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Emmanuel Jousse (dir.), *Œuvres de Jean Jaurès*,
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- 1 The Société des études jaurésiennes has undertaken to publish the works of Jean Jaurès. This volume is the most recent addition to a seventeen-volume project. The span of time covered is brief, the years 1910-1912, but Jaurès, not much past fifty at the time, was at the height of his powers. He churned out articles by the hundreds for *L'Humanité* and *La Dépêche*. He delivered speeches to SFIO party congresses. And he engaged in lengthy debates in the Chamber of Deputies. These are the materials from which the present volume is constructed. The choice of subtitle, the voice of socialism, has been made with care, for what the reader hears is a master orator at work, addressing the issues of the day in tones by turns argumentative and pedagogical. Much of the speech is tactical. Jaurès staked out policy positions, even as he whipped up the faithful and chided opponents. Yet, all the while, Jaurès's words were guided by a vision, by a pragmatic one of a possible tomorrow but also by one more uplifting of an ideal future lying just over the horizon. They are guided too by a principled understanding of how to get from here to there. Jaurès knew how to transmute the drab of day-to-day politics into something aspirational that made a better world seem within reach.
- 2 Let us begin with the major issues of the day. There were four, starting with the pension bill of 1910. The proposed legislation provided for the creation of worker and peasant retirement funds. The second issue was the great rail workers strike of 1911, which the prime minister at the time, Aristide Briand, crushed with an inventive repressive measure. He called up the strikers for military service, sacking those who did not answer the call and subjecting the rest to martial discipline. That very same year, the Second Moroccan Crisis erupted, which concluded with the imposition of a French Protectorate over most of the sultanate and the cession of a Spanish sphere of influence in the country's south. These are all well remembered incidents. Less so is the question of proportional representation. Under the then existing electoral system, departments were broken down into arrondissements and voters cast ballots for the individual candidate they liked best. Jaurès favored larger, multi-seat constituencies, with the electorate choosing between party lists and with winning seats awarded in proportion to the vote any one list garnered. It is puzzling at first glance why a socialist was so invested in the particularities of voting procedure. Yet Jaurès was, and in the end, it becomes clear why the issue so preoccupied him.
- 3 Jaurès had no doubt where he stood on these concerns and did not shy away from a scrap over details of policy. A pension bill worthy of the name, unlike the one proposed, would, he argued, allow working people to retire at sixty, not sixty-five. Jaurès advocated additionally that all interested parties—wage-earners, employers, and the



state—make a contribution to retirement funds and that workers have a hand in fund management. As to the railroad strike, Jaurès expressed outrage that the government punished people for exercising what was after all a legal right. He demanded the reinstatement of fired workers, singling out Prime Minister Briand by name as a turncoat who in younger days had been a partisan of the general strike but was now an apostle of the heavy hand. To Jaurès's mind, the government's conduct in Morocco was not just unjust but reckless. France had taken over the Sultan's finances, sucking the regime dry such that it lost credit among its own people who were driven to revolt. Then France marched in to reimpose order, nettling the Germans—who had an interest in Moroccan affairs recognized by treaty—and the Spaniards too, thereby risking a general European crisis. What Jaurès execrated about the *scrutin d'arrondissement* was the way it turned elections into personality contests. The system favored, not the candidate with the best platform or ideas, but the one who was best known or, worse, the one who made use of corrupt techniques to cobble together a loyal voting clientele. The greatest offender in this regard was the Parti Radical. It boasted a noble past, having fought hard to build the Republic, and a vestige of that nobility lingered on. The party still at times spoke in the accents of social reform, but all too often, it contented itself with playing politics, maneuvering and intriguing, promising whatever it took to win seats and then delivering next to nothing.

- 4 France, however, needed parties with clear-cut programs, strong enough to make good on what they promised. That is where proportional representation came in. In winner-take-all elections, socialists often came up short against hostile party coalitions. This would no longer happen under proportional representation. On top of that, the *scrutin de liste* empowered parties. It was parties, after all, which composed the candidate lists. To be sure, personalities would still count for something but what the party stood for would count for even more, and strong parties, Jaurès firmly believed, were good for democracy. It was in the name of democracy in fact that he took aim at upper houses across the Atlantic world, inveighing against the American and French Senates, the German Bundesrat, and the British House of Lords as bastions of plutocratic and landed privilege that stood in the way of progress. Sweep away such anti-democratic debris, Jaurès urged, while at the same time reconfiguring the electoral system, and the path would be cleared for an energized SFIO, working in partnership with a Parti Radical restored to itself, to enact real and not watered-down reform. A decent pension system would be just the first step. The way that the railway strike unfolded angered Jaurès for several reasons. It was not only that employers refused to negotiate. That much was to be expected of management. The state, however, was in a position to play a mediating role, in a strong position in fact as the rail companies were in a concessionary relationship to the state, operating under contract with it. And yet, the state refused to help, choosing to suppress worker protest instead. In a democratic France, state-sponsored arbitration would be the order of the day. Even more than that : in sectors, like the railroad industry, where companies exercised monopoly power, Jaurès envisioned the state moving beyond mediation toward full-on control, nationalizing (not his word) the companies involved and transforming them into *services publics* (this phrase, he did use). In the scrum of the political fight, Jaurès sketched out what a socialist path forward would look like. Welfare reform, arbitration, and nationalizations, these were the building blocks of a socialist future, of an *État social*, as Jaurès called it, more just and equitable than the Republic as it then existed. That future, as it turned out, was not so far off, for in more ways than one, Jaurès's vision

anticipated the reform program that Léon Blum, a fervent admirer of Jaurès, would attempt to implement in the Popular Front era.

- 5 Jaurès was firmly persuaded, moreover, that what was good for France was good for the world. He may not have been the most militant anti-imperialist. Jaurès thought it a good thing that Morocco open itself up to “influences européennes (p. 547).” But a genuine civilizing influence, he believed, was not one imposed by force of arms. There were alternatives to violence when differences arose, and Jaurès considered them all. He was well-disposed to the federalist constitution of the British Commonwealth, which allowed participating states to pool their strength without giving up their individual personalities. The Liberal Party in England thought to resolve the Irish question by granting Home Rule. Jaurès liked this idea too and proposed a similar arrangement for the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. He was no revanchist. He was willing to let the provinces go, provided that the German Reich granted the population self-governing powers. When it came to Morocco, Jaurès proposed negotiation and arbitration as the best means to manage a bad situation, one of France’s own creating. What the world needed, in fact, was a permanent international body with arbitration authority and a code of international law to back up its efforts. On this score too, Jaurès’s vision was anticipatory, calling to mind, not so much Blum and the Popular Front, as Albert Thomas and the League of Nations.
- 6 This vision, anticipatory and inspiring as it might have been, was not the be-all and end-all of socialism as Jaurès understood it. Certain rhetorical flourishes crop up again and again in his writings. He looked to a democratic future, based on “le suffrage universel” and “l’arbitrage universel” (p. 26). He imagined a socialist economy, not as some bureaucratic, top-down machine, but as “une unité fédérative de groupes de producteurs (p. 165).” And he imagined an international order, purged of national egoism, that drew strength and stability from “l’universelle fédération des peuples (p. 633).” All this, a boon for “la civilisation humaine (p. 139),” would be made possible by “l’organisation universelle du prolétariat (p. 500).” In Jaurès’s vocabulary, the words *federalism*, *universality*, and *civilization* carried special weight, opening vistas as they did onto a world of human flourishing and possibility, a world that, as Jaurès conceived it, was organized and free at the same time. This was the real promise of democratic socialism.
- 7 So, there was a near term and a far term in Jaurès’s scheme of the things. The former was within reach, but it was a steppingstone *en route* to something yet grander. Jaurès himself had no doubt that history was progressing in the right direction, stage by stage. The task of the SFIO was to help move things along. Jaurès was a partisan of organizations: of parties, trade unions, even state institutions provided they were rightly constituted. What made organizations potent was the upwelling of popular energy that they harnessed and focused on constructive ends. Not for Jaurès the violence and sabotage of *minorités agissantes*. As a tactician, he was given, rather, to verbal prodding and methodical action that built pressure. And to build maximum pressure, the proletariat in all its manifestations had to be united. On the national level, that meant extending a hand to the syndicalist and cooperative movements, as Jaurès did, and on the international front, it meant cultivating fraternal relations with socialist parties elsewhere and with the institutional expression of that fraternal impulse, the Second International. The hard, patient work of organization and the leverage that organization afforded in the push for social reform and ever greater

democracy would in time—in time, it should be emphasized—bring the socialist dream to realization.

- 8 Jaurès himself had a role to play in this unfolding, urging on and educating with the power of his oratory. It was a role, as this volume demonstrates, that he took on and performed with unsurpassed gusto. Yet as the reader knows, Jaurès's time on stage was to be cut short. The volume concludes in September 1912. All too soon, less than two years later, Jaurès's voice, the voice of socialism, would be silenced.