted France at a time when the position of the army in the nation was changing. The fact was that a generation had passed since the last war. There was a questioning by the nation as to whether the enormous financial and personal sacrifices to maintain the army were really worthwhile. One symptom of this doubt was the steadily rising number of anti-militarist works.¹⁰

But the most serious change was that the army had begun to lose its self-confidence and its sense of mission. Thirty years of peace and waiting for "le grand jour" had bred frustration and boredom. The monotonous routine of garrison duty, the excruciatingly slow rate of promotion and the woefully inadequate pay sapped the army of its confidence. "The increase in boredom of military life" wrote one officer some time later, "without a tangible aim and without realized hope, perhaps also the nostalgia of those deep dreams brought me by the old troopers who still kept them, seemed ever more impossible to

⁸La Revue Blanche, 1 March 1899.

⁹Le Figaro, 1 March 1898.

¹⁰Several examples of these works are Georges Darrien, Biribi, Henry Favre, Au port d'armes, and Lucien Descaves, Sous-offs.

realize."¹¹ Perhaps these doubts would have passed without any major strain on the army. But the stresses of the Dreyfus Affair made them more pronounced and heightened the disenchantment with military life and its seemingly inadequate rewards.

The Dreyfus Affair affected more than just the army, it radically altered the political alignment in France. The dwindling hopes of the monarchists were lost forever. The attempt to bring the Church into the political life of France, the Ralliement,¹² was ended. The influence of the Church in politics was severely damaged. From the Dreyfus Affair to the end of the Third Republic, the opposition would be within the framework of republican institutions, not outside of them.

It was the Left which emerged victorious from the Dreyfus Affair. Composed of the Radicals, the Radical-Socialists and the more moderate socialists, they were to dominate the politics of France for the next ten years. It was the Radical and Radical-Socialist Party which were the greatest gainers. Jacobin, anticlerical, and suspicious of the army, they grew dramatically in strength during the affair. With the appointment of Waldeck-Rousseau as Prime Minister, they became the deciding force in government policy. When Emile Combes became Prime Minister, they attained the power to carry out their program.

Thus by June 1899, the army found itself attacked by its opponents and compromised by its friends. The Golden Age was over for the army. The Radical Age was to begin.

¹¹ Commandant de Civrieux, Du rêve à la réalité, (Paris: Editions Belleville, 1908), p. 67

¹² Ralliement is the term used to denote the attempt to create a Catholic political atmosphere sympathetic to a Republican form of government.

CHAPTER II

THE MINISTRY OF GENERAL DE GALLIFET: THE CURBING
OF THE ARMY'S PREROGATIVES

The ascension of the Radicals to power was a direct result of the Dreyfus Affair. Perhaps it was inevitable that they would become the dominant political party in France, because they represented the direction in which France was evolving. But the Dreyfus Affair speeded the process tremendously.

The incident at Auteuil caused the collapse of the cabinet of Charles Dupuy and precipitated a governmental crisis. For ten days negotiations proceeded as Raymond Poincaré, Léon Bourgeois and Henry Brisson attempted to piece together a new coalition.¹ Finally, René Waldeck-Rousseau, a well respected Senator, managed to create a new cabinet. It was a union of all of the republican elements in France and included the extraordinary union of General Marquis Auguste de Gallifet and the socialist Alexandre Millerand.

Undoubtedly the least likely political marriage of the Third Republic was that which brought de Gallifet and Millerand together in the same cabinet. De Gallifet

¹Guy Chapman, The Dreyfus Trials, (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), p. 214.

was a descendant of one of the oldest noble families in France and had earned a reputation at Sedan as a dashing cavalry general. Nicknamed "The Butcher of the Commune" for his summary executions during La Semaine Sanglante,² he represented all that was hated by the Left,³ But the devotion of Léon Gambetta to the army had made de Gallifet a republican at a time when there were almost no general officers devoted to the Republic,⁴ Waldeck-Rousseau selected de Gallifet because of his republicanism and his position in the army. De Gallifet was respected by the officer corps and his appointment assured them that the civilians would not run rampant on their institutions.⁵

Within the same cabinet was Alexandre Millerand, the terror of the bourgeoisie. At a time when all socialists were considered little better than anarchists, Millerand was considered to be a radical. In 1895, at Sainte Mande, he had given a speech in favor of collectivism. Yet he was anything but doctrinaire. In fact he was a very practical

²See Footnote 6, Chapter I.

³Alexandre Zévaès, Ombres et silhouettes, (Paris, Georges Anquetil, 1928) p. 296.

⁴Paul Boncour, Entre deux guerres, 3 vols., (Paris: Plon, 1945-46), I, 101.

⁵Col X, "l'Armée" Nouvelle Revue, 15 July 1899, p. 349.

man. He saw Waldeck-Rousseau's invitation as a golden opportunity to attain power. His joining the cabinet split the socialist party in France and precipitated a debate in every socialist party in Europe. But he added strength to the new cabinet because he was able to bring important members of the more moderate socialists to the side of the cabinet.⁶

From the very beginning it was obvious that the cabinet existed only with the approval of the Radicals. As long as it defended the Republic and pursued an anti-clerical and reformist policy towards the army, it would be supported. Inevitably it would have to move to the left if it was going to keep its support intact.

De Gallifet had entered the cabinet with the condition that he be given a carte blanche in his policy towards the army and that no one else be allowed to meddle in the army's affairs. "This will be a ministry of the liquidation of the affair," he wrote.⁷ He wanted to turn the clock back to those glorious days before the Dreyfus Affair when the army was the beloved of the nation. The Radicals on the other hand wanted to disassemble the army and reconstruct it in their own image. Although the two aims were compatible for several months, inevitably a

⁶Chapman, p. 216.

⁷Princess Radziwill, Lettres de la Princess Radziwill au General de Robilant, 4 vols., (Bologna: Zanichelli 1933-1934) II, 337.

clash would have to come.

De Gallifet's policy was always very clear to him.

I intend that the army will stay outside of politics, but also that politics will not interfere in the army. I cannot at any price assent to a measure that will raise a stone of the "Bloc"⁸ against the army. I do not know if all of the republican party agrees with me on this subject. There was once a time when all that was asked of officers was silence on those matters concerning politics. Today one must give preference to those officers who display their republicanism. This would be dangerous and absurd. The army is most thoroughly antisemitic. I have forbidden them to speak but I cannot forbid them to think.

De Gallifet put this limited policy into effect immediately. First he issued an order of the day demanding silence in the ranks.¹⁰ In June 1899 he transferred five superior officers, including General Roget the victim of the Déroulède fiasco.¹¹ On July 8, General Emile Zurlinden lost his position as the military commander of Paris and was transferred to Bordeaux. Later that month General Georges Gabriel de Pellieux, at one time in charge of the Dreyfus investigation during the ministry of Godefroy Cavaignac, was also transferred away from Paris.¹² All were replaced by officers who had not been tainted by the

⁸ The name given to the coalition of republican parties.

⁹ Radziwill, II, 344.

¹⁰ Le Radical, 27 June 1899.

¹¹ Le Matin, 26 June 1899.

revelations of the Dreyfus Affair. Yet all of this activity was not very serious. They were little more than slaps on the wrists of officers who had become too deeply involved in the politics of the Dreyfus Affair.¹³

The first challenge to de Gallifet's policy came from General de Negrier a member of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre and the designated commander of an army in war time. On an inspection tour of the various corps under his direction, he castigated the government for its actions against high ranking officers. He then told the assembled officers:

We demand to know what are the measures that we can count on the government taking to put an end to the campaign against the army.¹⁴ If they will do nothing we will give them some advice.

The Radical newspapers jumped on this speech as a test of the government's firmness. Le Matin called it a direct threat to the Republic.¹⁵ Le Radical wrote, "In the presence of these acts, hesitation cannot be permitted. Thus informed, the council of ministers must act. The chief that must command must first be taught to obey. The government must not fail in its duty."¹⁶ De Gallifet

¹³ David Ralston, The Army of the Republic, (Cambridge Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1967), p. 244.

¹⁴ Le Matin, 26 July 1899.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Le Radical, 27 July 1899.

immediately removed Negrier from his post and placed him on the reserve list. But this was not done to please the Radicals. Negrier had disobeyed de Gallifet's order and had to be punished. As he told Negrier, "You speak well, monsieur le général, but you speak too much!"¹⁷

Shortly after Dreyfus was found guilty again at his trial at Rennes, de Gallifet issued his famous order of the day.

The incident is closed. The military judges, surrounded in all respects, have delivered their verdict in complete independence. We have, without any reservations, bowed before their decree. We shall likewise bow before the act which a sense of profound pity has dictated to the President of the Republic. It is impossible that any question of reprisals of any sort whatsoever should henceforth arise. I repeat, the incident is closed. I ask you, and if need be I shall order you, to forget the past in order to think only of the future. With you, who are all my comrades, I cry heartily "long live the army". The army,¹⁸ which belongs to no party, but only to France.

The order of the day was issued by de Gallifet without the approval or knowledge of Waldeck-Rousseau.¹⁹ He was on the verge of asking for de Gallifet's resignation but, in the interest of republican unity, he decided

¹⁷ H. de Rollant, Gallifet, (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle France, 1945), p. 200.

¹⁸ Louis L. Snyder, The Dreyfus Case, (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1973), p. 348.

¹⁹ Chapman, p. 245

to let the incident pass.²⁰ Not so the Radical press. Georges Clemenceau was outraged; "You have permitted the army to reduce a man to the state of a walking corpse, and have allowed the army to raise itself to the point of revolt against the government...If there will be no justice for the innocents, there will be no justice for the guilty."²¹ Le Radical wrote,

The incident is not closed. There remains the task of rehabilitating those who were unjustly condemned. There is also the impossibility of leaving at the head of our troops men who have forfeited all honors, and can no longer command. The incident will not be closed until we have separated the grain from the chaff. It is not possible to honor at the same time and in the same manner the man who has defended a just²² cause and the man who has fought against it.

By his order of the day and his lack of vigor in punishing those who the Radicals felt were guilty of hostility to the Republic, de Gallifet forfeited much of the support he had from them. The actions that he did take aroused the hostility of the army and its supporters. Thus from all parts of the political spectrum, de Gallifet was under attack.

²⁰ Le Radical, 24 September 1899 and Le Matin, 23 September 1899.

²¹ L'Aurore, 24 September 1899.

²² Le Radical, 24 September 1899.

De Gallifet's most important reform was his curtailing of the powers of the classification committees over promotion. Even so, it was a change that the army itself had suggested for many years.²³ He did not want to eliminate the committees entirely, but he did seek to curtail their most obnoxious abuses. He ordered that voting for promotion by the committees be done openly instead of by the old secret ballot procedure. "I consider it no less indispensable to sanction by decree the right reserved only for the Minister of War who is encumbered with all of the responsibility which touches the army, to have the last word in the inscriptions on the promotion lists proposed by the classification committees."²⁴

What de Gallifet did by this act was to restore the ministerial responsibility that Charles de Freycinet²⁵ had let slip. It was an important action because it broke the steady erosion of power from the Minister of War to the various institutions of the army. But it was only a theoretical breakage. The classification committees still had the right to nominate and establish the promotion lists. The Minister of War only had the right of review. He could make additions

²³ General Pedoya, Recrutement et l'avancement des officiers, (Paris: H.C. Lavauzelle, 1909), p. 74.

²⁴ Bulletin officiel du ministère de la guerre, 9 January

²⁵ Charles de Freycinet, Minister of War 1888-1893 and 1898-1899.

to the list or delete names, but he did not create the lists.²⁶

The Radicals were not very happy with the change. They wanted swifter action.²⁷ What they did not realize was that de Gallifet had cracked the cornerstone of the army's power, its insularity. Henceforth, the extent and the type of changes would depend on the Minister of War. The immovable mass of the army would now be challenged by the revolving door of Third Republic politics. But since de Gallifet refused to go further or permit the government to institute more thorough reforms, it became obvious to all that a new Minister of War would be needed.²⁸

De Gallifet had wanted to resign for some time. He was seventy-two years old and not in the best of health. As the novelty of his new position wore off, and the ministry dragged on long past the expected three months, he looked for an excuse to leave.²⁹ After the Rennes verdict he wrote, "I will permit no reprisals. If the sectaires do not agree, I will resign."³⁰ Later that year he complained about the attacks the nationalist press was making on him. "I would

²⁶ Bulletin officiel du ministère de la guerre, 9 January 1900.

²⁷ Ralston, p. 248.

²⁸ Chapman, p. 251.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³⁰ Radziwill, p. 341.

like to find a good time to leave this drudgery. But I cannot abandon my post without a serious reason."³¹

On January 25, 1900, de Gallifet sent a letter to Waldeck-Rousseau demanding that he choose between him and Millerand. He felt that he had accomplished his task of restoring discipline to the army and that at present "It is a good time to end the equivocation that had taken place at the formation of the cabinet."³² To stress his point, he absented himself from a diplomatic dinner.³³ Rumors circulated that certain of Waldeck-Rousseau's fellow cabinet ministers desired to see de Gallifet leave and his place be taken by General Louis Andre.³⁴

De Gallifet found his excuse to leave on May 28, 1900. During one of those long tumultuous parliamentary debates on the Dreyfus Affair, Waldeck-Rousseau let slip a remark in which he referred to an officer as a felon.³⁵ De Gallifet immediately took offense to the remark and stalked out of the Chamber of Deputies saying "I have

³¹ Ibid., p. 342.

³² General Legrande-Girarde, Un quart de siècle au service de la France, (Paris: Presse Littéraire de France, 1954), p. 251.

³³ Ibid., p. 252,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Chapman p. 255.

had enough."³⁶ Pandemonium broke loose and for a while it seemed as if the government had fallen. The session was suspended for several minutes. When it reopened, Waldeck-Rousseau offered an apology. The government continued in power with the convenient excuse that de Gallifet had left because of a sudden indisposition. In fact, Waldeck-Rousseau held his resignation.³⁷

De Gallifet explained his actions in a letter to Princess Radziwill.

There are things which a military man cannot bear to hear from a civilian...I left the chamber immediately but discreetly^{1/}, and I immediately sent in my resignation. Waldeck-Rousseau apologized, but the blow had been struck. The head of the ministry having thus spoken, I would not stay without justly irritating the army. My authority, laboriously recovered during eleven months of work had been diminished too much...Waldeck-Rousseau, in agreement with me at the beginning has since fallen under the destructive influence of Millerand; every day he gains an advantage. Each day the necessity to preserve the majority forces him to take another step towards the program of the anarchists and socialists.³⁸

With his usual flourish, de Gallifet had made his exit. The Radicals were not sorry to see him go. They already had waiting in the wings a replacement, General André.

The ministry of de Gallifet was the beginning of the

³⁶ London Times, 29 May 1900, Le Radical, 29 May 1900; La Croix 31 May 1900.

³⁷ London Times 30 May 1900 and Le Radical, 30 May 1900.

³⁸ Radziwill, p. 335.

movement to reform the army. His reform of promotion procedure and the reestablishment of civilian dominance were the essential preludes to the work of the Radicals. But de Gallifet was devoted to the army and deeply respected its institutions and traditions. Essentially he saw his task as one of removing the grosser manifestations of injustice in the army. He would keep the army out of politics and politics out of the army. Clearly, he was not the man to "republicanize" the army as the Radicals so ardently desired.

CHAPTER III

THE APPOINTMENT OF GENERAL ANDRÉ AND HIS GATHERING OF POWER

General de Gallifet had proven to be unsuitable for the needs of the Radicals. They searched for a Minister of War whose philosophical and political outlook was consistent with their own. Even more important they needed someone who would be ready and willing to carry out their programs. They found their man in an obscure general of artillery, General André.

Louis Joseph Nicholas André was born in 1838 at Nuits St. Georges near Dijon. His father's occupation was listed as négociant and was sufficiently wealthy to send his son to the well-known preparatory school of Sainte Barbe in Paris. Louis was admitted number fifty-four of one hundred and twenty students, to the École Polytechnique. His grades at the school were mediocre, particularly in the areas of foreign language and literature. He finished his first year as number seventy-one and graduated as number sixty of one hundred and two students. It was not until he was at the École d'Application d'Artillerie that he showed any outstanding ability. There he graduated number one.¹

His service in the army of the Second Empire was uneventful. He entered too late to take part in the Italian campaigns. During

¹Etat de service de Louis Joseph Nicholas André, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

the Mexican expedition, he was in Paris as a lieutenant in the Imperial Guards, an assignment that was to be a source of embarrassment to the Radical republican war minister.

When the Franco-Prussian War began, André was commanding a battery of artillery in Paris. He was locked up there with the rest of the shattered remnants of the Imperial Army during the entire siege of Paris. He took part in the "Great Sortie" and was at the second battle of Le Bourget. He was still in Paris on March 18, 1871 when the Commune erupted. At the time he was still serving with the artillery, but he did not take part in the initial actions in Montmartre.²

Evacuating Paris, he was shipped to Rennes with the rest of his regiment. Refitted, the regiment returned to Versailles on May 3, 1871. He took part in the suppression of the Commune and was named a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor for his action at Montmartre.

Following the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, André settled down to a long and undistinguished career in several garrisons, a General Staff tour, and the headship of several technical committees. He made a name for himself as a good technical officer by the publication of several works on gunnery and physics. Promotion was slow. Appointed to the rank of captain in 1868, he did not reach the rank of major until 1877 and lieutenant-colonel eight years later. His career only becomes remarkable with his promotion

²Ibid.

to colonel in 1888 and his appointment the same year as the director of artillery at Vincennes. In 1893, he received his general's star and the assignment as the commander of the École Polytechnique.³

In 1897, André was the commandant of the Fourth corps artillery. His commander was General Auguste Mercier. André writes in his memoirs that he was on the best of terms with Mercier and often discussed the Dreyfus Affaire with him. "I was convinced from these conversations that Mercier had in his hands the proofs of Dreyfus' guilt."⁴ At this time André was, by his own admission, an anti-dreyfusard. It was not until Mercier's testimony at the Zola trial that André began to have his doubts.⁵

André did not emerge from his semi-obscurity until his promotion to divisional general and his appointment to command the Tenth Infantry division in Paris. His division had been transferred to Paris after Déroulède's escapade during Félix Faure's funeral had

³At least one author Ernest Mayer, Nos chefs de 1914, (Paris: Stock, 1930), pp. 128-129 has suggested that André's classmate at the École Polytechnique, Sadi Carnot (President of France 1888-1894), was the one responsible for his promotion to general and his appointment to the head of the École Polytechnique.

⁴Louis André. Cinq ans du ministère, (Paris: L. Michaud, 1907), p. 229.

⁵Ibid., p. 233.

cast doubt over the reliability of the Paris garrison. On December 18, 1899 André issued an Order of the Day which was to endear him to the Radicals and mark him for particular abuse by the nationalists. It read,

The General in command of the division has noticed, in certain reading rooms of non-commissioned officers, journals known for their systematic hostility towards the governments.

The troops' commanders will take the measures necessary to prohibit the entry of these journals into the barracks and will make known to the general of the division the names of the officers charged with the carrying out of this order, and its supervision in the reading rooms.⁶

The order launched André's political career.

The republican papers congratulated André on his forthright action. Le Matin wrote "We can only approve in its entirety the terms of this decision and we hope that it will gradually contribute to curtail in the army, and especially among the non-commissioned officers, the habit of meddling in politics."⁷ Le Radical wrote, "We congratulate General André because we are now reduced to congratulating officers who simply do their duty."⁸ La Libre Parole answered André's order by asking why only nationalist journals were proscribed and not those that attack the army. What right, it demanded, does André have to prescribe any journals? The paper

⁶The order was picked up by several newspapers and published according to their political leanings. See Le Matin, 28 December 1899 and La Libre Parole, 30 December 1899.

⁷Le Matin, 28 December 1899.

⁸Le Radical, 30 December 1899.

called on General de Gallifet to rescind the order.⁹ De Gallifet did not. In fact on January 1, 1900 he extended the order to the entire army and included officer cercles as well.¹⁰

Several days after André's order of the day had been made public, La Libre Parole stated that André was now the hope of the dreyfusards. It reported that an excellent source had informed them that André was the Minister of War designate. He had all the right attributes: he was a freemason (a false accusation that was to be repeated constantly) and a good friend of Henri Brisson.¹¹

As early as December of 1899, there appeared the general outline of the nationalist campaign against the Radical army reforms in general and André in particular. La Libre Parole published the "Radical plan to disorganize the army." It would take place in three parts. First a campaign of outrage—which has preceded de Gallifet's appointment. Second: a phase of destruction carried out by de Gallifet designed to knock down the supports of the military edifice. This done, the reign of de Gallifet has ended. A new stage was about to begin, a stage of creation. André, the creature of Reinach and Brisson, was to connect the freemasons to

⁹La Libre Parole, 30 December 1899.

¹⁰Bulletin Officiel du Ministère de la Guerre, 1 January 1900, p. 1.

¹¹La Libre Parole, 30 December 1899. See also Joseph Reinach Histoire de l'affaire dreyfus 7 vols., (Paris: Revue Blanche, 1901-1911), VI 121-122, who also attributes André's selection to the influence of Henri Brisson.

the war ministry with a secret link. The army was to be turned over to the freemasons.¹² In various forms, this attack would persist for the four and one-half years of André's ministry.

On the evening of May 28, 1900 André received a telegram from Waldeck-Rousseau requesting that he report immediately to the prime minister. At the time, he was on an inspection tour but admitted "I had little doubt about the reason for the message. I was being called to replace de Gallifet."¹³ André stated in his memoirs that he had doubts as to whether or not he should accept the post. Finally he decided that he would accept in order to help the republican officers who were suffering for their views.¹⁴ A more likely reason was that he was a very junior divisional general with only three years left before he would have to retire. Obtaining the command of a corps or a military governorship would be nearly impossible under these conditions. With no higher rank open to him, his acceptance was a foregone conclusion.

André's account of his initial conversation with Waldeck-Rousseau is very illuminating. Waldeck-Rousseau, André states, was very agitated. The situation he outlined was very serious.

¹²La Libre Parole, 30 December 1899.

¹³Le Matin, 16 June 1906. André's memoirs were first published in Le Matin during 1906. This version varies somewhat from that of the 1907 memoirs.

¹⁴André, p. 9.

The spirit of coup d'état, which had almost been carried out at the time of the Rennes trial, was still rampant in the army. He did not have much faith in the loyalty of the high command towards the Republic.¹⁵

Viewed from a perspective of more than seventy years, the student of history must conclude that the possibility of an army coup d'état was very remote at the time of the Dreyfus affair. Except, perhaps, for some junior commanders, the idea was never seriously considered. The high command of the army never wavered in its obedience to the civil authorities. Roget's action at Félix Faure's funeral is an excellent example of the army's attitude towards a seizure of power. But the misconceptions, the myth of a military coup were the driving force behind the Radicals' army reforms. Much of André's work attempted to create a submissive, if not an enthusiastically loyal officer corps.

André outlined two possible solutions to the problem of unreliable officers. In 1883 the government had temporarily suspended the law forbidding the removal of judges. It then proceeded to purge all of the judges whose loyalty to the Republic was questionable. André offered this as a precedent. By suspending the 1832 law that made an officer's rank his personal property, it would be possible to remove quickly all undesirable officers. The alternative was more conservative. The same thing could be done without touching what André called the "sacred ark." It was slower

¹⁵Ibid.

but might obtain "quelques résultats immédiates qui peut-être feront reculer les uns et contiendront les autres."¹⁶

One can imagine Waldeck-Rousseau's reaction to the first suggestion. The methodical lawyer could never accept such a radical break with the law. In addition, it was dangerous. To relieve magistrates of their post is one thing, to relieve officers of theirs is quite another. Magistrates are relatively easy to replace. At worst the disruption in the judicial process is an inconvenience. But the army is quite another matter. One could not underestimate the amount of affection the nation still felt towards its army. In addition, since the army was still suspected of desiring to carry out a coup d'état, surely such a move would provoke it. It would also cause chaos in the army high command and leave the country defenseless for many years. Fashoda was still too recent to risk another diplomatic humiliation.¹⁷ The first solution was quickly rejected.

The second method was more suited to Waldeck-Rousseau's temperament. It would be slower, but there was the promise of some quick action to pacify the more extreme

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁷ Fashoda incident. In 1898, a diplomatic crisis erupted over the possession of the headwaters of the Nile River. A French detachment under Jean Marchand seized the town of Fashoda and held it in the face of overwhelming British military superiority. The crisis was peaceably resolved.

Radical elements. The cabinet approved the second proposal. It was to be André's method for the next four and one-half years.¹⁸

- 1) There is a need to put more punch in the regulations and above all in their application;
- 2) Reestablish discipline in the grand chefs;
- 3) The inviolable attachment to discipline is the best guardian of the army's greatness;
- 4) Never forget that the army must never pass judgment on politics;
- 5) At the military schools we must demand of those who wish to enter a pledge to support our institutions, and not to fight them;
- 6) The army must not become complacent in its position;
- 7) The army's dignity does not allow it to be served, instead of serving;
- 8) The army of the republic...will be invincible when the modern and republican spirit penetrates its commanders.¹⁹

For the most part, the principles that André followed were concerned with the reestablishment of discipline. The notable exception is his last point. What the army needed was to be strong in modern ideas. Republicanism was a modern idea; Catholicism and monarchism were not. A republican officer would be more adaptable to the rapid changes in military thought than the reactionary officer. André sought to create a fresh wind to stir the officer corps to great accomplishments. Republicanism would rekindle the dying embers of thought in the officer corps.

¹⁸ Despite the importance of this conversation, no other record of its having taken place exists. In a massive biography of Waldeck-Rousseau, Pierre Sorlin, Waldeck-Rousseau, (Paris: A. Corlin, 1966), does not mention the meeting.

¹⁹ André, pp. 16-17

André's appointment was enthusiastically received in the republican press. Le Radical wrote that the appointment would be applauded by all true republicans. It also commented that General de Gallifet had been somewhat of a disappointment. He had curbed the classification committees and struck out at some of the more outspoken generals, but he had never exercised the powers he had retaken. He still promoted the same type of officers as the committees. The paper encouraged André to do better.²⁰ Le Figaro and Le Matin called André an energetic and intelligent officer of unquestionable republican convictions.²¹ Le Temps expressed the hope that:

The new Minister of War will not do other than what his predecessor has done....It goes without saying that the Dreyfus Affair is closed and that the army must remain outside of politics and be respectful of the government...and that the government must have no sentiments other than those of affection for the army....Nothing²² should change but the name of the minister.

Opinion on the right varied. L'Echo de Paris wrote that André had done nothing to earn recognition. He had distinguished himself only by his punctuality.

²⁰Le Radical, 1 June 1900.

²¹Le Figaro, and Le Matin, 31 May 1900.

²²Le Temps, 31 May 1900.

Scrupulous, methodical and slow, he was the perfect chef de bureau. He had been chosen because he is weak. He would be the perfect tool of the Radicals.²³ La Libre Parole and L'Intransigeant were less kind. He was called a dreyfusard, a freemason, a Protestant, incompetent, and controlled by the "syndicate."²⁴ But the nationalist press was not the only one displeased with André's appointment. De Gallifet expressed his distaste in a letter to Princess Radziwill. "The ministry is now homogeneous because General André, less of a soldier than a sectarian, dreyfusard-freemason, has now entered. He will be inspired by M. Brisson, whose creature he is."²⁵ General Legrande-Girarde (at the time a junior officer attached to the Elzé guard) wrote in his diary: "André, the man of the freemasons, a sectarian, and a little mad; a former admirer of General Mercier is now Minister of War."²⁶ Thus from the beginning André was the target of abuse

²³ L'Echo de Paris, 19 June 1900

²⁴ La Libre Parole and L'intransigeant, 31 May 1900.

²⁵ Princesse Radziwill, Lettres de Princesse Radziwill au General de Robilant, 4 vols. (Bologna, Zanichelli 1933-1934), II, 345.

²⁶ General Legrande-Girarde, Un quart de siècle au service de la France, (Paris: Presse Littéraire de France), p. 264.

from the nationalist press and despised by the army.

André had promised Waldeck-Rousseau "certain immediate results" for the reform of the army. Eleven days after his appointment, he provided the first ones. On June 8, 1900, he replaced the chiefs of the First, Second and Third Bureau of the General Staff. The act began André's first confrontation with the army and the parliamentary opposition.

No reason was given by André in his memoirs for the changes. In fact, he minimized his decision. He pointed out that he had changed only three of the one hundred and twenty officers of the General Staff. In addition, they were replaced by their immediate subordinates.²⁷

In fact, André's shakeup was extraordinary. While proportionately a small change, the dismissal of three bureau heads at once was a radical change in the composition of the General Staff. André did not replace the bureau chiefs with their immediate subordinates as he claimed. The new chief of the First Bureau was commanding a regiment at the time of his appointment. The new chiefs of the Second and Third Bureaus were men who had risen from the ranks and at the time were on

²⁷ André, p. 46.

the General Staff but were not the second in command of the bureaus.

There were definite political considerations taken into account when the changes were made. In at least one case, anti-clerical motives can be seen to have played a role. The commander of the First Bureau, Colonel de Castelnau (later to become a Marshal of France), was nicknamed the archbishop because of his religiousness. Finally, André and Delanne, the Chief of the General Staff, had disliked each other for some time. André had been coldly received by Delanne when he became Minister of War. In addition, André took offense at the large number of religious articles and "reactionary journals" he found scattered about the war ministry.²⁸ Taking this into account, André's intentions were obvious. In one stroke he would give notice that "clericals" and "reactionaries" were no longer to be favored. He would also provoke the chief of the General Staff to resign. In this manner André hoped that he would

²⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

firmly establish his authority over the army.

The legality of André's action was questionable at best. According to article eight of the law of January 3, 1891 reorganizing the General Staff, "The chief of the General Staff is charged under the authority of the Minister of War, with the direction of the personnel and of the services of the General Staff as well as the choice and the instruction of the officers of the service." Article nine specified the personnel that he could appoint. They included the chiefs and the assistant chiefs of all the bureaus.²⁹

Since its passage, the law had been interpreted as giving the Chief of the General Staff full powers of appointment and dismissal over the General Staff of the Army. André changed this interpretation. According to his view the important phrase was that the Chief of the General Staff held his power "under the authority of the minister." Thus the Minister of War could intervene to change the personnel as he saw fit. In fact there can be little doubt that when Minister of War de Freycinet framed the law, he had no such interpretation in mind. De Freycinet was notorious for giving the army a great deal of autonomy. The phrasing was an obvious concession to the theory of civil predominance. André intended to change the theory into reality.

There is no way of knowing whether or not the cabinet was informed in advance of the decision. André's memoirs are silent on the question. It is doubtful that Waldeck-Rousseau would have

²⁹ B.O.M.G., 3 January, 1891, p.7.

approved such a move so soon after a cabinet crisis. It would have been more prudent to wait three more weeks until parliament would adjourn for its summer vacation. It appears as if André simply presented Waldeck-Rousseau with a fait accompli.

André soon compounded his error. Delanne, as was expected, handed in his resignation. André refused it stating that he could only accept his resignation from the army and not just from his post as Chief of the General Staff. Delanne balked at this condition.³⁰ But André still had Delanne's resignation in his pocket and could look for a new Chief of the General Staff. Delanne requested that André let him inform the General Staff of what had occurred. Incredibly André not only granted the request but permitted it to be sent without his first reading it.³¹ It was sent on June 12, 1900. It was a declaration of war.

In saying my farewell to the officers of the General Staff, I have been authorized by the Minister to make known his decision on my request to be relieved of my post. Yesterday afternoon the minister advised me that he is opposed to my departure and ordered me to remain at my post. I can only obey. Since the reasons that prompted the request still exist, I have informed the minister that I still wish to be relieved of my duties.

I therefore found it necessary to inform the army that it is a formal order that compels me to stay at my post.³²

Delanne's intentions in writing such a note is not known.

Did he wish to shake the minister? Was he trying to win a showdown

³⁰ André, p. 30

³¹ André Memoirs in Le Matin, 19 June 1906.

³² Reported in several newspapers including L'Intransigeant and Le Matin, 26 June 1900.

with André? In all likelihood, Delanne felt that he had to show the General Staff that he was defending its interests. But the note went far beyond the realm of military propriety.³³

The dispute first hit the newspapers on June 12, 1900 when the story of André's replacement of the three bureau chiefs without Delanne's knowledge came to light. L'Echo de Paris, consistently one of the best informed newspapers on military affairs, stated that when Delanne protested the appointments, André told him that it had been done to "republicanize" the General Staff. "He had resolved to place only those officers newly arrived."³⁴ La Libre Parole accused André of disorganizing the army.³⁵

Le Temps expressed concern over the instability being introduced into the high command. Since the onset of the Dreyfus Affair, the Minister of War has been changed every six months. Thankfully the position of Generalissimo and Chief of the General Staff had remained stable. But in the last four years, there have been four Chiefs of Staff. "Let us not have the problem of rotating prefects occur in the army."³⁶

Adding to André's discomfort was his inability to find a replacement for Deianne. He had already encountered such a problem

³³ David Ralston, The Army of the Republic, (Cambridge Mass.: M.I.T. Press), p. 290.

³⁴ L'Echo de Paris, 12 June 1900.

³⁵ La Libre Parole, 11 June 1900.

³⁶ Le Temps, 12 June 1900.

when he was searching for new bureau chiefs.³⁷ First, General Bonnal was offered the position. He refused. One after another, the highest ranking generals were called. For four weeks André searched for a general who was not only qualified, but unquestionably republican.³⁸

The newspapers took up a lively discussion over the case. Le Radical wrote that Delanne had to accept the appointments because "If any general wants to be obeyed by his subordinates, he must first obey his superiors."³⁹ L'Echo de Paris wrote "From Le Figaro to the socialists it has been written that the Chief of the General Staff is no more than a functionary. Thus he has but one duty, to obey. But a general is not just a functionary and has the right to disassociate himself from a crime and not compromise his honor."⁴⁰ In another article on the same day expressed the army's sentiments over the affair.

Thus, after thirty years of work to make the army independent and strong for those who have been giving the most difficult mission that a man can assume: for thirty years we searched for a means to insulate that man from the dangerous fluctuations of politics. For thirty years we have tried to give one Chief of the General Staff the initiative commensurate with his responsibility. We have taxed our parliamentary institutions to the fullest to give this man an authority bordering on that given by the Germans to their Chief of the General Staff. Then an improvised minister comes and suppresses these initiatives and weakens the most important conditions of the most important section of the army.⁴¹

³⁷ Le Matin, 18 June 1900.

³⁸ Legrande-Girarde, p. 257.

³⁹ Le Radical, 15 June 1900.

⁴⁰ L'Echo de Paris, 16 June 1900.

⁴¹ Ibid.

In parliament, the nationalist deputy Firmin Faure demanded an interpellation on the legality of André's action. It was put off with the hope that parliament would adjourn before the interpellation could take place.

Delanne, however, decided to force the issue. On June 28, he issued the following order. "It has been brought to the attention of the acting Chief of the General Staff of the arrival of Lieutenant-Colonel Mercier-Millon, named as the Director of Personnel of the General Staff. Until otherwise ordered, that section will continue to be directed by Lieutenant-Colonel Meunier."⁴² The order was a direct challenge to André's authority. The Chief of the General Staff had countermanded the orders of the Minister of War.

The nationalist press took the position that Delanne's action was perfectly legal. He was merely exercising the authority that parliament had given him under articles eight and nine of the law of January 3, 1891.⁴³ But the Radical press put up a tremendous howl. Le Radical wrote:

In effect, we have witnessed nothing less than a praetorian sedition. It is a revolt of the ranking soldiers against the Minister of War, the chief of the army, and against the government of the republic. He has incited his subordinates to sedition. He has dared the minister and the government to touch the military faction at the Rue St. Dominique. The faction fears nothing. Absolute masters of their own home, autonomous and with discretionary powers, the Jesuit militarists laugh at the orders of the day proclaiming the predominance of the civil over the military power.⁴⁴

⁴² André, p. 32. Le Matin 29 June 1900.

⁴³ L'Echo de Paris, 25 June 1900. La Libre Parole 25 June 1900.

⁴⁴ Le Radical, 28 June 1900.

The parliamentary debate over the affair was uneventful. André cleverly used his interpretation of the law to demolish the arguments of Faure. There was never any doubt that he would win an impressive vote of confidence. He had won his first important battle as Minister of War. With the firm backing of the republican majority in the Chamber, he now felt confident that he could continue his reorganization plans.

In the meantime, André's problems with Delanne were complicated by the resignation of the Vice-President of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, General Javout. On the day of the Delanne resignation, Javout had an interview with President Leubet. He told him that "The fact that General André has been called to the ministry of war is an all too clear indication of the government's intentions."⁴⁵ He told President Leubet that he intended to resign. Leubet asked him to stay on, but he refused. The same day he sent his resignation to André stating:

The instability of the Chief of the General Staff is incompatible with the formation and conduct of armies in the field. At the beginning of a war, the commander of an army group must have a collaborator in which he has complete confidence, who is informed about the army and who knows the mobilization plan by having prepared its details. Since this has changed, the difficulties already so great and so heavy have multiplied themselves beyond my ability to reduce them.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ralston p. 290. La Libre Parole, 5 July 1900.

⁴⁶ Reported in several newspapers including Le Matin and La France Militaire, 6 July 1900.

But Jamont was the archetypal, obedient non-political soldier. His resignation remained confidential until July 6. When the letter did reach the newspapers, its wording threw more fuel on the fire that Andre' and Delanne had started. Le Radical wrote:

This is the supreme maneuver that the reactionary nationalist coalition has yet attempted....The coup has been carefully prepared. They have hoped to intimidate the government, and above all the new Minister of War. It is sincerely hoped that the Minister of War will crush this lamentable combination.⁴⁷

At the same time, the nationalist press began a subscription to post Jamont's letter all over France.⁴⁸ Jamont was appalled at the uproar he had caused. He immediately sent a letter to the nationalist papers insisting that they end their subscription. The letter, he insisted, had been intended only for the eyes of the Minister of War. He had informed the minister of his reason for retiring, and that had been his only intention.

Jamont's resignation created a great deal of controversy. It had been the accepted theory, both within the army and the country at large, that the Vice-President of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, was the commander-in-chief designate in case of war, the "generalissimo." Legally speaking, there was no such position as "generalissimo."⁴⁹ But, it was reasoned, since the Conseil

⁴⁷ Le Radical, 6 July 1900.

⁴⁸ It was begun on 6 July 1900 as a joint effort of L'Intransigeant and La Libre Parole.

⁴⁹ Ralston, p. 293.

Supérieur de la Guerre was the highest military authority in the country, the Vice-President, who commanded it, was the commander of the army. André's contention was that this was not so. Since the position did not legally exist, it did not exist at all.⁵⁰

On July 5, André ended the crisis by appointing General Brugère, the military governor of Paris, as the new Vice-president of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre. General Pendezec, Brugère's chief of staff, was appointed as Chief of the General Staff. It would prove to be a bad appointment for André. Brugère was very much a political general. As L'Intransigeant commented, "Brugère is an antechamber general who has fought most of his battles at the Elysée Palace."⁵¹ He was ambitious and egotistical. His long years at the Elysée Palace, in fact he spent most of his career there as either the commander of the palace guard or as military secretary to the President, had left him with a taste for intrigue. As General Legrande-Girarde observed:

Surely the men in power are mad....They have chosen as generalissimo Brugère, who has never commanded a single man before the enemy. He is ambitious, and he aspires to be the president of the republic. He is perfectly capable of performing a coup d'état one day.⁵²

He was to give André a great deal of trouble over the next four years. Relations between the two became so bad in fact that for two years they did not meet together in private.⁵³ But Brugère

⁵⁰ André, p. 44.

⁵¹ L'Intransigeant, 6 July 1900.

⁵² Legrande-Girarde, p. 264.

⁵³ Generale Brugère was interviewed by L'Echo de Paris on 18 July 1906 in response to André's criticism of him in his

was reported to be a republican and since it took André so long to find a replacement, it is possible that he was the only general who was willing to accept the post.

The country was relieved over the final resolution of the crisis. André had won his first battle with the army. It was a major victory which paved the way for his ministry. He had shown the army that his position was unassailable. He was strongly backed by the majority in parliament, well supported in the press, and he had a strong enough will to fight it out with the generals. Most of all he showed that he did not have the reverence towards the generals and the command structure and the traditions of the army that his predecessors had had.

After the battles with Delanne and Jamont, André next tackled the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre. The members of this committee all held active commands in addition to being members of the committee. This had originally been authorized by General de Gallifet in order to reduce the prestige that the members had. In fact it was a poor organizational idea.

For thirty years, the entire organization of the French Army was based on the thesis that the command structure in peace time was to reflect command structure at the outbreak of war. Thus by having the members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre hold two positions, that of army commanders designate and either a corps, military governor or inspector general, several important changes would have to be made at the outbreak of war. On July 27, 1900,

André split the duties. The members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre were now to concern themselves exclusively with the organization of their command areas.⁵⁴

But there was another good reason for André to alter de Gallifet's organization system. By separating the functions of the members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, he opened up several key positions which could be filled with his own appointees. He was therefore able to place his own choices in such important posts as the military governor of Paris. Thus he picked up another vital string of authority that the ministers of war had let slip over the last thirty years.

André wasted little time in putting his hands on the most important power of all, promotion. On June 24, 1900 he issued orders not to make any final decisions on promotion without his approval. He gave as his reasons "the right to take into account, in the greatest measure, new facts which may modify the qualifications of the candidates since the establishment of the promotion tables. It is necessary that every opportunity to alter the lists remain at the minister's discretion."⁵⁵

This rather ominous warning did not go unnoticed. L'Echo de Paris commented:

⁵⁴ B.O.M.G., 27 July 1900 p. 1460 and Ralston, pp. 185-188 and 190-191.

⁵⁵ Reported in several newspapers including L'Echo de Paris 25 June 1900 and Le Radical, 26 June 1900.

It is not only the officers' expecting their promotion who are menaced. The general inspectors, corps commanders, the members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre are declared suspect since it is their propositions and their classifications which are declared ruinous. The regime of bon plaisir is here. After striking down the high command, he has now attacked the lower ranks. A kind of terrorism awaits our beautiful army. ⁵⁶

When the promotions were finally made, it was found that no really radical change had taken place. André's personal staff was not rewarded, as was the custom of all new war ministers, with promotions and medals. A few officers who had risen from the ranks were promoted to colonel, but in general there were few surprises.

On October 3, 1900 André issued an order on the drawing up of the new promotion lists. He gave as his reason:

The rights of the minister would be illusory if the classification committee takes it upon itself to submit recommendations corresponding exactly to the needs of the army. The number corresponding to the needs of the army must be notably increased so that the minister can choose without being constrained to follow the order of the classification committee.

In addition he stipulated that all officers on the promotion list not promoted in the year of their presentation are to be eliminated from the promotion list. In effect then, each year an entirely new promotion list was to be drawn up. ⁵⁷

The new system was to work as follows: All recommendations were to be drawn up individually by each corps and technical service; artillery, engineers, etc. They were to contain three times the number of officers

⁵⁶ L'Echo de Paris, 25 June 1900.

⁵⁷ B.O.M.G., 3 October 1900, p. 1585.

required for that promotion. Thus it would be the Minister of War who would be able to make the final decision on each promotion. It was the logical step to take after the order of June 24, and made the Minister of War the virtual arbiter of promotion.

The army was not at all happy with the decision. La France Militaire published half a dozen articles condemning the decree. As one contributor wrote: "The decree...has produced a certain emotion in the army that I find somewhat premature. It is not possible to judge in advance the value of the new promotion method. It would be wise to await and see how the law is applied before we judge it."⁵⁸ But his opinion was very much in the minority.

Camille Pelletan commented in Le Matin:

Before André (thanks to Freycinet) the Minister of War was little more than a rubber stamp for the wishes of his subordinates. Not even a lieutenant could be promoted without the recommendation of a general. It is an absurd position and unconstitutional. As for its political affect: the hierarchy of the army has made the highest positions virtually hereditary, reserved for the nephews of the archbishop and the personal entourage of a general. The virtual exclusion of commoners rising from the ranks; the silent hatreds drives the best ones to leave the army....The prerogatives of the minister is no panacea but he is accountable to parliament and he is above the petty squabbles that so often influence promotion. In any event he merits more confidence than his subordinates because⁵⁹ he is the one with the command responsibility.

Over the next four years, André would be drawn into an extended

⁵⁸ La France Militaire, 24 October 1900.

⁵⁹ Le Matin, 11 October 1900.

battle in matters of promotion.

The next victim to fall to André's assault was the military school at St. Cyr. His purpose was to gain control of the power of appointment to the administrative teaching staff of the most important institution. The Radicals had felt for a long time that it was at St. Cyr that many of the "dangerous" ideas of the officer corps originated. The young impressionable students, the Radical argument went, were instructed by reactionary, caste-minded professors who perpetuated the antidemocratic and anti-republican traditions of the officer corps. It was time to put an end to the problem.⁶⁰

André decided that the best way to solve the problem was to remove the "reactionary" elements and appoint a more "republican" administration. To get his way, he had President Loubet sign a decree concerning St. Cyr which contained an article giving him the right to name all of the employees at the school. He gave as his reason:

The decrees which regulate the organization of the military school does not allow the minister to choose the instructor or professors except those proposed by the inspector generals or by the artillery and engineering committees. It also specifies that the instructors be chosen from graduates of the school. I feel that the right of the minister to choose the officers...not be limited and that he be permitted to choose from all the officers in the army with no distinctions.⁶¹

⁶⁰ In 1900, Le Temps published a series of articles entitled "Lettres Libres" written by an anonymous officer. Throughout, this argument is apparent. The articles also served as the foundation of Radical criticism of the entire officer structure

⁶¹ B.O.M.G., 25 September 1900, p. 1545.

Thus Andre' again returned to the same theme. The minister has been limited in his powers of choice. The restrictions must end if the minister is to exercise his constitutional powers. The caste structure of the officer corps must be broken and it must start at St. Cvr. To do this all officers must have the opportunity to teach there.

But Andre' was not content to win one of de Gallifet's battles of principles. He followed his decree by transferring twenty-one officer instructors from St. Cvr to their regiments. Their replacements contained a large number of St. Maxient graduates. Le Figaro called it a reorganization.⁶² La Libre Parole was less generous. "Andre' has purged St. Cvr so that it will reflect his ideas....He has destroyed the school's morale and teaching ability.... It is an unprecedented disorganization"⁶³ The usually non-partisan La France Militaire wrote:

In principle the authority of the minister is unassailable. But it cannot be concealed that this authority is a double-edged sword. Appointment may be returned to the unreal preoccupations of politicians. It is to be feared that with the instability of our parliamentary institutions, there will be a return to those very inconveniences that we wish to correct.⁶⁴

⁶² Le Figaro, 1 October 1900.

⁶³ La Libre Parole, 27 September 1900.

⁶⁴ La France Militaire, 29 September 1900.

André's action in fact was little less than a wholesale attempt at reorienting the philosophy of the school towards a more "republican" outlook.

André's only defeat in these months was in his attempt to favor students educated in state schools over those who attended congregational schools in the granting of scholarships to St. Cyr and the Ecole Polytechnique. His official reasoning was that if a family could afford to send their child to a religious school, they could afford the costs of the military schools. The reasoning was facetious and André knew it.⁶⁵ Scholarships to congregational schools were freely distributed and in fact it often cost less for a family to send its children to a congregational school than to a state school. The real reason behind André's decision was that he wished to laicize the student body by only accepting those students with a state education. He would thus cut away another foundation stone from the caste structure of the officer corps. In any event it was very much within the Radical anticlerical program.

André could hardly have expected the storm of protest he aroused. The nationalist press was, of course,

⁶⁵ André, p. 68.

violently aroused. Even Le Radical was hard pressed to defend André. "The decision is no more arbitrary than that of the classification committees and at least it is arbitrary in favor of the Republic."⁶⁶ The outcry was so great that André was forced to back down on this policy. The restrictions would have to wait for a more propitious moment.

An account of André's first seven months as Minister of War would be incomplete without mentioning a relatively minor demonstration of André's new-found power. At the Ecole d'Application at Versailles, a certain Captain Coblentz, a Jew, was appointed as an instructor. He was not welcomed by the other instructors. In fact a protest letter, signed by several officers, was sent to the Minister of War. The letter stated that not only was captain Coblentz not qualified to teach at the school, but his presence was disruptive to the harmony of the school. André's action was swift. Seven officers were transferred from the school and sent back to their regiments. When the commander of the school protested, he was relieved of his command and sent into retirement. Thus with one stroke André took control of yet another part of the military apparatus, and gave a sharp warning to the

⁶⁶ Le Radical, 19 October 1900.

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officer corps that antisemitism and exclusiveness would no longer be tolerated.⁶⁷

The newspapers did not let the incident go unnoticed. Le Radical wrote "It is time to end the religious hatreds in the army. The military hierarchy must learn that the government will not tolerate it. It must learn that there are only French officers in the army. We applaud André's action."⁶⁸ Le Gaulois, however, attributed it to André's lust for power.⁶⁹

At the end of 1900 André attended a banquet at Beaune. After the usual eating and drinking and toasting he was called upon to give an impromptu speech. Perhaps he was feeling the effects of the wine he had had. Perhaps his tendency to speak his mind got the better of his judgment. In any event, the speech was a terrible gaffe,

You will find in the next parliamentary debates a great deal of criticism of my policies. I will not let it influence me. I fear nothing and no one. I will realize the total union of hearts between France and her army. I will see it through to the end. The worst that can happen are the injuries; they are the dues to be

⁶⁷ All of the newspapers were filled with articles on the incident. See Le Temps, 16 October 1900, and Le Matin 15 October 1900 for the most balanced accounts of the incident.

⁶⁸ Le Radical, 15 October 1900

⁶⁹ Le Gaulois, 15 October 1900.

paid. I believe in explaining myself whatever the attacks made upon me by the enemies of the republic and the fatherland....I only regret that the law on treason cannot be used against those who would put personal politics before the interests of the republic....

I have come to say in a few words what I feel on my heart and which all Frenchmen should know. The task that has been thrust upon me I will finish against all obstacles. I will follow it through to the end. I will swallow everything that must be swallowed, the injuries and the insults. I will not lower myself and I will not leave the ministry except feet first.⁷⁰

The speech earned Andre the appellation of general pieds devants in the nationalist press.

Le Temps criticized him for his truculence. But the speech was prophetic. He would continue in office for four years, withstanding some of the most virulent abuse any minister has ever had to contend with and in the end was literally carried out feet first from his place on the government benches.

⁷⁰Le Temps, 27 December 1900.

CHAPTER IV

THE RADICAL PROGRAM

The political upheaval of the Dreyfus Affair thrust the Radical Party into power. For the army, no political party, save the Socialists, could have been more antagonistic to their interests. The ascension of the Radicals would prove to be a long purgatory for the army.

The Dreyfus Affair served as an opportunity to re-examine all aspects of French society. The army was no exception. The radicals' view on the army was colored by their ideology and distorted by their analysis of the army's role in the Dreyfus Affair. It is important to examine the Radicals' ideology in order to understand their program.

The Radicals considered themselves to be the descendants of the Jacobins and the heirs of the French Revolution. For them Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité were ideals to be attained. Time and again we find these aspirations repeated. Edouard Herriot declared "We must work to establish a regime where each citizen will have only the advantages of work and merit."¹

For the Radicals it was political control of the state that was of utmost importance. Gambetta declared in his Belleville program, "I consider the progressive achievement

¹Onzième congrès du Parti Radical et Radical-Socialists,
1911, p. 38.

of...reforms depends absolutely on the political reforms."²
 Only after the seizure of power could the society be changed.

The Radicals were Positivists. Converts to the theories of Auguste Comte, they were firm believers in the beneficial affects of evolution. Their aims were to aid progress with enlightened laws,

The Radical-Socialist party has an aim; it is to organize society both politically and socially, along the laws of reason, that is to say in view of the complete development of the individual...The Radical party has a method, the method of nature herself. It is known that all organisms tend to develop towards a superior state...What is awaited is the moral and intellectual evolution of each individual and the progressive amelioration of society.³

The Radicals were convinced that not only were they called upon to aid that evolution, but that their ascension to power was part of that evolution.

The Radicals drew much of their support from the provincial bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie. In many respects, they reflected the prejudices and fears of this group. They saw the Dreyfus Affair as part of the monarchist, clerical plot to overthrow their beloved Republic. Their enemies had been narrowly defeated and it was now their duty to destroy their opponents for the good of the Republic.

² Quoted in David Thompson, Democracy in France, Since 1870. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 84.

³ Gaston Merins, Le Parti Radical. (Paris: Librairie des Sciences Politiques et Sociales, 1929), p. 33.

Camille Pelletan⁴ sounded the cry at the first Radical Congress,

The first thought of a republican congress should be that of union against the common enemy. This has been forced upon the whole democracy in the face of open plots and intrigues for a coup de'état... It unites all the sons of the Revolution...against the men of the counter revolution, whose numbers are swollen by accomplices drawn from the ranks of our former friends...

The best way to defend the Republic is to make it really republican...The law against the congregations has already been passed. The country expects it to be enforced...The era of postponement must end. The era of resolution must begin.⁵

The Radicals felt that the time had come to put an end to those forces which had sought to overthrow the Republic time and again. The Church and the army were the two institutions singled out as being the most hostile to the Republic. The primary effort of the Radicals was directed primarily upon the Church. The congregations were dissolved, their monopoly on education ended, and their political power broken. The policy against the army, was not as successful. Other than the reduction in military service, no fundamental change was made in the organization or composition of the army. Yet the Radicals did have detailed plans to "republicanize"

⁴Camille Pelletan 1857-1917. Radical politician and journalist. Minister of the Navy 1902-1905.

⁵Thompson, pp. 275-277.

and "democratize" the army.

A distinction can be drawn between the terms "democratization" and "republicanization." In the Radical rhetoric, they were sometimes used interchangeably. But they did carry different meanings. Democratization referred to the policy of wider recruitment of officers, the promotion of men from the ranks, suppression of orderlies and special privileges. Republicanization referred more to the reform of the attitudes of the officer corps and the indoctrination of soldiers with republican ideals.

The Radicals had a nine-point program, which was elaborated upon as time went on. It consisted of 1) the reduction of military service to two years; 2) the suppression of the classification committees and a return of the power of promotion to the Minister of War; 3) a greater rate of promotion of men from the ranks; 4) the reassertion of the civil over the military authority; 5) the ending of all officer privileges; 6) a reform of the military schools; 7) the creation of a new role for the officer corps; 8) the removal of the last vestiges of clerical influence in the army; 9) complete reform of the military justice system.

The first four items of this program will be dealt with in later chapters. They were the most important parts of the Radical program. But this is not to say that the Radicals considered the other items to be of secondary importance. In fact, some of the proposed reforms are interesting because they reveal much in the Radicals'

attitude towards the army and military problems at the turn of the century.

The Radicals had come to believe that the army should be more than an instrument of national defense. It was an idea that was not original with them. It had been formulated by Captain (later Marshal) Hubert Lyautey in 1891, in an anonymous article entitled, "Du Rôle social de l'officier." He stated bluntly that there must be a fundamental change in the role of the army. It must cease to concern itself solely with the preparation for some war in the distant future and begin to play a role as the builder of youth.⁶

The officers had ignored the soldiers. In fact, they knew the names of their horses better than those of their men. Promotion had become the be-all and end-all of their existence. Soldiers were considered no better than animals to be disciplined and force...fed with military instructions.⁷

These attitudes were vestiges of the army before 1870. But mass education had turned the constrict into a literate individual. With mass conscription, France could no longer afford to expose so many men to a system which

⁶ /Hubert Lyautey/ "Du Rôle social de l'officier,"
Revue des Deux Mondes, March 1891, p. 449.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 449-50

"diminished the moral sense...and encouraged the habits of intemperance and viciousness."⁸

Yet the officer corps was perfectly suited to play a role in social education. The new officers were infused with an intellectual vitality born of the change in military studies over the last generation. Most of all, he was a dedicated individual.⁹

What Lyautey proposed was to replace "instruction" with "education" as the primary purpose of the officer. The narrowness of technical instruction had to be replaced by a broadening of the soldiers' horizons. The officer had not accepted the role, but, Lyautey stated, he should.¹⁰

The potential gain would be enormous. For the nation it would mean "the pacification and submission of spirits to this regime, and make them more resistant to the excitation of class hatreds." For the military it would create a new form of discipline which would respond to the new warfare of unseen and sudden death. For the officer "for whom peace has become the normal state, it would mean the introduction of a higher element into his life." It would replace those long periods of boredom in the garrisons, the dull routine

⁸ Ibid., p. 449.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 445-446.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 456.

of barracks life and the seemingly endless wait for promotion.¹¹

The cost of maintaining an army was so staggering that it was essential that the country get the most benefit possible from it. "The corvée brutale"¹² must be transformed into a vast field for social action."¹³

Lyautey's article was not well received by the military establishment. He was shipped off to Indochina, with the expectation that he would sink into oblivion. In 1891, Lyautey was ahead of his time. In 1900, the time for his ideas had arrived.

André was greatly influenced by Lyautey's article, as his memoirs amply prove. For him, "The army was a prolongation of school. The regiment is more than a great family, it is a school.... It must be the school in civics, the school for student citizens. We receive large children, we must give back to the nation men." André wanted to transform the officer from a saluting functionary to a changer of souls.¹⁴

Shortly after André entered the cabinet, the French National Congress of Education sent him a resolution. It stated: "The congress calls to the attention of the Minister

¹¹Ibid., pp. 453-454.

¹²Cruel statutory service.

¹³Ibid., p. 457.

¹⁴Louis André, Cinq ans du ministère, (Paris: Louis Michaud, 1907), p. 71.

of War and the chief of the army the necessity of developing the officer corps his sense of social mission."¹⁵

Attached to the resolution was a list of suggestions. They included presenting in each of the military schools lectures with instruction to the future officers on existing social problems; encouraging the formation of libraries in all of the garrisons which should include books on social matters; the encouragement of lectures by officers to further the education of their men and granting a greater number of scholarships to the children of the lower classes to increase the democratization of the officer corps.¹⁶

The resolution spurred André to action. He commissioned George Duruy, a civilian lecturer at the Ecole Polytechnique, an eminent educator of the time, and a prominent Radical, to construct an outline for such a course.

The outline owed a great deal to Lyautey's article. Certain points were to be emphasized: the glory of the French military traditions and the virtues of honor, courage, discipline, and self-sacrifice. To this he added two new virtues: the spirit of solidarity between the army and the nation and between the officer and his men.¹⁷

¹⁵ La France Militaire, 3 October 1900.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ George Duruy, L'Officier éducatrice, (Paris: R. Chapelot, 1904), pp. 247-248.

It was in Duruy's lectures that we see the true drift of his thought and his debt to Lyautey. He begins with the statement, "The enormous machine is not moving. It rests immobile, wasting its formidable resources, always strained and always active." He pointed out the paradox the army found itself in. Designed to be an instrument of war, it found itself in a state of perpetual peace.¹⁸

The officer was the victim of this paradox. Highly trained and highly motivated, he was frustrated because in times of peace he had nothing to do. To make matters worse, promotion had become terribly slow and has created a "griffe egoïste." The officer's desire for a feeling of usefulness clashed with the desire of the nation for peace. The result was an estrangement between the army and the nation.¹⁹

Of all the charges levelled against the army, the most serious, in Duruy's opinion, were that it was useless, that it did not return in performance what it cost to support. He also considered quite serious the charge that the army served as a center of opposition to the government and that it acted as a social deadweight. Finally, there was the charge that the economic, political and social evolution of France had

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 2, 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

made conformity to military life impossible.²⁰

Duruy was not an antimilitarist. He believed that a state of tension would continue to exist between France and Germany so long as the question of Alsace-Lorraine was not settled. An army was therefore a necessity. A militia would not be an effective substitute. New ideas had to be formulated in order to combat the charges of uselessness that were leveled against the army. He offered two: "That the preparation for war should remain the principal but not the only function of the officer and that the officer's purely military role should be accompanied by his social role."²¹

Duruy took great pains to point out that the concept of an officer's social role was not all that revolutionary. He cited fifteen years of literature and essays to support his thesis.²² Yet the sheer amount of space that he gave to the proofs of the non-revolutionary character of his suggestion clearly indicated that he was working outside the mainstream of military thought.

Duruy offered dozens of suggestions to his students on how to prepare for and play the role of educator. Many

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 26-30.

²¹ Ibid., p. 34.

²² Ibid., p. 35.

suggestions for instruction were similar to the methods employed in elementary schools, an excellent idea considering the educational level of the "students." He suggested the institution of lectures ranging from history and economics to the dangers of alcoholism. He also suggested the creation of recreation centers to keep the young soldiers out of the brothels and bistros.²³

The role of the officer according to Duruy, took three forms. The first was moral action, in which the officers were professionally obligated to seek out and correct the faults of their men. The second was informal intellectual action, which was to be carried out during the frequent contacts with the soldiers. The third was formal intellectual action, i.e., regular lectures. Duruy added the admonition that these lectures must remain voluntary, otherwise they would be fruitless.²⁴

Duruy summed up his lectures as follow:

The metier of the professional officer finds itself in a disturbing crisis. The officer no longer fights... or rarely....He is no longer promoted... or slowly.... He feels somewhat isolated.... For a great number of Frenchmen...the officer is a suspect. It is necessary that the officer become aware of his social role and play it. The army must become a great school of moral and physical hygiene. It would resolve the problem of transforming universal service from the instrument of national degeneration which, it is, in certain measure into an instrument of virtue, which it should become.²⁵

²³ Ibid., p. 179.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 198.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 224-240.

In each of the military schools of France, a similar course of lectures was given. The most important and the most often quoted of these was given by Commandant Charles Ebener, at St. Cyr. His lectures were significant because it took Duruy's outline, which was primarily civilian in its outlook, and set it into a military framework.

Ebener sought to fuse all the disparate traditions of the French Army. From the Royal army he took the tradition of devotion to duty. From the Revolution he took the élan of the soldiers. From the First Empire he took the glory of the Grande Armée. But in each of these he found fault, the caste system of the Royal army, the amateurism of the Revolution, and the ambition of the Empire.²⁶

The army, he stated, had a new role. The age of glorious battles and incessant war had passed. It no longer sufficed to train men, it had to educate them. The army had not accepted its role. The men who passed through the army were not improved, they were destroyed.²⁷

Ebener called for a great work of regeneration: "To you gentlemen goes the honor of being assigned the role of educator of our republican army." He exhorted

²⁶ Charles Ebener, Conférences sur le rôle social de l'officier, (Paris: H.C. Lavauzelle, 1902), p. 37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

his students to become the moral guides for their men. This could only be done if the officer attempted to know each of his men individually and thus found the best way to reach him. The officer must no longer remain at a distance, the result of what he called the fruit of an "esprit de caste,"²⁸ a snobbism incompatible with the republicanism of the vast majority of Frenchmen.

It is this "esprit de caste" that Ebener aimed to discredit. The officer was human, he had to appear to be human and he must act humanely. "In a democracy like our own, it is inadmissible that officers consider themselves infallible."²⁹

Ebener considered the feeling of caste to be quite extensive in the army. He therefore gave very detailed instructions on the best way to approach the soldiers.

You would approach a new horse with kindness in order to win its confidence, so why not a man? A peasant should be approached on his level. Speak of what interests him....The workers you will win by appealing to his ego or his vanity. He will be devoted to you the day that you will show your superiority to him in all respects....You should invite students to participate³⁰ in your work of moral regeneration.

²⁸ Caste spirit.

²⁹ Ebener, p. 45.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

Ebener attacked the officer corps as being too preoccupied with the "cuite de moi," and with politics. The former he attacked as furthering that caste structure that had so alienated the army and the nation. The latter led to the strict admonition that "our duty...can be summed up in two words, no politics. All officers who by their speech or by their attitude would let it be supposed that they admit the substitution or the alteration of a rule would be gravely lacking in their professional duty. The officer does not involve himself in politics, he has only his duty."³¹

The thread that ran through both of these lectures is the belief that the army had to create a new image and a new set of goals. To fail to do so would cause the army to become an atrophied institution and the object of general scorn. Unity with the nation, the rejection of caste and the assumption of the social roles for Duruy and Ebener was the only viable solution.

André took several steps to create an army-school. In January of 1901, he ordered that every

³¹ Ibid., p. 67.

garrison institute a series of lectures on the dangers of alcoholism.³² In 1902, he granted permission for commanders to have members of the national lecture society organize lectures in the various garrisons in France. He also ordered that he be informed as to the number of lectures instituted and the results of these lectures.³³ Again in 1903, he encouraged the use of lecture societies as a supplement to the lectures given by officers and noncommissioned officers.³⁴

The range of these lectures was considerable. Geography, history, science, and grammar were quite common. In addition, a great number of lectures were given on the dangers of alcoholism and venereal disease. But the most popular lectures were those on agriculture. The science and economics of farming were enthusiastically supported by the peasant-soldiers.

But the program was much less of a success than had been hoped for by its innovators. Most lectures were badly planned and poorly executed. Le Figaro commented, "The problem had been that the young soldiers have not been interested in such action." The lectures

³² Bulletin Officiel du Ministère de la Guerre, 15 January 1901, pp. 99-100.

³³ *Ibid.*, 17 April, 1902, p. 513.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9 November 1903, p. 1307.

were on academic subjects that did not interest the conscripts. However, the newspaper was encouraged by the success of the agricultural lectures.³⁵

In October of 1901, a meeting of the Society for Popular Lectures heard a report on some experimental lectures that had been held in various garrisons. They found a definite lack of interests on the part of the soldiers. However, if visual aids were employed, the soldiers would come to a lecture on almost anything.³⁶ But, in general, the lectures were not well attended as indicated by the number of commanders who issued direct orders to the conscripts to go to them.

As a corollary to the lecture program, André encouraged the creation of recreation halls. The purpose of these foyers du soldat was to keep the young conscripts out of the unhealthy recreation centers in town. Since the parliament allocated no funds for the project, local societies were asked to contribute.

A typical example of the recreation halls was the one established by the Ligue de l'enseignement

³⁵ Le Figaro, 8 December 1900.

³⁶ Le Temps, 23 November 1901.

at Vincennes. It had a piano, reading rooms, lecture rooms, a library, an assortment of games, and a garden. Of course no alcohol was served.³⁷

The foyers were very popular with the conscripts. But being dependent on private charity, a relatively small number were created. Andre' tried to spur his corps commanders to greater action in this sphere by ordering their construction in April of 1902. But the limitations of the order can be seen by his reissuing of it on August 13, 1904. At that date, he severely chastised the generals for their lack of action on the matter.³⁸

Most of the officer corps was not happy with the new role that Andre' was encouraging them to assume. One general wrote in La France Militaire:

The mission of the officer is not at all a social one. If it is, it is only indirectly so. The social mission of the officers is to give to the nation the armed force required to deal with the interests of the nation in the diplomatic arena and to forestall any aggressor against the republic.³⁹

Another officer complained bitterly:

³⁷ Le Figaro, 19 December 1901.

³⁸ Bulletin Officiel du Ministère de la Guerre, 13 August 1904, p. 381.

³⁹ La France Militaire, 12 November 1900.

In many corps thirteen courses have been opened....It is all well and good to create so many courses, but it is difficult to find soldiers willing to take them. The young conscripts are much happier resting after the day's labors. In some regiments, the punished soldiers are ordered to attend the classes. In others, men are chosen to go. Thus the empty rooms are filled and everyone is happy.⁴⁰

The debate over the social role of the officers was yet another example of the conflict in views between the Radicals who saw the army as withering away in this time of peace, and the officers who saw the army as the eternal guardian of the nation's existence.

From the end of the Napoleonic wars, the officer corps had developed into a caste within society. Laws on marriage, justice, promotion, as well as the myriad of traditions surrounding the officers had created a corporate body very conscious of its distinctions from the rest of society. The Third Republic added a great deal to this tendency by excluding the nobility from the civil service, and by idolizing the army.

In the years after the Franco-Prussian War, the army saw a tremendous influx of titled officers. In part it was due to the fact that the army was one of the traditional employers of the warrior class. Coupled with their exclusion from government positions,

⁴⁰Jean d'Epee, *L'Officier Français*, (Paris: H.D. Lavauzelle, 1907), p. 76.

and the declining power of the Church, the army became less and less a mirror of society. The situation was aggravated by the method of promotion which tended to raise the titled officers faster than their untitled colleagues. The result was a disproportionate number of titled officers at the top of the military hierarchy.

The officers had a number of privileges and duties which also set them apart from the rest of society. By an 1832 decree, the officers held their rank as their personal property. They could be transferred or retired, but they could not lose their rank. This made it exceedingly difficult to alter the structure of the officer corps. By another decree, an officer could not marry unless his spouse brought a 1200-franc dowry with her. The future wife of an officer was carefully investigated before she was allowed to marry the officer.⁴¹

The officer was immune from criminal prosecution in civil court. Any violation of the law, whether civil or military, had to be tried in a military court of law.

The Radicals found all of this distasteful, to say the least. The army became the very incarnation

⁴¹An excellent example of the bridal investigation can be found in André's dossier at the archives of the Ministry of War.

of the inequality the Revolution had sought to eliminate. One of their policies became to break down the caste structure of the officer corps in order to restore what they called the unity of the army and the nation.

The attack on the army's caste structure revolved around two of its most important aspects, promotion and military justice. The first will be dealt with in a later chapter. It was the military justice, and more specifically the court-martials, that chagrined the Radicals almost as much as promotion.

The courtmartial was an obvious target of attack. After all, it had been a miscarriage of justice in the courtmartial that had begun the Dreyfus Affair. The entire institution was declared to be absurd. A typical example is an article written by Pelletan.

A military judge cannot break away from the habits of discipline that an entire lifetime have conditioned him. An officer cannot judge a man who is either one of his subordinates or his comrade....Justice is rendered unequally. An officer steals, and he is retired. A soldier has an altercation with a sergeant and he is shot....The officer does not have any judicial training, yet he is called upon to be a judge. The system is illogical.⁴²

⁴² Le Matin, 14 October 1899.

The question of court-martials was brought to a head anew in 1902 over the case of a certain Lieutenant-Colonel Goudin Saint Rémy. Stationed in Brittany, Lieutenant-Colonel Saint Rémy was ordered by the civil authorities to expel a group of nuns from their convent in 1902. He refused, and he was placed under arrest and tried by a court-martial. He was acquitted of disobeying a military command but was convicted of disobeying a civil command and was sentenced to one day in prison. In fact, the entire trial was little more than an attack on the government's religious policy.

The Radical press was outraged by the verdict. Le Radical asked, "After Saint Rémy's refusal to obey his orders, how can you expect a lowly soldier to obey orders to fire on a crowd of strikers?"⁴³ Le Matin stated that the only reason that Saint Rémy had received such a light sentence was because he had disobeyed the government.⁴⁴ All of the Radical press cited this as yet another example of the inadequacies of the court-martial system. The outcry was so intense that André

⁴³Le Radical, 17 August 1902.

⁴⁴Le Matin, 7 September 1902.

was forced to retire Saint Rémy and relieve his commanding general of his position.

During the Radical party congress of 1902, a resolution was adopted calling for the suppression of courtmartial and a radical reform of the code of military justice. It called for the trial by civil court of all infractions of the civil laws. It demanded the creation of a corps of military judges to replace the rather arbitrary selection of judges then in use.⁴⁵

In fact the resolution was little more than a commentary on the new code of military justice that had been submitted to the Chamber of Deputies in 1901. It proposed 1)to try officers in civil court for civil crimes; 2)to have all cases reviewed by the court of appeals; 3)to create a justice corps in the army; 4)to draw at least two judges from the same service as the defendant (a clear desire to avoid the problems which arose during the Dreyfus trial); 5)to permit the accused to remain at liberty until his trial. Including the other provisions incorporated into the bill, it would have been a complete reform of the military justice system in the direction the Radicals were consistently pushing, and

⁴⁵Deuxième congrès du Parti Radical et Radical Socialiste, 1903, p. 68.

lead to the ending of special military privilege. The bill was never brought to the floor of the Chamber of Deputies. The same fate awaited several other measures that would have altered or eliminated court martials during peacetime.⁴⁶

During the 1903 Radical party convention, Adolphe Messimy, one of the most important military experts the Radicals had, presented the party's platform on army reform. It contained some suggestions which were later incorporated into a reorganization plan he submitted to the Chamber of Deputies. The principal idea of the plan was that France should have an army commensurate with her size and economic potential, rather than the army she deemed necessary to maintain her position in Europe.

We can affirm that the strength of an army does not lie in its maintenance of an artificially inflated number of effectives, arbitrarily fixed and subject to faddish changes. It creates a disproportionately large cadre of officers, condemned to forced inaction. Our country has supported for thirty years the most pressing military budgets....Real patriotism does not consist of supporting millions of soldiers disproportionate to our resources in money and men, to pay an insurance rate more costly than that paid our rivals ...to expend our most precious blood and our productive capabilities and our economic strength. Real patriotism consists of lightening as much as possible all of these burdens. If our army is artificially inflated, if it duplicates the functions of useless organs, if it is a costly compromise between the system of a professional

⁴⁶La France Militaire, 8 July 1902.

army and that of a national army, we must hasten to transform, to lighten, to rejuvenate a pressing organization, aged and ambiguous. We must no longer present the facade of power, but power itself.⁴⁷

When Messimy submitted his plan, it called for a total reorganization of the army. The standing army would be a skeleton force that would be flashed out upon mobilization. It was a radical departure from the existing theory that the standing army was the principal fighting force and that the reserves would serve as support for that force.

The proposal was severely criticized by military experts. General Lamireur wrote in La France Militaire: "It is the substitution... of a mass held in reserve for a mass prepared for action. It was based on political and economic considerations, not military."⁴⁸ In an earlier article on the subject, La France Militaire took issue with Messimy's basic contention, that a nation must have an army commensurate with her ability to pay for it. A country must have an army proportionate to her needs. France is a great power with a large number of interests and powerful opponents. A large standing army is a necessity.⁴⁹ Le Temps took the view that it

⁴⁷ Troisième congrès du Parti Radical et Radical - Socialiste, 1903, p. 68.

⁴⁸ La France Militaire, 7 October 1903.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 18 July 1903.

was impossible to introduce all of these reforms at once. After thirty years, it was not possible to change suddenly the philosophy that governed the army. The resulting chaos would be detrimental to the welfare of the country. The plan should be carefully studied before it was adopted, and then it must be incorporated piecemeal in order not to disrupt the army.⁵⁰

The acceptance of the Messimy proposals would in fact have caused a great deal of disruption and dissension in the army. The precipitous reduction in the number of effectives that it called for would have meant the massive retiring of officers, a move that would never be popular with the military. But the most important aspect of this plan was its acknowledgement that France could no longer keep up with her neighbors in military might. It was a realization of Germany's greater size and resources. It was an admission that few Frenchmen would make then or later.

Most of the Radical programs for the army were never brought to fruition. In part it was due to their greater preoccupation with religious matters. But even more important was the fact that the army was too

⁵⁰Le Temps, 18 October 1903.

entrenched to be altered by the Radicals. They simply never had the power or desire to change things as much as their speeches indicated they wanted. But they did succeed in making one basic change in the army, the reduction in military service.

CHAPTER V

THE TWO-YEAR CONSCRIPTION LAW

One of the mainstays of the Radicals' program was a reduction in the length of military service. If the examples and myths of the French Revolution were the bases of their political thought, it was the leveé en masse and the armies of the Sambre and Meuse that formed the basis of their military thought. With their ascension to power, it became inevitable that there would be a reform of the conscription laws.

The Radical concept of the nation in arms went back to the armies of the First French Republic. Confronted by a coalition of the greatest powers of Europe, the fledgling republican government was forced to take desperate measures. On August 23, 1793, it issued the famous proclamation mobilizing France.

Article I- From this moment until that in which our enemies shall have been driven from the territory of the Republic, all Frenchmen are permanently requisitioned for service in the armies.

Young men will go forth to battle; married men will forge weapons and transport munitions; women will make tents and clothing and serve in hospitals; children will make lint from old linen; and old men will be brought to the public squares to arouse the courage of the soldiers while preaching hatred against kings and the unity of the Republic.¹

¹Wallace E. Adams et al., The Western World, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1970), II: 92.

The successes of the armies of the First Republic were remembered and not the failures. Patriotism and loyalty to the Republic were the answers to all military problems. The amalgam and the new tactics were forgotten.

The Franco-Prussian war strengthened these beliefs. The citizen army of Prussia had trounced the professional army of France. Gambetta's efforts stood in stark contrast to the ineptness of Napoleon III. The Radicals were convinced that if France had had a "republican" army in 1870, the disaster would have been avoided.

National defense, however, was not the only consideration in the reform of the conscription laws. The major crises of the Third Republic had centered around the army. Seize Mai, the Boulanger incident, and the Dreyfus Affair, had brought the army's loyalty into question. The Radicals had a long history of opposition to standing armies. In his Belleville Program, Gambetta had called for the formation of a citizen army. All republicans remembered that it was the blind obedience of the army's long-service volunteers who had carried out the commands given on December 2, 1851. It was sincerely felt that a citizen army would offer the Republic better protection not only from external

enemies, but from internal ones as well.

The opposition to a more liberal conscription law held a completely different set of views. The army remembered that the masses drafted by the Revolution were useless until they were integrated with the veteran soldiers of the monarchy. Gambetta's legions were defeated as decisively as Napoleon III's army. The army was by no means opposed to universal conscription, but it insisted on a firm backbone of longer service soldiers.

The conservatives agreed with the army. If possible, citizen participation should be strictly limited. But the conservative viewpoint was based upon memories of the Commune of 1871 and the revolutionary national guard. The thought of the masses having arms frightened them even more than the Germans. A balance had to be struck between the needs of national defense and domestic tranquility.

After the catastrophe of the Franco-Prussian War, France set out to reconstruct her military institutions. One of the most significant reforms was the adoption in 1872 of a universal conscription law. It stated that all Frenchmen had a personal obligation to serve in the military. But once the principle was announced, the provisions of the law swiftly changed the reality. The conservative delegates to the national assembly provided for a five-year service

by conscripts both unlucky enough to draw a "bad" number in the conscription lottery and too poor to hire a substitute. Those who draw "good" numbers, or had some wealth would serve only six months or not at all. It was hardly an egalitarian law.

The 1889 conscription law sought to correct the faults of the 1872 law. It reduced the length of service to three years. Everyone did serve, but the length of service still depended on a "good" or "bad" number or whether the conscript could get some sort of exemption. Very often those young men with money or influence could wrangle some hardship or educational excuse. Within ten years, the steadily growing strength of egalitarian ideas in France dictated some reform of this law.²

On November 11, 1898, Senator Rolland deposited a bill calling for the reduction of military service to two years. The bill was sent to the army committee and stayed there for three and one-half years. It was kept there in part because of the thorough investigation of the matter that the committee conducted. The senators were in no hurry to conduct business and felt that a testing of the political winds should be undertaken. But most important, it languished in committee because

² David Ralston, The Army of the Republic, (Cambridge Mass.: M.I.T. Press 1967) p. 303-304.

of the army's opposition to the bill.

The army opposed the bill because it doubted that it would provide enough men to fill the army's needs and that a soldier could not be trained in two years. As early as February of 1900 the General Staff announced its official opposition to the law in a note to General de Gallifet. It stated that the army would have to be reduced by 91,000 men if the bill was adopted. It pointed out that there would be a potential danger during the period between the release of one class of conscripts and the training of another. It voiced serious doubts over whether an infantryman could be trained in just two years, but it was sure that a cavalryman or an artilleryman could not be trained in so short a period. It pointed out that the Germans had kept the three-year service for these branches. But it noted: "In a country where the equal bearing of military charges is considered a consequence of democracy, this is impossible."³

When André became Minister of War, he ordered a thorough investigation of the consequences of the two-year conscription bill. On December 23, 1900, he received

³"Conséquences du service de deux ans," February 1900, carton 7N26, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

the report on effectives stating that even if all exemptions were abolished, if the Algerian contingent were inducted and if each candidate for conscription was examined three times before being rejected and if several other measures were taken, there would still be a diminution of 53,000 men. But, the report went on to say, parliament would never enact such stringent measures, and thus 90,000 men would be missing from the army.⁴

As for the composition of the new army, the proposed law would prove to be a disaster.

The opinion of military men is unanimous on the point that the cavalry cannot play its proper role in case of war unless it is composed of a high proportion of experienced soldiers who have had a great deal of practice with horses. Reservists are inadequate for this task because they rapidly lose their abilities once they return to civilian life. Under these conditions, the two-year service is inapplicable for the cavalry.... It is therefore necessary that if the two-year service is adopted that it be specified that men incorporated into the army by reason of their special aptitudes be required to serve three years.⁵

⁴"Conséquences de la réduction à deux ans de la durée du service militaire actif au point de vue des effectifs de l'armée permanente," December 23, 1900, carton 7N31, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

⁵Ibid.

The army saw the unequal military service adoption to be a political impossibility.

The report then went on to examine the possibility of recruiting 90,000 volunteers to fill the gap that the new law would create. It found that it would cost approximately one hundred million francs a year in order to recruit the number of volunteers the army felt it would need. Not only did the report doubt that parliament would vote the funds, but even if the money was available, it did not think that the volunteers could be found in such numbers.⁶

André was not particularly anxious to push the bill. He was far from convinced of its workability. For example, when he was called before the Senate committee studying the bill he declared that "My presence before the committee should not be interpreted as being indicative of the government's adhesion to the principle of the law. I have only come to furnish the committee the information that it has asked of me."⁷ On March 20, 1901 he wrote a letter to the committee stating his

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Louis André, Cinq ans du Ministère, (Paris: L. Michaud, 1907) p. 171.

conditions for acceptance of the law. They were:
 1) the complete suppression of all exemptions from military service; 2) a delay in the implementation of the law in those arms that cannot adequately prepare for it; 3) earlier call-up of the conscripts; 4) an increase in the number of non-commissioned officers and reenlisted soldiers.⁸

Despite the army's objections to the bill, on December 23, 1901, the army committee reported on the two-year conscription bill. It began by severely attacking the 1889 law. It called the law a bad combination of universal conscription and long-term service. Then in a political aside it noted that "the inequalities of the law have raised a clamor in the country for a change."⁹ It pointed out that 72,000 men did not serve more than one year in the army. In all arms of the service, the soldiers received all of their instruction in the first year of service. As for the military spirit, more men are put into jail in the second and third year of their service than in the first year.¹⁰ Finally it stated that "the majority of the

⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

⁹ Annales du Sénat, Documents, 1901, p. 511.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 515.

committee believes that the retention of young soldiers the shortest amount of time possible will have excellent repercussions in all phases of national life and add to the wealth of the nation."¹¹ Nowhere in the report was military doctrine mentioned as a reason for change. The committee made no attempt to hide the strictly political considerations of the law.

The most important provisions of the bill were Article II which abolished all exemptions and articles three which set the active duty service at two years. Articles 50 and 54 set the length and conditions of service for reenlistment and volunteers. These articles turned out to be the center of the debates on the bill.¹²

The strongest argument against the two-year conscription bill was that it would not provide sufficient men to meet the army's needs. The army high command had emphasized this point in all of its early reports on the bill. Andre' stated before the Senate that he would not support the bill unless he received man for man the same number of soldiers he had under the three-year conscription law.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 512.

¹² Ibid., p. 560.

¹³ Ibid., Débats, 1902, p. 867.

The committee did not dispute the army's figures on the reduction in the number of men in the army if the two-year bill was adopted. The committee proposed to compensate for the loss by a better utilization of the men who would be available. It also proposed the incorporation into the army of men who had been judged physically unfit. These men would serve in non-combatant roles and relieve men who were more fit for combatant roles. The committee argues that in fact as many as 120,000 men were employed by officers as domestic servants, cooks, tailors, shoemakers, etc. who might better be used as soldiers. These men could easily be replaced by non combatants. The incorporation of 20,000 to 80,000 of these auxiliaries would fill any gaps left by the reduction in the length of service.¹⁴

The army protested that such a scheme could not possibly work. They objected on several grounds: 1) Since the mobilized army is designed to be composed of one-third active soldiers and two-thirds reservists, the active army must be kept strong as possible; 2) Auxiliaries are not strong enough to take the place of soldiers under any conditions; 3) The incorporation of

¹⁴ Ibid., Documents, 1901, p. 575.

auxiliaries will fill up the hospitals; 4) The overall strength of the army would be weakened by the inclusion of auxiliaries.¹⁵

Throughout the debate that was carried out between the politicians and soldiers over the two-year conscription bill, one is left with the feeling that they were arguing on two entirely different planes of thought. The army was convinced that three years were necessary to form a soldier and that the army had to have 575,000 active soldiers in order to insure mobilization. In effect, the military men, as was their duty, were concerned with the combat readiness of the army. The politicians, on the other hand, were more concerned with matters of ideology and political advantage. This had nothing at all to do with the army's fitness for war.

The debate over the two-year bill also reveals another dichotomy in argument. The politicians viewed the world at the turn of the century at peace. Yes, there were wars, but they were small colonial encounters. The reality was that Europe was at peace, and had been at peace for thirty years. There were no indications

¹⁵"Conséquences d'incorporation des auxiliaires dans l'armée permanente," June 1901, carton 7N99, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

that anything might disturb this peace. Therefore, a reduction in the burden of military expenditures was necessary. In addition, in order to justify its existence, the army would have to assume a new role in France. These ideas were best summarized by M. Gervais in his defense of the two-year law before the Chamber of Deputies in 1904.

I feel that the army must, by its character, its nature and its organization, participate in a task that is being pursued at this moment, the work of a general peace in the world.

In foreign affairs it appears at this moment, but without abandoning our hopes for the restitution due us, that there has been a real transformation in our relations; We have the alliance with Russia, the entente with England, the agreements with Italy and the friendship or sympathy of almost all nations. Generally speaking, despite passing troubles and the worries of the moment, there exists a real détente in Europe. The army must benefit from this state of affairs. It must sustain it and contribute to its development. The army associates itself with all the manifestations of the patrie and the designs of The Republic. Arm of war when it is necessary, it must be a collaborator in the task of peace when it is useful.

One freely recalls when confronted with the question of army organization the old Roman adage 'If you want peace, prepare for war.'

Do you not believe that we can now modernize this saying by stating "To have peace, one must prepare for peace?"

I feel that in this general work, the army has its role and must serve this policy.¹⁶

¹⁶ Annales de la Chambre des Députés, Débats, 1904, p. 76.

It was Gervais' view that certain reforms of the army were needed to achieve this goal. The reduction in the length of conscription was first.

It was Guyot de Villeneuve, a former army officer, who responded to this analysis and in so doing expressed the opinion of the entire officer corps. "We have applied ourselves to the task of arousing the nation from the slumber that the long years of peace have forced her into. We cannot let our country be lulled to sleep by the theories of humanitarianism. To do so would risk an awakening that could be terrible."¹⁷

The officers could not accept Gervais' view of conditions. If there was no danger of war there was no need for an army. If there was no need for an army, there was no need for officers. The officer corps had to live with the myth of imminent war in order to justify their existence. To deny the imminence of war was to deny their usefulness.

The two sides also disagreed over the purpose of the active army. For the officers, it was an article of faith that the only army that was important was the first line. As one army report stated:

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

Actually, the military power of a country depends on the strength of the army that can be immediately put into the front line at the time of national danger. That strength is itself a result of the strength of the peace time army.... It has been seen as indispensable to give to the army of the first line a particularly strong makeup. For this effort, we have used almost all of the active elements of the army complemented by selected reservists. The army of the second line, on the other hand, is composed of reserve units, containing only those active elements needed for its proper organization.¹⁸

Operating under such a doctrine, the army simply could not permit what they felt to be a weakening of the standing army.

The Radicals, on the other hand, took a different view. For them, the purpose of the standing army was to train the reservists. It would be the second line that would decide the issue, not the first. The standing army was to teach the conscripts the fundamentals of the military craft. It was, in effect, to become a training school. As senator Rolland so bluntly stated, "What is the army really, if not a school for reservists?"¹⁹ It is for these reasons that in reading the debates, it sometimes seems as if the participants are speaking past each other.

¹⁸ (Untitled), carton 7N26, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

¹⁹ Annales du Sénat, Débats, 1904 p. 631.

The debates which opened in the Senate on June 19, 1902, centered around several points; the number of effectives, the affects that the shortened service time would have on discipline and training, and the abolition of all exemptions. The opponents of the bill used every parliamentary tool and argument they could muster in order to delay passage of the bill.

The opponents of the law pointed out time and again that there would be a drastic reduction in the size of the army if the bill were enacted. Senator Alfred Messiers pointed out that the German two-year law was an example that France could not follow because the German birth-rate was so much higher that even with a two-year law not all of the candidates could be taken.²⁰ General Mercier argued that the idea of using auxiliaries to fill the gaps was not a new one; he had tried it in 1894 with disastrous results.²¹ As for assuring a sufficient number of enlistments and reenlistments, many both in and out of the army that they could be obtained.

²⁰Ibid., 1902, p. 836.

²¹Ibid., p. 876.

Time and again the opposition tried to delay the law by calling for a test period to determine the feasibility of the committees' ideas on obtaining the required enlistments.

The supporters of the bill had no doubt that the required number of effectives would be obtained. Senator Rolland stuck by his assertion that the auxiliaries and higher enlistment rates would compensate for any loss in effectives. Andre²² seemed to have been won over. He stated that if the proper pay increases were passed he could raise 24,000 men by reenlistments. Added to several other reforms, the deficit could be made up.²²

Yet there is some doubt as to whether or not Andre²² was convinced that parliament would give him the tools necessary to recruit enough volunteers. In August of 1902, he sent a letter to Charles de Freycinet, of the army committee, recommending certain changes in the bill in order to facilitate the enlistment of volunteers. He asked for an increase in the pay of noncommissioned officers in order to attract and keep them. He wanted certain government jobs reserved for them so that they would be employed after leaving the service. He then added:

²² Ibid., p. 868.

I am convinced that thanks to all the reforms that we will propose for parliament's approval that we will obtain enough reenlistments. But it would be dangerous not to provide a means to pare the deficit. It is no less important that we get the budget committee to guard against the temptation to reduce the indispensable credits needed for the higher salaries. The effectives of the national army must not be at the mercy of a law of finances voted during a moment of lassitude.

Andre also asked for an article allowing him to maintain a certain number of men if the army fell below the desired 575,000 men.²³

The number of effectives was not the only part that was debated. Two fundamental assumptions clashed over questions of discipline and training: the traditional view that the soldier must obey blindly every command given to him, and the emerging belief that discipline could only come from within.

Those who opposed the bill contended that only after three years could a soldier be properly trained. The instant obedience required could only come after constant repetition. The opposition also believed, being highly influenced by the army's view, that certain branches could not be trained in the short period allowed by new law. The opponents were severely hampered by the

²³"Lettre à M. le Président de la Commission de l'Armée au Sénat," (n.d.), carton 7N27, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

arguments they had made for the longer service during the 1872 and 1889 debates. In each case they contended that a soldier could not be trained in only seven, five or three years, and each time they were proven wrong.

The Radicals, on the other hand, had no fears about the training and discipline of the army. André stated that the requirements of discipline were patriotism and courage, and these factors could not be learned. The Radicals were fond of using the Boer War as an illustration of how a conscript citizen army could defeat a professional army.²⁴

Equality of service was also a goal of the Radicals. In their drive for equality, the authors of the two-year conscription bill abolished most of the exemptions that had become a fixture of conscription laws in France. Now only sole supporters of families and the physically handicapped were to be excused.

The Radicals considered this provision to be an essential mechanism for creating a more democratic army. Senator Rolland stated in his report on the bill that exemptions had become a source of injustice.²⁵

²⁴ Le Matin, 21 December 1899.

²⁵ Annales du Sénat, Débats, 1902, p. 835.

Andre had insisted on the provision for a more practical reason. It was the only way he could be sure to get the maximum number of men possible under the regime of the two-year law.

The opponents of the bill took the side of the poor. One after another they decried the effects that conscripting bread-winners would have on the poor. They attacked the interruption of a young man's career. The country could only suffer by the disruption of the education of its future leaders.²⁶

The conservative senators opposed the bill in part because they saw it as another step towards a militia system. Senator De Lemaizell asked: "Where is there a difference between your two-year system and a one-year or a militia system?"²⁷ Andre was forced to answer, with some illogic, that while a soldier could be trained in one year, another year was needed to give him time to reflect on what he had learned. Andre made it clear that he had no intention of creating a one-year militia system. "The government is opposed to any one-year service, even for the smallest part of the contingent."²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., p. 836.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 837.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 918.

A one-year service was proposed in the Senate during the investigation of the two-year bill. Ironically it was some of the most conservative members of that house who proposed it. The bill called for a long-service volunteer army of 200,000 men in which the one-year conscripts would serve as the reserves. Such a system was anathema not only to the Radicals but to the Socialists as well. It was never seriously considered by the Senate.²⁹

During the initial debates on the bill in the Senate, one senator asked if André had consulted the members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre on the bill. André responded that he had done so informally, polling each member privately. He reminded the senators that he had no constitutional duty to consult with the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre on the matter. In fact he did not consult them because he knew in advance that they would not approve of the plan. As early as 1895, the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre had announced that it was opposed to any further reduction in the length of military service.³⁰

André's contention that he was under no

²⁹ Ibid., p. 520.

³⁰ Ralston, p. 301.

constitutional obligation to confer with the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre was legally correct, but he violated the spirit of the law that created the body. The Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre was the highest military organ in the army, and its opinion was usually consulted on such important military matters.

It was a measure of the army's plight that the Minister of War could ignore this body over a matter as important as a conscription law. The army's displeasure was probably best expressed by one of their staunchest supporters in the Senate, Comte de Traveneuc. "You said that you have consulted the members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre individually but that you alone are responsible. But on the day of reckoning, when we are defeated because of the neglect of our defenses, who will think of the responsibility of this or that ephemeral minister?"³¹

There was, however, such to be said for the bill. The 1889 law provided an unequal military service. Each year approximately 70,000 men did not serve more than one year,³² a condition that resulted in a lack of homogeneity in training. The two-year conscription

³¹ Annales du Sénat, Débats, 1902, p. 865.

³² Ibid., Documents, 1901, p. 512.

bill would solve this problem by making everyone serve an equal amount of time. But this benefit was not emphasized by the supporters of the bill as much as the fact that it was socially, economically and politically desirable.

Despite strong support, nearly one year passed before it was finally passed by the Senate. Dozens of votes were taken on proposed amendments that would have weakened the bill. Alternative reform measures were introduced by conservative senators. Articles were debated endlessly. But the bill finally emerged, essentially intact from its second reading on June 12, 1903.

The debates in the Chamber of Deputies ran roughly along the same lines as the debates in the Senate. The conservative members of the house insisted that the two-year law would mean the end of the army. The members of the Left were convinced that the law would strengthen the army.

The army's most formidable defender in the Chamber of Deputies of 1902-1906 was Lieutenant-Colonel Kousset. A former instructor at the Ecole de Guerre, he often served as the army's voice in parliament. He

attacked the bill because it would cause hardship for the poor. The induction of breadwinners would make life unbearable for the poor.³³ He pointed out that at a time when military theory was evolving towards a greater concentration of mass on the battlefield and larger armies, France was opting for a smaller army.³⁴ By accepting the theory of the army as a training center, he insisted, not only the standing army would be destroyed, but an impotent hybrid would emerge in its place.³⁵ A soldier could not be trained in just two years. To rely on the reservist's ability to recall his instruction after several years, and in the heat of battle, was a dangerous assumption on the part of the law makers. Most dangerous of all, the new law would give France a military organization inferior to that of Germany. Only a radical reorganization of the army could compensate for the lack of men. This reorganization should occur before the adoption of a new conscription law, not after.³⁶

Defending the law was Andre Gervais, a prominent

³³ Annales de la Chambre des Deputes, Debats, 1904, p. 61.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

Radical, who contended that the military fitness of an army was dependent on many factors, not just the size and training of the army. For him the important factor was the socio-political considerations of the law.

The law which regulates the length of military service marks a transformation in the nature of the army. The army is in its primitive form an anti-social element in society. Even in its modern form, it has an element which places it outside of society. With the advent of the Republic, it ceases to form a society within a society, and becomes an organ and function of democracy. That is the army we are creating at this moment....The essential object is to make the army the complete expression of democracy. It is the goal of the law before us.³⁷

In true Radical ideology he saw the two-year bill as a part of man's political evolution.

Gervais had no doubt that a soldier could be trained in two years, because the simplification of weapon operation made this possible. He called for a complete overhaul of the army in order to bring it into harmony with the needs and aspirations of the nation. The two-year bill was a first step in this reform.³⁸

The army committee of the Chamber of Deputies brought the same bill to the floor that was passed by

³⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

the Senate. The same doubts were expressed over whether or not the deficiencies in manpower could be made up and whether auxiliaries would be adequate replacements. The only important amendments adopted by the Chamber was over the length of the periods of exercise for the territorials. By 346-224 the Chamber decided to reduce the period from thirteen days to six days with André strongly opposing the changes as did Berteaux, the bill's reporter. But the Chamber ignored their pleadings. The Senate proved to be stubborn on the matter (no doubt encouraged by André and the army high command) and dropped the amendment from the law before its final passage. One other amendment, opposed by the army, was adopted by the Chamber would permit reservists to serve in the units closest to their home. The army opposed the amendment, but its protests were again ignored.

Except for minor details, the Senate bill emerged intact from the Chamber of Deputies. After conferences, the law was reintroduced in both the Senate and the Chamber and became law in March of 1905. One of the cornerstones of the Radical program had been achieved.

The opposition to the law by the army continued

to the very end. The General Staff poured out an unending stream of General Staff reports showing that the army would be severely weakened by the law. Articles written by officers appeared by the dozens condemning the various provisions of the law. Perhaps this opposition slowed the progress of the bill, but in the end it altered nothing. It was yet another example of the extent of the army's political impotency in the face of the Radicals.

The two-year law was a clear case of an idea whose time had come. Despite delays and parliamentary roadblocks that were put before it, after the Radical victory in the 1902 elections, it became inevitable that the bill would be passed. The army did not like the law and barely tolerated its existence for the next eight years. From the time it was passed, the army pressed for its reversal. It got its wish in 1913.

CHAPTER VI

THE CRISIS OF PROMOTION

Perhaps the officer corps would have been able to withstand the slings and arrows of outraged politicians if there had not already been a great deal of discontent within the body. Many officers had expressed disappointment in recent years over several aspects of the officer's life. Poor pay was an endemic problem in the army. At the turn of the century, a captain made as little as 3000 francs a year, a sum much too small to support his family in the style to which its social position entitled him. There were complaints about the boredom of garrison life, a common problem of all peacetime armies. The Dreyfus Affair bred resentment of the suspicion many of their fellow citizens felt towards them. The officers resented their new role as school teachers which the Radicals were pressing upon them. In short, their pride was hurt by the results of the Dreyfus Affair and the long years of peace.¹

But the center of all of the officer's discontent was the excruciatingly slow rate of promotion in the French

¹For good examples of these complaints see Jean D'Epee, L'Officier Français, (Paris: H.C. Lavauzelle, 1907) pp. 19-57. Also Commandant Civrieux, Du rêve a realite, (Paris: Editions Belleville, 1909), pp. 202-225.

army at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The problem was the result of several conditions including the steadily decreasing size of the army, the complex laws governing promotion and retirement, and the army's desire to have more active officers than was necessary.

After a period of tremendous expansion from 1871-1890, the army not only ceased to grow, but in fact, after 1896, it began to contract, severely constricting promotion. For example, in 1904, there were less than 700 positions on the regimental and higher command positions for infantry officers (lieutenant colonel, colonel, brigadier general and divisional general). Yet there were 13,000 junior officers (second lieutenant, lieutenant, captain and major) waiting to fill them. As a result, there were 1,000 captains out of 5,000 who had not been promoted for ten years, and some had not been promoted for more than fifteen years. In the cavalry and artillery the situation was even worse. In the artillery, forty percent were captains for ten years or more. In the cavalry, one half were captains for more than six years. These figures are typical for the entire period from 1895-1914.²

² Annuaire de l'armée française, 1904.

The problem was further complicated by the mandatory retirement rule. A captain had to resign upon reaching the age of fifty-one, major at age fifty-four, a lieutenant colonel at age fifty-seven, a colonel at age sixty, a brigadier general at age sixty-three, and a divisional general at age sixty-six. Because many officers languished so long as lieutenants and captains, they did not become majors until they were between forty-five and forty-nine years of age. From that time on, it was a race to be promoted before being forced to resign. Andre's career was a useful example. He served as a lieutenant for ten years and a captain for nine years. From that point he progressed rapidly becoming a colonel at age fifty. But after 1890, when the slowdown began, his relatively rapid promotion now became a race against time. He became a brigadier general at age fifty-five but he was promoted to a divisional general only one year before he had to retire. The situation became even worse for those officers who entered the army after it ceased to grow.³

The junior officers presented the greatest problem to any solution to the promotion question.

³ See chapter III p. 1 for the details of Andre's career.

The French army did not have an adequate doctrine for the recruitment and training of reserve officers at the turn of the century. It was accepted by the General Staff that the reservists would be integrated into the standing army upon mobilization and commanded by active duty officers. This policy required a large number of junior officers who in peacetime had very little to do except wait for promotion. This condition not only increased the competition for promotion but led to a great deal of dissension in the army.

The extent of the discontent within the army can be gauged by the sheer volume of articles, books, and pamphlets that appeared on the subject of the officer's plight. Each offered some solution to one or all of the problems. In a series of articles that appeared in Le Temps in 1899, an officer suggested that it was the officer's lack of political representation that prevented his fair treatment. The restoration of the vote to the army would be the solution to many of the officer's ills.⁴ But the center of the officer's complaints was promotion.

The original causes of the promotion problem was the classification committees and the law of 1838 which

⁴Le Temps, 20 December 1899.

governed promotion. By the ordinance of 1838, promotion was regulated by a combination of seniority and selection by choice. The proportions of each were strictly defined and varied from rank to rank. Up to the rank of lieutenant, all promotion was by seniority. To the rank of captain, two-thirds were by seniority, and one-third by choice. For majors, half were selected by seniority, and half were selected by choice. Above the rank of major, all promotions were by selection.

The ordinance had been framed with the intention of providing fairness to all and initiative for the brightest. Theoretically, an officer could be promoted swiftly, and during times of war, men rose quickly. But during times of peace, the law led to discrimination and excruciatingly slow promotion.

While various systems to decide promotion within the framework of the 1838 ordinance were tried, the one in effect at the time of the promotion crisis was controlled by the classification committees. They had been created in 1889 by a decree of Minister of War Charles de Freycinet. As was his general policy, the decree gave the officer corps virtual autonomy over matters of promotion.

The classification committees were divided into three groups; the corps committees, the service committees and the high command committees. Their duties varied.

The Corps Committees- These committees were composed of the brigadier and divisional generals of each army corps. They were presided over by the corps commander. They decided which infantry officers were to be promoted to captain and to major, and they nominated those officers who were to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and colonel.

The Service Committees- These committees served much the same purpose as the corps committees did for the infantry. They were composed of the inspector generals of each service, later modified to include the corps generals as well as the generals of the particular service. They too decided upon the promotion of captains and majors and proposed lieutenant-colonels and colonels for promotion.

The High Command Committees- These committees were composed of the corps commanders and the members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre. They decided upon the promotion of lieutenant-colonels and colonels and made the proposals for brigadier and divisional generals. The final decision on the promotion of generals was nominally made by the Minister of War, but in fact, the minister did not make any decision. He had to choose from the list presented to him by the classification committee. The committee usually submitted only as many names as there were positions available, thereby compelling the minister

to accept their choices.⁵

The system led to abuses other than the undermining of the minister's authority. The meetings of the classification committees often became bantering sessions with favorites being often put forward by generals and deals being made to promote each other's protégés. An excellent example was that cited by General Padoya. During one classification committee session, a general nominated his orderly officer for promotion. The general did not think that the officer would be promoted because of his lack of seniority, but he did want to give him the advantage of having had his name put forward. By coincidence, there was another general on the committee who knew the candidate and had become his "protector." He gave a rousing speech on the officer's merits. When a vote was taken, it was discovered that twelve generals had voted for the officer because of the speech that had been given. Five had voted for the officer because they owed the general a favor. All had voted for the officer believing that he would only obtain enough votes to be placed on a tentative promotion list. As it turned out, the officer had enough

⁵An excellent study on the subject can be found in Charles Roche, "L'Avancement et l'avenir de l'armée," Journal de Sciences Militaires, series 10, v. 1 (March 1899), pp. 87-125.

votes to be promoted.⁶

With total control over promotion, the generals tended to promote officers fashioned in their own image. The result was a consistently higher proportion of titled officers in the upper ranks than in the lower ranks. This was especially so in the cavalry, a traditionally aristocratic service. For example, of 1140 captains in the cavalry in 1902, thirty-three percent were titled, but thirty-eight percent of the majors, forty-eight percent of the lieutenant colonels, fifty-five percent of the colonels, fifty-eight percent of the brigadier generals and sixty-two percent of the divisional generals were titled.⁷

The system lent itself to a great deal of criticism. Although the Radicals thundered against the antechamber maneuvers of the generals, it was a series of articles published in 1899 that brought to light the extent of the abuses. Written anonymously by a Colonel Faure (later appointed by André to the General Staff), they exposed the discrimination in promotion. One particular comment roused the Radicals more than any other: "There is not a single example of an officer

⁶General Pedoya, Recrutement et avancement des officiers, (Paris: H.C. Lavauzelle, 1909), p. 74.

⁷Annuaire de l'armée française, 1902.

who has not been hampered by his profession of republicanism."⁸ Colonel Faure pointed out that many of those qualities that would help a civil servant in his career hindered an officer in his. Attending mass, indifference or hostility to the Republic were necessary for a successful career. A particule before one's surname was a great advantage, as was birth, family relations and personal fortune. The classification committees, he wrote, were composed of reactionary clerical generals who promoted their favorites, and for this reason France has had so many reactionaries in important military positions.⁹ It was this series of articles more than anything else that determined the Radical's policy towards promotion.

It was within the framework of the general discontent with the classification committees and their promotion practices that we can examine the steps taken by de Gallifet and André to liquidate the committee's power. De Gallifet struck the first blow by ending the committee's ability to promote without the approval of the Minister of War. Article ten of that decree stated, "The lists of nominees...are to be submitted to the

⁸ Le Temps, 3 December 1899.

⁹ ibid.

minister who will examine them and make the final decisions. The list composed by the minister is the promotion list."¹⁰ This effectively reduced the role of the classification committees to that of an advisory board.

The committees still managed to retain their prerogatives. They complied with de Gallifet's decree by submitting to the minister only enough names to fill the available positions, a violation of the spirit of the decree that de Gallifet accepted. André did not. On October 3, 1900, André issued a decree demanding that the number of names submitted to the minister be three times the number required. In this way, the minister would have a real choice in promotion.¹¹

But André was not content with this solution. Deciding to end the classification committees completely, he issued a decree on March 15, 1901, terminating the reign of the committees. The Radical newspapers applauded the decree. Le Figaro called it the most important army reform in the last fifty years.¹²

¹⁰ Bulletin officiel du ministère de la guerre, January 9, 1900, p. 12.

¹¹ Ibid., October 31, 1900, p. 1585.

¹² Le Figaro, 16 March 1901.

Le Radical concurred stating that now there would be a great rejuvenation of the officer corps.¹³

The same decree created a new system. All lieutenants and captains with sufficient seniority were to be considered eligible for promotion. Each regimental commander would assign them a number indicating his preference. The regimental lists were then sent on to the brigade, divisional and corps commander. In each case, preference numbers were given to the revised list. The list was then submitted to the Minister of War who assigned his own number to the list taking into account any additional factors he felt important. The same process was repeated for majors, lieutenant-colonels and colonels. In each case the list was first composed at the level immediately above the officer's rank.¹⁴

The result was not a system, but chaos. The promotion list for 1903, for example, contained the names of 10,000 officers, approximately half of the officer corps. In effect, the minister had the right of arbitrary choice. He could promote as he wished. But the reality was that these lists were composed after the fall maneuvers, the worst possible time for the minister. With parliament in session, the budget being

¹³Le Radical, 17 March 1901.

¹⁴General Pedoya, p. 79.

prepared, and with evaluation of the maneuvers taking up much of his time, the task of promotion fell to the minister's personal staff, a potentially dangerous situation. It was this system, augmented by the espionage organization created by the Freemasons, that served as the basis for promotion during André's tenure at the Ministry of War. Conceived in a haphazard manner, it was never intended to be permanent. That it served as the foundation for promotion attests more to the inability of André to find a more adequate system than it does to malice on his or anyone else's part.

A recurrent theme in much of the discussion on promotion concerned the diversity of schools from which officers graduated. No fewer than six schools contributed officers to the army. But two of them, L'Ecole Polytechnique and St. Cyr, consistently provided the officers for the highest ranks in the army. Those officers who rose from the ranks and went on to St. Maxient, Saumur, Versailles, or Fontainebleau rarely rose to the upper ranks of the army.

The result of this varied recruitment was a distinct split in the officer corps. Those who graduated from the more prestigious schools felt themselves to be professionally and socially superior to their comrades

who rose from the ranks. As long as promotion was rapid, the split would not become obvious. As soon as the situation became critical and competition for promotion became fiercer, the hostility rose to the surface.

The army, or rather the more unfortunate officers, were not very happy with this state of affairs. One writer in La France Militaire wrote, "The crisis that traverses the army, the agitation which troubles it, pulls one's attention more and more to the greatest vice of our organization, the diversity of origins of our officers."¹⁵

The Radicals were not very happy with the situation either because it went against all of their principles. Not only was it discriminatory and a reflection of the caste structure of the officer corps, it did not open a career for those who were talented. As one Radical deputy wrote, "It is useless to cover up the fact that in the French officer corps neither homogeneity nor the unity of thought still exists. The caste spirit, one's military origins, the particularism of each service, holds too large a place."¹⁶

¹⁵ La France Militaire, 21 March 1902.

¹⁶ Annales de la Chambre des Représentés, Documents, 1902, p. 1072.

The Radical press constantly played upon the theme of unity of origin. Le Radical commented, "Each candidate for promotion must be judged equally no matter what his origins. Officers must be recruited as widely as possible. It is not what an officer learns in school that is important, but what he learns after he leaves his school that is important."¹⁷

But the Radicals had another reason to favor the unity of origin of officers. It was one of their fundamental beliefs that the officer corps was a rigid caste society. Recruited from the aristocratic classes, educated at the same schools, and serving together, they were virtually a corporate body on the style of the ancien régime. By introducing men from the lower classes into this society, the caste structure must inevitably give way to a more democratic system. What the Radicals failed to realize was that very often those men who rose from the ranks were even more attached to the army than the aristocratic officers the Radicals feared so much. They did not learn from the example of Major Henry, the officer who did most of the dirty work in the Dreyfus Affair. Completely loyal to his superiors, he had reached his high position by rising from the ranks.

¹⁷ Le Radical, 22 November 1902.

Many military authorities argued against the unity of origin of officers. General Pedoya felt that there would be more homogeneity in an officer corps that was uniformly educated. It would also make promotion dependent on ability and not on origins. But he also pointed out that the army could not hope to recruit just the best men the country had to offer. There would always be a need for junior officers, men who would not make adequate regimental commanders, or who did not have the ability to become generals. Their training had to be commensurate with their ability.¹⁸

During the debates on the two-year conscription law, there was a great deal of argument over whether or not to require officer candidates to first serve their two years as conscripts in the army. The Radicals argued that such a requirement would inform the young officers of the problems confronted by the common soldier. The requirement was adopted in Article XXXIV of the two-year conscription law. It could be seen as a concession to the unity of origin of officers. But in fact, it did nothing to alleviate the problem of the diversity of recruitment of officers.

In 1903, a bill was deposited in the Chamber of Deputies by Andre' Gervais to compel the unity of origin of officers. He contended that the problem of promotion could not be solved without some resolution of the origin problem.

¹⁸General Pedoya, pp. 44-49.

His bill provided that St. Cyr and St. Maxient should be suppressed, to be replaced by one special military school with a division at St. Cyr and one at St. Maxient. The Ecole Polytechnique would be turned into a civilian technical school. Differentiation in service arms would be made at special schools to be located at Versailles, Fontainebleau and Saumur. One third of the places at St. Cyr and St. Maxient were to be reserved for non-commissioned officers. All officer candidates would first serve as common soldiers in order to acquaint themselves with the life a soldier leads.¹⁹

In retrospect, the proposed bill held definite advantages. It would have ended the hodgepodge collection of military schools which provided officers. A greater cohesiveness in training could only add to the army's strength. But the bill received little attention in the press and parliament and languished in committee for years. It was never brought up for discussion.

It was not by the laws on the unity of origin of officers or by temporary decrees that Andre' hoped to regulate promotion. He felt that some law was needed to institutionalize the promotion system. His opinion

¹⁹ Annales de la Chambre des Deputés, Documents, 1903, p. 572.

was shared by the army, long since wearied by the ever changing criterion for promotion. The views of the two differed only in the nature and control of the institution to be created.

Nearly every military writer had an idea as to what to do about promotion. General Prudhomme wrote in La France Militaire that the only way to ease the crisis was to retire the superannuated colonels and generals to provide positions for younger leaders. But, he added, the number of junior officers had to be radically reduced in order to relieve the pressure on the channels of promotion.²⁰ Colonel Faure, in his Lettres Libres, suggested using the German system whereby officers passed over for promotion would resign. He also wished to see utilized the German system of adding to the seniority of an officer.²¹ The number of suggestions were legion, and came from every part of the military hierarchy.

For eighteen months André pondered the problem. The first hint of what his solution might be came from Le Temps. That newspaper's military writer, who consistently had inside information about the war ministry, discussed the

²⁰ La France Militaire, 19 December 1901.

²¹ Le Temps, 16 December 1899.

chagrin of officers when acts of valor or scholarship went unrewarded because promotion was based on seniority. The correspondent suggested that an immediate reward be given for some outstanding performance. He proposed that this could be done by granting additional seniority for exceptional deeds.²²

In July 1902, General Percin, Chief of the General Staff, sent the text of a proposed promotion bill to the General Staff for their consideration. The bill stated that the promotion system was not working well and that it suffered from a certain amount of injustice. For example, even though an officer might spend ten to fifteen years with the same rank, it was only his reports for the last three years that were taken into consideration for his promotion. It was proposed that an increase in seniority be granted under certain circumstances. The bill provided that all promotions up to lieutenant-colonel would be dependent on seniority, but the minister should have the right not to promote those officers who had displayed serious weaknesses.²³

There would be seven ways to increase one's

²² Le Temps, 28 January 1902.

²³ "Project de loi sur l'avancement," July 1902, carton 7N35, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

seniority: 1) taking special courses; 2) attending the Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre; 3) service in the colonies; 4) special service such as being an officer in the minister's cabinet or on the General Staff or on foreign mission; 5) special work performed as determined by the minister; 6) for wounds received in action; 7) aptitude for command and the manner in which one had served.²⁴

It would be the corps commanders who would confer the increases in seniority, with the consent of the Minister of War. The proposal also permitted the minister to determine how much seniority could be added as well as the right to confer increases on his own accord.²⁵

The bill bears Andre's imprint in all of its aspects. By basing promotion solely on seniority, it gave a firm mathematical basis for advancement. It was easily calculated and would not lend itself to external influences. The proposal would keep the minister in full control of promotion. The increases depended upon the minister for approval. In the case of promotion to the rank of colonel and above, the minister's promotion powers were absolute. Thus civilian authority would be maintained and the ability of officers to promote themselves curtailed.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

The General Staff studied the proposals and submitted a report on them in September 1902. It conceded that the old system was not functioning properly and had to be replaced. Although it acknowledged the rationality of the proposed system, the General Staff stated that it would be rather difficult to implement it. It objected to the decision to end promotion by seniority at the lieutenant-colonel level. The General Staff proposed to divide the increases in seniority into two categories. In one category there would be those whose increases that would come because of wound or colonial service, which would count towards pay increases and retirement, but not towards promotion. The other category of increases would count towards promotion, but an officer would only be allowed to accumulate a limited amount of these increases.

The General Staff lashed out at André's attempt to keep most of the promotion power in his own hands, and protested at the vagueness of the amount of seniority gained from each of the categories that had been outlined. It also voiced displeasure over the idea that the Minister of War could grant twice as much seniority as the corps commanders because such a practice would inevitably lead to injustice. Those officers personally known to the

minister or his staff would benefit by their ministerial connections. Officers would much rather be judged by their superiors than by men who did not know them.

The General Staff report showed concern over the vagueness of the provisions for promotion above the rank of lieutenant-colonel. The law would permit the Minister of War to promote to these ranks with no interference from the army whatsoever. "It is therefore to be understood that the loyalty of an officer will be one of the factors of his promotion from the time of his proposition for the rank of colonel. This could not possibly be the minister's intention." It suggested that the members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, under the minister's authority, compose the promotion list for these categories.²⁶

The General Staff's objections were based on the traditional grounds that promotion should be left for the army hierarchy to decide. They wanted no interference from the civilian authorities in any aspect of military organization, least of all in the area of promotion. The counter proposals clearly showed that the army wanted a return to the reign of the classification committees or at least the General Staff desired such a return. The enduring prejudice against the colonial officers was

²⁶ "Rapport sur le projet de loi sur l'avancement," September 1902, carton 7N35, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

displayed in the General Staff's desire to prevent colonial service from counting towards an increase in seniority for promotion.

After receiving the General Staff report, certain minor modifications were made in the bill. André submitted the bill to the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre for its opinion. Again, a great deal of objections were voiced. Concerns over aroused jealousies, shattered hopes, increases for unimportant work, and an abuse of the power to confer seniority dominated the report. Objections were raised to the minister's ability to grant more of an increase in seniority than the corps commanders. Most of the members of the council voiced their approval of the old classification committees system. As General Négrier stated, "The choices of the classification committees were not bad. The members of this council are proof of that." The Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre voted ten to two against the principle of the increase in seniority. As for the specifics of the project, the vote was eleven to one against them.²⁷

André could not have been encouraged by the results of the General Staff and Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre reports. On the other hand, he probably expected

²⁷ "Procès verbal du Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre," 18 October 1902, carton 5N8, Service Historique de l'Armée Française, Vincennes.

such disapproval. In any event, he sent the bill to parliament on October 21, 1902. These concessions to the army's objections were made, but the principle of the power of the minister remained intact. The amount of seniority to be gained was detailed, but the minister still had the right to grant more seniority than anyone else.²⁸

The newspapers examined the law, but as usual, they did so in light of their political prejudices, rather than on its merits. Le Gaulois doubted that promotion could be reduced to such mathematical formulas. In any event, with the ministerial power to grant extra seniority, the entire system would be jeopardized.²⁹ Le Temps gave cautious support to the bill. It had to be better than the chaotic system that was then in use.³⁰ But it was a writer in La France Militaire who seemed to have the most realistic view of the bill and its potential effects.

Those who have suffered from the miasma of promotion cannot but feel that the proposal is a balm to their wounds. It represents a considerable advancement in the manner of promotion. It makes advancement more equal. But do not be so illusioned as to believe that it will speed promotion. The evil from which

²⁸ Annales de la Chambre des Députés, Documents, 1902,

²⁹ Le Gaulois, 1 November 1902.

³⁰ La France Militaire, 4 November 1902.

promotion suffers does not lend itself, as it is believed, to solution by law. The lack of criterion for judgment is not the problem. It is the crowding in all of the ranks of officers, a fatal result of the long period of peace that is the problem. The project will only increase the crowding in the upper grades, not decrease it. The only clear advantage of the bill is that the increases will be granted for the work that has been done, and not for any other reason. The only real solution is to separate pay increases from promotion. In this way an officer can live on what he earns, without worrying about having to be promoted in order to support his family.³¹

The bill would have provided more order in promotion. It would have made promotion fairer by using a universal rule. But it did not get at the crux of the problem. An army based on reservists but having few reserve officers had to have a disproportionate number of active officers in the lower ranks. Combined with thirty years of peace and a steadily decreasing standing army, no mathematical formulas or ingenious concoctions would speed promotion.

The bill languished in committee. André was never called to testify before the army committee on the proposal. Only the cataclysm of World War I with its wholesale slaughter of junior officers and its display of the incompetence of superannuated generals would break the log jam of promotion.

³¹La France Militaire, 4 November 1902.

The problem of promotion was a central theme in the struggle between the army and the Radicals. The officer corps saw promotion as being an internal problem of a complexity that did not lend itself to outside interference. Promotion was essential to the individual officer as a means of rising in his profession and as an acknowledgement of performance. But with the slowing of promotion, enormous frustrations and discontents were created within the officer corps.

The crisis in promotion revealed the latent divisions within the officer corps. The officer corps was never as cohesive as the Radical pictured it to be. There were social divisions between noble officers and the commoners. There was a professional division between those officers who had risen from the ranks and those who had attended the prestigious military schools of St. Cyr and the Ecole Polytechnique. There was also the rivalry between those officers who had attended the Ecole de Guerre for General Staff training and those who had not. As long as promotion was relatively rapid and at least perceived to be equitable, these divisions would remain irritating but not disruptive. With a change in the rate and nature of promotion, and its attendant frustrations, these discords severely shook the cohesion of the officer corps.

The Radicals saw the officer corps as being a monolithic organization. They believed that it was the promotion process which created and preserved this organization. It was the promotion system, in their view, which prevented officers with republican leanings from rising to higher positions. By breaking this system, the officer caste would be broken. By creating a new promotion system, a new breed of officer would rise to important command positions.

The problem, however, was that no new system would meet all of the requirements of the Radicals and still meet the needs of army leadership. If real ability was to be favored, there was no assurance that republican officers would be promoted. If officers were to be promoted for their political leanings, there was no certainty that they were good soldiers. It was essential that some degree of cohesiveness be maintained within the officer corps, otherwise the army was bound to suffer. No adequate solution was found by the Radicals for this problem.

It was a measure of the army's political impotence that the promotion crisis, clearly recognized by both the officers and civilians, could be allowed to linger so long. Once, the army was considered so important that laws for its organization were enacted before a constitution for the state formulated. After the Dreyfus Affair, political conflicts

left the officer corps in limbo. Poorly paid, bored, with no outlet for their training, ability or ambition, the officers led a frustrating existence. Only the danger of war was to end this purgatory. But as bad as the situation seemed, it would become much worse before there would be any improvement.

CHAPTER VII

THE AFFAIRE DES FICHES

The system which produced the Affaire des Fiches was the result of two severe crises for the French Army: the questioning of the army's loyalty to republican institutions and the slowdown in promotion. Had the former crisis not existed, there would have been no need to pry into the political opinions of the officer corps. Without the latter, there would have been no need to apportion promotion so carefully nor would there have been the spectacle of one officer informing on another.

When General André was appointed Minister of War, he had proposed to Premier Waldeck-Rousseau a slow but sure system of "reforming" the officer corps.¹ It would be methodical but it would cause very little disruption in the army. What Waldeck-Rousseau did not expect (nor perhaps André either) was that it would degenerate into an espionage system.

Even before entering the Ministry of War, André possessed information on many officers. He wrote in his memoirs:

¹ Louis André, Cinq ans du ministère, (Paris: L. Michaud, 1907), p. 12.

I had during the course of my career and during my general inspections, kept notes on interviews I had had with a number of officers; I had occasion to examine and revise these notes during the duration of their military career. I put this personal information that I had saved in order, and to clear up certain points, I contacted the officers and their commanders again.²

But, at best, this was a limited listing, confined to the relatively small number of officers that André had come into contact with during the course of his career. The inadequacies of this system were soon revealed when André was confronted with his first promotions a scant six weeks after his appointment. Thousands of officers' records had to be examined in order to find the few hundred who were to be promoted. In addition, it was discovered that there was no place in the officers' dossiers where any information on the candidate's political opinions could be found.³

As André accumulated more and more of the power to decide promotion,⁴ the need for political information, in his opinion, became greater. He readily admitted to conferring with politicians, members of the government, commanding generals, and others in order to discover the required information. This was by no means unusual;

² André's memoirs published in Le Matin, 6 September 1908.

³ Even in André's personal dossier there are no remarks on his political opinions. In fact on the annual reports made on each officer, there was no place provided for political comments.

⁴ See Chapter VI, pp. 7-9.

previous war ministers had done the same, and in fact this politics of promotion was an accepted part of the process of advancement.

Andre' found this system to be inadequate. He felt that the high command of the army was purposely trying to keep him in the dark on the reliability of the subordinates. Finally he decided to circumvent the army's hierarchy. "I directed that by indirect routes, bypassing the regular hierarchy, I was to be informed of all of the faults committed by the officers. The acts of political and religious intolerance, the acts of hostility in regard to the government of the Republic and its representatives were all to be reported to the Ministry of War."⁵

One of the first sources that Andre' turned to were the prefects. This avenue was opened by the circular of November 6, 1900 sent by Waldeck-Rousseau to the prefects, It stated:

You are...the delegates of all the ministers. They must be informed by you with the greatest exactitude. I know the value my colleagues attach to your collaboration and I ask you never to neglect to assure the most complete political unity in all parts of the administration. I do not have to insist that the government has the right to expect this from all of its functionaries. The example of loyalty to our institutions that they have a mandate to serve is the most important of their duties. The conformity of conduct with the principles that inspire the government is to be their best testimony. If you wish to step aside

⁵Andre', p. 300.

you are to inform the appropriate minister at the same time that you inform me, but I do not doubt that the Republic will be able to count on you.⁶

The information from the prefects was an important source for André. Selected for their republicanism, the prefects would not shrink from reporting anti-republican incidents.

But André was still not satisfied. He wanted as many sources of information as possible to corroborate any wrong doing. He then committed his fateful error. "I gave to my collaborators the authorization to ask and to receive information from all the republican groups and associations, the Freemasons as well as others."⁷

The Freemasons during the course of the nineteenth century had become one of the most important republican societies in France. During the 1890's, the radicals had gained control of the lodges, and during the Dreyfus Affair, the lodges were centers of dreyfusard sympathies. The bonds between the ideas of the two groups as well as the leadership is striking. For example, in a handbook published by the Freemasons on army reform, we find the following demand for the

⁶ René Waldeck-Rousseau, La Défense Républicaine, (Paris: L. Michaud, 1902) p. 27.

⁷ André, p. 306.

"Progressive reduction of the time of military instruction to the absolute minimum necessary, the complete subordination of the military authority to the civilian authority and the necessity of informing the military of their social duties."⁸ In the 1904 Radical party congress, we find demands for a new promotion law "which has for its objective the transformation of the moral situation of the officer; to make him understand his social duty." There was a call for a reduction in military service to two years, a call that was repeated in every party congress between 1901 and 1905.⁹

One of the most eminent Masons, Henri Brisson, was also the leader of the Radical party and one of André's most important supporters. Between 1898 and 1906, there were no fewer than 149 Masons in Parliament at one time or another and they consistently voted for Radical programs. In 1899, at the Grand Orient Council, a resolution was adopted advocating quarterly meetings of all Masons in the Senate and in the Chamber of Deputies. "Occasionally, the leaders reminded Masonic members of Parliament that if they did not vote 'correctly' they would not be sup-

⁸ N.X., L'Armée: ce qu'il doit être, Ce qu'il faut modifier, (Paris: Bibliographie Sociale, 1903), pps. xv., 5, 18.

⁹ Congrès du Parti Radical et Radical-Socialiste, (Paris, 1904), p. 126.

ported in the next election."¹⁰ The Masons were also quite prominent in the various cabinets of the 1890's and early 1900's. Waldeck-Rousseau, for example, had five Masons in his cabinet, Combes had seven.¹¹

Not only were the Masons very prominent in politics, but they had an activist philosophy as well. As Mildred Headings has noted, "The orders aimed through their men in public office to secure the triumph of ideas (and individuals) approved by the body of Masons."¹²

The Masons were not unprepared to accept André's request for information. As early as 1892, a Masonic circular declared "It is indispensable that the Freemasons know their friends and their adversaries. The interest of the Masonic order, the Republic required it."¹³ Even earlier, in 1889, one member asked for the formation of an agency to protect the lodges from "reactionaries." He was told that there already existed a "committee of requests." The committee was sometimes powerless but "It had often acted

¹⁰ Mildred Headings, French Freemasonry Under the Third Republic, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1949), p. 112.

¹¹ Saint-Pastour La Franc-Maçonnerie au parlement, (Paris: Documents et Tomolnages, 1970), p. 19.

¹² Headings, p. 76.

¹³ Jean Bidegain, Une Conspiration sous la Troisième République - la vérité sur l'affaire des fiches, (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905), p. 44.

effectively...not by itself, but by means of the go between it had used. Besides...it possessed extremely interesting files on the worth of men, files which will permit the Masons one day to say with certainty 'this is a false man, do not trust him,'"¹⁴

As an information network, the Masonic order had certain definite advantages. It was at least nominally secret, it was a national organization with active lodges in every part of the country, it was fanatically loyal to the Republic, and finally, it was representative of the attitudes of the Radicals.

The defenders of the Republic were not adverse to such surreptitious investigations of an arm of government. Gambetta, whom the Radicals considered the finest example of the true republican, stated in 1876, "I cannot admit the government can be well defended except by those who love it." In fact, Gambetta himself had conducted an intensive investigation of the Army in the 1870's very much along the lines which Andre used.¹⁵

Andre made a fateful miscalculation in both methods and goals. By choosing the Masons, he was committing the same faults as had existed under the regime of

¹⁴Headings, p. 115.

¹⁵Bidegain, p. 35.

General Boisdeffre, when he was Chief of the General Staff. He was permitting a secret society to have a say in promotion. The only difference was that instead of the antirepublican Jesuits, it was to be the fanatically republican Freemasons. Given the fissures that existed in French society (and after all this was what the Dreyfus Affair had been all about), the latent power of the Church, the suspicion by republicans of any secret society, it is difficult to conceive of a greater blunder.

In effect, Andre' confused the "spoils system" of political appointments with the legitimate needs of the French Army and national defense by basing promotion on political loyalty. He also badly misjudged the extent of the discontent between the army and the nation. While the republican majority in France was suspicious of the army, it was not antimilitaristic or even overtly hostile to the army. France had had a love/hate relationship with her army for centuries. The nation simply would not tolerate her army being embarrassed by a domestic espionage scandal. Had Andre' simply weighed the potential political costs if his scheme was ever revealed, he surely would never have embarked on such an adventure. But as Andre' proved so many times, he was simply incapable of thinking along strictly political lines.

According to Andre', he saw his duty as being the creation of "an officer corps animated by the invigorating spirit of the Republic. To attain this

minimum goal, I felt that the officers must be shown by government acts and by persuasion that an officer's republican convictions had ceased to be a cause for disfavor."¹⁶ But André's subordinates saw their task as being somewhat more radical. As one member of his staff wrote:

It was resolved to proceed by the road of the slow purge, to replace with correct officers those who, by way of transfer or promotion, should disappear. The Minister of War wanted republican officers to have an advantage and those who were notoriously hostile to the government of the Republic were to be held up or eliminated.¹⁷

There can be little doubt that André was responsible for this attitude among his subordinates. Even in the manner in which he selected the officers of his personal staff he demonstrated a desire to obtain not only officers tepidly loyal to the Republic, but fanatically loyal. Two cases will demonstrate the point. Captain Charles Humbert had discovered a petty embezzlement of funds by a sergeant. He had reported it to his colonel, and when he did not receive satisfaction, he protested again. He was confined to his quarters for insubordination and for disrupting the cohesion of the

¹⁶ André, p. 306

¹⁷ Jules Mollin, La Vérité sur l'affaire des fiches, (Paris: Librairies Universelles, 1905), pp. 54-55.

regiment. The affair came to the attention of Camille Pelletan, the reporter of the army budget for that year, who gave a long speech in the Chamber of Deputies against the punishment of this "loyal republican" officer. When André was appointed Minister of War, Humbert was recommended by Pelletan as a loyal republican and was appointed to André's war ministry cabinet.¹⁸

The other case in point is that of Captain Jules Mollin. During the height of the Dreyfus Affair, Mollin had married one of the daughters of Anatole France, a leading dreyfusard. For his impetuosity, he was placed in quarantine by his fellow regimental officers. As a result of his father-in-law's connections with the republicans, Mollin was recommended as a loyal republican officer and was accepted into André's cabinet. But not all of the officers in André's cabinet would prove to be fanatically loyal to the Republic or even loyal to André.

It is difficult to determine the precise date a regular correspondance between Ministry of War and the Freemasons began. Mollin stated that after the problems confronted in the promotion of 1900, André decided to ask for information from all the republican societies.

¹⁸ Au Sein des commissions. Fragments d'histoire 1914-1919 2 vols, (Paris: Libraire Ollendorf, 1924) II, 192-202.

Since Mollin was a Freemason, he was given the task of contacting them.¹⁹ André related a similar story in his memoirs.²⁰

Soon after the system began, it became quite regular. Mollin stated that he was given a desk adjacent to General Percin, André's chef de cabinet. Percin daily gave Mollin a list of names to have investigated. "My duties consisted of taking a part in general correspondence, to study the question submitted to me, and to take care of the fiche service and its information."²¹ Mollin would take Percin's list and attach a note to it requesting information. It would be carried by messenger directly to the office of the Grand Orient Lodge of the Freemasons on Rue Cadet. If the information was particularly urgent, that would also be included in the note. On occasion, the General Secretary of the Grand Orient, Vadecard, would recommend particular officers for particular posts. On occasion these requests were granted.²²

¹⁹ Mollin, p. 76.

²⁰ André, p. 311.

²¹ Mollin, p. 78.

²² Ibid., pp. 80-86.

Mollin also compiled a list of those officers who had subscribed to the Henry memorial.²³ He also "reread the records on the Dreyfus trial before the court of Appeals of Rennes in order to pick out the names of all the officers who had a favorable or unfavorable attitude to the innocent one."²⁴

Percin, according to Mollin, handled the other sources of information and would frequently give Mollin lists of good or bad officers with or without information attached. The information was collated and the names entered into two books, Corinth, for those officers who were good republicans, and Carthage, for those officers who were considered to be unfavorable to the Republic. The books were periodically revised to keep them up to date.²⁵

Mollin was no mere go-between for the war ministry and the Grand Orient. He took to his work with a conviction bordering on fanaticism. He had no doubts that what he was doing was not only right, but a valuable

²³After the suicide of Colonel Henry, the nationalist press began a subscription in his honor. The contributors represent an important cross section of the anti-dreyfusard forces.

²⁴Mollin, p. 100.

²⁵Ibid.

service to the Republic. Completely unrepentant he wrote in his memoirs:

The brain that is capable of adapting itself to the republican idea in general is superior not only in the realm of abstraction but also in concrete realities, to the brain which has evolved towards the idea of monarchy, an idea which is one of stagnation, reaction and tradition...No, there is nothing to fear that in republicanizing our officer corps we will decrease the intellectual valor. There is, on the contrary, much to be hoped that in the evolution of the military mind towards the republican idea that a great deal of good would occur. At any cost, it was necessary to know the republican officers.²⁶

At first, the system was used to acquire specific information on specific individuals. For example, in July 1901, when André sought a new commandant for the military school at St. Cyr, he drew up a list of three possibilities. (How the list was drawn up is unknown, but probably it was a combination of men whom André knew personally, recommendations from politicians and other generals, i.e. the politics of promotion.) Next to two of the names, Mollin included certain comments ("we believe he is a republican"). Mollin also reminded Vadecard how important it was to have a good republican in this position and urged him to respond as quickly as

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 57, 72.

possible. Vadecard then sent the request for information to the appropriate lodges. The responses consisted of personal opinions, consultations with other Masons and "sure" republicans. Each response was forwarded to Mollin. Only comments such as "he is a Freemason" were changed to read "He is a free thinker" or "he is a republican." The anonymity of each respondent was preserved. Mollin kept his file, and the Grand Orient kept the originals. From beginning to end, the process took one week.²⁷

The quality of the information varied greatly. In some cases it was quite extensive, covering the man's military career, his expressed political beliefs, family relations, etc.²⁸ But the vast majority of them consisted of hearsay spiced with malice.

Generally, the fiches²⁹ were composed of rumors and gossip gleaned from interviews with merchants, other Masons and anyone else who "knew" anything about the officer.

²⁷ L'Echo de Paris, 7 November 1904.

²⁸ Robert Nanteuil, Le Dossier de M. Guyot de Villeneuve: l'armée cléricale, (Paris: Bibliographie Sociale, 1906), p. 124.

²⁹ Fiches- index cards.

The results were reports such as that of Lt. D'Aurelles de Montmarin. "He is one of the most militant clericals in the garrison; he encourages the patronage of the Catholic church; he goes to Mass, and receives the senior priest at his table; he represents the dyed-in-the-wool reactionary."³⁰ Or that of Lt. Col. Caillot which read "He is an intensely religious fanatic. He wants to be named the commander of the sixty-second regiment, and it is believed that he had the nickname goupillon. He is a monk dressed as a soldier."³¹ Other officers were condemned swiftly with no reason given: Colonel Bouton "clerical reactionary," Colonel Lagrene "clerical reactionary." Commandant Toubetbatt "a very reactionary clerical. A mediocre officer."³²

Yet it is highly doubtful that the army was as disloyal as the fiches seem to indicate. Factors such as going to Mass or sending one's children to religious schools were considered to be anti-republican acts. But it must be remembered that a disproportionately large segment of the officer corps was drawn from the old conservative aristocratic classes, traditionally religious.

³⁰Nanteuil, p. 125.

³¹Ibid., p. 122.

³²Ibid., pp. 122-123.

In addition, it is an acknowledged fact that in most instances the religious schools were superior to the state schools. Another factor was that it was Church policy to grant scholarships to the children of officers to encourage their attendance at religious schools. But none of these circumstances was taken into consideration by the authors of the fiches. Given their frame of reference, i.e., that the army was hostile to republican institutions, and that the Church was anti-republican, even the most personal acts could be, and were, interpreted as attacks on the government.

The system inevitably expanded. By July of 1901, the Grand Orient began a study of the entire upper echelons of the army. A letter was sent to each lodge stating "Would you please give us the most complete information you can as to the political and philosophical point of view of all the higher officers and generals [here the name of the appropriate garrison was inserted]." ³³

In 1903, two commandants struck upon the idea of organizing an association of Masonic officers under the name "Solidarité des Armées de Terre et du Mer." It too served as an agency for the Grand Orient. The officer members were encouraged to give information on their fellow

³³ Bidegain, p. 92.

officers. In fact they were sent a sample questionnaire asking: "1) The civil state of the mother and the father of the officer. 2) The civil state of the mother and father of the officer's wife. 3) The schools the officer and his wife attended. 5) Their religious practices. 6) The schools their children attend. 7) Their social life. 8) The parties to which they are invited. 9) Is the officer anti-semitic?"³⁴

Jean Bidegain, whose job at the Grand Orient was quite similar to Mollin's position at the ministry of war, gives the following figures: between September 1, 1901 and October 30, 1903, he sent 18,818 fiches to the War Ministry.³⁵ Out of a total of 22,000 officers in the French Army in these years, it is obvious that the system touched virtually every officer in the army. Yet André states categorically in his memoirs and in his various speeches that the system was never used to decide promotion, but was only used to make sure that all officers were being promoted fairly.³⁶ André even cites the fiches of some thirty officers whom he promoted to general during his tenure at the War Ministry. Yet the statistics show that the system was used quite ex-

³⁴Journal des Débats, 31 October 1904.

³⁵Bidegain, p. 95.

³⁶André, p. 302.

tensively to decide promotion.

The vast majority of the fiches were unfavorable. Of 726 published fiches, 524 (72%) were very critical in their descriptions of the officer. Of the remaining fiches, 100 were favorable and 103 were either so contradictory that any interpretation was impossible, or were indifferent, neither critical nor favorable. Of these 726 published fiches previously cited it was possible to examine 501 intensively. If we compare the rank of these 501 officers in 1900 to their ranks in 1905, we find that 236 (47%) were promoted. This is a proportionately larger number of promotions than if a random sampling was taken of the officer corps in these years. But the significant point is that of these 236 promotions, 137 (58%) went to officers who had received "bad" fiches. Sixty-three of the promotions went to officers with good fiches (27%). The remaining thirty six promotions (15%) went to officers with the contradictory or indifferent fiches. When these figures are compared with the number of good, bad and indifferent fiches examined it is found that twenty-six percent of the bad fiches were promoted, sixty-three per cent of the good fiches were promoted and thirty-five per cent of the indifferent fiches received promotion. It was thus twice as likely for an officer with a good fiche to be promoted as it was

for an officer with a bad fiche. It thus appears that the fiches did more than just guide promotion, in many instances they determined it.³⁷

With so many people involved in the system, it is astonishing that it was able to function nearly four years without a major scandal and especially since its operation was not a complete secret. As early as February 5, 1901, André was interpellated on reports of officers who were being denounced. Le Temps commented that it hoped that André's statement (on equal representation in the high command) meant equal access and not an absurd mathematical rigidity.³⁸

In May of 1901, La Libre Parole published an article by Gaston Mery in which he claimed that he had found a letter written by a Freemason, stating that two lists of officers were sent to André, one containing names of Masonic officers who should be promoted, and a second list of those to be kept back, or sent to undesirable garrisons.³⁹ The "letter" was in all likelihood a figment of Mery's pen. The Masons were constantly being attacked by La Libre Parole, and this was just one of the less scurrilous articles published by that journal. While in the light

³⁷ Analysis drawn from a comparison with Nanteuil and Annuaire de l'Armée Française, 1900 and 1905.

³⁸ Le Temps, 6 February 1901.

³⁹ La Libre Parole, 14 May 1901.

of later revelations it seems to be quite prescient, nothing ever came of the "revelation."

The following month, L'Intransigeant devoted a long article to the espionage system in the war ministry. "André interests himself in what the officers read, and designates those journals which are to be read to the exclusion of all others. He has gone so far as to observe the wives of these unfortunates and to have himself informed on their visits."⁴⁰ In July, the journal announced that Lt.-Col. Gallet was the commander of the system.⁴¹

Le Gaulois also published reports on the system. On January 21, 1902, it reported that promotion in the army depended on the collated information sources of André's cabinet.⁴² Later that year, Le Gaulois' staff was augmented by the addition of Colonel Rousset, a former instructor at the Ecole de Guerre swept out in André's early house cleaning. In May of 1902 he too wrote an article on the fiches revealing that not only did the army know about them, but feared them as well. "A single captain," he wrote, "chosen for his political convictions holds the fate of all the officers in the high command

⁴⁰ L'Intransigeant, June 30, 1901.

⁴¹ Ibid., 24 July 1901.

⁴² Le Gaulois, 21 January 1902.

in his hands....Officers are suspicious of one another.... The corps generals have had their authority undermined by not being able to do more than pass on the names of those they think should be promoted."⁴³

Indeed, the army did suspect that something was amiss. General Legrande-Girarde wrote in his diary as early as October 1901 that Lt.-Col. Gallet was acquiring surreptitious information on officers.⁴⁴

General Dubois was convinced of a Masonic plot.

Never has the action of parliament or the Masons been so greatly or silently exercised. Never has denunciation been honored more at the Rue St. Dominique; under the observation or the denunciation of a brother..., under the recommendation of a venerable..., an officer is excluded from the promotion lists or added to it. The intrigues have reached the point where even the old Masons from the eastern regions have told me that they were sickened to see young officers entering the lodges solely to satisfy their ambition.⁴⁵

But all of these revelations came from the right-wing press or the "anti-republican" military establishment. They seemed like the same old tired accusations one side hurled at the other from time to time in the verbal civil war which was only beginning to subside in France. What

⁴³ Ibid., 29 May 1902.

⁴⁴ General Legrande-Girarde, Un Quart de siècle au Service de la France, (Paris: Presse Littéraire de France, 1954), p. 427.

⁴⁵ General Emile Dubois, Mes souvenirs de l'Elysée 1900-1906, (No publisher or date listed), p. 77.

was needed were facts. By September 1904, the facts were available.

The necessary proofs came from two unrelated sources, Captain Charles Humbert and Jean Bidegain. In 1902, Captain Humbert had gotten into a row with the other members of André's cabinet over certain denunciations by a lieutenant of his commander. Not being able to obtain satisfaction from his colleagues, Humbert went directly to André and told him of what was going on. André responded that it was none of Humbert's business. Shortly thereafter, André ordered Humbert transferred to Lille. Humbert then went to Camille Pelletan, an old friend and Minister of the Navy, and requested that he be attached to his department as liaison officer. When Pelletan contacted André on the matter, André refused permission, an unusual action as one minister rarely denied another such a request. The refusal put a considerable strain on the relationship between the two ministers.

Humbert resigned from the army rather than be transferred. But before he left, he took some three hundred fiches. Over the next two years, he was to add 1200 more fiches to his collection, brought to him by other members of André's cabinet.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Au Sein des Commissions. pp. 204-205. Le Journal, 26 June 1908.

Humbert became a journalist, writing variously for L'Aurore and Le Matin. But in 1904, with the aide of his fiches collection, he would launch his political career.

At the same time, another fatal leak was developing at the Grand Orient Lodge of the Freemasons. It came in the form of an unstable young man by the name of Jean Bidegain, who was a man in search of certitudes. Until he was twenty, he was an ardent Roman Catholic and even helped establish a Roman Catholic worker's society. Disillusioned, he turned to the freemasons for "salvation." He also at one time or another attended meetings or joined societies of occultists, spiritualists, collectivists, and even anarchists. At last he began to be disillusioned with the Freemasons as well.⁴⁷

At about this time, Bidegain struck up a friendship with a certain Abbé Tourmentin,⁴⁸ the head of the Société Antimaçonnique de France. Bidegain confided his doubts to Tourmentin and eventually told him the story of the fiches. To bolster his story, he brought Tourmentin samples of the correspondance. Bidegain was encouraged to acquire more fiches.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Jean Bidegain, Masques et visages maçonnique, (Paris: Libraire Antisemite, 1906), pp. 369-371.

⁴⁸ A pseudonym for Abbé Henri Stanislas Athanase Joseph.

⁴⁹ Bidegain, Conspiration, pp. 125-129.

What to do with the information was now the major problem. It was obviously political dynamite and had to be handled with great care. But Bidegain was determined to make a few francs out of his crisis of conscience. He sought out some deputies who would be sympathetic to him and also have some ready cash. Bidegain first sent an anonymous letter to M. Prache, a deputy who had recently interpellated André on denunciation in the army. Next Abbé Tourmentin visited Prache with copies of letters and fiches and demanded 100,000 francs. Prache simply did not have that kind of money. But he knew of two deputies who did have access to that much cash.⁵⁰

Gabriel Syveton was the secretary general of the Ligue de Patrie Française, and one of the most violent nationalists in France. He had been a high school teacher but had lost his job after some violent anti-dreyfusard and anti-governmental tirades. His stormy career continued after his installation in the Chamber of Deputies in a disputed election in 1902. He was ordered to run again and he won again. He had even been expelled from the Chamber of Deputies for several sessions after some violent remarks. But as secretary general for the

⁵⁰From the dossier of Guyot de Villeneuve at the Paris prefecture de Police.

Ligue de Patrie Française, he had at his command a great deal of money.

Guyot de Villeneuve was the son of a very old and very wealthy noble family. He had attended St. Cyr, but resigned from the army in 1899 after being punished for publicly sending a check to Syveton after his suspension from teaching. He also was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1902 as a nationalist and was a consistent and persistent critic of André.

The first meeting between all the principal members of the plot did not go very well. Syveton and Guyot de Villeneuve wanted to use the fiches immediately to overthrow the cabinet. Bidegain, on the other hand, wanted to wait until the elections of 1906 and not only change the cabinet but the composition of the Chamber of Deputies as well. Tourmentin wanted to use the fiches to smash the Freemasons. There was also a great deal of haggling over the price that was to be paid for the information. But in August an agreement was finally reached; the fiches would not be used until 1906 and Bidegain would receive 40,000 francs as an installment on 100,00 francs. In return Bidegain promised to supply Syveton and Guyot de Villeneuve with a steady stream of fiches. What Bidegain never suspected was that events would not permit his partners to adhere to the bargain. Not only would the fiches be used immediately, but he would never see any more money for his information.⁵¹

⁵¹ Bidegain, Conspiration, p. 137.

The state of the Combes ministry must be examined briefly in order to appreciate the political maneuvers involved in what came to be known as the Affaire des Fiches. Combes had been pressing the Association Laws very hard and had alienated a large segment of the populace. In fact the Cabinet was so immersed in the clerical question that most other matters, including military, were ignored. More important, Combes had forfeited the support of the moderates in Parliament. Waldeck-Rousseau, shortly before his death, had given an important speech in the Senate condemning Combes' interpretation of the Association Laws.

In August 1904, at the Hague Conference of Socialist Parties, a resolution was passed condemning the support of bourgeois governments by socialist parties. This deprived Combes of the support of the socialists and the abilities of Jaurès. With the loss of Jaurès, the Bloc de Gauche, the leftist caucus in Parliament, was badly weakened.

Finally, there was the fact that by September 1904, the Combes ministry had outlasted every other ministry in the history of the Third Republic, save that of Waldeck-Rousseau. With that longevity went the build-up of animosities and jealousies of the other leaders in Parliament. A desire for change was in the air in the Fall of 1904.

On September 10, 1904, Le Matin began a series of articles on what it called "Denunciation in the Army." The articles were based on the information provided by Charles Humbert, at the time a contributor and assistant editor of Le Matin. The articles claimed that there had been a systematic attempt by André to change the composition of the Ecole Militaire by appointing instructors amenable to his ideas of the new model officer. Within the articles there were published several examples of fiches.⁵² In succeeding days the newspaper printed stories of what it called irregularities by André in appointments. It told of an officer who had been found embezzling funds being transferred to a choice garrison.⁵³ Another officer who proclaimed his pacifism was punished by his commander. The lieutenant was transferred to Paris, his commander to the provinces.⁵⁴ Other cases were also cited. The newspaper demanded to know why such actions had been taken.

It is difficult to tell why Le Matin and Humbert chose this moment to publish its information. There is no evidence that they knew of the transaction between Syveton, Guyot de Villeneuve and Bidegain. On the contrary, when

⁵² Le Matin, 10 September 1904.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 17 September 1904.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 September 1904.

the bomb did go off, they were as surprised as André. In fact there was no indication that they sought to overthrow André or the Combes cabinet. If that were the case, the journal would have been better advised to wait six more weeks until Parliament reopened. Then it could have surprised André and the cabinet with the information rather than give him time to conceive of a counterstroke.

It seems as if the journal was merely bringing to light an abuse, an abuse that it sought to correct by its disclosures. As late as September 23, 1904, it wrote:

The cares of national defense demand that the Republic accord rank to officers on the merits of their work. We no longer want to have the accounts of secret notes compiled by responsible mouchards consulted and promotions reserved to those who are better known for their displays of zealotry towards the Republic rather than their ability as soldiers.⁵⁵

The articles ended on September 29, 1904. In summation the journal called on André to desist before it was too late.

It wrote:

It is not possible that you lower yourself to the role you are playing. It is not possible that you allow beside you... the perpetration of this work of mouchardage and denunciation which is destroying France's army. The place of the officers keeping the registers of denunciation and secret information is not in your cabinet....Burn your fiches and to the wind your files. There are no republicans who can excuse a fault against honor, and there are no masons who can cover an agency of wire pullers.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 23 September 1904.

The Republic has no need to live with officers who are thieves, and the Freemasons have no need to render services to the Republic that would turn it into an office of denunciation. All of this must be ended.⁵⁶

But André did not heed the warnings.

The Combes cabinet had no advance warning that a storm would break over the matter. Combes' usually quite efficient spy system did not detect even the slightest rumors of trouble even after the initial disclosures in Le Matin.

From this point, the narrative of the Affaire des Fiches takes two tracks. Along one, we have the campaign in the press to overthrow André and the fiche system. Along the other, we have the parliamentary battle to oust Combes and his cabinet. The divergence began with the reopening of Parliament on October 18, 1904. On that day thirty-six requests for interpellations were deposited. The first six were concerned with varying aspects of the religious question. The seventh was on colonial policy. The eighth was a joint request by Colonel Rousset and Guyot de Villeneuve for an interpellation on army affairs.

There had long been demands in the nationalist press for a large-scale interpellation on the conduct of the War Minister. On August 15, 1904, there appeared in

⁵⁶ Ibid., 29 September 1904.

Le Gaulois (to which Syveton and Guyot de Villeneuve were periodic contributors) an article demanding just such an accounting.

An accounting must be demanded of outrages against our army; there must be provoked a great debate which will open the eyes of those least disposed to see, which will provoke the "blowards" themselves to choose between their duty as Frenchmen and their party interests....It is necessary that he [André] leave, that he is chased from, that he abandon the ministry, not feet first, but rather as he is hanging on to his portfolio.⁵⁷

Colonel Rousset's request for an interpellation lulled André into the belief that he would only be confronted with questions based on the Le Matin articles. He was given no inkling that more proofs existed. The interpellation was scheduled for October 28, 1904.

On October 27, the second phase of the attack began. On that day Le Figaro published the proofs sustaining the allegations of the articles in Le Matin. These articles were based on material supplied by Guyot de Villeneuve, and were published under the headline "La Délation dans L'Armée. Une Nouvelle Maffia." It stated that the freemasons, at the height of the anti-clerical battle had organized a secret information service. So widespread was the system that not one garrison, not one barracks lacked its informers. Those that were condemned were denied promotions. Their accusers were rewarded. "Who would

⁵⁷ Le Gaulois, 15 August 1904.

have ever thought," the paper wrote, "that the supreme head of the army would lower himself to use the political hatreds between officers serving the same flag."⁵⁸

On October 28, Le Figaro added more fuel to the fire by directly linking the war ministry with the Grand Orient. It published several fiches and examples of what happened to officers who were denounced.⁵⁹

On the same day, Le Matin published an editorial displaying a great deal of discomfort over the monster it had created. Commenting on the forthcoming debate it stated

We do not enter this debate with joy in our hearts, and we would be the happiest ones if it would end in a honorable manner for the chefs that are accused. The minister who had the task to explain these acts cannot promise that it will not happen again. The subordinates who...created, organized, and developed this lamentable regime denounced by us must disappear. Denunciation was an evil when it was used by the Jesuits who controlled the army. It is just as abominable now. It is the Minister of War who must decide on promotion and not a captain in care of the register of denunciation or a major classifying the fiches of the police.⁶⁰

Incredibly enough, the paper did not realize the scope of the scandal. It ended the article by calling on André to retake his prerogatives in promotion.

When the Chamber of Deputies was called into session that afternoon, all of the deputies expected a difficult day. Lt.-Colonel Rousset led off the questioning with a long recital of the charges issued by Le Matin

⁵⁸ Le Figaro, 27 October 1904.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28 October 1904.

⁶⁰ Le Matin, 28 October 1904.

and Le Figaro and demanded an answer from André. André's answers consisted of dodging specific questions, stating that the facts cited were misleading and incomplete. He spoke at length about certain changes he had made and not at all about others. In fact, André's greatest defense was the simple fact that Rousset possessed no information beyond that cited in the newspapers. Upon the completion of Rousset's interpellation, it seemed as if André had survived the day rather well.⁶¹

André's sense of security was heightened by the belief that the Guyot de Villeneuve interpellation would be concerned only with the rumored reforms at St. Cyr. This could be fought on strictly party lines and with the firm majority displayed several days before by the Combes Ministry, all would be well.

When Guyot de Villeneuve rose, he immediately changed the subject of his interpellation. He announced that he would offer the proofs lacking in Colonel Rousset's interpellation. He then proceeded to lay bare the entire fiche system, with the help of the information provided by Jean Bidegain. The most damaging fiches and letters were read. He accused André and Combes of knowing of the system and even organizing it. The Minister of War had divided and injected politics into it. Upon completion of the interpellation, he called for the overthrow of the

⁶¹ Annales de la Chambre des Députés, Débats, 18 October 1904 pp. 202-214.

Combes cabinet.⁶²

André immediately denied any knowledge of the system. He had made a fateful error. André did in fact know of the system and Guyot de Villeneuve had enough documents to prove it. When André was forced to admit not only knowledge of but participation in the system, his position would become untenable. This was yet another example of André's total lack of political sense. As Jaurès would prove time and again during the course of the Affaire des Fiches, if it came down to a choice between the anti-clerical left and the nationalist right, the Chamber of Deputies would vote with the government. Had André immediately admitted to knowing of the system and stated that he did it to save the Republic from the machination of the nationalists and Jesuits, he would have been saved. When he was finally persuaded to follow this course, it was too late.

André equivocated in his defense. He condemned the system and denied all knowledge of it. He asked to see the documents so that he could determine their authenticity. He would not condemn anyone until he saw the documents. "But," he said, "you can be certain of one thing, if I ascertain that these things have occurred as we think, I will begin by taking those measures I judge to be necessary."⁶³ It was a pathetic defense by a man taken totally by surprise.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 215-223.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 224.

The leaders of the "Bloc" saw that a crisis of major proportions had arisen. They would have to rally their forces if they were going to survive the session. And so, one by one, they rose not to defend the fiche system, but to save the government.

First Gérault-Richard rose. He immediately cited the famous articles in Le Temps published in 1899. The army had been a hotbed of opposition to the Republic. André sought to make it firmly loyal to republican institutions.

The Republic and the republican party had not only the right, but the duty to defend itself, and it commits a crime if it neglects to take the necessary precautions and leaves its army in the hands of the Republic's worst enemies. Why do you want the Republic to be so naive as to abandon itself only to its enemies. She had the duty to confide its important posts to those she is sure of.⁶⁴

Another deputy rose to defend the government. He simply reminded his colleagues that "In the situation as it exists, the first thing that must be looked at is the work that the ministry has carried out while it has been on those benches...."⁶⁵

But in the end it was Jaurès who saved the day. First he reminded the chamber of other "authentic" documents which had condemned Dreyfus. He then called

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

for the majority to regain their self-assurance and not let themselves be outsmarted by a "manoeuvre de séance." "What you will not forgive...is his André's courageously assuming the task of forming a republican spirit in the army." For good measure, Jaures hauled out the spectre of the coup manqué of the Dreyfus Affaire.⁶⁶

Shortly after Jaurès' defense, the Chamber of Deputies voted on a resolution proposed by M. Maujan and accepted by André. It was a carefully worded piece of parliamentary hair splitting designed to pick up the crucial votes in the chamber. It read: "The chamber condemns, if it is found to be exact, the inadmissible procedures described at the tribune, and convinced that the Minister of War will give the necessary sanctions, and forbidding any addition, passes to the order of the day."⁶⁷ The order of the day was passed 278-274. The government was saved.

The opposition newspapers were enraged over the results of the vote. Le Figaro wrote "The Bloc cannot resist the revelations of such a scandal. It saved the ministry yesterday by a majority of four votes."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 227.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 230.

⁶⁸ Le Figaro, 29 October 1904.

Le Gaulois stated: "The Bloc has rallied to save Combes, if not André. The government will survive until the next attack, but it has lost all moral authority....There are now only two parties, those who defend France against M. Combes, and those who have decided to sacrifice her to M. Combes' ambition."⁶⁹ L'Echo de Paris stated that the "The Chamber has contented itself for today to disavow these disgraceful practices, and an order of the day learnedly equivocal has permitted the success of a desperate maneuver launched by Jaurès at the end of the sitting. But the 'Bloc' is reduced to a majority of four votes."⁷⁰ All of the opposition newspapers were quick to point out that the majority of four had been assured by the votes of four ministers.

Even the ministerial newspapers were hard pressed to defend André. L'Humanité asked: "Where were all of these indignant Radicals when it was the Jesuits and reactionaries who had a system of delation and favoritism." Much of the problem, it wrote, was due to the overzealousness of some subordinates. But at least André's system sought to give France loyal officers.⁷¹ Le Radical saw the whole action as a plot to overthrow the cabinet.

⁶⁹ Le Gaulois, 29 October 1904.

⁷⁰ L'Echo de Paris, 29 October 1904.

⁷¹ L'Humanité, 30 October 1904.

"We want," it wrote, "a national republican army, but we intend to use other means than the miserable processes that we blame, to give to this army the capable leaders and republicans she needs."⁷² The article was written by M. Maujan, an important Radical leader, and was quite significant. For the first time, this government organ drew a line between André and the cabinet. It was emphasized that it was the government of republican action that was in danger. All means must be taken to save it. Implied was the resignation of André.

The case for André's swift resignation was quite obvious. But André had no intention of either assuming the responsibility for the system or of resigning.

Le Figaro was quite insistent on calling for his resignation. "General André," it wrote, "finds himself in the impossible position of being unable to preserve his portfolio without raising in the army an indignation bordering on agitation."⁷³ Le Gaulois wrote, "He [André] has lost all moral authority.... André has become a functionary of the Masonic police. He has lost all value for directing our army."⁷⁴

It is impossible to determine exactly why André

⁷² Le Radical, 30 October 1904.

⁷³ Le Figaro, 29 October 1904.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

refused to resign immediately. It is quite likely that he thought he could ride out the storm, or that Guyot de Villeneuve had shot his bolt. If new revelations could be avoided, perhaps the affair could be buried. It is more likely that André simply refused to be the sacrificial lamb to save the ministry. La Petite Marseillaise reported that Combes was enraged over the revelations that had put the ministry in such a fix. Combes privately let it be known that he hoped that André would resign. But André let it be known that he would bring down the entire ministry if pushed. André simply refused to leave unless the whole cabinet went with him.⁷⁵

If André thought that Guyot de Villeneuve or Le Figaro would let the matter rest, he was mistaken. In an interview the day after the parliamentary battle, Guyot de Villeneuve made it clear that he would press the attack. "The affair of denunciation is not closed," he said. He demanded André's resignation and an investigation of all those officers involved in the organization of the system. If this was not done, he warned, he would bring the matter before the attention of the Chamber of Deputies again, and with new documents.⁷⁶

⁷⁵La Petite Marseillaise, 1 November 1904.

⁷⁶La Liberté, 29 October 1904.

Any lingering doubts as to André's innocence that any of his supporters may still have had were shattered during the week that separated the interpellations of October 28 and November 4. On October 29, Le Temps published a letter from Lt.-Colonel Hartmann, a former member of André's cabinet. In this letter Lt.-Colonel Hartmann declared that he had confronted André with the existence of the system and had been dismissed because he disapproved of it.⁷⁷ On October 31, Le Figaro revealed that Vadecard had become a member of the Legion of Honor for his contribution to the press, even though he had never worked for a newspaper or any other kind of a journal. On November 1, Le Figaro published a facsimile of a list for the Legion of Honor. The list contained a column in which the results of an officer's fiche were to be placed. André's signature was on the list.⁷⁸ All during the week, Guyot de Villeneuve passed out pieces of his dossier to various journals in an attempt to keep the pot boiling. He succeeded. The cries for André's resignation became louder.

André meanwhile had taken some steps to alleviate the situation. He had asked for, and received, Mollin's resignation. He had also burned all of the fiches in his possession. But his actions were a case of much too little and much too late.

⁷⁷ Le Temps, 29 October 1904.

⁷⁸ Le Figaro, 1 November 1904.

On November 4, 1904, Le Figaro published a devastating letter sent by Waldeck-Rousseau to Combes concerning the existence of an espionage system written in December of 1902. Waldeck-Rousseau had been visited by General Percin who had told him all of the details of the fiche system. "I would readily admit," wrote Waldeck-Rousseau, "that the prefects, representing the central power, should be consulted for important promotions. They offer guarantees and they are responsible, but not one could imagine granting the same importance to information furnished by just anyone. Denunciation does not need to be encouraged."⁷⁹ Combes never responded to the letter. The letter clearly implicated the Prime Minister in the scandal.

November 4 was to be the day the fate of the ministry was to be decided. Le Figaro wrote: "The army awaits silently but impatiently the vote that will repudiate the guilty minister or to add the collective complicity of the deputies to that of the government. It is not a political question. It is a question of honor and morality. It is for the chamber to declare today if the army in distress is to be saved."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3 November 1904.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 4 November 1904.

When the Chamber of Deputies reconvened on Friday, November 4, it was obvious that the government would be in for a hard time. The day before they had won a tactical victory when they managed to join an interpellation by Maurice Bertaux and one by Jaurès to the new Guyot de Villeneuve interpellation. It was hoped that the debate could be so confused that a definitive vote would not be possible. The government still displayed considerable strength as it won the maneuver by a vote of 310-240.

From the very beginning the session was tumultuous. The subject of Guyot de Villeneuve's interpellation ostensibly was to determine if anything had been done by André to alleviate the situation revealed in the interpellation of October 28. In fact, Guyot de Villeneuve was offering a rebuttal to André's contention that he did not know of the fiche system and that the documents offered as proof were not authentic. After the revelations that had appeared in Le Figaro and the other opposition newspapers, neither point needed much proving. But it would serve well as another excuse to attempt to force the cabinet to resign.

André rose to defend himself. He had finally resolved, or had been convinced, that he must attack and not wait for more piecemeal revelations. So in the best Radical tradition, he rolled out the old coup manqué story

and how Waldeck-Rousseau had commissioned him to save the country and the army.⁸¹ He claimed that he had used the fiche system because there had been a conspiracy of inertia by the high command to excuse "the reprehensible acts committed by their subordinates for the very honorable reason that a leader must cover his subordinates." As André went on he cited incidents of intolerance, disloyalty and other "reprehensible" acts, but the chamber was no longer willing to believe him. He was frequently interrupted by demands for names, dates, places, and more detailed accounts. He did not provide them.⁸²

André did, however, reveal the truth when he explained his reasons for adopting the system:

After a long period during the course of which the republican officers did not obtain anything, where the officers hostile to the government received everything, I found it just that one must first give satisfaction to the republican officers....If that necessitates an absolute correction in the attitude of all the officers vis-à-vis our institutions, and its power to inspire all their acts, the minister would have to be completely informed and would have to find in the notes of each officer all of the useful elements of appreciation.⁸³

André denied that the fiches dictated his decisions and cited examples of promotion he had made in contradiction to his information.⁸⁴ But as it has already

⁸¹ Annales, 4 November 1904 pp. 269-270.

⁸² Ibid., p. 271

⁸³ Ibid., p. 275.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 277.

been shown, he did largely follow the advice of the fiches. All of Andre's deviations stemmed from the fact that there simply were not enough "good republicans" to fill all of the important posts in the army.

André placed most of the blame on Mollin. He admitted that he had authorized Mollin to obtain information, but not of the nature that had come to light. The letters had never been seen by Mollin's superiors. At the end of his address, André made it quite clear that he would not resign. "It is not in the middle of this campaign," he said, "that I will desert my post because the defense of the Republic is my deepest conviction and to defend it and reassure the republican officers and those officers who will be coming to the Republic, I will remain."⁸⁵

André's address was followed by that of Maurice Bertaux, who delivered a long and somewhat irrelevant speech on the need for a promotion law. It was a stall and a smokescreen that would allow the Radicals to reorganize.⁸⁶

Only Jaurès refused to take a defensive position. As he had done a week before, he denounced the denunciation system that had existed under the reactionary regime preceding the de Gallifet ministry. "You claim," he said,

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 277-278.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 285.

"that republican officers were promoted after only six and one-half years as a commandant....Look at the number of noble officers promoted after only five, four, or three years." He accused the old system of having given better notes for nobles than for non-noble officers thus assuring the nobles of promotion.⁸⁷ It was an extreme, if not embarrassing position for Jaurès to take. But he felt that the cabinet had to be defended, and the strict party line would be the strongest.

The principal theme of the rebuttal to Jaurès' argument, and the position of much of the center, was expressed by Georges Leygues.

The government has the right and the duty to inform itself by the intermediaries of its representatives on the political attitudes of the officers....But it is not admissible that the informal chats not only of officers but all functionaries, that the simple interest of citizens be at the mercy of a small group of individuals, disguised for the most part, without responsibility or mandate....We absolutely refuse to approve the return of the practices incessantly denounced by the reprobation of the country.⁸⁸

The government was now in serious trouble. Ribot rose to speak and denounced the government for its actions.⁸⁹ Millerand denounced the system as being completely unjustified.⁹⁰ Thus spoke the two men most likely to for

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 287

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 288-291

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 293.

the next left-of-center government. With their desertion, it seemed as if the government would collapse in this session.

Incredibly, the cabinet survived, not once, but twice. First it defeated a motion to vote the order of the day pure and simple by 279-277. Then it won a vote to consider the order of the day of Bienvenu-Martin, which supported the government, by a vote of 286-276.

At this point, unnoticed, Gabriel Syveton rose from his seat, walked calmly up to the minister's benches and slapped André twice. Pandemonium erupted. About 100 deputies from the left as well as many deputies from the right side of the chamber poured onto the floor and they ensued what the reporter from Le Figaro called "un formidable pugilat." Brisson immediately suspended the session for fifteen minutes. When the session was reopened, Syveton was censured and his exclusion voted in less than five minutes. Syveton refused to leave and the session was again suspended while the guards were called in to escort him from the chamber. Only after this incident was the order of the day voted upon and passed 343-236.

There can only be one interpretation of Syveton's action. Seeing that the chamber had split on strictly party lines, he felt that there was no longer any possibility of overthrowing the cabinet in this session. In addition

it was very likely that a new interpellation could be blocked by the cabinet and eventually buried. There remained but one recourse, in Syveton's mind, the fires of the scandal had to be kept hot for a future date. By assaulting André, he would create a court case, a circus dear to the heart of all Frenchmen. With new revelations, the issue would soon be back in Parliament, and another attempt to end the cabinet could be made.

Syveton's action not only increased the cabinet's majority, if only temporarily, but put the opposition newspapers in a most embarrassing position. They now had to attack the government and disassociate themselves from one of the most prominent nationalists. L'Intransigeant ran a long article on the session but only mentioned the Syveton attack in passing.⁹¹ Le Gaulois deplored the attack as a valuable diversion for the government.⁹² Le Figaro deplored the attack as well but reminded its readers that it did not absolve the government from its responsibility.⁹³ All of the newspapers made it clear that the cabinet had only been saved by two votes.

The pro-government press went into ecstasy over the "outrage." For the first time since Le Matin initially

⁹¹ L'Intransigeant, 6 November 1904.

⁹² Le Gaulois, 5 November 1904.

⁹³ Le Figaro, 5 November 1904.

published its articles they had something substantial to retaliate with. They took full advantage of the opening. Le Radical ran a full page headline "Agression Contre Général André." It published two long articles, one of the aggression against André and the other on the nationalist peril. Only in passing did it record the votes preceeding the incident.⁹⁴ Clemenceau in L'Aurore called the attack a "brutal disavowal of the ministers who have sought to create the secular state."⁹⁵ Briand in L'Humanite exulted that the blow had finally brought the republican majority to its senses. He too called the attacks "the supreme clerical and nationalist assault against a republican Minister of War and a sincerely democratic government."⁹⁶

In fact November 4, 1904 was the high water mark of the Affaire des Fiches. From that day it steadily slipped from the attention of the public. In part, the government was aided by the eruption of an international crisis precipitated by the Dogger Bank incident.⁹⁷ The combination of that crisis and the convenient excuse that André had been seriously injured by the attack, gave the cabinet valuable time to repair the badly battered ship of state.

The obvious solution to the crisis was to lighten

⁹⁴ Le Radical, 6 November 1904.

⁹⁵ L'Aurore, 5 November 1904.

⁹⁶ L'Humanite, 5 November 1904.

⁹⁷ On its way to meet the Japanese fleet at the Pacific, the Russian Baltic fleet mistakenly attacked a British fishing fleet, causing a serious diplomatic crisis.

the load, i.e., remove André. But the General simply refused to leave gracefully. In an interview with L'Humanité, he made it very clear that he had no intention of resigning. He told his interviewer that he had offered to resign in July, but Combes had not accepted his offer. But to abandon his post now would be desertion. "The ministry is united," he declared, "we march together. And it is not in full battle that I will desert my post. I will only leave if the chamber places me in the minority."⁹⁸ In effect, he was stating that he would resign only if the entire cabinet resigned with him.

But the pressure on André was to prove too great. General Brugère, Vice-President of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, stated on November 7 in a meeting with President Loubet that "It is a disgrace to keep at the head of the army a liar and a coward." General Dubois wrote "I intend to express the same sentiment to all of the officers that pass through my office. The Minister of War cannot stay one day more in power. That is the general opinion of the Army."⁹⁹

But even the army's disgust over the revelations would not have sufficed to force André to resign. But in the course of his "illness" every important Radical leader visited him. Ostensibly the purpose of the

⁹⁸ Dubois, p. 108.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

visit was to pay their respects. But undoubtedly they also took the opportunity to urge him to save the government by resigning. Faced with this opposition, André had no choice but to tender his resignation.

On November 15, André sent in his resignation. He did it, he said, in order not to jeopardize the republican majority. The longest continuous Ministry of War in the history of the Third Republic was terminated.

The nationalist press gloated over his departure. In general they were only sorry that the entire cabinet did not resign, but they were confident that the cabinet could not survive for long. Le Gaulois wrote, "The only thing that remains to be seen after André's resignation is whether or not Combes can create a new milieu to work in."¹⁰⁰ Guyot de Villeneuve stated that he was not satisfied and that he would continue the assault. He wanted a complete rectification of the wrongs committed for four years.¹⁰¹

The Left breathed a sigh of relief when André resigned. Le Radical wrote "General André has handed in his resignation...by persuasion. The republicans... will be sadly surprised by this decision...."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Le Gaulois, 16 November 1904.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Le Radical, 17 November 1904.

Jaurès wrote in L'Humanité, "André leaves with the thanks of the entire nation of republicans. He has broken the power of the clerical reactionary oligarchy. He has understood that without equality there cannot be a real military force in the country. By his resignation he has sought to rally the failing spirits of the weaker republicans."¹⁰³

There remained several loose ends to tie up after André's resignation. The most immediate one was the pending trial of Gabriel Syveton. On November 21, 1904 the Chamber of Deputies voted to prosecute Syveton. On December 7, he appeared before a judge and pleaded guilty with extenuating circumstances to a charge of assault. His trial was set for December 15. On December 8, Syveton committed suicide.

Only slowly did the reasons for Syveton's suicide emerge. An investigation by various journals revealed that Syveton had had an affair with his stepdaughter, who suddenly felt contrite enough to tell her husband about the matter. Her husband quickly confronted Syveton with the charges. The following day Syveton committed suicide. It was also learned that Syveton had embezzled large sums of money from the treasury of the Ligue de Patrie Française.

¹⁰³L'Humanité, 17 November 1904.

All of these revelations made the public forget the revelations of the Affaire des Fiches and for several weeks (much longer than the entire Affaire des Fiches) it was the talk of Paris. André was quickly forgotten.

The new Minister of War, Maurice Bertheaux, quickly disavowed André. On November 21, 1904 he told an interviewer from Le Radical that "the system used by General André had also presented great problems in deciding promotion. From now on all officers should be informed about the notes that their superiors give them."¹⁰⁴ On January 13, 1905, he felt compelled to issue the following letter to all superior officers;

I have stated at various times that there will no longer be at the War Ministry any information provided by the fiches that are published daily. These fiches have been totally destroyed by fire. I have decided that each officer will have the right to receive the communication of all that he is the object of on the part of his commanders and that the commanders are to take note only of those notes that may influence an officer's career and bring these notes to the officer's attention. Political information received from the prefects are not to be placed in the dossiers of officers until they are asked for and if they would create an unfavorable decision by the minister they are to be reviewed by the hierarchy.¹⁰⁵

The fiches system was dismantled.

The matter was brought to the attention of Parliament several more times after André's resignation.

¹⁰⁴ Le Radical, 21 November 1904.

¹⁰⁵ "Correspondance Général, "carton 5N6, 13 January 1905. Service Historique de l'armée Française, Vincennes.

Each time the ministry managed to avoid a vote on the matter. But Combes had been mortally wounded by the whole affair. For two months his cabinet staggered from one near reversal to another, kept alive by ten and fifteen vote majorities. On January 15, 1905 the Combes ministry was finally forced to resign. The great Radical ministry was over.

The revelations of the Affaire des Fiches destroyed the republican coalition. With the destruction of the "Bloc," the continuance of the Radical's military policy became impossible. The army could only breathe a sigh of relief. Although it was not apparent at the time, the army had reached the nadir of its fortunes. The following years would see a steady rise to its former position of eminence.

In examining the creation of the fiche system, several factors stand out. Firstly, André completely misjudged the temper of France. The average Frenchman was more interested in an officer corps based on promotion by merit than one artificially indoctrinated with republican ideals. A spy system for promotion was abhorrent no matter which political faction it favored. Furthermore, humiliation of the army would not be tolerated. André's system could not be judged as anything less than a national disgrace.

Secondly, Andre was never able to create an organized promotion system. To be equitable, there had to be some institutional foundation for promotion. Although Andre did try to create one, he dropped the idea after encountering serious opposition.

Thirdly, Andre failed to properly oversee exactly what his subordinates were doing. It was not possible for him to see the reports submitted on some 20,000 officers. Therefore all he did see were summaries of officer reports. It is doubtful that he knew the evidence that these summaries were based upon. Too much authority was delegated to subordinates. Inevitably, caprice, bad judgement, and personal vendettas played a role in promotion.

The failure therefore is Andre's. On his shoulders must rest the blame for not only the collapse of the Combes ministry, but for the destruction of the Radical army program.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of seventy years, clearly the era of Radical reform of the army is proof of the French proverb, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Most of the reforms were short-lived and had little lasting effect.

The Radicals came to power with some definite ideas regarding officer promotion, conscription, organization, and the role that the army was to play in society. In each case, initial success would be eroded during the years leading to World War One.

Officer promotion was one of the great bêtes-noires of the Radicals. It was their firm belief that one of the most important lessons to be drawn from the Dreyfus Affair was that a truly republican army needed republican officers. The stranglehold that the officer caste had on promotion had to be broken. Much of De Gallitiet's work was devoted to establishing precedents for civil control of promotion.

It was André who took the bit between his teeth and attempted to speed the promotion of officers he believed to be good republicans. His attempt suffered from several fatal flaws. He never made a serious attempt to create a smoothly operating institution for the fair promotion of officers. His reforms placed promotion power in the hands of the Minister of War, but

he created no rational organization to handle it. Surely no man could cope with the records of 20,000 officers. To alleviate the problem, André haphazardly constructed a ramshackle system given to caprice and incompetence in promotion. In the end it was the failure of this "system" that was to cause his downfall.

The revelations of the Affaire des Fiches created a great revulsion against André's system. By 1912, promotion was clearly back in the hands of the military. What greater testimony to failure can be offered than the observation that de Castelnau, removed by André in 1900 from his post as the chief of the First Bureau of the General Staff, commanded the French Second Army at the outbreak of World War One?

With the lack of any institutionalized method of promotion, the continuation of a policy of republicanization was impossible. Succeeding ministers were not as determined as André that the officer corps be imbued with the spirit of republican ideas. A return to the older methods of promotion became inevitable.

The Radicals felt that a reduction in the length of conscription was one of their most important reforms. By any measure it is a major piece of legislation. But

it was passed despite the vehement objections of the army, many of which were based on sound military theory. At best, the military reasons for reduction were not very convincing. But it was not for military reasons that the Radicals forced the legislation but for financial and political ones. The government budget was feeling the strain of military costs and a reduction in the length of service was felt to be a most welcome relief. Politically speaking, it was a very popular idea with the electorate.

The army used every method at its command to halt the two-year conscription law but to little avail. General Staff reports claimed that it would be more, rather than less, expensive to have a two-year army rather than a three-year length of service. The reports insisted that soldiers could not possibly be trained in such a short period of time. The army had serious doubts that reservists could perform the duties of regular soldiers on the battlefield. But the army's real fear was the reduction in the number of men under arms that a shorter term of service would produce. The General Staff had a well founded fear that the rapidly expanding population of Germany would create an army much larger than that of France unless extraordinary measures were taken. It mattered very little then whether Germany had two- or three-year conscription, but rather how many men were in the active army.

But there was an even deeper question involved; was France still capable of maintaining a military establishment on a par with those of the other Great Powers? Only Adolph Messimy was courageous enough to broach the question openly. Very few military or civilian leaders were willing to discuss the question publicly in such a naked manner. So it was disguised in the form of a public debate on the length of military service.

As the threat from Germany became more critical after 1905, the army was able to increase its pressure to replace the two-year conscription law with a three-year law. It achieved its goal in 1913, with the passage of a new three-year conscription law. Thus after only eight years, the radicals' most important piece of military legislation was junked.

The Radicals felt that it was not enough for the army to be an instrument of war, it also had to play some role in peace. To this end they tried to force the ideas of Lyautey on the army and the nation upon the officer corps. By using lectures at the military academies, the radicals hoped to indoctrinate an entire generation of officers in the ideas of the army as the nation's secondary school. Active encouragement, but pitifully little in the way of funds, was given to open recreation centers for the soldiers. Lecture series were organized to

further the education of the conscript. But again very little was of lasting consequence. The officers resented the idea of being transferred into saluting schoolteachers. The army already had a vital role to play without the addition of extraneous functions. Perhaps if Europe would have been blessed with another fifty years of peace such an idea might have taken root. But the hostile winds of foreign crisis after 1905 quickly destroyed it.

The centerpiece of Radical policy was to restore civilian control over the army. In the years after 1870, the army had become a semi-autonomous body within France. In fact it could be said to have been the last corporate social class in France, a near relic of the ancien régime. De Gallifet took the first steps to reduce the army's autonomy. But he was unwilling to go as far as the Radicals desired and left. André took more extreme steps. He made the Minister of War the center of all decision-making. He was quick to punish any officer that he believed to be too "political." He was ruthless in his purge of the military academies which he believed to be the seedbed of the caste mentality.

The establishment of civilian control was always an impermanent one. Civilian Ministers of War in every country have proven to be very susceptible to the "expertise" of the military. The sheer complexity of

of military problems and decisions as well as the technological proficiency required usually renders a civilian minister incapable of combating the charts, graphs and projections of the military. With André's passing, the officer corps regained the decision making power, culminating in 1912 when General Joseph Joffre became Vice-President of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre. André's restoration of civilian dominance was merely a temporary setback for the army.

What the Radicals did achieve was a return to the army's traditional state of silence in political matters. The Dreyfus Affair had displayed certain potentially dangerous tendencies in the army. Many higher officers had allowed themselves the privilege of commenting publicly on political affairs. The officer corps welcomed the support of the most reactionary elements in French politics as a means of defending itself from the hostile Left. It permitted itself to become involved in ludicrous attempts at coup d'états. De Gallifet's and André's ruthless purge of any officer making the least comment on politics silenced any public opposition by the officer corps to governmental policy. André's use of an internal espionage system made even private comments taboo. With this silencing, the potential for the army to become the center of opposition to the Republic was ended.

The Radicals mistook this silence for support of the Republic. It was not. By 1905, the vast majority of officers' attitudes towards the Republic was the same as it had been in 1871; it was the legal existing government and as such it had to be defended from internal and external enemies.

Another check to the Radicals' ability to transform the army was popular opinion. While the vast majority of Frenchmen believed that the army must stay out of politics, they also believed that the government should stay out of military affairs. Equality of opportunity had to be maintained and the years of service had to be held at a minimum, but technical matters had to be left to the military men.

There was still a great reservoir of respect and admiration for the army. In many provincial towns, the army remained the focal point of social life. Parades and band concerts were always well attended. All of the newspapers would devote their front page to florid descriptions of the military parades on Bastille Day. These people would not permit their army to be humiliated by scandal nor destroyed by neglect. The extent of the popular revulsion at the revelations of the Affaire des Fiches is ample demonstration of this.

It was the Affaire des Fiches that brought the era of Radical Reform to a close. From 1905 onwards, the army could rebuild its confidence and its position. It was aided by the approach of war, but clearly the greatest aid was the fact that institutions change slowly and the Radicals never had the time to finish the task they had started.

APPENDIX

There were many reports issued by the French General Staff on the results of a two-year conscription law on the number of effectives in the army. Typical is the report of April 19, 1902.¹ It noted that between 1901 and 1910, the number of men available for service would drop from 437,000 per year to 387,000 because of the declining birth rate. The results of the two- and three-year conscription law was then compared

	<u>Two Year</u>	<u>Three Year</u>
Number of men available for service	387,000	387,000
Number of men rejected for service because of poor health	118,000	118,000
Number of men obtaining hardship deferments	80,000	80,000
Number of men released before full term		27,000
Total Number of Conscripts per year	<u>189,000</u>	<u>152,000</u>
Number of men in permanent army in 1901	117,000	
Number of men lost in permanent army due to reduced years of conscription		<u>15,000</u>
Total number of permanent army	117,000	117,000
Total number of men in army permanent + conscripts	480,000	573,000
Net loss from the adoption of a two-year conscription law		93,000

"Note sur les effectives," April 19, 1902, carton 7N100,
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