

Revolutions, Political and Social

By J. HARRINGTON.

Second Article.

THE term revolution is generally associated with all manner of excess, and an exhibition of the most inhuman and bestial acts known to man. As a result, an inhibition against the advocacy of revolutions arises in the average mind, as strong as that which exists in regard to human sex relations. That the normal activities of peoples exhibit acts of brutality which far transcend any recorded of revolutionary periods is a fact of which evidence is too abundant. For unrestrained bestiality the record of mob violence in the United States is without parallel in any revolution. And the records of religious history reveal such wanton cruelty that no revolutionary tribunal or mob has ever been charged with, much less committed. As for bloodshed, more men are killed every month in the year by mine explosions than has been recorded of most revolutions.

We realize that evidence is a small factor in the formation of opinion, but we are not insensible to the fact that it has some weight: that ideas which have been absorbed by reading, association, and teaching, might be modified by calling attention to facts which in themselves are obvious enough but entirely overlooked.

The French Revolution is the example par excellence of revolutions, and calls up pictures of September massacres and promiscuous guillotining; to it the average mind reverts when discussing revolutions. This is quite reasonable, when we realize that the average mind has no recollection of any other revolution, excepting of course the Russian Revolution, which, in its broad aspects resembles the French.

That France had other revolutions as drastic as that of 1789 wherein no more suffering was experienced than would naturally follow an excessive gorge of rank sausage and cheap wine, does not form part of the intellectual furniture of the average human mind. And yet such is the record of history, that in 1851 Louis Napoleon overthrew a republic and established an empire without any fuss or fury. Being President of the Republic he of course had exceptional opportunities to lay his plans, which, when put into effect and the revolution carried through, found sanction in the minds of the most influential of the nation, and if not accepted by the majority, did not sufficiently disturb them to cause any active resentment.

Between this revolution by conspiracy and the "great" French Revolution there is a vast difference in historical sequence and in social consequence. Preceding the revolution of 1789 every Frenchman of intellectual standing had been subjected to insult. For the most part, the fruits of their intellectual labor had been burned by the common hangman, and they were deemed fortunate who were merely beggared by the loss of property; many lost their liberty too. Though it must be noted, and noted well, that the prison terms meted out to these pioneers of thought, were not nearly so savage and senseless as has been experienced by humbler soldiers of progress in that free-est country on Earth, the United States—"at this time", as the American orators say. But we might take that up later. While the intellectuals of France were being goaded into fury by stupid insults and unwarranted violence, the commercials were being reduced to bankruptcy by loss of colonies, excessive taxation, and all manner of petty annoyances, if not downright robbery.

The records of this period portray a condition bordering on desolation, which might well prompt the speculative mind to enquire into the causes which prevent mankind from putting an end to such monumental misery when the means are so

ready to hand. But all they asked was a mitigation of their wrongs, and an alleviation of their misery; this being denied, they undertook active measures to secure them and, having once broken with the past, each new situation, each attempt to deny them their very humble demands, took them further and further from their original objective until they ended by decapitating their king, an act which all Frenchmen execrated in the English scarcely more than a century previous.

Briefly then, we find that the attitude of the monarchy forced the French people to extreme measures, and at that point the monarchy had practically no power. The revolution might have been as bloodless as that of England in 1688 had the other European powers not interfered.

The social revolution, however, progressed, and found full expression under an Emperor in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte, who overthrew the republic, with ridiculous ease, although at the time in such a frenzy of fear that a child might have overcome him; he succeeded, and restored all the political evils which were the cause of so much righteous indignation a few years previous. That mankind will surrender tamely all that years of heroic strife and terrible sufferings have secured is not uncommon, but in the case of France it is so pronounced, and presents one of these apparently unsolvable riddles of human behavior so forcibly, that we are compelled to linger, and examine it more closely than we had previously planned.

In the first place Europe was then and for some years after, populated by peasants. The industrial age had commenced in England, but had scarcely touched Europe. What is perhaps quite as important as the absence of the machine, though not generally noted, the potatoe had not been accepted by the French, and so the relatively expensive food demanded more land per family than today. This peasant was by the revolution freed from the handicap tolls imposed by feudalism on the serf; he had his land free from rent, and providing foreign armies did not march over his fields, his post-revolutionary condition was all that he had ever hoped for. To the peasant, the vast majority of the people, the revolution had brought salvation. The armies of Napoleon had secured him against foreign invasion and his entire future promised prosperity. Looking back over the misery of pre-revolutionary days, and the uncertainty of the revolutionary period itself, we can realise that this peasant who had scarcely been touched by the propaganda for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity which had enthused the city population, and having experienced what the city workers certainly missed, an enormously increased measure of prosperity, would readily acquiesce in any possible stabilization of his conditions, regardless of disputes about sovereignty. The city workers, depleted by years of strife or mobilized in victorious armies, disgusted with eternal squabbles about principles, were also ready for peace. And while Napoleon assumed all the prerogatives of a king he also assumed the traditional labors of a king, and as the immediate result of his usurpation was an increase in the prosperity and glory of France, there remained but few to challenge him in the name of freedom. And after all, however much we may idealize the word, freedom means nothing more nor less than comfort. We have yet to learn of a people possessed in a marked degree of comfort and security, instituting a rebellion in the name of freedom. And we have many examples today of people actually living under onerous restraint, who are loud in the praises of their free institutions. You can fool all the people, all the time, providing you feed them.

Since the beginning of the 19th century France has had many revolutions, but they did not alter the economic status or interfere with the property

relations, and neither Napoleon nor the restored Bourbons dared to interfere with the new-found property of the peasant. We wish to particularly emphasise that for years preceding 1789 propaganda of an extensive and intensive character had been carried on. All the intellect of France combined to attack the political form of government. Religion, King, and nobility were held up to ridicule, and while the demand for the abolition of these institutions was voiced by few, they came to be held in general contempt and whatever restraint they formerly possessed over the masses was weakened. In the darker moods of the mind, which the prayer book calls envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness, we are apt to forget our moral instructions.

The force of this restraint, "the divinity that doth hedge a King" was beyond question; it appears in many places even today, but its power is gone. It departed when Napoleon peopled the towns of Europe with fishermen. It lingers, but the democratic Royalty of today, top hatted, frowsy looking tradesmen, can never inspire the awe once commanded by the distant resplendent warriors in a superstitious age. That awe had to be overcome, and was, by a series of events and by propaganda.

Political revolutions arise in general from dissatisfaction with the form of governments. When social changes become imminent, necessarily the forms of government lagging far behind bear heavily on the attempts of mankind to meet the altered conditions of life. A changed method of producing the means of life such as resulted from the exploitation of America, Africa and India, was bound to come into conflict with the political forms which had developed around a producing medium which was largely local and almost entirely individual. Such were the conditions which the European merchants and manufacturing towns of 1521 encountered and so the Roman supremacy had to go; such were the conditions which confronted the English, American and French people in the 17th and 18th centuries, and so political revolutions heralded the social revolution. In those countries where the social development lingered, the political forms had an opportunity. The Romanoffs, the Hapsburgs and the Hohenzollerns were disposed of with less trouble than is sometimes experienced in getting rid of a labor union President. And as with the two latter no property was threatened, little trouble followed the stampede of these descendants of a hundred kings. And as to the Romanoffs, for a few months Russia was accorded the fullest measure of praise, but,—however, the but will have to keep till we get further into our story.

Socialist Party of Canada

PROPAGANDA MEETINGS

STAR THEATRE, 300 Block, Main Street

March 4th. Speaker: J. HARRINGTON.

All meetings at 8 p.m.

MEETINGS EVERY SUNDAY.

Questions.

Discussion.