

Appendix I

Notes in the Hand of Léon Pierre-Quint Being the Record of a Conversation

Théodore Fraenkel

Source: Manuscript, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Nouvelle acquisition française 18360

Since this transcription was first made, the last twenty eight lines have been published in an edition of Théodore Fraenkel's *Carnets, 1916–1918* (ed. Marie-Claire Dumas with Michel Fraenkel & François Sullerot, pp. 149–150, Paris, 1990). Omissions due to illegibility are indicated by [...]. Italics correspond to the manuscript. This translation is published with the very kind permission of Monsieur Jacques Fraenkel.

Conversation with Théodore November 1936

Political attitude of the Surrealists

First, it had as a motto: the Revolution for the Revolution. Less a political theory than an expression of Romantic despair. Destruction of all that is. With what joy R[obert] D[esnès] will set fire to the apartments of these bourgeois masses where once he would have so liked to please and shine, where he experienced a contained rage from its vulgarity, that vulgarity of the petit bourgeois world [...] It's a kind of nihilist dream – not so far, it seems to me, from the Anarchism *Revue Blanche* of 1899. With this difference, that anarchism was a systematic theory, with an economic doctrine, consider Bakunin – a Communist doctrine for some – an individualist doctrine, for others, as one put it then – from all that nothing: certain terroristic bombings [...] and that *saying* of Laurent Thaillade.

The Surrealists wished to go further. Above all they sought to put their ideas into practice – Breton, tortured at once by the absolute and action, thought that Communism would be the party which would most quickly bring to the Surrealists the Revolution for which they longed. I imagine that if they thought that the Royalists were quite close to a revolution, they would have been disposed to support the Royalists ... / a debatable idea – for the Surrealists were anti-traditionalists, to the Left, etc. ... / It remains that the economic aspects of Communism were then a matter of indifference to them.

Soon, things changed. Marxism impassioned the Surrealists. They hated Capitalism; having maintained, from the fact of having operated in groups, a certain habit of collective discipline, at the same time they all adopt the ideas of the 'party'. Including the clichés of the party. Who desires the end desires the means. Dictatorship of the Proletariat – Lenin – The terror – The great and terrible destructions [*decimations*] – Russia. All these images attracted them and in their minds assumed a poetic color, still the same, that of their first despair: the Revolution. But at the same time they had the satisfaction of supporting their dreams through the most immediate reality of action: Communist politics.

Were they not victims of an illusion? The worker, the fate of the worker – basis of the party – was it not, in the end, a matter of complete indifference, *but for the hatred* of the bourgeoisie? Economic theories, instruments of work interested them only to the extent where they overturn what obtains – but not at all for what they make possible etc. . . . The Communists of the Party understood them well. They did not take the Surrealists seriously. Dissent – Polemics – an attempt at rapprochement by the Surrealist group and *Clarté* which was to end in the creation of a journal – *La Guerre Civile* – failed because the Surrealists had nothing to write on economic questions, which are the bread and butter of Communism.

Aragon indeed attempted, exceptionally, a study on the intellectual proletariat; an exception followed by some other exceptions – but which remained isolated – The *Philosophie* group, since become *L'Esprit*, was in alliance with two other groups for some weeks, but this could not be sustained and *Philosophie* was the first to withdraw. The idea which linked them all: Revolution for the sake of Revolution [*Révolution pour la Révolution*], too vague, too empty, was not able to prevail for each of these groups, considering too what was essential: Surrealism, economics, politics, mysticism [...] Its theory sought to sacrifice the idea of the group in favor of the revolutionary idea. Impossible for Surrealism: one cannot sacrifice everything for nothing. When the *Surrealists* then decided to *enter* the Communist Party (they did not all enter; disagreement amongst them; certain claimed that they would better aid the Party from the outside – pretext) – they were accepted with suspicion, as literary men, as bourgeois, as sons of privilege [and there was nothing that could lessen the misunderstandings]. If Breton began to attack the manner in which *L'Humanité* was directed: obviously the paper was not Surrealist since, in the end, the Surrealists wished Communism to become Surrealist.

What I regret, it's that the Surrealists had not created, in politics, an autonomous group. And if I agree with the details of their action, it is because I consider that no one better than they were undoubtedly *destined* to this action – and that having, all told, failed the present moment by attaching themselves to Communism, they still remain linked today to this action.

In Germany, there exists a workers' Communist Party, though extra-parliamentary – which groups many thousands of adherents – and which, in

accepting as given Marxist theories, poses the moral and intellectual problems: what will the chief be? Who has the right to govern? etc. ...

In France, there is perhaps still much more to be done. We are living on completely outdated ideas. The reactionaries depend on the Monarchists of the 17th century – and Maurras has brought no innovation – the liberals on the ideas of the 19th century: St. Simon etc. ... – the socialists: Proudhon, 1848, L. Blanc – the Communists on Marx, etc., end 19th century. But after 1918, the 20th century really started. The war made the breach [*coupure*] – which is an abyss. Every old ideology is outdated.

Let's consider Communism for a moment. On the one hand, in Russia it is cut into two tendencies. The party in power [...] already so taken with power that it has rejected true Communism, and [on the other hand] the opposition which, in order to triumph, would like to reject the essential idea of Communism (which moreover it represents): the dictatorship and control of free discussion, democracy only for propaganda and victory. What irony!

In France, the Communists admit parliamentary democracy. Dictatorship is only therefore a means as long as Communism is not a majority in the country: if it is, no more dictatorship, no more revolution [...] the Republic becomes a Surrealist Soviet! Where, then, is your Revolution? For there is nothing unreasonable in thinking that some years hence, following an economic crisis, that the Communists may have a Parliamentary majority [...] which would be equally possible for the Socialists [...] since Socialists have really held power in England. [...] There would be no patriotism, Communists will bring about a Communist Republic.

Philosophy. Ph[ilippe] S[oupault] declares that the idea of Revolution for the sake of Revolution is an aesthetic point of view – and admits that there has been some evolution in the ideas of the *Surrealists*.

For me, the autonomous group which needs to be created, would have for its essential aim less the overturning of capitalism – thus at least it would be Marxist – than the overturning of the bourgeoisie. Moreover it would be necessary to go deeper in order to see if capitalism and bourgeoisie are not indissolubly bound.

Why? Because in the bourgeoisie everything is false, because it only allows for a disfigured life – narrow, painful, horrible. Because it is mean and heartless. Because it lacks intelligence; because it envisages nothing but what is given, the scientific. It has deformed Christianity into a Jesuistic Catholicism, into an infernal Puritanism.

Everything to rebegin: the idea of the family. The education of the child. The child *thing*, means in the mind of parents (read Jules Romain) – Children living between them. Freedom of travel etc. ... idem the sexual – idem the idea of *Patrie* and war. (This idea of war linked, it appears, to Capitalism.) Destroy as well *modern colonialism*.

I glimpse a new individualism. The individual being grouped, no longer in its family, not even by its country, but in a kind of association of young people

from the age of 12 years and these diverse associations being every few years reunited *internationally* according to their intellectual and moral aptitudes or affinities.

It is only then that I should like to envisage an economic organization – based upon the associations.

I will tend much more freely toward Co-operatism – than towards the total seizure by the State of the whole of life.

For Co-operatism would organize itself quite naturally in line with the associations. ... If today I had to give a name to my Party, I should call it Individualism, Association, Cooperation.

Translated by M. Stone-Richards