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The Socialist Legacy of Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum

Benjamin T. Tolosa, Jr.



The tradition of socialist theory and practice associated with the Frenchmen Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum is virtually unheard of in the Philippines. In a way, this is not surprising in a polity where ideological distinctions are not fully understood and appreciated, and where "socialism" is often equated with the "communism" espoused by the underground Communist Party of the Philippines and its allies. But such a gap in knowledge, while understandable, is most unfortunate.

The aim of this note is to help fill this intellectual void in Philippine political-economic literature. The note also intends to show that this particular French contribution to socialist thinking can be used as a prism through which the current dilemmas facing the Philippine political economy may be discerned—particularly by those who have a deep commitment to both political democracy and socio-economic justice.

We should, of course, guard against any facile comparisons between the French and Philippine experiences. Certainly, there is no comparing February 1986 in the Philippines with the French Revolution of 1789, nor can we simply compare the Philippine Democratic Socialist movement with its counterpart in France. At the same time, however, if we were to study carefully the complex political position of those whose twin commitments to democracy and socialism have led them to defend the Aquino regime against extremist challenges—despite this government's obvious limitations and failures—perhaps a comparison with the dilemmas of French Socialism may not be as pointless as it may seem initially.

A thoroughly revised and updated version of a lecture originally delivered on "Aspects of the French Development Experience" as part of the French Studies Lecture Series, "France and the Philippines: Partners in Development," on 7 December 1987, Ateneo de Manila University.

The contemporary political project of both "defending" the genuine "democratic gains" of the popular victory against the Marcos dictatorship and at the same time of "transforming" the very limited and formal nature of democracy restored under the Aquino regime, finds a parallel in the French experience. The desire "to complete an unfinished revolution"—to extend democracy from the political to the socioeconomic sphere—is at the heart of the theory and practice of that strand of French Socialism identified with Jaurès and Blum. It is an important element in the heritage of international Democratic Socialism which no serious student of political economy can afford to ignore.

The French Revolution and Its Legacy

It has been said that no individual French socialist thinker has exercised as much influence as the British Owen, the Germans Marx and Engels, the Russian Lenin, or even the Chinese Mao. But collectively, the French have had the most influence (Cole 1954–55).

Any discussion of the French socialist legacy and even of socialism in general, cannot but take as its starting point, the great French Revolution of 1789. It was the political expression of the Enlightenment, the assertion of the democratic ideal, the belief in the "sovereignty of the people." It was a revolution against traditionalism and absolutism embodied in the French monarchy—the *ancien régime*. Socialism, to the extent that it sees itself as a revolutionary movement, owes its heritage to the French Revolution.

Even though the French revolution was founded basically on liberalism, it also became the catalyst for the emergence of socialism. G.D.H. Cole in his history of socialist thought, has argued that while the philosophy behind the French Revolution may have stressed individualism, at the same time because of it,

... the "social question" forced its way for the first time to the front, not merely as a moral problem for a limited group of intellectuals and reformers of manners, but as an insistent practical issue involving a real and menacing conflict between the rich and the poor, between the propertied and propertyless, between the privileged orders of the old society and the underprivileged (Cole 1954–55, 12).

The very limitations of that revolution paved the way for socialist ideas. The continuing poverty of urban workers, in particular,

showed the conflict between the political and social implications of revolutionary principles. It led to an insistence, as early as 1796 in the "conspiracy of equals" led by Gracchus Babeuf, on a "further social revolution" in the form of common ownership of the means of production (Thomson 1964, 19). This theme was to become central in the writings of the early French socialists: Saint-Simon, Fourier, Blanc and Proudhon. Their works all demonstrate a disillusionment with continuing poverty and inequality in the face of political "freedom" and "liberty."

Another legacy of the French Revolution and its aftermath was a consciousness of "The Republic" as an institution to be defended against monarchists, Bonapartists, clericalists, anarchists, fascist-militarists and other forces who might wish to destroy it. One must recall that the chaos which followed the French Revolution gave way eventually to the despotism of Napoleon Bonaparte and to the restoration of the monarchy. Later on, even the Second Republic collapsed in favor of another Bonaparte. In the 1930s, the Third Republic was threatened by a military coup d'état and the rise of international fascism. The surrender of this same Republic to Germany during World War II led to the Vichy government's collaboration with Hitler. The Fourth Republic, in turn, was marked by continuing instability and imminent collapse in the postwar years.

Liberal democracy in France has had a history of coming under threat from various anti-republican forces. It is therefore seen by French democrats as a precious heritage, a treasure that must be protected. Thus, many French socialists saw it as their duty to defend the Republic and the formal institutions of "liberty" which it represented. Republican democracy would be the framework from which socialism in France was to be constructed.

The traditional political notions of "Left" and "Right" in France were defined originally with reference to the Republic (i.e., "Left" signifying pro-republicanism and "Right" signifying anti-republicanism). In the past, both ardent defenders of liberal capitalism as well as committed advocates of socialism could be classified as part of the French "Left." Thus, French Socialism, to the extent that it is a legacy of the French Revolution also has at its core a republican heritage. These twin legacies have become a source of both dynamism and tension in the socialism of Jaurès and Blum.

There are other important traditions of socialism in France. There is the anarcho-sindicalist tradition, which has emerged from early French socialism and which has permeated the labor movement

since then. This tradition has historically been suspicious, if not hostile, to the state and to political action, particularly, parliamentary activity. Instead, it has advocated the direct action of the workers through the ultimate weapon of the general strike.

Even before 1914, there was a distinct strand of French socialism identified with the French Marxist Jules Guesde and guided by orthodox historical and dialectical materialism. And after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the 1920 Congress of Tours, the machinery of the unified French Socialist Party was taken over by its left wing to form the French Communist Party along Marxist-Leninist lines and aligned with the Third International.

But as stated earlier, this note shall concern itself only with that strand of French socialism which, while critical of the limitations of the French Revolution especially in the socio-economic realm, was also concerned with preserving the liberal and humanistic achievements of that "bourgeois revolution" in the political and cultural realm.

Jaurès: Socialism as the Completion of Democracy

Jean Jaurès (1859–1914) was the acknowledged leader of the French Socialists from the time of their unification in 1905 under one party—the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* (S.F.I.O.)—until his assassination in 1914. He was "the outstanding figure in the French Socialist Party, and also the greatest single figure in the Congresses of the Second International" (Cole 1953, 373). He was a professor of philosophy, a gifted orator, a prolific journalist and a master politician responsible for bringing together the various factions of French Socialists under one party. For Jaurès, the mission of socialism was to continue the work of the French Revolution of 1789—to complete rather than destroy its achievements:

The triumph of socialism will not be a break with the French Revolution but the fulfillment of the French Revolution in new economic conditions. (Jaurès in Przeworski 1980, 31)

The French Republic which was an achievement of the revolution was, therefore, not an enemy but an instrument of socialism. Democracy was not in its essence a bourgeois institution. For Jaurès, democracy was:

. . . the largest and most solid terrain on which the working class can stand . . . the bedrock that the reactionary bourgeoisie cannot dissolve without opening fissures in the earth and throwing itself unto them. (Jaurès in Przeworski 1980, 33)

Socialism was necessarily to be built on democratic foundations. Socialism was the completion of democracy, not its destruction and replacement by an alternative class dictatorship.

The socialism which Jaurès represented was deeply humanistic and democratic. He continually stressed the moral and ethical bases of socialism. His lifelong philosophy was thus an attempted synthesis of materialism and idealism (see Jaurès 1895 in Fried and Sanders 1964). "His passion for the free life enriched the socialist tradition, endowed it with a deep human value" (Goldberg 1968, 136). Though conscious of the inevitable tension between authority and freedom under socialism, Jaurès believed that this dilemma could and should be resolved, because socialism without freedom would be devoid of true meaning.

We socialists, we also have a free spirit; we also feel restive under external restraint . . . If we couldn't walk and sing and meditate under the sky, if we couldn't drink in the air and pick flowers when we chose, we would even accept the present society, despite its misery and incoherence; for though its freedom is a deception, it is a deception which men still agree to call a truth and which sometimes grips their hearts . . . Rather solitude with all its perils than coercion, rather anarchy than despotism, whatever its disguise. (Jaurès in Goldberg 1968, 136)

Jaurès saw socialism as a revolutionary project. But since it was rooted in republicanism, socialism was a revolution that was "well on its way." It was not necessary to make a new revolution. Jaurès' revolutionism was "fully consistent with reformism and quite inconsistent with any doctrine of destructive violence . . ." (Cole 1953, 375). Reform and revolution were thus not mutually exclusive in his worldview. In a famous statement during the S.F.I.O. Congress at Toulouse in 1908, Jaurès declared:

Precisely because we are a party of revolution, we are the most deeply reformist party, the only one which can give response to the demands of the workers, and make each conquest a point of departure for further conquests. (Jaurès in Goldberg 1968, 551)

Jaurès, however, did not fully embrace the ideas of the German "revisionist" theoretician Eduard Bernstein, nor did he completely approve of the actions of the French socialist parliamentarian Alexandre Millerand. He believed that Bernstein's fundamental rejection of the central tenets of Marxism transformed socialism into "a reformism without identity and substance." On the other hand, the parliamentary tactics of Millerand and the other "Independent Socialists" had "scrapped Marxism for a vague pragmatism." Though Jaurès "deeply believed in amelioration through reforms, he was equally convinced that no social system short of collectivist socialism could permanently provide full employment and fair distribution" (Jaurès in Goldberg 1968, 268-69). While he was prepared to accept reforms, he was not willing to accept them on terms which would lead to the "domestication" of the workers' movement and to the destruction of their power (Cole 1953, 375). G.D.H. Cole's very perceptive insight into Jaurès' politics deserves lengthy quotation here:

By disposition he was a parliamentarian, and he was by no means prepared to regard the State as simply the executive committee of the ruling class. Yet this did not mean that he belonged to the constitutionalist right wing: he insisted that the workers, in their struggle for power, could not allow themselves to be shut up within the confines of bourgeois legality. They might, he agreed, have to act unconstitutionally, to flout the law, or to rise in rebellion; but he regarded such a prospect, not with the jubilation of the instinctive revolutionary, but as an unpleasant necessity to be avoided as far as possible, because he was very anxious that the growing pains of the new society should not destroy the human and cultural values that were worthy of being taken over into it. (Cole 1953, 379)

Blum: Socialist "Exercise of Power"

Léon Blum (1872-1950) was in many respects the successor of Jaurès, both in mind and spirit. But in one sense, Blum surpassed his mentor by forming the first Socialist-led Popular Front government in France in 1936. Blum was the leader of the French Socialists from 1920 until the years immediately following the Second World War. But the party he led was no longer the same S.F.I.O. that Jaurès had so carefully and painstakingly put together. The Russian Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 had led to the setting up of the Third International which forced a split in the S.F.I.O. in their 1920 Con-

gress at Tours. The new Moscow-based International secured the adherence of the left wing majority of the French Socialists based on the "21 points" imposed by Lenin and Zinoviev for admission. The minority Center and Right factions refused to accept the conditions unconditionally, left the Congress and launched a new Socialist Party but used the prewar party's old name and statutes.

Blum was particularly opposed to the principles of the Third International and in a speech before the Congress of Tours denounced Bolshevism as a narrow creed specific to the Russian experience and inconsistent with European socialist traditions. Blum noted that Communism, among its many errors, wrongly equated the seizure of power with social revolution, perverted the democratic process with its concept of party organization, threatened the traditional independence of trade unions which it sought to put under party control, and denied that workers could fight to defend their nation (Greene 1969, 2).

Like Jaurès, Blum's socialism represented a synthesis of the French democratic tradition with selected aspects of Marxism. The product was a socialism propelled by a moral impulse—a socialism in a humanist mould. He also believed that political and social democracy were inseparable. The goal of socialism was to realize "the great ideals of 1789 . . . and infuse the economic and social order with political, civil and personal liberty" (Blum in Greene 1969, 14).

Consistent with the social democratic tradition, Blum did not dichotomize reform and revolution. Reforms contained the seeds of revolution. He did not equate socialism with gradual capitalist reform, however. To achieve socialism, the conquest of power by the working classes was necessary. "I do not recognize two kinds of socialism, revolutionary and nonrevolutionary. There is only one socialism, and it is . . . inherently revolutionary" (Blum in Halperin 1946, 250).

Nevertheless, Blum argued that without "revolutionary preparation," a premature seizure of power (as advocated by the Communists) could only lead to tyranny and repression. This long process of preparation for social revolution could be attained only through participation in the institutions of the Republic (Greene 1969, 15). Thus, following Jaurès, Blum strove to integrate the French Socialist Party into the country's parliamentary system. Like his revered master, he saw that the defense of democracy was consistent with the struggle for socialism. It was in this light that he developed his theory of the "exercise of power."

As an added background, it must be pointed out that the 1904 Congress of the Second International at Amsterdam explicitly forbade socialist participation in bourgeois governments as a general rule. This resolution was made as a direct response to a crisis in French Socialism triggered by Millerand's acceptance of a Cabinet post in the liberal regime of René Waldeck-Rousseau. While critically supportive of Millerand's actions as crucial for Republican defense, Jaurès had accepted the Amsterdam resolution as a necessary condition for socialist unification. In the 1920s, the S.F.I.O. continued to adhere to this principle, partly to demonstrate their revolutionary commitment in the face of the mounting challenges coming from the French Communist Party.

During the latter half of the 1920s, however, there was increasing pressure on the Socialists to accept positions in the Cabinet, since they had become the second leading party in the country next to the Radical Socialists. It was in this context that Blum made a distinction between the "conquest of power," which was a revolutionary notion designed to bring about socialist transformation, and the "exercise of power" in a capitalist regime, which was nonrevolutionary and merely the "consequence of parliamentary action itself." As he noted in a speech in 1926:

If through the operation of parliamentary institutions, we were called upon to exercise power within the framework of existing institutions and of the present constitution, we would exercise it legally and loyally without committing any chicanery like attempting to profit by our presence inside the government in order to transform the exercise of power into a conquest of power. (Blum in Colton 1953, 522)

Blum was aware of the inherent risks and contradictions of a Socialist "exercise of power" which he foresaw as "a particularly painful and difficult experience"—"an experience to which the party can be subjected even in spite of itself" (Blum in Colton 1953, 523). This was true, not only in a situation where the Socialist Party would find itself as a minority partner in a "bourgeois" Cabinet, but also even in the case of a "balanced" governmental coalition with nonsocialists. Much later in his career, he wrote:

Perhaps there is no more arduous task in the world than that of a Socialist government acting within the framework of the capitalist system, which it has neither the power nor the mandate to transform in its legal essence. It embodies at the same time the working class and the state. (Blum in Colton 1953, 540)

Blum believed, however, that such an involvement in government, while exceptional, was justified when the Republic itself was threatened by counter-revolution, which during Blum's time was epitomized by fascism. It was precisely this right-wing threat which opened the possibility for a Cabinet role for the Socialists as early as 1932 and paved the way for the creation of the Popular Front government in 1936 which Blum headed in coalition with the Radical Socialists. Even after the defeat of Blum's government, it was this same belief in the socialist responsibility to defend the democratic Republic—in the "vital connection between the preservation of political democracy and the advance of socialism" (Blum in Colton 1953, 533)—which led to Socialist participation in other nonsocialist governments in the years preceding and following the Second World War.

The Dilemmas of Democratic Socialism

What were the political implications of the socialism of Jaurès and Blum? The discussion above shows that central to their conception of socialism was their republicanism. Both of them were of the firm belief that a genuine socialist commitment required full participation in the life of the (bourgeois) Republic which also meant its active defense during times of crisis.

Thus, for example, during the Dreyfus Affair of the late nineteenth century when French society was polarized into two camps—the anti-Dreyfusard monarchists and militarists on one side, and the Dreyfusard liberal republicans on the other—Jaurès supported the entry of the then socialist Millerand into a Radical Cabinet. Jaurès was also instrumental in the creation and maintenance of an active alliance among the bourgeois and socialist "Left"—despite this bloc's nonsocialist objectives. Jaurès subsumed socialist goals under the banner of "Republican defense."

While such a perspective and approach was responsible for the growth of French Socialism as a parliamentary force and rooted its politics and ideology firmly in the democratic tradition, Jaurès' "political Radicalism" was also a major cause of instability within the Socialist Party. It "encouraged Frenchmen of the left to swing to and fro between Socialism and Radicalism, or at all events between Socialist self-sufficiency and alliance with the bourgeois left" (Cole 1958, 496). As Jaurès himself was to discover painfully in the

case of his former colleagues and friends in the "Independent Socialist" tendency (e.g., Millerand, Aristide Briand and René Viviani), the lines between Republicanism and Socialism could become blurred beyond recognition. Reforms, and worse, the pursuit of high-ranking government positions, could become the ends, not the means, of some self-proclaimed "socialists" (see Goldberg 1968).

Similarly, in the case of Blum, it was the fascist threat of the 1930s and the double threat of Gaullism and Communism in the 1940s, which justified socialist participation in "defensive" government coalitions which were hardly committed to socialist transformation. Because the country's democratic liberties were being threatened, "the Socialist party had to subordinate everything to the overriding duty of defending those liberties" (Blum in Colton 1953, 536). For Blum, what had happened was not simply the subordination of Socialist loyalties to Republican loyalties. He was convinced until the end of his life that the socialist program "rested first and foremost upon the safety of the democratic republic" (Blum in Colton 1953, 542).

This complete identification of the Socialist Party with liberal democratic reformism and sometimes, even with conservative policies, led to widespread disillusionment among its former supporters, which was manifested in elections throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Jean Rous, a Socialist deputy in parliament who resigned from the party in 1947, revealed the extent of disillusionment when he attacked the S.F.I.O. for acquiescing to "pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist and anti-labor" policies in the name of defending the Republic.

By carrying out the policy of 'others' . . . the S.F.I.O. has now become a party of 'others,' a party that still has perhaps a role of republican center to play, the heritage of the old Radical party to pick up and exploit, but a role that has nothing in common with that of a workers' party. (Rous in Colton 1953, 539)

It is a sad fact, indeed, that the mainstream of French Socialism, in common with the other parties of the Second International, had in due course abandoned their maximum goal of "socialization" in favor of "republican defense" and "welfare promotion." To be sure, many social reforms were real working class gains—as was true of the reforms achieved during Blum's Popular Front government. But what became a significant deviation from the tradition of Jaurès and

perhaps even of Blum, was that the reforms were no longer seen in the context of an eventual transition to "full socialism." The logic of electoralism and parliamentary participation had a natural moderating influence (see Przeworski 1980 and 1985). The dramatic rise to power of François Mitterand's *Parti Socialiste* (formed in 1968) marked a new turn in the history of French Socialism and deserves separate discussion elsewhere. What is apparent, however, is that the current socialist vocabulary of "technocratic modernism" and "superior economic management" seems even more removed from the Jaurès-Blum conception of socialism and of the role of the Socialist Party than the welfare state ideology of post-World War II social democracy (see Ross and Jenson 1988; Kesselman 1986; and Petras 1984).

The defense of democracy has not led to its completion. The revolution has remained unfinished.

The Aquino Regime and Philippine Democratic Socialism

Much space has been devoted towards an understanding of the socialism of Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum because the French experience finds a striking parallel in the contemporary Philippine situation—in the theory and practice of the so-called "Democratic Socialist" tendency. While an extended discussion of the nature and history of this political grouping and of the even broader "Democratic Left" in the Philippines is beyond the scope of this note, it is possible to gain some insights into this distinct ideological tendency by appreciating the complex political stance taken by its adherents towards the 1986 EDSA revolution and the formally liberal democratic system restored under the Aquino government.¹

One must remember that the "Democratic Left" participated in the 1986 elections in support of Cory Aquino, in marked contrast with the national democrats. "Participation without illusions" meant making common cause with Center-Right groups and individuals (including Aquino herself) who while anti-Marcos and anti-dictatorship, did not share the commitment to far reaching political and social reform. But the creation of a broad centrist democratic alliance was seen as a necessary condition for bringing about a more socially just order through relatively peaceful means.

Thus when victory came in February 1986, the response of this tendency was not, as in the case of the mainstream national democrats, to dismiss it outright as meaningless, but to describe the EDSA uprising as an "unfinished revolution." What this position meant

was that its supporters considered the ouster of the Marcos dictatorship as a genuine gain for political democracy. But they also believed that the real meaning of "people power" lay in authentic popular empowerment through independent mass organizations and social transformation via redistributive government programs. The democratic struggle was seen as a continuing process.

Such a position has meant the active defense of the so-called "democratic space" which also implied critical support for a generally conservative Aquino government, since it was the only legitimate and concrete vehicle of the democratic transition. Thus the various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), sectoral organizations and political groups associated with the "Democratic Left" lent their full support to the ratification of the 1987 Constitution, the consolidation of liberal democratic representative institutions and the continued defense of the constitutional order against violent threats from both the extreme Right and Left. Much in the spirit of Jaurès and Blum, they believe that the deepening of democracy presupposes its strength.

The evolution of the Aquino regime, however, away from any bold initiatives for both political and social reform towards policies catering to established political and business interests, has resulted in much dissatisfaction with the government among many segments of the "Democratic Left." Moreover, this has led to a general suspicion of and distaste for the Aquino government's offers of collaboration (as illustrated by the NGOs' lukewarm response to *Kabisig*).²

But here lies precisely the dilemma for Democratic Socialists. The paralysis and conservatism of the Aquino government in the face of crisis has fueled the insurrectionist ambitions of political extremists. But even more worrisome is the fact that even within mainstream political and business circles, there are people who are attracted to an authoritarian solution to the problems of the country. The weakness of the Aquino government has been interpreted as the weakness of democratic governance itself. There are those who seem to be willing to discard the gains of the popular victory against dictatorship in the name of political stability, economic growth and national security.

Conclusion

The survival of democratic institutions continues to be at stake in the current period of politico-economic transition in the Philippines.

Thus, a significant number of Filipino progressives, consistent with their conception of socialism as anchored in a continuing process of democratization, accept that the preservation of liberal democratic institutions is an essential component of their socialist commitment.

It appears from the experience of France, however, that the challenge of such a commitment lies in translating "defensive" action into an "offensive" project which does not surrender the interests of workers and other oppressed sectors to the prerogatives of conservative democrats, but instead advances socialist influence in the formal power structures of society.

Surely, socialist politics in the tradition of Jaurès and Blum is fraught with many tensions and even contradictions. Success demands much hard-nosed organizing and political creativity which combines both extra-parliamentary and parliamentary activity. Filipino Democratic Socialists have recognized that the challenge in 1992 and beyond lies in being able to penetrate effectively into the Philippine political mainstream, which obviously means electoral and governmental participation.³ But perhaps the greater and more difficult challenge is to accomplish this objective without abandoning the more fundamental and long-term structural goals.

Despite accusations of "utopianism" and "eclecticism" from both political conservatives and radicals, the commitment to both democracy and socialism in the Philippines remains a compelling vision. That vision defines today's task for Filipino Democratic Socialists to complete the unfinished revolution.

Notes

1. Democratic Socialism in the Philippines dates back to the Christian Socialism of Raul Manglapus and the "moderate" activism of the pre-1972 era. But the codification of Philippine Democratic Socialist theory and practice owes much to the painstaking work of Jesuit socialist theoretician, Romeo J. Intengan, during the martial law period. "Democratic Left" is also understood in the broader sense of all the various groups and individuals who are critical of the dogmatic and centralist tendencies of the National Democratic Left. For discussions of this tendency, see Karaos (1987); Abinales (1986); Tadem (1986); and Tolosa (1990).

2. The brief and difficult experience of Florencio "Butch" Abad—a much-respected "Democratic Left" personality—as a member of the Aquino Cabinet, contributed much to the NGOs' disillusionment with Cory Aquino. For an insider's view of this "DAR experience," see Tolosa (1992).

3. Social development NGOs identified with the "Democratic Left" have, in fact, initiated "Project 2001"—a collective undertaking with the aim of making mass-based people's organizations a significant electoral force in the twenty-first century. It involves strategic and creative participation in electoral exercises beginning in 1992.

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