

Revolutions: Political and Social

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Article Seventeen

THE political revolutions we have related, covering the principal capitals of Europe, left scarcely a trace on the law-books. By 1852 Europe was, politically, where she had been in 1848.

The efforts of large or small groups of earnest and courageous men, though successful in seizing control of the political forces, were lacking in power to alter the social trend of life, as we pointed out in our opening article. They could scheme, conspire and prepare for the overthrow of another group of men, and lay their plans with every assurance of success. The factors being all ascertainable and comprehensible, it only remained for them to be collected, and a plan drawn to cover the occasion.

The success of the operation depended upon the thoroughness, courage and resources of the revolutionists. They had merely to over-reach, out-guess and out-fight the group in control of the government. This was a comparatively easy matter in several instances, and presented no overwhelming difficulty in any case. A little foresight, a little patience, a little courage, how little might be seen from the career of Louis Napoleon—a little luck, and the deed was done.

But as people live, not on laws, however enlightened, nor on ideals, however exalted, the revolutionists, dealing largely in such commodities, fell short of the anticipations which their promises had inspired. The production of food might be retarded or accelerated by a government, but it will be found even today—and it was certainly true of the middle of last century—that production proceeded without any aid from the state. The chief function of the state was to maintain order; it is still its chief function. When the government did interfere it generally threw a sprag into the wheels of progress, and was not infrequently ignored.

Aside from that little group of very ordinary men who comprised the government, the great multitude who maintained the productive machine labored on. To anticipate the results of their energy was beyond the ken of man. To out-guess the steam engine or the chemical combinations of the newly discovered elements was impossible, and during the years following the revolutionary period we find the parliaments and governments of the world desperately engaged in an almost endless effort to keep pace with the development of the machine.

A quiet country side, where for centuries a peaceful peasantry have produced, and paid their taxes, is invaded by a railway; immediately it becomes a scene of turmoil and strife, for which no rules and regulations are laid down; the government hastily draws up a code of rules, which are no sooner enacted than they become the cause of further strife. The government is extremely embarrassed; these questions are beyond its power to solve. Hitherto, the calls upon its ingenuity were such that a few bureaucrats, working in well-known grooves, kept things moving somehow. But strange apparitions of ferocious old men, presenting the strangest demands, had lately robbed the bureaucrats of much rest and had upset their pomposity. Coarse old fellows, lacking culture or elegance, but possessing an extraordinary knowledge of coal and iron products, and presenting unprecedented demands for the abolition of taxes and imposts long accounted the very life blood of the nation. Strangest of all this strange eventful history, these crude creatures (of whom Mathias Stinnes, the grandfather of the present de facto Dictator of Germany, was the vanguard) had become factors in the social wellbeing of the nation and, consequently, of the bureaucrats themselves. And the manner in which this came about was in this wise:

Water had been, up to the end of the 18th century, the great carrying agent of mankind, and commerce, making its way by the easiest route to the

sea, naturally followed, wherever possible, the great rivers. Quite energetic engineering enterprises had been carried out by various governments to this end. Canals had been cut and roads built to this end. Even the most profligate of governments, such as that of Louis XVI. of France, contributed. For even to their purblind social vision the need for inter-communication between their productive centres was apparent. But however skilful the engineer, and however great the monarch, north and south remained apart as the poles, and formed the dividing line from a centre of which commerce flowed, as water from two sides of a hill. So that Southern Germany, Baden, Bavaria, Wurtemberg, remained distinct economic units whose produce went south, while that of Prussia, Saxony and Hanover went north. The numerous small Duchies and Principalities which make up Germany did not contribute to the building of roads, and river traffic was more hampered by tariff and regulations than by shoal and rapids. On the Elbe, between Hamburg and Magdeburg, tariff was collected fourteen times, and on the Main, between Bamberg and Mainz, thirty-three times, early in the 18th century, and the Rhine was in even worse case; the control of its banks was not settled by the Great Powers until well into the middle of the century.

Germany was further handicapped, before the advent of the locomotive, by the fact that east of the Rhine the Romans had never established the groundwork of road building which had recompensed the countries they conquered.

The principal rivers of Germany, too, had their mouths in foreign territory, the Danube being in the hands of one of the poorer states, Roumania, and the obstacles to navigation on this southeast bound river have not been adequately dealt with to this day.

The great need for a unified Germany, then, will be understood without further laboring the matter.

The Zollverein (Customs Union) had to some extent removed much of tariff nuisance in the territory within its jurisdiction. But Hanover and the northwest states remained outside.

Prussia, the wealthiest and the nearest to the ocean, was exceptionally favored, and commenced a series of diplomatic victories, by loans of money and engineers to smaller states, succeeding in breaking up the alliances prompted by economic needs which developed in the south and in the northeast. These were checkmated for a time by the unscrupulous Prince Schwarsenburg, and Austria's leading reactionary policy prevailed.

But the triumph of Austria was short lived. Lacking every means to meet the industrial revolution, she required fearless rascality and wisdom of the highest order to maintain her position. These are not given to many men, and in 1852 Schwarsenburg departed this life.

The poor condition of the German roads, a matter engaging the attention of every state, gave an impetus to railroad building, and the demands of Krupp & Co., Stinnes & Co., and similar growing giants, which were already attracting attention, as being almost "English" in completeness. It was still necessary to obtain a charter on mediaeval lines to start a company, and, while this made for security to investors, it restricted private enterprise. The various states therefore were partly compelled to either aid railroad building or entirely construct the roads themselves. List, the economist fresh from the United States, published an engineering journal, and was influential in forwarding many projects. It is remarked that these roads cost less than a third per mile than the roads in England, which were opened by private enterprise.

Twelve years after the Germany revolution, that country was unified by thirty-five hundred miles of railroads. The remotest centres were brought with-

in a few hours of the ocean. Manufacture was released from local conditions, the world supplied raw material, and consumed the finished produce.

Far back in the Thuringian Forest a pipe industry flourished, which obtained its cedar from Lebanon, cherrywood from Lower Austria, birch from Sweden, amber from the Baltic countries, meerschau from Armenia, brass from Britain, resin from India, silver and gold bands from any and everywhere. It cost but little more to take the raw material there and carry the finished article away than would be required to perform a similar service in Berlin, Paris or London. The world was still twenty-five thousand miles around, but space was practically annihilated.

The system of control which sufficed for the days when the people of the Thuringian Forest passed their days grubbing a livelihood from a niggardly nature was manifestly absurd when these peasants handed their wares to the gold-diggers of California. This one illustration should make clear the transformation which followed the appearance of the locomotive. Following directly upon this revolutionary agency, and supporting it in numerous ways, came the electric telegraph and the Morse system of word conveyance. The world was still further narrowed. In March, 1848, we remember it took weeks for a message to pass from one capital to another. In fact, Caesar Augustus could travel as fast as Count Von Bismarck or Prince Metternich, and could hear from his remotest provinces as quickly. By 1850 the latter were in immediate communication with each other, and could visit each other's palaces between suns.

The dividing line of commerce no longer obtained, and to the great ports on the Baltic flowed all the commerce of the interior. In spite of the mediaeval legal machinery, vast enterprises of docking, drawing on the timber of the interior, steel rails, and, later, fabrications for bridges, called for enormous quantities of iron; the mills producing these required endless small parts for their maintenance—and so on and so on. From isolated peasants and handicraft workers, having hardly a thing in common, the inhabitants of Germany were suddenly converted into next-door neighbors, with a dozen pressing grievances. From strangers, hardly able to abide each other, they became bosom cronies, literally bound together with bands of steel. The manufacturers met each other to discuss their needs; the workers met to discuss their woes.

But we fancy our allotted space is full, and we had better leave them ruminating till next issue.

SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

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THEATRE ROYAL

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18

Speaker: A. J. BEENY

All meetings at 8 p.m.
Questions. Discussion.

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