

#### 4 'War memorials, is that what the dead would have wanted?'

The first-time traveller to France is always struck by the presence of memorials commemorating the 1914–1918 war in every town and every village. At least 36,000 of these memorials mark public spaces, offering an impression of national unity around the slaughter of 1,350,000 French people. A heritage of suffering or heroism redefined the topography of France's communes with the triptych of church, town hall, memorial, and established a new social ritual of the 11 November ceremony, the date of the 1918 armistice.<sup>264</sup> The commonly held vision of the commemorative process for the two world wars that France was subject to rests on a thesis that dominates historiography: after the Great War, French society experienced a fusional epiphany around memory, then after the Second World War, the country grappled with a plural and conflictual form of memory owing to the need to confront the civil war caused by the Vichy regime. Given the different natures of the two conflicts, there is, of course, a paradigmatic differentiation between the two politico-memorial regimes. This process of memorialisation for the First World War is reputed to have laid the foundations for a 'civil religion'<sup>265</sup> that would reconcile the French people and consolidate Republican sentiment around the 'cult of laicity'. However, the idea of a dominant, unanimous, and consensus passage into memory requires some nuance.

This premise of unanimous consensus continues to dominate and makes it difficult to integrate different or dissenting memories into commemorations, such as soldiers shot as an example ('fusillés'), mutineers, deserters, and anti-militarists.<sup>266</sup> It is unimaginable that mayors of communes today could refuse to participate in the ceremonies commemorating the 1918

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264 Maurice Agulhon, *Les métamorphoses de Marianne. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1914 à nos jours*, Paris, Flammarion, 2001, p. 35.

265 Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace: Representations of France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. by Jay Winter and Helen McPhail, Bloomsbury 2014, pp. 36–37. The first essay in this volume 'War Memorials of the Great War: Monuments to the Fallen' in which this phrase appear was first published in Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire*.

266 André Loez, *14–18. Les refus de la guerre: une histoire des mutins*, Folio-Histoire, 2010.

Armistice; it is even more difficult to imagine that there were cases of mayors refusing to do so in the aftermath of the Great War. And yet, this phenomenon did exist. The commemorative and celebratory enthusiasm witnessed, for example, in Nantes should not be considered the norm.<sup>267</sup> From this perspective, the situation in the Loire department offers an interesting example to study. Saint-Étienne presents a particular set of circumstances: the area's traditional industries made the city the largest arms supplier during the conflict, whilst its political tradition was steeped in revolutionary trade unionist ideology, orienting it towards a pacifist and anti-capitalist left. Taking account of these conditions, how does one 'honour' (since commemoration is largely contingent on the process of transforming soldiers into heroes) something that caused the death of so many young Frenchmen?

Such circumstances can only produce a sort of uneasy conscience, which may explain the fact that mobilising industry in Saint-Étienne and the Loire department as part of the war effort has barely left any trace on heritage and memory. It is as if the process of heritage creation has not happened, as if memory has been subject to repression. This ontological ambiguity is at the centre of the difficulties inherent to the process of creating heritage, whether immaterial or material, and allows for an understanding of why memory in many cases was non-consensual and shaped by political oppositions. The case of the Loire department contextualises the hypothesis that memory was a force for resilience and reconciliation. The difficulty of creating a memory of the Great War and, in times of peace, prolonging the myth of the sacred union it created should be read within the context of the post-war 'social explosion' and the little-known conflicts that peppered both commemorative ceremonies and the erecting of memorials.

Reality lies somewhere between the historians who advance the argument that 'heroic grandeur'<sup>268</sup> was at the heart of the commemorative process set up

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267 In Nantes, 12 roads were renamed; several monuments were planned in the most prominent locations; a 'gate of glory' and a 'park for the heroes' were conceived; there was a desire to create 'peace houses'; a museum in the Château des ducs de Bretagne was even suggested. It was as if a new 'utopia' had emerged from the horror, resulting in the search for 'a society regenerated by the war, made more fraternal, and worried it would forget the soldiers' sacrifices.' Bruno Cabanes, *La victoire endeuillée. La sortie de guerre des soldats français (1918–1920)*, Paris, Seuil, 2004, p. 438–439.

268 Ch. Theodosiou, *Le deuil inachevé. La commémoration de l'armistice du 11 novembre 1918 en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres*, éditions de la Sorbonne, 2018, p. 21. See al-

after the war, and that of other historians who prefer to speak of a ‘mourning-filled victory’.<sup>269</sup> In the Loire department’s large towns (it is necessary to distinguish towns from the countryside), it is possible to speak of a ‘divided victory’. Commemoration did not produce the effect of resilience that is normally ascribed to it: rather, it revealed and revived the social and ideological fractures at work prior to the war and signified a redefinition of the trade unionist and political field. The political context of the time should not be forgotten, with the split on the left following the Tours Congress (1920) that put the socialists and the communists in opposition for a long time. This division had evident repercussions at a local level.

Histography has tended not to deal with this image of misalignment in relation to the myth of unity.<sup>270</sup> However, commemorations of the Great War mirrored the fragmentation in French political life, and sometimes fell victim to becoming political instruments. Debates around the construction, financing, and symbolic meaning of war memorials intersected with more general anthropological questions of the relationship between war and death, and the meaning that should be ascribed to this European drama.

### *Revolutionary Trade Unionist Culture and Pacifist Propaganda*

At the very beginning of the war, which many believed would be ‘over by Christmas’, the population seemed largely favourable towards general mobilisation: ‘The declaration of war was not met with resolute resistance from the working class’.<sup>271</sup> German aggression was condemned and the increase in production boosted the workforce and buying power. Yet this did not last long. The economic situation worsened very quickly due to the crisis of provisions, rationing, and price increases, as well as the ruthless salary policy of employers with a ‘feudal’ reputation. It is estimated that

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so A. Becker, « Du 14 juillet 1919 au 11 novembre 1920 mort, où est ta victoire? », *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire*, n°49, January–March 1996. pp. 31– 44.

269 B. Cabanes, *La victoire endeuillée*, *op.cit.*

270 In her seminal book, Monique Luirard shows this irenic tendency to believe in consensus by affording it a place that cannot be reduced to the process of politization which took hold very soon after the commemoration of the victory, and by eschewing the question of the ambiguity around the memory of industrial mobilisation in the war effort.

271 Jean Charles, « Le syndicalisme français, la paix et la guerre, de 1909 à 1921 », in François Boulet (ed.), *Les sociétés, la guerre et la paix de 1911 à 1946 : Europe, Russie puis URSS, Japon, Etats-Unis*, 2003, p. 31.

the cost of living in Saint-Étienne tripled between 1914 and 1918<sup>272</sup>. The pacifist push and resistance towards the infernal rhythm imposed by the war effort took root well before the end of the conflict, and even before the start of the Russian Revolution, which inspired a resurgence in pacifist and anti-militarist sentiment.

On 4 January 1915, the Prefect of the Loire department notified the Sub-Prefects and police superintendents of the distribution of a 4-page tract intitled 'Appel aux socialistes, syndicalistes, révolutionnaires et anarchistes' (Call to Socialists, Trade Unionist, Revolutionaries and Anarchists)<sup>273</sup> written by Sébastien Faure, a Saint-Étienne-born anarchist propagandist and Freemason with an international reputation. Faure founded the newspaper *Le Libertaire* with Louise Michel in 1895 and he was an ardent supporter in the Dreyfus Affair. The Prefect singled out Faure's analysis of the causes of the war, and notably of 'German aggression' and his 'call' that 'promised benefits from a rapidly concluded peace'. The Prefect judged that no truce could be offered so soon to those 'Barbarians' whose only goal was 'to crush France and civilisation'. In the text, Faure laments the coming of war to Europe, which broke his dreams of 'universal fraternity'. After five months of 'a rough, relentless, atrocious war', he asked his 'comrades' who believed in the legitimacy of war against Germany and in a patriotic war to look at the situation with 'sangfroid' and to return to their positions. The war had not been wanted by 'the working class of any country' but was the result of 'the murderous will of certain governments' and has been imposed on the proletariat. Faure admitted that 'we had neither the strength, nor, perhaps, the courage to avoid this crime' and that the French government had no choice but to react with military force in the first instance. But now, the time had come for compromise, to negotiate to stop the worst outcome. He agreed to not 'dishonour France' in pushing the country to ask for a separate peace treaty without its allies' knowledge. The manifesto suggests the neutral European powers could play the role of intercessors to convince both France and Germany to stop this 'wretched war' and to prepare a peace treaty with the view of a 'reconciled and pacific Europe'. Faure recommends following the German socialist leader Karl Liebknecht who, by refusing to vote for military spending, advocated for 'a quick peace without

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272 Jean Lorcin, « La société stéphanoise face à la guerre et à la paix (1911–1946) », in François Boulet (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 69.

273 Sébastien Faure, « Appel aux socialistes, syndicalistes, révolutionnaires et anarchistes ». Printed sheet, no date (1915). Archives départementales de la Loire (ADL), 1 M 473.

humiliating anyone, a peace without conquest'. The 'revolutionaries' who were fighting for peace were the 'only conscious, powerful and coordinated individuals'.

This manifesto circulated in the Loire department, but without hope of reaching the masses. Yet, its ideas were transmitted through the 'Resolution' adopted at a meeting of departmental and national labour councils and trade unions (Conférence des Bourses du travail, Unions départementales et Fédérations nationales corporatives et d'industries), which took place in Paris on 15 August 1915. With the same pacifist tone as Faure's manifesto, the meeting declared 'This war is not our war!' The Resolution invalidated two key themes found in discourses justifying France's participation in the conflict: the liberation of 'peoples oppressed prior to the war' and resistance towards 'Germany's imperialist war against Europe'. For the signatories, the war was but the result of the 'shock of national imperialism that has intoxicated every State, large and small, and taken root in the oversized, essentially egotistical, ambitions of every ruling class'. All governments, including Russia, are thus responsible and guilty for not having wanted to find a common ground. According to the Resolution's authors, only one combat is legitimate: 'class struggle', which must lead to 'the proletariat's victory' over 'the economic exploitation of modern employers'. 'The sacred union' must therefore be considered a trap that risks 'silencing the most wholesome and most conscious part of the proletariat'. This discourse would be taken up again by politicians on the left who came to power in the 1919 local elections.

The signatory organisations of the Resolution included the departmental trade union association for the Loire (amongst 12 other departmental associations) and the labour councils for Rive-de-Gier and Firminy (but not for Saint-Étienne) alongside 7 other councils (Aix, Marseille, Nîmes, Romans, Algiers). This offers an interesting indication of the 'revolutionary' culture that dominated this highly industrialised region and allows for a better understanding of the difficulties of commemorating the victory. Metalwork factories in the Giers valley (Saint-Chamond, Lorette, Rive-de-Giers) made cannons, artillery material, and parts for the Navy.

The authorities were worried about this movement 'agitating for peace'. On the 20 December 1915, the police chief superintendent for security informed the Prefect in writing of the measures he had taken 'with a

view to halting pacifist propaganda.<sup>274</sup> He organised a discreet surveillance service 'in the factories', which allowed them to identify, for example, 'some workers' at the Forges et Ateliers de la Chaléassière in Saint-Étienne who were working on national defence projects. This reporting included the distribution of a brochure about the Zimmerwald conference (5–8 September 1915), which the secretary of the Metalwork Federation in the Loire and a member of the Socialist Party attended. The police also obtained a list of subscribers in favour of peace who frequented workers boarding houses. The labour council seemed to be the nerve centre of the movement. It hosted a large meeting in March 1918 organised by the Ligue des Familles nombreuses to protest high living costs (and those starving people and stockpiling food).<sup>275</sup> During the meeting, the delegate from a renters' union (Syndicat des locataires) declared that moving towards 'immediate peace' was necessary. The governments who presided over the fate of the country during the war were treated as 'incapable'. Shouts in favour of 'Wilson's peace plan' were heard.

The Acières et Forges de Firminy seems to have been particularly active and was closely watched. General Pouradier, commander of the 13<sup>th</sup> military region at Clermont-Ferrand, was alerted about some pacifist acts in 1916. A tract entitled *Unissons-nous contre la guerre* (Let's Unite Against the War) and the manuscript announcing it were sent to the Prefect. The tract was a cry of despair against 'Europe [which] has become a gigantic abattoir of men' to the profit of the 'ruling classes' and the 'capitalists'. The authors sought to tug at the readership's heart strings:

'Women, with your sensitive and gentle hearts, you who are made to procreate and love, do you not see the horror of the battlefields? Do you not hear the cries of pain from your sons, your husbands, your brothers, who implore you as they struggle in horrible suffering. [...] Workers, fathers, mothers, widows, wives, fiancées, you all suffer from the war. We ask you to demand immediate peace and to tell everyone around you that peace will only be obtained through our collective will and our combined energies...'

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274 Note from the police chief superintendent for security to the Prefect of the Loire Department, 20 December 1915. ADL, 1 M 473.

275 500 people, mostly women and children, took part. Report dated 4 March 1918 by special superintendent at Saint-Étienne station. ADL, 1 M 473.

Firminy became the hub driving forward this revolutionary trade unionism and experienced significant strikes that fostered a rejection of the war. The Zimmerwaldist group voiced their opinion throughout the whole conflict, but this was quickly surpassed by the progressively growing anti-militarist movement in which women would play an important role.<sup>276</sup> The context of social tension linked to price rises and rationing led to strikes. The increased pace of production in heavy industries provoked pre-insurrectional instances of hostility: ‘Very quickly, the strikes, which were originally restricted to salary demands, were directed towards the war due to the influence of women’.<sup>277</sup> In early 1917, the very centre of arms production was even affected. A brochure with a preface written by Anatole Sixte-Quenin, a socialist member of parliament, circulated in the state-owned Manufacture Nationale d’Armes. It seemingly sought to rehabilitate the German Socialist Party by mentioning the press campaign orchestrated by ‘Prussian militarist’ circles to show how Russia was excessively arming itself to destroy the Austrian Empire before turning its sights on Germany. The Zimmerwaldists took an active role in the discussions of plans to create a cooperative restaurant at the Manufacture and, according to a police report, ‘they spoke up against the interference by the military establishment’s management’.<sup>278</sup>

The Russian Revolution added a more ideological dimension to the anti-war position. On 30 March 1918, the gendarmes spotted ‘defeatist posters’ on the wall of Rue de la République in Chambon-Feugerolles, opposite the main entrance to the town’s factory. This text by the ‘Groupe des amis de la Paix’ (Friends of Peace Group) defended the Russian Revolution on political grounds as being far from ‘banditry’ and ‘anarchy’: ‘It is only the transformation from the capitalist regime to a collective regime wholly applied with justice and equality’<sup>279</sup>. The Revolution provided an ideological foundation to the partisans for peace who justified the retreat of Russia from fighting against the common enemy.

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276 Whilst it is difficult to measure this phenomenon, police reported increasingly mention the places that were influenced by ‘pacifist propaganda’.

277 Jean Lorcin, *art. cit.*, p. 70.

278 Report dated 5 mars 1917 by special superintendent at Saint-Étienne station. ADL, 1 M 473.

279 *Ibid.*

'War memorials: is that what the dead would have wanted?'

The discourse of pacifist movements likens war memorials to lying, underlining the contradiction between the spirit of post-war treaties, which promised to end all wars and the coming of an era of peace, and the policies of revenge and armament, which seemed to motivate French politics. The young pacifists union (Union départementale des Jeunesses pacifistes de France), whose headquarters were at 24 Rue Rouget-de-Lisle in Saint-Étienne, launched a membership campaign based on this idea:

'We're being lied to! Between 1914 and 1918, 13 million men died in the war to end war. On 28 June 1919, the governments at Versailles promised the people disarmament and peace. What have they done? WAR MEMORIALS. Is that what the dead would have wanted? No! Young people, young women, so that they didn't die in vain, fight for PEACE! Let's unite across borders, across old grudges, across parties to create the biggest party for the future of humanity, the party for the FUTURE! Join the Union des Jeunesses Pacifistes, a movement independent of all political parties and under the patronage of the FOP des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre [association for veterans and victims of war].'<sup>280</sup>

Memorials represent a ploy, a false homage to those who died and a violation of their memory. The commemorative injunction, which established consensus around the respect owed to the dead, also posed a danger as people could not view the international policy undertaken by the government objectively, and this policy that would not lead towards appeasement. The pacifists criticised the nationalistic usage that could emerge from the necessary national union towards the fallen that commemoration was meant to symbolise. Even if it was not explicitly stated in the tract, the call for a worldwide fraternity aims to surpass Franco-German antagonism. For the pacifists, the memorial lies.

Since the vast majority of memorials erected in the aftermath of the war do not have a warmongering tone, this view is not entirely accurate. Overtly pacifist or anti-war memorials are indeed rare, with only around

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280 ADL, 1 M 542. The tract is not dated but seems to have been written in 1920. On pacifism linked to the Great War, see Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919–1939*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.



one hundred found in France.<sup>281</sup> Nonetheless, the pacifists' reaction is of interest as it opens up avenues to explore the philosophical and political issues underlying the creation of the Great War's heritage. Do memorials 'honour those who died for France' (to cite the terms of the 25 October 1919 law) or are they a glorification of war and the military as the pacifists believe? The inscription on the pedestal of the memorial in Saint-Ouen (Paris region) serves as a warning: 'War is a crime that does not excuse the victory.'<sup>282</sup> Should we pay homage to victims or to heroes, or to heroes who are also victims of an absurd war? Can reference be made to religion? These questions are by no means theoretical: they are found in the minutes of municipal council meetings when communes attempted to define the characteristics of their memorial. The war memorial in Villeurbanne (Rhône department, close to Lyon), located in the town's cemetery, is a case in point. In January 1922, the commission put forward the idea of a simple memorial, 'representing the suffering and on which, alongside the names of the fallen soldiers, only epitaphs against the war would be inscribed'. The inauguration should be a sombre affair and exclude 'any military elements' and 'any religious presence'. The minutes from the council meeting of 14 February 1922 state that the mayor, a communist, was keen to stress that it was not about 'perpetuating the memory of the war, but of our poor fallen soldiers'. The memorial's pacifist inspiration is found in the understated inscription chosen for its pedestal ('From Villeurbanne to its fallen, 1914–1918') and the refusal to mention 'Died for France'. This discreetness is testament to the fact that the memorial, finally inaugurated on 11 November 1925, was the result of numerous discussions and a compromise<sup>283</sup>.

The theme of 'lying' spread in certain spheres during the war. An anonymous printed tract entitled *Au peuple français* (To the French People)<sup>284</sup> begins: 'Armed with lies and defamation, our governments are forcing the

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281 Danièle and Pierre Roy, *Autour de monuments aux morts pacifistes en France (Histoire et présentation d'édifices de la mémoire pacifiste et laïque et évocation de leur actualité: rassemblements de commémoration et d'action contre la guerre)*, published by the Fédération Nationale Laïque des Associations des Amis des Monuments Pacifistes, Républicains et Anticléricaux, 2006.

282 Cited in M. Agulhon, *Les métamorphoses de Marianne*, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

283 Xavier Hyvert, « Le monument aux morts (1914–1918) de Villeurbanne au cimetière ancien de Cusset, monument pacifiste ». [http://lerizeplus.villeurbanne.fr/arkotheque/client/am\\_lerize/encyclopedie/fiche.php?ref=716](http://lerizeplus.villeurbanne.fr/arkotheque/client/am_lerize/encyclopedie/fiche.php?ref=716)

284 « Au peuple français », printed tract, no date (1917?), ADL, 1 M 473.

country to pursue the terrible butchery 'til the end. But 'til the end of what? Do they seek to make us continue this monstrous battle until the very last drop of blood of the very last French soldier has been spilt?' The tract's rhetoric of 'immediate peace' is not part of an ideological logic. In a catastrophist tone, it speaks of the 'suicide of France' and the 'destruction of the French race'. The Germans are not demonised. It assures us that they are not 'an enslaved people' as they could have made their government 'renounce all programmes of conquest and accept a peace that would respect the liberty, independence, and territorial integrity of all peoples'. The tract blames France. The country, 'which calls itself the most democratic in the world', should be 'ashamed' for not engaging in the pursuit of a 'generous formulation of peace without annexation, nor indemnities'. The tract denounces the 'madness' of France's official position: 'No peace without victory'. For 'pure' pacifists, the very notion of 'victory' must be questioned. To them, the memorialisation of France's victory does not represent a work of peace-making, but rather a false reconciliation and a misleading commemoration. For these reasons, one veterans' association with communist allegiances, the Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants (ARAC), were opposed to erecting memorials. The great writer Henri Barbusse shared this view, mocking the 'unsightly memorials' that 'disfigure town squares and the corners of villages'<sup>285</sup>.

The pacifist movement, bolstered by a left-leaning political culture that was revived with the bright new dawn in the East, allows for an understanding of the reluctance, even the initial opposition, towards commemoration. However, other factors blur and make more complex this process of memory creation.

*The "Poilus" died for 'interests and a cause that was not their own'*

One consideration that needed carefully managing was the syndrome of the opposition between 'the back' and the soldiers at the front and the image of a population who, according to some, worked in the arms industry, without seeing front-line action, to boost the famous 'benefits of war'. The heavy industries (extract of coal, crucible steel, coke) in the Saint-Étienne region experienced a significant increase in production and all the other industries

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285 Cited in Nicolas Offenstadt, *Les fusillés de la Grande Guerre et la mémoire collective (1914–1999)*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1999, p. 86.

contributed to this growth, including textiles. Foreigners, colonial subjects, and women were employed, which caused xenophobic tension that has only lately and discreetly been historicised. Metal workers and miners were brought back from the front as ‘special operatives’ to make up ‘the other front’. For this reason, Saint-Étienne has ‘often been labelled a city of shirkers (“embusqués”) by soldiers on leave’.<sup>286</sup> For patriots, the workers in the arms industry were shirkers.

This view was referenced in a Saint-Étienne’s municipal council meeting on 27 December 1918. The deputy mayor René Peuvergne spoke in front of the council to calculate the number of victims from Saint-Étienne at the front, arriving at an estimate of 4800–5000 victims. The conclusion of his short speech reflected at length on ‘current opinion’ that tended to diminish Saint-Étienne’s patriotism and engagement in the war:

‘Compare these numbers with those that were provided for the country as a whole and you will notice that, contrary to current opinion and despite the large number of our fellow citizens engaged elsewhere, there were many men from Saint-Étienne that generously sacrificed their lives for the country. It must be known in the city, in the neighbouring communes, and in the whole department that we paid a heavy price for the war and that a great number of the city’s children died for this country.’<sup>287</sup>

Peuvergne puts his finger on the specific circumstances in Saint-Étienne that might play a role in the city’s refusal to commemorate the war: due to their special assignment, workers were ‘relatively spared’ in comparison to agricultural workers. Moreover, officers from the engineering school *École des Mines de Saint-Étienne* paid ‘a potentially even heavier price’ than the workers.<sup>288</sup> The figure of 6000 dead was reached in 1919. By the time of the municipal council meeting on 13 August 1919, the idea of a memorial dedicated to these fallen soldiers was in advanced talks. Yet the city was in no rush and sought to confer the search for funding and artistic proposals to an association.

These difficulties can be perceived, for example, during a meeting on 3 April 1920. The mayor Louis Soulié (democratic left, Georges Clemenceau’s

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286 Aurélie Brayet, *Revivre: victimes de guerre de la Grande guerre à Saint-Étienne 1914–1935*, Presses de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006, p. 212.

287 1 D 112, Registry of municipal council meeting minutes, Archives municipales de Saint-Étienne (AMSE)

288 Jean Lorcin, *art. cit.*, p. 73.

party) proposed that the municipal council reflect on what would be a suitable way to pay homage to the soldiers from Saint-Étienne who were killed during the war. The deputy mayor Ferdinand Faure, whose remit notably included the labour council and workers retirement, expressed the left's reluctance to make a decision. Faure, a future member of parliament for the Loire department who was a café owner then printer, was a socialist from a family of passementerie workers: he was first on the list of the leftist bloc that triumphed in the 1919 local elections. In his short speech, Faure accepted that it was necessary to 'honour' those 'we consider as victims', but it must not stop there. As he explained, it was also necessary to denounce the troublemakers and the war profiteers:

'We have the duty both to protest and to ruin once more those responsible for the horrendous carnage. [...] We believe that, whilst it may appear to the fallen soldiers that they died a glorious death, it is profoundly sad to think that many unfortunate souls, whose whitening bones are scattered from the sea to the Vosges mountains, felt a moment of supreme sacrifice when they were actually dying *for interests and a cause that was not their own*, when they were actually giving their lives solely in the interests of capitalism. It is in these conditions that we join forces, us other socialists, to pay homage, in the way we want, to the memory of those who died in the great turmoil, and we express our sincere condolences to their families.'<sup>289</sup>

During some municipal council meetings, there was hesitation over whether to question industry's role in the conflict. This line of argument on 'war profiteers' permeated discourse on the left during the entire inter-war period, and it found its way into the depoliticised positions taken by veterans. In 1924, Joseph Beynet, future president of the veterans' association Union des Poilus de la Loire, recalled the shock when poilus (infantrymen) returned from the front only to discover that 'people had suddenly become rich from their misery'. In 1927, the section of veterans from Saint-Bonnet le Courreau denounced the shirkers who had been honoured and decorated as well as 'the profiteer and the marketeer [who] seemed to miss wartime when their clientele was never better and their profits never higher'. The newspaper *Le Mutilé de Roanne*, in 1930, went after the 'canon sellers' for whom peace came too soon, whilst in Chambon-Feugerolles, in 1932, the

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289 Registry of Saint-Étienne municipal council meeting minutes, AMSE, 1 D 114.

spokesperson for veterans attacked the 'big financial brains' who saw the war as 'just a huge profit-making operation'. In another speech in November 1938 in Saint-Étienne, the 'immorality' of the war and the 'feeding time for profiteers, the shameful getting rich of munitions dealers' were condemned<sup>290</sup>.

It is perhaps necessary to see a dialectic relationship between the accusation brought against the 'profiteers' and the workers' worries about exonerating themselves from the suspicions of shirking that hung over them. The same dialectic might also be applied to the pacifists who, to escape inflammatory accusations of defeatism and anti-patriotism, overplayed the argument of the uselessness and immorality of the Great War. Politicians on the left certainly experienced this phenomenon on a psychological level. Their discourses implicitly reflect a logic of image rehabilitation. The social uprisings (1919–1920) and the violent confrontations that the population of Saint-Étienne (amongst other cities) experienced were perhaps a way of 'reaffirming a working-class culture that had been compromised by the war',<sup>291</sup> of restoring the conflicted image of workers in arms factories that the soldiers from the front could spread.<sup>292</sup>

*A source of 'shame': The endless deliberations over the Saint-Étienne War Memorial*

The shadow of shirkers and profiteers and the fear that commemoration would 'glorify the war' can account for the difficulties in constructing a memory of the Great War and establishing a consensus founded on opposition to the *Chambre Bleu horizon*.<sup>293</sup> The endless deliberations over the war memorial in the capital of the Loire department attest to this.

The first trimester of 1920, it must be noted, was marked by large-scale strikes in Saint-Étienne, from railway workers to miners. Pierre Chovet, a trade unionist for railway workers and local councillor for Saint-Étienne (he was on the list led by Ferdinand Faure in November 1919), was a

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290 Citations taken from M. Luirard, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

291 Antoine Prost, Jay Winter, *Penser la Grande Guerre. Un essai d'historiographie*, Seuil Point-Histoire, 2004, p. 201.

292 On this question, see Jean-Louis Robert, *Les Ouvriers, la Patrie et la Révolution. Paris 1914–1919*, Besançon, Les Annales littéraires de l'université de Besançon, 1995.

293 The 1919 legislative elections gave a majority to right in parliament, the *Bloc National* coalition, which is where the expression '*Chambre Bleu horizon*' comes from.

member of the general strike committee. In a speech delivered to 7000 people, he proclaimed: 'I salute the proletarian class. We need to make the profiteers pay. Long live the social revolution.' The 'assassin' generals who led the war were also in his sights. Chovet represented an anti-militarist hard line that would see him, in 1924, 'calling for the working class to desert en masse if a new conflict broke out'<sup>294</sup>. This background is important for understanding the reluctance of the municipal council to commemorate the war.

At the municipal council meeting of 12 May 1920, elected officials denounced the students from the *École des Mines* who had replaced striking railway workers. Some right-leaning members of the *Union nationale des combattants* supported the efforts of students. A communist deputy mayor condemned the *Ecole* as the 'home of *Action française*' (a far-right monarchist movement) and attacked the engineer as 'the most formidable adversary of the proletarian movement', which resulted in the delay of a vote on a subsidiary for the new *Ecole* building. These circumstances bear witness to a radicalisation of political life, which favoured the birth of the communist party to the detriment of traditional revolutionary trade unionism. Society in Saint-Étienne was more divided than ever, and a new line of division emerged: those that opposed both the workers and the soldiers, the back and the front. For this reason, the city opposed any official participation in the 11 November ceremonies. On 10 September 1920, the municipal council ruled: 'We have taken the resolute decision not to participate in the celebrations being organised for 11 November because it does not represent a Republican celebration for us, rather it appears to be a nationalist and militarist event.'

This movement would become widespread with the dynamics that emerged from the Tours Congress (December 1920). Ferdinand Faure represented the radical anti-commemorative position. During the municipal council meeting on 24 February 1921, he refused to vote for the subsidy to erect a war memorial, but he supported the proposal that sought to affix a plaque in memory of the 'fusillés' from the Great War. The Prefect put an end to the project but, in the same year, the city renamed a road in Saint-Étienne 'Rue des Fusillés de Vingré' (which would later become 'Rue des Réhabilités de Vingré' and then 'Rue des Martyrs de Vingré').<sup>295</sup>

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294 <http://maitron-en-ligne.univ-parisl.fr/spip.php?article2302>, entry 'CHOVET Pierre' by Jean Lorcin, version uploaded 30 June 2008, last modification 29 June 2012.

This difficulty of constructing a memory of the war explains the endless deliberations over the memorial in Saint-Étienne, which the newspapers spoke of as a source of 'shame'. As it deliberated, the municipal council decided to affix a commemorative plaque on the Hôtel de Ville.<sup>296</sup> Significantly, this plaque makes no direct reference to the Great War, rather it reproduces François Rude's *La Marseillaise*, a republican icon paying homage to the volunteer soldiers of 1792. The event of the 'First World War' gives way to a reminder of the Revolutionary myth and a re-affirmation of Republican culture, as if there was a potential paradox that only sought to view patriotism through a belligerent lens. This symbolic distancing from the Great War expresses the municipal council's difficulty of positioning itself on the very delicate terrain of memorialising the role of Saint-Étienne during the war.

It was not until 23 October 1933 that, after years of controversy, the Saint-Étienne war memorial at Place Fourneyron was finally inaugurated. This delay was not only because of its cost as was frequently mentioned at the time. The Saint-Étienne council meeting on 22 February 1930, which relaunched the project, was keen to reaffirm 'the reservations expressed in 1921, that is to say that the memorial, in general, should express the idea of peace and exclude any glorification of the war'.<sup>297</sup> It was about paying 'homage to the children of our city who died during the turmoil'. A long-lasting dividing line formed between partisans for the cult of 'heroes' and those attacking the 'butchery' that attached itself to the 'victims', between those who valorised the country and those who advocated for 'universal' accord, between those who were in favour of the war memorial and those who above all were looking at it from the perspective of the labour council.

The change that came about in 1930 is certainly linked to Antoine Durfour's rise as the leader of the council. As a member of parliament and minister, he brought about the vote for the '5 sous for the poilus' law. The population of Saint-Étienne liked the man who was also behind the laws establishing an eight-hour working day in the mines and social security. As *Le Poilu* from 11 November 1930 recounts: 'For the first time, the mayor of

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295 The 'Vingré martyrs' were six soldiers (three of whom were from the Loire department) shot 'as an example' in the Aisne department in December 1914. They were rehabilitated in 1921 by the court of cassation. A consensus quickly emerged within the municipal council. See: Nicolas Offenstadt, *op.cit.*, p. 86, p. 91.

296 Registry of municipal council meeting minutes, AMSE, 1 D 113.

297 Minutes of the Saint-Étienne municipal council meeting from 23 October 1930 (which mentions previous meetings). ADL 1 M 614.

Saint-Étienne enthusiastically waved the flag and was brilliantly passionate'. The previous year, on 1 August 1929, the international day against war declared by Communist International had not been a big success. The page of hostility towards commemorating the Great War gradually turned.

### *Constructing War Heritage Outside Public Spaces*

Before 1930, war heritage was constructed outside public spaces. The memorialisation of the industrial war effort, which was politically highly sensitive, discreetly materialised in private spaces across the city of Saint-Étienne as the following four examples show.

The first project was the erection of a commemorative monument, which is currently housed at the Musée de la Mine in Saint-Étienne. The monument was inaugurated on 11 July 1920 at the former Couriot mine. One of the rare company memorials, *La Victoire* sculpted by Paul Graf presents a group of three bronze statues — a winged Victory, a soldier and a miner — with mining tools depicted on the rear. The monument carries the following inscription: 'From the Société des Mines de la Loire to its fallen employees, victims of war and duty.' This monument, a unique work of statuary in France, seeks to reunite the poilus of 1914 and the miner, the worker and the warrior in one homage. Its anthesis is found in Levallois where the war memorial, one of the rare explicitly pacifist examples, stages a worker breaking a sword, which would provoke a hostile campaign from the UNC.<sup>298</sup> For the mining company, it was a case of honouring 'the many employees that we lost, fallen on the battlefield of honour' and who 'without any distinction of social rank, paid with their life for devoting themselves to defending the fatherland'<sup>299</sup>. Contrary to the dominant discourse of shirkers and profiteers, the employer sought to show that industry too had fulfilled its 'duty' far from the front, and that victory was as much due to them as the frontline fighters. The back and the 'employees' also have a right to their part of the honour:

'We have the right to pay homage to all our employees without distinction, because we owe it to their intelligence and their tireless activity

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298 Frédéric Rousseau (ed.), *Guerres, paix et sociétés, 1911–1946*, Neuilly, Atlande, 2004, p. 553.

299 Société anonyme des Mines de la Loire: report by the board of directors to the annual general meeting (1911–1920). ADL, 1 ETP 1058.



for having developed our production at a moment where the intensified needs of national defence imposed an extra effort on all of us.<sup>300</sup>

The second project appeared in a Catholic setting, with the inauguration of a memorial to the students of the Saint-Louis boarding school on 22 May 1921. There were no representatives from the municipal council at the inauguration, which can be easily understood, but the colonel in command of the Saint-Étienne branch was present. The president of the association for former pupils reeled off the religious metaphors. What the poilus lived for five years was a 'Passion'. Their sacrifice was sacred. The poilus were the 'sacred phalanx of God', the 'resurrection' awaits them. Homage was paid to the army, that 'great family', and its leaders. The writer Charles Péguy was the titular figure of the ceremony.<sup>301</sup> It was the cross and the sword, all that Saint-Étienne's municipal council viewed with dread.

The Saint-Étienne lycée was behind the third project and erected a monument to the memory 'of its teachers and former pupils'. During the inauguration on 19 November 1922, the mayor himself delivered the speech in the guise of a former pupil. It was as if he had been liberated from the pressures exerted by the left and could let his own emotions speak. Whilst he deplored the 'losses' that no 'glory' could ever repay, he acknowledged the 'heroes' who represented 'the immortal France' that the monument symbolised. Vouillé, Poitiers, Bouvines, Patay, Valmy, Marne: 'these are the immortal steps of France's defence,' proclaimed the mayor. However, he took care to add an important nuance: 'the French people have acquired their military glory, superior to that of all the other peoples, *not in conquest but in defending* victoriously its land for fifteen centuries'. He even dared to cite the reactionary Joseph de Maistre and his definition of the fatherland.<sup>302</sup>

The fourth project was located in another educational institute: the École des Mines de Saint-Étienne. From 1921, a collection of biographies featuring students who were killed or received recognition during the war was published.<sup>303</sup> It was a homage to the role that science and industry played

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300 Report by the board of directors on the 1920 financial year (1921), Société anonyme des Mines de la Loire; report by the board of directors to the annual general meeting (1921–1929). ADL, 1 ETP 1059.

301 Speech reproduced by M. Luirard, *op.cit.*, p. 101–102.

302 *Ibid.*, p. 107–108.

303 L'École Nationale des Mines de Saint-Étienne à la guerre 1914–1918, (1921). Fonds de l'Amicale des anciens élèves de l'École des Mines de Saint-Étienne., AMS, 18 S 266.

to put France on the side of the victors, but, with a preface written by General de Castelnau, Chief of the Defence Staff during the war, it was also a sign of support for the army. A member of parliament for the right and president of the Ligue des Patriotes before establishing the Fédération nationale catholique, Castelnau was a figure on the anti-communist, nationalist right, representing the complete opposite of the dominant political culture in Saint-Étienne. Castelnau acknowledged the engineers from the École des Mines who contributed to 'that abundant wartime rise of the metalwork and mining industries applying themselves to the war effort'. In the speech the dean delivered during the ceremony awarding the Croix de Guerre to the Ecole on 20 June 1926, he endeavoured to render homage to the Maréchal Émile Fayolle (originally from Puy and former student, like Maréchal Foch, of the Collège Saint-Michel in Saint-Étienne) who presided over the ceremony. He anointed him a 'great soldier crowned with the purest glory'. In the same hero-worshipping tone, a war veteran imagined that the fallen soldiers were looking down at the Maréchal: 'They are looking down at you, Maréchal, and their eyes, still filled with the horrors of the battle, but also its tragic beauty, are saying: thank you<sup>304</sup>'. His speech ended with a hymn to France and her glory:

'France, oh beloved fatherland, on the ever-gloomy route to peace, can you find leaders to guide you worthy of those that wrote the most glorious pages of your glorious history?'

The president of the École's board of directors foregrounded the role of the soldiers of industry who also could risk the worst fate outside of the battlefield in the defence of France:

'A plaque already full of so many names reminds the young generations of the dangers of the profession, but also the glorious service rendered by many of our former students, fallen victim to duty, some at the bottom of mine galleries, others during dangerous explorations in far-off lands, others in the factories where they pursued perilous research whose results were not insignificant for the defence of the fatherland.'<sup>305</sup>

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304 Speech by M. Doliguez, veteran. ADL, 1 M 675.

305 Circular n°195, la Société amicale des anciens élèves. Fonds de l'Amicale des anciens élèves de l'École des Mines de Saint-Étienne. 'Remise de la croix de guerre' (20 June 1926). AMSE, 18 S 266.

This ceremony worried the Prefect. The police reassured him: 'I have the honour of letting you know that there is no question in the progressive and extremist milieus of organising a counterdemonstration'.<sup>306</sup> The simple fact of having carried out this inquiry certainly indicates the tense climate that reigned in the capital of the Loire department. The Prefect did not want to speak out. The speeches must have really irritated the mayor who was present.

*Conflicts between monument committees and municipal councils*

Whilst memorials sprung up in almost all the small rural communes of the department without posing any political issues, it was not at all the case in larger communes whose industrial activities had been impacted by the war effort. Some communes refused to finance war memorials, leading to the creation of committees that took charge of the project and organised the ceremonies. The case of Firminy shows how this could be a source of conflict.

At its highest, the Forges de Firminy employed 9983 workers during the war.<sup>307</sup> The town's municipal council refused to be represented at the inauguration of the commemorative memorial and provided no subsidy. In the lead up to the inauguration, which was scheduled for 11 November 1928, the Prefect of the Loire wondered if he should accept the invitation that the war memorial committee had sent him. Was the municipal council going to be associated with it? he wondered. And will the member of parliament be invited? When quizzed, the police superintendent seemed to know that the memorial committee 'had not yet sent invitations to the municipal council, nor any politician in the region'.<sup>308</sup> The municipal council had only been informed of the date of the inauguration. The committee for planning the memorial to the Great War in Firminy had been set up precisely because of the council's reluctance, so it was therefore a purely private endeavour. The superintendent concluded: 'In any case, it is already almost certain that Firminy's municipal council will refuse any invitation sent to it'.

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306 Note from special superintendent Nonon to the Prefect of the Loire department, 16 June 1926. ADL, 1 M 675.

307 Factories of war: list of businesses working for national defence (1916). ADL, 2 R 126.

308 Note from the superintendent of the Firminy Police to the Prefect of the Loire department, 22 October 1928. ADL 1 M 614.

The committee was presided over by M. Vergeat, a disabled veteran. He was a sales representative on behalf of the coal mining companies in Roche-la-Molière and Firminy. The committee members, if the superintendent is to be believed, were 'patriots' who profess 'republican ideas, a centre left persuasion, with some individuals slightly more to the left without adhering to socialism'. With only one representative from the working class, a metal-worker, the social composition of the committee is telling. In addition to Vergeat, it included a trader, a war widow, three office workers, a masonry business owner, a sales representative, and a privately wealthy woman. The working class was not reflected in this committee; and the municipal council did not support the project.

When the associations charged with planning memorials did not initially have support from the commune, they sometimes sought funding to organise the inauguration. This was the case, for example, in the commune of Roche-la-Molière. The municipal council put to a vote the decision of attributing the sum of 3000 Francs to the event: 8 votes 'for', 4 'against', 1 abstention. Opposition was discreet, but real. In small communes, the situation was very different. In general, all the municipal councillors participated in the planning committees and supported funding contributions. Political questions did not interfere with consensus, rather it was the opportunity for a collective celebration.

In rare cases, there was no inauguration for the monument. The commune of Saint-Martin d'Estreaux in the conurbation of Roanne has the only explicitly pacifist monument in the Loire department. The village's mayor Pierre Monot, a farmer and departmental councillor with radical socialist tendencies, wanted to pay homage to the 64 fallen soldiers from his commune. Yet, he combined that homage with a critical reflection on the war and those who could not stop it. The account of the conflict that appears on the bas relief specifically mentions the 'scandalous fortunes built on human misery' and more discretely men who were shot as an example ('From innocent to the execution post'), before declaring 'Damned be the war and its authors!' The mayor never hid his wish for those shot as an example to be rehabilitated. Erected in 1922, the memorial would only be inaugurated in 1947. It has been vandalised several times.

*Religious Symbols: A Source of Conflict*

Religion, like politics, was also a dividing factor. One source of dissensus was the question of the presence of religious representatives at the ceremonies. In Grand'Croix in 1921, the municipal council clashed with the war memorial planning committee as it intended to apply an old decree banning the clergy from wearing sacerdotal dress in any procession that they took part in. The village's commemorative programme was also drawn up without the municipal council's consent. The mayor feared that the procession would provoke a counterdemonstration by the Barbusse group. Henri Barbusse, an anti-clerical pacifist and veteran, wrote *Le Feu* (1917), the first book demystifying the Great War. 'Barbusse groups' circulated pro-Bolshevik ideas. The police superintendent concluded: 'Though it is certainly divided into two camps, the population is calm. Opinion is split, but the majority of inhabitants approve the mayor's decision'.

Demonstrations from the far left were feared, as were 'reactionary events' to use the term found in a note by the police superintendent of Rive-de-Gier. As the clergy was excluded from the commemorative public space, they organised events on their own land, in private spaces. In Rive-de-Gier, a war memorial was inaugurated on 29 August 1920 at the Notre-Dame church. However, the procession was formed on and had to take a public road, which the police superintendent reflected on:

'On this occasion, a slightly reactionary event was organised and in which sports clubs from Saint-Chamond, Izieux and Rive-de-Gier took part. In a procession, this group crossed the main roads of the town. No provocations, nor incidents of any nature were reported during their passage. It should be mentioned that the bishop of Saint-Étienne delivered a measured, correct and especially patriotic sermon. On the other hand, Sir Germain de Montauzan gave a long speech to the Mollard circle (free schools) during which he showed himself to be somewhat aggressive towards the government. The impression left by the speaker was of an eloquent, ironic and even aggressive orator. Around 1500 people listened to and applauded his speech<sup>309</sup>'

The religious issue could also emerge in other situations, for example, when there was a request to transfer a war memorial from the municipal

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309 Note from the superintendent of the Rive-de-Gier police to the Prefect of the Loire department, 30 August 1920. ADL, 1 M 614.

cemetery to a public space. The town of Veauche presents an interesting case that shows the difficult relationship between these committees and municipal councils, particularly when the council did not align with the association's motivations.

In 1919, the Veauche war memorial was planned for the small Place des Tilleuls, which bordered the main road. Private land had been given over to the commune. The initial project included religious symbols and it was rejected by the Prefect of the Loire department. Arguing that this memorial had been financed with public funds and a contribution from the commune, the Prefect explained that this public memorial, on public land, could not exhibit any religious symbols. A new project without Christian emblems was submitted to the Prefect and was accepted. However, in protest, the committee's treasurer refused to transfer the funds to the municipal purse. The committee opposed transferring the 10,000 francs that they had collected on the grounds that 'the incorporation of the religious symbol, the cross, had been the main reason for these donations'. By way of conciliation, the mayor proposed placing the memorial in the cemetery. Despite opposition from some councillors, a new ruling from the municipal council intervened in the matter in February 1920: the monument would be erected not in the initial location, in a public space, but in the municipal cemetery with the original religious symbols. All interested parties seemed satisfied.

However, ten years later, on 13 April 1930, without consulting the committee members or the donors, the municipal council reversed their decision: they wanted to return the memorial to the original site, a public space, and to remove its religious symbols in line with article 28 of the law of 9 December 1905. A request to stop the movement of the monument was submitted on 25 March 1931. The members of the committee felt betrayed, and an intense legal debate ensued. Article 28 states: 'It is prohibited, in the future, to erect or to affix any religious signs or symbols on public buildings or in any public place, except on buildings used as places of worship, burial grounds, in cemeteries, and on funerary monuments, including museums and exhibition halls. As a defence, the municipal council explained that 'war memorials are not on funerary monuments'. In response, the Conseil d'État's decree of 4 June 1924 ('arrêt Lebon') was brandished. The decree stipulates that the definition of a 'funerary monument' applies to all monuments designed to remember the dead, wherever they are erected, even if they do not cover a grave'. For the mayor, it was all in the small details: 'it is a commemorative memorial and not a funerary monument'.

He explained that it was ‘a question of higher principles. Men were not called to the front for belonging to one religion or one philosophical sect, and some Frenchmen did not belong to any. In fact, ‘men holding very different views did their duty and to be equitable, if any symbol other than those representing France needed to figure on the monument, there would be place to inscribe them all without distinction’<sup>310</sup>. Moreover, the mayor referenced the fact that the commune had given 2000 francs for the memorial, and a further 1500 francs for its enclosure, which made up the largest contribution towards the 12,000 francs cost. The Prefect followed this line of thinking and ruled against the complainants: the memorial would be placed on town land since, having paid the businesses through the municipal purse, the commune was its owner and could manage it as it wished.<sup>311</sup> It was agreed the religious symbols would be removed. In the place of the cross, three names were engraved: Marne (which marked the halting of the invasion); Verdun (which symbolised ‘resistance and courage’); Somme (where ‘the movement to evacuate the region’ emerged).

Sometimes there was a war of memorials, which crystallised the tensions between working class memory and memory of the war. This was the case in La Ricamarie, a mining village whose emblematic figure was the trade unionist miner and mutual benefit company militant Michel Rondet. La Ricamarie’s Poilus organisation decided to take on the planning of a memorial in 1920. To collect funds, they organised a fête with a raffle. The Prefecture advised that the association would need the municipal council’s authorisation if they wanted to put the takings towards the committee’s activities. To force the hand of the municipal council, the association asked the Prefect directly to be the committee’s honorary president, which he ‘gladly’ accepted. The municipal council therefore could not oppose the tombola. However, a war of monuments was already underway in the village, which meant that secular associations were absent from the war memorial’s inauguration on 3 September 1922. Their issue related to the statue monument dedicated to Michel Rondet, which was discreetly inaugurated by the trade unionists in 1913. Ten years later, in a highly significant symbolic act, the statue was moved on 3 March 1923 to a prominent location in front of the town hall. Working class memory supplanted memory of the war.

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310 Veauche municipal council meeting minutes, 1 March 1931. ADL, 1 M 614.

311 Note to the Prefect of the Loire department, 9 April 1931. ADL, 1 M 614.

'Politicians don't understand the word "Fatherland"'

Organising the inauguration of memorials often led to controversy. When communes themselves planned the inauguration ceremonies, it was necessary to work with veterans to avoid the risk of conflict, which was what happened in Roanne.<sup>312</sup> The war memorial's inauguration was scheduled for 1 November 1925. All would have gone off smoothly had the mayor Albert Sérol not decided to deprive veterans of the opportunity to speak. For the press, who widely reported this controversy, it was a political issue. *Le Journal de Roanne* from 11 October 1925 wrote:

'Clearly there is fear that they (the veterans) would not be internationalist or pacifist enough. There is fear that they would stress too loudly the detestable responsibility of Germany. In particular, there is fear that they would mention the victory, *the victory that is loathed and misunderstood* by the amnesty party, the shirkers and second line fighters. Are the soldiers going to take this snub without protesting?'

*L'Union républicaine de Roanne* also criticised the mayor's decision as an inexcusable 'lack of tack'. Behind this reluctance of allowing the veterans to speak, there was apparently a desire to exonerate Germany to the detriment of Raymond Poincaré: 'We know that the mayor's party supported the odious idea that Poincaré was responsible for the war'. Sérol was also a member of parliament and supported the left coalition as a member of SFIO.

The procession started well. After long negotiations, the mayor allowed the president of an association for bereaved parents whose sons had died for France to speak, but not representatives of veterans, who saw this move as a trick. The names of the 1297 fallen soldiers were read out. The mayor's speech was structured around the idea that it was necessary to 'preserve the memory of the fallen for future generations so that there would be no more wars' and to move towards 'a general reconciliation of all peoples'. Hate must be banished. This speech, influenced by the ideas of Aristide Briand, aimed to distance itself from nationalism and anti-German sentiment. Numerous veterans on the right did not see themselves reflected in the speech. The expression 'loathed victory' comes from this misalignment, which once again raises the ever-present question of shirkers in Saint-Étienne and the

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312 The key references for the Roanne affair come from the file: ADL, 1 M 615.



positions that elected officials on the left sometimes took with regard to conscious objectors.

The Sub-Prefect’s speech was the least well accepted. He explained that the victory was actually made possible because the soldiers had been educated in the Republic’s schools, that is secular schools where ‘moral virtues are glorified’. According to the 2 November edition of *Le Nouveau Journal*, the sub-Prefect was ‘pathetic’. The little that he said of his own invention was ‘misplaced’: ‘The soldiers educated in secular schools did do their duty, but others did theirs as well’. The mayor was ‘sectarian’. The article ends simply with: ‘Poor fallen soldiers’. The religious divide, which ran through French society and resulted in strong political oppositions, is found here. The Sub-Prefect should be reported to the Prefect of the Loire department. Significantly, the article was written by ‘an injured veteran who had undergone trepanning’ and was president of the Poilus’ association in Roanne. He accused the Sub-Prefect of acting ‘politically’ in the name of the ‘reactionaries’ and to the profit of the parliamentary group Union républicaine. He assured readers that he did not enjoy ‘any respect’.<sup>313</sup>

On 3 November, *Le Nouveau Journal* was even more damning, running the headline: ‘Politicians don’t understand the word “Fatherland”’. The Sub-Prefect was ‘odious’: he had insulted the fallen. The criticism of the mayor’s speech was cutting:

‘When he finished, the only thing we learnt was, according to him, the poilus were not killed to save France, but for international justice... International justice? The poilus were... They marched because the Boche invaded their land, burnt their houses... But the mayor couldn’t say any of that because his party maintains that Germany wasn’t responsible for the war.’

Whilst this account of the mayor’s speech is highly selective and inaccurate,<sup>314</sup> it does reveal how violent the disagreements were.

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313 Note from the Sub-Prefect of Roanne to the Prefect of the Loire department, 7 November 1915.

314 The Sub-Prefect said: ‘Teachers will teach them [the children] how France was unjustly attacked and how she defended herself. [...] It was because it wasn’t just France that was at stake in the war, but defending ideals of liberty, civilisation, and social justice of which she is the flagbearer. Those whose memory this memorial preserves were sacrificed in the hope that the war would spare other generations. I think not of diminishing Germany’s responsibility and reducing the crime that her leaders committed by unchaining it from the plague that cost the lives of millions

The great interpretative debate over the causes of the war and what Europe should subsequently become bubbles to the surface in these speeches. The mayor was ahead of his time in terms of opinion. He was reproached, like in the *Journal de Roanne*, for not having named France, nor the victory (which was real), for having given an 'official and cold' speech 'like the style of the memorial itself'.<sup>315</sup> Yet, underlying it was the strength of political, religious, and ideological divisions, and, precisely at that time, those for and against the leftist coalition. On 11 November 1925, the Roanne branch of the poilus association had its revenge. They organised a highly successful event that contradicted the Sub-Prefect's account. It started with a mass at the aptly named Notre-Dame des Victoires church in the presence of 1500 people. The procession (in which the Action Française flag was present) then visited the memorial for the soldiers of the 1870 war, before reaching the cemetery. A speech was delivered honouring 'the courage of our soldiers during the war'. The next day, the *Journal de Roanne* praised 'a magnificent patriotic display': 'the veterans have their revenge for the insult of 1 November'. All the city's patriotic societies and a delegation of officers from the garrison responded to the invitation. Yet, there were also notable absences, namely the association of the war wounded. The speeches spoke of the 'glorious fallen soldiers' and their sacrifice, but the president of the Poilus association had to concede that the sacred union was dead: it was a 'return to the pre-war internal fighting'.

Even if this lament for the end of national 'concord' did not make its way into political discourse, it was increasingly affirmed in the discourse of those who represented the veterans. For example, in a 1922 speech, the president of the veterans' association in Chambon-Feugerolles spoke of his broken 'dream' in remarking that the 'community of danger and sacrifices', forged through 'so much suffering', had not survived the victory, that the 'great purifying current' which should have 'regenerated' France had come up against a barrier of 'divisions' and 'debates'.<sup>316</sup> One of the reoccurring ideas in

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of men. History will judge this crime with a merciless severity. But I have not come to sew or stoke hate between people either.' To cite the words of President Paul Painlevé during the inauguration of the Lorette war memorial, it was a question of the 'safety of Europe'. Cited in *Le Réveil républicain*, 8 November 1925.

315 The mayor positioned himself very abstractly: 'Be courageous. We need to raise up our fragile humanity, regenerate the old world. With all our strength, we wish that the passionate youth of tomorrow develop and thrive in safety, that humanity calmly opens the road to happiness.'

316 Speech delivered 11 September 1922. Cited in M. Luirard, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

the discourse of war veterans was the ‘sickening politics that divides us’,<sup>317</sup> which, nevertheless, was evoked in an ‘apolitical sense of coming together’.<sup>318</sup>

### Conclusion

In a speech in front of the war memorial, the mayor of Roanne imagined at the inauguration would allow for an unparalleled point of communion between citizens to be reached: ‘here today, nothing divides us. It is neither the time, nor the place for controversies...’ Either he was mistaken or taking refuge in denial. The commemoration of the fallen soldiers seems not to have had enough resilience or cohesive strength. This inauguration, in fact, revived divisions and increased the lack of consensus in opinion: ‘A work of misunderstood deaths, humiliated Poilus, a disappointed and unhappy population, that is the result of this sorry morning.’<sup>319</sup> Heritage’s virtues of social cohesion disappear into political cultures.

Pacifism, which postulates the ‘immorality’ of war, cannot pay tribute to the soldiers’ heroism or the participation of the arms industry. Victory has such a high price that it cannot be celebrated. The process of ‘glorification’ is a pitfall on the road to peace, which can just as easily lead to nationalism. A certain amount of forgetting, as Ernest Renan said, is thus necessary so that peoples will reconcile amongst themselves and work towards a united Europe. This discourse was rarely heard from war veterans who felt that their ‘victory’ was denied, their sufferance reduced to silence, and their sacrifices hijacked to the benefit of interests that were not their own. Moreover, as Antoine Prost has shown, war veterans on the left and right (including the UNC) were attached to the unity of memory and the idea of peace. Elected officials (especially communists), who feared that commemoration would engender national hate and took offense at the explosion of monuments, only wanted to see memorials that ‘glory not the victorious Fatherland, the grandeur of France or the triumph of the poilu, but the sacrifice of the dead’, testifying, above all, to a culture of republican civicism.<sup>320</sup>

317 Cited in Antoine Prost, *Les Anciens Combattants, 1914–1940*, Gallimard/Julliard, coll. Archives, 1977, p. 101–109.

318 Serge Berstein, Michel Winock (eds), *La République recommencée, de 1914 à nos jours*, Seuil, 2004, p. 69.

319 *Journal de Roanne*, 8 November 1925. ADL, 1 M 615.

This misalignment between what the war veterans felt and how some municipalities represented them resulted in an over-politicisation of the question of memory, which was used as an instrument to serve other causes. Part of the disappointment of the surviving poilus, who dreamed of an apolitical source of union and fraternity, comes from this misalignment. Sometimes, the Loire department's war veterans had to fight to preserve 'their' celebration of 11 November. They sometimes needed to explain (including in the early 1930s) that 'remembering is not stoking the fire of revenge. Rather, it is understanding the true price of sacrifice and paying homage in our reverence and our eternal gratitude to those that signed up for it, to those that died so that their Fatherland could live'.<sup>321</sup>

The question of the war's 'benefits', which fostered the refusal to commemorate the conflict, was rightly asked as part of an exhibition curated by the Musée d'art et d'industrie (October 2015 to March 2016) in Saint-Étienne that retraced the war effort. The very title of the exhibition ('Benefits of war, war of benefits?') resonated a century later as a response to the controversies of that time. The exhibition courageously addressed the theme of the profiteers at the back and the benefits of war. It aptly revealed the unease that Saint-Étienne society experienced (and still perceives today) regarding its industries' participation in the Great War. The inhabitants of Saint-Étienne must accommodate a conflicting memory that seeks a point of conciliation between an anti-militaristic political culture and the image of an industrial supplier of arms. This fundamental ambiguity is at the centre of the difficulties inherent to creating heritage around the Great War in the city. These difficulties were fanned by the violence of political expression and social combat that prevented Saint-Étienne society from uniting around the memory of the Great War. It would not be until the early 1930s that politicians would understand the profound meaning of a commemorative ritual, which promotes a 'funerary cult'<sup>322</sup> and adherence to the Republic. The paradox is that veterans, from one war to the next, and from left to right, continually showed their support for the pacifism found in the politics of reconciliation promoted by Aristide Briand, a long-standing member of parliament for the Loire department.

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320 Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

321 According to a speech delivered by Jean Taurines, member of parliament for Bloc National de la Loire and veteran who underwent amputation after the war, in Firminy in November 1928. Cited in M. Luirard, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

322 Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace*, *op.cit.*, p. 98.