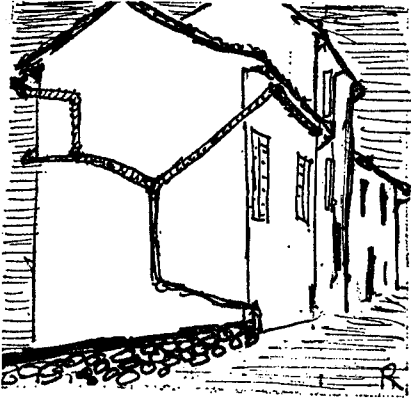


Thomas J. Spinner, Jr.

## Jean Jaures—Socialist Tribune



THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 was undoubtedly remembered by many still living, while scores of others have reflected upon the immediate event which triggered the first World War. Unfortunately the vast majority of Americans will not be aware of the fact that an equally terrible assassination of an infinitely greater man took place slightly more than a month later. On the evening of July 31, 1914, with war clouds

descending over Europe, the Great Tribune of the French People and the most illustrious of socialist leaders, Jean Jaurès, was cruelly murdered by a nationalist fanatic. Virtually every village, town and city in France contains a street or square named after Jaurès and both the Communist and the Socialist parties of France claim him as their own. He rests now after his years of struggle and tragic end in the Panthéon in Paris along with Voltaire and Rousseau. It is fitting indeed that he lies with these two profound Enlightenment thinkers since Jaurès, in his own way, sought to reconcile the anti-clericalism and individualism of Voltaire with the deeply religious (not Christian) feeling and sense of community to be found in Rousseau. Integrated with the humanitarian principles which he derived from the Eighteenth Century were the ideas of Karl Marx and the other important socialist thinkers of the nineteenth century who responded to the challenge of the industrial revolution and the emergence of a depressed proletarian class.

Jaurès was not himself born into a working class family and his movement toward socialism was a gradual one at first. It came through his attempt to synthesize idealism and materialism and a recognition that the tired formulas of nineteenth-century liberalism were no longer adequate if the final two words of that great revolutionary trinity—equality and fraternity—were ever to be realized in this world.

Jaurès was born in the south of France in 1859 and achieved a great success at that training ground for teachers, politicians and philosophers in Paris, the École Normale Supérieure, where one of his leading rivals was Henri Bergson. After teaching for a few years he decided to enter politics and was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1885 as a supporter of the Third Republic and, in general, a follower of Jules Ferry and the recently deceased Léon Gambetta.

Four years in the Chamber of Deputies were followed by an electoral defeat in 1889. Jaurès, however, was beginning to reconsider his political position and to realize that the old Radical and Republican rallying cries of saving the

Republic from the Monarchists and of removing the Catholic influence from the state would not be enough when it came to the task of reconstruction. It was this new conception that led him into the confused world of French socialism where the doctrinaire Jules Guesde and others were already presiding over a number of quarreling socialist factions all of whom believed they were the sole repository of truth.

It was the task of Jaurès with his charming southern temperament and his magnificent optimism to attempt to bring the squabbling factions together. He sought always to make the "movement" exactly that and not merely a political sect. His attempt to reconcile idealism and materialism, though not entirely successful, enabled him to appeal not only to the Marxian scientific analysis of the development of a capitalistic society but also to hold up the vision of the society which could be created if men would only set their minds to it. It was in socialism that Jaurès found a philosophical system which appealed not only to the intellect but also to the heart. The society which he sought to create by his own conscious effort as well as by the inexorable movement of history was one in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." It would be one in which the opportunity for "creative activity" was available to everyone and not merely to a few; a society in which great wealth in private hands would no longer exist since great wealth meant great power not merely over things but also over people. It was this excessive concentration of wealth which had made a sham of bourgeois liberalism and exposed the weakness of political democracy unless it was linked to economic and social democracy.

Jaurès, after some initial hesitation and over the opposition of several socialists who thought it a bourgeois affair, entered the Dreyfus affair on the side of the victimized Captain. His cooperation with the Radicals led him to advocate socialist support for reforming middle class ministries which the more doctrinaire Marxists opposed as simply being patchwork on a rotten capitalistic society which would be better off in total decay so that the socialist transformation might then take place. Jaurès, however, opposed Eduard Bernstein's revisionist rejection of certain Marxist arguments which was then causing such a ferment within the German Social Democratic party; but he also objected to any absolute prohibition on contacts and cooperation between bourgeois and working class parties as urged by the orthodox leaders of German socialism. August Bebel and Karl Kautsky. This issue reached a climax in 1904 at the meeting of the Second International in Amsterdam. Jaurès argued that the German Social Democrats did not live in a political democracy with responsible government and therefore no one was going to ask them to serve in a ministry while, in France, it might be possible to accomplish certain desired ends by agreement between socialists and middle class radicals without losing sight of socialist goals. In a prophetic speech, Jaurès observed that the German socialists lacked a revolutionary tradition and had always been granted concessions from above. "Behind the inflexibility of theoretical formulas which your excellent Comrade Kautsky will supply you with till the end of his days, you concealed from your own proletariat, from the international proletariat, your inability to act." This was a brilliant forecast of the melancholy events of 1918-1919 when the German socialists presented—with a few important exceptions—as miserable

a spectacle in how not to carry out a revolution as had the German bourgeoisie in 1848-1849.

However, Jaurès was voted down and he accepted his defeat in good grace both in 1904 and again in 1905 when the major conflicting groups of French socialism were finally unified into a single Socialist party. With one international crisis following another Jaurès became increasingly preoccupied with foreign policy and military affairs. His keen historical sense had already been evidenced by a number of studies dealing with the French Revolution and he came to urge a new citizen army which would renew the tradition of 1793 and thereby prevent the French democracy from falling into the hands of reactionary militarists. Jaurès hoped to make the French army more democratic by his concrete proposals for reform and to end the military system which had produced the outrages of the Dreyfus case.

THE STRENGTH OF THE FRENCH SOCIALIST PARTY continued to grow. In the elections of 1906, the party won 54 seats and in 1910 the Socialists polled more than a million votes for the first time and garnered 76 seats. A Socialist triumph by evolutionary rather than revolutionary means seemed in sight when the followers of Jaurès won 103 seats and some 1,400,000 votes in the elections of late April 1914. When one considers that the German Social Democrats made up almost a third of the Reichstag after their success of 1912, the growth of the Labour party in Great Britain and the ability of Eugene Debs to get six percent of the vote in the United States in 1912, the fears engendered by their growing strength in the breasts of middle class liberals and radicals may be more easily understood. The revolutionary middle classes had created the type of society which they wanted in the course of the Nineteenth Century and they now shuddered with terror before the growing avalanche of socialism. Subconsciously many liberals and conservatives must have looked without too much horror upon the idea of a "little war" to revive the unity of the nation and so paper over class divisions. George Dangerfield has written perceptively of *The Strange Death of Liberal England* immediately prior to 1914; it might be better to speak of the strange death of liberalism in the entire Atlantic community. There was an unwillingness to face the "social problem" by conceding the structural reforms demanded by an aroused socialist movement and a tragic willingness, as William Morris had predicted, for the "tremendous organization under which we live" not "to lose anything which really is its essence" without first pulling "the roof of the world down upon its head."

The internationalism of the Second International and the vague talk of proletarian action to avert a war eventually came to naught as the vast majority of socialists in the world rallied to their national colors. In retrospect, however, an international strike for peace and socialism could hardly have produced more bloodshed than the futile slaughter of the next four years. Ironically, the war made possible a socialist revolution in backward Russia where it had not been expected and so confused and complicated the transition from capitalism to socialism.

Would Jaurès have been able to stop the war in 1914? It seems highly unlikely. He would in all likelihood have supported the French government against German aggression as did most of his comrades. Of course the German

Socialists were also able to argue that they were defending Germany against a Russian invasion. However, as G. D. H. Cole has suggested, the brilliant intellectual and political gifts of Jaurès were sorely needed after the war started "and in the situation after 1916 his presence might have made a real difference." The same may also be said about his possible response to the Bolshevik Revolution and the great need for understanding the dramatic events in Russia after 1917.

IT IS ALMOST impossible to finish a brief assessment of this warm and human individual with better words than those of Jaurès himself (as quoted in Harvey Goldberg's excellent biography of Jaurès):

In our narrow, confined existence, we tend to forget the essence of life. . . . All of us, whatever our occupation or class, are equally guilty: the employer is lost in the running of his business; the workers, sunk in the abyss of their misery, raise their heads only to cry in protest; we, the politicians, are lost in daily battles and corridor intrigues. All of us forget that before everything else, we are men, ephemeral beings lost in the immense universe, so full of terrors. We are inclined to neglect the search for the real meaning of life, to ignore the real goals—serenity of the spirit and sublimity of the heart. . . . To reach them—that is the revolution.

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## Rusty Weapons On the Cultural Front

WHEN THE EDITOR of the "progressive" *National Guardian* devotes a column to a literary magazine, one can guess this is not some ordinary quarterly. On February 20, James Aronson suddenly muses aloud about the "yawning void in the current magazines," and asks if any magazines realize that it is "possible to go on living without still another interminable discussion of alienation in the art of the films of Antonioni?" Ah... there is a light, at long last, dawning on the cultural front. "Well, along has come a bi-monthly named *American Dialog*, published by Dialogue Publications." The lost "ue" in the transition from publisher to title does not trouble Aronson; he states ingeniously, "I think I have a clue: they're trying to combine the best of two worlds in the magazine, the old and the new, and therefore the traditional and the avant garde in Dialogue-Dialog. I think they are succeeding... So we bid a sister publication a most warm welcome and say: On with the dialog(ue)!"

One glance at Volume I, No. 1 of the magazine and it is easy to see the reason for the *Guardian's* unusual interest in a literary magazine. The editor is Joseph North, who was an editor of *New Masses* in the thirties and currently writes a column for the *Worker*; the sponsors include John Howard Lawson, Paul Robeson, Michael Gold, and Hugo Gellert. The magazine has the physical shape of the *New Republic*, *National Review*, etc., and the first cover has the eerily accurate symbolic drawing of two armored heads confronting each other in the most guarded and suspicious way.

*Mainstream*, the shrinking successor to *Masses & Mainstream* and *New Masses*, folded some time ago, and the Communist Party has evidently had some difficulty forging a new cultural weapon, but finally

it has come through: *American Dialog* is here, peddling the same premises and dogmas that the artistic hacks of the Party have been dutifully repeating for thirty years. There may be new cultural forms of the enemy: existentialism, homosexual novels, hipsterism, abstract art, but the cause is the same—a capitalistic system which deviously produces these new cultural guises to divert the people from their goals. In the first issue, artist Frank Kleinholz writes:

I wonder if it is an accident that non-objective art made its appearance about fifty years ago when the first great social upheaval was developing and the first real challenge to the existing order took place? And do you think it is an accident that this "art" and its derivatives have become the pampered darlings of the international art set? Or was it a marriage made in Heaven? Did the McCarthy era, the witch-hunts, blacklists, loyalty oaths have any effect on what the artist painted and the way he painted? How convenient to have non-objective art so handy as a sanctuary for retreating warriors!

In the same issue, Leslie Woolf Hedley sees the same plot:

If much of hipster writing seems a product of ignorance it may be that a certain kind of ignorance is purposely cultivated in this country. (Assuredly, books of this calibre (Leroi Jones' *The Moderns*) will never give the State Department or the CIA or the FBI any sleepless nights...)

What is unique about *Dialog* is the flaccid quality of all of the writing. The first issue had an editorial statement of intentions:

The purpose of *American Dialog*, is, of course, to discuss important questions concerning Americans today. But we propose to do so in a way that