

Revolutions : Political and Social

BY J. HARRINGTON

Eighth Article.

WE now return to France, which we left that night in February 1848 when the rain-sodden workers danced in the Tuilleries to the Marseillaise played on the Queen's piano.

There is a painting, I forget by whom, of the Duchess of Orleans presenting her two sons to the Chamber of Deputies, the morning after the revolution; one of these boys, aged nine was king of France by the abdication of old Louis Philippe; the Duchess was Regent. This idyllic scene was interrupted by a mob of uncouth and unsentimental creatures, lacking in dramatic sense, and whose tear glands had been excited so long by their own sorrows that they were unequal to the task of weeping over the troubles of a Queen mother. The Duchess and her boys were roughly handled, and any one else who, by his grave countenance indicated his descent. When finally extracted from the mob the latest King departed from his kingdom to Claremont, in Italy; the deputies fled and the Rengency ended ere it had begun.

The creation of a government was the next order of business.

The revolutionary gentlemen who had carved a symbol of revolt upon the boulevard tree, of course prepared to enter into their well deserved reward. A provisional government was installed at the Palais Bourbon which included but one name connected with the extreme radical movement, Ledru-Rollin. Louis Blanc had been nominated but his name was removed. Garnier Pages, the rebel you remember who had asked his friends to do the symbolic carving, (see Clarion 889), was on the list in spite of opposition by the workers who were assembled. Meanwhile the socialist, republican and anarchist groups met at the office of the Reform newspaper, and drew up a Provisional Government of their own, which, by a coincidence, contained only one Liberal, Arago the astronomer. This group seized the Town Hall. Their proclamation counselled the people to retain their "arms, positions and revolutionary attitude."

Thus on the morrow of the revolution a civil war was quite in order, since two different governments could not very well survive in the same town. The matter was adjusted, however, without further blood-shed, principally through the efforts and eloquence of Lamartine the poet, aided by the tremendous enthusiasm displayed on the boulevards by all classes. Generous sums were subscribed by the wealthy for the relief of those who had been wounded at the barricades, and for the dependents of those who had been killed. Lo! Baron Rothschild leads all the rest.

Were a big bellied, rosy faced, well dressed gentleman to place his hands on your shoulder, having just donated a large sum to the "cause," and mingle his voice with yours in chorusing a revolutionary song, however, emaciated and ill-garbed you might be you would scarcely feel like disemboweling him; at least so it was in Paris on February 25, 1848, and the compromise of the boulevards was reflected in the council chamber, and out of the two governments was formed a third. Marrast, Blanc, Flocon, journalists, and a worker, Albert, became secretaries to the Palais Bourbon selection. Lamartine had suggested that his government was prepared to solve the troubles of labor, and a proclamation was drawn up by Louis Blanc and signed by him as secretary and by Garnier Pages as Mayor of Paris (the rest of France was as yet silent), which read: "The Government of the French Republic pledges itself to guarantee the livelihood of the worker by labor; It pledges itself to guarantee work for all citizens; It recognises that the workers should form associations among themselves to enjoy the legitimate profit of their labor; The Provisional Government returns to the workers, to whom it belongs, the million which falls into its hands from the Civil List."

The Tuilleries was turned into a hospital for

workers injured in industry. All articles were to be returned to their owners if less than ten francs value, and the Republic to sustain the loss. The establishment of national workshops was decreed. An auspicious day for labor!

But the next day, February 26th, the sordid facts of the real world were made manifest. The happy harmony dissolved in a realization of past experiences. Baron Rothschild and his rosy friends heard with concern the tumult in the Republican Clubs, and the keen February wind revived the chill in proletarian homes, not to be in any wise relieved by the reminder of his lean and hungry spouse that the larder was empty. Blanqui, a man of dauntless energy, sour and suspicious, reported to the Central Republican Committee that he had been rebuffed by the government, that they refused to adopt the Red Flag and that they should reject the compromise. While in London, a pale faced adventurer with a unique trim of whiskers, later to be known as "imperial," sat till midnight conferring with an Italian banker whose historical foresight was not questioned by the unfolding scroll of fate. His midnight visitor became Napoleon III. Emperor of France.

The national workshops upon which the Socialists placed so much reliance were the first indications that the Provisional Government had acted more in fear than in sympathy. Thomas, who had charge of the plan, evidently desired to accomplish something but the commercial crisis, the famine, and now the revolution had left France stagnant, and it required more than rhetoric and good will to call prosperity back "to home." In Paris factory after factory closed down for lack of orders, so the problem of starting government factories was quite apparent.

In March there met at the Luxemburg an assembly of workers which became known as the Socialist Parliament, to consider means for solving the various troubles which afflicted them. A similar assembly of employers also met. However, the workers' assembly had this to say among other things—"To the business men who find themselves today faced with disaster and come to us to say: 'Let the State take our establishment and step into our shoes,' we reply: 'The State consents. You shall be generously recompensed. But this recompense which is your due cannot be taken from the insufficient resources we have to our hand: hence the State bonds bearing interest, and creating a mortgage on these very establishments, to be repayable by annuities or by redemption.'" Sure enough the consent of the business men to this arrangement might have led to an amicable solution. But the experiment was never tried. A government that had sprung from a successful working class revolution, composed entirely of members belonging to the master class (the four socialist members were not of the government, they were merely secretaries), could not be expected to view working class domination with enthusiasm.

Thomas has happily left a very complete and frank account of his administration, in which is the record of a conversation which took place between himself and Marie, the Minister of Commerce. Louis Blanc had demanded the establishment of a Ministry of Labor and Progress, with himself as Minister. Marie told Thomas that they had refused, believing such a move would give Blanc a position of great power. They had however given permission to form a Commission of Workers (Luxemburg Assembly), as there "he could disorganise labor only in intention and not in fact." Also, "M. Marie told me that the definite intention of the government was to permit this experience (National Workshops), that in itself it could only have a good result since it would prove to the workers themselves all the inanity and falsity of these inapplicable

theories, and cause them to perceive their disastrous consequences for themselves." Nor was this the limit of a wise and generous policy. Blanqui (whom readers of Marx's "Civil War in France" will remember as the man who in his opinion could have given the Commune a lead and for whom the Commune offered to exchange all its hostages) had headed a demonstration to protest against the early election. Blanc had been against the early election. Blanc had been chosen to meet them and had succeeded in pacifying them with a two weeks' delay; this on March 17. In such times as we are considering, where the state is yet unstable, a mob of any kind can easily become a revolutionary army, in fact Blanqui had often said twenty-four hours is enough to start a revolution. Just a week following this Marie again called Thomas to his office and had a whispered conversation with him. Five millions had been granted for the National Workshops. Could Thomas rely on the workers? He thought he could, on those he had, but the members were growing and his direct contact diminishing. "Never mind the number, said the Minister; if you have them in hand it can never be too great, but find a way of attaching them sincerely to you. **Do not spare money, if need be we will even allow you a secret fund.**"

They further told him to have them armed: "It may be the day is near when it will be necessary to march them into the street."

Conspiracies of this kind are worth while studying.

The Socialist Assembly, however were not entirely engrossed in solving their masters' problems. On the first of April they issued a proclamation, and by the way it contains a curious sentence peculiar to all the speeches and proclamations of the day,—"The revolution surprised us"—however they admit the difficulties ahead and suggest that each industry send three delegates to a Central Workers Committee for the purpose briefly:—

"(1) To assume the maintenance of the popular Republic by giving centralization and a common aim to workers hitherto isolated.

"(2) To assume the triumph of democracy in elections by careful examination of candidates and by giving its recommendation to those who seem to it trustworthy.

"(3) To prepare the organization of labor, particularly by the serious study of the technical processes of each industry, and the classification of the industries which are mutually indispensable for the making of the finished product."

This will no doubt shock some people who have already fathered the idea of representation by industry upon their various gods.

The Provisional government continued to pass enlightened laws and repeal measures of a purely restrictive character. Taxes on salt, wine, meat, and such evident indirect taxation of the workers were repealed and incidentally as enormous sums were required such were saddled directly on the property owners, of whom many were peasants. We have not read any conversation relating to this, but it was duly felt and duly resented a little later. The elections, based on universal suffrage, were set for April 9. the workers knew that this meant a reactionary victory. On March 17 a postponement until April 23rd had been forced, and now a further postponement was sought. Hassall in his "The French People" says—"Though the ignorant voters were perhaps as capable of knowing what was best for their interests as were Barbes, Blanqui and Louis Blanc, these latter determined to bring about a postponement of the elections." Hearnshaw says the Parisian mob realized the elections meant their defeat, and it did its best to prevent them being held. (Europe in the 19th Century.)

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