

ARTICLE

## FLASH-LIGHTS OF THE AMSTERDAM CONGRESS.

[Rather than try to give a condensed report of the Amsterdam Congress and what I saw of the European Movement in general, I shall present a series of articles under the above general head, subdivided under special heads. This flash-light method will be on the whole better. It will deal in detail with persons and things; and the flash-lights will, in the end, be seen to run into one another and portray the scene more effectively.—DANIEL DE LEON.]

### I.

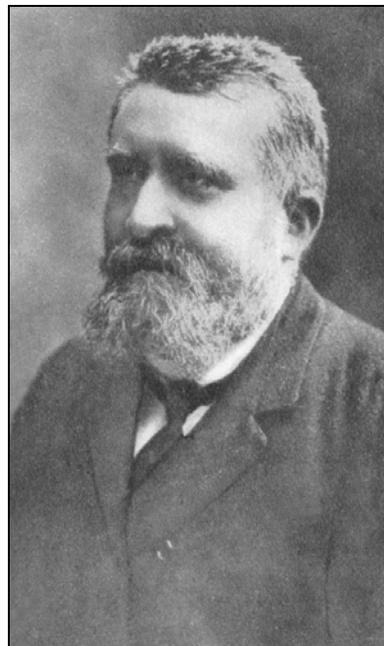
#### JEAN JAURES.

**I** TAKE up Jaures first, not because I consider him to be, or to have been, least of all because I am of opinion that he will henceforth be the or a leading figure in the Socialist Movement of Europe. On the contrary, I believe he is done for in the Socialist camp. Just for this reason, coupled with this other that around him the war has been raging for the last four years and was climaxed at Amsterdam, I wish to treat of him first.

Jaures, our readers will greatly wonder thereat, is no orator—and that to his credit. Two minutes on his feet and speaking settle the point. He lacks two of what is established as essential characteristics of the orator. In the inventory of these essentials, enumerated by Plato of old in his Gorgias, and closely followed by our own Emerson of our own days, tallness or stateliness of figure and a melodious voice are given first rank. Jaures is short and stocky; and as to his voice, it sounds like the bray of a trumpet, rather harsh, unpleasant upon the ear. Neither the eye nor the ear is taken in.

The external appearance of the “orator,” backed by his voice, must be

captivating. Since the days of the Athenian marketplace, down to those of our own modern public platforms, these external features have been found usually to go together with an ability of a special kind, the ability of the sophist, of the intellectual tight-rope dancer, of the juggler with thought, of the venal character, the superficial insincere man. The orator must be able to “take in” his audience—not to educate, instruct or drill it. Fascinated by his appearance, lulled by the melody of his voice, the orator’s audience is expected by him to be humbugged. Here in America, where—if the platform speakers of the old parties are critically watched—it will be noticed that the



JEAN LÉON JAURÈS (1859–1914)

“Committees on Speakers” instinctively follow the classic rules laid down by Plato, we have a living type and exponent of the orator. He is Bourke Cockran. With an imposing appearance and a voice like an auditorium organ, he fills the air with sweet sound and glittering phrases, which he non-partisanly sells one day to the gold standard, another to the silver standard, one day to Tammany, another to the Republican party of New York City, one day to militarism, another day to anti-expansion—always intent upon “taking in,” a man of no convictions. That is the orator; Jaures is none such.

I know that in my estimate of Jaures’ intellectual integrity I probably differ from many a comrade of the admirable Parti Socialiste de France. But men in a hand-to-hand struggle with another cannot always do him exact justice. It is impossible to have our pound of flesh without the corresponding drops of blood. Jaures has been an unqualified nuisance in the Socialist Movement of the world at large, of France in particular. He must be removed—with all the tenderness that is possible, but with all the harshness that may be necessary. Yet he is a man of convictions and of noble purpose.

When Guesde closed the debate in the Committee on International Political Attitude, ripping up Jaures with a brilliant little speech, he turned to Jaures at a certain point and said: “I shall not call that your crime, but the consequence of

YOUR conception of Socialism.” Jaures is the best, the most favorable, type I know of what is called the “intellectual” or “utopian” Socialist. A man of vast reading, his overtopping ideology, has prevented him from a systematic acquisition of the knowledge of Socialism. Socialist maxims are quickly transformed in his mind into hollow phrases; unsteadied by the strictness of Socialist logic, they fly off the handle, aimlessly. Many a sentence of his great speech sounded on the domain of Socialism, as if on the domain of geology one were to claim that the Post-Tertiary period did not need the previous development of the Palaeozoic; or on the domain of botany that the oak can evolute direct from the moss; or on the domain of palæontology that the eohippus is not a necessary precursor of man; or on the domain of mechanics that the Marconi wireless telegraphy need not be predicated upon the previously acquired telegraphic appliances. The man knows nothing of the geology, so to speak, of Socialist science. But the nonsense Jaures utters is uttered with a conviction born of earnest, though impatient purpose, and nourished and given wings to by high scholastic training. That, uttered in choicest diction, produces an ensemble that is wonderful and by its very wonderfulness must serve as a warning to all serious laborers on the field of Socialism.

What has falsely given Jaures the unenviable title of “orator” is his diction, the brilliancy and fluency thereof, his quickness at pithy repartee. A few instances of the latter will convey an idea of what I mean.

During the debate, Adler, having the floor, was attacking Plechanoff whom he designated as a dangerous “physician” who might injure the “patient.” The subject being about himself, Jaures interjected: “And I am the disease.”

Again. Just before him on the list of speakers was Rosa Luxemburg, who also acted on the committee as the translator from French into German. She let fly against him a scathing Philippic, during which he frequently writhed under her lash, the burden of her argument being that the so-called “co-operation of the classes” was productive of evil only. It was Jaures’ turn next. He rose, and as soon as the applause on Rosa Luxemburg’s speech ceased, he opened his great speech (and great it was, in its way) with these words: “And yet, within a few minutes, you will see the citizen Rosa Luxemburg translating me into German; you will thus see how there CAN be useful co-operation despite conflict.”

Again. As Jaures faced the committee during his speech he stood opposite to Pablo Iglesias, one of the representatives of Spain, who sat in the first row of seats. In the measure that he warmed up, Jaures crowded, unknown to himself, more and more upon Iglesias. Iglesias leaned, tipping his chair more and more back. But a moment came, when Jaures in a flight of eloquence dashed forward, that Iglesias lost his balance and nearly fell over backward. Jaures stepped back, and remarked to Iglesias: "There were no Pyrenees between us!"—alluding to the high mountain range that separates France from Spain.

I can not conceive of Jaures working in the harness requisite for the Socialist infantry of the Revolutionary army any more than I can conceive of a warbling nightingale in a cage. The action of the Amsterdam Congress will, I believe, have for its effect the dismemberment of his party. Its radical wing will in all probability pull away and join the Parti Socialiste de France (Guesdist). But neither do I believe that such dismemberment of Jaures' party will be its or his finish. In all probability Jaures will organize a large radical bourgeois party, of radically subversive policy and propaganda. As the leader of such a body, outside of the Socialist camp, his labors to Socialism will be invaluable—as invaluable as they are harmful within the Socialist camp.

As I have more than once said with regard to our own American affairs, that if there were no so-called Socialist, alias Social Democratic party here, the Socialist Labor Party should itself set up such a concern. I believe our comrades of the Parti Socialiste de France will find their account in promoting the setting up of such a Jaures radical party in France. A fighting, militant party of Socialism must be free from the "intellectual," "utopian" and not always honest elements that would otherwise crowd into its ranks and bother it, if there is no such "intellectual," "utopian" and "broadly" tolerant ditch to attract and drain them into.

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