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# Jules Guesde

The Birth of Socialism and Marxism in France

Jean-Numa Ducange

*Translated by* David Broder

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ISSN 2524-7123

ISSN 2524-7131 (electronic)

Marx, Engels, and Marxisms

ISBN 978-3-030-34609-6

ISBN 978-3-030-34610-2 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34610-2>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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# PREFACE

## A LIFE DEDICATED TO SOCIALISM

In June 2015 the Parti Socialiste held an extraordinary congress in Poitiers, three years after its candidate François Hollande had been elected president of the Republic. ‘There has been a political clarification’, declared Jean-Marie Le Guen, at that time Secretary of State for Relations with Parliament. Issuing an appeal not to ‘get bogged down in debates’ and arguing for ‘government that confronts the real problems’, this representative of the party majority added that ‘there has always been a part of the French left that has not been able to embrace the idea of governing, of assuming responsibility’. Looking back to history, he contrasted Jean Jaurès, a socialist able to ‘bring people together’, to ‘the sectarian Jules Guesde, the dogmatist who developed a constant critique of the Republic because it was not social enough’. Le Guen then set off on a more or less haphazard genealogy of the Left, in which Léon Blum was associated with Jaurès, and Guesde with Guy Mollet and his so-called Marxist intransigence. Also coming in for criticism were those Greek activists who challenged the ongoing retreats under their new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras; they were accused of being the descendants of this same ‘dogmatic sectarian’. Little mentioned, here—though directly in the firing line, in the context of the party congress—were dissidents within the Parti Socialiste who criticised the Hollande government’s neoliberal orientation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All citations from the intervention by Jean-Marie Le Guen—see the video of his speech at <http://congres.parti-socialiste.fr>

One year before this, the philosopher Vincent Peillon—a leader of the Parti Socialiste and former Minister of National Education—had written a piece in *Le Figaro*, marking the centenary of the assassination of Jean Jaurès.<sup>2</sup> Passing very sharp judgement on Jaurès, Peillon argued that ‘the entire twentieth century, for [French] socialism, was to be dominated by this compromise by Jaurès—and we may well consider that this did not necessarily do the French Left any good’. But what ‘compromise’ was he referring to, here? The former minister explicitly attacked Jaurès for having built ties with Jules Guesde, the man with whom he had created the party back in 1905: ‘If Marxist thought dominated over French thought ... this was because Jaurès gave in to Jules Guesde over some doctrinal questions in order to obtain a united party’. Hence the problem, here, was less to do with the basics of Jaurès’s own thought than with his alliance with Guesde—or more precisely, his ‘compromises’ with him.

We could find many such quotes: but we would struggle to find the slightest positive comment on Guesde in any of them. If many politicians—even on the Right and far right—seek to present themselves as loyal heirs to Jaurès, no one, even on the Left, wants to take any share of Guesde’s legacy. A delegate at a socialist congress in 1905 or even 1914 would have had a hard time imagining that a century later there would be such an imbalance between Guesde and Jaurès!

So, what happened? To understand all this, we have to go beyond ideological anathemas and get to grips with the history of Guesde and what has been called ‘Guesdism’—an oft-pejorative epithet which could sometimes still be heard on the French left even into the 1970s. To answer this question we need a specific study—if only to understand how and why such a major figure in the Left’s history as Jaurès opted for an alliance with Guesde.

There are, however, many other reasons to take a deeper interest in Guesde’s career. First, on the grounds that any more or less in-depth historical biography of Guesde’s life was bound to be a first. This is, indeed, a peculiar case, given the countless number of biographies on the politicians of the Third Republic. There has been no genuinely historical biography of Guesde in French or in any other language—excluding, that is, a few flattering volumes by informed yet rather partial supporters of

<sup>2</sup>‘Vincent Peillon: “Le compromis jaurésien n’a pas nécessairement fait du bien à la gauche”’, *Le Figaro*, 31 July 2014.

his.<sup>3</sup> Next to Jaurès—subject of a vast biography which we can consider definitive<sup>4</sup>—Guesde appears almost like an unknown, no matter how much leading politicians still mention him. In 1965 the historian Claude Willard, of Communist leanings, did publish a striking study on the Guesdist current<sup>5</sup>; Jacques Girault also took an interest in this same subject, paying more specific attention to Guesde’s close acolyte Paul Lafargue. Tellingly, Lafargue—with Guesde had many differences—has drawn rather more attention. Karl Marx’s son-in-law, this unabashed dandy and author of the charming *Right to Be Lazy*, who committed suicide together with his wife in 1911, is the subject of a fine and indeed sizeable two-volume biography published in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Among the trailblazers we have mentioned, in this regard, we could also cite Michelle Perrot. While few readers will probably know it, the initial research topic addressed by this great women’s historian was the Guesdists and the problem of their relationship with Marxism.

## UNDERSTANDING GUESDE IN HIS TIME

Let’s say it straight out: there are, indeed, solid foundations for the popular trope that makes out Guesde to have been a ‘sectarian’ or ‘dogmatist’—in large part explaining the lack of interest shown towards him. Among the pioneers who first introduced Marxism to France, Guesde also transformed it into an oft-simplistic catechism. During the Dreyfus affair he refused to join the *dreyfusard* side, for fear of drowning socialism in the bourgeois swamp. But if we emphasise only these aspects, we end up forgetting major historical facts, not least the immense, deep respect that many socialist militants and sympathisers felt for Guesde. They admired a peerless leader who also knew how to be caustic, a prodigious orator and talented populariser, a polemical journalist who was sometimes schematic

<sup>3</sup> Adéodat Compère-Morel, *Jules Guesde, le socialisme fait homme, 1845–1922*, Paris, Aristide Quillet, 1937. Alexandre Zévaès, *Jules Guesde 1845–1922*, Paris, Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1929.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Candar, Vincent Duclert, *Jean Jaurès*, Paris, Fayard, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> The biography published by Claude Willard in 1991 contains some valuable insights but is barely a hundred pages long and overlooks many decisive aspects of Guesde’s career. See Claude Willard, *Jules Guesde. L’apôtre et la loi*, Paris, Éditions ouvrières, 1991. On his other works (and those by Jacques Girault) see the bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the founding of French Marxism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991; *Paul Lafargue and the flowering of French Marxism, 1882–1911*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998.

but formidably effective. A charismatic figure feared by his adversaries and respected both within and outside his party, Guesde's name cuts through a half-century of both French and international political life. He was in direct contact with Karl Marx and then the German social democrats—indeed, his adversaries long called him ‘the Prussians’ candidate!’ But Guesde was also in the front rank as French socialism turned from being a loose set of modestly sized opposition groups into a great party of national importance. In his early years as a clandestine militant who was jailed on several occasions—indeed, one who intransigently set his face against the Republic—Guesde ultimately became a loyal minister, as the *Union sacrée* took form in 1914.

While Guesde initially adopted a rebellious and revolutionary attitude, he eventually enlisted to administer a state he had long condemned as ‘bourgeois’—and, indeed, made this turn seemingly unconditionally. Such a career would have a hard time giving rise to any kind of revolutionary mythology. His choice not to follow the Bolsheviks in 1920 made Guesde's case even trickier. The most revolutionary would damn him for his betrayal, after he supported the *Union sacrée* in 1914; on the other hand, ‘responsible’ socialists took him as the very symbol of the refusal to govern. Was he incoherent? Weak-minded? Dogmatic? A capitulator? Perhaps. But these paradoxes themselves demand that we turn back to history itself, beyond the mere caricatures which have—successfully—been transmitted across several generations.

To take our distance from the historiography does not, of course, imply ignoring it. Logically enough, historiography does take up an important place in this volume. The reader will surely be surprised to discover that up till the 1960s Guesde remained a respected figure among the socialists and perhaps even more so among the communists, especially in *Le Nord*—the *département* which was both his happiest hunting-ground and the site of his electoral victories. MP for Roubaix across two decades, he was long one of the most emblematic representatives of this part of northern France. Before he was demoted—and even forgotten—Guesde was widely commemorated and celebrated, indeed sometimes even more so than his brother-enemy Jean Jaurès. And across several decades, the memory of Guesde blended with the history of the French left itself. To forget about him is to deny ourselves a unique route into history, one allowing us to understand how come Marxism left such a lasting mark on the rhetoric of several political parties.

## GUESDE, THE FIRST GUESDIST

As well as being inextricably linked to his adoptive region, Guesde is similarly identified with the current that bears his name—Guesdism. This, too, is a peculiarity of his: hardly ever do we hear a mention of ‘Jaurèsism’. Jaurès aroused a great deal of goodwill, but never brought together such a structured, hierarchically organised and particular current as Guesde did. The imprint left by Jaurès is a real and well-documented one, and it also seems more enduring—at least, over many decades far more claims have been made to Jaurès’s legacy. Yet for half-a-century the ‘Guesdists’ occupied important positions in both socialist and communist ranks.

Guesdism left its mark on socialism in several regions. This implantation was itself the object of attention—or even a certain fascination—at a time when the question of Marxism and its French particularities occupied a growing historiographical space, in the course of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet following a certain eclipse during the 1980s, it has, instead, been the English-speaking world that has seen several remarkable studies on these same themes. These are welcome efforts—taking Guesde out of France is, indeed, a good means to break him away from internal-French debates alone. Indeed, Guesde made up part of a complex international game that ought to be reconstructed in all its rich development: himself a French politician, Guesde was at first an exile and, subsequently, forever on the cusp of multiple national spaces, not least thanks to his numerous contacts with the Germans. In overly ‘nationalising’ Guesde’s career we lose sight of his significance to his European interlocutors, who knew him so well as a speaker at international congresses. This, too, is one of the goals of this book: to allow the reader to understand all the different dimensions of Guesde. This will help us see not only a politician anchored in France’s own national logics but so, too, one who made up part of transnational dynamics which would, at first glance, be anything but self-evident.

## THERE WERE MANY GUESDES

The representative of a recognisable current, Guesde however also embodied multiple different figures. Often in pain and long-enduring precarious conditions, at least for the first part of his life he can be identified with the kind of heroic gesture quite compatible with the socialist ‘grand narratives’ of the late nineteenth century. But he can also be seen as one of the ‘proletaroid’ intellectuals diagnosed by Max Weber. Unable to become

intellectuals with a recognised social position, such figures instead decided to make the revolution their life's work. This came at the cost of opportunistic political combinations that often neglected real reflection—a task that inspired distrust or even disdain. Guesde can, moreover, be taken for the traitor *par excellence*, as the man who both 'betrayed' socialism by rallying to the war effort in 1914 and then rejected the Bolsheviks' audacious move in 1917, instead preferring the *vieille maison* of the Parti Socialiste.

Yet Guesde was, in any case, a major figure, shaped by the experience of multiple struggles. These latter came along in a decisive period of France's history, as for the first time a Republic established itself in the long term. Tracing Guesde's activity offers us a front-row seat for the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the Paris Commune of 1871, the first French political parties and the divides resulting from the Dreyfus affair and the 1905 law on the separation of churches and state. His era was also the moment of the first social policy—sparking enthusiasm but also criticism in the workers' movement. Then came the terrible blow of what became a world war, the Bolshevik Revolution and, finally, the test of the division between socialists and communists—the last episode in Guesde's life, and one he experienced as a tragedy. Born in the Paris where Karl Marx was writing his first works and reaching the end of his life as the Civil War reached its conclusion in the young Soviet Russia, Guesde often himself played an important role in these various upheavals. Even as he did reach the end—ageing and unable to make public interventions—Guesde remained a confidant. Even now, he had the ear of militants who played major roles in the greatest crisis in the French left's history—the events of 1918–1920, which would forever separate socialists and communists. Strangely, very few have taken an interest in the final years of Guesde's life—indeed, it has usually been assumed that his position as a minister in a unity government simply and utterly discredited him. But taking our distance from such approaches, our concern has been to understand this man from top to bottom, examining the arguments which he himself put forward at each stage. To proceed in such a fashion does not at all imply any attempt to justify his actions. Yet to play down the final part of Guesde's life would be to deny ourselves an important key to understanding a decisive turning point in the history of socialism, which directly concerned the man himself.

An ambivalent figure, Guesde embodied distrust for the state and governmental power, a sincere commitment to the workers' cause and a frenetic activism that rejected theoretical inquiry as secondary or even pointless. For Jaurès, Guesde could be framed in terms of '[s]implicity of

conception, simplicity of tactics, simplicity of action'.<sup>7</sup> And, we could add, effective communication—something which explained his power of attraction even beyond the ranks of his own current. Pock-marked with often painful personal and private experiences, Guesde's whole life was directed towards politics and socialism. His close friend and first biographer Compère-Morel put it forcefully: Guesde was 'socialism made man'.

As well as closely linking Guesde to the current which he so centrally drove, writing a biography of such a figure also demands we look towards the kind of *Gesellschaftsbiographie* ('biography of society') envisaged by Siegfried Kracauer.<sup>8</sup> This also means avoiding the psychologising, ahistorical and unsociological approaches which many authors including Pierre Bourdieu have quite rightly warned against.<sup>9</sup>

In dialogue with one of his German colleagues, the famous historian of the *sans-culottes* Albert Soboul spoke of the possibility of a 'social biography', such as could cover the many actors in the revolutionary era. In Soboul's view, the role of a few great figures ought not eclipse the multiple social and political groups involved—of which these figures were, above all, the embodiment.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Soboul's thinking is also a useful starting point for understanding what linked Guesde to his own time: he was an exceptional figure but cannot be detached from the many socialists and the multiple social and political upheavals of his era.

At a time when divisions on the Left were filling up the newspaper columns, it was time to restore to its proper place the career of a man still today regularly cited as the very emblem of sectarianism. For this is a man who remains very little understood. Here, then, is Jules Guesde—a whole life dedicated to socialism. A Guesde finally restored to history, outside of the myths and the stigma that have so long afflicted him.

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<sup>7</sup>Jean Jaurès, *Préface aux discours parlementaires: Le socialisme et le radicalisme en 1885*, Paris, Édouard Cornély, 1904, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach ou le secret du Second Empire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994 (1937).

<sup>9</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'illusion biographique', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 62–63, June 1986, pp. 69–72.

<sup>10</sup>Walter Markov, *Zwiesprache mit dem Jahrhundert, Dokumentiert von Thomas Grimm*, Berlin and Weimar, Aufbauverlag, 1989.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks first of all go to the dauntless Vincent Duclert: to publish a biography of Jules Guesde next to Pericles, De Gaulle and Mendès France and the like was not an obvious choice. So, too, to Corinne Ergasse, for her availability and for her great professionalism.

This book owes a great deal to a number of exchanges I have had with others. My warm thanks to the following, who have each in their own way provided me references, advice and sometimes simply their own impressions on this enigmatic figure: Julien Chuzeville, Thierry Merel, Sebastien Budgen, Alexis Corbière, Gilles Morin, Frédéric Cépède, Michel Prat, Jean-Pierre Brard, Vincent Chambarlhac, Pierre Boichu, Jean-Marc Schiappa, Michel Maso, Serge Wolikow, Charles Silvestre, Patrick Le Hyaric, Claude Willard, Catherine Moulin, Jacqueline Lalouette, Xu Juezai and Li Qiqing. Thanks also to the members of the Eurosoc Normandie project. Particular thanks to its president Candar, an attentive re-reader, Jaurésien in heart and spirit, a Guesdist in his spare time. Also to Serge Grosset for his magnificent attentiveness. To Charles-Numa, a lover of historical biographies, who would surely have appreciated reading one written by a Numa.

For Roza, who is so considerate in every way, and without whom nothing would have been possible.

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## The Apostle of the Fourth Estate (1845–1880)

On 11 November 1845, Jules Bazile came into the world. He was born on the Rue de la Femme-sans-tête, later the Rue le Regrattier, on Paris's île Saint-Louis. He later chose to adopt his mother's surname; from November 1945, the street would thus bear a plaque commemorating the 'tireless theorist and apostle of socialism' Jules Guesde.

It did, indeed, take decades of 'tireless' battles for socialism to become a national political reality in France. What, after all, had 'socialism' meant back in 1845? Since the 1830s the adjective 'socialist' had designated a teeming array of doctrines that called for radical social change and aspired to a more egalitarian world. Fourier, Saint-Simon, Proudhon and, indeed, Louis Blanc, among many others, were its most eminent representatives in this period. It is impossible to understand their rise without grasping the intolerable destitution among the workers of this era, the result of the industrialisation of European societies. In his 1841 *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers*, the doctor Villermé described the world this created:

For these unfortunates, the fatigue of a working day already long beyond all proportion, a day of at least fifteen hours, is combined with that of travels back-and-forth as frequent as they are arduous. The result is that they reach home at night overwhelmed by the need for sleep, and the next morning head out again before they are completely rested, in order to make it to the workshop for opening time.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Villermé, *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers*, Paris, 10/18, 1971 (1841), p. 34.

The material conditions of the poorest were appalling. As Villermé continued ‘In Mulhouse, in Dornach, from neighbouring houses I have seen these miserable lodgings where two families slept each in its own corner, on hay thrown on the tiles and supported by two planks of wood. All that lies over this hay are rags for a cover and a often a sort of feather mattress, of disgusting filthiness.’ In a resounding speech to the National Assembly in 1851, Victor Hugo forever immortalised this early nineteenth-century destitution. Evoking the ‘cellars of Lille’, he cried:

Imagine streets, whole streets, where at each step we come across these spectacles, where the most lamentable distress pulsates everywhere and in all forms. My fellow-travellers and I stayed but one day in Lille; I repeat, it was by chance that we stumbled into these luckless districts; we entered the first houses we passed. Well! We did not even half-open a door without finding destitution, sometimes agony, behind it.<sup>2</sup>

It was in these lands of the working-class North that Guesde’s socialism would sink lasting roots some four decades later. But when we take the moment in which Hugo gave his speech, we are still far from the development of the organisations of the 1880s–1890s, which history has long remembered as ‘the workers’ movement’. So, when did this movement really begin? This is itself a point of controversy: recent historiography has included the first cooperative and guild forms of the early nineteenth century, which had previously been neglected and looked down upon, much like the bold conceptual sallies of the first socialisms of this era.<sup>3</sup> We can grasp the essential point by following the British historian Eric Hobsbawm, when he said that ‘The labour movement provided an answer to the poor man’s cry’.<sup>4</sup> To put an end to working-class destitution: thus could be summarised the shared objective of the many socialist theorists of the 1840s–1860s.

France’s head of government in this era, François Guizot—a brilliant intellectual who has been attributed the famous line ‘enrich yourselves by work and savings’—had no intention of allowing these subversive

<sup>2</sup>Victor Hugo, ‘Les Caves de Lille’, 1851. See Victor Hugo, *Détruire la misère et les caves de Lille*, Paris, D’ores et déjà, 2013.

<sup>3</sup>François Jarrige and Emmanuel Fureix, *La modernité désenchantée. Relire l’histoire du XIXe siècle français*, Paris, La Découverte, 2015.

<sup>4</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848*, New York, Vintage Books, 1996, p. 209.

movements and doctrines to prosper. Indeed, he repressed them unceremoniously. For instance, a few months before Guesde's birth, the government ordered the expulsion of one of the many German émigrés who had come to Paris and been won to socialist ideas: a certain Karl Marx, at that time known only to the initiated. Three years later, an oppositional campaign resulted in a spectacular return to the barricades, in February 1848. The last monarchy in French history gave way to the Second French Republic: this latter aroused many hopes, but they were rapidly swept away by the terrible clashes in June. The insurgent workers who rose up to demand a social republic were harshly repressed, indeed by a republican general, Cavaignac. Returning to Paris before he was again expelled, Marx described this moment as the 'first great battle between the two classes of modern society'. For him, as for many socialists, there was no doubt: June 1848 showed that the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat represented the great problem of the nineteenth century.

After June 1848, the socialists' hopes dissipated, giving way to the redoubtable Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte. His skill for manoeuvre allowed him to re-establish the Empire of his illustrious uncle Napoleon I, himself taking the name Napoleon III. Clear-sighted about the developments of his time and exploiting the confusion among categories with some panache, the new emperor even managed to reconcile part of the socialist-inflected working-class circles to his own rule: although Proudhon was the first theorist of anarchism, at first he, too, was tempted by this adventure.

Jules Bazile grew up amidst this troubled political context. He was not a son of the people, the child of a working-class family immersed in destitution. Rather, his father, born in 1809, had come from Picardy to Paris and taught at a religious school in Passy—a *commune* that was not integrated into the capital until 1860. His mother, a Catholic from Nièvre, was a primary school teacher. Both were practicing Catholics. This was, indeed, a pious family if ever there was one: their five children were baptised and one of Jules's sisters even entered an order as a nun. The family lived modestly, but its lifestyle was quite distinct from the destitution then experienced by much of France. Jules, who passed his baccalaureate aged 16, rapidly embraced republican convictions. A whole generation grew up in opposition to Napoleon III's regime: these militants were inspired by the memory of the Revolution and the Republic, as they dreamed of doing away with the reign of 'Napoleon le Petit'. Again, this sobriquet for the Emperor owed to Victor Hugo. The young Guesde, who spent his days at the Bibliothèque Impériale reading books of philosophy and politics,

greatly admired this writer, an emblematic figure of the opposition to Napoleon III. No other work marked the young Guesde more than Hugo's *Les Châtiments* ['Castigations'], a collection of satirical poems that lampooned imperial power. 'I became a republican under the Empire, secretly reading Victor Hugo's *Les Châtiments*', Guesde would claim in 1893.<sup>5</sup> Such readings left an enduring mark: in the twilight of his life in the early 1920s, Guesde would still recite entire pages of Hugo's verse to those close to him. He shared this reference point with a whole generation: for instance, Gustave Rouanet, born in 1855, the son of an outlaw under the Second Empire and himself a future socialist MP for Paris's 18th arrondissement, had also learned by heart the 'iron verses' taken from *Les Châtiments*.<sup>6</sup>

Seeking to salve his family's material troubles, from age 19 Jules took up a series of administrative posts at the Seine police prefecture and the Ministry of the Interior. He then took the plunge by throwing himself into political journalism. In a context where calling oneself a republican entailed major risks, he took his mother's surname in order to avoid seeing his father punished in his place. An oppositional left-republican, the young Parisian wrote for multiple newspapers. The militant journalist Jules Guesde was born. And his passion for politics would never leave him.

### THE MONTPELLIER RADICAL

Guesde acquired a solid experience as a journalist, first of all working for the Paris, Bordeaux and Toulouse press. He soon made his name known thanks to his lively writing style. It was in Montpellier that he finally decided to make his home in July 1869; he remained there until June 1871. A journalist at *La liberté de l'Hérault*, he would especially devote himself to *Les droits de l'homme*.

A fierce republican opponent of the Empire,<sup>7</sup> his freedom of tone soon forced his resignation from *La liberté*. More lasting—and interesting—were his commitments at *Les droits de l'homme*, which he helped found on

<sup>5</sup>'M. Jules Guesde', *Le Matin*, 2 November 1893. We shall not otherwise give footnote references for citations from newspapers if the title, publication and date are explicitly mentioned in the text.

<sup>6</sup>Étienne Rouanet, 'Gustave Rouanet, un publiciste et parlementaire socialiste face à l'émergence de l'antisémitisme français (1885–1895)', *Cahiers Jaurès*, 3/2016, pp. 57–84.

<sup>7</sup>Francis Arzalier, 'Trois ans de journalisme militant en Languedoc: Jules Guesde à Montpellier', *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut de recherche marxiste*, no. 26, 1986, pp. 49–74.

27 April 1870, as secretary to the editorial board. Here he rubbed shoulders with a medicine student—a certain Paul Brousse—who a decade later became one of his adversaries. Guesde affirmed himself as an ardent republican who supported major structural reforms. There was nothing very original about his ideas, which coincided with the concerns of many republicans: he defended the idea of national sovereignty against any return to the monarchy, sought increased civil liberties, and called for the separation of churches and state. Conversely, he said very little about economic questions. The few considerations we can find, in this regard, concerned the association among producers. At most, in some texts we can detect a certain Proudhonian inspiration—hence a somewhat anarchist bent, but which was on some occasions more statist. In these latter cases, Guesde drew closer to the ideas elaborated in *l'Organisation du travail*, a work by Louis Blanc, for whom cooperatives would necessarily rely on state support. Moreover, *Les droits de l'homme* also received some rather revealing messages of sympathy. Louis Blanc—at that time one of the most visible socialist theorists—himself addressed a letter to Guesde on 1 June 1870, lyrically saluting the existence of such a paper: ‘The idea of yours to publish a newspaper directed by men of the people, with the people’s savings and in the interest of the people, is a noble one. I associate myself with it, from the depths of my soul.’<sup>8</sup> Guesde on occasion even defended members of the International Workingmen’s Association founded in 1864, which brought together the various anarchist and socialist sensibilities of the era. But he acted as a sincere republican democrat attached to public freedoms, not as a convinced socialist.

Above all, like all republicans in this period Guesde was an ardent patriot. France had to pursue its universal destiny, heralded by the French Revolution of 1789. After the terrible defeat against Prussia at Sedan—a death sentence for Napoleon III’s regime—Guesde vigorously mobilised to defend the young Government of National Defence born of the proclamation of the Republic on 4 September 1870. Already on the following day, the 5th, he was at the head of a demonstration in Montpellier which proclaimed the Republic. The day after that, he published an ardent call for mobilisation in his newspaper: ‘So arise and to arms, no longer like a

Francis Arzalier, ‘Jules Guesde à Montpellier (1869–1871)’, *Études héraultaises*, 1987, pp. 107–112.

<sup>8</sup> IISG Amsterdam, Jules Guesde archives (henceforth, IISG J. G.). Letter from Louis Blanc to the founders of *Les Droits de l’Homme*, 18 June 1870.

month ago, in a dynastic interest, for the greater glory of a counterfeit Caesar, like the gladiators in the circus, but as free men, as citizens of a country that has come back into its own possession, for the defence of our reconquered freedoms and our invaded territory'.<sup>9</sup>

Guesde became one of the organisers of the popular movement for national defence in Montpellier. For several days he 'continued to sound the alarm in favour of the Republic and national defence'.<sup>10</sup> In October he warmly saluted Gambetta, in whom he at first placed his full confidence. But the movement fell back from January 1871, faced with a series of defeats. He now founded a section of the 'Parisian Republican Alliance', while a National Assembly elected by universal (male) suffrage gave a large majority to conservatives hostile to the Republic and in favour of peace. But many inhabitants of the capital animated by socialist ideas refused to lay down their arms. On 18 March the Paris Commune was proclaimed. Guesde learned of the news, but it had no real impact where he himself was active. As in most provincial centres, nothing concrete developed, though in neighbouring Narbonne an ephemeral Commune emerged in solidarity with the one in the capital. The information that reached Guesde thus remained very partial. At this time Guesde still defended the libertarians' 'associationist' ideals, as against the excesses of the Commune.

The violent repression of the Communards made Guesde change his tone, as he showed increasing sympathy towards them. For Guesde, 18 March 1871 was the continuation of the patriotism expressed on 4 September 1870 and the pursuit of 'defence to the last'. In April 1871 he was enraged at the idea that the French army might repress the Commune: 'What the Prussians have not dared to do—which is to say, attack the city walls with canons, force a way through, and unleash a column drunk on gunpowder and the blood of the French through this breach, against a part-disarmed population—the Versailles are now going to do'.<sup>11</sup> The Communards were the authentic patriots, faced with traitors.

The *patrie* above all else: up to this point Guesde remained 'little impassioned by the social and economic problem'.<sup>12</sup> Yet the sympathies he had expressed for the Commune during May 1871 were not without

<sup>9</sup> *Les Droits de l'Homme*, no. 96, 6 September 1870.

<sup>10</sup> Adéodat Compère-Morel, *Jules Guesde, le socialisme fait homme 1845–1922*, Paris, Aristide Quillet, 1937, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> *Les Droits de l'Homme*, 19 April 1871.

<sup>12</sup> Adéodat Compère-Morel, *op. cit.*, p. 83.