

Book Review

Vers l'égalité ou au-delà? Essai sur l'aube du socialisme. By Ludovic Frobert. Paris: ENS Editions. 2018. 198 pp. 18€. ISBN: 979-1036202551.

Socialism, the term invented by Leroux in the era of industrialization, became synonymous with new social science, philosophy and religion in the generation disgusted by an economy of individualism and laissez-faire that had produced such extremes of wealth and poverty. A return to its sources, suggests the author, shows they are worthy of reassessment. With the PS (Parti Socialiste) in France enduring its steepest ever national decline in electoral popularity in 2017, Ludovic Frobert suggests today's socialists should veer away from the social-democratic model of society that espouses equality of merit. Rather, the early thinkers could inspire them to move in an imaginative way, towards a more radical equality based on the basic needs of work, housing, health and education. By reinstating the early generation of social thinkers who wrote practical schemes for the implementation of the second of those two concepts, the author pleads for their example to be adopted for contemporary politics. His book is suitable for the readership of activists rather than for the student, even one well versed in French and French historiography on socialism; it does however come with a bibliographical guide from secondary sources from the nineteenth century and the contemporary era. Given the modern versions of capitalist exploitation that exist in France and other privileged countries—slave wages, battered women, homelessness, illegal people trafficking—a greater emphasis on the early socialists' agenda for the end of race and gender oppression would have been welcome. Frobert offers his reading of three nineteenth-century thinkers (Constantin Pecqueur, François Raspail and George Sand) compared to the more familiar names of Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier in the history of political ideas. He does not ignore them, or others he mentions in passing throughout the work: Pierre Leroux, Victor Considérant, Flora Tristan, Etienne Cabet, wishing to demonstrate the extent of the creativity and imaginative thinking of these three cases. The author attempts to contextualize their theories in what reads as a very brief synopsis rather than an in-depth study. For example, in the first chapter, the theories of Pecqueur are associated with Louis Blanc and François Vidal, discussed while narrating political events around the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, still under the shadow of the great 1789 moment. We read of the details of the Commission de Luxembourg, the short-lived worker representation body, an experiment of the Second Republic in the spring of 1848, also witnessed by politician and scientist Raspail and novelist Sand, discussed in chapters two and three. They were aware of each other's work and were each keen to find practical ways of implementing their theories. The context of remembering them is possibly more significant than the content of the three chapters, which can scarcely do justice to the depth of their lives of writing and activism. The political point of their rescue from obscurity is to stand up to the Marxists who, for so long, denigrated that era as too utopian, with the result that the radical

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