SOREL, Georges (November 2, 1847, Cherbourg – August 29, 1922, Boulogne-sur-Seine)

Georges Sorel was a French social thinker and political theorist. An engineer of modest bourgeois extraction, he was a state employee for twenty-five years. He theorized anarcho-syndicalism: an anti-state, non-party workers’ movement predicated on the threat of general strike (*le grand soir*) and nourished by fond memories of the Paris Commune (1871). Sorel’s influence was extensive. At his funeral, Italian Fascists, Bolsheviks, French Communists, unionized workers and royalists grieved side by side. Also a Dreyfusard, occasional Leninist and one-time monarchist, Sorel inspired many with his potent mix of reactionary rhetoric (the decadent society ripe for redemption) and revolutionary suggestions. He dismissed Marx as “utopian,” i.e. rationalistic. His own stance was at odds with materialism. Sorel favored voluntarism and an explosive irrationalism in contrast with the pacifistic socialists of his time, who held that capitalism would self-destroy as society inevitably evolved towards greater equality. Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence* (1908) exalts myth as the sole catalyst of political fervor, violence as the proper vehicle of social change, and moral revival in a society centered on (and corrupted by) negotiation and compromise, staples of the merchant civilization developed in the Mediterranean cradle.

Bibliogrpahy: Jeremy Jennings, *Georges Sorel: The Character and Development of his Thought* (St. Martin’s Press, 1985).

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