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Author(s): Charles A. Beard

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A SOCIALIST HISTORY OF FRANCE 1

SOCCIALIST writers have made varied and extensive contributions to the literature of economics; and it cannot be denied that their criticisms and suggestions have greatly influenced the development of economic doctrine.² In the field of history Marx and his followers undoubtedly have helped to turn the attention of historians from purely political and diplomatic affairs to the more permanent and fundamental forces in the development and conflict of nations, but in this sphere the socialists have not been so productive. Apart from some disconnected studies, they have written little history. The reason for this is not hard to find. The immediate purposes of party propaganda are apparently not served by lengthy treatises on large historical themes; and, generally speaking, the effective demand for such works would not justify their publication. Nevertheless, the avowed purpose of the Socialists to force a disintegration of the intellectual synthesis upon which the defence of the present order rests will compel them, in time, to re-open the whole question of historical interpretation and construction. The first attempt of this sort—the first attempt to rewrite history on a large scale—is made by Jaurès and his collaborators in their history of France since 1789. If the present plan is followed, the undertaking is to be a large one; for five stout volumes, four by Jaurès and one by Deville, bring the story only to the close of the period of the Directory.

According to the introduction, the design of the work is to tell the people, the workmen and peasants of France, the story of their country from the eve of the Revolution to the present day, but with a propagandist and moral purpose. The underlying philosophy is that of Marx and Engels. The fundamental force in history is economic, but the complex phenomena of social life, as the authors insist, cannot be re-

¹ *Histoire Socialiste, 1789–1900. Constituante, Législative, Convention jusqu' au 9 Thermidor, par Jean Jaurès; Du 9 Thermidor au 18 Brumaire, par Gabriel Deville.* Paris, Jules Rouff & Cie. Vols. i and ii, 1316 pp., vols. iii and iv, 1825 pp., vol. v, 596 pp.

² *Cf. Marshall, Principles of Economics, p. 64.*

duced to an economic formula.¹ As it would be false and futile to deny the relation of thought and emotion to the economic system and the precise forms of production, so it would be puerile to explain summarily by the evolution of economic relations the entire movement of human thought (vol. i, p. 7). Moreover, with the development of society, consciousness will play an increasing part in the shaping of institutions and social life; and in time man will rise from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom (vol. i, p. 8). History must recount and explain the movements of the past; but, according to Jaurès, it has also a moral function: it should inspire men to work for an ideal; it should keep alive the memory of men who have done their duty as they saw it and without fear or hypocrisy.² For these reasons the volumes are dedicated to Marx, Michelet and Plutarch.

Thus restricted, the economic interpretation of history will doubtless be accepted by most scholars who avowedly aim at objectivity, though they may not agree that the historian should assume the duties of an ethical teacher—for when he undertakes such a function he usually degenerates into a partisan. Many scholars hold with the late Professor York Powell that the formation and expression of ethical judgments do not fall within the historian's province. Historians will differ, according to their class or personal prejudices, in their distribution of praise or blame; and the inveterate and unwarranted suspicion which the socialist entertains concerning the intellectual honesty and moral probity of the bourgeoisie will strip the socialist Plutarch of almost all modern heroes.

Jaurès' first volume opens with a consideration of the causes of the Revolution. The elections and the *cahiers*, the revolutionary days from June to October, the organic laws, the civil constitution of the clergy and the nationalization of the church property, the federations and the flight to Varennes are the subjects of ten long and badly built chapters. In the review of the causes of the Revolution there is little that is not

¹ Jaurès, vol. i, p. 7: "La complication presque infinie de la vie humaine ne se laisse pas réduire brutalement, mécaniquement, à une formule économique." Similarly, Deville, vol. v, p. 1: "Si le fond économique sert de base aux phénomènes politiques comme aux autres phénomènes sociaux, il n'implique pas fatalement la forme sous laquelle ces phénomènes se produisent."

² Jaurès, vol. 1, p. 9: "Nous saluerons toujours, avec un égal respect, les héros de la volonté, et nous élevant audessus des mêlées sanglantes, nous glorifierons à la fois les republicains bourgeois proscrits en 1851 par le coup d'état triomphant et les admirables combattants prolétariens tombés en juin 1848. . . L'histoire ne dispensera jamais les hommes de vaillance et de la noblesse individuelles."

in accord with the conclusions of non-socialist scholars. There is a full account of the great variety of feudal burdens and of the position of the king, nobility and clergy in the old régime, but M. Jaurès does not regard the French people as the most downtrodden and oppressed on the earth. There were burdens enough, no doubt, but at the same time there were enough small holdings and enough savings hoarded up in spite of the taxes, to encourage the peasants to hope for still better things (vol. i, p. 28). The mediæval corporations which still existed were hindrances to free industry, but it is very easy to overestimate their importance (vol. i, p. 44).

For reasons of space, not for any narrow economic reasons, Jaurès neglects the great writers of the eighteenth century (vol. i, p. 752). He points out the close relation between freedom of thought in science and philosophy and the progress of industry. "The immobility of the economic life of the middle ages was connected with the immobility of its opinions (*de sa vie dogmatique*); and in order that modern production might develop all its energy, destroy all routine and break through all barriers, it was also necessary that modern thought should have all its freedom" (vol. i, p. 24). Moreover he recognizes the profound personal influence which the publicists exercised on the makers of revolutionary history (vol. i, p. 752).

The French state had been formed by monarchic centralization; feudal and ecclesiastical privileges had been curtailed in the interests of the monarchy, but these privileges still weighed upon the people; the bourgeoisie, increasing in numbers and wealth, arrived at a consciousness of class interests and of the possibilities of development which the old régime hampered; financial difficulties precipitated a crisis; the reigning monarch was incapable of founding a bourgeois state or meeting the crisis; hence a political and social cataclysm which left elements of disorder and discontent upon which political intrigues could operate. Such in brief is M. Jaurès' thesis, and there is nothing in it that is particularly original or socialistic—it is a scholarly appreciation of the movement of historical forces.

These general conclusions on the development of revolutionary forces are supported, however, by a detailed analysis of economic conditions and a minute study of the growth of capitalism, especially in Lyons and Bordeaux. Jaurès describes and even names the leaders and organizers of great colonial and manufacturing enterprises, declaring that this catalogue is an enumeration of the forces which were to make the Revolution.

We must examine even to the detail of names, the growth of this daring and brilliant bourgeoisie, at once revolutionary and moderate, in whose name Vergniaud will speak. . . . What force, and what sap! How evident it appears that these bold bourgeois, who start and manage great affairs all over the world, will soon determine to conduct on their own account the general affairs of the country. How we feel that they will soon tire of the insolent guardianship of the indolent nobles, of the parasitical existence of an unfruitful clergy, of the wastefulness of the court and the arbitrary conduct of the governmental bureaux [vol. i, pp. 52, 53].

Here Jaurès is writing history—not a drama in which man seems to act automatically and according to approved philosophical forms. He has his hand on the pulse of true historical forces.

As a partial evidence that the bourgeoisie understood the fundamental nature of the conflict they were waging, M. Jaurès devotes many pages to Barnave, whose *Introduction de la Révolution française* displayed a remarkable insight into the economic causes of the struggle. Long before Marx, Barnave had written: "As soon as industry and commerce have entered into the life of a nation and have created a new source of wealth for the support of the working class, a revolution in political institutions begins. A new distribution of wealth produces a new distribution of power" (cited vol. i, p. 101).

With a correct appreciation of the part played by Paris in the Revolution, Jaurès has made a careful study of the economic development and the class conditions in "the capital of the bourgeois Revolution, the center of the great movement" (vol. i, p. 108). His scrutiny fails to reveal any appreciable solidarity of labor or antagonism to the bourgeoisie (vol. i, p. 136). In the rural districts, however, he finds a class conflict growing out of a clearly discernible clash of interests (vol. i, p. 220).

In accord with Champion, our author protests against Taine and all the ideologues who regard the Revolution as proceeding from abstract theories. "The alleged revolutionary declamation is a mere phrase: a world of sufferings and of abuses, and a world of institutions also, is contained and, as it were, heaped up in each of these *cahiers*" (vol. i, p. 155). It was not the extravagances of the theorists that precipitated the crisis. Necker was not a statesman and could not meet the financial situation; Mirabeau failed in his design of making the king chief of the revolution; the reorganization of the municipal system of Paris, though placing the bourgeoisie in power, multiplied points of contact between the government and a people inclined towards democracy; vehemence and continuity of action gave power to the most zealous;

the Republic was thus forced upon a people wholly unprepared for it, and the revolutionary disorder was precipitated.

Although conforming to the views of most students of the Revolution, Jaurès' treatment of the famous night of August 4 will be extremely illuminating to those who fondly suppose that this was the occasion of a voluntary surrender of privilege and sacrifice of property on grounds of abstract right. The *cahiers* had shown an almost universal demand for fundamental changes in seignorial rights; the revolutionary ferment throughout the country made the situation dangerous; and it is evident that the Assembly was conscious of the danger. The speeches of Vicomte de Noailles and the Duc d' Aiguillon were evidently prepared in advance; they were based on a cool calculation of the situation; they were intended to save what could still be saved by the minimum of concessions. What the nobles surrendered had been already abolished by the peasant uprisings, and all the really important feudal privileges were abrogated only on condition of indemnity to the last penny and of their continuation until payment. This was a condition which the bourgeoisie could accept without endangering any of their landed rights. The importance of the August night must not be underestimated, however; for not only were the peasants shortly afterward freed from heavy burdens, but they ceased to live under the shadow of seignorial power and began to develop a democratic spirit. The process by which the August decree was carried out is fully described.

In his long chapter on the formulation of the organic laws, Jaurès naturally shows greatest interest in the discussion of the democratic measures, though all the laws are treated in detail. Three reasons are assigned for the restricted suffrage adopted by the Constituent Assembly. The bourgeoisie, without having a distinct class fear, felt some uneasiness about admitting the mob to power; in the experience of Turgot in the Limousin they found some reason to suspect that the poor would lean toward the nobles and clergy; and finally, since the philosophers had prepared the revolution, there was little thought of associating the ignorant in the work.

On the basis of a detailed statistical study of the distribution of church property, the social results of the nationalization are enumerated. A large number of people were committed to the support of the Revolution by purchase of the confiscated property; the reverence for the clergy was diminished; the political power of the forces of the old régime was undermined by the removal of the economic basis; rural democracy was reinforced by the increase of independent landholders; conservatism was strengthened by the approximation of the interests of

the small holders with those of the upper classes ; and the productivity of the soil was increased.

To give color of equity to the immense expropriation, the Assembly had to assume the burden of supporting the church, and therefore it became involved in the fundamental problems of ecclesiastical organization. In view of the present ecclesiastical situation in France, Jaurès' views are interesting. He has little patience with the partisans who reproach the Assembly for not settling the church and state problem once for all by separation. At that time concrete forces did not exist to support such action ; by centuries of inheritance and training catholicism was woven into the very fibre of French popular life : it required the violent opposition of the clergy to the Revolution, their complicity with the enemies of liberty and the crimes of the Vendée to turn the people from the clergy and Christianity. Jaurès even defends the assumption of the ecclesiastical budget by the state, not as a debt created by the expropriation but as a historical necessity accompanying the nationalization (vol. i, p. 541).

On the subject of the war with Europe Jaurès is critical and illuminating. By a long analysis of documents he arrives at the conclusion that the conflict was largely the result of political machinations. He shows clearly that the declarations of the powers against France were neutralized by the situations in which they were placed at the time, and, what is more important, that the agitators who urged the war were conscious of the weakness of possible combinations of the powers. The king was a vacillating traitor, but the powers were hesitating or impotent. The Legislative Assembly, instead of carefully watching the king and conciliating the powers, did the opposite. Only in war could the revolutionary energy be excited and maintained, intrigues exposed, the king put to the test and forced to submit to the Revolution or be overthrown (vol. ii, pp. 796, 812, 815, 816). Jaurès also devotes considerable attention to the causes of the war between France and England. He maintains that this war could have been avoided if England had rendered French propaganda innocuous by domestic political reforms and if France had renounced revolutionary propaganda and had given England assurance that her interests on the continent and the treaties she had guaranteed would be respected. Here it seems that our author has partially forgotten his economic thesis and has fallen into the habit of those historians who imagine that history can be written from diplomatic notes and parliamentary speeches. For more than one hundred years France and England had been engaged in a determined struggle for colonial and commercial dominion, and the forces which impelled France to war in 1778 were not inactive in 1793.

While Jaurès' views of politics and war are interesting, they are perhaps less useful than his study of the social and political ideas of Europe in their relation to the Revolution (vol. iii, pp. 442-854). He finds several reasons why Germany was relatively impervious to the revolutionary propaganda. In Germany political divisions impeded collective action; there was no Paris; there was no rich bourgeois class striving for economic and political power; the intellectual classes were conciliated by the liberty offered at petty courts and the patronage bestowed by petty princes; the political intrigues of Prussia and Austria consumed a great deal of energy; and there was no general assembly to form a centre for national activity. There was a great deal of intellectual ferment in Germany and there was much interest in the revolution; but the Germans were mild and incoherent theorists. Wieland, the boldest and clearest of them all, contented himself with the practical program of education under princely patronage (vol. iii, p. 489). Pestalozzi had a true passion for the people, but he did not lift his voice against the arbitrary power of seignors and bailiffs or advocate a democratic organization of justice or popular administration of the commune (vol. iii, p. 500). Under its mystical forms the teaching of Lessing was fundamentally revolutionary; thrown violently into the world, his ideas would have revolutionized philosophical and political systems; but Lessing's principles had no immediate force because his grand doctrine was that all eternity was at his disposal. Kant extended scientific criticism to political institutions, but it was only from the governments themselves that he expected reforms. As for Goethe,

In the soul of Faust there is no trace of the great emotion for revolution and for humanity. When the old and weary scholar is about to drink the cup of death, he is held back for an instant by the pious and pure song of the simple souls: "Christ is arisen." The bells that chime in his ears ring the song of the past; none of them rings the song of the future, the universal revolutionary liberation of men (vol. iii, p. 532).

Jaurès devotes more than two hundred pages to a study of English conditions. His comparison of Smith and the physiocrats is striking and valuable. The doctrines of the latter were a disconcerting mixture of progressive and retrograde ideas; they were the theories of a people not yet sure of its destiny, a people which did not know how to reconcile with its traditional agricultural power the new forces of production and multiform capitalism which were rising and spreading within the social structure. On the other hand the principles of Smith responded to the conviction of a people ripe for the factory system and the commercial

mastery of the markets of the world. Smith fully recognized the importance of agriculture but he wished it to be an aid, not a hindrance, to industry (vol. iii, p. 659). After comparing the English and French land systems, Jaurès sums up in a remarkable page the contrast between the economic, social and political conditions in the two countries (vol. iii, pp. 726, 727). The policy of Pitt is carefully examined, and that great statesman is characterized as whig reformer, but enemy of democracy, and *par excellence* defender of capitalism and commerce. There are sections on the radicals in England, Paine, Mackintosh, Cowper, Wordsworth and Robert Burns, and a critical appreciation of the controversy which raged around Burke's *Reflections*. Jaurès defends France against Burke's charge of being the victim of chimerical abstractions. He maintains that French history is also founded on realities; but, having no institutional traditions to fall back on, the French used natural rights as a justification for revolutionary notions. Jaurès does not mention what is now established beyond a question, that the traditional liberal interpretation of Magna Carta as a democratic document is utterly unfounded, and that the famous charter of liberties was really a reactionary feudal measure designed to bolster up the interests of the nobility.¹ Jaurès wonders at Burke's paucity of information concerning the real state of France (vol. iii, p. 736) and also at his use of wholly *ex parte* statements.

The fourth volume opens with the trial of the king and closes with the 9th Thermidor. In addition to the full discussion of political events there is a long and valuable chapter on the social theories of the Convention and the revolutionary government. No time is spent in discussing the legality of the action of the Convention in executing the king. France was in a revolutionary state; the suspension of the king and his incarceration were revolutionary acts; the Convention was a revolutionary body, since it was not summoned according to the provisions of the constitution of 1791. The foreign policy and the military organization, the development of factions and their contests from the death of the king to the fall of the Gironde are discussed in some five hundred pages. Jaurès does not seek to explain the complexity of domestic intrigues during the Terror on grounds of class antagonism. Between the social theories of the Gironde and the Mountain he finds no profound divergence; the pretensions of the former as defender of property are attributable to political tactics (vol. iv, p. 1448). It is true that one

¹ See Edward Jenks, in *The Independent Review*, November, 1904, and the qualified views of McKechnie, *Magna Carta*, 1905.

party was supported by bourgeois interests and the other by the people ; but if the Girondists had believed that they could have maintained their supremacy by consenting to the forced and progressive loan and to the *maximum*, they would not have hesitated, as they had no inflexible economic principles. A study of the social theories of Robespierre demonstrates that the prince of revolutionists advocated nothing that was fundamentally opposed to the bourgeois property concept (vol. iv, p. 1565). Robespierre saw that he needed the political support of the proletariat against the Girondists, whose traitorous inertia would have lost the Revolution. He saw in process of formation discontented parties which demanded for the people not only political rights but also certainty of livelihood, and he sought a modification of his theory of property which would attract the support of those who voiced this demand, but he never dreamed of its future developments (vol. iv, p. 1568). Jaurès believes that the law against monopoly was useful at a time when France was practically in a state of siege and that the extensive commercial publicity and the forced circulation of paper money may have prevented disaster,¹ although these measures could not remedy the price-crisis, owing to the scarcity of grain and the decline in the value of the assignats. Like the tension of the Terror and the dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety, these economic measures were abnormal ; they were incompatible with a society founded on individual property and private production ; the strong pressure of economic forces prevented an indefinite extension of the disorganization which weakened public credit and rendered commerce and industry precarious. The revolutionary measures, in other words, had no economic foundation, and France was destined to establish a political system that could give free play to the economic forces released from feudalism, namely, an orderly bourgeois state.

M. Deville takes up the story after the fall of Robespierre and writes the history of the reaction and the Directory. There is little in this period that lends itself to economic treatment. Before the 9th Thermidor the leaders of the Revolution had transformed social relations and adapted them to the economic necessities of their epoch, and a republic transcending the needs of the bourgeoisie—a republic of all the people—was bound to disappear. M. Deville therefore has political and military events to relate, but he also writes sections on Babeuf, finan-

¹ Vol. iv, p, 1783: "La loi du maximum, en même temps qu'elle restituait le crédit des assignats et servait par là merveilleusement le gouvernement révolutionnaire, l'État acheteur, a prévenu les paniques et empêché l'extrême tension des rapports économiques d'aboutir çà et là à des violentes ruptures d'équilibre."

cial legislation, science, commerce and industry. The master idea of French diplomacy was the contest with England—a conflict inevitable so long as France was under the “disastrous influence of the false principle of natural frontiers” (vol. v, p. 380). England never could consent to the annexation of Belgium; and the English commercial power could be broken only by a continental system carried out not by aggrandizement but by arrangements profitable to all parties concerned. This conflict with England is the key to the military situation. Domestic politics consisted of contests between ambitious factions which could not maintain order, and the coup d’ état of 1799 was consummated “to the great joy of the speculators” (vol. v, p. 592).

Such are the leading ideas of the new history of the Revolution so far as they can be reproduced within the limits of a review. The work, in spite of its ominous title and flaming red covers, is not a violent party polemic, but a monumental contribution to the literature dealing with the Revolution. Its interest lies not so much in its originality as in its acceptance of the views of the most recent scholars on the main points. We do not have to accept socialism in order to accept many of the conclusions of MM. Jaurès and Deville; indeed Professor Seligman has demonstrated that socialism and the economic interpretation of history are entirely different propositions. The story is remarkably impartial; and, indeed, there is no reason why an intelligent socialist should not be as impartial as a tory or whig. One who dissents from the views of both tory and liberal may write as scientifically as one who maintains either side. The most scholarly and definitive essay on the canon law in England is by a man who dissents from all churches.

However, the serious student has reason to find fault with Jaurès’ arrangement of his material and his use of documents. There are chapters from four to six hundred pages long without any break in the text to indicate transitions. There is no index, and the tables of contents are so meagre as to be almost useless. Printed and manuscript materials are extensively used; long and valuable quotations are made from rare and curious works; but there are no references to the volumes, editions or pages except in Deville’s part. There is no way of telling how thoroughly evidence has been sifted or of verifying statements. There are many misprints and mistakes in dates. If Jaurès would recast his material, document it thoroughly, treat related topics consecutively, break the chapters up into sections and provide a useful table of contents, scholars would find the value of the work greatly increased.

CHARLES A. BEARD.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.