

# Revolutions: Social and Political

BY J. HARRINGTON

ARTICLE TWENTY-THREE

THE PARIS COMMUNE.

(Part I.)

WHILE Moltke was talking to de Wumpple in the style of a drill sergeant, Paris rose, and the Second Empire departed with the Empress Eugenie in a closed hack. By the time the Parisians had illuminated the streets and had become fairly soused with Freedom, the Hun was at the gate. We pass over the harrowing details of the siege, which offers us, in our present investigation little of compelling interest, except perhaps, some very fine rhetoric on the gastronomic virtues of such dishes as consomme of bald rat, stewed elephant ears in the mud, baked leg of mule aux grateful, and but for our rooted objections to interjecting reforms into a revolutionary document, we might recite some delicious bills of fare, and give recipes where by indigent idlers might weather the industrial depression very nicely. Rats and mice are plentiful enough and the bones of cattle may be had for the labor of carrying away. We suspect however that in this case hunger was good sauce. However we noted some time back that in 1864 the International was organized and ere the armies left for the slaughter, communication passed between the proletariat of both countries in which the sentiment of brotherhood and fraternity was expressed, and in the cafe de la Renaissance, where Regault, Longuet, and many others were to head the Commune were arrested in 1866, at a committee meeting of the Internationalists.

There was also Blanqui, who thundered revolution in his "The Country in Danger." On Oct. 30, six weeks after the fall of the Empire, he wrote of the bourgeois government which had seized power . . . "1792 saved the Revolution and founded the Republic; the Hotel de Ville is destroying it. Its auxiliaries are all the monarchists who bawl 'Long live the Republic' after they have destroyed and proscribed it for twenty years, while preparing to destroy and proscribe it even more furiously than ever. It is the standard of traitors and chameleons . . . It is the counter revolution." The following day the last army of France surrendered at Metz, and for a time the bourgeois government was in danger of being overthrown. The Hotel de Ville was surrounded by an angry populace, and Jules Favre himself has stated that "on the 31st Oct. the Parisian population, from highest to lowest, was absolutely opposed to us. Everybody thought we deserved to be dismissed."

But there was no alternative force strong enough to take action, and the bourgeois members were permitted to govern Paris. The multitude were united against the usurping government, but hostilely divided against any alternative one. They were not entitled by any law to administer affairs, having seized upon power by virtue of a popular demonstration against the Empire on the Fall of Sedan and the surrender of Napoleon to the Prussian King.

The farce of defending Paris continued to the exasperation of every class in the beleaguered city. And when the elections on February 8th returned a rural majority of distinct monarchist views, Paris and other large towns were furious. As the citizens of Paris had been lead in a series of fruitless and quite evidently deliberately bungled sorties, it became plain even to the most confiding that they were being fooled, and when the government capitulated, it brought all classes together in a patriotic sweater of enthusiastic madness.

On Feb. 24 a Central Committee from all organi-

zations was elected by the National Guard, and on the 3rd March the National Guard refused to accept a Bonapartist General, d'Aurelles, as their chief. The National Assembly, which had been sitting at Bordeaux made Versailles the Capital of France on March 10th. Anyone who has noted the indignation which follows the removal of a fishery department with half a dozen clerks from one town to another on this continent can appreciate the feeling excited in Paris by such a drastic act. Every petty pedlar and every large land owner felt the world tip on its axis. The annual mob of politicians and heeblers which assemble to make the laws of a country, are not only in themselves good spenders but they are the magnets which draw many others who seek privilege and profit at the head spring of law and order, and who find, in pursuit of their lawful occasion—as the prayer book has it—a need to be lavish.

Paris had scarcely recovered from this shock when she was staggered by the announcement that the moratorium, in effect during the siege, would come to an end on March 13th.

These measures have but little bearing on working class Paris. True, some inconvenience would arise, but not more than they were habituated to and which, while annoying, were matters of too frequent occurrence to create any great disturbance among the workers. But to the bourgeois they meant positive and immediate ruin. Paris decapitated meant ruin in the future. To be compelled, after suffering a five month siege, to meet commercial bills and rents with three days' notice meant immediate bankruptcy. The government was keenly alive to the possibility of trouble and sought to disarm the National Guard. So on the morning of March 18th the cannon was seized, but before they could be removed some women, up before the sun, much before, approached the troops and held them in conversation until the alarm was sounded. This was the last straw. The National Guard had purchased the cannon with their own money; they had refused to deliver them up to Bismarck, and after the many treasons, stratagems and spoils of Thiers, Favre and Co., Paris was justified in entertaining suspicious of treachery when a government attempted to remove these cannon by stealth.

Before going into the struggle between Paris and Versailles it will be well to survey the leading characters of the Commune and their motives and principles. Louis Blanqui, a republican of fierce and uncompromising spirit, with a pronounced class viewpoint, preached the class struggle in season and out. "Twenty-four hours is sufficient time to make a revolution," was his philosophy. He suspected every act of the bourgeoisie and, during the siege of Paris, as during the days of 1848, his voice was always raised against the conflicting trust with which the workers always disarmed themselves in a crisis. Marx says he was the one man who could have given the Commune a head. And in every multitude which thronged the streets of Paris, to protest against governmental treason bourgeois writers "saw the sinister figure of Blanqui slinking on the fringe." Higher praise could not be given! But Thiers was as well aware as anyone of his influence, and he was kidnapped when the Versailles fled from Paris, and kept confined. The Commune offered all their hostages for his single release, but Thiers refused.

To him the Revolution was above the object: let the unknown future provide its own midwives; sufficient unto the day is the task thereof. What part he might have played, with the Revolution accomplished in Paris, we cannot say, but his followers played a sorry one, nor were they very numerous. Cluseret perhaps best represents the opinion and motives of the majority and also, so far as we are able to judge, had the clearest insight into the problems which confronted the Commune.

He declared that the leaders were too visionary and entirely controlled by impossible ideals. When faced with a practical problem they sailed clear over it into the air. And in his opinion the workers lacked intelligence or, at any rate, displayed but little; for an intelligent working class could easily effect their emancipation. He was bitter in his jibes at the monkey stunts of the officials in gold lace and Red Sash. Rossel, who succeeded him as Minister of War, especially incurred his resentment for his love of dress and parade, though he freely admired his ability and courage. But he frankly protested that Communalism and not Communism was his reason for combatting Thiers and his government. And this precisely was the reason the vast majority went into the fight. Occasionally, around the 18th of March, some rattletrap revolutionist full of good intentions and false information undertakes to rave about this epochal event, in which the hopes of a historical mouther combine with the ignorance of a rotarian to make the Paris Commune a class conscious effort to establish communism. The documents left by the Central Committee, the Proclamations of the Commune, the writings of the chiefs prove the exact opposite. So far we have shown briefly that the people of Paris, far from seeking a revolution, were goaded of Paris, far from seeking a revolution, were goaded by a series of unbearable affronts and outrageous betrayals into taking up arms against a usurping government which had no more legal right to rule than had the Central Committee. And all they asked was, the right to manage their own affairs, which London and Manchester possessed. Even Milliere, who sets forth the class nature of society and the evolutionary basis of history on that principle, and declares that the proletariat alone could save civilization, demands the Communal Council.

"Hence," he says, "the difficulties of the Communal Council. We have to face the questions of the organization of the Commune under the most unfavorable conditions possible, which make a good solution unattainable. Influenced by political preoccupations of the Government's enmity to Paris men's minds are not disposed to establish justly the principles of natural right which should regulate the relations of the Commune, a social unit, and the Nation, a political unit; and by the mere force of circumstances the Communal Council has to have unwilling recourse to measures which in ordinary times would be outside its sphere of action. . . Either the Versailles Government must be induced to recognize and sanction by law the rights of the Commune or the antagonism must be stopped by the substitution of the present Assembly whose particular mandate has practically expired of a Constituent Assemble whose mission will be to establish the basis of political and administrative organization in France on strong republican and municipal institutions."

Written in the closing days of the Commune this sufficiently shows the real nature of the revolt, but as the bourgeois writers have it, the sinister figures of Blanqui, shirked in the background, and Paris, armed and victorious, with the International regulating to some extent its policy, the Master Class, with a clearer insight into its fate than the workers ever show decided to blot it out in blood.

But we have been so long in the preliminaries, which we consider necessary to an understanding of the Commune, that we must ask for another issue to deal with the events.

## ALBERTA NOTES.

S. P. of C. Local Calgary, No. 86.

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