

Revolutions : Social and Political

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ARTICLE TWENTY-FIVE

THE Paris Commune was the grand finale of the revolutionary drama so far as labor graced the stage, and by the same token released the revolutionary actions of capital. This terrible defeat of the Parisian working class was so overwhelming that it carried with it the defeat of labor throughout the world, and left the new economic masters of the world free to consolidate their victory. The First International drooped and died; and socialism became a statutory crime.

No longer dreading the proletariat, capital turned its attention to the task of freeing itself from the monarchical shelter under which it had sought refuge during its struggle with the warlike feudal lord. So that France received its ideal of freedom—the Republic, from that notorious monarchist Thiers, who, by one of those ironic twists of circumstance became its first president. Germany came into its heritage, a unified empire, through the machination of an ultra conservative junker, Bismarck; Hungary received independence from a similarly minded junker, Deit; Italy drove the dauntless Garibaldi from her shores, to receive blessings "not promised at her birth," from Cavour, and so on.

Within a score of years after the Commune the monarchy in Europe had automatically become a combination decoy which drew the fire of the revolutionary and a glorified advertising medium which attracted foreign trade, particularly among "backward peoples." To the native potentates of Africa and Asia, still in the political status of feudalism, the grand emissary of an Emperor had an outstanding advantage over the democratic representative of a mere President, as France was to discover to her cost. And so we have the monarchy still with us, at the beck and call of every blacksmith's or navy's son who happens for the moment to represent democracy by chance, force or fraud. Shades of Plantagenet and Hapsburg, defend us from seasons such as this.

But apart from these relics of a non-steam age, the bourgeoisie dominated everywhere except in Russia. In the total collapse of the Republican idea we have an excellent example of the influence of ideas in human development. Take up any work written previous to 1871 by any liberal-minded publicist and you will find tirade and arguments against the monarchy in more or less profusion. Since then, flourishing Republican societies have died everywhere, but the object of their irrefutable logic and rousing eloquence remains.

The development of industry removed them from power if not from place; it was the happy solution in another form, which Paine voiced at his peril during the French Revolution: "Let us kill the monarchy but not the monarch." It is an astonishing fact when we fully realize it, that revolutions of force, in which the rising capitalist class completely overthrew the monarchies, during the 17th and 18th centuries did not give them social domination, and that following these complete victories the monarch came back with renewed vigor and brought with it all the shameful practices which had hastened its fall; and that in due course of time, without the loss of a night's rest social dominance came to the capitalist by sheer force of circumstances. Not that there was no struggle, nor lack of striving to that end. There was, both consciously and otherwise, but the fulfillment of their desire lay not so much in the struggle for it as in the general trend of social development. Marx, with his deep insight into historical development saw this, and has stated it with perfect clearness throughout his mature works, which the "real" Marxists desperately try to conceal, there being at present a fair market for ranting and raving about Dictatorship.

Marx wrote prefaces to his books which equal in quality if not in quantity the book itself, and in his "Critique of Political Economy" he says no social system is ever displaced until all the elements of development are worked out. In his "Civil War in France" he says so again, with particular reference to the working class. Anarchists, industrial unionists and communists with an anti-political bias have seized on a sentence in this book and trot it out in season and out. They neither look before nor after. Why should they? These few words answer their purpose and if they fool no one else they kid themselves. "The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes." This is followed by a minute analysis of the modern State and its uses, which our lefty revolutionary comrades might read with profit if not with pleasure. In the Commune Marx saw the germ of a new form of social association through which the workers might more effectively move toward their emancipation. By weakening the centralized State, through the abolition of the standing army, and the placing of all powers in the hands of the Communal Authorities, and the arming and drilling of all citizens, in the National Guard, it really gave political supremacy to the working class, but he says: "The political rule of the producer cannot co-exist with the perpetuation of his social slavery." He later declares that the working class "know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form toward which present society is irresistibly tending, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historical processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which the old bourgeois society is pregnant. In the full consciousness of their historic mission, 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 ink horn, and the didactic patronage of well wishing bourgeois doctrinaires, pouring forth their ignorant platitudes and sectarian crochets in the oracular tone of scientific fallibility." They can afford too, a hearty laugh at those tame pussy footers who suffer from the illusion, if it be delusion and not downright trickery, that the proletariat revolution can be accomplished minus the proletariat. Marx profiting by the practical schooling received in the revolutionary period of 1848, in all his writing since that time insists upon the historical development concept.

In fact the change from the revolutionary overthrow to that of industrial development occurred within a few months. In the spring of 1850 there still remained a hope that the revolutionary fires might be revived, and with the experience gained in two years of struggle there was a possibility that a sudden onslaught might be successful. By the end of the year reaction was everywhere triumphant. The suffrage was withdrawn, "free speech" denied and every proletarian organization disbanded or rendered helpless. The last argument to a general uprising was answered when the leaders of the Communist League were arrested and thrown into gaol early in 1851, and found guilty late in 1852 by means we have already referred to.

Both Marx and Engels read the lesson and immediately revised their tactics, which brought down upon them the wrath of all those warriors of the mouth, who up to then had anticipated good pickings, which, however, they afterwards received at the hands of Bismarck and Napoleon when it became apparent that Marx and Engels were correct.

This does not prevent the mouthers of today from enjoying themselves in a mimic world of their own, patterned on France and Germany of 1848, and Russia of 1917, and justifying their futile antics on what Marx said during and immediately following the revolution.

However, Marx, after the fall of the empire in September, 1870, in an address as President of the First International, advised the proletariat not to press forward too closely. With a foreign and victorious army everywhere in control, they would only invite disaster; but fate decided otherwise and of course if we must take the precise advice of Marx at all parts of the struggle, we should be forced to condemn the Russian for following a course contrary to that advice given to the French. But Marxism is, first of all, an understanding of social development, and those who would make it a programme of revolution with the particulars all mapped out are merely kidding themselves, if they are not trying to kid others.

However, just as the defeats of '48 and '49 drove the workers to despair and doomed the revolutionary movement to years of inaction, so did that of 1871. And as we have already pointed out, permitted the consolidation of the forces of capitalism. Bismarck demanded the left bank of the Rhine and an indemnity of five milliard francs. This was considered a staggering sum. But such were the forces released by steam and electricity that it proved the making of France, and almost broke Germany. But the latter country had an even greater benefit conferred upon it in the unifying of Germany, and the consolidating of her mineral and economic resources.

It so happened that Pasteur, busy spying on the insect world with a microscope, discovered some groups of parasites, with an aptitude corresponding to that of their human prototypes, to wit—an excessive and uncontrollable fondness for the product of the silk worm and the vine. In this microscopic world each lord of creation (who shall deny it?) with his favorite female on his arm, enjoyed, to the mystification of the French peasant, the silks and liquors of our masters at their very earliest stage. Pasteur detected their pilfering and was instrumental in developing a number of sprays and decoctions which destroyed the vine and silk worm diseases, thereby donating to France almost the entire means to pay Germany her indemnity.

The lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and sometimes to the looted nation. Each new discovery, every new invention, gives birth to a progeny of new associations and new ideas, which is what Marx means when he said that the proletariat would have to pass "through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men." And those inept mouthers of shibboleths who would crib, cabin and confine this enlightening conception of historical development into a time table and stage direction for their own sanguinary if imaginary world revolutions, are as far from understanding Marx, even if they do manage to work the Dictatorship of the Proletariat into everything they say, as the child who murmurs "Our father who art in heaven." It is a bitter pill to swallow, but for all that, of pathologic potency, to realize that we are the toys of circumstance. We have only to consider the devastating effects of the Versailles Treaty to realize that there are forces which transcend human efforts, and multiply his most earnest endeavors.

In the laboratory, in industry, or in the field, we can proceed to build and create by our own knowledge and skill; we work on matter, whose laws we understand, and which lies inert in the process. But in society we meet with a raw material which insists upon a say in the matter, and which sometimes says it with lead and poison gas. That is why political revolutions, engineered by man, so often fall hopelessly behind the ideals of those dauntless pioneers who carried them through. And that is why in the midst of glamorous chatter and revolutionary phrase-mongering we must still pursue, as time and means are vouchsafed us, a policy of education, and as our conception of edu-