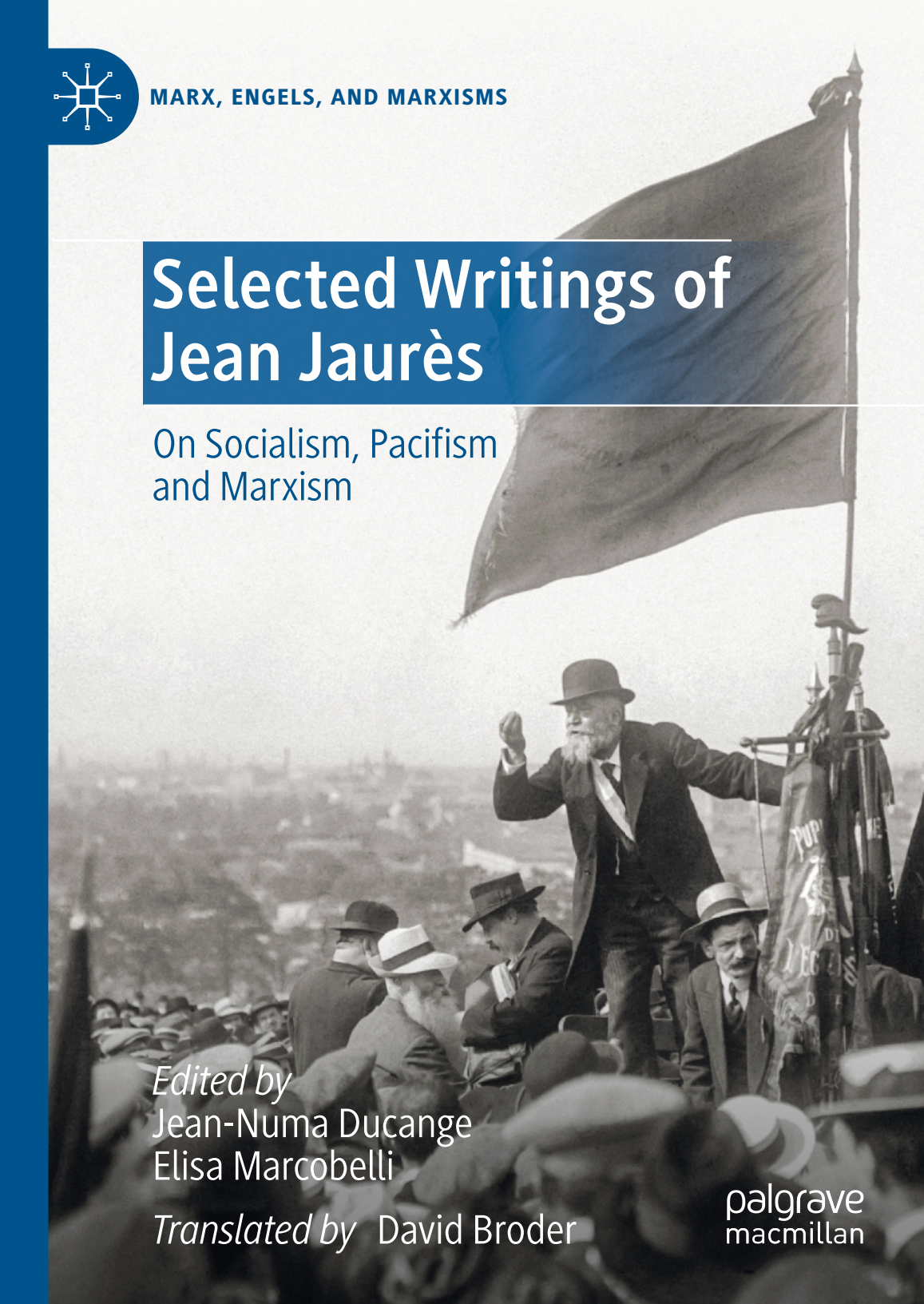

MARX, ENGELS, AND MARXISMS

Selected Writings of Jean Jaurès

On Socialism, Pacifism and Marxism

Edited by
Jean-Numa Ducange
Elisa Marcobelli

Translated by David Broder

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Introduction

Jean Jaurès is one of France's most famous political figures. Many French people have heard of Jaurès because of the streets and public buildings named after him, or even the shops situated on a "Rue Jean-Jaurès," in their own way recalling the socialist tribune's memory. In early 2014, Toulouse University was renamed in his honor, as part of the buildup to commemorations marking the centenary of his assassination in July 1914. But outside the ranks of history buffs and a few hardened militants, how many people actually know Jaurès's works? Surely, very few. Beyond France itself he is even less well known. Only specialists in the history of French socialism or the Third Republic know his name and his writings. Indeed, as soon as we cross the Alps from France into Italy his name disappears from the toponymy: Milan's "Via Jean Jaurès" is 'the only one nationwide. This anthology is intended to help those little-familiar with Jaurès to discover him. It does so through a selection of his most emblematic texts, covering some of the great political questions of his time.

From the Republic to Socialism

Born in 1859 to a bourgeois family in Castres, Jaurès was hardly fated to become one of history's great socialist leaders. His first steps in public life did little to distinguish him from other "opportunist" republicans—as the men of the center-left were called, in this period. This brilliant

student, educated at the École normale supérieure (where he achieved an *agrégation* in philosophy) and university lecturer, then became deputy mayor of Toulouse and, already in 1885, a young MP. Initially hostile to the socialists, he could have settled for a comfortable political career in the South of France, just like many others did.

But over the years from 1889 to 1892, Jaurès gradually "passed across to socialism."[1] There were two major factors at work in this "conversion," which has long been a subject of discussion among historians. One was Jaurès's study of German philosophy: he devoted his complementary thesis to *The Origins of German Socialism* (1892), a topic which he discovered especially thanks to his discussions with the École normale supérieure librarian Lucien Herr. The other was the importance of the social question, of which he became conscious through his contact with the miners of Carmaux—men facing often horrific working conditions, whom he met during a major strike in 1892. By this point, Jaurès had very much become a socialist. In that era, socialists were still a scattered array of loosely organized circles; ten years later, Jaurès would urgently set about uniting these different currents. For the moment, he was, at least, certainly to be counted among socialist ranks, and in 1893 he was elected an MP for the Tarn on the basis of the programme of the Parti Ouvrier led by Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue—men both close, in this period, to the ideas of Karl Marx. But more than these others, Jaurès's socialism would preserve its republican moorings, which a good proportion of the socialists influenced by Marxism in fact considered rather suspect. Was the Republic not fundamentally "bourgeois"—as its violent anti-worker repression tended to demonstrate?

Jaurès, for his part, thought that there was a deep bond of continuity between the Republic and socialism. For sure, the *current* Republic was imperfect. But for him, it remained the best political regime in existence, and it was within the Republic that socialism could be gradually developed. For Jaurès, the social Republic could not spring from some great cataclysm, as Marx and Engels had forecast in 1848, but rather would arise from a gradualist approach which took proper account of republicanism's achievements. This political outlook also ought to be set in connection with Jaurès's great admiration for the legacy of the French Revolution of

[1] Jean Jaurès, 'Le Passage au socialisme (1889–1893)', in *Œuvres*, vol. II, Paris, Fayard, 2011.

1789. Over 1889–90, he established a close continuity between the revolutionary struggles of 1789 and contemporary socialism. Between 1900 and 1904 he published the first volumes (and they were several thousand pages long!) of a vast *Histoire socialiste de la France contemporaine* he had launched; these initial tomes were dedicated to the early years of the French Revolution from 1789 to 1794. To read the introduction (1900) and conclusion (1908) to these volumes—texts reproduced in this present anthology—offers us a marvelous understanding of who Jaurès was and what his vision of socialism was. These pages are deeply imbued with an incorrigible optimism in the future, which especially shines through from the 1908 conclusion.

Jaurès, the Republicans, the Socialists, and the Syndicalists

If we cannot understand Jaurès without reading him, we also need to situate him in relation to the other great political figures and forces of his time. During his own lifetime, Jaurès was no better known than Jules Guesde or other republican personalities, even though posterity has often had much less of a place for these latter. Fundamentally, he never broke with the republicans and especially the radicals, with whom he had, as Rémy Pech put it, "a dispute but not a rupture."[2] His relations with the different socialist currents (of which there were five, at the end of the nineteenth century!) varied with the times. Jaurès had difficult relations with the "Guesdists," the partisans of Jules Guesde considered to have first introduced Marxism to France. An important cleavage divided him from the allies of Jules Guesde and Édouard Vaillant over the decisive question of the state, or more precisely, of governmental participation. In 1899, Alexandre Millerand became the first socialist minister to join a government, as part of Waldeck-Rousseau's cabinet. In the context of the Dreyfus affair and the threat to the republican regime, for some the notion of a government of "republican defense" justified participation in exercising power. Jaurès was part of this latter camp, while Guesde and Vaillant damned what they saw as an inadmissible compromise.

[2] Jean-Michel Ducomte and Rémy Pech, *Jaurès et les radicaux: une dispute sans rupture*, Toulouse, Privat, 2011.

This dividing line would split them also with regard to their attitudes toward captain Dreyfus: whereas Guesde considered it damaging to throw workers into struggle on behalf of a bourgeois army officer, Jaurès—after a little hesitation—invoked a principle of humanity that stood above class divides. For the socialist tribune, it was necessary to stand alongside figures like Zola, who accused the justice system of partiality and complicity in the military's efforts to cover up its institutional failings. *Les Preuves*—whose foreword is included in this volume—was one of Jaurès's great texts on this subject. Yet on some points, there were bridges between Jaurès and the Guesdists; sometimes these latter were fairly quick to give up on some of their more doctrinaire aspects, for instance on the question of small peasant property. While in some Marxists' estimation, the small property would disappear together with capitalist concentration, the majority of French socialists considered it something that needed to be defended. At the Nantes Congress of the (Guesdist) Parti ouvrier français in 1894, there was agreement between Jaurès and Karl Marx's son-in-law Lafargue—a Guesde ally—on this point.[3] But from 1899 onward, such areas of agreement rather thinned out. There were, indeed, two different methods—the *deux méthodes* which Guesde and Jaurès debated at a memorable public meeting in 1900, upon the invitation of the mayor of Lille.[4] Two years later, Jaurès's support for Émile Combes's new government followed this same logic: backing the Radicals' reform measures, but this time without direct socialist participation in government, Jaurès was elected vice-president of the Chamber of Deputies. He now became the most important political figure, alongside Aristide Briand, in allowing the vote on—and then the promulgation of—the law on the separation of churches and state in late 1905. Some socialists asked why Jaurès went so far in this alliance with the Radicals on the question of state secularism: wasn't the essential thing to conquer new social and political rights for workers, taking up a perspective of overthrowing capitalism? For Jaurès, who never abandoned the horizon of revolution, it was necessary to break workers from the grip of Catholicism. How could anyone imagine that a society still operating under the orders of the Church could be receptive to socialist ideas? Anything that could allow for a secularization of

[3] Gilles Candar and Jean-Numa Ducange, 'Paul Lafargue: la propriété paysanne et l'évolution économique', *Cahiers Jaurès*, no 195–196, pp. 70–80.

[4] Jean Jaurès, Jules Guesde, Rosa Luxemburg, *Les Discours des deux méthodes*, Paris, Le Passager clandestin, 2014 (2nd edition).

citizens' minds, even while respecting individual religious beliefs, was a step forward for socialism. Again, here, there was a sharp difference of method. Yet in the meantime, a few months before the law on separation of churches and state, the splits among France's socialists had finally been healed: whatever their differences, they all came together at the Le Globe congress in Paris in April 1905 to found the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière (SFIO), the now unified socialist party. More than anything, Jaurès feared that this unity would crack and thus socialism would fall back into the fragmented condition it had been in before 1905. Unity had been one of his life's great works, and he had a particular attachment to it. The subsequent splits in the French Left would likely have badly wounded him…

Formally speaking, the rhetoric of Guesde's supporters prevailed in the new party's statutes.[5] But at the SFIO's Toulouse Congress in 1908, there was no doubt that Jaurès's viewpoint chalked up some decisive victories. When, two years later, Guesde expressed opposition to the first law on "worker and peasant" pensions—to his eyes, the bill offered only weak guarantees to those on the lowest incomes—he was very much isolated compared to Jaurès who, despite the law's distinct weaknesses, voted for it because it would at least mean that the Republic would recognize the *principle* of pensions.[6] In the long run, it was, indeed, his perspective that prevailed among France's socialists, even though it would continue to be counterbalanced by other political choices.

What, at root, was Jaurès's perspective? A sensible gradualist and reformist attitude, as against the other socialists who wanted to overthrow capitalism? We should be careful not to plaster the realities of another era onto the socialism of 1900: the oppositions and ruptures that emerged after the Russian Revolution of 1917 were not already evident in Jaurès's own time. Some have spoken of a typically Jauresian "revolutionary reformism",[7] a "Jauresian synthesis" which resists any over simplistic oppositions incapable of capturing the thought of a plural and complex French socialism. Indeed, there was no ready-made model

[5] Claude Willard, *Jules Guesde, l'apôtre et la loi*, Paris, Éditions ouvrières, 1991.

[6] Gilles Candar et Guy Dreux, *Une loi pour les retraites. Débats socialistes et syndicalistes autour de la loi de 1910*, Lormont, Le Bord de l'eau, 2010.

[7] See especially Bruno Antonini, *État et socialisme chez Jean Jaurès*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004.

for revolution such as the Bolshevik revolution later proposed, notably including the centralized party-form as theorized by Lenin. Jaurès had no theory of the party, and even if he opposed the most centralizing tendencies among the Guesdists inspired by the German model, he proposed no alternative conception. This, even as he remained attached to the existence of a political party that would be pluralist yet united on the essential questions. Doubtless, he had no hesitation in referring to the example of the French Revolution of 1789–1794. But he did this less with a view to repeating the particular phases it had gone through, than as a matter of drawing inspiration from the great principles which had bloomed in that era. And when great upheavals struck other countries and revolution again seemed to be on the order of the day, Jaurès's thoughts would spontaneously turn to the French Revolution. When, in January 1905, a revolution began on the soil of the Tsar's despised authoritarianism—raising hopes across Europe—his lyrical speeches spontaneously mobilized the glorious French revolutionary tradition. The word "revolution" was, indeed, very much part of the Jauresian vocabulary, but it did not appear to stand in contradiction with partial victories through reforms. Tellingly, in expounding his political vision Jaurès used the formula "revolutionary evolution," which he had early on adopted from a formula used by Karl Marx.[8] If one wanted to apply a label to Jaurès, at the very limit one could term him a "radical reformist": deeply pacifist, he was distrustful of violent and brutal ruptures and, in this sense, he clearly distinguished himself from many other socialists with a stronger inclination toward a revolutionary rupture with the existing order. But he also distrusted the republicans' conservatism—and had no hesitation in speaking up for political and social reforms that some considered dangerous or impossible. Here again, his decision to defend particular laws (on pensions, on secularism) was well-indicative of his approach.

Jaurès was, moreover, a socialist attentive to other sensibilities, convinced as he was that the appropriateness of a given political line would become clear through debate—even if that debate was robust and sometimes violent. This is the spirit in which we should understand his creation of *l'Humanité* in April 1904. He never saw this "socialist daily" as an organ subservient to the party, but rather as a free tribune for the working-class and socialist movements of the time. He stuck to this

[8] Jean-Paul Scot, *Jaurès et le réformisme révolutionnaire*, Paris, Seuil, 2014.

pluralist decision to the last, even if it sometimes risked stormy polemics and splits with some of his friends. For evidence of this, we need only look to a 1911 editorial in *l'Humanité* where he paid an emphatic tribute to Paul Lafargue, who had just committed suicide together with his wife. This article came just a few weeks after Lafargue and Jaurès had clashed over major disagreements with a manifest harshness of tone. For Jaurès, his activity as a journalist was essential: before (and sometimes in parallel with) his work for *l'Humanité*, he was an active contributor to *La Dépêche* and *La Petite République*. A man of action, he published hundreds of newspaper articles, often much longer and denser than one might read today; for proof of that, one need only consult some of his pieces, which could at times even be difficult to follow given the sheer volume of historical and philosophical references they mobilized. Jaurès the journalist was a remarkable example of a politician who kept pace with the most immediate current events, without ever losing a depth of analysis that was bound to a vast culture.[9]

One particular point worth mentioning regards trade unionism. The situation in the France of this period was rather particular. The Confédération générale du travail (CGT), founded in 1895 was animated by a revolutionary-syndicalist majority very hostile to political parties and parliamentarism, who considered the "general strike" as the working class's main means of action and who characterized universal suffrage as a sham which prevented the active mobilization of the popular masses.[10]

At the Amiens congress in 1906, the CGT jealously defended its autonomy from the SFIO, in a text that has gone down in history as the "Charter of Amiens." Jaurès obviously opposed the CGT members' ideas as expressed in this document, for he remained attached to parliamentary, republican forms of political action. But there was a notable evolution in his understanding of the general strike after 1905: well aware of the strength that the CGT's syndicalism represented, and perhaps also conscious of the limits of parliamentary democracy, which could not alone suffice, he came to consider specific uses of the general strike as a useful means of action. A real—and fruitful—dialogue thus developed between Jaurès and the revolutionary-syndicalist CGT starting in the years from

[9] Charles Silvestre, *Jaurès, la passion du journaliste*, Pantin, Le Temps des cerises, 2010.

[10] Miguel Chueca, *Déposséder les possédants. La grève générale aux « temps héroïques » du syndicalisme révolutionnaire (1895–1906)*, Marseilles, Agone, 2008.

1906 to 1908, in a context in which Georges Clemenceau's government repressed workers' strikes.[11] Jaurès again distinguished himself from the partisans of Guesde, who wanted to subordinate the union to the party and saw the former only as an appendage of the latter. We again see this in Jaurès's attitudes toward the cooperative movement: unlike other socialists who held that it had to be placed in service of the party, Jaurès saw it as one of the means of social emancipation, alongside the SFIO and the union. He arrived at the consideration that a socialist militant must find their place in all three poles of party, union and cooperative. This showed his real feeling for the workers' movement's diverse forms of expression, where others insisted that one form must necessarily be prioritized over the others. He paid occasional tributes to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, father of anarchism and an influential figure in the workers' movements of the 1840s–60s, himself attached to the cooperative idea. Obviously, as against the anarchists, Jaurès believed in the regulating action of the state. But he also sometimes showed his attentiveness to arguments criticizing the bureaucracy and authoritarianism of certain republican and socialist currents. There was a Proudhonian or even libertarian streak in Jaurès, even though it was not the dominant one.

Jaurès, Germany and Marxism

Jaurès could understand and read German much better than English—indeed, this was often true in the international socialist milieu of the time. He had many friends in Europe, especially among the Belgian socialists, like Émile Vandervelde, leader of the Parti ouvrier belge and sometime president of the Socialist International. But in this period, German socialism was very much the model. Jaurès entertained a rather particular relationship with German socialism and its developments. As we have said, his *thèse complémentaire*, written in Latin, was a study of the origins of this movement and, most importantly, he regularly referred to it in many articles and speeches. There were several reasons for this focus. Firstly, Jaurès was a philosopher by training, and the Germany of Kant and Hegel was an essential reference point in this era. When Jaurès became a historian, with his *Histoire socialiste de la France contemporaine*, he took a close

[11] Alain Boscus, *Jean Jaurès, la CGT et le syndicalisme révolutionnaire*, Toulouse, Institut CGT d'histoire sociale, 2010.

interest in the French Revolution's impact on Germany, and he personally wrote the 1907 volume dedicated to the Franco-German war of 1870. Germany was also the country where the first independent workers' party in Europe had been founded, by Ferdinand Lassalle back in 1863; this was one of the components of what would become the Social Democratic Party in 1890. Of course, this was also the land of origin of Marx and Engels, and indeed of "Marxism" (a term which entered general use in the 1880s)—the doctrinal reference point for the SPD, the most powerful party in the Socialist International founded in 1889. Without this International, coordination among Europe's socialists and their collective action in the face of the danger of war would have been impossible. This explains why, despite the distance which separated Jaurès's republicanism from the Marxism of the German Social Democrats, the French socialist tribune always maintained a keen eye toward developments in that party and was active in the International's own structures. He published multiple articles on the SPD's internal debates and especially with regard to the "revision" of Marxism, revolving around Eduard Bernstein.

One of the great moments of this friendship, colored by intense debates and even sharp opposition, was the Amsterdam Congress of the Socialist International in 1904, which saw a notable clash between Jaurès's ideas and those of SPD party president August Bebel. Amsterdam was a decisively important congress, for the French: a motion was passed strongly exhorting the French socialists to unite, and this would encourage the creation of the SFIO in 1905. But the Republic was also a focus of debate. Formally at least, the SPD continued to call for a German Republic, in continuity with the ideals of the revolution of 1848. But this demand was increasingly pushed into the background. As we have seen, Jaurès remained firmly attached to the republican form, an imperfect foundation but a necessary one for any further advance to be made. Yet Bebel as well as many German Marxists like Karl Kautsky—the great intellectual authority of this era—considered Jaurès imbued with "republican superstitions." For them—and, as we have emphasized, French Marxists like Guesde and Lafargue—the republican form at most opened the way to a clearer expression of class struggles, allowing the clash between bourgeoisie and proletariat to appear with sharper contours. Sometimes they considered it outright superfluous, in light of political developments in France and Germany: had Bismarck's German empire not granted much more generous social guarantees than those offered by the French Republic? What good was there in celebrating a Republic which seemed