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Time on a Human Scale:  
Experiencing the Present in Europe, 1860-1930

Edited by Julian Wright & Allegra Fryxell

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**Political change and its timing: the choices facing politicians**

How would political change happen after the revolutionary era? This problem has not often been addressed by students of Western European politics, because, for many, the impulse towards rapid transformation or an upheaval in constitutional arrangements remains an essential feature of the way politics can and should work. The argument for incremental change based on an embracing of the present rather than the longing for the future has not often been made with as much persuasive force as the argument for revolution.<sup>877</sup>

Under the Third Republic in France (1870–1940), political consensus was sought in order to establish constitutional norms that would allow the transaction of government without returning to the chaos of the civil war in 1871. The memory of that upheaval and the divisions it left behind made any new consensus fragile. But the democratic framework did nonetheless allow the emergence of groupings that committed to working within the existing political regime. Attempted coups d'états were spectacular but ultimately insignificant blows to this balance. Many within politics, on the left and the right, believed that there were opportunities for reforming the system from within, whether through electoral reform, the reform of the administrative and regional organisation of the state, or the advancement of rapid programmes of social reform and progressive income tax.<sup>878</sup> The involvement of politicians who were

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<sup>877</sup> As Pierre Rosanvallon insists, there is often a disjuncture between the way political change is *thought of* and the way it is actually *managed in day-to-day administrative arrangements*: Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français. La société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris, Seuil, 2004), p. 432.

<sup>878</sup> Sanford Elwitt, *The Third Republic Defended: Bourgeois Reform in France, 1880-1914* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1986); H. S. Jones, *The French State in Question: Public law and Political Argument in the Third Republic* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993); Julian Wright, *The*

associated with the left-wing tradition of revolution in campaigns for reforms of this kind is a vital sign that, even for some of the most advanced socialist thinkers in France, the Third Republic had provided a means to achieve political change in the present. That some grew to despise the inevitable political compromises that surely followed does not detract from the point that those negotiations and compromises within the parliamentary system became part and parcel of the daily work of some socialist politicians.<sup>879</sup> In politics, the powerful strain of revolutionary socialism remained a challenge to this position.<sup>880</sup> But socialism could also focus on change in the present.<sup>881</sup>

The challenge for socialists was how to choose between two ways of engaging with the Third Republic and the political culture of every day. Should one put a toe into the water of democratic parliamentary debate, using it for precise campaigns and propaganda, while deploying revolutionary rhetoric to reassure the party about one's belief in a future socialist revolution? This choice was that of the revolutionary socialists, and it would allow them to fight against the accusation that engagement with parliamentary democracy was compromising the revolutionary tradition. Or should one seek to demonstrate energy and commitment to the current political system, however flawed? Jean Jaurès came to embody the idea that a socialist campaigner could focus on the present-times of the parliamentary system; and this chapter argues that this could be seen literally, through the physical 'presence' of Jaurès in parliament, in public debates and in the street. Initially a reform-minded republican, then an 'independent' socialist before becoming the leader of the unified socialist party (the 'Section française de

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*Regionalist Movement in France. Jean Charles-Brun and French Political Thought* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>879</sup> Two thinkers in particular challenged the present-minded socialism of Jaurès: Georges Sorel and Charles Péguy: Jeremy Jennings, *Georges Sorel: The Character and Development of his Thought* (London, Macmillan, 1985); Géraldi Leroy, *Charles Péguy: l'inclassable* (Paris, Colin, 2014).

<sup>880</sup> For a classic example: Jean-Numa Ducange, *Jules Guesde. L'anti-Jaurès* (Paris, Colin, 2017).

<sup>881</sup> Julian Wright, *Socialism and the Experience of Time: Idealism and the Present in Modern France* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017).

l'Internationale ouvrier' or SFIO) in 1905, Jaurès revelled in the life of the Third Republican parliament and seemed to project his stocky physique into the daily battles of democratic politics.<sup>882</sup>

But for a politician such as Jaurès, this engagement – seeking change in the present – posed an essential, even existential challenge. Do politicians who want change position themselves outside or beyond the democratic political arena – as a personal and intellectual rejection of the compromised world of the present? Do they promote change as a secret, subterranean excavation, out of which the mole of revolution will emerge explosively at an unknown point in the future... or do they work openly and committedly within the system as it is?<sup>883</sup>

This question is important on a wider scale for European history because it points to how modern culture can struggle to embrace the times within which we live as positive, as creative, or as hopeful. The clash between optimism and pessimism is a source of fundamental political and cultural tension within modernity. How could a positive view of the present emerge in a culture that had learned since the late 18th century to associate the unknown future with the positive, life-giving force of change? And if such a view were possible within modernity, how could modern political culture be modelled, and how could political behaviour take shape distinctively in the actions and intentions of a particular political actor?

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<sup>882</sup> The classic biography is by Gilles Candar and Vincent Duclert, *Jean Jaurès* (Paris, Fayard, 2014), which may be consulted for a fuller bibliography. The latest biography in English is over fifty years old, but remains important: Harvey Goldberg, *The Life of Jean Jaurès* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).

<sup>883</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 11 (New York, International Publishers, 1975), p. 185.

This is also a question that raises issues about individual identity. The way a political actor identifies their own behaviour with the temporal rhythms that they feel as most relevant to their action can be shaped by gender, culture, intellect, imagination, social status and sociability. The politician who thinks about social or political change may do so privately or publically. They may engage with friends and colleagues of their own gender or social class or may extend their natural circle of influence and activity further. How should politicians speak and act, when they promote change in the present?

The example of Jean Jaurès is important for two reasons. Jaurès was the outstanding left-wing orator in Europe from the 1890s to 1914. But he was also a philosopher, a historian and a deep thinker about political culture and modern society. In his reflections on democratic politics, the possibilities that were inherent to democratic argument in the present were seen as essential. While some of his interlocutors described him as being a prophet of the future, he would insist that his idealism was drawn specifically and concretely from the nature of political argument and social reality as one encountered it ‘in real life’, or in ‘day-to-day reality’.<sup>884</sup>

In *Socialism and the Experience of Time*, I have attempted to show how Jaurès and other intellectuals of his time became interested, as historians, in the encounter with day-to-day reality experienced by previous generations. Here, I want to turn to the exemplarity of Jaurès’ own ‘presence’ within the democratic arena. This ‘presence’ that was not just that of a man who enjoyed debate and who took himself seriously as a professional politician. It took a formidable physical form in its own right. Jaurès’ own form of physical left-wing heroism demands a reading that could draw on recent analysis of the gendering of republican politics

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<sup>884</sup> For a study of how this sense of the present emerged from some of Jaurès’ key writings, notably his doctoral thesis ‘De la réalité du monde sensible’: Geoffrey Kurtz, *Jean Jaurès: the Inner life of Social Democracy* (University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).



and the development of a ‘virile’ democratic code within Western European political culture. Virility, as Alain Corbin has argued, came in the 19th century to structure the representation of the world, providing ‘an ensemble of moral qualities that one had to acquire, to preserve, and which a man must be capable of proving’.<sup>885</sup>

But if Jaurès was a virile presence in political struggles, the kind of courage he vindicated was a long way from what Corbin and François Hartog refer to as the ‘presentism’ of the 20th century.<sup>886</sup> In the final part of this essay, we will see Jaurès engaging boldly, with many of the traits of the virile 19th-century politician, against the militaristic and colonialist myth of a virile France, at home and abroad. We might see Jaurès as marking a turning point, in which the culture of virile political expansion was challenged from within, using 19th-century cultural norms to different ends.<sup>887</sup> Jaurès’ physical presence presented a challenge to 19<sup>th</sup>-century French political culture; but what was so striking about his engagement was that he brought a very 19th-century sense of physical, masculine presence to the struggle.

How far was Jaurès’ physical and intellectual ‘presence’ deliberately developed, as an ostentatious challenge to modern bourgeois political culture? Generations of scholars have explored the ideas and struggles into which Jaurès threw himself as aspects of a social-democratic campaign to renovate republican democracy from top to bottom. Anecdotally, it has been of obvious interest to colour these discussions with the description of the bearded, pugnacious southerner, his high-flown oratory, in workers’ meetings or in the Chamber of Deputies. But was Jaurès’ physical energy of more than purely anecdotal significance for his project to build social democracy? How far was Jaurès consciously setting out a physical and

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<sup>885</sup> Alain Corbin, introduction, in *Histoire de la virilité*, vol. 2, *Le Triomphe de la virilité, le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. idem (Paris, Seuil, 2011), p. 9.

<sup>886</sup> François Hartog, *Régimes d’historicité. Présentisme et expérience du temps* (Paris, Seuil, 2003).

<sup>887</sup> Corbin, ‘Introduction’, p. 11.

moral sense of energetic commitment to the moments in which he lived, as a core element of the project to renovate democracy?

That there was a flesh-and-blood Jaurès who is worth trying to rediscover is hardly an original claim for a historian of the French left to make.<sup>888</sup> But there are nonetheless new points to make about Jaurès, and the way he fashioned his physical, political and intellectual environment, and there are both sources and wider reflections on the particular form of masculine leadership Jaurès espoused that need to be brought to light. Drawing both on texts that are well-known and widely discussed in the literature on Jaurès and the French Third Republic, we will also bring to bear personal testimonies that are less well known or as yet unpublished.

Jaurès developed a physical status within his own circles and within political society that made him outstanding. While he was not above reflecting on this, to a considerable extent the stereotype was not cultivated in a particularly self-conscious manner, and thus a careful balance needs to be made between his public image, his self-evident and often commented-on lack of personal vanity or even personal awareness, and the ultimately trustworthy persona that he projected. If anything, his physical *disinterestedness* gave his physical *presence* greater substance, and after his assassination the sense of physical *shock* described by many – friends and opponents alike – testified to this combination of unaffected disinterestedness and carefully projected presence.

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<sup>888</sup> In addition to the general bibliography in the biography by Candar and Duclert, see in particular Madeleine Rebérioux and Gilles Candar (eds.), *Jaurès et les intellectuels* (Paris, Éditions de l'atelier / Éditions ouvrières, 1994); and the essays by Rebérioux (including her entry on Jaurès for the *Dictionnaire biographique du monde ouvrier*) in *Pour que vive l'Histoire* (Paris, Belin, 2017).

In the spirit of following Jaurès' own, repeated insistence that the essence of the unity of the soul can be found 'between the workers' table and his hearth', this discussion of the 'presence' of Jaurès must involve a frank examination of the way in which he exemplified a particular form of masculine political leadership, by asking how far his public and private persona was projected consciously to model a distinctive style of political individual heroism.<sup>889</sup> We can address this problem by examining Jaurès' almost unique capacity for living in the moment both as a private and as a public individual. His relationships with family and friends are, as Gilles Candar and Vincent Duclert, his most important biographers, insist, sometimes difficult to understand. This is partly because he took the principle of living in the moment so much to heart that he regularly destroyed his correspondence and left almost nothing of his private interactions with colleagues to posterity. But there are elements of a private Jaurès that can be redrawn, partly from original sources and partly by re-examining the gendering of his own role and status among his family and friends; so by understanding Jaurès as a private and public figure, his strengths and weaknesses, we come back, in fact to an understanding of what physical energy, commitment and 'presence' could mean in a modern democracy, why new definitions of courage and commitment were needed at the dawn of the 20th century, and how this particular individual changed the meaning of the 'presence' of the intellectual and politician.

Jaurès' belief in engaging with reality as it was encountered from day to day drove him not just to argue for, but to embody, a concentration on hard facts and evidence, and he sought to make empirical observation an essential quality of the political and intellectual discourse of his time. His speeches were not just long because he was long-winded (though it sometimes

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<sup>889</sup> The closing lines of his doctoral thesis 'De la réalité du monde sensible' provide this metaphor and were, it would seem, essential to Jaurès' own conception of his work as an intellectual and a politician: Jean Jaurès, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, *Philosophe à trente ans*, ed. Annick Tabouret-Wajngart (Paris, Fayard, 2000), p. 374; Kurtz, *Jean Jaurès*, pp. 21–30.

felt like that to his contemporaries). They were long because there was a lot of evidence that the backsliding middle-class Republic had sought to ignore, and that needed to be brought to light. Bringing hard, difficult evidence into the bright light of present discussion was a central element of Jaurès' belief in Justice; Justice needed to live in the present, and to do so it needed to bring all the messy details of life into the open.

A fuller biographical study of Jaurès' ability to manage the political present will need to explore those aspects of his personality in which political negotiation and compromise were important. The problem was neatly captured by one of his opponents, the nationalist politician and novelist Maurice Barrès, who was fascinated by Jaurès and grew to like him personally, while battling him in the press and the chamber: 'His disciples praise him for having revived "idealism in politics" ... But quickly, the practical element which is necessarily present in a man of real action chills them, scandalises them. They add: "If in the end he is just a *politicien* like the others [*politicien* is more pejorative than the English term *politician*], so much for him, so much for us, so much for the thousands of souls to whom he gave hope and who will fall with him from a great height...' <sup>890</sup> Nonetheless, Jaurès remained concerned that humanitarianism and internationalism needed to be brought to life in a day-to-day present where debate was too often clouded by compromise and *raison d'état*. Thus this essay will close with a reading of important interventions by Jaurès over crimes committed in the Middle East and Africa, and will emphasise that for Jaurès, the job of the modern politician was no longer that of preparing for a revolutionary future, but rather that of casting light on the suffering of humanity in the present.

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<sup>890</sup> Maurice Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, vol. 2 (Paris, Édition des Équateurs, 2011), p. 212.

## **The presence and absence of Jaurès**

When we consider Jaurès' presence, it is tempting to reflect that he has been present, but as a rather abstract, grand doctrinaire, for much of the later 20th century, in the political imaginary; but that his presence in his own times still needs to be re-asserted. For his contemporaries, the end of Jaurès' life was, however, a brutal shock.

On the baking hot final evening of July 1914, Jaurès was sitting by the window in a second-arrondissement brasserie, eating with friends while planning a major article denouncing those who had promoted war, when a young man, Raoul Villain, obsessed with accomplishing some spuriously patriotic act, came up to him through the window and shot him at point blank range. Jaurès died almost instantly.

His assassination was felt as a visceral shock across the political spectrum. The president of the lower house, Paul Deschanel, reflected the shock when the Chamber of Deputies met on 4 August; but already, the loss of Jaurès was bringing people together at a time when the nation was seeking to turn towards unity:

Within the grave events that France is experiencing, a terrible disaster has hit us. Jaurès ... (*All the deputies rise*), Jaurès has been assassinated by an insane man at the very hour where he was attempting a supreme effort in favour of peace and national unity. A magnificent eloquence, a strength for work and an extraordinary culture, a generous heart, entirely devoted to social justice and to human fraternity and to which his contradictors themselves could only criticise him for one thing: substituting, in his drive to the future, his noble hopes for the hard reality that pulls us back, that is what an odious fate has torn

from us (*Lively applause on all benches*). His adversaries have been struck as much as his friends ...

But what do I say? Are there still adversaries? No, there are now only Frenchmen (*Prolonged, unanimous acclamations*) ...

From the coffin of the man who has perished a martyr to his ideas rises a spirit of union; from his frozen lips comes a cry of hope. To maintain this union, to realise this hope for the *patrie*, for justice, for human conscience, is that not the most beautiful homage that we can render him? (*The whole Chamber is on its feet; prolonged and unanimous acclamations; triple salvo of applause; unanimous cries: Vive la France.*)<sup>891</sup>

But the emotion was most raw for those closest to Jaurès, as in the account of the mayor of Carmaux, Jaurès' constituency in the south of France, who 'collapsed as though struck down in his vestibule ... got up shaken with nervous trembling, only to fall to his knees on the floor, smiting his head with his fist in rage and despair.'<sup>892</sup> The town of Carmaux woke up in a 'silence, heavy with loss and anguish. One might have said that the heart of the old mining town had suddenly stopped beating.' The socialist politician Marcel Sembat who had accompanied Jaurès on his last journey, visiting Brussels to speak at a peace rally, was at first numb, but when he met workers on the station platform who confirmed the news he at first scarcely believed, he dissolved like a child and reflected afterwards on an agonizing sorrow that he had almost never experienced. Others, too, he noted, seemed grotesque in their mourning, one politician, Bracke, blubbing as uncontrollably as he had, his face distorted like a baby.<sup>893</sup>

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<sup>891</sup> Quoted in Jacqueline Lalouette, *Jean Jaurès. L'assassinat, la gloire, le souvenir* (Paris, Perrin, 2014), pp. 3–8.

<sup>892</sup> Jacqueline Lalouette, *Jean Jaurès*, p. 33.

<sup>893</sup> Marcel Sembat, *Les Cahiers noirs: journal, 1905-1922*, ed. Christian Phéline (Paris, Viviane Hamy, 2007), pp. 567–8.

It was Jaurès' mission in life to create a sense of the physical embodiment of the struggle for socialism through his own forceful presence in parliament and in democratic debate beyond Paris. Removing him, the pillar of the political life of the democratic left, dramatically shifted key assumptions about socialism, peace and democracy. But the issue of whether Jaurès' presence in democracy was a force for debate, or a force for national unity in war, became wrapped up with the question of the 'absence' of Jaurès – and that was a fundamentally different question, one which has continued to dominate both academic historiography and political memorialisation to the present day. Famously, at the funeral of Jaurès, Léon Jouhaux, secretary-general of the CGT, called the working class to fight for liberty, for the creation of harmony between peoples, while nonetheless being aware of how the loss of Jaurès would prefigure 'a hideous mass of corpses that bullets will lay out on the ground'.<sup>894</sup> The crowds in early August, as they expressed their sorrow at the loss of their leader, were not inclined to show their violent hatred of the right-wing forces that could have been seen as inspiring the assassination. Police reports described a sense of calm sorrow, with only brief protests. This prompted the female left-wing journalist Séverine to anger. She was furious that the collective emotion of calm sorrow seemed to have put an end to any possibility of preventing the war through a working-class uprising.<sup>895</sup> What she described as the 'second death' of Jaurès followed, as the calm of the crowds allowed the government to neutralise the possibility of any rising that would prevent the outbreak of war.

The unity of the nation and even that of the socialist party was not to last long, and during the times of disunity that ensued, the felt absence of Jaurès was frequently remarked on

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<sup>894</sup> *L'Humanité* of 5 Aug. 1914 gave summaries of the speeches at the funeral. For this detail from Jouhaux' speech: *La Voix du Peuple*, 1 May 1915.

<sup>895</sup> Lalouette, *Jean Jaurès*, p. 31.

by many in left-wing politics. His absence and his presence remained intimately connected. After the socialist party broke into two under pressure from the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow, leading to the founding of a French Communist Party, those who remained in the old socialist SFIO were themselves deeply divided as to the path they should take. The moderate socialist Joseph Paul-Boncour, who had unsuccessfully represented the widow of Jaurès at the trial of Jaurès' assassin, created a moment of overwhelming emotion that would allow the congress of the rump SFIO to hold together.<sup>896</sup> remarking: 'Jaurès was a great mirror that reflected all the points of the complexity of the universe. A revolver bullet has broken this mirror into a thousand pieces. We are each a piece of this mirror. It is by bringing together our efforts that we will succeed in realising the work of Jaurès.'<sup>897</sup> The report in *Le Populaire* demonstrates how Jaurès' memory, evoked in this touching metaphor, could induce a visceral reaction:

The emotion is at its height. An ovation welcomed these words. The evocation of Jaurès united us all. Tears are in our eyes. Unity is achieved. The memories of our internal struggles have gone.

The remaining orators who were listed declined to speak and we sealed the accord ...<sup>898</sup>

The poetess Anna de Noailles wrote on the death of Jaurès, 'While we remained, observing this being / as one sees a city in flames disappear ... / History, weeping, shocked, took back / this hero killed at the head of the armies' [*Tandis qu'on restait à regarder cet être / Comme on voit une ville en flames disparaître, ... / L'histoire s'emparait, éplorée, alarmée, / De ce héros*

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<sup>896</sup> The full texts of speeches at the trial have been republished in *Le Procès de l'assassin de Jaurès* (Paris, Pagala, 2011).

<sup>897</sup> *Le Populaire*, 1 Jan. 1921.

<sup>898</sup> *Le Populaire*, 1 Jan. 1921.



*tué en avant des armées ...]*<sup>899</sup> The sense of history itself reacting emotionally, dissolving in tears as the gentle flow of minutes restored peace and quiet to the body of a man who had ever been energetic brought, in the poetess' eyes, a sense of time sharply focused on the present.

### **Jaurès in action**

As Christophe Prochasson argues, by the time of the presidency of Félix Faure (1895-9) the presentation of male courage was ritualised and made into a feature of high political culture.<sup>900</sup> Anna de Noailles' poem on the death of Jaurès focused on a classically masculine aspect of Jaurès' leadership. The male leader at the head of the army was often translated in left-wing culture into the male leader at the head of the crowd of protestors. If Jaurès was an unlikely military leader (in spite of his heavy involvement in proposals to reform the military system in France), he certainly muscled his way to the front of crowds of strikers or protestors, on many occasions. There was an unselfconscious projection of machismo about the way Jaurès seemed to seek out the position of leadership and to take on its dangers, with disinterestedness that bordered on the cavalier. In 1909, during the protests in Paris over the putting to death of the Spanish freethinker Francisco Ferrer, Jaurès had to be pulled away from the head of the procession of protestors by friends who were conscious that they needed to find the balance between allowing him to show himself, while not letting him be harmed when clashes with the police broke out. Sembat described Jaurès as pleased to have been involved in the rough demonstration.<sup>901</sup> In 1895, during the glassworkers' strike in Carmaux, Jaurès and colleagues played a dodgy game with a troop of mounted gendarmes, skipping from doorway to doorway to avoid being trampled. And most famously and tragically, more than one who

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<sup>899</sup> Quoted in Jean Rabaut, *Jaurès et son assassin* (Paris, Editions du Centurion, 1967), p. 88.

<sup>900</sup> Christophe Prochasson, 'Le corps de Félix: corps et records du président Félix Faure', in Jacques Julliard (ed.), *La Mort du roi: essai d'ethnologique politique comparée* (Paris, Gallimard, 1999), pp. 197-230.

<sup>901</sup> Candar and Duclert, *Jean Jaurès*, p. 378; on the wider solidarity campaign for Francisco Ferrer: Daniel Laqua, 'Freethinkers, anarchists and Francisco Ferrer: the making of a transnational solidarity campaign', *European Review of History* 21 (2014), pp. 467-84.

saw Jaurès in the last days before his assassination seemed to have a premonition that this voluble advocate of international peace was in danger of his life.

For Candar and Duclert, his assassination marked the end of an era, and the end of an essay in thinking and reflecting on the problems of modernity, modern war and what it would mean to democracy. ‘In the face of the acceleration of history, Jaurès acted like a combatant in a battle ... He did not imagine that his political work, his moral engagement would die with him. He believed in the force of just ideas, in the power of a historical conscience.’<sup>902</sup> The lucidity of Jaurès’ understanding of war, and his grasp of the sheer scale of the challenge posed to democratic society and culture, was never really shared by his contemporaries. Nonetheless, argue Candar and Duclert, something remained to be passed on – something of the ‘philosophy of the human’ which would be shaped anew through ‘the experience of combat, of politics and the world’.<sup>903</sup>

Jaurès’ great friend the philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl later remarked that Jaurès genuinely had the taste for ‘daily’ action in politics, and that he understood how a general line in politics needed to be driven through a focus on the practical issues of every day in public life: ‘he had a very sharp, very advanced sense of the needs of the moment and of the means by which one might face up to them.’<sup>904</sup> If, following Georges Clemenceau, we might read Jaurès’ speeches as being all written in the future tense, this was not because Jaurès wanted to live in the future, but rather because he wanted the mission for Justice to be a forward-looking

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<sup>902</sup> Candar and Duclert, *Jean Jaurès*, p. 39.

<sup>903</sup> Candar and Duclert, *Jean Jaurès*, p. 40.

<sup>904</sup> Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Quelques Pages sur Jean Jaurès* (Paris, *L’Humanité*, 1916), p. 60.

one that would give political colleagues and opponents a better understanding of how the present had to be open to wider concerns and to future needs.<sup>905</sup>

‘How alive Jaurès was!’ exclaimed another friend a few years after his assassination. ‘That’s it. He lived powerfully; he overflowed with life. His physiological value was of the first order. Life and Joy exploded within him. From there his generosity, his goodness, his frankness, his faith in all men and all things and this freshness of the spirit, this freshness of a child ...’<sup>906</sup> Sembat had a particular fascination with physiology, the life of the individual and all its diverse emotional and physical traits as they might be experienced from day to day.<sup>907</sup> Here he emphasised the sometimes apparent naivety of Jaurès, although others including Lévy-Bruhl balanced this by emphasizing that Jaurès did not like to be taken by surprise and was more concerned to master events than to be their victim.<sup>908</sup>

Leon Trotsky, meanwhile, understood how Jaurès’ fascination for high and noble ideals was tempered with ‘an empirical appraisal of even the secondary realities of life’.<sup>909</sup> He was a great force in politics, whose oratorical powers could sweep people before him; but, Trotsky reflected, he never ‘deafened himself’. Anyone intervening in his speech would find their comment was heard and measured and parried; so the flood of rhetoric was controlled and the instantaneous presence of his audience was essential in his performances at the Chamber of Deputies.

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<sup>905</sup> The famous remark of Clemenceau is often quoted, e.g. Marcelle Auclair, *La Vie de Jaurès, ou la France d’avant 1914* (Paris, Seuil, 1954), p. 485.

<sup>906</sup> Marcel Sembat, *L’Humanité*, 31 July 1919.

<sup>907</sup> Sembat’s fascination for temporal experience is explored in chapter 7 of my *Socialism and the Experience of Time*.

<sup>908</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, *Quelques Pages*, p. 57.

<sup>909</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Jean Jaurès*, 1915, at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/profiles/jaures02.htm>.

The arena of the Palais Bourbon, where the French lower house sat in the Third Republic, was Jaurès' arena. While developing his oratory, he studied that of others equally obsessively. The parliamentary arena was not just a natural vehicle for an extrovert public speaker; Jaurès perceived political oratory in the Chamber to be at the heart of the quest for political change and social redemption, because here it was that high ideals could collide with the mundane realities of political interests. His first biographer, the left-wing socialist Charles Rappoport, described him as a 'veritable athlete of the tribune. He shouts, thunders, storms, punches, carries his listener before him, but all the while he never ceases to enlighten and instruct him ... [the listener] feels a physical need to applaud and exalt the noble, the great tribune. We feel ourselves in the presence of an extraordinary strength, a higher strength ...'<sup>910</sup>

But Jaurès was as obsessed with the chamber as a vehicle for debate as a vehicle for his own performance. He studied the style and manners of others assiduously. In the 1890s, at the time when his fame as a speaker was rapidly spreading, Georges Renard, an older friend and socialist thinker and literary historian, observed Jaurès at his seat. 'He is always there, following the discussion. He follows with unwavering attention the orators who speak at the tribune; he listens to them with all his body and soul; he mutters in his teeth the phrases that punctuate their speeches, and he goes home afterwards as excited, as tired, as enervated as if he had been speaking himself. Politician! He is a politician to his fingertips.'<sup>911</sup>

This same intense focus was reflected in notes made from the opposite side of the Chamber. Barrès, a celebrated novelist, was generally on the look-out for striking characters in the chamber; but his fascination with Jaurès would grow. Several times in his notebooks, Barrès

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<sup>910</sup> Charles Rappoport, *Jean Jaurès, l'homme, le penseur, le socialiste* (Paris : L'Émancipatrice, 1915), 29-30.

<sup>911</sup> B[ibliothèque] H[istorique de la] V[ille de] P[aris], papiers Renard, MS 2489, f. 116. On Georges Renard and the important unpublished memoirs preserved at the BHVP: Wright, *Socialism and the Experience of Time*, ch. 6.

used Jaurès as a mirror to reflect more closely on his own ideals and preconceptions. ‘What a pleasure to hear him so articulated, so together’, wrote Barrès following a major intervention by Jaurès in June 1906, ‘He is demanding, he pauses if a pupil leans over to the ear of a neighbour. That said, the chamber does not trouble him. Stunned, shocked, intimidated by this oratorical force and this absurd poet, it hardly interrupts at all.’<sup>912</sup> During a particularly hot session, Jaurès’ tendency to perspire during his performances was remarked on, echoing a rather sarcastic comment by Renard in his memoirs: ‘He was wiping his forehead from the outset and his spectacles had to be held in place with his left hand ... When [Albert] De Mun [the social Catholic right-wing deputy] finished a speech, he became once more smiling and gracious, not wishing to be overcome ... I like better the monster Jaurès who returns to his place still steaming.’<sup>913</sup> Speaking of Gustave Rouanet, a friend and intimate supporter of Jaurès, but who had lost the trust of Renard, the latter caustically described him as equipped with a towel to mop down his *patron* after speeches.<sup>914</sup>

Only very rarely did Jaurès’ control of his emotional performance in the Chamber slip away from him. During the Dreyfus Affair he provoked a major scene by losing his temper with a nationalist politician, the comte de Bernis. ‘*M. de Bernis, vous êtes un misérable et un lâche!*’ (‘you are a wretch and a traitor’) he exclaimed; Bernis had called into question his patriotism. Calling his or a colleague’s honour into question was liable to provoke the more explosive side of Jaurès’ personality. In this case, the session had already become brutal, with the emotion and political tension provoked by the Affair at its height. Bernis strode to the tribune and struck Jaurès in the back, and the scene degenerated drastically.<sup>915</sup> The denigrating

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<sup>912</sup> Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, vol. 2, p. 174.

<sup>913</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180, 205.

<sup>914</sup> BHVP, papiers Renard, MS 2489, f. 113.

<sup>915</sup> The scene is frequently described in biographies of Jaurès, but is analysed carefully in Thomas Bouchet, *Noms d’oiseaux. L’insulte en politique, de la Restauration à nos jours* (Paris, Stock, 2010), chapter 8.

epithet ‘*lâche*’ exploded from Jaurès lips on another occasion not long after, once more a sign of extreme anger towards an opponent, when his great rival and leader of the so-called ‘orthodox’ Marxists, Jules Guesde, engineered a breakdown in the negotiations for socialist unity in France, through underhand procedures. There was a violent distaste for dishonourable means within Jaurès’ make-up.<sup>916</sup>

The physical display of masculine courage, if not self-confidence, implied in these parliamentary scenes was if anything a stylised performance when compared to the simple courage needed to impose oneself physically on difficult audiences when campaigning outside Paris. The reference to perspiration was made – in a positive sense on this occasion – by the reporter of the *Dépêche de Toulouse*, impressed with Jaurès’ battle with opponents during a speech at Carmaux in November 1896.<sup>917</sup> At various times during his career as a constituency politician, Jaurès was confronted with crowds who had been stirred up by his opponents to prevent him speaking. His colleague Paul Renaudel reminded him once of a meeting where he had simply started by saying in a deep, resonant voice, ‘You will hear me! You will hear me!’, repeating the phrase and raising his voice louder and louder, until he finished with a final ‘You will hear me!’ that was so tremendous it finally imposed silence on the crowd.<sup>918</sup> On occasion, particularly in the earlier part of his career, these head-on confrontations with difficult audiences would lead Jaurès into making mistakes, by his insistence on constantly, at all times ‘occupying the political terrain, making himself heard, drawing attention’.<sup>919</sup> Georges Renard thought the oratorical talent of Jaurès was even more apt for popular meetings than it was for

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<sup>916</sup> Emmanuel Jousse, *Les Hommes révoltés. Les origines intellectuelles du réformisme en France* (Paris, Fayard, 2017).

<sup>917</sup> Jean Jaurès, *Œuvres complètes*, iv. *Le Militant Ouvrier 1893-1897* (Paris, Fayard, 2018), p. 224.

<sup>918</sup> Auclair, *La Vie de Jaurès*, p. 620.

<sup>919</sup> Alain Boscus, introduction, in Jaurès, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4, p. 28.

the parliament, also noting that Jaurès was nervous sometimes of the Parisian habit of sharp detailed criticism.<sup>920</sup>

These descriptions of the physiognomy of the socialist leader draw on various masculine types that were widely present in the cultural commentary of the late 19th century; but in many ways Jaurès was an original. As Eleanor Accampo and Christopher Forth have argued, the body was ‘profoundly implicated in political institutions and social representations’, but, by the time of the Dreyfus Affair around the turn of the 20th century, French masculine scripts were being unpicked.<sup>921</sup> The ‘bulky frame of the bourgeois patriarch – famously embodied, amongst intellectuals, by Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola’ was no longer admired; the bourgeois politician would be decried as a victim of a feminizing, urban lifestyle. In this context, as Forth shows admirably, Zola himself went on a diet, and was increasingly depicted in the Dreyfusard press as an athlete, virile and modern, as opposed to the sedentary and dilapidated aesthete of an earlier age of intellectual characterisation.<sup>922</sup>

Nobody, however, would have accused Jaurès of going on a diet. ‘A little bull, a short compact creature, but who talks like a schoolteacher’, remarked Barrès.<sup>923</sup> In his early novel *Jean Santeuil*, Marcel Proust penned a sketch of Jaurès speaking in the Chamber (during the debate over the Armenian massacres, which we will come back to), and almost perfectly caught the movements that the cartoonist Albert Eloy-Vincent would draw a decade later: the stocky arm raised to ask permission to intervene; the ungainly figure stomping down to the floor from

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<sup>920</sup> BHVP, papiers Renard, MS 2489, f. 113.

<sup>921</sup> Elinor M. Accampo and Christopher E. Forth (eds.), *Confronting Modernity in fin-de-siècle France: Bodies, Minds and Genders* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4; Robert A. Nye, ‘Afterword’, in Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe (eds.), *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 232–41 at 236.

<sup>922</sup> Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 172.

<sup>923</sup> Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, vol. 2, p. 202.

his seat high on the left of the assembly, which reminded Proust of a syncopated passage of Beethoven, lacking a noble theme but nonetheless inspiring for its grandeur (Figure 1).<sup>924</sup> A survey of students in Bordeaux in 1973 found that 70 per cent of those surveyed associated Jaurès with the description ‘big and bearded’ – though as Frédéric Cépède remarks, this might not be particularly distinctive: images of Jaurès and the left-wing socialist Édouard Vaillant at a funeral in early 1914 allow us to see them as almost blood relations.<sup>925</sup>

### Figure 1

The memoirs of Georges Renard give once more a sharply-drawn perspective. His first impressions were of Jaurès’ strapping body and large head on a powerful neck.<sup>926</sup> He was, Renard commented, a ‘great eater and a good drinker who enjoyed food in abundance rather than delicately. He is a guest who derives great pleasure and enjoys himself at table.’<sup>927</sup> During the protests against the lock-out of Carmaux glassworkers in September 1895, a group of socialist orators went to Toulouse to address a mass meeting, dining fairly abstemiously in a bistro beforehand. The following day a right-wing newspaper printed a large selection of dishes from the menu, including partridges, asparagus, bombe glacée and a selection of wines and Champagnes. Jaurès, credulous, asked his friend: ‘Renard: so it turns out that you ate partridge and asparagus? How is it that I didn’t get any, me, who loves them so much?’<sup>928</sup> There was a naïve capacity for enjoying good honest food in Jaurès’ character that reflected a personal disinterestedness, and this was reflected in other aspects of his personality. He apparently found the appeal of extra-marital liaisons not just uninteresting but ridiculous. Like a starring tenor or baritone at the opera, Jaurès’ great performances in the Chamber would draw feminine

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<sup>924</sup> The passage in question is in chapter 8: for the English translation, Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil* (London, Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1955), p. 220.

<sup>925</sup> Frédéric Cépède and Éric Lafon, ‘Jaurès, l’image et l’acte. Esquisse d’un inventaire et d’une typologie des photographies de Jaurès et de leurs usages’, *Cahiers Jaurès*, 219-220 (Jan.-June 2016), 95–118 at 102.

<sup>926</sup> BHVP, papiers Renard, MS 2489, f. 107.

<sup>927</sup> BHVP, papiers Renard, MS 2489, f. 114.

<sup>928</sup> BHVP, papiers Renard, MS 2489, f. 238.



attention. One day, the Renards observed Jaurès tossing a little pile of rose-tinged correspondence from female admirers onto the lap of his wife Louise, remarking: ‘here, read that! that’ll make you laugh!’<sup>929</sup> This was a character which resolutely stuck to its own basic qualities, unconcerned with changes in style or the shifts in masculine norms which seemingly affected Zola. Jaurès sought to live his life in a politically charged present in which change would happen through the honest, day-to-day commitment of a politician who had to show physical as well as moral courage. The types and examples that he seemed to play on were those of a masculine but never self-consciously macho world, in which hearty but straightforward pleasures were married to thoroughgoing energetic commitment. A man’s man, he had little to say to the great *salonnières* of Paris, preferring to talk standing up or – better still – walking through the streets of Paris, keeping up friendships on the move and in the open air.<sup>930</sup>

### **The presence of detail**

Courage was a theme that Jaurès emphasised in one of his most famous speeches, a prize-giving speech in his own native region, well-known as ‘Discours à la jeunesse’. If Jaurès himself, through his presence at the heart of the political scene, combined moral and physical courage he had a philosophical understanding of how all individuals needed courage to be able to be faithful to one’s own purpose in life and to deepen and discipline one’s work within the wider life of the community. As we will see in the last part of this essay, the scholar and politician that Jaurès remained throughout his life was concerned that others would embrace his disciplined attention to the most minute or monotonous detail, while keeping a wider

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<sup>929</sup> BHVP, papiers Renard, MS 2489, f. 115.

<sup>930</sup> Joseph Paul-Boncour, *Entre Deux Guerres. Souvenirs sur la IIIème République*, vol. 1, *Les Luites républicaines 1877-1918* (Paris, Plon, 1945), p. 239.

perspective: ‘Courage is to understand one’s own life, to focus it, to deepen it, to establish it and coordinate it with that of general life.’<sup>931</sup>

In one of the very rare texts where Jaurès openly reflected on his own life and career, this sense of a grasp of detail and of a deepening of the personality by steeping oneself in daily action is clear. He described his schooling at the *École normale supérieure* as a poor preparation for the encounter with real life; how a student might read Fichte and Marx but remain ignorant of the political tradition in France that had absorbed their teaching was only one of many examples.<sup>932</sup> As Madeleine Rebérioux described it, Jaurès often spoke as though he had discovered socialist doctrine before socialist action.<sup>933</sup> During his first spell in parliament, as a very young deputy, he described himself vacillating between ill-expressed unease and frivolous optimism, not really able to put his finger on the precise issues that were gripping France and how he might analyse them.<sup>934</sup> His growing interest in socialism arose from the need to find a solid basis for his moral and political concerns, to draw them together in the real world.<sup>935</sup> In a commentary of 1894, written in response to criticisms of his recent socialist conversion, he remarked: ‘Forgive me for speaking of myself at such length! I prefer discussions of ideas to personal polemics, but when people try to challenge my right to fight for socialism, it seems to me that people are attacking the very basis of my being and the root of my moral life.’<sup>936</sup> As Candar and Duclert rightly underline in the conclusion to their biography, what drove Jaurès

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<sup>931</sup> ‘Discours à la jeunesse’, in Jean Jaurès, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, *Bloc des gauches*, ed. Gilles Candar, Vincent Duclert and Rémi Fabre (Paris, Fayard, 2016), p. 56.

<sup>932</sup> ‘Le socialisme et le radicalisme en 1885’, in Jaurès, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, *Bloc des gauches*, p. 67.

<sup>933</sup> Madeleine Rebérioux, ‘Jaurès et le marxisme’, in idem, *Pour que vive l’histoire. Écrits*, ed. Gilles Candar, Vincent Duclert and Marion Fontaine (Paris, Belin/Humensis, 2017), p. 279.

<sup>934</sup> Jaurès, ‘Le socialisme et le radicalisme en 1885’, p. 76.

<sup>935</sup> Jaurès, ‘Le socialisme et le radicalisme en 1885’, p. 169.

<sup>936</sup> ‘Questions personnelles’, originally published in *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, 17 Apr. 1894, in Jaurès, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4, p. 61.

on in his socialist engagement in the present was the sense that combat was at the heart of public life and political progress.<sup>937</sup>

The presence of Jaurès in the day-to-day republican debate was reflected in the form he gave to some of his most important speeches, where he married legal truth to a sense of vivid reality. Most famously, this focus on historical accuracy and legal exactitude was at the heart of his study of the Dreyfus Affair ‘Les Preuves’ (the proofs), in which he painstakingly worked through the evidence that showed Dreyfus was innocent. This study has long been at the heart of discussions of Jaurès’ republican virtue and concern with empirical veracity, both as a historian, a legal-minded politician and as a humanitarian, and has frequently been republished.<sup>938</sup> The painstaking, implacable logic of this text would be found once more in many later campaigns, notably his struggle against the extension of military service from two to three years. This concern for empirical detail also marked aspects of his style as a historian, that of a scholar carefully searching both for the lived political experience of political actors in the past, and the social and economic information that was needed to give a real basis for the study of modern social conflict.<sup>939</sup>

In many of his most important parliamentary speeches, the sense of the minute realities of everyday experience was vital. This was never more so than when confronting injustice. In the speech he delivered in autumn 1895 after many weeks of a harassing and personally damaging engagement on behalf of the workers affected by the lock-out in Carmaux, Jaurès

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<sup>937</sup> Candar and Duclert, *Jean Jaurès*, p. 539.

<sup>938</sup> For example, in an abridged edition prefaced by the late Madeleine Rebérioux, historian and president of the Ligue des droits de l’Homme, who saw in it a precursor of the great struggle to bring to light crimes committed during the Algerian conflict in the 1950s: Jean Jaurès, *Les Preuves. Affaire Dreyfus* (Paris, La Découverte, 1998). For the complete text in the Fayard *Oeuvres*: Jean Jaurès, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, *L’Affaire Dreyfus I* (Paris, Fayard, 2001), pp. 453–691.

<sup>939</sup> On Jaurès as a historian: Wright, *Socialism and the Experience of Time*, chapter 3, where detailed references to the scholarship on Jaurès’ project for a ‘Histoire socialiste de la France contemporaine’ and his own volumes on the French Revolution can be followed up.

subjected his colleagues in the Chamber to an account of the actions of the local bosses which spread over two days. Jaurès attended to each tale that families and individuals had to tell about the challenges they faced. Individual families were subjected to all kinds of blackmail to induce them to return to work in conditions that were worse than they had endured previously; but Jaurès' account was granular, individual; he brought to life the struggles that each felt, insisting 'this is what I saw' – an expression he would use regularly in later denunciations of injustice.<sup>940</sup> In a final peroration that historians have cited frequently, noting the grim sense of premonition which it contained, Jaurès dismissed the personal threats he had suffered himself during this difficult struggle. 'One day will come perhaps when we will be struck down precisely by one of those who we would wish to rescue. It is from the same suffering people that the violence of revolutions and the violence of reactions will come, depending on the prevailing political wind ... The important thing is not that we should be spared by the favour of men or the good luck of things, from the innumerable accidents of life and agitations of history; the important thing is that we act according to our ideal, that we give our daily strength to what we believe to be justice, and that we carry on our human work, while we await our burial, for ever, in the silence and in the night.'<sup>941</sup>

A year later, in November 1896, Jaurès took to the tribune of the parliament for another major speech – this time stretching over three parliamentary sessions. French historians such as Vincent Duclert have rightly stressed the importance of this celebrated intervention for the emerging younger generation of republican intellectuals who would soon be enlisting for the cause of justice in the Dreyfus Affair. The cause in question in 1896 was the appalling violence meted out against Armenian communities in Asia Minor at the hands of the Ottoman Empire

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<sup>940</sup> Jaurès, speech of 24-25 October 1895, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4, p. 131.

<sup>941</sup> Jaurès, speech of 24-25 October 1895, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4, p. 147.

and their Kurdish mercenaries.<sup>942</sup> His object was to use the metaphor of the instant, almost photographic representation of events as they unfolded in the present, to grab the attention not just of his parliamentary colleagues, but also that of the public, who thronged the galleries for a parliamentary set-piece at the Palais Bourbon.

Jaurès confronted silence with visual detail; to the veil of diplomatic obscurity he offered a technicolour description of human suffering in the present. In Jaurès' account of the Armenian massacres we have an example of a script that any 20th-century news reporter might have written to accompany a sequence of war footage. Jaurès' technique depended on a capacity – surely unrivalled in France in the 1890s – to tell a story as if it was unfolding in the very present in which story-teller and audience were engaging with one another.

A commission of enquiry had involved European consuls in trying to establish the facts of the brutalities committed in Asia Minor. Their reports had been made available to parliamentarians and Jaurès had studied them in detail. It was from this set of documents that he painted a picture of despair and violence that would have shocked his audience and forced the crisis onto the news agenda in France in a way that normal political commentary could not have done. His repeated use of the expression '*lorsque j'y ai vu*' – 'when I saw there' – made it seem like Jaurès himself had toured the devastated villages. In a single great sentence, Jaurès built the tension so that as well as the sense of being there in the present, this testimony of a present riddled with violence would be charged with emotion:

And, when, in the reports of the delegates of the Erzerum commission charged with examining the facts that had taken place at Sassoun, when, in the official reports of the

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<sup>942</sup> Vincent Duclert, 'Jean Jaurès et la défense des Arméniens. Le tournant du discours du 3 novembre 1896', *Cahiers Jaurès*, 217 (July-Sept. 2015), 63–88.

consuls of Europe on the facts at the six principal vilayets of Asia Minor, I read the detail of the atrocious brutalities committed in concert by the Kurds and by the soldiers of the Sultan; when I saw there the first resistances of this Armenian population, so long timid and passive, against the arbitrary pillaging of the Kurds; when I saw there the first bloody encounters of these nomads, in the ravines and the woods, with the shepherds and labourers of Armenia, and the sudden fury of the Kurds, and the extermination war which had begun, and the emigration of Armenian families fleeing their homes destroyed by fire; and the old people carried on shoulders, until they could only be abandoned on the road and massacred; and the women and mothers mad with grief covering the mouths of their crying children so as not to be betrayed by their screams in their flight through the woods, and the children hidden under stones or in the roots of trees, and slaughtered in their hundreds; and the pregnant women stabbed in the stomach and their foetuses bayoneted and paraded about; and the girls distributed between the Turkish soldiers and the Kurdish nomads and raped until the soldiers, having exhausted them, finally shot them in a monstrously sadistic exercise, with bullets passing through them from bottom to top, their murder thus mimicking the act of rape; and in the evening, around the tents where the soldiers and nomads carried on the same orgies, the great ditches dug for all these corpses, and the Armenians, mad with sorrow, hurling themselves in still alive; and the priests decapitated and their heads ignominiously placed between their thighs; and all this population fleeing to the high plains; and then, when all these barbarians realised that Europe remained indifferent, that no word of pity came to those that they had massacred and raped, the extermination war suddenly took on much greater scale: and no longer was it little groups that were massacred, but in the towns, great masses of 3000 and 4000 victims in a day, to the sound of the trumpet, with the regularity of the execution of a death sentence: that is

what has been done; that is what Europe has seen; that is what she has turned away from! – and when, I repeat, I saw the detail, it seemed to me that all the horrors of the Thirty Years' War were unchained in this Eastern land ...<sup>943</sup>

Jaurès knew that to force a parliament in Western Europe into a detailed and conscientious apprehension of crimes committed on another continent required this fine-grained sense of empirical detail and the capacity to place oneself as an observer in the present-time in which the crimes had unfolded. It was too easy for ignorance, half-truth and the protection of national economic and diplomatic interests to cloud debate. He succeeded in forcing the Armenian question to the heart of liberal intellectual debate in Paris, and many later Dreyfusards including the novelist Anatole France were inspired by Jaurès to support Armenian exiles.<sup>944</sup>

Many further examples throughout his parliamentary career ensued, notably during major debates over French colonial policy. One of the most striking was his intervention following a violent episode in March 1908 when French troops were accused of massacring unarmed women and children in Morocco. As he put it, he had been shaken with emotion when he first read the accounts, even though some of his socialist colleagues had suggested he proceed with caution. Once more, Jaurès was able to lift out of written reports both a sense of the immediate sorrow and emotion that brought him so closely to the details of the events, and a scientific, rigorous concern for aligning the events correctly and for shedding real light on an incident that would rapidly become muddled and put aside. The expression 'Lorsque j'ai lu' – 'when I read' – once more came to his lips:

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<sup>943</sup> Extract from the *Journal Officiel* of the French Chamber of Deputies, 3 November 1896, published online at [http://www.jaures.eu/ressources/de\\_jaures/les-massacres-darmenie-1896/](http://www.jaures.eu/ressources/de_jaures/les-massacres-darmenie-1896/).

<sup>944</sup> Philip Kolb, 'Proust's portrait of Jaurès in *Jean Santeuil*', *French Studies*, 15 (1961), 338–49.

When I read a few days ago in the newspaper *Le Matin* the long telegram from its correspondent relating that a gathering of Moroccans, which was not a camp, which was not an army, which was a great nomadic village, a gathering of men, children and women, when I read in this newspaper that this gathering, which did not even try to defend itself, had been surprised, enveloped by our artillery, blasted and that no human being had escaped... my first movement was one of doubt. I told myself that the press was giving in to the need to publish sensational stories; ... The text of the press agency Havas followed. Immediately after the text appearing in *Le Matin*, there appeared in all newspapers another account. Well! Gentlemen, this other account, that we can easily reconstitute by means of the common traits that appeared in all newspapers, I say in all conscience, it did not reassure me, and I fear that the day of 15 March will be a day that is sorely distressing for humanity and for France.<sup>945</sup>

Jaurès went on to use his mastery of the geographical details and military tactics in the tragedy to cast light on the nature of the brutal events. He had drawn his consequences from a rigorous, historical assessment of the case. The French units had made a journey of 80 kilometres to attack the gathering, under dubious information that they posed a threat. Reading accounts from the conservative newspaper *Le Temps*, Jaurès suggested that a bayonet charge had been ordered to finish off the bombing of the camp. Being directly contradicted by Georges Clemenceau, the Président du Conseil (prime minister), Jaurès turned the excuses of the government on their head. The general in charge of the attack had eventually ordered a cease fire, to save the women and children. But if women and children needed to be rescued, then the camp was precisely not a military formation! In his peroration, Jaurès once more drew together the idea of crimes committed in the present, with the light of empirical enquiry and justice cast in the present, the

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<sup>945</sup> Speech of 27 March 1908, in Jean Jaurès, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 17, *Le Pluralisme culturel* (Paris, Fayard, 2014), pp. 101-2.



better to assess, tomorrow, the moral consequences of the events: ‘Gentlemen, think, I ask you, what will happen, tomorrow, to our moral responsibility, if the concrete hypotheses that can be drawn from the accounts that we have received up to this hour, were confirmed by the accounts of eye-witnesses ... I insist that light be cast on this episode, and I declare ... that if excesses of this order have been committed, the honour of France will not be to hide them, nor to cover them over, nor to smooth them over, but to be the first in the world to denounce them, to punish and chastise them.’<sup>946</sup>

Jaurès’ physical, intellectual and moral courage consisted in attacking the mendacious attempt of a middle-class and colonialist political culture that sought to hide or paper over the injustices experienced in the present, by workers at home and native populations abroad. As he developed his role as a socialist who was less interested in dogma and the party’s preparations for a future revolution, but who was *already* involved in revolutionary struggle, through the parliamentary system, he also, implicitly, attacked the tradition of the revolutionary future, the passion for speeding time up and passing beyond the present which was so characteristic of the romantic revolutionary movements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The physical presence of a socialist in the Chamber, not simply there to criticise, but to invest personally and intensively in the renovation of society in the here-and-now, involved Jaurès in a personal mission that ultimately cost him his life. His disinterestedness, his pugnacious, dogged brand of male leadership and the partly self-conscious projection of his image as a democratic fighter marked him out from revolutionaries of older generations, and from the centrist politicians of his own day. The impression he made on contemporaries was one of a man who was physically

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<sup>946</sup> Speech of 27 March 1908, in Jean Jaurès, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 17 *Le Pluralisme culturel* (Paris, Fayard, 2014), pp. 107–8.

involved in wresting French democracy, not into a bright, dazzling light of an unknown future, but into a clear-sighted examination of the injustices and crimes of the immediate present. While his heroic stature and his fascination for the French Revolution made him appear to conservatives as cast in the mould of a 19th-century political pugilist, he was in fact involved in a deeply personal project to make politics move on from the 19th century, to establish social democracy with a focus on the trials and struggles of society in the everyday, and thus to set up the modern political compact towards which Western European democracy struggled later in the 20th century.