

Revolutions : Social and Political

BY J. HARRINGTON

ARTICLE TWENTY-FOUR

THE mutiny of the line regiments that were sent to seize the cannon of the National Guard and the shooting of its Generals, Thomas and Lecomte, removed every possible chance of a pacific solution between the large towns and the group of politicians into whose hands the government had fallen. War, though now inevitable, the Commune was loth to invoke, having in mind difficulties which some "real" revolutionists of these piping days of peace apparently overlook: the victorious German army, whose crushing defeat of the French army in a few weeks had caused a panic in every capital in Europe; the adverse and monarchist vote of the country; their own pitifully inadequate resources consequent upon a five months' siege, to mention a few.

But events brook no argument, however logical, nor can eloquence stay their onward march. It is the prerogative of the ruling class of all times to deal in death with a calm and unruffled conscience, as it is the fate of all subject classes to endure to the limit every form of suffering and degradation before choosing between misery without an end and an end without misery.

It is not our task to solve that riddle, but we wish to emphasise this strange phenomenon—the multitude which on March 18, 1871 shouted, "Long Live the Commune" was practically the same which thronged the streets of Paris on July 19, 1870 shouting, "To Berlin." To expect in the space of eight months that these people should have become Socialists, intent upon a Social Revolution, is asking much more than the law allows.

The Paris Commune becomes a working class tragedy because, with the advent of war every other class fled and left them holding the bag. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. It is not because the Commune in itself proclaimed any marked proletarian principle, but because the tribunals which condemned to imprisonment and death over a thousand clerks, three thousand laborers, fifteen hundred shoe-makers, twenty-five hundred metal workers and engineers, two thousand stone masons, five hundred goldsmiths, etc. These, from a very long list, will be sufficient when compared with one hundred teachers, one hundred instrument makers; no lawyers, preachers, grocers, nor gentlemen; saving your presence, yer reverence!

Remembering that the events which dragged these workers into a life and death struggle were solely matters of importance to the ruling and business classes, and reading Thiers' speech to the men who overthrew them, "When I see these sons of our soil, strangers often to an education that elevates, die for you, for us, I am profoundly touched," we are safe in declaring that for the Master Class this is the best of all possible worlds. The mistakes of the Commune have been gone over and over again and again. This is a pleasant pastime for a certain type of mind. We find no relish to it. Their mistakes were such, because they were called upon to act a part for which no preliminary training had been permitted, and for which the leaders had not the slightest aptitude.

Theatrical and romantic, they acted their part not under the circumstances of the hour, but in the atmosphere of 1792. This, we have pointed out before, is a very common human failing and can be indulged with pleasure if not with profit at most times, but a revolution is not an opportune moment to display histrionic ability. To dare: to dare again: and yet again to dare is an excellent plan, but we must know how, and what to dare. The Commune suffered in the first place principally from a lack of authority. Three different groups exercised power,—the Commune, being the city government, the Central Committee, elected pending the choosing of a government and after April 2nd the Committee of

Public Safety, an attempt at Dictatorship. To hear some of the neo-Marxists, real Marxists if you please, rave about the Commune failing to establish a Dictatorship we might infer that this was an oversight. Such is not the case. The Dictatorship simply would not establish. No one had that power which is essential to imposing a Dictatorship, and each group was determined not to be dictated to by any of the others.

The "real" Marxists imagine, or would lead us to believe they imagine a Dictatorship is some kind of a machine which might be built at will, and that pure perversity alone accounts for its absence. The Committee of Public Safety was a farce, and its members were mere mouthers. While these three groups wrangled and jawed, recriminated and denounced, the Versailles troops, under a dictatorship crept steadily nearer; forts fell, after superhuman efforts on the part of their defenders, who repeatedly asked for support, and the last remnants of the desperate bands would be in Paris for hours before the Department of War was aware of the disasters. The brilliant Rossel, so imposing in council, so calm and plausible, failed utterly in practical matters, but notwithstanding his futility and pomposity he continued to impress them in council until, ordered under arrest, he fled.

Again, on the first of May an attempt at Dictatorship was made, but this Committee of Public Safety was no more favored than its predecessor and the wrangling continued, and continued too the successes of the Versailles.

Several attempts had been made to reconcile Paris and Versailles, the Masonic Order particularly exerted itself in this hopeless task, but Thiers was now assured of victory and his conciliatory speeches of the first-week of the breach were now changed for an adamant demand "to punish the brigands." The Masons, finding a compromise impossible, draped their banners over the walls and some more theatricals were indulged in, during which they declared for the Commune regardless of the final issue.

The Pole, Dombrowski, who with his fellow countrymen Wroblenski was the only capable military leader at the service of the Commune, assumed supreme command in the closing days of the struggle, but it was too late. The herculean labors of the Parisian proletariat were incapable of wresting victory from that terrible situation; their long struggle had brought part of the country to their aid, but there was no concerted effort, and Bismarck released with each new danger to Versailles, a fresh batch of war prisoners. On the 21st of May the government troops entered Paris through the Gate of St. Cloud, informed by one of their numerous spies, Ducatel by name, of the absence of any troops in the vicinity. At that very moment a General staff officer, addressing the crowd who had been listening to the concert in the gardens of the Tuilleries declared—"Thiers promised to enter Paris yesterday; he did not enter; he will not enter. I invite you to come here next Sunday to the same place, to our second concert for the benefit of the widows and orphans of those who have fallen in the defence of the Commune."

If there are any lessons to be learned from the Paris Commune, the principal one is—to so order our warfare that the exact movements of the enemy be at all times known, and that no super-revolutionary fervor be allowed to rise between our mentality and the real state of the battlefield. Ducatel might betray and Thiers might intrigue, yet the one can be frustrated and the other overwhelmed, but in the grip of a supreme indifference to the real facts of life we are as hopelessly helpless as a twig in a maelstrom. When the dispatch from Dombrowski that the enemy was within the walls reached the Committee of Public Safety, they were trying Cluseret for treason, on the most trivial of street

gossip, and miserable spitefulness, for evidence. From then to the last day of May was nine long days of heroic effort and military impotence.

We cannot go into that nightmare, that vale of horrors; suffice that against hopeless odds the workers of Paris held barricade after barricade until the last stand of the Heights of Belleville left the vanquished at the mercy of the most infuriated master class in history. We do not care to go into the hell which followed that terrible defeat. Lissagaray in his "History of the Paris Commune" paints the picture in all its sordid details. But with that fall the bourgeoisie came into their own. Thiers, the Monarchist, became President of the Third Republic by the same means that Napoleon became Emperor. The contending Monarchies could not peacefully settle the panic-stricken bourgeoisie. And so, after all the political revolutions since 1848, political revolutions of such magnitude as have not been seen within Capitalism, far beyond the few days' struggle which gave Russia her opportunity to attempt a social revolution, after all the strife and all the bloodshed and suffering, the capitalist class achieved its social revolution and settled down to enjoy the fruits of its long struggle.

We will require one more spasm to close "this strange eventful history" in order to again emphasise that historical fact, which must not be ignored.

Political Revolutions can be made by men. Social Revolution can arise only through events.

HERE AND NOW.

There is more to worry about than to enthuse over, Here and Now, nicer and more handsome cash totals than those recorded here below being the standard of measurement as in days of yore. We are never satisfied, you say. Well, just shoot the figures up and up and we'll promise to tell you when to stop. Don't stop with these:—

Following \$1 each: Jim Quinn, A. Tree, Mrs. Dey, Miss Mary Williamson, D. MacPherson, C. E. Scharff, P. Wallgren, W. A. Pritchard, Arthur Jordan, E. Clements, T. Hanwell, J. McDonald, "K.", K. MacLeod, H. Reed, O. Erickson, H. Lahti, M. Farrell, O. Peterson, J. Jacobs, F. A. Charters.

Following \$2 each: R. Law, H. W. Speed, N. P. Dugan, A. C. Roga, Wm. Dorney.

Mrs. Burrough 50 cents; G. Beagrie \$4; Jim Cartwright \$4.

Above, Clarion subs. received from 14th to 27th March, inclusive, total \$39.50.

CLARION MAINTENANCE FUND.

J. Dennis 50 cents; J. McLennan \$1.50; Harry Williams \$1; "J. A. K." 50 cents; J. W. Jamieson \$1; D. MacPherson \$1; P. Wallgren 50 cents; A. G. McCallum \$5; Local Equity, Alberta (per A. Jorgenson) \$5.

Above, C. M. F. receipts from 14th to 27th March, inclusive, total \$16.

COMMUNE CELEBRATION.

The Commune Celebration was decidedly a success from everybody's standpoint, if comments upon the event mean anything. The music was good, dancing and eats were enjoyable, and below stairs—where questions and discussions were unofficially in order—there was a full house.

The committee members and all who co-operated with them in the really hard work of effecting the arrangements are to be congratulated on their efforts.