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Pierre Renaudel from Normandy to the Second International

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Pierre Renaudel was born on December 19th 1871 in Morgny-la-Pommeraye. The son of schoolteachers, he graduated from l'École nationale d'Alfortville (Seine department) and became a veterinarian. He threw himself into socialism at a young age. Originally, he was a Blanquist, that is to say a member of a trend attached to the French revolutionary traditions – from 1793 to the Paris Commune in 1871 – and very anticlerical. He attended the socialist rally promoted by Jean Jaurès during the turmoil of the Alfred Dreyfus case and was an activist in the French Socialist Party (FSP, 1902-1905). This party was inserted in the Lefts Bloc and perceived as “reformist”, contrary to the Socialist Party of France which sought to be “revolutionary” and gathered together the “Marxists” led by Jules Guesde, Paul Lafargue and the “Blanquists” of Édouard Vaillant. However, Renaudel occupied a special position because he led the left wing of the FSP; a wing which was critical of ministerial involvement and the compromises of principles – that they considered going too far right - reached by the parliamentarians. He did not hesitate to confront Jaurès during conventions; it gave them the opportunity to know each other and build a relationship based on mutual trust. This was perfectly understood by Rosa Luxemburg who was obviously more critical when she condemned the role of this conflict: Renaudel was not a “counterweight” but a “shield” for Jaurès, she said at the International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam (August 17th 1904).

As a speaker and organizer, Renaudel became essential to French socialism. His orientation gathered together more than 40% of the mandates within the FSP and played a pivotal role in the process which, after the last congress of the FSP held in March 1905 in Rouen, led to the formation of the Socialist Party: the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO, April 1905). Renaudel quickly abandoned the internal missions he was entrusted with – he served as Assistant Secretary of the party and then as permanent delegate for propaganda – to invest himself in fulfilling his role as editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité*. With Philippe Landrieu –

from Le Havre and administrator of *L'Humanité* – he supported the development of the newspaper and ensured its management under the leadership and with the trust of Jaurès. He fought alongside him, strengthened the relationships with the trade union milieu and kept an eye on the various manoeuvres which may have challenged the supremacy of “the boss”. At the Congress of Saint Quentin (April 1911), he ensured his triumph. He closely monitored the party’s internal affairs and took on the representation of the federation of the Seine-Inférieure department in the early years. However, as the center of power was at the National Assembly, he tried to get elected as Member of Parliament (MP) for the Var department and succeeded in becoming one in 1914.

During the Great War, he ran the newspaper *L'Humanité* and practiced an editorial policy based on “national defense” that he strived to preserve while being loyal to its principles. He refused to give in to nationalist excesses and met, with his friend Jean Longuet, the German Social Democrats Haase and Kautsky in neutral territory on April 12th 1915 in Bern. They met again in August but this initiative produced no concrete results. Against the “pacifist” minority, Renaudel increasingly represented the views of the party’s majority. Although he was very much opposed to the government led by Georges Clemenceau, he was more and more challenged and ended up losing his job as editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité* in favour of Marcel Cachin – A MP formerly very much in favour of “L’union sacrée” who became a “centrist” and joined the new majority - in October 1918.

Still active, Renaudel was marginalized within the party but his opinion still carried a lot of weight in the SFIO. Moreover, he was the one who came into contact with the Georgian Mensheviks whose Democratic Republic (1918-1921) was wiped out by Soviet Russia and was also the pen friend of Kautsky and many other people. He got elected as MP representing Var once again in 1924 and founded the socialist weekly publication, *La Vie Socialiste*, whose orientation represented the right wing of the SFIO and supported an arrangement with the radicals. This led him to split from the SFIO in 1932-1933 and launch The Socialist Party of France – Jean Jaurès Union; a party whose members varied a great deal. Yet, his work must not be caricaturized: he was a free thinker; he was at the head of the Human Rights League and campaigned for the pardon of Sacco and Vanzetti or against the death penalty. He supported the initiative of the Moroccan nationalist journal *Maghreb* (1932-1935) in favour of colonial reforms combined with the promotion of indigenous elites. In short, as many socialist leaders (Bracke, Longuet, etc.) said when he died on April 1st 1935: he consciously chose to be in favour of a reformist action and this choice was always consistent with the socialist principles of his youth.

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