

PARIS 150 COMMUNE

The book cover features a central red flag with a black silhouette of a person's head and shoulders. The background is orange with a repeating pattern of white gears. At the bottom, there are two strands of white barbed wire. The text is in white and red.

Karl Marx | V.I. Lenin | Bertolt Brecht
Tings Chak

Introduction by Vijay Prashad



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Note: We have decided to take Lenin's advice and publish our text not on 18 March 2021, the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Paris Commune, but on 28 May, when it was defeated. The Commune shows, Lenin argued, that every defeat of the working people is a school. The Paris Commune was a historical attempt by workers to build their own state.

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Introduction:

Opening the Door to Utopia

VIJAY PRASHAD

For seventy-two days in 1871, the people of Paris opened the door to utopia. Faced with a ruling class that had led France into a catastrophic war and into subservience to Prussia, the workers of Paris decided to barricade themselves, establish their own government with their own democratic principles, and try to solve the problems that the ruling class had created. ‘What elasticity, what historical initiative, what a capacity for self-sacrifice in these Parisians’, Karl Marx wrote in a letter to his friend Kugelmann on 12 April 1871.¹ ‘After six months of hunger and ruin, caused rather by internal treachery than by the external enemy, they rise, beneath Prussian bayonets, as if there had never been a war between France and Germany and the enemy were not at the gates of Paris. History has no like example of such greatness’.

These Parisian workers walked on their streets as heirs of the French Revolution of 1789 and of the uprising of 1848. In each of these moments, the workers reached toward the heavens, hoping to create a world designed by and governed by the working people of the world. But, each time, their uprising was taken from them, either by deceit as a small but powerful class—the bourgeoisie—used the mass uprising for their own ends, or by the armed violence of the state mobilised by the government of their class enemies (the bourgeoisie among them). Napoleon I and Napoleon III would become the instruments of the powerful

1 Karl Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 12 April 1871. Karl Marx, *Letters to Kugelmann*, New York: International Publishers, 1934.



against the aspirations of the many.² Defeats in 1789 and 1848 did not stop the workers, who knew that the fight in 1871 would be difficult. It would end with their defeat, with more than 100,000 men and women killed by a ruthless French bourgeoisie.

Red Flag Over the Hôtel de Ville

This seventy-two-day experiment was known as the Paris Commune. It was called a 'commune' because in 1792 the revolutionaries had organised their cities into territorial enclaves that developed principles of local self-government. It was in this tradition of popular government that the uprising in Paris took that name. In each *arrondissement* (district) of Paris, the communards set up a Committee of Vigilance, which sent four members to the Central Committee for the entire Commune. The representatives of Paris came from amongst the working class, particularly from the various revolutionary movements of the decades that preceded 1871. This Central Committee demanded that the municipal officials be elected, that the police be under the control of the elected bodies, that the judiciary be elected, that the press and public gatherings be free, and that the civilians be armed in defence of the city.³

The Commune began as a patriotic gesture, a way to defend Paris from the Prussian army; but it rapidly took on a more radical, democratic character as a consequence of the mood of the people and the influence of revolutionary groups. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, who wrote a detailed account of the Commune, of which he was a member, noted that those who rose to high office in the Commune were 'unknown', which allowed it to be 'universal, not sectarian, and therefore powerful'. On 19

2 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852 and Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*, 1895.

3 Jacques Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2014; Jacques Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004.

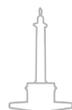
March, the day after the revolution of the Commune began, Lissagaray wrote, ‘The red flag floated above the Hôtel de Ville. With the early morning mists, the army, the Government, the Administration had evaporated. From the depths of the Bastille, from the obscure rue Basfroi, the Central Committee was lifted to the summits of Paris in the sight of all the world’.⁴

The Central Committee held elections to the various bodies of the Commune on 27 March. The next day, Lissagaray writes, the elected members took their seats.

Two hundred thousand ‘wretches’ came to the Hôtel de Ville there to install their chosen representatives, the battalion drums beating, the banners surmounted by the Phrygian cap and with the red fringe round the muskets; their ranks, swelled by soldiers of the line, artillerymen, and marines faithful to Paris, came down from all the streets to the Place de Grève like the thousand streams of a great river.

The elected officials stepped out, their red scarfs over their shoulders. Officials elected to the various local bodies had precise terms, including that they could be freely and immediately recalled if they did not function according to the will of the people. Gabriel Ranvier, a painter on porcelain and an elected official of the Commune, said ‘In the name of the people, the Commune is proclaimed’. *Vive la Commune*, the people yelled. ‘Caps were flung up on the ends of bayonets, flags fluttered in the air’, Lissagaray recalled. ‘All hearts leaped with joy; all eyes filled with tears’. The agents of the counter-revolution rushed to tell their bosses in Versailles, ‘It was really the whole of Paris that took part in the manifestation’.

4 Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Histoire de la Commune de 1871*, 1876, translated by Eleanor Marx. Most of the unattributed quotes in this text are taken from this crucial book.



The Proletarian Character of the Commune

The decrees of the Paris Commune clearly show the working-class character of its administration: deserted factories were to be occupied and run by the workers, fines levied on the workers were abolished, night work was banned in the bakeries, and church property was taken over for social use. Pawnshops, which had functioned as a kind of security for the working class, were transformed. 'It is well understood that the suppression of the pawnshops is to be succeeded by a social organisation giving serious guarantees of support to the working men thrown out of employment. The establishment of the Commune necessitates institutions protecting the workmen from the exploitation of capital', wrote the Communards.

The attitude of the Commune was that every member of the working classes, including the poor peasants, had to be incorporated into the new society—even those who had fought against the Commune. The chief of the Bureau of Public Safety announced that 'The Commune has sent bread to ninety-two wives of those who are killing us. The widows belong to no party. The Republic has bread for every misery and care for all the orphans'. Madame André Léo of the International Workingmen's Association wrote in her manifesto to the peasants in the countryside, 'Brother, you are being deceived. Our interests are the same. What I ask for, you wish it too. The *affranchissement* [liberation] which I demand is yours. What Paris after all wants is the land to the peasant, the tool to the worker'.

Karl Marx said in an address delivered to the International Workingmen's Association given two days after the fall of the Commune (and collected in this text), 'It was essentially a working-class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour'.

The officials in the various departments found them to have been run inefficiently by the Empire and set about making them productive. Zéphyrin Camélinat, a bronze-mounter, brought order to the Mint, while Albert Theisz, an engraver, settled the chaos in the postal department (Camélinat was to become the presidential candidate of the Communist Party of France in 1924). There are other names who brought their callous hands to bear on the mess left by the bourgeoisie, among them: Camille Treillard to the Department of Public Assistance, Jules Fontaine to the Post Office, Marius Faillet and Amédée Combault to the Department of Taxation, Louis-Guillaume Debock to the National Printing Press. Elie Reclus and Benjamin Gastineau reorganised the National Library to be used by the people, while Gustave Courbet, who oversaw the Federation of Artists, opened the museums up for popular enjoyment. Their work, over only a few months, showed the efficiency of proletarian governance, the ability of people with dirt under their fingernails to run departments in the interest of all of society, not just for the few.

Limits of the Commune

These leaders of the Commune came from a range of political backgrounds. There were followers of Louise Auguste Blanqui, of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and of Louise Michel; only a few were followers of Marx and members of the International. From their various standpoints, the members of the Commune pushed for a range of reforms, but what they lacked was an overall and clear programme of action.

The lack of such a programme comes into sharp focus at the doors of the Bank of France. 'Since 19 March', Lissagaray remembered, 'the governors of the bank lived like men condemned to death, every day expecting the execution of the treasure'. Hundreds of millions of francs sat in its tomb, such great wealth that the bankers could not even imagine moving it



to the safe confines of the territory of the counter-revolution in Versailles. The pressure was such that, on 23 March, the governor of the bank, Gustave Rouland, fled Paris. He left the premises in the hands of his deputy, Alexandre de Plœuc. De Plœuc understood the limits of the Commune's elected leaders, many of whom were in awe of the facts and figures that he doled out. He gave them money 'franc by franc' and held onto the fact that the bank had enough wealth to expand the work of the Commune and to establish it against failure.

Charles Beslay, a member of the International Workingmen's Association and the oldest member of the Paris Commune government, went to talk to de Plœuc, who told him that the bank held the 'fortune of your country' and should be treated as sacrosanct, more precious than the property of the churches which had been expropriated. Beslay hurried back to his comrades in the Hôtel de Ville with this surrender note: 'The bank is the fortune of the country; without it, [there is] no more industry, no more commerce. If you violate it, all its notes will be so much waste-paper'. The Commune did not have the nerve to occupy the bank, bring it under democratic control, and use its wealth for the social good. Engels later wrote that 'The hardest thing to understand is certainly the holy awe with which they remained standing respectfully outside the gates of the Bank of France'.⁵ The main explanation is that the forms of utopian socialism that dominated the Commune left them ill-equipped to understand the need to subordinate finance to democracy, to transplant the beating heart of the bourgeoisie into the hands of the working class.

Smash the State

Reverence for the Bank of France came alongside a belief in the structures of the French state. On 12 April, Marx reminded Kugelmann of what he had said in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of*

5 Friedrich Engels, postscript to Karl Marx, *Civil War in France*, 1891.

Louis Bonaparte; namely that after the 1789 Revolution, the next attempt to create a revolution 'will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to *smash* it'.

Rigidities of class had become calcified in the institutions of the state, habits of officials as wretched as the rules and regulations of the offices. In seventy-two days, such changes could not be put into place, but the Commune did not even try. After its fall, Marx told the International, 'The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purpose'. That machinery will end up being the Trojan Horse of counter-revolution, he warned, since it will not bend itself to the will of the people no matter the best intentions of the new government. In 1891, Engels reissued Marx's speech in a pamphlet with a preface that sharpened this point:

From the outset the Commune was compelled to recognise that the working class, once come to power, could not manage with the old state machine; that in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy, this working class must, on the one hand, do away with all the old repressive machinery previously used against it itself, and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment.

Then, Engels concluded on a precise, theoretical point, 'In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy'.

Two decades later, in the midst of the October Revolution of 1917, V.I. Lenin re-read Marx's address on the Commune and reflected on the perils of the inherited state machinery. The old state institutions, not the parliamentary system, Lenin wrote, had to be smashed and replaced with new forms of proletarian



governance. During the 1905 Revolution against the Tsar's empire, the Russian workers created a form of representative government and administration called the soviet. In 1908, writing of the Commune and of the 1905 Russian Revolution, Lenin wrote, 'The Commune taught the European proletariat to pose concretely the tasks of the socialist revolution'; a revolution had to tackle the immediate aspirations for democracy and for answering human needs.⁶ The Soviet advanced upon the form of the Commune, although the Commune itself had made immense advances. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin reflected on the democratic procedures of the Commune:

The Commune, therefore, appears to have replaced the smashed state machine 'only' by fuller democracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be elected and subject to recall. But as a matter of fact this 'only' signifies a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different type. This is exactly a case of 'quantity being transformed into quality': democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy; from the state (= a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer the state proper.

Reflecting on the Commune to Kugelmann, Marx wrote, 'History has no like example of such greatness'. But here he was in error. Working-class struggles against capitalism are filled with examples of heroic and creative attempts to supersede repressive government and put in place new democratic forms. In the late 18th century, the working class on the capitalist plantations of Haiti revolted and emancipated themselves from planter rule; they attempted to create new forms of governance, some of them modelled on the maroons of the enslaved people who ran off

6 V.I. Lenin, 'Lessons of the Commune', *Zagranichnaya Gazeta*, no. 2, March 1908.

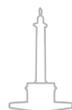
from bondage and set up their own egalitarian communities. Such experiences enrich our understanding of the tendency to democratic organisation in the midst of proletarian revolts. There is a straight line of experimentation from the Haitian Revolution (1804) to the Shanghai Commune (1927). These are all examples to be closely studied so that we might be clearer about the limitations of the dynamic of proletarian revolutions and to study how to better build proletarian democracy.

Halted Revolution

When the workers seized Paris, they did not seize its bank. Nor did they gather their considerable forces and march on Versailles to force the surrender of the government of the bourgeoisie. Having allowed the government of Adolphe Thiers to remain in charge, the Paris Commune set in motion its own destruction. This made Marx furious by mid-April, just a few weeks into the Commune. He wrote to Kugelmann:

If they are defeated, only their 'good nature' will be to blame. They should have marched at once on Versailles [as soon as] Vinoy and then the reactionary section of the Paris National Guard had themselves retreated. The right moment was missed because of conscientious scruples. They did not want to *start the civil war*, as if that mischievous *abortion* Thiers had not already started the civil war with his attempt to disarm Paris.

The inaction of the Commune allowed Thiers to take the reactionary government and the armed forces to Versailles. The communards should not have allowed the Versailles troops to depart from Paris; having held them in the city, it is possible that the majority of the soldiers would have been won over by the Commune. But this did not happen.



That lesson was imprinted on other revolutionaries. After the October Revolution, the young Soviets established the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army to defend their seizure of power against the reactionary old classes and the imperialist armies; it was clear that, unless the revolutionary forces fragmented their opposition and built their strength, the revolution would be destroyed. This was a key lesson learned in the ruins of the Paris Commune.

Thiers and his reactionary government negotiated with the Prussians to take back captured French soldiers, build their army, and assault Paris. The communards built barricades and prepared themselves for the eventual attack. When it came, between 22 May and 28 May, they could not maintain their hold on the city. Every street became a battlefield, but, with each battle, the communards had to retreat deeper and deeper into their lost city. The army of the bourgeoisie was brutal, killing the communards where they stood, filling the streets with blood. Lissagaray wrote that the Versailles army 'transformed itself into a vast platoon of executioners'. At Montmartre, the women's battalion of the communards held their ground for hours. General Justin Clinchant's troops overran them and the leader of the communards of the area was brought before the Versailles troops. 'Who are you?', asked the commanding officer. 'Lévêque, mason, member of the Central Committee', came the answer. The commanding officer snorted, 'A mason who wants to govern France'. That was the level of the contempt of the bourgeoisie. Lévêque was shot in the face.

The army led the captured communards to Père Lachaise Cemetery, where they were lined up and shot. General Gaston Alexandre Auguste, Marquis de Galliffet, led these troops to murder. He would later be posted to Algeria, where he brought his brutal skills practiced on the communards to bear in the French pursuit of its empire in north Africa. In the cemetery, the 'Wall of the Communards' appears almost stained with their

blood, the bullet holes still visible 150 years after the massacre. In one week, the forces of Versailles murdered 40,000 Parisians. ‘The burying of such a large number of corpses soon became too difficult’, Lissagaray wrote, ‘and they were burnt in the casemates of the fortifications; but for want of draught the combustion was incomplete, and the bodies were reduced to a pulp. At the Buttes Chaumont the corpses, piled up in enormous heaps, inundated with petroleum, were burnt in the open air’.

Adolphe Thiers surveyed the blood-soaked streets and declared, ‘The soil of Paris is covered with their corpses. We may hope this terrible spectacle may yet be a lesson to those insurgents who dared declare themselves partisans of the Paris Commune’. That was on 25 May. Three days later, on 28 May, the Commune fell.

Each Defeat is an Education for the Working Class

The Commune lasted only two months. Over the bodies of the communards, the bourgeoisie of France built an enormous basilica, the Sacre Coeur (‘sacred heart’). It was built, the Catholic Church said, to ‘expiate the crimes of the Paris Commune’. Today, there is no mention of the grotesque history that sits beneath this enormous building that looks out upon Paris. The bourgeoisie’s view of the Commune treats the uprising as a sin and blames the communards themselves for their own deaths. But the revolt did not kill itself; it was killed by the vengeful bourgeoisie, which sought to wrench this hard-fought sovereignty from the hands of the working class and re-establish its order to benefit itself. The democratic advances of the Paris Commune were set aside, their memory erased beneath the basilica.

In his preface to a collection of Marx’s letters to Kugelmann, Lenin wrote, ‘Marx could appreciate that there were moments in history when a struggle of the masses, even in a hopeless cause, was



necessary for the sake of the future education of these masses and their training for the next struggle'.⁷ The lesson of the Commune was not merely for the Parisian workers or for France, but it was a lesson for the international working class, for our self-education toward our own struggles to overcome the dilemmas of humanity and advance to socialism. Reflecting on the Paris Commune in 1911, the fortieth anniversary of the uprising, Lenin wrote, 'The cause of the Commune is the cause of the social revolution, the cause of the complete political and economic emancipation of the workers. It is the cause of the proletariat of the whole world. And in this sense, it is immortal'.⁸



7 V. I. Lenin, preface, Letters to Kugelmann.

8 V. I. Lenin, 'In Memory of the Commune', *Rabochaya Gazeta*, no. 4-5, 15 April 1911.



പഴമതൻ വിലങ്ങു പുട്ടിയിടുകയില്പ നമ്മളെ



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ഇന്നലെവരെയൊന്നുമല്പ നമ്മൾ, ഇന്നു തൊട്ടു നമ്മളാകുമെല്പാം.



Agrupémonos todos, en la lucha final,



y se alcen los pueblos,



por la Internacional.

A Bright Flower

TINGS CHAK

On 16 May 1871, the Vendôme Column—the monument to Napoleon-era imperialism—came toppling down. In its stead, the Communards renamed the plaza ‘Place Internationale’.

Nearly two decades prior, Karl Marx wrote in his foreboding *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852): ‘But when the imperial mantle finally falls on the shoulders of Louis Bonaparte, the bronze statue of Napoleon will come crashing down from the top of the Vendôme Column.’ And down it came.

Among the leaders behind its collapse was the French socialist painter and communard Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), known for creating work that rendered the sweat of peasants over the luxury of bourgeois life. Courbet’s life and work were bookended by two historic events: the French Revolution of 1848, in which the working class emerged as a force in its own right, and the 1871 Paris Commune. During the Commune – ‘the beautiful dream’, as Courbet called it, he was elected the founding president of the Federation of Artists and the minister of culture of the worker-led state. For this anti-imperialist act, he was jailed for six months and was indebted by fines until his death.

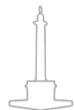
During the Commune’s life, the Federation drafted and debated proposals on education and aesthetics, methods and organisation, and the toppling of the old to erect new monuments. They knew deeply that the proletarian battle was also one over culture and its ideological and institutional foundations and that artists must be reimagined as militants in the revolutionary process.

‘Listen: leave us your Krupp cannons, we will melt them

together with ours,' Courbet wrote to the German army and artists months before the uprising in Paris. 'The last cannon, its upturned muzzle covered with a Phrygian bonnet, planted on a pedestal resting on three cannon balls; that colossal monument that we'll erect together on the place Vendôme will be our column, for you and for us, the column of the people.' For them, the symbols of the old must be replaced by the new, 'the inauguration of communal wealth' for the workers of the world.

Forty-seven painters, sculptors, architects, engravers, and decorative artists came together to declare their mission, to preserve the treasures of the past and to illuminate the needs of the present in order to regenerate the future through education, monuments, and museums. Among the founding members of the Federation of Artists was the poet Eugène Pottier. Faced with the bloody massacre that ended the seventy-two-day workers' state on 28 May 1871, Pottier wrote a poem. Its words would become one of the most widely sung anthems of the oppressed across the world: *L'Internationale*. In the pages of this book, you will find its verses in some of the countless languages in which this song has been sung to give our struggles courage in the years since. Together, they complete the song in its entirety, staying true to its internationalist intention.

Half a century after that bloody massacre, 10,000 Chinese workers and peasants gathered in the southern province of Guangdong on the 55th anniversary of the Paris Commune. Inspired by the Commune, alliances built between peasants, workers, and revolutionary soldiers led to several uprisings in 1927, marking a turning point in the country's revolutionary process. At the commemoration rally, despite the rains, they sang *L'Internationale* and chanted *Vive la Commune de Paris!* ('Long live the Paris Commune!'). Rather than focusing on the defeat of the Commune, Mao Zedong commemorated it: if the Paris Commune was a 'bright flower', he said, then the October Revolution was the 'happy fruit'. He wrote this merely twenty-



three years before leading his people and country to revolution.

In the pages of this book, you will find some cultural materials that point to this legacy of ours through words, images, and song. From the ruins of past empires, we remember our ‘bright flower’ from which more fruit can, have been, and will be born. After all, as Brecht wrote in the song *Revolution of the Communards*, ‘our future must be built by our dictate’, with people’s art as monuments of struggle to usher in that future.



The Civil War In France

Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association

KARL MARX

13 June 1871

To All the Members of the Association in Europe and in the United States

I

On September 4th, 1870, when the working men of Paris proclaimed the Republic, which was almost instantaneously acclaimed throughout France, without a single voice of dissent, a cabal of place-hunting barristers, with Thiers for their statesman, and Trochu for their general, took hold of the Hotel de Ville. At that time they were imbued with so fanatical a faith in the mission of Paris to represent France in all epochs of historical crisis, that, to legitimatise their usurped titles as Governors of France, they thought it quite sufficient to produce their lapsed mandates as representatives of Paris. In our second address on the late war, five days after the rise of these men, we told you who they were. Yet, in the turmoil of surprise, with the real leaders of the working class still shut up in Bonapartist prisons and the Prussians already marching upon Paris, Paris bore with their assumption of power, on the express condition that it was to be wielded for the single purpose of national defence. Paris, however, was not to be defended without arming its working class, organising them into an effective force, and training their ranks by the war itself. But Paris armed was the Revolution armed. A victory of Paris over the Prussian aggressor would have been a

victory of the French workman over the French capitalist and his State parasites. In this conflict between national duty and class interest, the Government of National Defence did not hesitate one moment to turn into a Government of National Defection.

The first step they took was to send Thiers on a roving tour to all the Courts of Europe there to beg mediation by offering the barter of the Republic for a king. Four months after the commencement of the siege [of Paris], when they thought the opportune moment came for breaking the first word of capitulation, Trochu, in the presence of Jules Favre, and others of his colleagues, addressed the assembled mayors of Paris in these terms:

“The first question put to me by my colleagues on the very evening of September 4th was this: Paris, can it, with any chance of success, stand a siege by the Prussian army? I did not hesitate to answer in the negative. Some of my colleagues here present will warrant the truth of my words and the persistence of my opinion. I told them, in these very terms, that, under the existing state of things, the attempt of Paris to hold out a siege by the Prussian army would be a folly. Without doubt, I added, it would be an heroic folly; but that would be all.... The events (managed by himself) have not given the lie to my prevision.”

This nice little speech of Trochu was afterwards published by M. Corbon, one of the mayors present.

Thus, on the very evening of the proclamation of the Republic, Trochu’s “plan” was known to his colleagues to be the capitulation of Paris. If national defence has been more than a pretext for the personal government of Thiers, Favre, and Co., the upstarts of September 4th would have abdicated on the 5th—would have initiated the Paris people into Trochu’s “plan,” and called upon them to surrender at once, or to take their own fate into their own hands. Instead of this, the infamous impostors resolved upon curing the heroic folly of Paris by a regimen of famine and broken heads, and to dupe her in the meanwhile by ranting



manifestoes, holding forth that Trochu, “the Governor of Paris, will never capitulate,” and Jules Favre, the Foreign Minister, will “not cede an inch of our territory, nor a stone of our fortresses.”

In a letter to Gambetta, the very same Jules Favre avows that what they were “defending” against were not the Prussian soldiers, but the working men of Paris. During the whole continuance of the siege, the Bonapartist cut-throats, whom Trochu had wisely intrusted with the command of the Paris army, exchanged, in their intimate correspondence, ribald jokes at the well-understood mockery of defence (see for instance, the correspondence of Alphonse Simon Guiod, supreme commander of the artillery of the Army of Defence of Paris and Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, to Suzanne, general of division of artillery, a correspondence published by the *Journal officiel* of the Commune). The mask of imposture was at last dropped on January 28th, 1871. With the true heroism of utter self-debasement, the Government of National Defence, in their capitulation, came out as the Government of France by Bismarck’s permission—a part so base that Louis Bonaparte himself had, at Sedan, shrunk from accepting it. After the events of March 18th on their wild flight to Versailles, the *capitulards* left in the hands of Paris the documentary evidence of their treason, to destroy which, as the Commune says in its manifesto to the provinces, “those men would not recoil from battering Paris into a heap of ruins washed by a sea of blood.”

To be eagerly bent upon such a consummation, some of the leading members of the Government of Defence had, besides, most peculiar reasons of their own.

Shortly after the conclusion of the armistice, M. Millière, one of the representatives of Paris to the National Assembly, now shot by express orders of Jules Favre, published a series of authentic legal documents in proof that Jules Favre, living in concubinage with the wife of a drunken resident at Algiers, had, by a most daring concoction of forgeries, spread over many years, contrived

to grasp, in the name of the children of his adultery, a large succession, which made him a rich man, and that, in a lawsuit undertaken by the legitimate heirs, he only escaped exposure by the connivance of the Bonapartist tribunals. As these dry legal documents were not to be got rid of by any amount of rhetorical horse-power, Jules Favre, for the first time in his life, held his tongue, quietly awaiting the outbreak of the civil war, in order, then, frantically to denounce the people of Paris as a band of escaped convicts in utter revolt against family, religion, order, and property. This same forger had hardly got into power, after September 4th, when he sympathetically let loose upon society Pic and Taillefer, convicted, even under the Empire of forgery, in the scandalous affair of "Étendard." One of these men, Taillefer, having dared to return to Paris under the Commune, was at once reinstated in prison; and then Jules Favre exclaimed from the tribune of the National Assembly that Paris was setting free all her jailbirds!

Ernest Picard, the Joe Miller of the Government of National Defence, who appointed himself Finance Minister of the Republic after having in vain striven to become Home Minister of the Empire, is the brother of one Arthur Picard, an individual expelled from the Paris Bourse as a blackleg (see report of the Prefecture of Police, dated July 13th, 1867), and convicted, on his own confession, of theft of 300,000 francs, while manager of one of the branches of the *Société Générale*, Rue Palestro, No. 5 (see report of the Prefecture of Police, dated December 11th, 1868). This Arthur Picard was made by Ernest Picard the editor of his paper, *l'Electeur Libre*. While the common run of stockjobbers were led astray by the official lies of the Home Office paper, Arthur was running backwards and forwards between the Home Office and the Bourse, there to discount the disasters of the French army. The whole financial correspondence of that worthy pair of brothers fell into the hands of the Commune.

Jules Ferry, a penniless barrister before September 4th,



contrived, as Mayor of Paris during the siege, to job a fortune out of famine. The day on which he would have to give an account of his maladministration would be the day of his conviction.

These men, then, could find in the ruins of Paris only, their tickets-of-leave: they were the very men Bismarck wanted. With the help of some shuffling of cards, Thiers, hitherto the secret promoter of the Government, now appeared at its head, with the ticket-of-leave men for his Ministers.

Thiers, that monstrous gnome, has charmed the French bourgeoisie for almost half a century, because he is the most consummate intellectual expression of their own class-corruption. Before he became a statesman, he had already proved his lying powers as an historian. The chronicle of his public life is the record of the misfortunes of France. Banded, before 1830, with the Republicans, he slipped into office under Louis Philippe by betraying his protector Lafitte, ingratiating himself with the king by exciting mob riots against the clergy, during which the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois and the Archbishop's palace were plundered, and by acting the minster-spy upon, and the jail-accoucheur of the Duchess de Berri. The massacre of the Republicans in the Rue Transnonian, and the subsequent infamous laws of September against the Press and the right of association, were his work. Reappearing as the chief of the Cabinet in March 1840, he astonished France with his plan for fortifying France. To the Republicans, who denounced this plan as a sinister plot against the liberty of Paris, he replied from the tribune of the Chamber of Deputies:

“What! To fancy that any works of fortification could ever endanger liberty! And first of all you calumniate any possible government in supposing that it could some day attempt to maintain itself by bombarding the capital; [...] but that the government would be a hundred times more impossible after its victory than before.” Indeed, no government would ever have dared to bombard Paris from the forts but that Government

which had previously surrendered these forts to the Prussians.

When King Bomba tried his hand at Palermo, in January, 1848, Thiers, then long since out of office, again rose in the Chamber of Deputies: "You know, gentlemen, what is happening at Palermo. You, all of you, shake with horror (in the parliamentary sense) on hearing that during forty-eight hours a large town has been bombarded—by whom? Was it a foreign enemy exercising the right of war? No, gentlemen, it was by its own Government. And why? Because the unfortunate town demanded its rights. Well, then, for the demand of its rights it has got forty-eight hours of bombardment ... Allow me to appeal to the opinion of Europe. It is doing a service to mankind to arise, and to make reverberate, from what is perhaps the greatest tribune in Europe, some words (indeed words) of indignation against such acts.... When the Regent Espartero, who had rendered services in his country (which M. Thiers never did) intended bombarding Barcelona, in order to suppress its insurrection, there arose from all parts of the world a general outcry of indignation."

Eighteen months afterwards, M. Thiers was amongst the fiercest defenders of the bombardment of Rome by a French army. In fact the fault of King Bomba seems to have consisted of this only, that he limited his bombardment to forty-eight hours.

A few days before the Revolution of February, fretting at the long exile from place and pelf to which Guizot had condemned him and sniffing in the air the scent of an approaching popular commotion, Thiers, in that pseudo-heroic style which won him the nickname *Mirabeau-mouche* [Mirabeau the fly], declared to the Chamber of Deputies: "I am of the party of Revolution, not only in France, but in Europe. I wish the Government of the Revolution to remain in the hands of moderate men ... but if the Government should fall into the hands of ardent minds, even into those of Radicals, I shall, for all that, not desert my cause. I shall always be of the party of the Revolution." The Revolution of February came. Instead of displacing the Guizot Cabinet by



the Thiers Cabinet, as the little man had dreamt, it superseded Louis Philippe by the Republic. On the first day of the popular victory he carefully hid himself, forgetting that the contempt of the working men screened him from their hatred. Still with his legendary courage, he continued to shy the public stage, until the June [1848] massacres had cleared it for his sort of action. Then he became the leading mind of the “Party of Order” and its Parliamentary Republic, that anonymous interregnum, in which all the rival factions of the ruling class conspired together to crush the people, and conspired against each other to restore to each of them its own monarchy. Then, as now, Thiers denounced the Republicans as the only obstacle to the consolidation of the Republic; then, as now, he spoke to the Republic as the hangman spoke to Don Carlos: “I shall assassinate thee, but for thy own good.” Now, as then, he will have to exclaim on the day after his victory: *L’Empire est fait*—the empire is consummated. Despite his hypocritical homilies about the necessary liberties and his personal grudge against Louis Bonaparte, who had made a dupe of him, and kicked out parliamentarism—and outside of its factitious atmosphere, the little man is conscious of withering into nothingness—he had a hand in all the infamies of the Second Empire, from the occupation of Rome by French troops to the war with Prussia, which he incited by his fierce invective against German unity—not as a cloak of Prussian despotism but as an encroachment upon the vested right of France in German disunion. Fond of brandishing, with his dwarfish arms in the face of Europe the sword of the first Napoleon, whose historical shoeblack he had become, his foreign policy always culminated in the utter humiliation of France from the London convention of 1841 to the Paris capitulation of 1871 and the present civil war, where he hounds on the prisoners of Sedan and Metz against Paris by special permission of Bismarck. Despite his versatility of talent and shiftiness of purpose, this man has his whole lifetime been wedded to the most fossil routine. It is self-evident that to

him the deeper undercurrents of modern society remained forever hidden; but even the most palpable changes on its surface were abhorrent to a brain all the vitality of which had fled to the tongue. Thus, he never tired of denouncing as a sacrilege any deviation from the old French protective system. When a minister of Louis Philippe, he railed at railways as a wild chimera; and when in opposition under Louis Bonaparte, he branded as a profanation every attempt to reform the rotten French army system. Never in his long political career has he been guilty of a single—even the smallest—measure of any practical use. Thiers was consistent only in his greed for wealth and his hatred of the men that produce it. Having entered his first ministry under Louis Philippe poor as Job, he left it a millionaire. His last ministry under the same king (of March 1st, 1840) exposed him to public taunts of speculation in the Chamber of Deputies, to which he was content to reply by tears—a commodity he deals in as freely as Jules Favre, or any other crocodile. At Bordeaux, his first measure for saving France from impending financial ruin was to endow himself with three millions a year, the first and the last word of the “Economical Republic,” the vista of which he had opened to his Paris electors in 1869. One of his former colleagues of the Chamber of Deputies of 1830, himself a capitalist and nevertheless a devoted member of the Paris Commune, M. Beslay, lately addressed Thiers thus in a public placard: “The enslavement of labour by capital has always been the corner-stone of your policy, and from the very day you saw the Republic of Labour installed at the Hotel de Ville, you have never ceased to cry out to France: “These are criminals!”” A master in small state roguery, a virtuoso in perjury and treason, a craftsman in all the petty stratagems, cunning devices and base perfidies of Parliamentary party-warfare; never scrupling, when out of office, to fan a revolution, and to stifle it in blood when at the helm of the State; with class prejudices standing him in the place of ideas, and vanity in the place of a heart; his private life as infamous as his public life is odious—even now, when playing the



part of a French Sulla, he cannot help setting off the abomination of his deeds by the ridicule of his ostentation.

The capitulation of Paris, by surrendering to Prussia, not only Paris, but all France, closed the long-continued intrigues or treason with the enemy, which the usurpers of September 4th began, as Trochu himself said, on the very same day. On the other hand, it initiated the civil war they were now to wage with the assistance of Prussia, against the Republic and Paris. The trap was laid in the very terms of the capitulation. At that time, above one-third of the territory was in the hands of the enemy, the capital was cut off from the provinces, all communications were disorganised. To elect under such circumstances a real representation of France was impossible, unless ample time were given for preparation. In view of this the capitulation stipulated that a National Assembly must be elected within eight days; so that in many parts of France the news of the impending election arrived on its eve only. This assembly, moreover, was, by an express clause of the capitulation, to be elected for the sole purpose of deciding on peace or war, and, eventually, to conclude a treaty of peace. The population could not but feel that the terms of the armistice rendered the continuation of the war impossible, and that for sanctioning the peace imposed by Bismarck, the worst men in France were the best. But not content with these precautions, Thiers, even before the secret of the armistice had been broached to Paris, set out for an electioneering tour through the provinces, there to galvanise back into life the Legitimist party, which now, along with the Orleanists, had to take the place of the then impossible Bonapartists. He was not afraid of them. Impossible as a government of modern France, and therefore, contemptible as rivals, what party were more eligible as tools of counter-revolution than the party whose action, in the words of Thiers himself (Chamber of Deputies, January 5th, 1833), "had always been confined to the three resources of foreign invasion,

civil war, and anarchy”? They verily believed in the advent of their long-expected retrospective millennium. There were the heels of foreign invasion trampling upon France; there was the downfall of an Empire, and the captivity of Bonaparte; and there they were themselves. The wheel of history has evidently rolled back to stop at the “Chambers introuvable” of 1816. In the assemblies of the Republic, 1848 to ’51, they had been represented by their educated and trained Parliamentary champions; it was the rank-and-file of the party which now rushed in—all the Pourceaugnacs of France.

As soon as this Assembly of “Rurals” had met at Bordeaux, Thiers made it clear to them that the peace preliminaries must be assented to at once, without even the honours of a Parliamentary debate, as the only conditions on which Prussia would permit them to open the war against the Republic and Paris, its stronghold. The counter-revolution had, in fact, no time to lose. The Second Empire had more than doubled the national debt, and plunged all the large towns into heavy municipal debts. The war had fearfully swelled the liabilities, and mercilessly ravaged the resources of the nation. To complete the ruin, the Prussian Shylock was there with his bond for the keep of half a million of his soldiers on French soil, his indemnity for five milliards and interest at 5 per cent. on the unpaid instalments thereof. Who was to pay this bill? It was only by the violent overthrow of the Republic that the appropriators of wealth could hope to shift onto the shoulders of its producers the cost of a war which they, the appropriators, had themselves originated. Thus, the immense ruin of France spurred on these patriotic representatives of land and capital, under the very eyes and patronage of the invader, to graft upon the foreign war a civil war—a slaveholders’ rebellion.

There stood in the way of this conspiracy one great obstacle—Paris. To disarm Paris was the first condition of success. Paris was therefore summoned by Thiers to surrender its arms. Then Paris was exasperated by the frantic anti-republican demonstrations of



the “Rural” Assembly and by Thiers’s own equivocations about the legal status of the Republic; by the threat to decapitate and decapitalise Paris; the appointment of Orleanist ambassadors; Dufaure’s laws on over-due commercial bills and house rents, inflicting ruin on the commerce and industry of Paris; Pouyer-Quertier’s tax of two centimes upon every copy of every imaginable publication; the sentences of death against Blanqui and Flourens; the suppression of the Republican journals; the transfer of the National Assembly to Versailles; the renewal of the state of siege declared by Palikao, and expired on September 4th; the appointment of Vinoy, the *Décembriseur*, as governor of Paris—of Valentin, the imperialist *gendarme*, as its prefect of police—and of D’Aurelles de Paladine, the Jesuit general, as the commander-in-chief of its National Guard.

And now we have to address a question to M. Thiers and the men of national defence, his under-strappers. It is known that, through the agency of M. Pouyer-Quertier, his finance minister, Thiers had contracted a loan of two milliards, to be paid down at once. Now, is it true or not—

1. That the business was so managed that a consideration of several hundred millions was secured for the private benefit of Thiers, Jules Favre, Ernest Picard, Pouyer-Quertier, and Jules Simon? and—

2. That no money was to be paid down until after the “pacification” of Paris?

At all events, there must have been something very pressing in the matter, for Thiers and Jules Favre, in the name of the majority of the Bordeaux Assembly, unblushingly solicited the immediate occupation of Paris by Prussian troops. Such, however, was not the game of Bismarck, as he sneeringly, and in public, told the admiring Frankfort Philistines on his return to Germany.

II

Armed Paris was the only serious obstacle in the way of the counter-revolutionary conspiracy. Paris was, therefore, to be disarmed. On this point the Bordeaux Assembly was sincerity itself. If the roaring rant of its Rurals had not been audible enough, the surrender of Paris by Thiers to the tender mercies of the triumvirate of Vinoy the *Décembriseur*, Valentin the Bonapartist *gendarme*, and Aurelles de Paladine the Jesuit general, would have cut off even the last subterfuge of doubt. But while insultingly exhibiting the true purpose of the disarmament of Paris, the conspirators asked her to lay down her arms on a pretext which was the most glaring, the most barefaced of lies. The artillery of the Paris National Guard, said Thiers, belonged to the State, and to the State it must be returned. The fact is this: From the very day of the capitulation, by which Bismarck's prisoners had signed the surrender of France, but reserved to themselves a numerous bodyguard for the express purpose of cowing Paris, Paris stood on the watch. The National Guard reorganised themselves and intrusted their supreme control to a Central Committee elected by their whole body, save some fragments of the old Bonapartist formation. On the eve of the entrance of the Prussians into Paris, the Central Committee took measures for the removal to Montmartre, Belleville, and La Villette of the cannon and mitrailleuses treacherously abandoned by the *capitulards* in and about the very quarters the Prussians were to occupy. That artillery had been furnished by the subscriptions of the National Guard. As their private property, it was officially recognised in the capitulation of January 28th, and on that very title exempted from the general surrender, into the hands of the conqueror, or arms belonging to the Government. And Thiers was so utterly destitute of even the flimsiest pretext for initiating the war against Paris, that he had to resort to the flagrant lie of the artillery of the National Guard being State property!



The seizure of her artillery was evidently but to serve as the preliminary to the general disarmament of Paris, and, therefore, of the Revolution of the 4th of September. But that Revolution had become the legal status of France. The Republic, its work, was recognised by the conqueror in the terms of the capitulation. After the capitulation, it was acknowledged by all foreign Powers, and in its name the National Assembly had been summoned. The Paris working men's revolution of September 4th was the only legal title of the National Assembly seated at Bordeaux, and of its executive. Without it, the National Assembly would at once have to give way to the Corps Legislatif, elected in 1869 by universal suffrage under French, not under Prussian, rule, and forcibly dispersed by the arm of the Revolution. Thiers and his ticket-of-leave men would have had to capitulate for safe conducts signed by Louis Bonaparte, to save them from a voyage to Cayenne. The National Assembly, with its power of attorney to settle the terms of peace with Prussia, was but an incident of that Revolution, the true embodiment of which was still armed Paris, which had initiated it, undergone for it a five-months' siege, with its horrors of famine, and made her prolonged resistance, despite Trochu's plan, the basis of an obstinate war of defence in the provinces. And Paris was now either to lay down her arms at the insulting behest of the rebellious slaveholders of Bordeaux, and acknowledge that her Revolution of September 4th meant nothing but a simple transfer of power from Louis Bonaparte to his Royal rivals; or she had to stand forward as the self-sacrificing champion of France, whose salvation from ruin, and whose regeneration were impossible, without the revolutionary overthrow of the political and social conditions that had engendered the Second Empire, and, under its fostering care, matured into utter rottenness. Paris, emaciated by a five-months' famine, did not hesitate one moment. She heroically resolved to run all the hazards of a resistance against French conspirators, even with Prussian cannon frowning upon her from her own forts. Still, in its abhorrence of the civil

war into which Paris was to be goaded, the Central Committee continued to persist in a merely defensive attitude, despite the provocations of the Assembly, the usurpations of the Executive, and the menacing concentration of troops in and around Paris.

Thiers opened the civil war by sending Vinoy, at the head of a multitude of *sergents-de-ville*, and some regiments of the line, upon a nocturnal expedition against Montmartre, there to seize, by surprise, the artillery of the National Guard. It is well known how this attempt broke down before the resistance of the National Guard and the fraternisation of the line with the people. Aurelles de Paldine had printed beforehand his bulletin of victory, and Thiers held ready the placards announcing his measures of *coup d'état*. Now these had to be replaced by Thiers's appeals, imparting his magnanimous resolve to leave the National Guard in the possession of their arms, with which, he said, he felt sure they would rally round the Government against the rebels. Out of 300,000 National Guards only 300 responded to this summons to rally round little Thiers against themselves. The glorious working men's Revolution of March 18th took undisputed sway of Paris. The Central Committee was its provisional Government. Europe seemed, for a moment, to doubt whether its recent sensational performances of state and war had any reality in them or whether they were the dreams of a long bygone past.

From the 18th of March to the entrance of the Versailles troops into Paris, the proletarian revolution remained so free from the acts of violence in which the revolutions, and still more the counter-revolutions, of the "better classes" abound, that no facts were left to its opponents to cry out about, but the executions of Generals Lecomte and Clement Thomas, and the affair of the Place Vendome.

One of the Bonapartist officers engaged in the nocturnal attempt against Montmartre, General Lecomte, had four times ordered the 81st line regiment to fire at an unarmed gathering in the Place Pigalle, and on their refusal fiercely insulted them.



Instead of shooting women and children, his own men shot him. The inveterate habits acquired by the soldiery under the training of the enemies of the working class are, of course, not likely to change the very moment these soldiers change sides. The same men executed Clement Thomas.

“General” Clement Thomas, a malcontent ex-quartermaster-sergeant, had, in the latter times of Louis Philippe’s reign, enlisted at the office of the Republican newspaper *Le National*, there to serve in the double capacity of responsible man-of-straw (*gérant responsable*) and of duelling bully to that very combative journal. After the Revolution of February, the men of the *National* having got into power, they metamorphosed this old quarter-master-sergeant into a general on the eve of the butchery of June, of which he, like Jules Favre, was one of the sinister plotters, and became one of the most dastardly executioners. Then he and his generalship disappeared for a long time, to again rise to the surface on November 1st, 1870. The day before, the Government of National Defence, caught at the Hotel de Ville, had solemnly pledged their parole to Blanqui, Flourens, and other representatives of the working class, to abdicate their usurped power into the hands of a commune to be freely elected by Paris. Instead of keeping their word, they let loose on Paris the Bretons of Trochu, who now replaced the Corsicans of Bonaparte. General Tamisier alone, refusing to sully his name by such a breach of faith, resigned the commandership-in-chief of the National Guard, and in his place Clement Thomas for once became again a general. During the whole of his tenure of command, he made war, not upon the Prussians, but upon the Paris National Guard. He prevented their general armament, pitted the bourgeois battalions against the working men’s battalions, weeded out officers hostile to Trochu’s “plan,” and disbanded, under the stigma of cowardice, the very same proletarian battalions whose heroism has now astonished their most inveterate enemies. Clement Thomas felt quite proud of having reconquered his June pre-eminence as

the personal enemy of the working class of Paris. Only a few days before March 18th he laid before the War Minister, Leflô, a plan of his own for “finishing off *la fine fleur* (the cream) of the Paris canaille.” After Vinoy’s rout, he must needs appear upon the scene of action in the quality of an amateur spy. The Central Committee and the Paris working men were as much responsible for the killing of Clement Thomas and Lecomte as the Princess of Wales for the fate of the people crushed to death on the day of her entrance into London.

The massacre of unarmed citizens in Place Vendome is a myth which M. Thiers and the Rurals persistently ignored in the Assembly, entrusting its propagation exclusively to the servants’ hall of European journalism. “The men of order,” the reactionists of Paris, trembled at the victory of March 18th. To them, it was the signal of popular retribution at last arriving. The ghosts of the victims assassinated at their hands from the days of June 1848, down to January 22nd, 1871, arose before their faces. Their panic was their only punishment. Even the sergents-de-ville, instead of being disarmed and locked up, as ought to have been done, had the gates of Paris flung wide open for their safe retreat to Versailles. The men of order were left not only unharmed, but allowed to rally and quietly to seize more than one stronghold in the very centre of Paris. This indulgence of the Central Committee—this magnanimity of the armed working men—so strangely at variance with the habits of the “Party of Order,” the latter misinterpreted as mere symptoms of conscious weakness. Hence their silly plan to try, under the cloak of an unarmed demonstration, what Vinoy had failed to perform with his cannon and mitrailleuses. On March 22nd a riotous mob of swells started from the quarters of luxury, all the *petits crevés* in their ranks, and at their head the notorious familiars of the Empire—the Heeckeren, Coëtlogon, Henry de Pène, etc. Under the cowardly pretence of a pacific demonstration, this rabble, secretly armed with the weapons of the bravo, fell into marching



order, ill-treated and disarmed the detached patrols and sentries of the National Guard they met with on their progress, and, on debouching from the Rue de la Paix, with the cry of "Down with the Central Committee! Down with the assassins! The National Assembly forever!" attempted to break through the line drawn up there, and thus to carry by a surprise the headquarters of the National Guard in the Place Vendome. In reply to their pistol-shots, the regular *sommations* (the French equivalent of the English Riot Act) were made, and, proving ineffective, fire was commanded by the general of the National Guard. One volley dispersed into wild flight the silly coxcombs, who expected that the mere exhibition of their "respectability" would have the same effect upon the Revolution of Paris as Joshua's trumpets upon the walls of Jericho. The runaways left behind them two National Guards killed, nine severely wounded (among them a member of the Central Committee), and the whole scene of their exploit strewn with revolvers, daggers, and sword-canes, in evidence of the "unarmed" character of their "pacific" demonstration. When, on June 13th, 1849, the National Guard made a really pacific demonstration in protest against the felonious assault of French troops upon Rome, Changarnier, then general of the Party of Order, was acclaimed by the National Assembly, and especially by M. Thiers, as the saviour of society, for having launched his troops from all sides upon these unarmed men, to shoot and sabre them down, and to trample them under their horses' feet. Paris, then, was placed in a state of siege. Dufaure hurried through the Assembly new laws of repression. New arrests, new proscriptions—a new reign of terror set in. But the lower orders manage these things otherwise. The Central Committee of 1871 simply ignored the heroes of the "pacific demonstration"; so much so, that only two days later, they were enabled to muster under Admiral Saisset, for that *armed* demonstration, crowned by the famous stampede to Versailles. In their reluctance to continue the civil war opened by Thiers's burglarious attempt on Montmartre,

the Central Committee made themselves, this time, guilty of a decisive mistake in not at once marching upon Versailles, then completely helpless, and thus putting an end to the conspiracies of Thiers and his Rurals. Instead of this, the Party of Order was again allowed to try its strength at the ballot-box, on the 26th of March, the day of the election of the Commune. Then, in the *mairies* of Paris, they exchanged bland words of conciliation with their too generous conquerors, muttering in their hearts solemn vows to exterminate them in due time.

Now, look at the reverse of the medal. Thiers opened his second campaign against Paris in the beginning of April. The first batch of Parisian prisoners brought into Versailles was subjected to revolting atrocities, while Ernest Picard, with his hands in his trousers pockets, strolled about jeering them, and while Mesdames Thiers and Favre, in the midst of their ladies of honour applauded, from the balcony, the outrages of the Versailles mob. The captured soldiers of the line were massacred in cold blood; our brave friend, General Duval, the ironfounder, was shot without any form of trial. Gallifet, the kept man of his wife, so notorious for her shameless exhibitions at the orgies of the Second Empire, boasted in a proclamation of having commanded the murder of a small troop of National Guards, with their captain and lieutenant, surprised and disarmed by his Chasseurs. Vinoy, the runaway, was appointed Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour by Thiers, for his general order to shoot down every soldier of the line taken in the ranks of the Federals. Desmaret, the gendarme, was decorated for the treacherous butcher-like chopping in pieces of the high-souled and chivalrous Flourens, who had saved the heads of the Government of Defence on the 31st of October, 1870. "The encouraging particulars" of his assassination were triumphantly expatiated upon by Thiers in the National Assembly. With the elated vanity of a parliamentary Tom Thumb, permitted to play the part of a Tamerlane, he denied the rebels the right of neutrality for ambulances. Nothing more



horrid than that monkey allowed for a time to give full fling to his tigerish instincts, as foreseen by Voltaire (See note, p. 74).

After the decree of the Commune of 7th April, ordering reprisals and declaring it to be the duty “to protect Paris against the cannibal exploits of the Versailles banditti, and to demand an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” Thiers did not stop the barbarous treatment of prisoners, moreover insulting them in his bulletins as follows: “Never have more degraded countenances of a degraded democracy met the afflicted gaze of honest men,”—honest, like Thiers himself and his ministerial ticket-of-leave men. Still the shooting of prisoners was suspended for a time. Hardly, however, had Thiers and his Decembrist generals become aware that the Communal decree of reprisals was but an empty threat, that even their gendarme spies caught in Paris under the disguise of National Guards, that even sergents-de-ville taken with incendiary shells upon them, were spared—when the wholesale shooting of prisoners was resumed and carried on uninterruptedly to the end. Houses to which National Guards had fled were surrounded by gendarmes, inundated with petroleum (which here occurs for the first time in this war), and then set fire to, the charred corpses being afterwards brought out by the ambulance of the Press at the Ternes. Four National Guards having surrendered to a troop of mounted Chasseurs at Belle Epine, on the 25th of April, were afterwards shot down, one after another, by the captain, a worthy man of Gallifet’s. One of his four victims, left for dead, Scheffer, crawled back to the Parisian outposts, and deposed to this fact before a commission of the Commune. When Tolain interpellated the War Minister upon the report of this commission, the Rurals drowned his voice and forbade Leflô to answer. It would be an insult to their “glorious” army to speak of its deeds. The flippant tone in which Thiers’s bulletin announced the bayoneting of the Federals surprised asleep at Moulin Saquet, and the wholesale fusillades at Clamart shocked the nerves even of the not over-

sensitive London *Times*. But it would be ludicrous today to attempt recounting the merely preliminary atrocities committed by the bombardiers of Paris and the fomenters of a slaveholders' rebellion protected by foreign invasion. Amidst all these horrors, Thiers, forgetful of his parliamentary laments on the terrible responsibility weighing down his dwarfish shoulders, boasts in his bulletins that *l'Assemblée siege paisiblement* (the Assembly continues meeting in peace), and proves by his constant carousals, now with Decembrist generals, now with German princes, that his digestion is not troubled in the least, not even by the ghosts of Lecomte and Clement Thomas.

III

On the dawn of the 18th of March, Paris arose to the thunder-burst of "Vive la Commune!" What is the Commune, that sphinx so tantalising to the bourgeois mind?

"The proletarians of Paris," said the Central Committee in its manifesto of the 18th of March, "amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs. ... They have understood that it is their imperious duty and their absolute right to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power." But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.

The centralised State power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature—organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labour—originates from the days of absolute monarchy, serving nascent middle-class society as a mighty weapon in its struggle against feudalism. Still, its development remained clogged by all



manner of mediæval rubbish, seignorial rights, local privileges, municipal and guild monopolies, and provincial constitutions. The gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century swept away all these relics of bygone times, thus clearing simultaneously the social soil of its last hindrances to the superstructure of the modern State edifice raised under the First Empire, itself the offspring of the coalition wars of old semi-feudal Europe against modern France. During the subsequent *régimes*, the Government, placed under parliamentary control—that is, under the direct control of the propertied classes—became not only a hotbed of huge national debts and crushing taxes; with its irresistible allurements of place, pelf and patronage, it became not only the bone of contention between the rival factions and adventurers of the ruling classes; but its political character changed simultaneously with the economic changes of society. At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labour, the State power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism. After every revolution marking a progressive phase in the class struggle, the purely repressive character of the State power stands out in bolder and bolder relief. The Revolution of 1830, resulting in the transfer of Government from the landlords to the capitalists, transferred it from the more remote to the more direct antagonists of the working men. The bourgeois Republicans, who, in the name of the Revolution of February, took the State power, used it for the June [1848] massacres, in order to convince the working class that “social” republic means the republic entrusting their social subjection, and in order to convince the royalist bulk of the bourgeois and landlord class that they might safely leave the cares and emoluments of government to the bourgeois “Republicans.” However, after their one heroic exploit of June, the bourgeois Republicans had, from the front,

to fall back to the rear of the “Party of Order”—a combination formed by all the rival fractions and factions of the appropriating class in their now openly declared antagonism to the producing classes. The proper form of their joint stock Government was the *Parliamentary Republic*, with Louis Bonaparte for its President. Theirs was a *régime* of avowed class terrorism and deliberate insult towards the “vile multitude.” If the Parliamentary Republic, as M. Thiers said, “divided them (the different fractions of the ruling class) least,” it opened an abyss between that class and the whole body of society outside their spare ranks. The restraints by which their own divisions had under former *régimes* still checked the State power, were removed by their union; and in view of the threatening upheaval of the proletariat, they now used that State power mercilessly and ostentatiously as the national war engine of capital against labour. In their uninterrupted crusade against the producing masses they were, however, bound not only to invest the executive with continually increased powers of repression, but at the same time to divest their own parliamentary stronghold—the National Assembly—one by one, of all its own means of defence against the Executive. The Executive, in the person of Louis Bonaparte, turned them out. The natural offspring of the “Party of Order” Republic was the Second Empire.

The Empire, with the *coup d'état* for its certificate of birth, universal suffrage for its sanction, and the sword for its sceptre, professed to rest upon the peasantry, the large mass of producers not directly involved in the struggle of capital and labour. It professed to save the working class by breaking down Parliamentarism, and, with it, the undisguised subserviency of Government to the propertied classes. It professed to save the propertied classes by upholding their economic supremacy over the working class; and, finally, it professed to unite all classes by reviving for all the chimera of national glory. In reality, it was the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet required the



faculty of ruling the nation. It was acclaimed throughout the world as the saviour of society. Under its sway, bourgeois society, freed from political cares, attained a development unexpected even by itself. Its industry and commerce expanded to colossal dimensions; financial swindling celebrated cosmopolitan orgies; the misery of the masses was set off by a shameless display of gorgeous, meretricious, and debased luxury. The State power, apparently soaring high above society, was at the same time itself the greatest scandal of that society and the very hotbed of all its corruptions. Its own rottenness, and the rottenness of the society it had saved, were laid bare by the bayonet of Prussia, herself eagerly bent upon transferring the supreme seat of that *régime* from Paris to Berlin. Imperialism is, at the same time, the most prostitute and the ultimate form of the State power which nascent middle-class society had commenced to elaborate as a means of its own emancipation from feudalism, and which full-grown bourgeois society had finally transformed into a means for the enslavement of labour by capital.

The direct antithesis to the Empire was the Commune. The cry of "Social Republic," with which the Revolution of February was ushered in by the Paris proletariat, did but express a vague aspiration after a Republic that was not only to supersede the monarchical form of class-rule, but class-rule itself. The Commune was the positive form of that Republic.

Paris, the central seat of the old governmental power, and, at the same time, the social stronghold of the French working class, had risen in arms against the attempt of Thiers and the Rurals to restore and perpetuate that old governmental power bequeathed to them by the Empire. Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men. This fact was now to be transformed into an institution. The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the Central Government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the Administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen's wages*. The vested interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of State disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves. Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central Government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the State was laid into the hands of the Commune.

Having once got rid of the standing army and the police, the physical force elements of the old Government, the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the "parson-power," by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the Apostles. The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of Church and State. Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it.

The judicial functionaries were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subserviency to all succeeding governments, to which in turn they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest



of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible and revocable.

The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France. The communal *régime* once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old centralised Government would in the provinces, too, have to give way to the self-government of the producers. In a rough sketch of national organisation which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet, and that in the rural districts the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service. The rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents. The few but important functions which still would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by Communal and, thereafter, responsible agents. The unity of the nation was not to be broken; but, on the contrary, to be organised by the Communal constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the State power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence. While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society. Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and

managers in his business. And it is well-known that companies, like individuals, in matters of real business generally know how to put the right man in the right place, and, if they for once make a mistake, to redress it promptly. On the other hand, nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supersede universal suffrage by hierarchic investiture.

It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness. Thus, this new Commune, which breaks with the modern State power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the mediæval Communes, which first preceded, and afterwards became the substratum of, that very State power. The Communal Constitution has been mistaken for an attempt to break up into a federation of small States, as dreamt of by Montesquieu and the Girondins, that unity of great nations which, if originally brought about by political force, has now become a powerful coefficient of social production. The antagonism of the Commune against the State power has been mistaken for an exaggerated form of the ancient struggle against over-centralisation. Peculiar historical circumstances may have prevented the classical development, as in France, of the bourgeois form of government, and may have allowed, as in England, to complete the great central State organs by corrupt vestries, jobbing councillors, and ferocious poor-law guardians in the towns, and virtually hereditary magistrates in the counties. The Communal Constitution would have restored to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the State parasite feeding upon, and clogging the free movement of, society. By this one act it would have initiated the regeneration of France. The provincial French middle-class saw in the Commune an attempt to restore the sway their order had held over the country under Louis Philippe, and which, under Louis Napoleon, was supplanted by the pretended rule of the country over the towns. In reality, the Communal Constitution brought the rural



producers under the intellectual lead of the central towns of their districts, and there secured to them, in the working man, the natural trustees of their interests. The very existence of the Commune involved, as a matter of course, local municipal liberty, but no longer as a check upon the now superseded State power. It could only enter into the head of a Bismarck, who, when not engaged on his intrigues of blood and iron, always likes to resume his old trade, so befitting his mental calibre, of contributor to *Kladderadatsch* (the Berlin *Punch*); it could only enter into such a head, to ascribe to the Paris Commune aspirations after the caricature of the old French municipal organisation of 1791, the Prussian municipal constitution which degrades the town governments to mere secondary wheels in the police machinery of the Prussian State. The Commune made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions, cheap government, a reality by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure—the standing army and State functionarism. Its very existence presupposed the non-existence of monarchy, which, in Europe at least, is the normal incumbrance and indispensable cloak of class-rule. It supplied the Republic with the basis of really democratic institutions. But neither cheap government nor the “true Republic” was its ultimate aim; they were its mere concomitants.

The multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favour, show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all the previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive. Its true secret was this: It was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour.

Except on this last condition, the Communal Constitution would have been an impossibility and a delusion. The political rule of the producer cannot co-exist with the perpetuation of his

social slavery. The Commune was, therefore, to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundation upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule. With labour emancipated, every man becomes a working man, and productive labour ceases to be a class attribute.

It is a strange fact. In spite of all the tall talk and all the immense literature, for the last sixty years, about Emancipation of Labour, no sooner do the working men anywhere take the subject into their own hands with a will, than uprises at once all the apologetic phraseology of the mouthpieces of present society with its two poles of Capital and Wage-slavery (the landlord now is but the sleeping partner of the capitalist), as if capitalist society was still in its purest state of virgin innocence, with its antagonisms still undeveloped, with its delusions still unexploded, with its prostitute realities not yet laid bare. The Commune, they exclaim, intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilisation! Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class-property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour. But this is Communism, “impossible” Communism! Why, those members of the ruling classes who are intelligent enough to perceive the impossibility of continuing the present system—and they are many—have become the obtrusive and full-mouthed apostles of co-operative production. If co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare; if it is to supersede the Capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production— what else, gentlemen, would it be but Communism, “possible” Communism?



The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending, by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant. In the full consciousness of their historic mission, and with the heroic resolve to act up to it, the working class can afford to smile at the coarse invective of the gentlemen's gentlemen with the pen and inkhorn, and at the didactic patronage of well-wishing bourgeois-doctrinaires, pouring forth their ignorant platitudes and sectarian crotchets in the oracular tone of scientific infallibility.

When the Paris Commune took the management of the revolution in its own hands; when plain working men for the first time dared to infringe upon the Governmental privilege of their "natural superiors," and, under circumstances of unexampled difficulty—performed it at salaries the highest of which barely amounted to one-fifth of what, according to high scientific authority, is the minimum required for a secretary to a certain metropolitan school-board—the old world writhed in convulsions of rage at the sight of the Red Flag, the symbol of the Republic of Labour, floating over the Hotel de Ville.

And yet, this was the first revolution in which the working class was openly acknowledged as the only class capable of social initiative, even by the great bulk of the Paris middle class—shopkeepers, tradesmen, merchants—the wealthy capitalist alone excepted. The Commune had saved them by a sagacious settlement of that ever-recurring cause of dispute among the middle-class themselves—the debtor and creditor accounts. The same portion of the middle-class, after they had assisted

in putting down the working men's insurrection of June 1848, had been at once unceremoniously sacrificed to their creditors by the then Constituent Assembly. But this was not their only motive for now rallying around the working-class. They felt there was but one alternative—the Commune, or the Empire—under whatever name it might reappear. The Empire had ruined them economically by the havoc it made of public wealth, by the wholesale financial swindling it fostered, by the props it lent to the artificially accelerated centralisation of capital, and the concomitant expropriation of their own ranks. It had suppressed them politically, it had shocked them morally by its orgies, it had insulted their Voltairianism by handing over the education of their children to the *frères Ignorantins*, it had revolted their national feeling as Frenchmen by precipitating them headlong into a war which left only one equivalent for the ruins it made—the disappearance of the Empire. In fact, after the exodus from Paris of the high Bonapartist and capitalist *Bobême*, the true middle-class Party of Order came out in the shape of the “Union Republicaine,” enrolling themselves under the colours of the Commune and defending it against the wilful misconstruction of Thiers. Whether the gratitude of this great body of the middle-class will stand the present severe trial, time must show.

The Commune was perfectly right in telling the peasants that “its victory was their only hope.” Of all the lies hatched at Versailles and re-echoed by the glorious European penny-a-liner, one of the most tremendous was that the Rurals represented the French peasantry. Think only of the love of the French peasant for the men to whom, after 1815, he had to pay the milliard of indemnity! In the eyes of the French peasant, the very existence of a great landed proprietor is in itself an encroachment on his conquests of 1789. The bourgeois, in 1848, had burdened his plot of land with the additional tax of forty-five cents in the franc; but then he did so in the name of the revolution; while now he had fomented a civil war against the revolution, to shift on to



the peasant's shoulders the chief load of the five milliards of indemnity to be paid to the Prussians. The Commune, on the other hand, in one of its first proclamations, declared that the true originators of the war would be made to pay its cost. The Commune would have delivered the peasant of the blood tax, would have given him a cheap government, transformed his present blood-suckers, the notary, advocate, executor, and other judicial vampires, into salaried communal agents, elected by, and responsible to himself. It would have freed him of the tyranny of the *garde champêtre*, the gendarme, and the prefect; would have put enlightenment by the schoolmaster in the place of stultification by the priest. And the French peasant is, above all, a man of reckoning. He would find it extremely reasonable that the pay of the priest, instead of being extorted by the tax-gatherer, should only depend upon the spontaneous action of the parishioners' religious instinct. Such were the great immediate boons which the rule of the Commune—and that rule alone—held out to the French peasantry. It is, therefore, quite superfluous here to expatiate upon the more complicated but vital problems which the Commune alone was able, and at the same time compelled, to solve in favour of the peasant, viz., the hypothecary debt, lying like an incubus upon his parcel of soil, the *proletariat foncier* (the rural proletariat), daily growing upon it, and his expropriation from it enforced, at a more and more rapid rate, by the very development of modern agriculture and the competition of capitalist farming.

The French peasant had elected Louis Bonaparte president of the Republic; but the Party of Order created the Empire. What the French peasant really wants he commenced to show in 1849 and 1850, by opposing his *maire* to the Government's prefect, his schoolmaster to the Government's priest, and himself to the Government's gendarme. All the laws made by the Party of Order in January and February 1850 were avowed measures of repression against the peasant. The peasant was a Bonapartist, because the great Revolution, with all its benefits to him, was, in

his eyes, personified in Napoleon. This delusion, rapidly breaking down under the Second Empire (and in its very nature hostile to the Rurals), this prejudice of the past, how could it have withstood the appeal of the Commune to the living interests and urgent wants of the peasantry?

The Rurals—this was, in fact, their chief apprehension—knew that three months' free communication of Communal Paris with the provinces would bring about a general rising of the peasants, and hence their anxiety to establish a police blockade around Paris, so as to stop the spread of the rinderpest.

If the Commune was thus the true representative of all the healthy elements of French society, and therefore the truly national Government, it was, at the same time, a working men's Government, as the bold champion of the emancipation of labour, emphatically international. Within sight of that Prussian army, that had annexed to Germany two French provinces, the Commune annexed to France the working people all over the world.

The Second Empire had been the jubilee of cosmopolitan blacklegism, the rakes of all countries rushing in at its call for a share in its orgies and in the plunder of the French people. Even at this moment, the right hand of Thiers is Ganesco, the foul Wallachian, and his left hand is Markowski, the Russian spy. The Commune admitted all foreigners to the honour of dying for an immortal cause. Between the foreign war lost by their treason, and the civil war fomented by their conspiracy with the foreign invader, the bourgeoisie had found the time to display their patriotism by organising police-hunts upon the Germans in France. The Commune made a German working man its Minister of Labour. Thiers, the bourgeoisie, the Second Empire, had continually deluded Poland by loud professions of sympathy, while in reality betraying her to, and doing the dirty work of Russia. The Commune honoured the heroic sons of Poland by placing them at the head of the defenders of Paris. And, to



broadly mark the new era of history, it was conscious of initiating, under the eyes of the conquering Prussians on one side and the Bonapartist army, led by Bonapartist generals, on the other, the Commune pulled down that colossal symbol of martial glory, the Vendôme Column.

The great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence. Its special measures could but betoken the tendency of a government of the people by the people. Such were the abolition of the nightwork of journeymen bakers; the prohibition, under penalty, of the employers' practice to reduce wages by levying upon their workpeople fines under manifold pretexts—a process in which the employer combines in his own person the parts of legislator, judge, and executor, and filches the money to boot. Another measure of this class was the surrender to associations of workmen, under reserve of compensation, of all closed workshops and factories, no matter whether the respective capitalists had absconded or preferred to strike work.

The financial measures of the Commune, remarkable for their sagacity and moderation, could only be such as were compatible with the state of a besieged town. Considering the colossal robberies committed upon the City of Paris by the great financial companies and contractors, under the protection of Haussmann, the Commune would have had an incomparably better title to confiscate their property than Louis Napoleon had against the Orleans family. The Hohenzollern and the English oligarchs, who both have derived a good deal of their estates from Church plunder, were, of course, greatly shocked at the Commune clearing but 8,000f. out of secularisation.

While the Versailles Government, as soon as it had recovered some spirit and strength, used the most violent means against the Commune; while it put down the free expression of opinion all over France, even to the forbidding of meetings of delegates from the large towns; while it subjected Versailles and the rest of France to an espionage far surpassing that of the Second Empire;

while it burned by its gendarme inquisitors all papers printed at Paris, and sifted all correspondence from and to Paris; while in the National Assembly the most timid attempts to put in a word for Paris were howled down in a manner unknown even to the *Chambre introuvable* of 1816; with the savage warfare of Versailles outside, and its attempts at corruption and conspiracy inside Paris—would the Commune not have shamefully betrayed its trust by affecting to keep all the decencies and appearances of liberalism as in a time of profound peace? Had the Government of the Commune been akin to that of M. Thiers, there would have been no more occasion to suppress Party-of-Order papers at Paris than there was to suppress Communal papers at Versailles.

It was irritating indeed to the Rurals that at the very same time they declared the return to the Church to be the only means of salvation for France, the infidel Commune unearthed the peculiar mysteries of the Picpus nunnery, and of the Church of St. Laurent. It was a satire upon M. Thiers that, while he showered grand crosses upon the Bonapartist generals in acknowledgment of their mastery in losing battles, signing capitulations, and turning cigarettes at Wilhelmshöhe, the Commune dismissed and arrested its generals whenever they were suspected of neglecting their duties. The expulsion from, and arrest by, the Commune of one of its members who had slipped in under a false name, and had undergone at Lyons six days' imprisonment for simple bankruptcy, was it not a deliberate insult hurled at the forger, Jules Favre, then still the Foreign Minister of France, still selling France to Bismarck, and still dictating his orders to that paragon Government of Belgium? But indeed the Commune did not pretend to infallibility, the invariable attribute of all governments of the old stamp. It published its doings and sayings, it initiated the public into all its shortcomings.

In every revolution there intrude, at the side of its true agents, men of different stamp; some of them survivors of and devotees to past revolutions, without insight into the present



movement, but preserving popular influence by their known honesty and courage, or by the sheer force of tradition; others mere brawlers, who by dint of repeating year after year the same set of stereotyped declarations against the Government of the day, have sneaked into the reputation of revolutionists of the first water. After March 18th, some such men did also turn up, and in some cases contrived to play pre-eminent parts. As far as their power went, they hampered the real action of the working class, exactly as men of that sort have hampered the full development of every previous revolution. They are an unavoidable evil; with time they are shaken off; but time was not allowed to the Commune.

Wonderful, indeed, was the change the Commune had wrought in Paris! No longer any trace of the meretricious Paris of the Second Empire. No longer was Paris the rendezvous of British landlords, Irish absentees, American ex-slaveholders and shoddy men, Russian ex-serfowners, and Wallachian boyards. No more corpses at the Morgue, no nocturnal burglaries, scarcely any robberies; in fact, for the first time since the days of February 1848, the streets of Paris were safe, and that without any police of any kind. "We," said a member of the Commune, "hear no longer of assassination, theft, and personal assault; it seems indeed, as if the police had dragged along with it to Versailles all its Conservative friends." The *cocottes* had refound the scent of their protectors—the absconding men of family, religion, and, above all, of property. In their stead, the real women of Paris showed again at the surface—heroic, noble, and devoted, like the women of antiquity. Working, thinking, fighting, bleeding Paris—almost forgetful, in its incubation of a new society, of the cannibals at its gates—radiant in the enthusiasm of its historic initiative!

Opposed to this new world at Paris, behold the old world at Versailles—that assembly of the ghouls of all defunct *régimes*, Legitimists and Orleanists, eager to feed upon the carcass of the nation—with a tail of antediluvian Republicans, sanctioning, by their presence in the Assembly, the slaveholders' rebellion, relying

for the maintenance of their Parliamentary Republic upon the vanity of the senile mountebank at its head, and caricaturing 1789 by holding their ghastly meetings in the *Jeu de Paume*. There it was, this Assembly, the representative of everything dead in France, propped up by the semblance of life by nothing but the swords of the generals of Louis Bonaparte. Paris all truth, Versailles all lie; and that lie vented through the mouth of Thiers.

Thiers tells a deputation of the mayors of the Seine-et-Oise—"You may rely upon my word, which I have never broken!" He tells the Assembly itself that "it was the most freely elected and most liberal Assembly France ever possessed"; he tells his motley soldiery that it was "the admiration of the world, and the finest army France ever possessed"; he tells the provinces that the bombardment of Paris by him was a myth: "If some cannonshots have been fired, it is not the deed of the army of Versailles, but of some insurgents trying to make believe that they are fighting, while they dare not show their faces." He again tells the provinces that "the artillery of Versailles does not bombard Paris, but only cannonades it." He tells the Archbishop of Paris that the pretended executions and reprisals (!) attributed to the Versailles troops were all moonshine. He tells Paris that he was only anxious "to free it from the hideous tyrants who oppress it," and that, in fact, the Paris of the Commune was "but a handful of criminals."

The Paris of M. Thiers was not the real Paris of the "vile multitude," but a phantom Paris, the Paris of the *francs-fileurs*, the Paris of the Boulevards, male and female—the rich, the capitalist, the gilded, the idle Paris, now thronging with its lackeys, its blacklegs, its literary *bohème*, and its *cocottes* at Versailles, Saint-Denis, Rueil, and Saint-Germain; considering the civil war but an agreeable diversion, eyeing the battle going on through telescopes, counting the rounds of cannon, and swearing by their own honour and that of their prostitutes, that the performance was far better got up than it used to be at the Porte St. Martin.



The men who fell were really dead; the cries of the wounded were cries in good earnest; and, besides, the whole thing was so intensely historical.

This is the Paris of M. Thiers, as the Emigration of Coblenz was the France of M. de Calonne.

IV

The first attempt of the slaveholders' conspiracy to put down Paris by getting the Prussians to occupy it was frustrated by Bismarck's refusal. The second attempt, that of March 18th, ended in the rout of the army and the flight to Versailles of the Government, which ordered the whole administration to break up and follow in its track. By the semblance of peace negotiations with Paris, Thiers found the time to prepare for war against it. But where to find an army? The remnants of the line regiments were weak in number and unsafe in character. His urgent appeal to the provinces to succour Versailles by their National Guards and volunteers, met with a flat refusal. Brittany alone furnished a handful of *Chouans* fighting under a white flag, every one of them wearing on his breast the heart of Jesus in white cloth, and shouting "Vive le Roi!" (Long live the King!). Thiers was, therefore, compelled to collect, in hot haste, a motley crew, composed of sailors, marines, Pontifical Zouaves, Valentin's gendarmes, and Pietri's *sergents de ville* and *mouchards*. This army, however, would have been ridiculously ineffective without the instalments of imperialist war-prisoners, which Bismarck granted in numbers just sufficient to keep the civil war agoing, and keep the Versailles Government in abject dependence on Prussia. During the war itself, the Versailles police had to look after the Versailles army, while the gendarmes had to drag it on by exposing themselves at all posts of danger. The forts which fell were not taken, but bought. The heroism of the Federals convinced Thiers that the resistance of Paris was not to be broken by his own strategic genius and the bayonets at his disposal.

Meanwhile, his relations with the provinces became more and more difficult. Not one single address of approval came in to gladden Thiers and his Rurals. Quite the contrary. Deputations and addresses demanding, in a tone anything but respectful, conciliation with Paris on the basis of the unequivocal recognition of the Republic, the acknowledgment of the Communal liberties, and the dissolution of the National Assembly, whose mandate was extinct, poured in from all sides, and in such numbers that Dufaure, Thiers's Minister of Justice, in his circular of April 23rd to the public prosecutors, commanded them to treat "the cry of conciliation" as a crime. In regard, however, of the hopeless prospect held out by his campaign, Thiers resolved to shift his tactics by ordering, all over the country, municipal elections to take place on April 30th, on the basis of the new municipal law dictated by himself to the National Assembly. What with the intrigues of his prefects, what with police intimidation, he felt quite sanguine of imparting, by the verdict of the provinces, to the National Assembly that moral power it had never possessed, and of getting at last from the provinces the physical force required for the conquest of Paris.

His banditti-warfare against Paris, exalted in his own bulletins, and the attempts of his ministers at the establishment, throughout France, of a reign of terror, Thiers was from the beginning anxious to accompany with a little by-play of conciliation, which had to serve more than one purpose. It was to dupe the provinces, to inveigle the middle-class element in Paris, and above all, to afford the professed Republicans in the National Assembly the opportunity of hiding their treason against Paris behind their faith in Thiers. On the 21st of March, when still without an army, he had declared to the Assembly: "Come what may, I will not send an army to Paris." On the 27th of March, he rose again: "I have found the Republic an accomplished fact, and I am firmly resolved to maintain it." In reality, he put down the revolution at Lyons and Marseilles in the name of the Republic,



while the roars of his Rurals drowned the very mention of its name at Versailles. After this exploit, he toned down the “accomplished fact” into a hypothetical fact. The Orleans princes, whom he had cautiously warned off Bordeaux, were now, in flagrant breach of the law, permitted to intrigue at Dreux. The concessions held out by Thiers in his interminable interviews with the delegates from Paris and the provinces, although constantly varied in tone and colour, according to time and circumstances, did in fact never come to more than the prospective restriction of revenge to the “handful of criminals implicated in the murder of Lecomte and Clement Thomas,” on the well-understood premiss that Paris and France were unreservedly to accept M. Thiers himself as the best of possible Republics, as he, in 1830, had done with Louis Philippe. Even these concessions he not only took care to render doubtful by the official comments put upon them in the Assembly through his Ministers. He had his Dufaure to act. Dufaure, this old Orleanist lawyer, had always been the justiciary of the state of siege as now in 1849 under Thiers, so in 1839 under Louis Philippe, and in 1849 under Louis Bonaparte’s presidency. While out of office, he made a fortune by pleading for the Paris capitalists, and made political capital by pleading against the laws he had himself originated. He now hurried through the National Assembly not only a set of repressive laws which were, after the fall of Paris, to extirpate the last remnants of Republican liberty in France; he foreshadowed the fate of Paris by abridging the, for him, too slow procedure of courts-martial, and by a new-fangled, Draconic code of deportation. The Revolution of 1848, abolishing the penalty of death for political crimes, had replaced it by deportation. Louis Bonaparte did not dare, at least not in theory, to re-establish the regime of the guillotine. The Rural Assembly, not yet bold enough even to hint that the Parisians were not rebels, but assassins, had therefore to confine its prospective vengeance against Paris to Dufaure’s new code of deportation. Under all these circumstances, Thiers himself could

not have gone on with his comedy of conciliation, had it not, as he intended it to do, drawn forth shrieks of rage from the Rurals, whose ruminating mind did neither understand the play, nor its necessities of hypocrisy, tergiversation, and procrastination.

In sight of the impending municipal elections of 30th of April, Thiers enacted one of his great conciliation scenes on the 27th of April. Amidst a flood of sentimental rhetoric, he exclaimed from the tribune of the Assembly: "There exists no conspiracy against the Republic but that of Paris, which compels us to shed French blood. I repeat it again and again. Let those impious arms fall from the hands which hold them, and chastisement will be arrested at once by an act of peace excluding only the small number of criminals." To the violent interruption of the Rurals, he replied: "Gentlemen, tell me, I implore you, am I wrong? Do you really regret that I could have stated the truth that the criminals are only a handful? Is it not fortunate in the midst of our misfortunes that those who have been capable to shed the blood of Clement Thomas and General Lecomte are but rare exceptions?"

France, however, turned a deaf ear to what Thiers flattered himself to be a parliamentary siren's song. Out of 700,000 municipal councillors returned by the 35,000 communes still left to France, the united Legitimists, Orleanists, and Bonapartists did not carry 8,000. The supplementary elections which followed were still more decidedly hostile. Thus, instead of getting from the provinces the badly-needed physical force, the National Assembly lost even its last claim to moral force, that of being the expression of the universal suffrage of the country. To complete the discomfiture, the newly-chosen municipal councils of all the cities of France openly threatened the usurping Assembly at Versailles with a counter Assembly at Bordeaux.

Then the long-expected moment of decisive action had at last come for Bismarck. He peremptorily summoned Thiers to send to Frankfort plenipotentiaries for the definitive settlement



of peace. In humble obedience to the call of his master, Thiers hastened to despatch his trusty Jules Favre, backed by Pouyer-Quertier. Pouyer-Quertier, an “eminent” Rouen cotton-spinner, a fervent and even servile partisan of the Second Empire, had never found any fault with it save its commercial treaty with England, prejudicial to his own shop-interest. Hardly installed at Bordeaux as Thiers’s Minister of Finance, he denounced that “unholy” treaty, hinted at its near abrogation, and had even the effrontery to try, although in vain (having counted without Bismarck), the immediate enforcement of the old protective duties against Alsace, where, he said, no previous international treaties stood in the way. This man who considered counter-revolution as a means to put down wages at Rouen, and the surrender of French provinces as a means to bring up the price of his wares in France, was he not *the one* predestined to be picked out by Thiers as the helpmate of Jules Favre in his last and crowning treason?

On the arrival at Frankfort of this exquisite pair of plenipotentiaries, bully Bismarck at once met them with the imperious alternative: Either the restoration of the Empire, or the unconditional acceptance of my own peace terms! These terms included a shortening of the intervals in which war indemnity was to be paid and the continued occupation of the Paris forts by Prussian troops until Bismarck should feel satisfied with the state of things in France; Prussia thus being recognised as the supreme arbiter in internal French politics! In return for this, he offered to let loose for the extermination of Paris the captive Bonapartist army, and to lend them the direct assistance of Emperor William’s troops. He pledged his good faith by making payment of the first instalment of the indemnity dependent on the “pacification” of Paris. Such bait was, of course, eagerly swallowed by Thiers and his plenipotentiaries. They signed the treaty of peace on the 10th of May, and had it endorsed by the Versailles Assembly on the 18th.

In the interval between the conclusion of peace and the arrival of the Bonapartist prisoners, Thiers felt the more bound to

resume his comedy of conciliation, as his Republican tools stood in sore need of a pretext for blinking their eyes at the preparations for the carnage of Paris. As late as the 18th of May, he replied to a deputation of middle-class conciliators—"Whenever the insurgents will make up their minds for capitulation, the gates of Paris shall be flung wide open during a week for all except the murderers of Generals Clement Thomas and Lecomte."

A few days afterwards, when violently interpellated on these promises by the Rurals, he refused to enter into any explanations; not, however, without giving them this significant hint: "I tell you there are impatient men amongst you, men who are in too great a hurry. They must have another eight days; at the end of these eight days there will be no more danger, and the task will be proportionate to their courage and to their capacities." As soon as MacMahon was able to assure him that he could shortly enter Paris, Thiers declared to the Assembly that "he would enter Paris with the *laws* in his hands, and demand a full expiation from the wretches who had sacrificed the lives of soldiers and destroyed public monuments." As the moment of decision drew near, he said—to the Assembly, "I shall be pitiless!"—to Paris, that it was doomed; and to his Bonapartist banditti, that they had State licence to wreak vengeance upon Paris to their hearts' content. At last, when treachery had opened the gates of Paris to General Douai, on May 21st, Thiers, on the 22nd, revealed to the Rurals the "goal" of his conciliation comedy, which they had so obstinately persisted in not understanding. "I told you a few days ago that we were approaching *our goal*; to-day I come to tell you *the goal* is reached. The victory of order, justice, and civilisation is at last won!"

So it was. The civilisation and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters. Then this civilisation and justice stand forth as undisguised savagery and lawless revenge. Each new crisis in the class struggle between the appropriator



and the producer brings out this fact more glaringly. Even the atrocities of the bourgeois in June 1848, vanish before the infamy of 1871. The self-sacrificing heroism with which the population of Paris—men, women, and children—fought for eight days after the entrance of the Versaillaise, reflects as much the grandeur of their cause, as the infernal deeds of the soldiery reflect the innate spirit of that civilisation, indeed, the great problem of which is how to get rid of the heaps of corpses it made after the battle was over!

To find a parallel for the conduct of Thiers and his bloodhounds we must go back to the times of Sulla and the two Triumvirates of Rome. The same wholesale slaughter in cold blood; the same disregard, in massacre, of age and sex, the same system of torturing prisoners; the same proscriptions, but this time of a whole class; the same savage hunt after concealed leaders, lest one might escape; the same denunciations of political and private enemies; the same indifference for the butchery of entire strangers to the feud. There is but this difference, that the Romans had no *mitrailleuses* for the despatch, in the lump, of the proscribed, and that they had not “the law in their hands,” nor on their lips the cry of “civilisation.”

And after those horrors, look upon the other, still more hideous, face of the bourgeois civilisation as described by its own press!

“With stray shots,” writes the Paris correspondent of a London Tory paper, “still ringing in the distance, and unintended wounded wretches dying amid the tombstones of Père la Chaise—with 6,000 terror-stricken insurgents wandering in an agony of despair in the labyrinth of the catacombs, and wretches hurried through the streets to be shot down in scores by the *mitrailleuse*—it is revolting to see the *cafés* filled with the votaries of absinthe, billiards, and dominoes; female profligacy perambulating the boulevards, and the sound of revelry disturbing the night from the *cabinets particuliers* of fashionable restaurants.” M. Edouard

Hervé writes in the *Journal de Paris*, a Versaillist journal suppressed by the Commune: “The way in which the population of Paris [!] manifested its satisfaction yesterday was rather more than frivolous, and we fear it will grow worse as time progresses. Paris has now a *fête* day appearance, which is sadly out of place; and, unless we are to be called the *Parisiens de la décadence*, this sort of thing must come to an end.” And then he quotes the passage from Tacitus: “Yet, on the morrow of that horrible struggle, even before it was completely over, Rome—degraded and corrupt—began once more to wallow in the voluptuous slough which was destroying its body and polluting its soul—*alibi prælia et vulnera, alibi balnea popivæque*—(here fights and wounds, there baths and restaurants).” M. Hervé only forgets to say that the “population of Paris” he speaks of is but the population of the Paris of M. Thiers—the *francs-fileurs* returning in throngs from Versailles, Saint-Denis, Rueil, and Saint-Germain—the Paris of the “Decline.”

In all its bloody triumphs over the self-sacrificing champions of a new and better society, that nefarious civilisation, based upon the enslavement of labour, drowns the moans of its victims in a hue-and-cry of calumny, reverberated by a world-wide echo. The serene working men’s Paris of the Commune is suddenly changed into a pandemonium by the bloodhounds of “order.” And what does this tremendous change prove to the bourgeois mind of all countries? Why, that the Commune has conspired against civilisation! The Paris people die enthusiastically for the Commune in numbers unequalled in any battle known to history. What does that prove? Why, that the Commune was not the people’s own government, but the usurpation of a handful of criminals! The women of Paris joyfully give up their lives at the barricades and on the place of execution. What does this prove? Why, that the demon of the Commune has changed them into Megæras and Hecates! The moderation of the Commune during the two months of undisputed sway is equalled only by



the heroism of its defence. What does that prove? Why, that for months the Commune carefully hid, under a mask of moderation and humanity, the bloodthirstiness of its fiendish instincts, to be let loose in the hour of its agony!

The working men's Paris, in the act of its heroic self-holocaust, involved in its flames buildings and monuments. While tearing to pieces the living body of the proletariat, its rulers must no longer expect to return triumphantly into the intact architecture of their abodes. The Government of Versailles cries, "Incendiarism!" and whispers this cue to all its agents, down to the remotest hamlet, to hunt up its enemies everywhere as suspect of professional incendiarism. The bourgeoisie of the whole world, which looks complacently upon the wholesale massacre after the battle, is convulsed by horror at the desecration of brick and mortar!

When governments give state-licences to their navies to "kill, *burn*, and destroy," is that a licence for incendiarism? When the British troops wantonly set fire to the Capitol at Washington and to the summer palace of the Chinese Emperor, was that incendiarism? When the Prussians, not for military reasons, but out of the mere spite of revenge, burned down, by the help of petroleum, towns like Chateaudun and innumerable villages, was that incendiarism? When Thiers, during six weeks, bombarded Paris, under the pretext that he wanted to set fire to those houses only in which there were people, was that incendiarism?—In war, fire is an arm as legitimate as any. Buildings held by the enemy are shelled to set them on fire. If their defenders have to retire, they themselves light the flames to prevent the attack from making use of the buildings. To be burned down has always been the inevitable fate of all buildings situated in the front of battle of all the regular armies of the world. But in the war of the enslaved against their enslavers, the only justifiable war in history, this is by no means to hold good! The Commune used fire strictly as a means of defence. They used it to stop up to the Versailles troops those long, straight avenues which Haussmann had expressly

opened to artillery-fire; they used it to cover their retreat, in the same way as the Versaillese, in their advance, used their shells which destroyed at least as many buildings as the fire of the Commune. It is a matter of dispute, even now, which buildings were set fire to by the defence, and which by the attack. And the defence resorted to fire only then, when the Versailles troops had already commenced their wholesale murdering of prisoners. Besides, the Commune had, long before, given full public notice that, if driven to extremities, they would bury themselves under the ruins of Paris, and make Paris a second Moscow, as the Government of National Defence, but only as a cloak for its treason, had promised to do. For this purpose Trochu had found them the petroleum. The Commune knew that its opponents cared nothing for the lives of the Paris people, but cared much for their own Paris buildings. And Thiers, on the other hand, had given them notice that he would be implacable in his vengeance. No sooner had he got his army ready on one side, and the Prussians shutting the trap on the other, than he proclaimed: "I shall be pitiless! The expiation will be complete, and justice will be stern!" If the acts of the Paris working men were vandalism, it was the vandalism of defence in despair, not the vandalism of triumph, like that which the Christians perpetrated upon the really priceless art treasures of heathen antiquity; and even that vandalism has been justified by the historian as an unavoidable and comparatively trifling concomitant to the titanic struggle between a new society arising and an old one breaking down. It was still less the vandalism of Haussmann, razing historic Paris to make place for the Paris of the sightseer!

But the execution by the Commune of the sixty-four hostages, with the Archbishop of Paris at their head! The bourgeoisie and its army, in June 1848, re-established a custom which had long disappeared from the practice of war—the shooting of their defenceless prisoners. This brutal custom has since been more or less strictly adhered to by the suppressors of



all popular commotions in Europe and India; thus proving that it constitutes a real “progress of civilisation”! On the other hand, the Prussians in France, had re-established the practice of taking hostages—innocent men, who, with their lives, were to answer to them for the acts of others. When Thiers, as we have seen, from the very beginning of the conflict, enforced the humane practice of shooting down the Communal prisoners, the Commune, to protect their lives, was obliged to resort to the Prussian practice of securing hostages. The lives of the hostages had been forfeited over and over again by the continued shooting of prisoners on the part of the Versaillese. How could they be spared any longer after the carnage with which MacMahon’s prætorians celebrated their entrance into Paris? Was even the last check upon the unscrupulous ferocity of bourgeois governments—the taking of hostages—to be made a mere sham of? The real murderer of Archbishop Darboy is Thiers. The Commune again and again had offered to exchange the archbishop, and ever so many priests in the bargain, against the single Blanqui, then in the hands of Thiers. Thiers obstinately refused. He knew that with Blanqui he would give to the Commune a head; while the archbishop would serve his purpose best in the shape of a corpse. Thiers acted upon the precedent of Cavaignac. How, in June 1848, did not Cavaignac and his men of order raise shouts of horror by stigmatising the insurgents as the assassins of Archbishop Affre! They knew perfectly well that the archbishop had been shot by the soldiers of order. M. Jacquemet, the archbishop’s vicar-general, present on the spot, had immediately afterwards handed them in his evidence to that effect.

All this chorus of calumny, which the Party of Order never fail, in their orgies of blood, to raise against their victims, only proves that the bourgeois of our days considers himself the legitimate successor to the baron of old, who thought every weapon in his own hand fair against the plebeian, while in the hands of the plebeian a weapon of any kind constituted in itself a crime.

The conspiracy of the ruling class to break down the Revolution by a civil war carried on under the patronage of the foreign invader—a conspiracy which we have traced from the very 4th of September down to the entrance of MacMahon's prætorians through the gate of St. Cloud—culminated in the carnage of Paris. Bismarck gloats over the ruins of Paris, in which he saw perhaps the first instalment of that general destruction of great cities he had prayed for when still a simple Rural in the Prussian *Chambre introuvable* of 1849. He gloats over the cadavers of the Paris proletariat. For him this is not only the extermination of revolution, but the extinction of France, now decapitated in reality, and by the French government itself. With the shallowness characteristic of all successful statesmen, he sees but the surface of this tremendous historic event. Whenever before has history exhibited the spectacle of a conqueror crowning his victory by turning into, not only the gendarme, but the hired bravo of the conquered Government? There existed no war between Prussia and the Commune of Paris. On the contrary, the Commune had accepted the peace preliminaries, and Prussia had announced her neutrality. Prussia was, therefore, no belligerent. She acted the part of a bravo, a cowardly bravo, because incurring no danger; a hired bravo, because stipulating beforehand the payment of her blood-money of 500 millions on the fall of Paris. And thus, at last, came out the true character of the war, ordained by Providence, as a chastisement of godless and debauched France by pious and moral Germany! And this unparalleled breach of the law of nations, even as understood by the old-world lawyers, instead of arousing the "civilised" Governments of Europe to declare the felonious Prussian government, the mere tool of the St. Petersburg Cabinet, an outlaw amongst nations, only incites them to consider whether the few victims who escape the double cordon around Paris are not to be given up to the hangman of Versailles!

That, after the most tremendous war of modern times, the



conquering and the conquered hosts should fraternise for the common massacre of the proletariat—this unparalleled event does indicate, not, as Bismarck thinks, the final repression of a new society upheaving, but the crumbling into dust of bourgeois society. The highest heroic effort of which old society is still capable is national war; and this is now proved to be a mere governmental humbug, intended to defer the struggle of the classes, and to be thrown aside as soon as that class struggle bursts out into civil war. Class rule is no longer able to disguise itself in a national uniform; the national Governments are *one* as against the proletariat!

After Whit-Sunday, 1871, there can be neither peace nor truce possible between the working men of France and the appropriators of their produce. The iron hand of a mercenary soldiery may keep for a time both classes tied down in common oppression. But the battle must break out again and again in ever-growing dimensions, and there can be no doubt as to who will be the victor in the end—the appropriating few, or the immense working majority. And the French working class is only the advanced guard of the modern proletariat.

While the European Governments thus testify, before Paris, to the international character of class rule, they cry down the International Working Men's Association—the international counter-organisation of labour against the cosmopolitan conspiracy of capital—as the head fountain of all these disasters. Thiers denounced it as the despot of labour, pretending to be its liberator. Picard ordered that all communications between the French Internationals and those abroad should be cut off; Count Jaubert, Thiers's mummified accomplice of 1835, declares it the great problem of all civilised governments to weed it out. The Rurals roar against it, and the whole European press joins the chorus. An honorable French writer, completely foreign to our Association, speaks as follows: "The members of the Central Committee of the National Guard, as well as the greater part of

the members of the Commune, are the most active, intelligent, and energetic minds of the International Working Men's Association ... men who are thoroughly honest, sincere, intelligent, devoted, pure, and fanatical in the *good* sense of the word." The police-tinged bourgeois mind naturally figures to itself the International Working Men's Association as acting in the manner of a secret conspiracy, its central body ordering, from time to time, explosions in different countries. Our Association is, in fact, nothing but the international bond between the most advanced working men in the various countries of the civilised world. Wherever, in whatever shape, and under whatever conditions the class struggle obtains any consistency, it is but natural that members of our association should stand in the foreground. The soil out of which it grows is modern society itself. It cannot be stamped out by any amount of carnage. To stamp it out, the Governments would have to stamp out the despotism of capital over labour—the condition of their own parasitical existence.

Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priest will not avail to redeem them.

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Office: 256, High Holborn, London, W.C.,
May 30th, 1871.

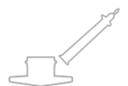
NOTES

I

“The column of prisoners halted in the Avenue Uhrich, and was drawn up, four or five deep, on the footway facing to the road. General Marquis de Galliffet and his staff dismounted and commenced an inspection from the left of the line. Walking down slowly and eyeing the ranks, the General stopped here and there, tapping a man on the shoulder or beckoning him out of the rear ranks. In most cases, without further parley, the individual thus selected was marched out into the centre of the road, where a small supplementary column was, thus, soon formed.... It was evident that there was considerable room for error. A mounted officer pointed out to General Galliffet a man and woman for some particular offence. The woman, rushing out of the ranks, threw herself on her knees, and, with outstretched arms, protested her innocence in passionate terms. The general waited for a pause, and then with most impassible face and

unmoved demeanour, said, 'Madame, I have visited every theatre in Paris, your acting will have no effect on me' ('ce n'est pas la peine de jouer la comédie').... It was not a good thing on that day to be noticeably taller, dirtier, cleaner, older, or uglier than one's neighbours. One individual in particular struck me as probably owing his speedy release from the ills of this world to his having a broken nose.... Over a hundred being thus chosen, a firing party told off, and the column resumed its march, leaving them behind. A few minutes afterwards a dropping fire, in our rear commenced, and continued for over a quarter of an hour. It was the execution of these summarily-convicted wretches."—*Paris Correspondent* "Daily News," June 8th. —This Galliffet, "the kept man of his wife, so notorious for her shameless exhibitions at the orgies of the Second Empire," went, during the war, by the name of the French "Ensign Pistol."

"The Temps, which is a careful journal, and not given to sensation, tells a dreadful story of people imperfectly shot and buried before life was extinct. A great number were buried in the square round St. Jacques-la-Boucherie; some of them very superficially. In the daytime the roar of the busy streets prevented any notice being taken; but in the stillness of the night the inhabitants of the houses in the neighbourhood were roused by distant moans, and in the morning a clenched hand was seen protruding through the soil. In consequence of this, exhumations were ordered to take place.... That many wounded have been buried alive I have not the slightest doubt. One case I can vouch for. When Brunel was shot with his mistress on the 24th ult. in the courtyard of a house in the Place Vendome, the bodies lay there until the afternoon of the 27th. When the burial party came to remove the corpses, they found the woman living still, and took her to an ambulance. Though she had received four bullets she is now out of danger."—*Paris Correspondent* "Evening Standard," June 8th.



II

The following letter appeared in the *Times* of June 13th:

“To the Editor of ‘The Times.’

“Sir,—On June 6, 1871, M. Jules Favre issued a circular to all the European Powers, calling upon them to hunt down the International Working-Men’s Association. A few remarks will suffice to characterise that document.

“In the very preamble of our statutes it is stated that the International was founded ‘September 28, 1864, at a public meeting held at St. Martin’s Hall, Long Acre, London’. For purposes of his own Jules Favre puts back the date of its origin behind 1862.

“In order to explain our principles, he professes to quote ‘their (the International’s) sheet of the 25th of March, 1869.’ And then what does he quote? The sheet of a society which is not the International. This sort of manœuvre he already recurred to when, still a comparatively young lawyer, he had to defend the National newspaper, prosecuted for libel by Cabet. Then he pretended to read extracts from Cabet’s pamphlets while reading interpolations of his own—a trick exposed while the Court was sitting, and which, but for the indulgence of Cabet, would have been punished by Jules Favre’s expulsion from the Paris bar. Of all the documents quoted by him as documents of the International, not one belongs to the International. He says, for instance, ‘The Alliance declares itself Atheist, says the General Council, constituted in London in July, 1869.’ The General Council never issued such a document. On the contrary, it issued a document which quashed the original statutes of the ‘Alliance’—L’ Alliance de la Democratie Socialiste at Geneva—quoted by Jules Favre.

“Throughout his circular, which pretends in part also to be directed against the Empire, Jules Favre repeats against the International but the police inventions of the public prosecutors

of the Empire, and which broke down miserably even before the law courts of that Empire.

“It is known that in its two addresses (of July and September last) on the late war, the General Council of the International denounced the Prussian plans of conquest against France. Later on, Mr. Reitlinger, Jules Favre’s private secretary, applied, though of course in vain, to some members of the General Council for getting up by the Council a demonstration against Bismarck, in favour of the Government of National Defence; they were particularly requested not to mention the Republic. The preparations for a demonstration with regard to the expected arrival of Jules Favre in London were made—certainly with the best of intentions—in spite of the General Council, which, in its address of the 9th of September, had distinctly forewarned the Paris workmen against Jules Favre and his colleagues.

“What would Jules Favre say if, in its turn, the International were to send a circular on Jules Favre to all the Cabinets of Europe, drawing their particular attention to the documents published at Paris by the late M. Milliere?”

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

“John Hales,

“Secretary to the General Council of the International Working Men’s Association.

“256, High Holborn, W.C., June 12th.”

In an article on “The International Society and its aims,” that pious informer, the London *Spectator* (June 24th), amongst other similar tricks, quotes, even more fully than Jules Favre has done, the above document of the “Alliance” as the work of the International, and that eleven days after the refutation had been published in the *Times*. We do not wonder at this. Frederick the Great used to say that of all Jesuits the worst are the Protestant ones.





Bangunlah kaum yang terhina, bangunlah kaum yang lapar!



Kebendak yang mulya dalam dunia, senantiasa tambah besar.



Lenjapkan adat dan paham tua, kita rakyat sadar-sadar.



Dunia sudah berganti rupa, untuk kemenangan kita.



है जंग हमारी आखरी, जिस पर है फैसला.



गाओ इन्तर्नास्योनाल्!



उठो! के वक्त आया!

The State And Revolution

Chapter III

Experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 Marx's Analysis

V.I. LENIN

1. What Made the Communards' Attempt Heroic?

It is well known that in the autumn of 1870, a few months before the Commune, Marx warned the Paris workers that any attempt to overthrow the government would be the folly of despair. But when, in March 1871, a decisive battle was *forced* upon the workers and they accepted it, when the uprising had become a fact, Marx greeted the proletarian revolution with the greatest enthusiasm, in spite of unfavorable auguries. Marx did not persist in the pedantic attitude of condemning an “untimely” movement as did the ill-famed Russian renegade from Marxism, Plekhanov, who in November 1905 wrote encouragingly about the workers’ and peasants’ struggle, but after December 1905 cried, liberal fashion: “They should not have taken up arms.”

Marx, however, was not only enthusiastic about the heroism of the Communards, who, as he expressed it, “stormed heaven”. Although the mass revolutionary movement did not achieve its aim, he regarded it as a historic experience of enormous importance, as a certain advance of the world proletarian revolution, as a practical step that was more important than hundreds of programmes and arguments. Marx endeavored to analyse this experiment, to draw tactical lessons from it and re-examine his theory in the light of it.



The only “correction” Marx thought it necessary to make to the *Communist Manifesto* he made on the basis of the revolutionary experience of the Paris Communards.

The last preface to the new German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, signed by both its authors, is dated June 24, 1872. In this preface the authors, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, say that the programme of the *Communist Manifesto* “has in some details become out-of-date”, and they go on to say:

“... One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes’....”

The authors took the words that are in single quotation marks in this passage from Marx’s book, *The Civil War in France*.

Thus, Marx and Engels regarded one principal and fundamental lesson of the Paris Commune as being of such enormous importance that they introduced it as an important correction into the *Communist Manifesto*.

Most characteristically, it is this important correction that has been distorted by the opportunists, and its meaning probably is not known to nine-tenths, if not ninety-nine-hundredths, of the readers of the *Communist Manifesto*. We shall deal with this distortion more fully farther on, in a chapter devoted specially to distortions. Here it will be sufficient to note that the current, vulgar “interpretation” of Marx’s famous statement just quoted is that Marx here allegedly emphasises the idea of slow development in contradistinction to the seizure of power, and so on.

As a matter of fact, *the exact opposite is the case*. Marx’s idea is that the working class must *break up, smash* the “ready-made state machinery”, and not confine itself merely to laying hold of it.

On April 12, 1871, i.e., just at the time of the Commune, Marx wrote to Kugelmann:

“If you look up the last chapter of my *Eighteenth Brumaire*, you will find that I declare that the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the

bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to *smash* it [Marx's italics—the original is *zerbrechen*], and this is the precondition for every real people's revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party comrades in Paris are attempting." (*Neue Zeit*, Vol.XX, 1, 1901-02, p. 709.) (The letters of Marx to Kugelmann have appeared in Russian in no less than two editions, one of which I edited and supplied with a preface.)

The words, "to smash the bureaucratic-military machine", briefly express the principal lesson of Marxism regarding the tasks of the proletariat during a revolution in relation to the state. And this is the lesson that has been not only completely ignored, but positively distorted by the prevailing, Kautskyite, "interpretation" of Marxism!

As for Marx's reference to *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, we have quoted the relevant passage in full above.

It is interesting to note, in particular, two points in the above-quoted argument of Marx. First, he restricts his conclusion to the Continent. This was understandable in 1871, when Britain was still the model of a purely capitalist country, but without a militarist clique and, to a considerable degree, without a bureaucracy. Marx therefore excluded Britain, where a revolution, even a people's revolution, then seemed possible, and indeed was possible, *without* the precondition of destroying "ready-made state machinery".

Today, in 1917, at the time of the first great imperialist war, this restriction made by Marx is no longer valid. Both Britain and America, the biggest and the last representatives—in the whole world—of Anglo-Saxon "liberty", in the sense that they had no militarist cliques and bureaucracy, have completely sunk into the all-European filthy, bloody morass of bureaucratic-military institutions which subordinate everything to themselves, and suppress everything. Today, in Britain and America, too, "the precondition for every real people's revolution" is the *smashing*,



the *destruction* of the “ready-made state machinery” (made and brought up to the “European”, general imperialist, perfection in those countries in the years 1914-17).

Secondly, particular attention should be paid to Marx’s extremely profound remark that the destruction of the bureaucratic-military state machine is “the precondition for every real *people’s* revolution”. This idea of a “people’s” revolution seems strange coming from Marx, so that the Russian Plekhanovites and Mensheviks, those followers of Struve who wish to be regarded as Marxists, might possibly declare such an expression to be a “slip of the pen” on Marx’s part. They have reduced Marxism to such a state of wretchedly liberal distortion that nothing exists for them beyond the antithesis between bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution, and even this antithesis they interpret in an utterly lifeless way.

If we take the revolutions of the twentieth century as examples we shall, of course, have to admit that the Portuguese and the Turkish revolutions are both bourgeois revolutions. Neither of them, however, is a “people’s” revolution, since in neither does the mass of the people, their vast majority, come out actively, independently, with their own economic and political demands to any noticeable degree. By contrast, although the Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905-07 displayed no such “brilliant” successes as at time fell to the Portuguese and Turkish revolutions, it was undoubtedly a “real people’s” revolution, since the mass of the people, their majority, the very lowest social groups, crushed by oppression and exploitation, rose independently and stamped on the entire course of the revolution the imprint of *their* own demands, *their* attempt to build in their own way a new society in place of the old society that was being destroyed.

In Europe, in 1871, the proletariat did not constitute the majority of the people in any country on the Continent. A “people’s” revolution, one actually sweeping the majority into its stream, could be such only if it embraced both the proletariat

and the peasants. These two classes then constituted the “people”. These two classes are united by the fact that the “bureaucratic-military state machine” oppresses, crushes, exploits them. To *smash* this machine, to *break it up*, is truly in the interest of the “people”, of their majority, of the workers and most of the peasants, is “the precondition” for a free alliance of the poor peasant and the proletarians, whereas without such an alliance democracy is unstable and socialist transformation is impossible.

As is well known, the Paris Commune was actually working its way toward such an alliance, although it did not reach its goal owing to a number of circumstances, internal and external.

Consequently, in speaking of a “real people’s revolution”, Marx, without in the least discounting the special features of the petty bourgeois (he spoke a great deal about them and often), took strict account of the actual balance of class forces in most of the continental countries of Europe in 1871. On the other hand, he stated that the “smashing” of the state machine was required by the interests of both the workers and the peasants, that it united them, that it placed before them the common task of removing the “parasite” and of replacing it by something new.

By what exactly?

2. What is to Replace the Smashed State Machine?

In 1847, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx’s answer to this question was as yet a purely abstract one; to be exact, it was an answer that indicated the tasks, but not the ways of accomplishing them. The answer given in the *Communist Manifesto* was that this machine was to be replaced by “the proletariat organised as the ruling class”, by the “winning of the battle of democracy”.

Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the *experience* of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume and as to the exact manner in which this



organisation would be combined with the most complete, most consistent “winning of the battle of democracy.”

Marx subjected the experience of the Commune, meagre as it was, to the most careful analysis in *The Civil War in France*. Let us quote the most important passages of this work.

Originating from the Middle Ages, there developed in the nineteenth century “the centralised state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature.” With the development of class antagonisms between capital and labour, “state power assumed more and more the character of a public force organised for the suppression of the working class, of a machine of class rule. After every revolution, which marks an advance in the class struggle, the purely coercive character of the state power stands out in bolder and bolder relief.” After the revolution of 1848-49, state power became “the national war instruments of capital against labour”. The Second Empire consolidated this.

“The direct antithesis to the empire was the Commune.” It was the “specific form” of “a republic that was not only to remove the monarchical form of class rule, but class rule itself....”

What was this “specific” form of the proletarian, socialist republic? What was the state it began to create?

“...The first decree of the Commune ... was the suppression of the standing army, and its replacement by the armed people....”

This demand now figures in the programme of every party calling itself socialist. The real worth of their programme, however, is best shown by the behaviour of our Socialist-Revolutionists and Mensheviks, who, right after the revolution of February 27, refused to carry out this demand!

“The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at any time. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class.... The police, which until then had been

the instrument of the Government, was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible, and at all times revocable, agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen's wages*. The privileges and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves.... Having once got rid of the standing army and the police, the instruments of physical force of the old government, the Commune proceeded at once to break the instrument of spiritual suppression, the power of the priests.... The judicial functionaries lost that sham independence... they were thenceforward to be elective, responsible, and revocable....”

The Commune, therefore, appears to have replaced the smashed state machine “only” by fuller democracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be elected and subject to recall. But as a matter of fact this “only” signifies a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different type. This is exactly a case of “quantity being transformed into quality”: democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy; from the state (= a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer the state proper.

It is still necessary to suppress the bourgeoisie and crush their resistance. This was particularly necessary for the Commune; and one of the reasons for its defeat was that it did not do this with sufficient determination. The organ of suppression, however, is here the majority of the population, and not a minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom, and wage slavery. And since the majority of people *itself* suppresses its oppressors, a “special force” for suppression *is no longer necessary!* In this sense, the state *begins to wither away*. Instead of the special institutions of a privileged minority (privileged officialdom, the chiefs



of the standing army), the majority itself can directly fulfil all these functions, and the more the functions of state power are performed by the people as a whole, the less need there is for the existence of this power.

In this connection, the following measures of the Commune, emphasised by Marx, are particularly noteworthy: the abolition of all representation allowances, and of all monetary privileges to officials, the reduction of the remuneration of *all* servants of the state to the level of “*workmen’s wages*”. This shows more clearly than anything else *the turn* from bourgeois to proletarian democracy, from the democracy of the oppressors to that of the oppressed classes, from the state as a “special force” for the suppression of a particular class to the suppression of the oppressors by the *general force* of the majority of the people—the workers and the peasants. And it is on this particularly striking point, perhaps the most important as far as the problem of the state is concerned, that the ideas of Marx have been most completely ignored! In popular commentaries, the number of which is legion, this is not mentioned. The thing done is to keep silent about it as if it were a piece of old-fashioned “naïveté”, just as Christians, after their religion had been given the status of state religion, “forgot” the “naïveté” of primitive Christianity with its democratic revolutionary spirit.

The reduction of the remuneration of high state officials seem “simply” a demand of naive, primitive democracy. One of the “founders” of modern opportunism, the ex-Social-Democrat Eduard Bernstein, has more than once repeated the vulgar bourgeois jeers at “primitive” democracy. Like all opportunists, and like the present Kautskyites, he did not understand at all that, first of all, the transition from capitalism to socialism is *impossible* without a certain “reversion” to “primitive” democracy (for how else can the majority, and then the whole population without exception, proceed to discharge state functions?); and that, secondly, “primitive democracy” based on capitalism and capitalist

culture is not the same as primitive democracy in prehistoric or pre-capitalist times. Capitalist culture has *created* large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc., and *on this basis* the great majority of the functions of the old “state power” have become so simplified and can be reduced to such exceedingly simple operations of registration, filing, and checking that they can be easily performed by every literate person, can quite easily be performed for ordinary “workmen’s wages”, and that these functions can (and must) be stripped of every shadow of privilege, of every semblance of “official grandeur”.

All officials, without exception, elected and subject to recall *at any time*, their salaries reduced to the level of ordinary “workmen’s wages”—these simple and “self-evident” democratic measures, while completely uniting the interests of the workers and the majority of the peasants, at the same time serve as a bridge leading from capitalism to socialism. These measures concern the reorganisation of the state, the purely political reorganisation of society; but, of course, they acquire their full meaning and significance only in connection with the “expropriation of the expropriators” either bring accomplished or in preparation, i.e., with the transformation of capitalist private ownership of the means of production into social ownership.

“The Commune,” Marx wrote, “made the catchword of all bourgeois revolutions, cheap government, a reality, by abolishing the two greatest sources of expenditure—the army and the officialdom.”

From the peasants, as from other sections of the petty bourgeoisie, only an insignificant few “rise to the top”, “get on in the world” in the bourgeois sense, i.e., become either well-to-do, bourgeois, or officials in secure and privileged positions. In every capitalist country where there are peasants (as there are in most capitalist countries), the vast majority of them are oppressed by the government and long for its overthrow, long for “cheap” government. This can be achieved *only* by the proletariat; and



by achieving it, the proletariat at the same time takes a step towards the socialist reorganisation of the state.

3. Abolition of Parliamentarism

“The Commune,” Marx wrote, “was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time....”

“Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent and repress [*ver- and zertreten*] the people in parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people constituted in communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for workers, foremen and accountants for his business.”

Owing to the prevalence of social-chauvinism and opportunism, this remarkable criticism of parliamentarism, made in 1871, also belongs now to the “forgotten words” of Marxism. The professional Cabinet Ministers and parliamentarians, the traitors to the proletariat and the “practical” socialists of our day, have left all criticism of parliamentarism to the anarchists, and, on this wonderfully reasonable ground, they denounce *all* criticism of parliamentarism as “anarchism”!! It is not surprising that the proletariat of the “advanced” parliamentary countries, disgusted with such “socialists” as the Scheidemanns, Davids, Legiens, Sembats, Renaudels, Hendersons, Vanderveldes, Staunings, Brantings, Bissolatis, and Co., has been with increasing frequency giving its sympathies to anarcho-syndicalism, in spite of the fact that the latter is merely the twin brother of opportunism.

For Marx, however, revolutionary dialectics was never the empty fashionable phrase, the toy rattle, which Plekhanov, Kautsky and others have made of it. Marx knew how to break with anarchism ruthlessly for its inability to make use even of the “pigsty” of bourgeois parliamentarism, especially when the situation was obviously not revolutionary; but at the same time he

knew how to subject parliamentarism to genuinely revolutionary proletarian criticism.

To decide once every few years which members of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament—this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism, not only in parliamentary-constitutional monarchies, but also in the most democratic republics.

But if we deal with the question of the state, and if we consider parliamentarism as one of the institutions of the state, from the point of view of the tasks of the proletariat in *this* field, what is the way out of parliamentarism? How can it be dispensed with?

Once again, we must say: the lessons of Marx, based on the study of the Commune, have been so completely forgotten that the present-day “Social-Democrat” (i.e., present-day traitor to socialism) really cannot understand any criticism of parliamentarism other than anarchist or reactionary criticism.

The way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the elective principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into “working” bodies. “The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time.”

“A working, not a parliamentary body”—this is a blow straight from the shoulder at the present-day parliamentarians and parliamentary “lap-dogs” of Social-Democracy! Take any parliamentary country, from America to Switzerland, from France to Britain, Norway and so forth—in these countries the real business of “state” is performed behind the scenes and is carried on by the departments, chancelleries, and General Staffs. Parliament is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the “common people”. This is so true that even in the Russian republic, a bourgeois-democratic republic, all these sins of parliamentarism came out at once, even before it managed to



set up a real parliament. The heroes of rotten philistinism, such as the Skobelevs and Tseretelis, the Chernovs and Avksentyevs, have even succeeded in polluting the Soviets after the fashion of the most disgusting bourgeois parliamentarism, in converting them into mere talking shops. In the Soviets, the “socialist” Ministers are fooling the credulous rustics with phrase-mongering and resolutions. In the government itself a sort of permanent shuffle is going on in order that, on the one hand, as many Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks as possible may in turn get near the “pie”, the lucrative and honorable posts, and that, on the other hand, the “attention” of the people may be “engaged”. Meanwhile the chancelleries and army staffs “do” the business of “state”.

Dyelo Naroda, the organ of the ruling Socialist-Revolutionary Party, recently admitted in a leading article—with the matchless frankness of people of “good society”, in which “all” are engaged in political prostitution—that even in the ministries headed by the “socialists” (save the mark!), the whole bureaucratic apparatus is in fact unchanged, is working in the old way and quite “freely” sabotaging revolutionary measures! Even without this admission, does not the actual history of the participation of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks in the government prove this? It is noteworthy, however, that in the ministerial company of the Cadets, the Chernovs, Rusanovs, Zenzinovs, and other editors of *Dyelo Naroda* have so completely lost all sense of shame as to brazenly assert, as if it were a mere bagetelle, that in “their” ministries everything is unchanged!! Revolutionary-democratic phrases to gull the rural Simple Simons, and bureaucracy and red tape to “gladden the hearts” of the capitalists—that is the *essence* of the “honest” coalition.

The Commune substitutes for the venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception, for the parliamentarians themselves have to

work, have to execute their own laws, have themselves to test the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents. Representative institutions remain, but there is *no* parliamentarism here as a special system, as the division of labour between the legislative and the executive, as a privileged position for the deputies. We cannot imagine democracy, even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions, but we can and *must* imagine democracy without parliamentarism, if criticism of bourgeois society is not mere words for us, if the desire to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie is our earnest and sincere desire, and not a mere “election” cry for catching workers’ votes, as it is with the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, and also the Scheidemanns and Legiens, the Semblats and Vanderveldes.

It is extremely instructive to note that, in speaking of the function of *those* officials who are necessary for the Commune and for proletarian democracy, Marx compares them to the workers of “every other employer”, that is, of the ordinary capitalist enterprise, with its “workers, foremen, and accountants”.

There is no trace of utopianism in Marx, in the sense that he made up or invented a “new” society. No, he studied the *birth* of the new society *out of* the old, and the forms of transition from the latter to the former, as a natural-historical process. He examined the actual experience of a mass proletarian movement and tried to draw practical lessons from it. He “learned” from the Commune, just as all the great revolutionary thinkers learned unhesitatingly from the experience of great movements of the oppressed classes, and never addressed them with pedantic “homilies” (such as Plekhanov’s: “They should not have taken up arms” or Tsereteli’s: “A class must limit itself”).

Abolishing the bureaucracy at once, everywhere and completely, is out of the question. It is a utopia. But to *smash* the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will make possible the gradual abolition



of all bureaucracy—this is *not* a utopia, it is the experience of the Commune, the direct and immediate task of the revolutionary proletariat.

Capitalism simplifies the functions of “state” administration; it makes it possible to cast “bossing” aside and to confine the whole matter to the organisation of the proletarians (as the ruling class), which will hire “workers, foremen and accountants” in the name of the whole of society.

We are not utopians, we do not “dream” of dispensing *at once* with all administration, with all subordination. These anarchist dreams, based upon incomprehension of the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship, are totally alien to Marxism, and, as a matter of fact, serve only to postpone the socialist revolution until people are different. No, we want the socialist revolution with people as they are now, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control, and “foremen and accountants”.

The subordination, however, must be to the armed vanguard of all the exploited and working people, i.e., to the proletariat. A beginning can and must be made at once, overnight, to replace the specific “bossing” of state officials by the simple functions of “foremen and accountants”, functions which are already fully within the ability of the average town dweller and can well be performed for “workmen’s wages”.

We, the workers, shall organise large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers. We shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid “foremen and accountants” (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees). This is *our* proletarian task, this is what we can and must *start* with in accomplishing the proletarian revolution. Such a beginning, on the basis of large-scale production, will of itself lead to the gradual “withering away” of all bureaucracy, to the

gradual creation of an order—an order without inverted commas, an order bearing no similarity to wage slavery—an order under which the functions of control and accounting, becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the *special* functions of a special section of the population.

A witty German Social-Democrat of the seventies of the last century called the *postal* service an example of the socialist economic system. This is very true. At the present the postal service is a business organised on the lines of state-*capitalist* monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organisations of a similar type, in which, standing over the “common” people, who are overworked and starved, one has the same bourgeois bureaucracy. But the mechanism of social management is here already to hand. Once we have overthrown the capitalists, crushed the resistance of these exploiters with the iron hand of the armed workers, and smashed the bureaucratic machinery of the modern state, we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the “parasite”, a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay them *all*, as indeed *all* “state” officials in general, workmen’s wages. Here is a concrete, practical task which can immediately be fulfilled in relation to all trusts, a task whose fulfilment will rid the working people of exploitation, a task which takes account of what the Commune had already begun to practice (particularly in building up the state).

To organise the *whole* economy on the lines of the postal service so that the technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as *all* officials, shall receive salaries no higher than “a workman’s wage”, all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat—that is our immediate aim. This is the state and this is the economic foundation we need. This is what will bring about the abolition of parliamentarism and the preservation of representative institutions. This is what will rid the labouring



classes of the bourgeoisie's prostitution of these institutions.

4. Organisation of National Unity

"In a brief sketch of national organisation which the Commune had no time to develop, it states explicitly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest village...." The communes were to elect the "National Delegation" in Paris.

"...The few but important functions which would still remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as had been deliberately mis-stated, but were to be transferred to communal, i.e., strictly responsible, officials.

"...National unity was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, organised by the communal constitution; it was to become a reality by the destruction of state power which posed as the embodiment of that unity yet wanted to be independent of, and superior to, the nation, on whose body it was but a parasitic excrescence. While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority claiming the right to stand above society, and restored to the responsible servants of society."

The extent to which the opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy have failed—perhaps it would be more true to say, have refused—to understand these observations of Marx is best shown by that book of Herostratean fame of the renegade Bernstein, *The Premises of Socialism and the Tasks of the Social-Democrats*. It is in connection with the above passage from Marx that Bernstein wrote that "as far as its political content is concerned", this programme "displays, in all its essential features, the greatest similarity to the federalism of Proudhon.... In spite of all the other points of difference between Marx and the 'petty-bourgeois' Proudhon [Bernstein places the word "petty-bourgeois" in inverted commas, to make it sound ironical] on

these points, their lines of reasoning run as close as could be.” Of course, Bernstein continues, the importance of the municipalities is growing, but “it seems doubtful to me whether the first job of democracy would be such a dissolution [Auflösung] of the modern states and such a complete transformation [Umwandlung] of their organisation as is visualised by Marx and Proudhon (the formation of a National Assembly from delegates of the provincial or district assemblies, which, in their turn, would consist of delegates from the communes), so that consequently the previous mode of national representation would disappear.” (Bernstein, *Premises*, German edition, 1899, pp. 134 and 136.)

To confuse Marx’s view on the “destruction of state power, a parasitic excrescence”, with Proudhon’s federalism is positively monstrous! But it is no accident, for it never occurs to the opportunist that Marx does not speak here at all about federalism as opposed to centralism, but about smashing the old, bourgeois state machine which exists in all bourgeois countries.

The only thing that does occur to the opportunist is what he sees around him, in an environment of petty-bourgeois philistinism and “reformists” stagnation, namely, only “municipalities”! The opportunist has even grown out of the habit of thinking about proletarian revolution.

It is ridiculous. But the remarkable thing is that nobody argued with Bernstein on this point. Bernstein has been refuted by many, especially by Plekhanov in Russian literature and by Kautsky in European literature, but neither of them has said *anything* about *this* distortion of Marx by Bernstein.

The opportunist has so much forgotten how to think in a revolutionary way and to dwell on revolution that he attributes “federalism” to Marx, whom he confuses with the founder of anarchism, Proudhon. As for Kautsky and Plekhanov, who claim to be orthodox Marxists and defenders of the theory of revolutionary Marxism, they are silent on this point! Here is one of the roots of the extreme vulgarisation of the views on



the difference between Marxism and anarchism, which is characteristic of both the Kautskyites and the opportunists, and which we shall discuss again later.

There is not a trace of federalism in Marx's above-quoted observation on the experience of the Commune. Marx agreed with Proudhon on the very point that the opportunist Bernstein did not see. Marx disagreed with Proudhon on the very point on which Bernstein found a similarity between them.

Marx agreed with Proudhon in that they both stood for the "smashing" of the modern state machine. Neither the opportunists nor the Kautskyites wish to see the similarity of views on this point between Marxism and anarchism (both Proudhon and Bakunin) because this is where they have departed from Marxism.

Marx disagreed both with Proudhon and Bakunin precisely on the question of federalism (not to mention the dictatorship of the proletariat). Federalism as a principle follows logically from the petty-bourgeois views of anarchism. Marx was a centralist. There is no departure whatever from centralism in his observations just quoted. Only those who are imbued with the philistine "superstitious belief" in the state can mistake the destruction of the bourgeois state machine for the destruction of centralism!

Now if the proletariat and the poor peasants take state power into their own hands, organise themselves quite freely in communes, and *unite* the action of all the communes in striking at capital, in crushing the resistance of the capitalists, and in transferring the privately-owned railways, factories, land and so on to the *entire* nation, to the whole of society, won't that be centralism? Won't that be the most consistent democratic centralism and, moreover, proletarian centralism?

Bernstein simply cannot conceive of the possibility of voluntary centralism, of the voluntary fusion or amalgamation of the proletarian communes, for the sole purpose of destroying bourgeois rule and the bourgeois state machine. Like all

philistines, Bernstein pictures centralism as something which can be imposed and maintained solely from above, and solely by the bureaucracy and military clique.

As though foreseeing that his views might be distorted, Marx expressly emphasised that the charge that the Commune had wanted to destroy national unity, to abolish the central authority, was a deliberate fraud. Marx purposely used the words: “National unity was ... to be organised”, so as to oppose conscious, democratic, proletarian centralism to bourgeois, military, bureaucratic centralism.

But there are none so deaf as those who will not hear. And the very thing the opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy do not want to hear about is the destruction of state power, the amputation of the parasitic excrescence.

5. Abolition of the Parasite State

We have already quoted Marx’s words on the subject, and we must now supplement them.

“It is generally the fate of new historical creations,” he wrote, “to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness. Thus, this new Commune, which breaks [*bricht*, smashes] the modern state power, has been regarded as a revival of the medieval communes ... as a federation of small states (as Montesquieu and the Girondins visualised it) ... as an exaggerated form of the old struggle against over-centralisation....

“... The Communal Constitution would have restored to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by that parasitic excrescence, the ‘state’, feeding upon and hampering the free movement of society. By this one act it would have initiated the regeneration of France....

“... The Communal Constitution would have brought the rural producers under the intellectual lead of the central towns



of their districts, and there secured to them, in the town working men, the natural trustees of their interests. The very existence of the Commune involved, as a matter of course, local self-government, but no longer as a counterpoise to state power, now become superfluous.”

“Breaking state power”, which as a “parasitic excrescence”; its “amputation”, its “smashing”; “state power, now become superfluous”—these are the expressions Marx used in regard to the state when appraising and analysing the experience of the Commune.

All this was written a little less than half a century ago; and now one has to engage in excavations, as it were, in order to bring undistorted Marxism to the knowledge of the mass of the people. The conclusions drawn from the observation of the last great revolution which Marx lived through were forgotten just when the time for the next great proletarian revolution has arrived.

“... The multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which expressed themselves in it show that it was a thoroughly flexible political form, while all previous forms of government had been essentially repressive. Its true secret was this: it was essentially *a working-class government*, the result of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which the economic emancipation of labour could be accomplished....

“Except on this last condition, the Communal Constitution would have been an impossibility and a delusion....”

The utopians busied themselves with “discovering” political forms under which the socialist transformation of society was to take place. The anarchists dismissed the question of political forms altogether. The opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of the parliamentary democratic state as the limit which should not be overstepped; they battered their foreheads praying before this “model”, and

denounced as anarchism every desire to break these forms.

Marx deduced from the whole history of socialism and the political struggle that the state was bound to disappear, and that the transitional form of its disappearance (the transition from state to non-state) would be the “proletariate organised as the ruling class”. Marx, however, did not set out to *discover* the political *forms* of this future stage. He limited himself to carefully observing French history, to analysing it, and to drawing the conclusion to which the year 1851 had led, namely, that matters were moving towards *destruction* of the bourgeois state machine.

And when the mass revolutionary movement of the proletariat burst forth, Marx, in spite of its failure, in spite of its short life and patent weakness, began to study the forms it had *discovered*.

The Commune is the form “at last discovered” by the proletarian revolution, under which the economic emancipation of labour can take place.

The Commune is the first attempt by a proletarian revolution to *smash* the bourgeois state machine; and it is the political form “at last discovered”, by which the smashed state machine can and must be *replaced*.

We shall see further on that the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, in different circumstances and under different conditions, continue the work of the Commune and confirm Marx’s brilliant historical analysis.





O crime de rico a lei o cobre. O Estado esmaga o oprimido



Não há direitos para o pobre. Ao rico tudo é permitido



À opressão não mais sujeitos! Somos iguais todos os seres



Não mais deveres sem direitos. Não mais direitos sem deveres!



Su, lottiamo! l'ideale nostro alfine sarà l'Internazionale futura umanità!



Su, lottiamo! l'ideale nostro alfine sarà



l'Internazionale futura umanità!

Manifesto of the Paris Commune's Federation of Artists

This manifesto was written by the Federation of Artists, a radical group of artists, painters, sculptors and ornamentalists who came together in April of 1871 to re-evaluate the role of art in the midst of the Paris Commune.

Federation of Paris Artists

The artists of Paris, in adhering to the principles of the Communal Republic, have formed a federation.

This uniting of all the artistic intellects has as its bases:

‘The free expansion of art, free from all governmental supervision and from all privileges.’

‘Equality of rights among all the members of the federation.’

‘The independence and dignity of every artist taken under the protection of all through the creation of a committee elected by the universal suffrage of artists.’ This committee strengthened the bonds of solidarity and achieved unity of action.

Composition of the Committee

The committee is composed of 47 members representing various faculties, namely:

- 16 painters;
- 10 sculptors;
- 5 architects;
- 6 engravers; and
- 10 members representing the decorative arts, incorrectly called the industrial arts.



They were appointed by the list system and by secret vote.

Citizens of both sexes who proved their position as artists—whether through the fame of their works, or through an exhibitor's card, or through a written attestation from two sponsor artists—had the right to take part in the vote.

Committee members were elected for one year.

Upon the expiration of the mandate, fifteen members designated by a secret vote of the committee will remain in office over the following year; the other thirty-two members will be replaced.

The outgoing members may only be re-elected at the end of an interval of one year.

The right of recall may be exercised against a member who is not fulfilling their mandate. This recall may only be pronounced one month after the demand for it has been made, and—if voted on in general assembly—on a majority of two thirds of the voters.

Establishing the Mandate

This government of the world of the arts by the artists has as its mission:

- Preserving of the treasures of the past;
- Implementing and illuminating all the elements of the present; and
- Regenerating the future through education.

Monuments and Museums

Monuments, from the artistic point of view, museums, and Paris establishments containing galleries, collections, and libraries of works of art not belonging to private individuals, are entrusted to the keeping and the administrative supervision of the committee.

It will erect them, preserve them, and adjust them, and it will

complete plans, inventories, indexes, and catalogues.

It will place these at the disposal of the public in order to encourage studies and satisfy the curiosity of visitors.

It will note the state of preservation of buildings, indicate urgent repairs, and present the Commune with a frequent account of its works.

After examination of their capacity and inquiry into their morality, it will appoint administrators, a secretary, archivists, and wardens, in order to assure the service needs of these establishments and for exhibitions, which will be spoken of later.

Exhibitions

The committee will organise communal, national, and international exhibitions taking place in Paris.

For national and international exhibitions not taking place in Paris, it will delegate a commission in charge of the interests of Parisian artists.

It will only admit works signed by their authors, original creations or translations from one art to another, such as engravings rendering paintings, etc.

It rejects absolutely all mercenary exhibitions that tend to substitute the name of the editor or the manufacturer for that of the real creator.

It has not been given awards.

Ordinary works commissioned by the Commune will be distributed among the artists that the votes of all the exhibitors will have designated.

Extraordinary works will be submitted to competition.

Education

The committee will supervise the teaching of drawing and modelling in the communal primary and professional schools



in which the teachers are appointed through competition; it encourages the introduction of attractive, logical methods; it stamps models; and it designs the subjects among which a higher spirit is revealed, and the studies of which must be completed at the expense of the Commune.

It prompts and encourages the construction of vast halls for higher education, for conferences on the aesthetics, history, and philosophy of art.

Publicity

It will create a publicity organ entitled: *Officiel des arts*.

Under the control and the responsibility of the committee, this journal will publish events concerning the world of the arts and useful information for artists.

It will publish accounts of the committee's works, the minutes of its meetings, the budget of receipts and expenditures, and all the statistical works that bring light and prepare order.

The literary section, dedicated to essays on aesthetics, will be a neutral field open to all opinions and all systems.

Progressive, independent, dignified, and sincere, *Officiel des arts* will be the most serious statement of our regeneration.

Arbitrations

For all contentious disputes relating to the arts, the committee—upon the request of the interested parties (artists or others)—will appoint conciliating arbiters.

On issues of principle and general interest, the committee will form into an arbitral council, and its decisions will be inserted into *Officiel des arts*.

Individual Initiative

The committee invites all citizens to send it all proposals, projects, reports, and opinions having the progress of art, the moral or intellectual emancipation of artists, or the material improvement of their lot as a goal.

It will give an account of this to the Commune and lend its moral support and its collaboration to everything it judges feasible.

It calls public opinion to sanction all attempts at progress, giving these proposals the publicity of *Officiel des arts*.

Lastly, by the word, by the pen, by the pencil, through popular reproduction of masterpieces, and through intelligent and edifying images that can be spread in profusion and displayed in the town halls of the most humble villages in France, the committee will work towards our regeneration, the inauguration of communal wealth, the splendours of the future, and the Universal Republic.

G. COURBET, MOULINET, STEPHEN MARTIN, ALEXANDRE JOUSSE, ROSZEZENCH, TRICHON, DALOU, JULES HÉREAU, C. CHABERT, H. DUBOIS, A. FALEYNIÈRE, EUGÈNE POTTIER, PERRIN, A. MOUILLIARD.

Translated from French by Jeff Skinner. This translation was originally published by Red Wedge Magazine and revised by Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.





Mi vse ustvarjamo na svetu, zato naj vse bo naša last;



zato naj delavcu in kmetu pripada tudi vsa oblast.



Ko vse lenube in tirane uniči naša trda pest,



krivice bodo vse pregnane, svoboden rod vasi in mest.



ہے جنگ ہماری آخری جس پر ہے فیصلہ



گاؤ انترناسیونال اٹھو کے وقت آیا ہے جنگ ہماری آخری جس پر



ہے فیصلہ گاؤ انترناسیونال اٹھو کے وقت آیا

Resolution of the Communards

BERTOLT BRECHT

Realizing that it is our weakness
That enables you to pass your laws
We resolve in future to abandon meekness
And the law hereon will justify our cause

Realizing that you hold us captive
With loaded pistols at our heads
We resolve in future not to fear your torture
Slavery is worse than death

Realizing that you keep us hungry
So that you yourselves have all the more
We resolve that all that keeps us from the pantry
Can be overcome by breaking down the door

Realizing that you hold us captive
With loaded pistols at our heads
We resolve in future not to fear your torture
Slavery is worse than death

Realizing that you keep us homeless
While around us houses stand unused
We have now resolved to put an end to trespass
From now on every worker shall be housed

Realizing that you hold us captive
With loaded pistols at our heads
We resolve in future not to fear your torture
Slavery is worse than death



Realizing that we won't persuade you
Into paying us a living wage
We resolve that we will take the factories from you
Realizing that your loss will be our gain

Realizing that you hold us captive
With loaded pistols at our heads
We resolve in future not to fear your torture
Slavery is worse than death

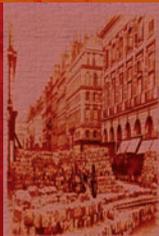
Realizing that we can't depend on
All the promises our rulers make
We've resolved for us the Good Life starts with freedom
Our future must be built by our dictate

Realizing that the roar of cannons
Are the only words that speak to you
We must prove to you that we have learned our lesson
In future we will turn the guns on you





PARIS
COMMUNE
150



On 18 March 1871, the people of Paris opened the door to utopia. Over 72 days, the workers built new institutions and advanced the practice of democracy. The forces of counter-revolution regrouped, marched on the city, and defeated the Commune on 28 May. Two days later, Karl Marx delivered an address to the International Workingmen's Association, a text later published as *The Civil War in France*.

Almost fifty years later, as the Soviet Republic was being formed, Lenin reflected on Marx's text to consider how to smash the inherited

state institutions and to build socialist institutional forms. The Commune was reborn in a higher form as the Soviet. This book collects Marx's address, Lenin's chapter in *State and Revolution* on the Commune, Bertolt Brecht's poem on the communards, and Manifesto of the Paris Commune's Federation of Artists.

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