

THE RED FLAG

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In Commemoration of the Paris Commune 1871

IT is now almost half a century since the great working class tragedy was enacted in Paris. In 1871, a dense cloud settled upon enslaved humanity. An attempt had been made to overcome the conditions under which labor was exploited of all that could make for a free and full development. The attempt was doomed; and the overwhelming defeat was felt in every corner of the earth.

It resulted in the downfall of the First International, and opened the way to a general hounding of the foremost Socialists of Europe. Each year as the 18th of March comes round the memory of the men who fell in Paris is commemorated.

Notwithstanding the stupid lies which the great lying press indulged in at that time, the true story of what occurred in Paris between March and May of 1871 has long been known by the revolutionary workers. There are many, very many, even now however, who do not know that such an event is recorded in history. We are not surprised at this, seeing that most histories, which can spare pages to describe Louis Bonaparte's frantic actions at Sedan, dismiss the Paris Commune with a sneer. "The rabble seized Paris but was soon subdued." If more space is given, it is generally devoted to abuse.

That the Commune was the most vital and far-reaching event of the Franco-Prussian War they either ignore or seek to hide. It remains for working class papers and organizations to retell the story when the anniversary of the day of glorious memory recurs.

The events which preceded the seizure of power by the proletariat of Paris are of such character that no bourgeois historian has ever had the hardihood to excuse. From the time when the son of Napoleon's step-daughter stripped France of every particle of honor, by forcing a nation of over 40 millions to recognize him as emperor, all through his subsequent career; the never-to-be forgotten follies of the Crimean War; the double-crossing of Italy in her war with Austria; the insane attempt to create an empire in Mexico, and finally the crowning folly of forcing a war with Prussia, when that country was organized to the last man for such a war, and when France had not even a clear conception of where to attack.

To such a pass had the fear of a revolutionary working class led the French master class, that all the hair-brained schemes of the group which surrounded Louis Napoleon, were received without protest. Having control of the press, they could create the necessary atmosphere and their partisans paraded the streets, making the night hideous with noise, while any opposition was promptly squelched.

The result of the war is well known. When the German army came in contact with the French at some points, they found the French soldier digging in potato fields for food to keep from starving.

The war opened in July 1870 and the second of September saw Napoleon capitulate at Sedan. Two days later the republic was proclaimed in Paris, and two more days saw the publication

of the circular by the republic which contained the words "Not an inch of our soil will we cede, not a stone of our fortresses."

Then commenced the seizure of Paris. During the entire war, criminal incapacity, and unparalleled treachery characterized the conduct of those in charge of the destinies of France. So the Parisians declared, when on the 18th of March, 1871, the Central Committee took control of Paris, "amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling class."

The empty and absurd boasts of the politicians who seized control of France were solely for the purpose of deluding the French people. When they surrendered Paris and moved the seat of government to Bordeaux, the Parisians looked on with fierce distrust.

C. A. Fyffe in his "History of Modern Europe" tells that, that "Favre, Trochu, and the other members of government of defence had assumed power on the downfall of Napoleon III because they considered themselves the best individuals best able to serve the state. There were hundreds of other persons in Paris who had exactly the same opinion of themselves; and when, with the progress of the siege, the government of the defence lost its popularity and credit, it was natural that ambitious and impatient men of lower political rank should consider it time to try whether Paris could not make a better defence under their own auspices. Attempts had been made before the end of October to overthrow the government. They were repeated at intervals but without success. The agitation however, continued within the ranks of the national guard, which, unlike the national guard in the time of Louis

Phillippe, now included the mass of the working class and was the most dangerous enemy instead of the support of the government. The capitulation brought things to a crisis. Favre had declared it would be impossible to disarm the national guard without a battle in the streets. At his instance, Bismarck allowed the National Guard to retain their weapons and the fears of the government itself thus prepared the way for a successful insurrection." Page 469.

The Parisians considered themselves the centre and mainspring of France. The so-called government sought to humiliate and disarm them, for "Paris was the revolution armed."

It was not a working class revolt at first. The hangers on of capital saw ruin, immediate and complete, if the Bordeaux National Assembly matured their plans. Consequently, they urged Paris to resist. But when the supreme moment came they left the working class to carry on the struggle alone.

From the proclamation of the Commune, March 18th, to the surrender of the last fort, Vercennes, on the 29th of May, the Communists had to fight against treason within and the French army without the walls. Shut off by the German forces on three sides, they had to reorganize Paris, just recovered from a five months siege, by the German government, and a five months rape by the French government. They bent their energies to the task as only working men can. It was solely undertaken by the workers and in all its history the master class has never shown either the ability nor the courage needful to such achievements.

Overwhelmed by a greatly superior army and betrayed by spies, the Commune was overthrown.

We cannot go into further detail here, other than to state the gross and brutal treatment dealt out to the defeated Communards. Lined up in batches, they were mowed down with machine guns, after they had surrendered. All the horrors which the Great Lying Press tell of Russia today were enacted by the French government 48 years ago. In fact, if the unimaginative scribblers would get the records of that cowardly massacre, they could fill their papers with "situations" which at least would be plausible, instead of the stupid lies now their chief stock in trade. In doing this, they would not have to vary their tactics. Fastening their own crimes upon their opponents is their chief manoeuvre.

The lessons to be taken from the Commune of Paris are, first—Let the working class attend to its own business. Second—They have capacity in their own ranks to conduct their own affairs.

When and where the Commune failed was but a page from the history of our class. Russia has carried the story to a fuller and happier development. Germany has also taken the road and the hoary-headed, ancient old fogeys shake their heads and wonder if it is all true.

The Paris Commune was a step on the road, and Russia is a step further. We approach the goal. "Individuals often err in the safe-guarding of their interests. A class for any prolonged period never is in error." J. H.

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