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Ludovic Frobert, *Vers l'égalité, ou au-delà? Essai sur l'aube du socialisme*. Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2021. Notes and bibliography. 200 pp. €18.00 (pb). ISBN 979-10-362-0255-1; €9.00 (eb). ISBN 979-10-362-0256-8.

Review by K. Steven Vincent, North Carolina State University.

The inadequacy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's dismissive characterization of French socialists of the early nineteenth century has been frequently noted, though the charge of "utopianism" (even when rejected) still unfortunately provides the organizational framework for many histories of European socialism. The tenacity of this utopian framework is no doubt a result, at least in part, of the wide acceptance of liberal economic ideas that view all theories not situated on a foundation of competitive markets naive or worse. But it is probably even more the consequence of the influence of Marx and of the continuing torrent of scholarship devoted to his life and ideas. In comparison, works about early French socialists are a shallow stream, with most of what has been published in recent decades focusing on the Fourierists and the Saint-Simonians. To be sure, there have been excellent studies of workers' associations and cooperatives, and of feminist movements on the French Left, but what we have lacked is attention to the thought and activity of other French socialists during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Fortunately, this is changing. A significant part of this is due to the work of Ludovic Frobert, who publishes frequently and who collaborates with other historians interested in this field. Frobert was trained as an economist and first published on prominent figures who wrote about political economy--François Simiand, Élie Halévy, Albert Hirschman, and John Kenneth Galbraith.[1] Almost two decades ago, however, he turned his attention to early French socialism, and since 2007 he has been a director of research for the CNRS (ENS-Lyon/Triangle) that has focused on this topic. The result is that over the past ten-plus years, many new studies have been published, some authored by Frobert, others written or edited in collaboration with colleagues.[2]

Frobert's latest book, *Vers l'égalité, ou au-delà? Essai sur l'aube du socialisme*, is an elegant example of his métier. The book proceeds as a series of portraits of Louis Blanc, François Vidal, Constantin Pecqueur, François-Vincent Raspail, and George Sand, but the larger purpose is to revisit the thought of these early socialists and to provide an understanding of their lament about the state of French society in their era and, also, to give us a sympathetic presentation of their views of what a better society would look like. As Frobert points out, these early socialists "formed a vigorous intellectual generation that considered themselves first as having a mission to remedy the state of moral and social decomposition of the society of their time...and [second, as having a

mission] to elaborate the rules and institutions of a new order, an order adapted to the new industrial epoch and expressing, on the political and moral plane, the values tied to liberty, equality and fraternity" (p. 15).[3]

These early socialists believed that the French Revolution had destroyed the structure of French corporate society, but they despaired that it had not introduced a just and comprehensive new order. They rejected the theories of the classical political economists and their French liberal supporters (Jean-Baptiste Say and François Guizot, for example) who celebrated the new industrial and financial organization of the country. Economic change had, in their eyes, created more wealth for the well-to-do, but had only increased poverty for many. Moreover, this distorted economic growth was accompanied by a lamentable corruption of social mores as competition and individualism became more pronounced.

Much of the critical side of this assessment was shared with other early socialists like Charles Fourier and Henri Saint-Simon. What distinguished Frobert's socialists was their recommended solutions. While they agreed with the Saint-Simonians' disapproval of the traditional hierarchies of blood, birth, caste, and race, they rejected the Saint-Simonians' proposal for a technocratic or theocratic hierarchy. And while they agreed with revolutionary socialists that the power of the idle class should be eliminated, they rejected violence. They believed advancement should rely upon social forms like cooperatives and associations, and they insisted that these should be introduced with the expectation that experimentation and adjustment would be required as new inequities became visible.

The principles that would orient this experimentation and advancement were the familiar triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but interpreted in the appropriate socialist manner. Liberty did not refer only to civil and political liberties (though these were important), but included the right to fully develop one's faculties. Equality was not limited to civil and political equality (though these were important), but must be extended to promote distribution according to need, and not just to capacity. Fraternity was not limited to an occasional festival, but must be realized through the promotion of solidarity, an ideal that drew from religious notions of devotion and from secular notions of republican virtue.

These were the ideals that undergirded the proposals of Blanc, Vidal, and Pecqueur when they were members of the Luxembourg Commission in 1848. These were the ideas that Raspail insisted required universal suffrage, the abolition of the death penalty, free and obligatory education, and the encouragement of the activities of all who had the capacity to make a contribution. And, they were the ideals that informed Sand's novels. One of the most intriguing sections of Frobert's book is his analysis of Sand's 1846 novel *Le péché de Monsieur Antoine.*

Frobert reminds us that the early French socialists rejected the so-called laws of the market claimed by classical political economists. And, he points out that they would be opposed to the later claims of Marxist who situated their theory on an uncompromising historical metaphysic, a form of historical determinism that Marx argued made it unnecessary to consider the contours of the better society of the future. Some early French socialists believed that they had discovered the laws that would necessarily lead to a better future--a utopian leap that many have found unconvincing--but they did not imagine that this eliminated the need to think about social organization and about the social mores beyond class struggle. Frobert insists that we focus on the inventive optic of these socialists, their critical gaze on the injustices of their society and their

positive imaginings of a more generous society where solidarity would prevail. He celebrates this embrace of what he refers to as their imaginative invention: "Far from associating the term invention with a crazy story (*affabulation*), we have here entwined it with ideas of creation and imagination.... In this perspective, the socialism of '48 constitutes in part a doctrine that pretends to discover the new social, economic, political truth, but also, in part, a doctrine aspiring to imagine, invent, create" (p. 164). Change was to be experimental, incremental, collective, and from below.

The title of the book refers to the limitations of a socialism that restricts reform to an instantiation of a level playing field so that all individuals would have the same opportunities. This fails to take into consideration the emergence of unexpected inequities. Frobert, like his socialists, insists that new paths for emancipation, progress, and equality will always need our attention. This requires adjusting institutional arrangements, but also developing more generous and inclusive dispositions. During the 1830s and 1840s, when the term socialism was coined--that is during the dawn of socialism--there was a recognition that society must reach beyond striving for a simple equality to build a world that lay beyond such a limited goal.

NOTES

[1] Ludovic Frobert's early publications include: *Le travail de François Simiand, 1873-1935* (Paris: Économica, 2000); *Elie Halévy: République et économie (1896-1914)* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2003); *Galbraith: La maître de l'économie* (Paris: Michalon, 2003); and, with Cyrille Ferraton, *L'enquête inachevée: Introduction à l'économie politique d'Albert O. Hirschman* (Paris: PUF, 2003).

[2] Leaving aside his many articles, Frobert's recent publications include: *Les canuts, ou la démocratie turbulente: Lyon, 1831-1834* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009); *Archives de soie: fabrique et insurrections à Lyon au début des années 1830* (Milan: Silvana editoriale, 2014); and, *Des républicains, ou Le roman vrai des Raspail* (Lyon: Libel, 2019). His co-authored and co-edited books include: with Jonathan Beecher, *L'Écho de la fabrique: naissance de la presse ouvrière à Lyon, 1831-1834* (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2010); with George Sheridan, *Le Solitaire du ravin: Pierre Charnier (1795-1857) canut lyonnais et prud'homme tisseur* (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2014); with Thomas Bouchet, Vincent Bourdeau, Edward Castleton, and François Jarrige, *Quand les socialistes inventaient l'avenir 1825-1860* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015); with Clément Coste and Marie Lauricella, *De la République de Constantin Pecqueur (1801-1887)* (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2017); and, with Jonathan Barbier, *Une imagination républicaine: François-Vincent Raspail (1794-1878)*, (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2017).

[3] Translations from Frobert's French text into English are by the reviewer.

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