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**THE PARIS
COMMUNE**

V. I. LENIN



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THE PARIS COMMUNE

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INTRODUCTION

THE Paris Commune of 1871 arose victoriously from the ruins of the Second Empire and, after seventy-two epoch-making days, it succumbed heroically under the hail of bullets of the Versailles counter-revolution. The Commune was, in a far higher sense than the June insurrection of 1848, the "most tremendous event in the history of European civil wars" (Marx) in the nineteenth century. It marked the violent conclusion of the "pre-history" of the proletarian revolution; with it begins the era of proletarian revolutions. It was the brilliant culmination of the romantic "*Sturm und Drang*" period of the revolutionary proletariat, which was glorious in heroic deeds and bloody defeats, in bold initiative and growing attempts. But chiefly it was the first dress rehearsal in world history of the socialist revolution of the working class, which, at the head of all oppressed and exploited classes, for the first time set up its power by its own might with the purpose of setting the whole of society free from the system of enslavement and exploitation, as well as securing its own political and social emancipation.

The Commune was a turning-point of decisive importance. It stands at the threshold of the modern age of imperialism. The conditions, methods and aims of the proletarian revolutionary movement in the age of imperialism were, so to speak, grandly foreshadowed in it. Its lessons were the starting-point for formulating the system of strategy and tactics of the proletarian revolution in its matured Leninist form. The decades of experience of the class struggle and the concrete lessons of the proletarian revolutions of the twentieth century, above all of the victorious October Revolution, were first needed in order that the historical significance of the Commune in all its grandeur might be learned and the profound actuality of its lessons be understood in our own day.

Before examining more closely the exact historical rôle of the Commune in the history of the proletarian revolution, we wish to recapitulate in general outline the course of events from March 18 to May 28, 1871.

The Franco-German war of 1870-71, which had been kindled by

Louis Bonaparte in order to bolster up the tottering structure of the Second Empire, dealt the death-blow to this system (space will not permit us to deal with Bismarck's rôle and aims in the war). Marx's brilliant prediction in the first manifesto of the International Workingmen's Association of July 23, 1870: "The death-knell of the Second Empire has already sounded at Paris. It will end, as it began, with a parody" *—was fulfilled at Sedan. With military defeat, the Bonaparte Empire, its foundations long since undermined, collapsed. The Republic which took over the pitiful legacy left by the adventurer Louis Bonaparte, did not have to lift a finger to overthrow the throne. "That Republic has not subverted the throne, but only taken its place become vacant. It has been proclaimed, not as a social conquest, but as a national measure of defence." **

From this special situation it is clear that the republic that liquidated the Bonapartist regime, entered upon its life with a Janus-head. At almost the same time that the "Government of National Defence" took the rudder of state into its hands on September 4, the armed proletariat of Paris set up its committees of control in order to watch over the measures taken by Thiers' government for the defence of Paris and to assure the food supply of Paris. And so arose a peculiar form of "dyarchy" which was repeated in history almost a half-century later, at a higher level of development, after the collapse of the tsarist regime in Russia, in the period from February, 1917, to the October revolution.

The period from September 4, 1870, to March 18, 1871, was marked by the struggle for power between these two centres of government. The strength of the Parisian proletariat rested on the power of arms, on the armed force of the National Guard. The disarming of the Parisian proletariat was therefore the real government programme of men like Thiers and Jules Favre. Thus the government of "National Defence" was transformed into the government of national betrayal, and the defence of Paris, which the proletariat itself had taken in hand, became under these conditions the point of departure for the decisive clash of March 18, 1871.

On January 8, 1871, Paris, which had been starved out, had to capitulate to the Prussian army. The forts were surrendered, the outer wall disarmed, the weapons of the regiment of the line and

* Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (International Publishers), p. 69.

** Second Address of the General Council on the Franco-Prussian War, *ibid.*, p. 77.

of the mobile guard were handed over, and the troops considered prisoners of war. But the National Guard kept their weapons and guns, and only entered into an armistice with the victors; who themselves did not dare enter Paris in triumph. . . . Such was the respect which the Paris workers inspired in the army before which all the armies of the Empire had laid down their arms; and the Prussian Junkers, who had come to take revenge at the very centre of the revolution, were compelled to stand by respectfully, and salute just precisely this armed revolution! *

What the Prussians had not dared to do in January, Thiers attempted to carry out two months later with the support of Prussian bayonets. On March 18 he sent troops of the line to Paris to steal the National Guard's artillery, which had been cast by the Paris workers themselves. But the proletariat did not allow itself to be disarmed. The provocative intention of the Versailles government kindled a spontaneous uprising of the people. The Versailles troops were sent home with cracked heads, and the elected committee of the National Guard, a kind of soviet of Red Guard Deputies, took over power in the name of the Paris proletariat.

What was the specific character of the new government authority and what was its programme? The Central Committee of the National Guard, in its proclamation of March 18, gave the classic answer:

The proletarians of Paris, in the midst of the defeats and betrayals of the ruling class, have come to understand that they must save the situation by taking the conduct of public affairs into their own hands. . . . They have realised that it is their highest duty and their absolute right to make themselves the masters of their own fate and to seize the power of the government.

Thus, the class character of the revolutionary events in Paris and the class content of the Paris Commune, which had been "thrust into the background" by the struggle for national defence against the alien conqueror and had been more or less veiled, was sharply defined. "Its true secret," says Marx in his *Civil War in France*, "was this: It was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the expropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour." **

It cannot be our task here to describe in detail the historic deeds of

* Frederick Engels, Introduction to *The Civil War in France*, pp. 11-12.

** *Ibid.*, p. 43.

the Commune during the seventy-two days of its heroic struggle. In the manifestoes of the General Council, as drawn up by Marx, and in his *Civil War in France*, we have imperishable documents which, with Marx's genius and impassioned penetration, picture and analyse the history of the Commune, its "heaven-storming" revolutionary measures and its tragic errors, committed as a result of the immaturity of the proletariat and the social and political situation.

The revolutionary activity of the Paris Commune was hindered and in part rendered illusory by manifold circumstances. The decisive obstacle was that it was continuously under the fire of the Versailles counter-revolution and hemmed in by a ring of enemies and consequently, it was obliged to concentrate all its strength on the defence of the revolution. The historian of, and the fighter in the Commune, Lissagaray, reproaches the leaders of the Commune for failing "to understand that the Commune was a barricade and not a government office." This reproach is not unfounded, but it holds only half the truth. It was just because the Commune, under the onslaught of the united Versailles and Bismarckian counter-revolution, had to be a "barricade," and could not be a "government office," that it was able to take only the first awkward steps towards organising and firmly establishing the power of the victorious working class.

In attempting to master such a task, the Commune, in addition, lacked the organising and guiding force of a strong proletarian class-party with clear principles. The Paris proletariat was chiefly recruited from amongst the exploited petty artisans. Modern industry in Paris was still at its initial stage. There was no true revolutionary party. The various political groups of the proletariat, resting on an uneven degree of development of class consciousness, reflected in their multiplicity the immaturity of the proletariat itself. In the Commune, which was formed by the elections of March 26, as well as in the Central Committee of the National Guard, there sat representatives of the most diverse tendencies: petty-bourgeois anarchists of the Proudhon stamp, Blanquists, Babeufists, Jacobins and supporters of the International Workingmen's Association. The Internationalists were in the minority but their dominating part in formulating the ideas of the Commune is clear in all the decisive measures of the Commune, despite their personal, political and theoretical inexperience and weakness.

The Paris proletariat was still too immersed in the deep-rooted

traditions of petty-bourgeois, democratic Utopianism—which corresponded to the predominance of small artisan industry—and in the patriotic illusions inherited from the great bourgeois revolution of the eighteenth century and the period of Jacobin dictatorship. The experiences of the Commune and of the bloody “witches’ sabbath” of the May days were necessary in order to clear the minds of the French working class of these obsolete ideas.

Thus, the Commune stopped half-way in its course and fell victim to its unavoidable fate. On May 28, the last barricades went down under the fire of the Versailles cannon and the first revolutionary workers’ government was drowned in the blood of more than twenty-five thousand men, women and children, the boldest and most heroic fighters of the Paris proletariat.

In order that its complete historical importance may be grasped, the Commune must be regarded from two points of view, which are merely two forms of one and the same historical attitude: first, its specific rôle in the process of development of the proletarian revolution; second, its importance as the point of departure and as a guide for the proletarian revolutions of the twentieth century.

The Paris Commune had its basis in the experiences of the June insurrection of 1848; it turned its lessons into deeds. The significance of the June uprising Marx saw in the fact that after June, 1848, every revolution in France would bring up the question of “overturning bourgeois society,” while before February, 1848, it could be a question only of “overturning the form of government.”* The Paris Commune furnished the solution of the problem. In June, 1848, the working class was “still incapable of carrying through its own revolution.” The Commune, on the other hand, was “the first revolution in which the working class was openly recognised as the only class capable of social initiative.” In the year 1848, the proletariat was only able to set the task, to conquer “the terrain for the struggle for its social emancipation.” With the Commune it began its struggle for its actual emancipation; the Commune was to serve as the lever for overthrowing the existing economic foundations on which rested the position of classes and therefore class rule. In June, the French proletariat constituted itself a separate class and received its baptism of blood under Cavaignac’s bullets.

* Karl Marx, *The Class Struggle in France* (International Publishers).

In the Commune the proletariat for the first time in history brought into being its own class rule.

The history of the class struggles and of the proletarian revolutions of the nineteenth century in France has furnished imperishable lessons to the world proletariat. All later proletarian revolutions and revolutionary uprisings rest upon the experiences of the June revolt and of the Commune. The Commune opened a new epoch in the history of the proletarian revolution, it presented "a new point of departure which was of tremendous import in world history." * Its lessons, which served as guide-posts for the world proletariat, have been fully and in their ripest form transformed into reality by the victorious October Revolution.

The decisive lesson of the Commune, surpassing all others in significance and including them all in itself, was the concrete formulation of the content of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In his *Civil War in France* and in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx drew from the experiences of the June uprising the conclusion that the next step of the French revolution would consist in: "No longer, as hitherto, the transference of the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but its destruction." ** By what should the annihilated bourgeois machinery of the state be replaced? This question, which was decisive for the further development of the proletarian revolution, was answered by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* still more or less abstractly: the bourgeois state was to be replaced by "the state of the proletariat organised as the ruling class." *** In *The Class Struggle in France*, on the basis of the June lessons, Marx formulated the battle-cries: "Down with the Bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the Working Class!" In the *Eighteenth Brumaire* **** he made these watchwords concrete through the slogan: "Break up the bureaucratic and military machine" of the bourgeoisie. But these words took on flesh and blood for the first time in the Commune, came into being as concrete reality. The Commune was "the political form at last discovered under which

* Karl Marx, *Letters to Dr. Kugelmann*, International Publishers, p. 110 (April 17, 1871).

** *Ibid.*, (April 12, 1871).

*** Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (International Publishers), p. 30.

**** Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (International Publishers).

to work out the economic emancipation of labour.⁷ And Engels added the comment:

Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat.*

The interpretation of the Commune, worked out by Marx's genius, can be understood in all its profundity and actuality only on the basis of the revolutionary experiences of the twentieth century, which are integrally connected with the lessons of the Commune, go beyond them and give them concrete reality. It is therefore historically true to say that these lessons were consciously falsified by the dominant revisionist and centrist tendencies in the Western European Social-Democratic Parties and were "forgotten" by the left groups, and that Lenin had first to "excavate" them, so to speak, on the basis of the revolutionary events in Russia, in order to discover anew and to deepen further the doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as it had been deduced by Marx from the history of the Commune.

In the revolutions of 1905 and of October, 1917, the lessons of the Commune found their historical application on a still higher level. With the widening of its social basis and with the increase in importance of its historical tasks, the social content of the proletarian dictatorship changed and the forms of this dictatorship, created by the exploited masses of toilers for the violent overthrow of the rule of the exploiters, were further developed. To-day we are able to determine the various steps in the development of this "higher type of the democratic state" (Lenin), the "Commune-state." The Paris Commune, though still undeveloped, though still burdened with the rudimentary forms of petty-bourgeois democracy, was the first form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It had to perform the historic task of setting "free the elements of the new society." ** It could base itself only upon the most advanced strata of the proletariat of those times. Its attempt to win over the peasant masses did not go beyond the merest beginnings.

In the Soviets of 1905, which had a deeper and wider social basis than had the Commune—which was a result of the predominant rôle of the proletariat as the leading force in the bourgeois revolution and of the sweeping movement of revolt among the peasant masses

* *The Civil War in France*, p. 19.

** *Ibid.*, p. 44.—Ed.

—a further step was taken towards winning the proletarian dictatorship, the “Democracy for the Toilers.” It was for the first time in the form of the Soviet power, which stepped upon the stage of history as a result of the victorious October Revolution, that the dictatorship of the proletariat—the only “class that is revolutionary to the last degree, the only true representative and leader of all exploited peoples”—found the perfect form, corresponding to the period of capitalist decline, and of the birth of Socialism; this form can “serve as a lever” to “set free the elements of the new society” and to assume and accomplish the task of building up the new Socialist society.

This symposium contains the finest and most important articles, speeches, and excerpts from the longer works of Lenin, in which he concretises and develops the lessons of the Commune. Throughout all of Lenin’s theoretical and practical work there runs like a red thread the problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the struggle leading to it, the problem of destroying the exploiters’ state and of the revolutionary struggle for “proletarian democracy.” After 1905, when it found its historical, epoch-making expression in the power of the Soviets, Lenin moved this problem into the central position in his strategy and tactics. The October Revolution gave the historical proof of the correctness of Lenin’s teaching and turned the heritage of the Commune into a reality on an incomparably higher historical level.

Lenin’s commentaries on the lessons of the Commune are not historical observations, they are documents of our own time; as a whole they form an imperishable guide to the strategy and tactics of the world proletarian revolution.

PAUL BRAUN.

I

IN MEMORY OF THE COMMUNE

Forty years have passed since the proclamation of the Paris Commune. According to the established custom, the French proletariat has honoured the memory of the revolutionary workers of March 18, 1871, by meetings and demonstrations. At the end of May they will again bring wreaths to the tombs of the Communards who were shot, the victims of the dreadful "May Week," and over their graves they will once more take the oath to fight untiringly until their ideas have fully conquered, until their cause has been completely victorious.

Why does the proletariat, not only in France but throughout the entire world, honour the workers of the Paris Commune as their forerunners? What was the heritage of the Commune?

The Commune broke out spontaneously. No one consciously prepared it in an organised way. The unsuccessful war with Germany, privations during the siege, unemployment among the proletariat and ruin among the petty bourgeoisie; the indignation of the masses against the upper classes and against the authorities who had displayed their complete incapacity, a riotous fermentation in the ranks of the working class, which was discontented with its lot and was striving towards a different social system; the reactionary make-up of the National Assembly, which roused fears as to the fate of the Republic—all this and many other things combined to drive the population of Paris to revolution on March 18, which unexpectedly placed power in the hands of the National Guard, in the hands of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie which had joined in with it.

This was an event unprecedented in history. Up to that time power had customarily been in the hands of landlords and capitalists, *i.e.*, in the hands of their trusted agents who made up the so-called government. After the revolution of March 18, when the Thiers government fled from Paris with its troops, its police and its officials, the people remained masters of the situation and power passed into the hands of the proletariat. But in modern society the proletariat,

enslaved economically by capital, cannot dominate politically unless it breaks the chains which fetter it to capital. This is why the movement of the Commune inevitably had to take on a Socialist colouring, *i.e.*, to begin striving for the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie, the power of capital, to destroy the very *foundations* of the present social order.

At first this movement was extremely indefinite and confused. It was joined by patriots who hoped that the Commune would renew the war with the Germans and bring it to a successful conclusion. It was supported by the small shopkeepers who were threatened with ruin unless there was a postponement of payments on debts and rent (the government did not want to give them such a postponement but the Commune gave it). Finally, it had, at first, the sympathy of the bourgeois republicans, who feared that the reactionary National Assembly (the "backwoodsmen," ignorant landlords) would restore the monarchy. But the chief rôle in this movement was of course played by the workers (especially the artisans of Paris), among whom Socialist propaganda had been energetically carried on during the last years of the Second Empire and many of whom even belonged to the First International.

Only the workers remained loyal to the Commune to the end. The bourgeois republicans and the petty bourgeoisie soon broke away from it; some were frightened by the revolutionary Socialist proletarian character of the movement, and others dropped out when they saw that it was doomed to inevitable defeat. Only the French proletariat supported *their* government fearlessly and untiringly, they alone fought and died for it, for the cause of the emancipation of the working class, for a better future for all toilers.

Deserted by their allies of yesterday and supported by no one, the Commune was doomed to inevitable defeat. The entire bourgeoisie of France, all the landlords, the stockbrokers, the factory owners, all the great and small robbers, all the exploiters, combined against it. This bourgeois coalition, supported by Bismarck (who released a hundred thousand French soldiers who had been taken prisoner to put down revolutionary Paris), succeeded in rousing the backward peasants and the petty bourgeoisie of the provinces against the proletariat of Paris, and in surrounding half of Paris with a ring of steel (the other half was held by the German army). In some of the larger cities in France (Marseilles, Lyons, St. Etienne, Dijon, etc.), the workers also attempted to seize power, to proclaim the

Commune, and come to the help of Paris, but these attempts soon failed. Paris, which had first raised the flag of proletarian revolt, was left to its own resources and doomed to certain destruction.

For the victory of the social revolution, at least two conditions are necessary: a high development of productive forces and the preparedness of the proletariat. But in 1871 both of these conditions were absent. French capitalism was still slightly developed, and France was at that time mainly a country of petty bourgeoisie (artisans, peasants, shopkeepers, etc.). On the other hand there was no workers' party, *there was no preparedness and no long training of the working class*, which, in the mass, did not even clearly visualise its tasks and the methods of fulfilling them. There were no serious political organisations of the proletariat, no strong trade unions and co-operative societies.

But the main thing which the Commune lacked was the time, the free time to look around and undertake the fulfilment of its programme. It hardly started working, when the Versailles government, supported by the entire bourgeoisie, opened military operations against Paris. The Commune had to think first of all of defence. Right up to the very end, May 21-28, it had no time to think seriously of anything else.

However, in spite of such unfavourable conditions, in spite of the brevity of its existence, the Commune found time to carry out some measures which sufficiently characterise its real significance and aims. The Commune replaced the standing army, that blind weapon in the hands of the ruling classes, by *the universal arming of the people*. It proclaimed the separation of church from state, abolished the state support of religious bodies (*i.e.*, state salaries for priests), gave popular education a purely secular character, and in this way struck a severe blow at the gendarmes in cassocks. In the purely social sphere the Commune could do very little, but this little nevertheless clearly shows its character as a popular, workers' government. Night work in bakeries was forbidden, the systems of fines, this system of legalised robbery of the workers, was abolished. Finally, the famous decree was issued according to which all factories, works and workshops which had been abandoned or stopped by their owners, were to be handed over to associations of workers in order to resume production. And, as if to emphasise its character as a truly democratic proletarian government, the Commune decreed that

the salaries of all ranks in the administration and the government should not exceed the normal wages of a worker, and in no case should exceed 6,000 francs per year.

All these measures showed with sufficient clearness that the Commune was a deadly menace to the old world, founded on slavery and exploitation. Therefore bourgeois society could not sleep peacefully so long as the Red Flag of the proletariat waved over the Paris City Hall. When at last the organised force of the government had managed to defeat the poorly organised forces of the revolution, the Bonapartist generals who had been beaten by the Germans and who were brave only when fighting their defeated countrymen, these French *Rennenkampfs* and *Meller-Sakomelskys*, organised such a slaughter as Paris had never known. About 30,000 Parisians were killed by the ferocious soldiery, about 45,000 were arrested and many of these were afterwards executed, thousands were imprisoned and sent into penal servitude or exiled. In all, Paris lost about 100,000 of its sons, including the best workers of all trades.

The bourgeoisie was satisfied. "Now we have finished with Socialism for a long time," said its leader, the bloodthirsty dwarf, Thiers, after the blood-bath which he and his generals had given the proletariat of Paris. But these bourgeois crows cawed in vain. Only six years after the suppression of the Commune, when many of its fighters were still pining in penal servitude or in exile, a new workers' movement rose in France. A new Socialist generation, enriched by the experience of their predecessors and no whit discouraged by their defeat, picked up the flag which had dropped from the hands of the fighters of the Commune and bore it boldly and confidently forward, with cries of: "Long live the social revolution! Long live the Commune!" And a few years after that, the new workers' party and the agitation raised by it throughout the country, compelled the ruling classes to release the imprisoned Communards, who were still in the hands of the government.

The memory of the fighters of the Commune is not only honoured by the workers of France but by the proletariat of the whole world, for the Commune did not fight for any local or narrow national aim, but for the freedom of toiling humanity, of all the downtrodden and oppressed. As the foremost fighter for the social revolution, the Commune has won sympathy wherever there is a proletariat struggling and suffering. The picture of its life and death, the sight of a workers' government which seized the capital of the world and kept it

in its hands for over two months, the spectacle of the heroic struggle of the proletariat and its sufferings after defeat—all this has raised the spirit of millions of workers, aroused their hopes and attracted their sympathies to the side of socialism. The thunder of the cannon in Paris awakened the most backward strata of the proletariat from deep slumber, and everywhere gave impetus to the growth of revolutionary Socialist propaganda. This is why the cause of the Commune did not die. It lives to the present day in every one of us.

The cause of the Commune is the cause of the social revolution, the cause of the complete political and economic emancipation of the toilers. It is the cause of the proletariat of the whole world. And in this sense it is immortal.

Rabochaya Gazeta, No. 4-5, April 28, 1911.

II

LESSONS OF THE COMMUNE *

AFTER the *coup d'état* which crowned the Revolution of 1848, France came for eighteen years under the yoke of the Napoleonic régime. This régime reduced the country not only to economic ruin, but also to national humiliation. The proletariat which rose against the old régime took upon itself two tasks: a general national, and a class task—the liberation of France from the German invasion, and the Socialist liberation of the workers from capitalism. This combination of two tasks is the most original feature of the Commune.

The bourgeoisie had established “the government of national defence,” and the proletariat had to fight under its leadership for national independence. In reality, this was a government of “national betrayal” ordained, as it thought, to fight the Paris proletariat. But the proletariat did not realise this, for it was blinded by patriotic illusions. The patriotic idea had its origin in the Great Revolution of the eighteenth century; the minds of the Socialists of the Commune were under its spell, and Blanqui, for instance, a true revolutionary and an ardent advocate of socialism, could not find a

* On March 18, 1908, an international meeting took place in Geneva in connection with three proletarian anniversaries: the 25th anniversary of Marx's death, the 50th anniversary of the March Revolution of 1848, and the anniversary of the Paris Commune. Lenin spoke on behalf of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party on the significance of the Commune.—*Ed.*

more suitable title for his newspaper than the bourgeois cry: "Our Country is in Danger!"

It is this combination of contradictory tasks—patriotism and socialism—which constituted the fatal error of the French Socialists. Already in the Manifesto of the International, September, 1870, Marx warned the French proletariat not to be carried away by the false national idea: profound changes had taken place since the time of the Great Revolution, class differences had become more acute, and although at that time the struggle against the reaction of the whole of Europe united the whole revolutionary nation, the proletariat of the present time can no longer unite its interests with the interests of other classes hostile to it: let the bourgeoisie bear the responsibility for the national humiliation—it is the business of the proletariat to fight for the Socialist liberation of labour from the yoke of the bourgeoisie.

And true enough, the idea underlying bourgeois "patriotism" was not slow in revealing itself. Having concluded a shameful peace with the Prussians, the Versailles Government devoted itself to its direct task—it undertook a raid upon the dreaded arms of the Paris proletariat. The workers replied by proclaiming the Commune and Civil War.

Although the socialist proletariat was divided into many sects, the Commune was a brilliant example of the capacity of the proletariat to unite for the realisation of democratic tasks to which the bourgeoisie could only pay lip service. Without any special complicated legislation, the proletariat which had seized power, carried out simply and practically the democratisation of the social order, did away with bureaucracy, and had all officials elected by the people.

But two errors robbed the brilliant victory of its fruit. The proletariat stopped half-way: instead of proceeding with the "expropriation of the expropriators," it was carried away by dreams of establishing supreme justice in the country, based on the common national task. For instance, institutions such as the bank were not seized; the theory of the Proudhonists about "equitable exchange," etc., still held sway among the Socialists. The second error was the unnecessary magnanimity of the proletariat: instead of annihilating its enemies, it endeavoured to exercise moral influence over them; it did not attach the right value to the importance of purely military activity in civil war, and instead of crowning its victory in Paris by a determined advance on Versailles, it hesitated and gave time to the

Versailles government to gather its dark forces and to prepare for the bloody May Week.

But with all its errors, the Commune is the greatest example of the greatest proletarian movement of the nineteenth century. Marx valued very highly the historical importance of the Commune: if, during the treacherous raid of the Versailles gang on the arms of the Paris proletariat, the workers had given them up without a fight, the disastrous effect of the demoralisation which such weakness would have brought into the proletarian movement would have been much more serious than the injury from the losses suffered by the working class in the fight while defending its arms. Great as were the sacrifices of the Commune, they are redeemed by its importance for the general proletarian struggle: it stirred up the Socialist movement throughout Europe, it demonstrated the value of civil war, it dispersed patriotic illusions and shattered the naïve faith in the common national aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The Commune has taught the European proletariat to deal concretely with the problems of the socialist revolution.

The lesson taught the proletariat will not be forgotten. The working class will make use of it, as was already the case in Russia during the December insurrection.*

The epoch which preceded and prepared the Russian Revolution was somewhat similar to the epoch of the Napoleonic rule in France. In Russia, too, the autocratic clique had reduced the country to the horrors of economic ruin and national humiliation. But the revolution could not break out for a long time—not until social development had created conditions for a mass movement, and, in spite of their heroism, the isolated attacks on the government in the pre-revolutionary period came to naught owing to the indifference of the masses. Only Social-Democracy, by its persistent and systematic work, educated the masses up to the highest forms of struggle—mass demonstrations and civil war.

It was able to eradicate “common national” and “patriotic” aberrations in the ranks of the young proletariat, and when, with its direct intervention, it was possible to make the Tsar proclaim the Manifesto of October 30,** the proletariat took up energetic preparation for the further inevitable stage of the revolution—armed

* Moscow, 1905.

** This Manifesto promised to grant civil liberties, an extension of universal suffrage to the Imperial Duma, and other democratic reforms.—*Ed.*

insurrection. Free from "common national" illusions, it concentrated its class forces in its mass organisations—the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, etc. And, in spite of all the differences between the aims and tasks confronting the Russian Revolution and those of the French Revolution of 1871, the Russian proletariat had to resort to the same means of struggle which the Paris Commune had initiated—civil war. Bearing in mind its lessons, the proletariat knew that it must not disdain peaceful weapons of struggle—they serve its everyday interests, they are essential during the preparing of revolutions—neither must it ever forget that under certain conditions the class struggle assumes forms of armed struggle and civil war; there are times when the interests of the proletariat demand ruthless annihilation of its enemies in open battle. The French proletariat was the first to demonstrate this in the Commune, and it was brilliantly confirmed by the Russian proletariat in the December insurrection.

These magnificent insurrections of the working class were crushed, but there will be another insurrection in the face of which the forces of the enemies of the proletariat will prove impotent, an insurrection in which the socialist proletariat will be completely victorious.

Zagranichnaya Gazeta, No. 2, March 23, 1908.

III

MARX'S ESTIMATION OF THE COMMUNE *

MARX'S estimation of the Commune is the crowning glory of the *Letters to Kugelmann*. And this estimation becomes particularly valuable when compared with the methods of the Right-wing Russian Social-Democrats. Plekhanov, who, after December, 1905, faint-heartedly exclaimed: "They should not have resorted to arms," had the modesty to compare himself with Marx. Marx, he hinted, also put the brakes on the revolution in 1870.

Yes, Marx, *too*, put the brakes on the revolution. But see what a gulf is opened up between Plekhanov and Marx when this comparison (which Plekhanov himself makes) is made!

In November, 1905, a month before the first revolutionary wave

* Excerpt from Lenin's Introduction to *Letters to Dr. Kugelmann*.—Ed.

reached its culminating point, Plekhanov not only refrained from emphatically warning the Russian proletariat, but on the contrary spoke very definitely about the necessity to "*learn to use arms and to arm.*" A month afterwards, however, when the struggle flared up, Plekhanov, without making the slightest attempt to analyse its significance and its rôle in the general march of events and its connection with the previous forms of struggle, hastened to play the part of a penitent intellectual and exclaimed: "They should not have resorted to arms."

In September, 1870, six months before the Commune, Marx emphatically warned the French workers. Any attempt at upsetting the new government would be desperate folly, he said in his well-known Address of the International. He revealed *in advance* the nationalistic illusions concerning the possibility of a movement in the spirit of 1792. He had the prescience to say, *not after the event*, but many months before: "Don't resort to arms."

And what was his attitude when this *hopeless cause* (according to his own September declaration) began to be realised in March, 1871? Did he merely take the opportunity (as Plekhanov did in regard to the December events) to "have a dig" at his enemies, the Proudhonists and Blanquists who were leading the Commune? Did he, like a scolding school-mistress, say: "I told you so, I warned you, see what you got for your romanticism, your revolutionary ravings"? Did he preach to the Communards, as Plekhanov did to the December fighters, the sermon of the smug philistine, "They should not have resorted to arms"?

No. On April 12, 1871, Marx writes an *enthusiastic* letter to Kugelmann—a letter which we would gladly see hung on the wall of the home of every Russian Social-Democrat and of every literate Russian worker.

In September, 1870, Marx called the insurrection desperate folly, but in April, 1871, when he saw the mass movement of the people, he treated it with the great attention of a man participating in great events which marked a step forward in the world historical revolutionary movement.

This is an *attempt*, he says, to destroy the bureaucratic military machine and not simply to place it in other hands. And he sings a veritable *hosanna* to the "*heroic*" Paris workers led by the Proudhonists and Blanquists.

What elasticity—he writes—what historical initiative, what a capacity for self-sacrifice in these Parisians. . . . History has no like example of a like greatness.

The historical initiative of the masses is what Marx values above everything. . . .

And like a *participant* in the mass struggle to which he reacted with all his characteristic ardour and passion, Marx, while in exile in London, sets to work to criticise the *immediate steps* of the “foolishly brave” Parisians who were *ready to “storm heaven.”*

Oh, how our present “realist” wiseacres among the Marxists, who are deriding revolutionary romanticism in Russia in 1906-07, would have scoffed at Marx at that time! How they would have mocked at the *materialist and economist*, the enemy of utopia, who pays homage to an “attempt” to “storm the heavens”! . . .

But Marx was not filled with the wisdom of these gudgeons who are afraid to discuss the *technique* of the higher forms of revolutionary struggle. It was precisely the *technical* questions of the insurrection that he discussed. Defence or attack? he asks, as if the military operations were taking place outside of London, and he decides that it must be attack: “*They should have marched at once on Versailles. . . .*”

This was written in April, 1871, a few weeks before the great and bloody days of May. . . .

The insurgents who began the “desperately foolish” (September, 1870) business of storming heaven “should have marched at once on Versailles.”

In December, 1905, “they should not have resorted to arms” in order to oppose by force the first attempts to take back the liberties that had been won. . . .

No, it is not for nothing that Plekhanov compared himself with Marx!

The “second mistake”—continues Marx in his *technical* criticism—was that the Central Committee (the *military leadership*—note, this refers to the Central Committee of the National Guard) surrendered its power *too soon*.

Marx was able to warn the *leaders* against a premature rising. But his attitude towards the *proletariat* which was storming heaven was that of a practical adviser, that of a participant in the *struggle* of the masses who were carrying the *whole* movement to a *higher stage* in spite of the false theories of Blanqui and Proudhon.

However that may be—he writes—the present rising in Paris, even if it be crushed by the wolves, swine and vile curs of the old society—is the most glorious deed of our Party since the June insurrection.

And Marx, without concealing from the proletariat a single mistake committed by the Commune, dedicated to this *exploit* a work which *to this very day* serves as the best guide in the struggle for “heaven” and as a terrible bugbear for the liberal and radical “swine.”

Plekhanov dedicated to December a “work” which has almost become the bible of the Cadets.*

No, it is not for nothing that Plekhanov compared himself with Marx.

Apparently Kugelmann replied to Marx with some expressions of doubt and pointed out the hopelessness of the business and compared realism with romanticism—at least he compared the Commune, the insurrection, with the peaceful demonstration in Paris on June 13, 1849.

Immediately Marx reads Kugelmann a severe lecture (letter of April 17, 1871). He writes:

World history would, indeed, be very easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances.

In September, 1870, Marx called the insurrection desperate folly. But when the *masses* rose Marx wanted to march with them, to learn with them in the process of the struggle and not to give them bureaucratic admonitions. He realised that it would be quackery or hopeless pedantry to attempt to calculate the chances in advance *with complete accuracy*. *Above everything else* he put the fact that the working class heroically, self-sacrificingly and taking the initiative itself, *makes* world history. Marx looked upon this history from the point of view of those who *make* it without being able to calculate *exactly* the chances beforehand and not from the point of view of a moralising intellectual and philistine who says: “It was easy to foresee . . . they should not have resorted to . . .”

Marx was able to appreciate the fact that moments occurred in history when the desperate struggle of the *masses* even for a hopeless cause is *necessary* for the sake of the further education of these masses and their training for the *next* struggle.

To our present quasi-Marxists who love to quote Marx merely for

* The abbreviated title of the Constitutional-Democratic Party.—Ed.

the purpose of learning to estimate the past and not to acquire the ability to mould the future—to them such a *method of presenting* the question is incomprehensible and even alien in principle. This did not even occur to Plekhanov when he began to “put the brake on,” after December, 1905.

But it is precisely this question that Marx raises without in the least forgetting that he himself in September, 1870, regarded the insurrection as desperate folly.

The bourgeois *canaille* of Versailles—he writes—presented the Parisians with the alternative of taking up the fight or succumbing without a struggle. In the latter case, the *demoralisation of the working class* would have been a *far greater* misfortune than the fall of any number of “leaders.”

And with this we shall conclude our brief review of the lessons in a policy worthy of the proletariat which Marx gives in his *Letters to Kugelmann*.

The working class of Russia has already proved and will prove many times again that it is capable of “storming heaven.”

February, 1907.

IV

THE COMMUNE AND THE STATE *

EXPERIENCE OF THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871: MARX'S ANALYSIS

1. *In What Does the Heroism of the Communards Consist?*

It is well known that in the autumn of 1870, a few months prior to the Commune, Marx warned the Paris workers that an attempt to overthrow the government would be the folly of despair. But when, in March, 1871, a decisive battle was *forced* upon the workers and they accepted it, when the uprising had become a fact, Marx welcomed the proletarian revolution with the greatest enthusiasm, in spite of unfavourable auguries. Marx did not assume the rigid attitude of pedantically condemning an “untimely” movement as did the ill-famed Russian renegade from Marxism, Plekhanov, who, in November, 1905, wrote encouragingly about the workers' and

* Excerpts from *State and Revolution* (International Publishers).—Ed.

peasants' struggle but, after December, 1905, cried, liberal fashion: "They should not have taken up arms."

Marx, however, was not only enthusiastic about the heroism of the Communards who "stormed the heavens," as he expressed himself. He saw in the mass revolutionary movement, although it did not attain its aim, an historic experiment of gigantic importance, a certain advance of the world proletarian revolution, a practical step more important than hundreds of programmes and discussions. To analyse this experiment, to draw from it lessons in tactics, to re-examine his theory in the new light it afforded—such was the problem as it presented itself to Marx.

The only "correction" which Marx thought it necessary to make in the *Communist Manifesto* was made by him on the basis of the revolutionary experience of the Paris Communards.

The last preface to a new German edition of the *Communist Manifesto* signed by both its authors is dated June 24, 1872. In this preface the authors, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, say that the programme of the *Communist Manifesto* is now "in places out of date."

One thing especially—they continue—was proved by the Commune, *viz.*, *that the "working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes."* *

The words within quotation marks in this passage are borrowed by its authors from Marx's book, *The Civil War in France*.

It thus appears that one principal and fundamental lesson of the Paris Commune was considered by Marx and Engels to be of such enormous importance that they introduced it as a vital correction into the *Communist Manifesto*.

It is most characteristic that it is precisely this vital correction which has been distorted by the opportunists, and its meaning, probably, is not known to nine-tenths, if not ninety-nine-hundredths, of the readers of the *Communist Manifesto*. We shall deal with this distortion more fully further on, in a chapter devoted specially to distortions. It will be sufficient here to note that the current vulgar "interpretation" of Marx's famous utterance quoted above consists in asserting that Marx is here emphasising the idea of gradual development, in contradistinction to a seizure of power, and so on.

As a matter of fact, *exactly the opposite is the case*. Marx's idea

* *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 7.—Ed.

is that the working class must *break up, shatter* the “ready-made state machinery,” and not confine itself merely to taking possession of it.

On April 12, 1871, *i.e.*, just at the time of the Commune, Marx wrote to Kugelmann:

If you look at the last chapter of my *Eighteenth Brumaire* you will find that I say that the next attempt of the French revolution will be no longer, as hitherto, the transference of the bureaucratic military machine from one hand to another, but its *destruction* [Marx's italics—the original is *zerbrechen*], and this is essential for every real people's revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic party comrades in Paris are attempting.*

In these words, “the destruction of the bureaucratic-military machine,” is contained, briefly formulated, the principal lesson of Marxism on the tasks of the proletariat in relation to the state during a revolution. And it is just this lesson which has not only been forgotten, but downright distorted, by the prevailing Kautskyst “interpretation” of Marxism. . . .

It is interesting to note two particular points in the passages of Marx quoted. First, he confines his conclusions to the Continent. This was natural in 1871, when England was still the model of a purely capitalist country, but without a military machine and, in large measure, without a bureaucracy. Hence Marx excluded England, where a revolution, even a people's revolution, could be imagined, and was then possible, *without* the preliminary condition of destroying the “ready-made state machinery.”

To-day, in 1917, in the epoch of the first great imperialist war, this exception made by Marx is no longer valid. Both England and America, the greatest and last representatives of Anglo-Saxon “liberty” in the sense of the absence of militarism and bureaucracy, have to-day plunged headlong into the all-European dirty, bloody morass of military bureaucratic institutions to which everything is subordinated and which trample everything under foot. Today, both in England and in America, the “precondition of any real people's revolution” is the *destruction, the shattering* of the “ready-made state machinery” (brought in those countries, between 1914 and 1917, to general “European” imperialist perfection).

Secondly, particular attention should be given to Marx's extremely

* *Neue Zeit*, XX-1, 1901-1902, p. 709. The letters from Marx to Kugelmann have come out in Russian in no less than two editions, one of them edited and with an introduction by me. [Karl Marx, *Letters to Dr. Kugelmann*, p. 110.—*Ed.*].

profound remark that the destruction of the military and bureaucratic apparatus of the state is "essential for every real *people's* revolution." This idea of a "people's" revolution seems strange on Marx's lips, and the Russian Plekhanovists and Mensheviks, those followers of Struve who wish to be considered Marxists, might possibly declare such an expression to be a "slip of the tongue." They have reduced Marxism to such a state of poverty-stricken "liberal" distortion that nothing exists for them beyond the distinction between bourgeois and proletarian revolution—and even that distinction they understand in an entirely lifeless way.

If we take for examples the revolutions of the twentieth century, we shall, of course, have to recognise both the Portuguese and the Turkish revolutions as bourgeois. Neither, however, is a "people's" revolution, inasmuch as the mass of the people, the enormous majority, does not make its appearance actively, independently, with its own economic and political demands, in either the one or the other. On the other hand, the Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905-1907, although it presented no such "brilliant" successes as at times fell to the lot of the Portuguese and Turkish revolutions, was undoubtedly a real "people's" revolution, since the mass of the people, the majority, the lowest social "depths," crushed down by oppression and exploitation, were rising independently, since they put on the entire course of the revolution the stamp of *their* demands, *their* attempts at building up, in their own way, a new society in place of the old society that was being shattered.

In the Europe of 1871, the proletariat on the Continent did not constitute the majority of the people. A "people's" revolution, actually sweeping the majority into its current, could be such only if it embraced both the proletariat and the peasantry. Both classes then constituted the "people." Both classes are united by the circumstance that the "bureaucratic-military state machinery" oppresses, crushes, exploits them. To *shatter* this machinery, to *destroy it*—this is the true interest of the "people," of its majority, the workers and most of the peasants, this is the "essential" for a free union of the poorest peasantry with the proletarians; while, without such a union, democracy is unstable and Socialist reorganisation is impossible.

Towards such a union, as is well known, the Paris Commune was making its way, though it did not reach its goal, owing to a number of circumstances, internal and external.

Consequently, when speaking of "a real people's revolution," Marx, without in the least forgetting the peculiar characteristics of the petty bourgeoisie (he spoke of them much and often), was very carefully taking into account the actual interrelation of classes in most of the continental European states in 1871. On the other hand, he stated that the "destruction" of the state machinery is demanded by the interests both of the workers and of the peasants, that it unites them, that it places before them the common task of removing the "parasite" and replacing it by something new.

By what exactly?

2. *What Is to Replace the Shattered State Machinery?*

In 1847, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx answered this question still in a purely abstract manner, stating the problems rather than the methods of solving them. To replace this machinery by "the proletariat organised as the ruling class," by "establishing democracy"—such was the answer of the *Communist Manifesto*.

Without resorting to Utopias, Marx waited for the *experience* of a mass movement to produce the answer to the problem as to the exact forms which this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class will assume and as to the exact manner in which this organisation will be combined with the most complete, most consistent "establishment of democracy."

The experiment of the Commune, meagre as it was, was subjected by Marx to the most careful analysis in his *The Civil War in France*. Let us quote the most important passages of this work.

There developed in the nineteenth century, he says, originating from the days of absolute monarchy, "the centralised state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy and judicature." With the development of class antagonism between capital and labour, "the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism. After every revolution marking a progressive phase in the class struggle, the purely repressive character of the state power stands out in bolder and bolder relief." The state power, after the revolution of 1848-1849 became "the national war engine of capital against labour." The Second Empire consolidated this.

"The direct antithesis to the Empire was the Commune," says

Marx. It was the "positive form" of "a republic that was not only to supersede the monarchial form of class rule, but class rule itself."

What was this "positive" form of the proletarian, the Socialist republic? What was the state it was beginning to create?

"The first decree of the Commune . . . was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people," says Marx.*

This demand now figures in the programme of every party calling itself Socialist. But the value of their programmes is best shown by the behaviour of our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, who, even after the revolution of March 12, 1917, refused to carry out this demand in practice!

The Commune was formed of municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. . . . Instead of continuing to be the agent of the Central Government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen's wages*. The vested interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves. . . .

Having once got rid of the standing army and the police, the physical force elements of the old government, the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the "parson power." . . .

The judicial functionaries were to be divested of [their] sham independence. . . . Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible and revocable.**

Thus the Commune would appear to have replaced the shattered state machinery "only" by fuller democracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be fully elective and subject to recall. But, as a matter of fact this "only" signifies a gigantic replacement of one type of institution by others of a fundamentally different order. Here we observe a case of "transformation of quantity into quality": democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is generally thinkable, is transformed from capitalist democracy into proletarian democracy; from the state (*i.e.*, a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer really the state in the accepted sense of the word.

* *The Civil War in France*, pp. 37-40.—*Ed.*

** *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.—*Ed.*

It is still necessary to suppress the bourgeoisie and crush its resistance. This was particularly necessary for the Commune; and one of the reasons of its defeat was that it did not do this with sufficient determination. But the organ of suppression is now the majority of the population, and not a minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom, and wage labour. And, once the majority of the people *itself* suppresses its oppressors, a "special force" for suppression is *no longer necessary*. In this sense the state *begins to wither away*. Instead of the special institutions of a privileged minority (privileged officialdom, heads of a standing army), the majority can itself directly fulfil all these functions; and the more the discharge of the functions of state power devolves upon the people generally, the less need is there for the existence of this power.

In this connection the Commune's measure emphasised by Marx, particularly worthy of note, is: the abolition of all representation allowances, and of all money privileges in the case of officials, the reduction of the remuneration of *all* servants of the state to "*workmen's wages*." Here is shown, more clearly than anywhere else, the *break* from a bourgeois democracy to a proletarian democracy, from the democracy of the oppressors to the democracy of the oppressed classes, from the state as a "special force for suppression" of a given class to the suppression of the oppressors by the *whole force* of the majority of the people—the workers and the peasants. And it is precisely on this most striking point, perhaps the most important as far as the problem of the state is concerned, that the teachings of Marx have been entirely forgotten! In popular commentaries, whose number is legion, this is not mentioned. It is "proper" to keep silent about it as if it were a piece of old-fashioned "naïveté," just as the Christians, after Christianity had attained the position of a state religion, "forgot" the "naïvetés" of primitive Christianity with its democratic-revolutionary spirit.

The reduction of the remuneration of the highest state officials seems "simply" a demand of naïve, primitive democracy. One of the "founders" of modern opportunism, the former Social-Democrat, Eduard Bernstein, has more than once exercised his talents in repeating the vulgar bourgeois jeers at "primitive" democracy. Like all opportunists, including the present Kautskyists, he fails completely to understand that, first of all, the transition from capitalism to Socialism is *impossible* without "return," in a measure, to "primi-

tive" democracy (how can one otherwise pass on to the discharge of all the state functions by the majority of the population and by every individual of the population?); and, secondly, he forgets that "primitive democracy" on the basis of capitalism and capitalist culture is not the same primitive democracy as in prehistoric or pre-capitalist times. Capitalist culture has *created* large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc., and *on this basis* the great majority of functions of the old "state power" have become so simplified and can be reduced to such simple operations of registration, filing and checking that they will be quite within the reach of every literate person, and it will be possible to perform them for "workingmen's wages," which circumstance can (and must) strip those functions of every shadow of privilege, of every appearance of "official grandeur."

All officials, without exception, elected and subject to recall *at any time*, their salaries reduced to "workingmen's wages"—these simple and "self-evident" democratic measures, which, completely uniting the interests of the workers and the majority of peasants, at the same time serve as a bridge leading from capitalism to Socialism. These measures refer to the state, to the purely political reconstruction of society; but, of course, they acquire their full meaning and significance only in connection with the "expropriation of the expropriators," either accomplished or in preparation, *i.e.*, with the turning of capitalist private ownership of the means of production into social ownership. Marx wrote:

The Commune made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions, cheap government, a reality by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure—the standing army and state functionarism.*

From the peasantry, as from other sections of the petty bourgeoisie, only an insignificant few "rise to the top," occupy "a place in the sun" in the bourgeois sense, *i.e.*, become either well-to-do people or secure and privileged officials. The great majority of peasants in every capitalist country where the peasantry exists (and the majority of capitalist countries are of this kind) is oppressed by the government and longs for its overthrow, longs for "cheap" government. This can be realised *only* by the proletariat; and by realising it, the proletariat makes at the same time a step forward towards the Socialist reconstruction of the state.

* *Ibid.*, p. 43.—*Ed.*

3. *The Destruction of Parliamentarism*

The Commune—says Marx—was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time. . . .

Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business.*

This remarkable criticism of parliamentarism made in 1871 also belongs to the “forgotten words” of Marxism, thanks to the prevalence of social-chauvinism and opportunism. Ministers and professional parliamentarians, traitors to the proletariat and Socialist “sharks” of our day, have left all criticism of parliamentarism to the Anarchists, and, on this wonderfully intelligent ground, denounce *all* criticism of parliamentarism as “Anarchism”!! It is not surprising that the proletariat of the most “advanced” parliamentary countries, being disgusted with such “Socialists” as Messrs. Scheidemann, David, Legien, Sembat, Renaudel, Henderson, Vandervelde, Stauning, Branting, Bissolati and Co., has been giving its sympathies more and more to Anarcho-syndicalism, in spite of the fact that it is but the twin brother of opportunism.

But to Marx, revolutionary dialectics was never the empty fashionable phrase, the toy rattle, which Plekhanov, Kautsky and the others have made of it. Marx knew how to break with Anarchism ruthlessly for its inability to make use of the “stable” of bourgeois parliamentarism, especially at a time when the situation was not revolutionary; but at the same time he knew how to subject parliamentarism to a really revolutionary-proletarian criticism.

To decide once every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and oppress the people through parliament—this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism, not only in parliamentary-constitutional monarchies, but also in the most democratic republics.

But, if the question of the state is raised, if parliamentarism is to be regarded as one institution of the state, what then, from the point of view of the tasks of the proletariat in *this* realm, is to be the way out of parliamentarism? How can we do without it?

Again and again we must repeat: the teaching of Marx, based on the study of the Commune, has been so completely forgotten that any criticism of parliamentarism other than Anarchist or reactionary

* *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 42.—*Ed.*

is quite unintelligible to a present-day "Social-Democrat" (read: present-day traitor to Socialism).

The way out of parliamentarism is to be found, of course, not in the abolition of the representative institutions and the elective principle, but in the conversion of the representative institutions from mere "talking shops" into working bodies. "The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time." . . .

4. *The Organisation of National Unity*

In a rough sketch of national organisation which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet. . . .

From these Communes would be elected the "National Delegation" at Paris.

The few but important functions which still would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by Communal, and, therefore, strictly responsible agents. The unity of the nation was not to be broken; but, on the contrary, to be organised by the Communal constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the state power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence. While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society.*

To what extent the opportunists of contemporary Social-Democracy have failed to understand—or perhaps it would be more true to say, did not want to understand—these observations of Marx is best shown by the famous (Herostrates-fashion) book of the renegade Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*.** It is just in connection with the above passage from Marx that Bernstein wrote saying that this programme

. . . in its political content displays, in all its essential features, the greatest similarity to the federalism of Proudhon. . . . In spite of all the other points of difference between Marx and the "petty-bourgeois" Proudhon [Bernstein places the words "petty-bourgeois" in quotation-marks in order to make them

* *Ibid*, pp. 41-42.—*Ed.*

** An English translation is published under the title *Evolutionary Socialism*.—*Ed.*

sound ironical] on these points their ways of thinking resemble each other as closely as could be.*

. . . Federalism is not touched upon in Marx's observations about the experience of the Commune, as quoted above. Marx agrees with Proudhon precisely on that point which has quite escaped the opportunist Bernstein. Marx differs from Proudhon just on the point where Bernstein sees their agreement.

Marx agrees with Proudhon in that they both stand for the "destruction" of the contemporary state machinery. This common ground of Marxism with Anarchism (both with Proudhon and with Bakunin) neither the opportunists nor the Kautskyists wish to see, for on this point they have themselves departed from Marxism.

Marx differs both from Proudhon and Bakunin precisely on the point of federalism (not to speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat). Federalism arises, as a principle, from the petty-bourgeois views of Anarchism. Marx is a centralist. In the above-quoted observations of his there is no deviation from centralism. Only people full of petty-bourgeois "superstitious faith" in the state can mistake the destruction of the bourgeois state for the destruction of centralism.

But will it not be centralism if the proletariat and poorest peasantry take the power of the state in their own hands, organise themselves freely into communes, and *unite* the action of all the communes in striking at capital, in crushing the resistance of the capitalists, in the transfer of private property in railways, factories, land, and so forth, to the *entire* nation, to the whole of society? Will that not be the most consistent democratic centralism? And proletarian centralism at that?

Bernstein simply cannot conceive the possibility of voluntary centralism, of a voluntary union of the communes into a nation, a voluntary fusion of the proletarian communes in the process of destroying bourgeois supremacy and the bourgeois state machinery. Like all philistines, Bernstein can imagine centralism only as something from above, to be imposed and maintained solely by means of bureaucracy and militarism.

Marx, as though he foresaw the possibility of the perversion of his ideas, purposely emphasises that the accusation against the Commune that it desired to destroy the unity of the nation, to do

* Bernstein, *ibid.*, German Edition, 1899, pp. 134-136.

away with a central power, was a deliberate falsehood. Marx purposely uses the phrase "to organise the unity of the nation," so as to contrast conscious, democratic, proletarian centralism to bourgeois, military, bureaucratic centralism.

But no one is so deaf as he who will not hear. The opportunists of contemporary Social-Democracy do not, on any account, want to hear of destroying the state power, of cutting off the parasite.

5. *Destruction of the Parasite-State*

We have already quoted part of Marx's statements on this subject, and must now complete his presentation.

It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations—wrote Marx—to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness. Thus, this new Commune, which breaks [*bricht*] the modern state power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the mediaeval Communes . . . for a federation of small states [Montesquieu, the Girondins] . . . for an exaggerated form of the ancient struggle against over-centralisation. . . . The Communal Constitution would have restored to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the state parasite feeding upon, and clogging the free movements of, society. By this one act it would have initiated the regeneration of France . . . the Communal Constitution brought the rural producers under the intellectual lead of the central towns of their districts, and there secured to them, in the working man, the natural trustees of their interests. The very existence of the Commune involved, as a matter of course, local municipal liberty, but no longer as a check upon the now superseded state power.*

"Breaks the modern state power," which was a "parasitic excrescence"; its "amputation," its "destruction"; "the now superseded state power"—these are the expressions used by Marx regarding the state when he appraised and analysed the experience of the Commune.

All this was written a little less than half a century ago; and now one has to undertake excavations, as it were, in order to bring uncorrupted Marxism to the knowledge of the masses. The conclusions drawn from the observation of the last great revolution, through which Marx lived, have been forgotten just at the moment when the time had arrived for the next great proletarian revolutions.

The multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favour, show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of govern-

* *The Civil War in France*, pp. 42-43.—Ed.

ment had been emphatically repressive. Its true secret was this. It was essentially a *working class government*, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour.

Except on this last condition, the Communal Constitution would have been an impossibility and a delusion.*

The Utopians busied themselves with the "discovery" of the political forms under which the Socialist reconstruction of society could take place. The Anarchists turned away from the question of political forms altogether. The opportunists of modern Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of a parliamentary, democratic state as the limit which cannot be overstepped; they broke their foreheads praying before this idol, denouncing as Anarchism every attempt to *destroy* these forms.

Marx deducted from the whole history of Socialism and political struggle that the state was bound to disappear, and that the transitional form of its disappearance (the transition from the political state to no state) would be the "proletariat organised as the ruling class." But Marx did not undertake the task of *discovering* the political forms of this future stage. He limited himself to an exact observation of French history, its analysis and the conclusion to which the year 1851 had led, *viz.*, that matters were moving towards the *destruction* of the bourgeois machinery of state.

And when the mass revolutionary movement of the proletariat burst forth, Marx, in spite of the failure of that movement, in spite of its short life and its patent weakness, began to study what political forms it had *disclosed*.

The Commune is the form "at last discovered" by the proletarian revolution, under which the economic liberation of labour can proceed.

The Commune is the first attempt of a proletarian revolution to *break up* the bourgeois state machinery and constitutes the political form, "at last discovered," which can and must *take the place* of the broken machine.

We shall see below that the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, in different surroundings and under different circumstances, continued the work of the Commune and confirmed the historic analysis made by the genius of Marx.

* *Ibid.*, p. 43.—Ed.

Marx gave the fundamentals on the question of the meaning of the experience of the Commune. Engels returned to the same question repeatedly, elucidating Marx's analysis and conclusions, sometimes so forcibly throwing *other* sides of the question into relief that we must dwell on these explanations separately.

1. *The Housing Question*

In his work on the housing question (1872) Engels took into account the experience of the Commune, dwelling repeatedly on the tasks of the revolution in relation to the state. . . .

Speaking of the conversion of the Blanquists, after the Commune and under the influence of its experience, to the principles of Marxism, Engels, in passing, formulates these principles as follows:

. . . Necessity of political action by the proletariat, and its dictatorship as the transition to the abolition of classes and, with them, of the state. . . .*

Those addicted to hair-splitting criticism, and those who belong to the bourgeois "exterminators of Marxism," will perhaps see a contradiction, in a previously cited quotation from the *Anti-Dühring*, between this *avowal* of the "abolition of the state" and the repudiation of a formula like the Anarchist one. It would not be surprising if the opportunists stamped Engels, too, as an "Anarchist," for the social-chauvinists are now more and more adopting the method of accusing the internationalists of Anarchism.

That, together with the abolition of classes, the state will also be abolished, Marxism has always taught. The well-known passage on the "withering away of the state" in the *Anti-Dühring* does not blame the Anarchists for being in favour of the abolition of the state, but for preaching that the state can be abolished "within twenty-four hours."

In view of the fact that the present predominant "Social-Democratic" doctrine completely distorts the relation of Marxism to Anarchism on the question of the abolition of the state, it will be quite useful to recall a certain polemic of Marx and Engels against the Anarchists.

* Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (International Publishers).—Ed.

2. Polemic Against the Anarchists

This polemic took place in 1873. Marx and Engels contributed articles against the Proudhonists, "autonomists" or "anti-authoritarians," to an Italian Socialist publication, and it was not until 1913 that these articles appeared in German translation in the *Neue Zeit*. . . .

Engels . . . ridicules the muddled ideas of the Proudhonists, who called themselves "anti-authoritarians," *i.e.*, they denied every kind of authority, every kind of subordination, every kind of power. . . .

. . . The anti-authoritarians demand that the political state should be abolished at one stroke, even before the social relations which gave birth to it have been abolished. They demand that the first act of the social revolution should be the abolition of authority.

Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? Revolution is undoubtedly the most authoritative thing possible. It is an act in which one section of the population imposes its will on the other by means of rifles, bayonets, cannon, *i.e.*, by highly authoritative means, and the victorious party is inevitably forced to maintain its supremacy by means of that fear which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day had it not relied on the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie? Are we not, on the contrary, entitled to blame the Commune for not having made sufficient use of this authority? And so: either—or: either the anti-authoritarians do not know what they are talking about, in which case they merely sow confusion; or they do know, in which case they are betraying the cause of the proletariat. In either case they serve only the interests of reaction.*

. . . The customary criticism of Anarchism by modern Social-Democrats has been reduced to the purest philistine vulgarity: "We recognise the state, whereas the Anarchists do not." Naturally, such vulgarity cannot but repel revolutionary workingmen who think at all. Engels says something different. He emphasises that all Socialists recognise the disappearance of the state as a result of the Socialist revolution. He then deals with the concrete question of the revolution—that very question which, as a rule, the Social-Democrats, because of their opportunism, evade, leaving it, so to speak, exclusively for the Anarchists "to work out." And in thus formulating the question, Engels takes the bull by the horns: ought not the Commune to have made *more* use of the *revolutionary* power of the state, *i.e.*, of the proletariat armed and organised as the ruling class?

Prevailing official Social-Democracy usually dismissed the question as to the concrete tasks of the proletariat in the revolution either

* *Neue Zeit*, XXXII-1, 1913-1914, p. 39.

with an inane philistine shrug, or, at the best, with the evasive sophism, "Wait and see." And the Anarchists were thus justified in saying about such a Social-Democracy that it had betrayed the task of educating the working class for the revolution. Engels makes use of the experience of the last proletarian revolution for the particular purpose of making a concrete analysis as to what the proletariat should do in relation both to the banks and the state, and how it should do it.

3. Letter to Bebel

One of the most remarkable, if not the most remarkable observation on the state to be found in the works of Marx and Engels is contained in the following passage of Engels' letter to Bebel dated March 18-28, 1875. This letter, we may remark in passing, was first published, so far as we know, by Bebel in the second volume of his memoirs (*Aus meinen Leben*), published in 1911, *i.e.*, thirty-six years after it had been written and mailed.

Engels wrote to Bebel, criticising that same draft of the Gotha Programme which Marx also criticised in his famous letter to Bracke; referring particularly to the question of the state, Engels said:

. . . The people's free state has been transformed into a free state. According to the grammatical meaning of the words, the free state is one in which the state is free in relation to its citizens, *i.e.*, a state with a despotic government. It would be well to throw overboard all this chatter about the state, especially after the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word. The Anarchists have too long thrown this "people's state" into our teeth, although already in Marx's work against Proudhon, and then in the *Communist Manifesto*, it was stated definitely that, with the introduction of the Socialist order of society, the state will dissolve of itself [*sich auflöst*] and disappear. As the state is only a transitional phenomenon which must be made use of in struggle, in the revolution, in order forcibly to crush our antagonists, it is pure absurdity to speak of a people's free state. As long as the proletariat still *needs* the state, it needs it, not in the interests of freedom, but for the purpose of crushing its antagonists; and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom, then the state, as such, ceases to exist. We would, therefore, suggest that everywhere the word "state" be replaced by "community" [*Gemeinwesen*], a fine old German word, which corresponds to the French word "commune." *

. . . "The Commune was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word"—this is Engels' most important statement, theoretically

* *Aus meinen Leben*, pp. 321-322.

speaking. After what has been presented above, this statement is perfectly clear. The Commune *ceased* to be a state in so far as it had to repress, not the majority of the population but a minority (the exploiters); it had broken the bourgeois state machinery; in the place of a *special* repressive force, the whole population itself came onto the scene. All this is a departure from the state in its proper sense. And had the Commune asserted itself as a lasting power, remnants of the state would of themselves have "withered away" within it; it would not have been necessary to "abolish" its institutions; they would have ceased to function in proportion as less and less was left for them to do. . . .

5. *The 1891 Preface to Marx's Civil War in France* *

In his preface to the third edition of *The Civil War in France* (this preface is dated March 18, 1891, and was originally published in the *Neue Zeit*), Engels, with many other interesting remarks, made in passing, on questions of the attitude towards the state, gives a remarkably striking résumé of the lessons of the Commune. This résumé, confirmed by all the experience of the period of twenty years separating the author from the Commune, and directed particularly against the "superstitious faith in the state" so widely diffused in Germany, can justly be called the *last word* of Marxism on the question dealt with here. . . .

Here are the lessons to which Engels attached prime importance:

. . . It was precisely this oppressive power of the former centralised government—the army, political police and bureaucracy which Napoleon had created in 1798 and since then had been taken over as a welcome instrument by every new government and used against its opponents—it was precisely this power which should have fallen everywhere, as it had already fallen in Paris.

The Commune was compelled to recognise from the outset that the working class, once come to power, could not carry on business with the old state machine; that, in order not to lose again its own position of power which it had but just conquered, this working class must, on the one hand, set aside all the old repressive machinery previously used against itself, and on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials by declaring them all, without any exception, subject to recall at any moment. . . .

Engels emphasises again and again that not only in a monarchy, but *also in a democratic republic*, the state remains a state, *i.e.*, it

* Section 4, "Criticism of the Draft of the Erfurt Programme," is omitted in this selection.—*Ed.*

retains its fundamental and characteristic feature of transforming the officials, "the servants of society," its organs, into the *masters* of society.

Against this transformation of the state and the organs of the state from servants of society into masters of society—a process which had been inevitable in all previous states—the Commune made use of two infallible remedies. In the first place, it filled all posts—administrative, judicial and educational—by election on the basis of universal suffrage of all concerned, with the right of these electors to recall their delegate at any time. And in the second place, all officials, high or low, were paid only the wages received by other workers. The highest salary paid by the Commune to any one was 6,000 francs.* In this way, an effective barrier to place-hunting and careerism was set up, even apart from the imperative mandates to delegates to representative bodies which were also added in profusion. . . .**

Engels approaches here the interesting boundary line where consistent democracy is, on the one hand, *transformed* into Socialism, and on the other, it *demand*s the introduction of Socialism. For, in order to destroy the state, it is necessary to convert the functions of public service into such simple operations of control and accounting as are within the reach of the vast majority of the population, and, ultimately, of every single individual. And, in order to do away completely with careerism it must be made *impossible* for an "honourable," though unsalaried, post in the public service to be used as a springboard to a highly profitable post in the banks or the joint-stock companies, as happens *constantly* in all the freest capitalist countries. . . .

Engels continues:

This shattering [*Sprengung*] of the former state power and its replacement by a new and really democratic state is described in detail in the third section of *The Civil War*. But it was necessary to dwell briefly here once more on some of its features, because in Germany particularly the superstitious faith in the state has been carried over from philosophy into the general consciousness of the bourgeoisie and even of many workers. According to the philosophical conception, the state is the "realisation of the idea" or, translated into philosophical language, the Kingdom of God on earth; the sphere in which eternal truth and justice is, or should be, realised. And from this follows a superstitious reverence for the state and everything connected with it, which

* Nominally this means about 2,400 rubles a year; according to the present rate of exchange about 6,000 rubles. Those Bolsheviks who proposed a salary of 9,000 rubles for members of the municipal administration, for instance, instead of suggesting a maximum salary of 6,000 rubles *for the whole of the state*—a sum quite sufficient for anybody, are making quite an unpardonable error.

** *The Civil War in France*, pp. 17-18.—Ed.

takes root the more readily as people from their childhood are accustomed to imagine that the affairs and interests common to the whole of society could not be managed and safeguarded in any other way than as in the past, that is, through the state and its well-paid officials. And people think they are taking quite an extraordinarily bold step forward when they rid themselves of faith in a hereditary monarchy and become partisans of a democratic republic. In reality, however, the state is nothing more than a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil, inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the proletariat, just like the Commune will have at the earliest possible moment to lop off, until such time as a new generation, reared under new and free social conditions, will be able to throw on the scrap-heap all the useless lumber of the state.*

VULGARISATION OF MARX BY THE OPPORTUNISTS

. . . Bernstein, in his Herostrates-like famous *Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus*, accuses Marxism of “Blanquism” (an accusation since repeated thousands of times by the opportunists and liberal bourgeois in Russia against the representatives of revolutionary Marxism, the Bolsheviks). In this connection Bernstein dwells particularly on Marx’s *The Civil War in France*, and tries—as we saw, quite unsuccessfully—to identify Marx’s view of the lessons of the Commune with that of Proudhon. Bernstein pays particular attention to Marx’s conclusion, emphasised by him in his 1872 preface to the *Communist Manifesto*, to the effect that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.”

The dictum “pleased” Bernstein so much that he repeated it no less than three times in his book—interpreting it in the most distorted opportunist sense.

We have seen what Marx means—that the working class must *shatter, break up, blow up* (*Sprengung*, explosion, is the expression used by Engels) the whole state machinery. But according to Bernstein it would appear as though Marx by these words warned the working class *against* excessive revolutionary zeal when seizing power.

A crasser and uglier perversion of Marx’s ideas cannot be imagined. . . .

Kautsky propounds the matter in the following way: the victorious proletariat, he says, “will realise the democratic programme,” and

* *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.—*Ed.*

he formulates its clauses. But of that which the year 1871 taught us about bourgeois democracy being replaced by a proletarian one—not a syllable. . . .

By evading this question, Kautsky *in reality* makes a concession to opportunism in this most essential point. . . .

Kautsky has not reflected at all on Marx's words: "The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time."

Kautsky has not in the least understood the difference between bourgeois parliamentarism, combining democracy (*not for the people*) with bureaucracy (*against the people*), and proletarian democracy, which will take immediate steps to cut down bureaucracy at the roots, and which will be able to carry out these measures to their conclusion, the complete destruction of bureaucracy, and the final establishment of democracy for the people.

Kautsky reveals here again the same "superstitious reverence" for the state, and "superstitious faith" in bureaucracy. . . .

Kautsky goes over from Marxism to the opportunists, because, in his hands, this destruction of the state machinery, which is utterly unacceptable to the opportunists, completely disappears. . . .

The main thing is whether the old state machinery (connected by thousands of threads with the bourgeoisie and saturated through and through with routine and inertia) shall remain or be *destroyed* and replaced by a *new* one. A revolution must not consist in a new class ruling, governing with the help of the *old* state machinery, but in this class *smashing* this machinery and ruling, governing by means of *new* machinery. This *fundamental* idea of Marxism Kautsky either slurs over or has not understood at all. . . .

From what Kautsky says, one might think that if elective officials remain under Socialism, bureaucrats and bureaucracy will also remain! That is entirely incorrect. Marx took the example of the Commune to show that under Socialism the functionaries cease to be "bureaucrats" and "officials"—they change *in the degree* as election is supplemented by the right of instant recall; when, *besides this*, their pay is brought down to the level of the pay of the average worker; when, *besides this*, parliamentary institutions are replaced by "working bodies, executive and legislative at the same time."

All Kautsky's arguments . . . and particularly his splendid point that we cannot do without officials even in our parties and trade unions, show, in essence, that Kautsky is repeating the old "argu-

ment" of Bernstein against Marxism in general. Bernstein's renegade book, *Evolutionary Socialism*, is an attack on "primitive" democracy—"doctrinaire democracy" as he calls it—imperative mandates, functionaries without pay, impotent central representative bodies, and so on. . . .

Marx's critico-analytical genius perceived in the practical measures of the Commune that revolutionary *turning point* of which the opportunists are afraid, and which they do not want to recognise, out of cowardice, out of reluctance to break irrevocably with the bourgeoisie, and which the Anarchists do not want to perceive, either through haste or a general lack of understanding of the conditions of great social mass transformations. . . .

Marx teaches us to avoid both kinds of error; he teaches us unswerving courage in destroying the entire old state machinery, and at the same time shows us how to put the situation concretely: the Commune was able, within a few weeks, to *start* building a *new*, proletarian state machinery by introducing such and such measures to secure a wider democracy, and to uproot bureaucracy. Let us learn revolutionary courage from the Communards; let us see in their practical measures *an outline* of practically urgent and immediately possible measures, and then, following this road, we shall arrive at the complete destruction of bureaucracy. . . .

V

THE COMMUNE AND DEMOCRACY *

I. HOW KAUTSKY CHANGED MARX INTO A DECEITFUL LIBERAL

. . . THE Paris Commune was a dictatorship of the proletariat, but it was elected by universal suffrage, without depriving the bourgeoisie of the franchise, *i.e.*, "democratically." Kautsky is elated: "The dictatorship of the proletariat is, for Marx, a condition which results necessarily from pure democracy when the proletariat forms the overwhelming majority."

This argument is so amusing that one almost suffers from an *embarras de richesses*. First, it is known that the flower of the bourgeoisie, its staff and upper strata, had run away from Paris to Versailles. There, at Versailles, was also the "Socialist," Louis

* Excerpt from *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (International Publishers).—Ed.

Blanc—which circumstance, by the way, proves the falseness of Kautsky's assertion that "all schools" of Socialism took part in the Commune. Is it not ridiculous to represent as "pure democracy," with "universal" suffrage, the division of the inhabitants of Paris into two belligerent camps, in one of which was concentrated the entire militant and politically active section of the bourgeoisie?

Second, the Commune was at war with Versailles as the workers' government of France against the bourgeois government. What had "pure democracy" and "universal" suffrage to do with it if Paris was deciding the fate of all France? When Marx gave us his opinion that the Commune had committed a mistake in failing to seize the Bank of France, belonging to the whole of France, did he base himself on the principles and practice of "pure democracy"?

Obviously, Kautsky was writing his book in a country where the people are forbidden by the police to act or even to laugh "collectively"—else Kautsky would have been long since annihilated by ridicule.

I beg respectfully to remind Mr. Kautsky, who knows Marx and Engels by heart, of the following evaluation of the Commune by Engels from the point of view of "pure democracy":

Have these gentlemen [the anti-authoritarians] ever seen a revolution? Revolution is undoubtedly the most authoritative thing possible. It is an act in which one section of the population imposes its will on the other by means of rifles, bayonets, cannon, *i.e.*, by highly authoritative means, and the victorious party is inevitably forced to maintain its supremacy by means of that fear which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day had it not relied upon the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie? Are we not, on the contrary, entitled to blame the Commune for not having made sufficient use of this authority? *

Here you have "pure democracy!" What ridicule Engels would have heaped upon the head of that vulgar petty-bourgeois, the "Social-Democrat" (in the French sense of the 'forties of last century, and in the European sense of 1914-1918), who would have talked about "pure democracy" in a society divided into classes!

But enough. It is impossible to enumerate all the absurdities uttered by Kautsky, since every phrase of his contains a bottomless pit of apostasy.

Marx and Engels have analysed in a most detailed manner the Commune of Paris, showing that its merit consisted in the attempt

* *Neue Zeit*, XXXII-1, 1913-1914, p. 39.

to break, to smash up, the existing state machine. Marx and Engels considered this *conclusion* to be of such importance that they introduced it in 1872 as the only amendment to the partly "obsolete" programme of the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels showed that the Commune was abolishing the army and the bureaucracy, was destroying parliamentarism, was wiping out "that parasitical incubus, the state," and so forth; but the all-wise Kautsky, pulling his nightcap over his ears, repeats the fairy-tale about a "pure democracy," which has been told thousands of times by liberal professors. . . .

II. BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIAN DEMOCRACY

. . . By a thousand tricks the capitalists in a bourgeois democracy—and these tricks are all the more skillful and effective, the further "pure" democracy develops—keep the masses out of the administration and frustrate the freedom of the press, the right of assembly, etc. The Soviet state is the first in the world (or strictly speaking, the second, because the Paris Commune started to do the same thing) to *attract* the masses, precisely the *exploited* masses, to the work of administration.

The participation of the labouring masses in bourgeois parliament (which *never* decides the most important questions in a bourgeois democracy, as they are decided by the stock exchange and the banks) is blocked by a thousand and one barriers, and the workers know, see and feel perfectly that the bourgeois parliament is an alien institution, an *instrument of oppression* of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, an institution of the hostile class, of the exploiting minority.

. . . This could have remained unnoticed only by a person who is either the conscious servant of the bourgeoisie or is politically dead, does not see life from behind the dusty pages of bourgeois books, is permeated through and through by bourgeois-democratic prejudices, and thereby, objectively speaking, becomes the lackey of the bourgeoisie.

This could have remained unnoticed only by a man who is incapable of putting the question from the point of view of the exploited classes. Is there a single country in the world, even among the most democratic bourgeois countries, in which the ordinary rank-and-file worker, the ordinary rank-and-file agricultural la-

bourer or semi-proletarian peasant (that is, a representative of the oppressed mass of the overwhelming majority of the population), enjoys even approximately the same *liberty* to have meetings in the best halls, has the same *liberty* to utilise the largest printing plants and the best paper warehouses for expressing his ideas and protecting his interests, has the same liberty to put forward people precisely of his own class to administer the government and to “*organise*” the state, as in Soviet Russia?

It is ridiculous to think that Mr. Kautsky could find in any country one single informed worker or agricultural labourer in a thousand who would hesitate in replying to this question. Instinctively, through reading the bare fragments of truth in the bourgeois press, the workers of the entire world sympathise with the Soviet Republic, just because they see in it a *proletarian* democracy, a democracy *for the poor*, and not a democracy for the rich, as is the case with every bourgeois democracy, even the best. “We are ruled, and our state is run, by bourgeois bureaucrats, by capitalist parliaments, by capitalist judges”—such is the simple, indisputable, and obvious truth, which is known and felt, through their own daily experience, by tens and hundreds of millions of the exploited classes in all bourgeois countries, including the most democratic. In Russia, on the other hand, the bureaucratic apparatus has been completely smashed, the old judges have all been driven from their benches, the bourgeois parliament has been dispersed, and instead the workers and peasants have received a much more *popular* representation, their Soviets have replaced the bureaucrats, or are controlling them, and their Soviets have become the authorities who elect the judges. This fact alone is enough to justify all the oppressed classes in regarding the Soviet power, that is, the present form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic.

Kautsky does not understand this truth, so obvious and evident to every worker, because he has “*forgotten*” how to put the question: democracy *for which class*? He argues from the point of view of “pure” (classless? or above-class?) democracy. He argues like Shylock: “a pound of flesh,” nothing else. Equality of all citizens—otherwise no democracy. One has to ask the learned Kautsky, the “Marxist” and the “Socialist,” the following question: Can there be equality between the exploited and the exploiter? It is monstrous, it is incredible, that one should have to ask such a question in

discussing a book by the ideological leader of the Second International. But there is no way of escaping from this necessity. In writing about Kautsky one has to explain to the learned man why there can be no equality between the exploiters and the exploited.

III. CAN THERE BE EQUALITY BETWEEN THE EXPLOITERS AND THE EXPLOITED?

Kautsky says, "The exploiters always formed but a small minority of the population."

This is certainly true. Taking it as the starting point, what should be the line of reasoning? One may argue in a Marxist, in a Socialist way, taking as a basis the relation between the exploited and the exploiters, or one may argue in a liberal, in a bourgeois-democratic way, taking as a basis the relation of the majority to the minority.

If we argue in a Marxist way, we must say: The exploiters inevitably turn the state (we are thinking of a democracy, that is, one of the forms of the state) into an instrument of domination of their class over the exploited class. Hence, so long as there are exploiters ruling the majority of exploited, the democratic state must inevitably be a democracy for the exploiters. The state of the exploited must fundamentally differ from such a state: it must be a democracy for the exploited, and for the *suppression of the exploiters*. And the suppression of a class means inequality in so far as this class is concerned, its exclusion from "democracy."

. . . The relation between the exploited and the exploiters has entirely vanished in Kautsky's arguments, and all that remains is a majority in general, a democracy in general, that is, the "pure democracy" which is already familiar to us. And all this, mark you, is said *à propos* the Paris Commune!

Let us quote, by way of illustration, how Marx and Engels discuss the subject of dictatorship, also *à propos* the Commune:

Marx: "When the workers substitute for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie . . . their revolutionary dictatorship . . . in order to break down the resistance of the bourgeoisie . . . the workers invest the state with a revolutionary and transitional form. . . ."

Engels: "The victorious party is inevitably forced to maintain its supremacy by means of that fear which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day had it not relied on the authority of the armed people against the

bourgeoisie? Are we not, on the contrary, entitled to blame the Commune for not having made sufficient use of this authority?"

Engels: "As the state is only a transitional phenomenon which must be made use of in struggle, in the revolution, in order forcibly to crush our antagonists, it is pure absurdity to speak of a people's free state. As long as the proletariat still *needs* the state, it needs it, not in the interests of freedom, but for the purpose of crushing its antagonists; and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom, then the state, as such, ceases to exist."

The distance between Kautsky, on the one hand, and Marx and Engels on the other, is as great as between heaven and earth, as between the bourgeois liberal and the proletarian revolutionary. "Pure democracy," or simple "democracy," of which Kautsky speaks, is but a paraphrase of the very same "people's free state," that is, a *perfect absurdity*. Kautsky, with the scientific air of a most learned arm-chair fool, or else with the innocent air of a ten-year-old girl, asks: Why do we need a dictatorship when we have a majority? And Marx and Engels explain: In order to break down the resistance of the bourgeoisie; in order to instill the reactionaries with fear; in order to maintain the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie; in order that the proletariat may forcibly suppress its enemies!

We know the example of the Commune, we know all that the founders of Marxism said in connection with it. On the basis of this data I examined the question of democracy and dictatorship in my book, *State and Revolution*, which was written before the October Revolution. Not a word was said about the restriction of the franchise. And at present it must be stated that the restriction of the franchise is a specific national question, and not one relating to dictatorship in general. One must approach the question of the restriction of the franchise by studying the *specific* conditions of the Russian Revolution, the *specific* course of its development. This will be done in subsequent pages. But it would be erroneous to guarantee in advance that the impending proletarian revolutions in Europe will all, or for the most part, be accompanied by a restriction of the franchise for the bourgeoisie. This may be so. After the war and after the experience of the Russian Revolution it will probably be so. But it is not absolutely necessary for the establishment of a dictatorship. It is not necessarily implied in the idea of dictatorship, it does not enter as a necessary condition into the historical

or class conception of dictatorship. What forms a necessary aspect, or a necessary condition of dictatorship, is the forcible suppression of the exploiters as a class, and consequently an infringement of "pure democracy," that is, of equality and freedom, *in respect of that class.*

VI

THE COMMUNE AND THE SOVIETS *

OUR task is to characterise the Soviet type of state. I have tried to set out my theoretical views on this question in the book, *State and Revolution*. It seems to me that the Marxist view of the state has been very greatly distorted by the predominant official Socialism in western Europe, but it is very clearly confirmed by the experience of the Soviet Revolution and the creation of the Soviets in Russia. In our Soviets there is much that is crude and unfinished. This cannot be doubted, it is clear to every one who has observed their work; but the important thing, the historically valuable event which represents a step forward in the world development of Socialism, is the fact that a new type of state has been formed here.

In the Paris Commune, this took place for a few weeks in a single town, without realising what was being done. The Commune was not understood by those who had created it. They created with the instinctive genius of the awakened masses, and not a single fraction of the French Socialists realised what they were doing. But since we are standing on the shoulders of the Paris Commune, and the long development of German Social-Democracy, we can see clearly what we were doing when we formed a Soviet state. The new type of state has been formed by the masses of the people, in spite of the crudeness and lack of discipline which exists in the Soviets—which is a relic of the petty-bourgeois character of our country. It has been in operation not for a few weeks or months, not in a single town but in a tremendous country, in several nations. This type of Soviet state will justify itself. . . .

The Soviet state is an apparatus by the aid of which the masses can begin immediately to learn how to govern and to organise in-

* Excerpt from a speech delivered at the Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party, on the Revision of the Programme and the Name of the Party.—*Ed.*

dustry on a national scale. This is a tremendous and difficult task. But it is of historical importance that we undertake its accomplishment not only from the point of view of our country, but also call for assistance upon the workers of Europe. We must concretely explain our programme precisely from this general point of view. This is why we consider that this is a continuation of the Paris Commune. This is why we are convinced that by entering on this path, the European workers will be able to assist us. . . .

We say that every time we are thrown backwards—if the hostile class forces drive us to this old position—we shall, without refusing to make the most of bourgeois parliamentarism, strive for what has been won by experience, for the Soviet power, for the Soviet type of government, for a government of the type of the Paris Commune. This should be expressed in the programme. . . .

VII

BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY *

. . . THE Paris Commune, which every one who wishes to be considered a Socialist honours, for he knows that the working masses warmly and sincerely sympathise with it, has shown particularly clearly the historically conditioned character and limited value of bourgeois parliamentarism and of bourgeois democracy—of institutions which are in the highest degree progressive in comparison with the middle ages but which inevitably call for fundamental change in the epoch of proletarian revolution. Marx in particular, who best of all estimated the importance of the Commune, in his analysis of it showed the exploiting character of bourgeois democracy and of bourgeois parliamentarism, by which the oppressed classes get the right once every few years to decide which representative of the possessing classes shall “represent and suppress” the people in parliament. Particularly to-day, when the Soviet movement, by embracing the whole world, is continuing the work of the Commune before the eyes of all, the traitors to socialism forget the concrete experience and concrete lessons of the Paris Commune when

* Excerpt from “Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” *The Foundation of the Communist International* (International Publishers).—Ed.

they repeat the old bourgeois rubbish about "democracy in general." The Commune was not a parliamentary institution.

The importance of the Commune consists further in the fact that it made an effort to smash and destroy to the foundation the bourgeois state apparatus, its civil service, legal, military and police apparatus, replacing it by the self-administering mass organisation of the workers which recognised no division of legislative and executive power. All modern bourgeois democratic republics, including the German, which the traitors to socialism, deriding the truth, call a proletarian republic, preserve this state apparatus. In this way it is again and again fully and clearly confirmed that the shouts in defence of "democracy in general" are in fact a defence of the bourgeoisie and of its exploiting privileges. . . .

VIII

THE FIRST STEP *

"SOVIET power" is the second world-historical step or stage in the development of the proletarian dictatorship. The first step was the Paris Commune. The brilliant analysis of the essence and significance of this Commune, given by Marx in his *The Civil War in France*, showed that the Commune created a *new type* of state, *the proletarian state*. Every state, including the most democratic republic, is nothing but a machine for the suppression of one class by another. The proletarian state is the machine for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat, and such suppression is necessary because of the frenzied, desperate, and reckless resistance offered by the big land-owners and capitalists, by the whole bourgeoisie and its lackeys, by all exploiters, as soon as their overthrow, the expropriation of the expropriators, begins.

* Excerpt from "Letter to the Workers of Europe and America," which was published in *Pravda* on January 24, 1919. It deals with the betrayal of the working class movement by the Second International, the formation of the Communist International, the spread of the revolutionary movement in Europe and the significance of the Soviets.—*Ed.*

IX

THE NEW TYPE OF STATE ARISING IN OUR REVOLUTION *

THE Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants', etc., Deputies are not understood, not only in the sense that their class character, their part in the Russian Revolution, is not clear to the majority. They are not understood also in the sense that they constitute a new form, rather, a new type of state.

The most perfect and advanced type of bourgeois state is that of a parliamentary democratic republic: power is vested in parliament; state machinery, apparatus, and organ of administration are the usual ones: a standing army, police, bureaucracy, practically unchangeable, privileged, and standing above the people.

But revolutionary epochs, beginning with the end of the nineteenth century, bring to the fore the highest type of democratic state, the kind of state which in certain respects, to quote Engels, ceases to be a state, "is no state in the proper sense of the word." This is a state of the type of the Paris Commune, a state replacing the standing army and the police by a direct arming of the people itself. This is the essence of the Commune, which has been so much misrepresented and slandered by bourgeois writers, which, among other things, has been erroneously accused of wishing to "introduce" Socialism immediately.

This is the type of state which the Russian Revolution began to create in the years 1905 and 1917. A Republic of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants', etc., Deputies, united in an all-Russian Constituent Assembly of the people's representatives, or in a Soviet of Soviets, etc.—this is what is already coming into life now, at this very time, upon the initiative of millions of people who, of their own accord, are creating a democracy in their own way, without waiting until Cadet gentlemen-professors will have written drafts of laws for a parliamentary bourgeois republic, or until the pedants and routine worshippers of petty-bourgeois "Social-Democracy," like Plekhanov and Kautsky, have abandoned their distortion of the teaching of Marxism concerning the state.

Marxism differs from Anarchism in that it admits the necessity of the state and state power in a revolutionary period in general, and

* Excerpt from "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution," *Collected Works*, Vol. XXI; Little Lenin Library, Vol. IX.—Ed.

in the epoch of transition from capitalism to Socialism in particular.

Marxism differs from the petty-bourgeois, opportunist "Social-Democracy" of Plekhanov, Kautsky and Co. in that it admits the necessity for the above-mentioned periods of a state not like the usual parliamentary bourgeois republic, but like the Paris Commune.

The main differences between the latter type of state and the bourgeois state are the following:

It is extremely easy to revert from a bourgeois republic to a monarchy (as history proves), since all the machinery of repression is left intact: army, police, bureaucracy. The Commune and the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies smash and remove that machinery.

A parliamentary bourgeois republic strangles and crushes the independent political life of the masses, their direct participation in the democratic upbuilding of all state life from top to bottom. The opposite is true about the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

The latter reproduce the type of state that was being evolved by the Paris Commune and that Marx called the "political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour."

The usual objection is that the Russian people is not as yet prepared for the "introduction" of a Commune. This was the argument of serf owners who claimed that the peasants were not prepared for freedom. The Commune, *i. e.*, the Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies, does not "introduce," does not intend to "introduce," and should not introduce any reorganisations which are not absolutely ripe both in economic reality and in the consciousness of an overwhelming majority of the people. The more terrible the economic collapse and the crisis produced by the war, the more urgent is the need of a most perfect political form which facilitates the healing of the wounds inflicted by the war upon mankind. The less organisational experience the Russian people has, the more determinedly must we proceed with the organisational development of the people, not leaving it merely to the bourgeois politicians and bureaucrats with sinecures. . . .

THE SOVIET POWER AND THE COMMUNE *

COMRADES: On behalf of the Council of People's Commissars, I have to report to you on its activities for the two months and fifteen days which have passed since the establishment of Soviet power and of the Soviet government in Russia.

Two months and fifteen days—this is only five days more than the period during which a previous workers' government was in power over a whole country, or over the exploiters and capitalists—the power of the workers of Paris in the epoch of the Paris Commune of 1871.

We must recall this workers' government, we must look back into the past and compare it with the Soviet power which was established on November 7 (October 25). Comparison of the previous and present dictatorship of the proletariat will show at once what a tremendous stride forward has been made by the international labour movement, and in what an incomparably more favourable situation is the Soviet power in Russia, in spite of the unprecedentedly complex conditions of war and devastation.

The Parisian workers who first created the Commune, which was the embryo of the Soviet power, held their power for two months and ten days and perished under the fire of the French cadets, Mensheviks, Right Socialist-Revolutionaries and Kaledinites. . . . The French workers were compelled to pay an unprecedentedly heavy price in victims for the first experiment of a workers' government, the aims and ideas of which were not known to the overwhelming majority of the peasants in France.

We are in a much better position because the Russian soldiers, workers and peasants have succeeded in creating an apparatus which informed the whole world of the forms of their struggle, namely, the Soviet government. This is the primary difference between the position of the Russian workers and peasants and of the power of the Paris proletariat. They had no apparatus, the country did not understand them, but we at once based ourselves on the power of the Soviets, and hence there was never any doubt for us that the Soviet power has the sympathy and the most enthusiastic and faithful sup-

* Excerpt from the Report of the Council of People's Commissars at the Third All Russian Congress of Soviets, January 24, 1918.—*Ed.*

port of the overwhelming majority of the masses, and that therefore the Soviet power is invincible.

XI

THE PARIS COMMUNE AND THE TASKS OF THE DEMOCRATIC DICTATORSHIP

Was the Commune a dictatorship of the proletariat?

Engels' preface to the third edition of Marx's *The Civil War in France* concludes with the following words:

Of late the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: dictatorship of the proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat.*

But then, not all dictatorships are alike. Perhaps it was a *real, pure* dictatorship of the proletariat in the sense that its composition and the nature of its practical tasks were purely Social-Democratic? Certainly not! The class-conscious proletariat (and only *more or less* class-conscious, at that), *i.e.*, the members of the International, were in a *minority*; the majority of the government consisted of representatives of petty-bourgeois democracy. One of its latest investigators (Gustave Jaekkh) states so most unequivocally. In the Central Committee of the National Guard, for instance, there were thirty-five members of whom only two were Socialists (*i.e.*, members of the International), but on the other hand, these two (Varlin and Avoine) had enormous influence among their colleagues in power. Lissagaray writes about the same committee: "Were its members well-known agitators? or Socialists? Not at all; not a single well-known name: petty-bourgeois shopkeepers, grocers, clerks. . . ." And yet Varlin and Avoine joined the Committee. Later on, Pindy, Austin and Jourdes joined this committee.

The *New Yorker Arbeiterzeitung*, the organ of the International, in its issue of July 18, 1874, wrote as follows:

The Commune was not the work of the International; these two were not identical, but the members of the International accepted the programme of

* In this quotation the German Social-Democratic Party had substituted "German philistine" for "Social-Democratic philistine" without Engels' consent. Lenin was not aware of this, since the change was not discovered until recently. See *Civil War in France*, p. 19.—Ed.

the Commune, at the same time greatly extending its original scope. They were also its most zealous, most reliable champions, for they understood its importance for the working class.

The General Council which, as is well known, was headed by Marx, approved these tactics of the Paris Federation of the International. In its Manifesto, it stated: "Wherever and in whatever form and under whatever conditions the class struggle is waged, it is natural for the members of our Association to stand in the front ranks." But our predecessors, the members of the International, did not wish to be merged with the Commune. All the time they defended *their* separate purely proletarian party organisation. Jaeckh writes:

The Federal Council of the International, through its representatives, first in the Central Committee, then in the Commune, succeeded in establishing its constant influence on the development of important questions.

A splendid proof of the independence of the proletarian organisation of that time, the representatives of which, however, took part in the government, may be supplied by the following invitation card:

A special meeting of the Federal Council of the International Workingmen's Association will be held on Saturday, May 20, at 1 P.M. The members of the Commune, who are also members of the International, are invited to be present. They will be asked to report on the position they have taken up in the Commune, and of the cause and nature of the differences that have arisen in its midst. Entrance by membership card only.

And here is another very interesting document, the decision of the above-mentioned special meeting:

The International Workingmen's Association, at its special meeting on May 20, passed the following resolution: "Having heard the report of its members, who are also members of the Commune, this meeting approves their position as being perfectly loyal, and resolves to urge them to continue to defend in the future the interests of the working class by all means in their power, and also strive to preserve the unity of the Commune in order to intensify the struggle against the Versailles government. Moreover, the meeting recommends that they insist on full publicity for the meetings of the Commune and the repeal of paragraph 3 of its Manifesto as being incompatible with the right of the people to control the actions of the executive, namely, the Committee of Public Welfare."

Six members of the Commune were present at this meeting, three excused themselves for being absent. On march 19 Lissagaray counted twenty-five representatives of the working class in the Com-

muné, but not all of them belonged to the International: the majority even then consisted of petty-bourgeois elements.

This is not the place to relate the history of the Commune and the role played in it by members of the International. We shall only state that Donville was a member of the Executive Commission; Varlin, Jourde, and Beslay, of the Finance Commission; Donville and Pindy, of the Military Commission; Assy and Chalain, of the Commission of Public Safety; Malon, Frankel, Theisz, Dupont and Avrail, of the Labour Commission. On April 16, new elections took place, and a few more members of the International were elected (among others, Marx's son-in-law, Longuet), but the Commune included also some of the avowed enemies of the International, such as, for instance, Vesimier. Towards the end of the Commune the finances were in charge of two very able members of the International: Jourde and Varlin.

Trade and labour were presided over by Frankel, the postal and telegraphic service, the mint and the direct taxes, were also in the charge of Socialists. Still, the majority of the most important ministries, as is remarked by Jaeckh, remained in the hands of the petty bourgeoisie.

Thus there can be no doubt that Engels, in calling the Commune a dictatorship of the proletariat, had in view only the participation, and, moreover, the *ideological leading* participation, of the representatives of the proletariat in the revolutionary government of Paris.

But perhaps the immediate object of the Commune was none the less a complete Socialist revolution? We can cherish no such illusions.

True, in the famous Manifesto of the General Council on the Commune, which was undoubtedly written by Marx, it is stated: "The Commune was to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule." *

But immediately afterwards the Manifesto adds:

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par decret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending, by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic

* *Civil War in France*, p. 43.—Ed.

processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.*

All the measures, all the social legislation of the Commune were of a practical, not a Utopian, character. The Commune tried to carry out what we now call "the minimum programme of Socialism." In order to recall to mind what precisely the Commune did in that direction, we shall quote the following extract from Engels' preface, already mentioned:

(The Paris Commune was elected on March 26 and proclaimed on the 28th.) The Central Committee of the National Guard, which up to then had carried on the government, handed in its resignation to the National Guard, after it had first decreed the abolition of the scandalous Paris "Morality Police." On the 30th the Commune abolished conscription and the standing army, and declared that the National Guard, in which all citizens capable of bearing arms were to be enrolled, was to be the sole armed force. They released the citizens from all payments of rent for dwelling houses from October, 1870, to April [1871], taking also into account amounts already paid in advance, and stopped all sales of articles pledged in the hands of the municipal pawnshops. On the same day the foreigners elected to the Commune were confirmed in office, because "the flag of the Commune is the flag of the World Republic."

On April 1 it was decided that the highest salary received by any employee of the Commune, and therefore also by its members themselves, might not exceed 6,000 francs. On the following day the Commune decreed the separation of the church from the state, and the abolition of all state payments for religious purposes as well as the transformation of all church property into national property; on April 8 this was followed up by a decree excluding from the schools all religious symbols, pictures, dogmas, prayers—in a word, "all that belongs to the sphere of the individual's conscience"—and this decree was gradually applied. . . . On the 6th the guillotine was brought out by the 137th battalion of the National Guard, and publicly burnt, amid great popular rejoicing. On the 12th the Commune decided that the Column of Victory on the Place Vendome, which had been cast from captured guns by Napoleon after the war of 1809, should be demolished, as the symbol of chauvinism and incitement to national hatreds. This decree was carried out on May 16. On April 16 the Commune ordered a statistical registration of factories which had been closed down by the manufacturers, and the working out of plans for the carrying on of these factories by workers formerly employed in them, who were to be organised in co-operative societies; and also plans for the organisation of these co-operatives in one great Union. On the 20th the Commune abolished night work for bakers, and also the workers' registration cards, which since the Second Empire had been run as a monopoly by nominees of the police—exploiters of the first rank; the issuing of these registration cards was transferred to the mayors of the twenty districts of Paris. On April 30 the Commune ordered the closing of the pawnshops, on the ground that they were a form of individual exploitation of the worker, and stood in contradiction with the right of the workers to their instruments of labour and credit. On

* *Ibid.*, p. 44.—*Ed.*

May 5 it ordered the demolition of the Chapel of Atonement, which had been built in expiation of the execution of Louis XVI.*

As is known, the Commune, partly owing to the mistakes committed by it, and its excessive generosity, did not succeed in repressing the reaction. The Communards perished. But, did they disgrace or compromise the cause of the proletariat, as is being croaked by Martynov with one eye on the possible future revolutionary government in Russia? Obviously not—for this is what Marx wrote about the Commune:

Workingmen's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them.**

It seems to us that this brief historical record is instructive. It teaches us, first of all, that the participation of representatives of the Socialist proletariat in a revolutionary government together with the petty-bourgeoisie is quite admissible in principle, and under certain conditions is simply imperative. It shows us, further, that the practical task which the Commune had to carry out was above all the realisation of a democratic, not of a Socialist, dictatorship, the realisation of our "minimum programme." Finally, it reminds us that in deriving lessons for ourselves from the Paris Commune, we must imitate, not its errors (they did not seize the Bank of France, they did not undertake an offensive against Versailles, they had no clear programme, etc.), but its practically successful measures, which indicate the correct path. It is not the term "Commune" that we must borrow from the great fighters of 1871, nor must we blindly repeat every one of their slogans. What we must do is to make a careful selection of these slogans referring to their programme and practice which correspond to the condition of things in Russia and which are summed up in the words: revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

Proletary, No. 8, July 17, 1905.

* *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.—*Ed.*

** *Ibid.*, p. 63.—*Ed.*

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