

Revolutions : Political and Social

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Ninth Article

AFTER the invasion of the Palais Bourbon by the Luxemburg Assembly and the brief hour of dictatorship we found the proletariat deprived of their leaders, and it might be just as well to state that French revolutionary governments always housed themselves in the palaces of their kings. The Palais Bourbon, though never a favorite home of the Bourbons, houses today the French parliament. The Luxemburg Palace, a much older building, was the home of the Medici queens of France, and is today the meeting place of the French Senate.

Following the fiasco of May 15th, the Socialist Parliament was dissolved, and the revolutionary leaders either fled from France or were imprisoned. The closing of the National Workshops meant trouble, but as Bourbon, Orleans and Buonaparte factions were always ready to seize a chance to enthrone their king, the Palais Bourbon Assembly had to select a military hero who had not been purchased by any of the three contenders. The "National" staff had already contributed generously to the government, having monopolized the best jobs. Even its duelling bully, Sergt. Major Thomas, who was to find a place in history some eighteen years later (shot by the Commune), found his services in demand. The "National" now contributed one more saviour of society. One of the editors, Cavaignac, had a brother who was sergeant major in the African army. The paper and its hirelings boosted this old savage who, even for a sergeant major of the line was notoriously bad, into prominence, and he was appointed general, then given command of the National Guard, and later became head of the entire military forces of France.

The mobilizing of an army which could be trusted under all circumstances was his task. And with the utmost care Cavaignac proceeded. The National Guard was considered safe, being composed of the business and professional classes. The Guard Mobile was doubtful, being largely recruited from the down and out section of the working class. It was also feared that the National Guard of the working class districts might go over; perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say it was feared they would not. Finally the troops were located, armed, prepared and at their stations. In fact Cavaignac had purposely removed the army from the most dangerous sections of Paris, to insure an uprising of a desperate character. The government protested in vain, their timid souls could see nothing but folly in making the business so hazardous. Cavaignac, however, was master of the situation and of them at whom he snarled and sneered, but went his way regardlessly. To him the only consideration was that the uprising should be a real one. And his only fears were that the army would not be required. The savage deliberation of this affair, common enough too, in history, and quite capable of being repeated, should never be lost sight of by the workers. The entire machinery of the government was in action; perhaps a hundred and fifty thousand disaffected workers in Paris, with a few scattered thousands in the provinces, without arms, without organization, without leaders, have been engaged but four weeks since beating each other with clubs and stones (May 15th, the closing of the Workshops had brought the workers into one camp). Against them the government had fifty thousand troops of the line, the National and Mobile Guards another hundred thousand, armed to perfection, organized and drilled to the minute, with leaders of long standing, and all France to draw on for reinforcements; small wonder the martial gentlemen entertained doubts of a genuine insurrection. The entire situation on June 22nd should be included in the intellectual furniture of every worker. A very significant feature is the entire absence of those flamboyant war cries gener-

ally found among revolutionists whose ardour decreases the nearer the revolution approaches, who chant meaningless phrases and plan retributive vengeance, usually upon members of their own class; who take great satisfaction from the noise they make, and mark revolutionary progress by its volume.

The members of the Luxemburg and the delegates of the workers in the National Workshops issued a proclamation on June 18, before the closing order, but during the period when chaos reigned. When, as eye witnesses relate, they were wheeling dirt from one pile to another and back again, the events of the past month had not been lost on them. We give only a part:

".....Reaction..... scatters gold abroad. Beware friends! Wait, wait but a few days more, with that calm you have often shown and wherein lies your strength. Have hope for the times have come; the future is ours; do not encourage by your presence demonstrations which are 'popular' only in name; keep clear of these stupidities of a past age.

"Believe us, listen to us; nothing is now possible in France but the Social and Democratic Republic.

"The history of the last reign is terrible. Let it not be continued. There must be neither emperor nor king. Nothing but Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Long live the Republic."

This was issued three days before the workers going to draw their relief money were confronted with the order to starve and be damned. Four months previously they had established the Republic, arms in hand. They had been induced to surrender their power, and after a few very generous concessions had received endless rebuffs, much humiliation, and little else. They had a knowledge of their power, the recollection of the July days of 1830, of the February day of 1848, when, with the National Guard they had made their will felt, not thine, oh lord!

Of the June insurrection very little can be learned from proclamations, writings, or reported speeches of the proletariat; their leaders were, as we have already stated, either in hiding or in jail. In one proclamation, issued perhaps June 22nd but undated, the fact that "... we, trusting in their word abandoned our barricades. In four months, what have they done? They have broken their word, and not fulfilled their promises," is noted.

The demands outside of "A Social Republic," were very conservative. And as both Marx and Engels remark, they were not clear what a Social Republic meant. A second proclamation, dated June 26th, the day of defeat, gives no added information. It states that in "defending the Republic we defend property," probably an answer to the war-cry of the Party of Order. It demands "the Social and Democratic Republic"; calls on the workers to give support to the battle wherein so many have fallen. The childish comments of the Press of that period offer no information. We had, if we never have anything else, the Winnipeg strike as proof that the Press is the most worthless source of information extant on matters relating to labor troubles.

The French bourgeois were prepared then for a few hours' disorder. Victor Hugo arose on the 20th of June and counselled the workers to cause no further trouble. He accused the government of creating vagabonds and lazzaroni out of the virtuous Parisian laborer, demanded that Socialists cease preaching anarchy, pointed to the prosperity in London, stated that capital fled from Paris (how familiar all this sounds), in face of the fact that the workers were being deliberately goaded to revolt, but we shall see this same rebel later, in another role.

On the 21st, after the proclamation, the workers proposed to the government that a monster banquet

be held. M. Marie gave permission, with the sinister comment that a more suitable day or place (opposite the Vincennes fortress) could hardly be named) as a grand review of all the troops in Paris would also be held and they would thus have an opportunity of renewing their acquaintance with their brethren of the Workshops. The banquet was not held. On the 22nd 3,000 men from the Workshops were ordered to leave Paris, meal tickets, and a little money were provided for food and bed. They left in the morning, but before noon a large number returned and demanded to see the Executive. The government allowed four to interview them. Marie, sure of his ground, again cynically goaded them, and when they returned to the waiting, hungry, desperate, and badgered workers they were not in a state to consider consequences. The real earth, old, unquenchable material for a revolution had been carefully prepared and the match was now applied. The uproar following the deputation's report was soon taken up in every part of Paris, and in an hour a mob surrounded the Town Hall. There the matter was openly discussed, and from there they departed to prepare to resist the orders.

The government brought up its troops to commanding positions, the National and Mobile Guards being covered by regular troops, but enough scope was allowed the workers to organize. The night passed in noise and excitement, but in peace. The morning of the 23rd the drums called the National Guard to arms (general assembly), at nine o'clock the Faubourg St. Antoine, famous in revolutionary history, had erected a barricade; later a company of the National Guard passing down Port St. Denis encountered a barricade being built, and the first shots were fired. After being driven back twice the barricade was carried. But the bourgeoisie were to learn that independently of the word weavers who had been the accredited leaders of the workers, a determined and desperate campaign had been planned, loop holes had been cut in all the houses and walls had been cut through, so that as one barricade was lost the retreat to another was covered by a hail of lead from the upper storeys of the houses. Large quantities of arms had been obtained and a few companies of the National Guard in the proletarian sections had gone over to the workers. The Guard Mobile, made up of the lowest section of the workers, the slum proletariat, of whose fidelity grave doubts had been entertained, remained faithful to the government, but before night fell the vastness of the task was apparent, and Cavaignac was proclaimed dictator. Troops and artillery were rushed to Paris, and Europe breathlessly awaited the news. The 24th dawned and the barricades levelled the previous day had all been restored. The workers had also seized some cannon during the night, and women and children had been busy making bullets for the muskets. By evening Cavaignac announced that the situation was well in hand; the morning of the 25th gave him the lie.

The Archbishop of Paris attempted to stop the slaughter. He proceeded in his sacred vestments to the barricades in the Faubourg St. Antoine, and directly in face of the firing, walked up to the insurgents. Firing ceased, but while he was speaking a shot was fired and he fell wounded in the groin. No one that we have read accuses the workers of this act; he was picked up by them and hurried to a house behind the barricades, where he died. The fighting continued and the dead and wounded assumed the proportions of a decisive battle between nations. Three generals of the regular army were killed, a record, so far as our information goes, and certainly beyond anything the later war records.

On the 26th the heavy artillery had reduced the barricades and houses of the last survivors in

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