

The Bourgeois Revolution

By Georgi Plekhanov



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(Translated from the German by Henry Kuhn)

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Introduction

This essay was originally printed in *Die Neue Zeit* (a Socialist weekly published at Stuttgart, Germany, under the editorship of Karl Kautsky), Nos. 4 and 5, Vol. IX, 1890–1891. Originally it bore the title: “Wie die Bourgeoisie ihrer Revolution gedenkt.”¹

It is an excellent sketch of the French Revolution from the viewpoint of the material and economic conflicts between the contending classes. With justifiable scorn Georgi Plekhanov holds the great revolution as a mirror before the gaze of the present day bourgeoisie, and riddles the latter’s pretenses of “respectability” and “law and order.” He makes it clear that revolutions establish their own law and order, recognizing no code of jurisprudence but that which reflects the needs and purpose of the revolution. Incidentally, he reveals the modern proletariat in embryo as a factor in the bourgeois revolution, a factor, however, that served chiefly as a broom in the hands of the bourgeoisie with which to sweep out thoroughly the rubbish left by the collapsed feudal system.

To the reader not familiar with the various political factions a few words as to these may be in order. The Girondists, the Jacobins and the Montagnards reflected certain social and economic layers in society at that time. The Girondists represented the upper (though not uppermost) layers of the bourgeoisie — the well-to-do middle class. The Jacobins represented the petty bourgeoisie and the portion of the as yet unformed proletariat which was not absolutely on “the ragged edge.” The Montagnards (“the Mountain”) represented the vast number of propertiless proletarians who, however vaguely, sensed the fact that they had little or nothing in common with the other groups. Each group played its part on the stage until, following chaos and threatening social disintegration, there appeared the “man on horseback,” Napoleon Bonaparte, who at the psychologically right moment consolidated the revolution, definitely establishing the capitalist political State which was to prevail thenceforth, all surface changes notwithstanding.

For further reading the following books are recommended:

¹ [The present translation by Henry Kuhn was published in two installments in the *Weekly People*, July 31 and August 7, 1926.—Editor.]

The Bourgeois Revolution

The French Revolution, by E. Belfort Bax.

Crises in European History, by Gustav Bang.

The Sword of Honor, by Eugene Sue.

Few other books on the French Revolution are worth the attention of the busy working class reader, though the more studious will find Carlyle's dithyrambic work interesting and stimulating, and Kropotkin's *The Great Revolution* profitable despite its somewhat anarchistic bias.

ARNOLD PETERSEN

August 26, 1926

How the Bourgeoisie Remembers Its Own Revolution

A year ago [1889] there was celebrated in France, as well as in the whole civilized world, the one hundredth anniversary of that revolution which, quite justly, is called “the Great,” because it forms the initial point of a new historic period. Many benefits followed this event — for the entire civilized world generally and, more particularly, for the bourgeoisie, the French bourgeoisie first of all. This revolution put an end to the rule of the nobility and secured to the bourgeoisie front rank in all the departments of public life. All attempts by the Restoration to change back the status of things created by the revolution remained unsuccessful, the more so since the reactionaries did not even try to eliminate the most important, that is, the social consequences of the great revolution. No one even then could fail to see that, in this respect, nothing could be changed any more; that despite all the ever so liberal “indemnification” of the feudal nobility, its leading role in the life of society had come to an end forevermore. With the great revolution began the uncontested rule of the bourgeoisie.

Small wonder then that the bourgeoisie remembered this important event when it celebrated its centennial anniversary. Even some years prior to the celebration of the anniversary of the revolution, the bourgeois press had trumpeted in all possible keys about the coming great festivity. But let us observe a little more closely how the bourgeoisie remembers its revolution. How is this momentous event pictured in its mind?

Before us lies the book of one of the patented scientists of the French bourgeoisie, Paul Janet (*Centenaire de 1789, Histoire de la Revolution Francaise*, par Paul Janet, Paris) who is sometimes — he himself does not seem to object — counted among the philosophers. The circumstance that Paul Janet stands in some sort of relation, incomprehensible to us, to the science of philosophy, in this case comes in very handy to us, because a bourgeois philosopher, better than any one else, can enlighten us about the bourgeois philosophy of the great revolution. Let us therefore, with the aid of the aforesaid book, search for this philosophy.

REBELLION AND REVOLUTION IN ENGLAND

But first a brief preliminary observation. England passed through her

The Bourgeois Revolution

revolutionary storms in the 17th century, and there were then two revolutions: the first led, among other things, to the execution of Charles 1, while the second ended with an animated banquet and the rise of a new dynasty. But the English bourgeoisie, in the evaluation of these revolutions, manifests very divergent views: while the first, in its eyes, does not even deserve the name “revolution” and is simply referred to as “the great rebellion,” the second is given a more euphonious appellation; it is called “the glorious revolution.” The secret of this differentiation in the evaluation of the two revolutions has already been revealed by Augustin Thierry in his theses about the English revolutions.

In the first revolution, the people played an important role, while in the second the people participated hardly at all. When, however, a people mounts the stage of history and begins to decide the destinies of its country according to its power and best understanding, then the higher classes (in this case the bourgeoisie) get out of humor. Because the people is always “raw” and, if the revolutionary devil begins to pervade it, also becomes “coarse,” the higher classes have a way of always insisting upon politeness and gentle manners — at least they demand these of the people. This is the reason why the higher classes are always inclined to put upon revolutionary movements, if prominently participated in by the people, the stamp of “rebellions.”

REVOLUTION AND REBELLION IN FRANCE

The history of France is particularly rich in “great rebellions” as well as in “glorious revolutions.” Only in France, so far as the historic sequence of events is concerned, matters happened in a manner opposite to the one that prevailed in the England of the 17th century. In England, for instance, “the great rebellion” preceded “the glorious revolution,” while in France it the glorious revolutions” usually had to give way to “the great rebellions.” This fact repeated itself in the entire course of the 8th century.

Upon the heels of “the glorious revolution” of 1830 in Paris followed the rather sizable “great rebellion” of the weavers in Lyon, which gave the whole bourgeoisie such a great fright; upon “the glorious revolution” of February, 1848, glorified even by Lamartine, followed “the great June rebellion,” which prompted the bourgeoisie to seek refuge in the arms of a military dictatorship; and upon the “most glorious”

The Bourgeois Revolution

September revolution of 1870 followed, finally, in March of the subsequent year, the “greatest of all French rebellions.” The bourgeoisie now claims that the “great rebellions” have always injured the cause of “the glorious revolutions.” We cannot here consider the correctness of this claim in its application to the 19th century, but must yield the floor to the bourgeois philosophers about the events of the 8th century.

Toward the end of that century there took place in France a “great rebellion” and a “glorious revolution” of 1789 and “the great rebellion” which played its part largely in 1793. After what has already been said, the reader will now be able to predict with certainty what the bourgeois philosopher, Paul Janet, thinks of those revolutionary movements.

JANET ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

In the final chapter of his book, Janet says: “In order to arrive at an objective evaluation of the French Revolution, one must in regard to it differentiate three things: the purpose, the means and the results obtained. The purpose of the revolution — to gain civic equality and political freedom — was the most sublime, the most legitimate a people has ever striven to attain.” But the means were bad: “only too frequently they were forcible, terrible.”

So far as results are concerned, civic equality, according to Janet, has been fully attained and leaves nothing to be wished for; “political freedom,” however, “obtains in France since the revolution only sporadically, and to this day is more or less endangered.” It will be secure only when the French people shall dispense with all forcible, unlawful methods and shall learn once for all to look upon their revolution as finished, and, finally, when the revolution itself has passed into the historic past as irrevocably as has already been the case with the revolutions in England and in the United States. “The attainments of the revolution should be held fast, but there must be renunciation of the revolutionary spirit and of forcible and unlawful means.”

Very good. But let us not forget that revolutionary means had been employed since 1789, that is, not only at the time of “the great rebellion,” but also during “the glorious revolution.” Is “the glorious revolution” to be condemned by Paul Janet

The Bourgeois Revolution

because of its forcible means? But no — on the contrary. In his description, the acts of force practiced during “the glorious revolution” appear fully justified, highly useful and thoroughly efficacious. He speaks very commendingly of the popular insurrections directed against royalty, aye, he seeks to prove that, without these uprisings, the government would have smothered all the reforms of the national assembly in embryo, and that the great aims of the revolution would then have remained unattainable.

The storming of the Bastille he hails as “the first victorious appearance of the people of Paris on the revolutionary stage”; and in the same approving manner he expresses himself about the second appearance of the same people on the same stage, about the events of October 5 and 6, and also about the storming of the Tuileries. Arrived there, *nota bene*, after Janet has proved the inevitable necessity of eliminating a king who was negotiating with the enemy at the very outset of the war, he adds in a melancholy vein: “France became gradually accustomed to solving political questions with such sorry means.” But he does not tell us with what other means the given and unpostponable task might have been accomplished.

Only after the storming of the Tuileries, that is, after this last necessary uprising, according to Janet, do the people of Paris, under the pen of our historian, gradually become transformed into a mob governed by the lowest passions. Now it becomes clear: a “rebellion” is quite acceptable, only one must not permit oneself to be led astray by low passions — does the bourgeois historian want to be understood in that sense? Not at all. We are at once informed that now, “the glorious revolution” being over, all insurrections lack both sense and justification. Now we have it at last. The king has fallen, the nobility has been destroyed, the bourgeoisie has been lifted on the shield — what more does the heart wish for? Now, be quiet, after you have on this earth done all that belongs to the earth. Who, unless it be the common mob, would think of insurrection ?

PROLETARIAN REVOLUTIONARIES CONDEMNED

Next! As could have been expected, Paul Janet extends his sympathy to all the parties that successively stood at the head of the movement, except the party of the Mountain. Upon the latter he pours the whole vial of his wrath; for this party he reserves all his strong language and epithets.

The Bourgeois Revolution

Between these miscreants and the “manly, generous Gironde,” Janet draws this interesting parallel: “The ones, like the others, wanted the republic. . . .” But while “the Girondists aimed at a free, lawful, mild republic, the Montagnards strove for a despotic, cruel republic. Without attention to liberty, the latter prized only equality. True, both parties favored the sovereignty of the people, but with the difference that the Girondists righteously wanted to include among ‘the people’ all the citizens, while for the Montagnards, in keeping with the perversity still current today, the people consisted only of members of the working class, of persons living by their own labor. Consequently, according to the Montagnards, to rule should be the prerogative of this class alone.”

DIFFERING VIEWS ON “THE PEOPLE”

The political program of the Girondists, therefore, differed essentially from that of the Montagnards. Whence this difference? Paul Janet himself gives us sufficient information about that. The difference proceeded from the fact that the Mountain party, as we have seen, conceived of the mutual relations of the then existing social classes in a way different from that of the Gironde. The latter “would have it understood that the people included all the citizens,” while the former considered only the working class as “the people”; the other classes, according to the Montagnards, were no part of “the people,” because the interests of these classes were contrary to those of the working class.

And, strictly speaking, the Girondists themselves did not include in “the people” all the citizens, i.e., the entire French nation of the time, but only the Third Estate. Did they include in “the people” the aristocracy and the higher clergy? Not at all. Did not Abbe Sieyes himself, who never went so far as the Girondists, in his brochure “*Qu’est-ce que le tiers-etat?*” [“What is the Third Estate?”] set “the people,” that is, the Third Estate, without compunction against the small aggregation of the privileged, i.e., the nobility and the higher clergy?

The Girondists, who fought the “privileged” far more decisively, no doubt agree with Sieyes about that. If, for all that, their conception of “the people” was so different from that of the Montagnards, this may be explained only by the fact that the Mountain party had gone one step further, in that it classed as “privileges” also such social institutions as appeared to the Girondists sacrosanct and necessary. It

The Bourgeois Revolution

was a contested question which classes really should be regarded as “privileged.” But that shows — and Paul Janet’s explanations leave room for no other interpretation — that according to the Montagnards all persons and classes that live by “labor,” but the labor of others and not their own, belong in the category of the “privileged.”

We must now seek to clear up the point of why the defenders of the cause of the working class inclined toward a “despotic and cruel” republic. Why did they not rather appear as adherents of a “lawful, free and mild” republic? This circumstance must be traced back to two causes, one external, the other internal. Let us turn, first, to the external cause, that is, to the relations then existing between revolutionary France and the other European States.

FRANCE THREATENED FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

The condition of France, at the time the Mountain party seized power, was most desperate, aye, it was hopeless. Janet says: “Enemy troops invaded French territory from four sides: from the north, the English and Austrians; in Alsatia, the Prussians; in the Dauphine, proceeding as far as the city of Lyon, the Piedmontese; and in Roussillon, the Spaniards. And all this at a time when civil war raged on four sides: in Normandy, in the Vendee, in Lyon and in Toulon.” Aside from these open foes there were the secret adherents of the old regime scattered all over France, who were ready surreptitiously to aid the enemy.

The government, which had taken up the struggle against these innumerable inner and outer foes, had neither money nor sufficient troops — it could count on nothing but a boundless energy, the active support of the revolutionary elements of the country, and the colossal courage to shrink from no measure, however arbitrary, illegal or ruthless, so long as it was necessary for the defense of the country.

DESPERATE SITUATION CALLED FOR DESPERATE MEASURES

After the Montagnards had called to arms the entire French youth, without being able to supply the newly formed armies even partially with arms and food out of the slender means flowing to them from taxation, they resorted to requisitions, confiscations, forced loans, decreed rates of exchange for the *assignats* — in short and in fine, they forced upon the scared possessing classes money sacrifices, all in

The Bourgeois Revolution

the interest of an imperiled country for which the people were sacrificing blood.

These forcible measures were absolutely necessary if France were to be saved. There was no depending upon voluntary money contributions — Janet himself admits that. The iron determination and energy of the government were also necessary to spur to the limit of effort all the fresh forces of France — Janet admits that, too. But he, Paul Janet, would rather have seen the dictatorship in the hands of the “noble and magnanimous Gironde” than in those of the abominable Montagnards. Had the Girondists emerged victorious from the struggle with the Mountain, then, according to the author, “they, too, would have been placed in the same position as was the case with the Montagnards; they too would have been forced to quell the royalist insurrections, beat down the opposition party, repel the invasions, and it may be doubted whether, without the dictatorship, they would have been able to cope with all these evils. But their dictatorship would have been less bloodthirsty and would have given more scope to law and liberty.”

But upon which layers of the population would the gentle Girondists have been able to lean? When, after their defeat in Paris, they sought help in the provinces, they found there only the passive help of — to use Janet’s expression — “the dilatory and lukewarm” middle class and the malignant support of the royalists, which they themselves had to reject. And could they reckon with a more effective support on the part of their adherents in the struggle with the foreign foes? The Gironde never did and never would find favor with the lowest, the most revolutionary layer of the population, least of all in Paris. That part of the population evidently entertained views about “the people” and its interests quite different from those of the Gironde, so vastly admired by Janet because of its maon.animity.

It was just this circumstance which brought about the fall of the Gironde and the victory of the Mountain. The former was almost exclusively confined to the forces of “the dilatory and lukewarm middle class.” Could anything substantial be accomplished with such allies? No, the moderate and liberal Gironde never would have been able to rescue France from the critical condition in which she found herself enmeshed in 1793.

The Bourgeois Revolution

It was the external situation of France that made the dictatorship, the one of the Montagnards, a necessity. And once a dictatorship was needed, all the talk about a “free, lawful and mild” republic became simply ridiculous. The revolutionary dictatorship necessarily had to be as rigid and as ruthless as the external foes who had called it into being; just like the manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick, and like the threats of a reactionary Europe against France.

Let us now proceed to the internal causes which made it impossible for the Montagnards to find a “free, lawful and mild” republic to their taste. Here we must first of all direct the attention of the reader to the famous rights of man and of the citizen. Among these we find many rights which conform to the interests of the lowest class of the population; but we also find among them one toward which this class, from the very outset, was compelled to maintain a peculiar and contradictory attitude. We refer to the right of property.

THE PROLETARIAT AND “PROPERTY RIGHTS”

How would, for instance, a Paris “*sansculotte*” (literally a man without pants [*culottes*], a nickname resembling the English word “ragamuffin”) conceive of this right, when his very name shows that he himself is bare of all property? How could he proceed to exercise this wonderful right conceded to him? There was no lack of examples lying near to his hand. The bourgeoisie had taken unto itself many a piece of aristocratic and Church property — why should he not now do the same with bourgeois property?

The *sansculotte* at that time had to pass through many hard, albeit many merry days. Often he had to endure hunger in the most literal sense of the term, and hunger, as is well known, is a bad counselor. Thereupon our has-nothing began to exhibit a great nonchalance toward bourgeois property. The bourgeoisie resisted that as well as it knew how.

How this social struggle was bound to affect the political life is obvious. The “mob” gathered in a party of its own and raised the Montagnards upon the shield. The “mob” of that day knew how to fight and soon obtained control. And then there was obviously nothing left for it to do but to use the political power just attained to call into being social institutions under which the right to property would no longer

The Bourgeois Revolution

sound like bitter mockery. But for the proletariat of that day, as well as for the modern proletariat, this was possible only under one condition — the total abolition of private property in the means of production and the social organization of production.

But the latter, under the conditions then prevailing, was simply unthinkable for two closely connected reasons: The proletariat of that day did not possess the requisite capacity, nor did the means of production of that day meet even the elementary requirements for socialization. Therefore, neither the proletariat of the time nor its most advanced representatives could even conceive of the idea. It is true that in pre-revolutionary French literature we find a few Communist Utopias, but these, for the reasons stated, could find neither currency nor recognition.

REASONS BEHIND TERRORISTIC TACTICS

Under these circumstances, what was left for the momentarily victorious “mob” to do? If socialization of the means of production was not to be thought of, then private property therein necessarily must continue, and the indigent populace was limited to casual and forcible encroachments upon its realm. And because of such encroachments the “mob” is being blamed by all bourgeois historians to this very day. Forcible encroachments upon the realm of private property made a “lawful” republic an impossibility, because the law was framed to protect just that private property.

No more could the republic be “mild,” because the possessing classes naturally did not tolerate, with their hands in their laps, such interference with their property, but, on the contrary, eagerly sought for an opportunity to put an end to such nonchalant “mob rule.” The struggle between the proletariat of that day and the possessing classes, fatedly and inevitably, had to be fought with terroristic weapons. By means of terror alone, in a condition replete with insoluble economic contradictions, could the proletariat then maintain its rule. Had the proletariat attained a higher stage of development and, on the other hand, had economic conditions been sufficiently advanced to secure its welfare, then there would have been no need for it to resort to measures of terror.

The Bourgeois Revolution

REASONS FOR BOURGEOIS “LAWFULNESS”

Let us have a look at the bourgeoisie, praised so highly by the historians because of its penchant for “lawfulness.” By no means did it leave its enemies in peace, nor in critical moments did it shrink from decisive measures; but its cause stood then upon such firm footing that it had no need to fear an opponent. Come to power during its “glorious” revolution, the bourgeoisie introduced the social order suited to its needs, and did it with such thoroughness that even the most stubborn reactionists could thereafter scarcely think of abolishing it. If the latter had essayed an attempt in that direction, they would soon have become convinced of its utter futility.

Under such circumstances it was easy for the bourgeoisie to talk about “lawfulness”; when your cause has won and your enemies are hopelessly defeated, then the order of things most suitable to your interests becomes “lawful” — would you then still resort to unlawful means? You are certain that henceforth your privileges will be amply protected by law. The bourgeoisie strove for lawfulness in politics, because historic evolution had fully secured its triumph in economics.

In its place, the proletariat could not and would not have acted otherwise. That the spokesmen of the “mob,” the Montagnards, no less than the Girondists, held on high the principle of liberty and law, is proved by the constitution they formulated, the freest ever written in France. The constitution introduced direct legislation by representatives of the people and limited the powers of the executive to a minimum. However, because of the entire external and internal conditions of France, it became impossible for the Montagnards to apply the constitution.

Generally speaking, it may be regarded as a rule permitting no exceptions, that a given social class or layer of the population, having come to power, will the more readily resort to measures of terror if its chances to retain power are small. In the 19th century, it had to become clear to the bourgeoisie that its rule over the proletariat was becoming more shaky every day and, in consequence, it now strives more and more for terroristic subjection of the same. Against the June insurgents it proceeded more ferociously than in 1831 against the weavers of Lyon; and in the suppression of the Communards of 1871 it acted far more atrociously than in June, 1848.

The Bourgeois Revolution

The terror practiced by the bourgeoisie against the proletariat overshadows by far the atrocities of the Jacobins which, by the way, have been greatly exaggerated by the reactionaries. Robespierre, when compared with Thiers, looks like a veritable angel, and Marat, put side by side with the bourgeois press cossacks of the bloody May week, appears like a mild, benevolent being. He who looks deeper into the French history of our century must fully agree with the Russian writer, Herzen, when, after the June days, he said that there was no more ferocious government, and there could not be a more ferocious one, than that of the shopkeeper running amuck.

BOURGEOISIE RESPONSIBLE FOR FRENCH REACTION

It was just this shopkeeper ferocity which made impossible a permanent consolidation of political freedom in France. The bourgeoisie must be held solely responsible for the reactionary lapses that typify the history of France in the 19th century. Even during the time of the Restoration the victory of the reactionaries was made much easier because the bourgeoisie, mortally afraid of the workers, for a long time prevented their entrance upon the struggle.

And now, for the sake of tranquilizing the bourgeois writers, who shudder at the mere thought of the Jacobin rule of terror, we shall present a truth which to us seems irrefutable. The victory of the working class, now impending in all civilized countries, is certain not to be marred by cruelty, because the victory of the cause of labor is made secure by the course of history to such an extent that no terror will be needed. Of course, the bourgeois reactionists will be well advised if they abstain from trying to trip up a victorious proletariat, and are judicious enough not to imitate the royalist conspirators of the great revolution. "*A la guerre comme a la guerre*" (in war act as in war, i.e., as war makes necessary) is a true saying, and in the heat of the fight it might go hard with the plotters. But, we repeat, the entire course of historic evolution guarantees the success of the proletariat.

CONDITIONS FAVORING SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

On the occasion of the celebration of the centennial anniversary of the great revolution, the French bourgeoisie has almost purposely proceeded to demonstrate to the proletariat *ad oculos* (to the eyes) the economic possibility and necessity of a social transformation. The world exhibition gave it an excellent demonstration of

The Bourgeois Revolution

the unprecedented development of the means of production in all civilized countries, which has outwinged the boldest fantasies of the Utopians of the preceding century. In keeping therewith, the emancipation of the proletariat, instead of the noble dream it was at the time of Babeuf, has become an historic necessity.

The exhibition has shown, furthermore, that the modern development of the means of production, under the anarchic conditions governing production, must logically and necessarily lead to industrial crises ever more destructive to world economy. In order to escape the dangerous consequences of these crises, nothing is left for the European proletariat but to lay the foundation stone for the planful organization of social production which, for the *sansculottes* of the past century, was a thing impossible. Not only do the modern production forces make possible such an organization, but they tend in that direction. Without such an organization the full utilization of these forces is not to be thought of.

In the modern mechanical workshop production has already taken on a social character; all that is now needed is to bring into harmony the different productive functions in these workshops and, in keeping therewith, transform the ownership of the product, i.e., change it from private to social ownership. To attain this aim will be the task of the European proletariat. The International Socialist Congress, meeting in July, 1889, did not fail to remind the proletariat of this great task.

And now back to our philosopher, Paul Janet, of whom we have lost sight for a while. Just now he presents himself with the assertion that one “must remain true to the spirit of the revolution, but must reject the revolutionary spirit.” In other words, mankind must be satisfied with the results of the great revolution attained by the bourgeoisie, but must not take another step forward.

NEED FOR CLASSCONSCIOUSNESS AMONG WORKERS

But we hold that the very opposite is true. The aims of the bourgeoisie cannot possibly be those of the working class, and the results attained by the former cannot satisfy the latter. And, therefore, the workers go one step further when they reject the bourgeois spirit of the great revolution, but remain true to the revolutionary spirit. To remain true to that means to struggle ceaselessly and fearlessly for a better future, to struggle implacably against all that is old and obsolete.

The Bourgeois Revolution

The bourgeoisie would fain instill into the workers' minds the idea that modern society knows no class divisions because the foundation of the modern state is the equality of all before the law. But this formal equality can console the workers as little as, under the old regime, the proclaimed equality of all before God satisfied the bourgeoisie; not content with this fantastic equality, the bourgeoisie did not rest until it had come into possession of all possible mundane goods. Small wonder then that the proletariat will not be content with juristic fictions, knowing full well that economic inequality must in real life render illusory all other equality.

In much the same manner the bourgeoisie would make the workers believe that, today, there is nothing more to be done in the realm of economy and that, therefore, one must only indulge in the game of "pure" politics. But "pure politics" means for the workers nothing but kite-tail politics in the service of the bourgeois parties, and the bourgeoisie is fully aware of the significance of this brand of "pure politics," at least such was the case when it was engaged in the struggle with the nobility and clergy.

In the brochure *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Eta?* ["What Is the Third Estate?"] once before mentioned, which must be regarded as the program of the bourgeoisie of 1789, the sophistries of the "pure politicians," then to be found in the two upper estates, were refuted with much talent. Abbe Sieyes insisted that the nation, as a matter of fact, was divided into two camps: in the one, the privileged; in the other, the oppressed; and that this actual division must be reflected in politics. It was natural and understandable that the privileged should seek to preserve their interests by means of political measures; but the oppressed also must not neglect the safeguarding of their interests, and should appear as a unified party in the newly opened political arena.

To this very day this lesson has not suffered in either sense or importance. Conditions have changed only in so far as the bourgeoisie today occupies a privileged position. And what else is now left for the workers but to close their ranks in a separate party of the oppressed, standing in opposition to the privileged bourgeoisie?

The Bourgeois Revolution

CONFUSED IDEAS ON THE CLASS STRUGGLE

At the end of the 18th century, at the time of “the great rebellion” of the French “mob,” the class antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat was present only in embryo. For that reason the classconsciousness of the proletarians had to be rather unclear. When, in the course of this treatise, we tried to explain the argumentation of Paul Janet relative to the Jacobin conceptions of “the people,” we ascribed to them an attitude antagonistic to all classes living on the labor of others. That was really the only possible meaning of the argument of the author.

However, this is correct only in so far as the Montagnards, in reality and instinctively, always strove to defend the interests of the poorest class of the population. This was so because in their conception there was present a feature which, in the course of further evolution, would have taken on a thoroughly bourgeois character. This feature shows up plainly in the speeches of Robespierre. And through it is to be explained the struggle of the Jacobins against the Hebertists, and in general their struggle against the so-called agrarian legislation.

But these “agrarian laws,” as their adherents pictured them to themselves, contained nothing that was of a Communist character. Private property, and the petty bourgeois purposes closely connected therewith, forced themselves into the programs of even the most extreme revolutionists of the time. Babeuf alone took a different stand; he appeared in the last act of the great tragedy, when the strength of the proletariat had already been wholly exhausted in the preceding struggles. The party of the Mountain failed just because of that innermost contradiction between its petty bourgeois conceptions and its endeavor to be a representative of proletarian interests.

To the present-day representatives of the working class, these contradictions are foreign, because modern, scientific Socialism is nothing but the theoretic expression of the unbridgeable antagonism of interests between bourgeoisie and proletariat. The impending victory of the working class under the banner of Socialism is going to be far more glorious than all the “glorious” revolutions of the bourgeoisie put together.

Force, naked force, based upon bayonets and cannon, becomes more and more

The Bourgeois Revolution

the only support of bourgeois rule. And candid “theoreticians” make their appearance, who admit without further ado that the prevailing bourgeois order cannot be justified theoretically, and does not require such justification — because the bourgeoisie controls the public powers. Thus, for instance, speaks an Austrian professor, Gumplowicz, in his book *The Political State and Socialism*.

When the representatives of the nobility and clergy, in one of the first sessions of the estates, fell back upon the foundation of their privileges — the historic right of conquest — the theoretician of the bourgeoisie, Abbe Sieyes, proudly replied: “*Rien que cela, messieurs? Nous serons conquerants a notre tour!*” — which means, “Nothing but that, gentlemen? Well, we too shall be conquerors in our turn!”

And the working class must say just that to the advocates of bourgeois force.

The
Bourgeoisie, Anarchism and Socialism

By
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[This “essay” constitutes the concluding chapter of Plekhanov’s brilliant work, *Anarchism and Socialism*, translated by Karl Marx’s gifted daughter. It seems fitting to add it to Plekhanov’s work, *The Bourgeois Revolution*, as a closing commentary on the protagonists and practitioners of the various shades of anarchism, now generally referred to as the anarcho-bourgeois, the anarcho-syndicalist and the anarcho-communist or Stalinist. — A.P.]

The “father of anarchy,” the “immortal” Proudhon, bitterly mocked at those people for whom the revolution consisted of acts of violence, the exchange of blows, the shedding of blood. The descendants of the “father,” the modern anarchists, understand by revolution only this brutally childish method. Everything that is not violence is a betrayal of the cause, a foul compromise with “authority.”¹ The scared bourgeoisie does not know what to do against them. In the domain of theory they are absolutely impotent with regard to the anarchists, who are their own *enfants terribles*.² The bourgeoisie was the first to propagate the theory of *laissez faire*,³ of disheveled individualism. Their most eminent philosopher of today, Herbert Spencer, is nothing but a conservative anarchist. The “companions” are active and zealous persons, who carry the bourgeois reasoning to its logical conclusion.

The magistrates of the French bourgeois Republic have condemned Grave⁴ to prison, and his book, *La Société Mourante et l’Anarchie*, to destruction. The bourgeois men of letters declare this puerile book a profound work, and its author a man of rare intellect.

And not only has the bourgeoisie⁵ no theoretical weapons with which to combat

¹ It is true that men like Reclus, do not always approve of such notions of the revolution. But again we ask, what is left of the anarchist when once he rejects the “propaganda of the deed”? A sentimental, visionary bourgeois — nothing more.

² Children who let out awkward facts or whose inopportune remarks cause embarrassment.

³ Literally, let do, or let alone. Noninterference by the capitalist government in capitalist business affairs.

⁴ Jean Grave, French anarchist.

⁵ In order to obtain some idea of the weakness of the bourgeois [capitalist] theorists and politicians in their struggle against the anarchists, it suffices to read the articles of C. Lombroso and A. Berard in the *Revue des Revues*, February 15, 1894, or the article of J. Bourdeau, in the *Revue de Paris*, March 15, 1894. The latter can appeal only to “human nature,” which, he thinks, “will not be changed through the pamphlets of Kropotkin and the bombs of Ravachol.”

The Bourgeoisie, Anarchism and Socialism

the anarchists; it sees its young folk enamored of the anarchist doctrine. In this society, satiated and rotten to the marrow of its bones, where all faiths are long since dead, where all sincere opinions appear ridiculous, in this *monde ou l'on s'ennui*,⁶ where after having exhausted all forms of enjoyment they no longer know in what new fancy, in what fresh excess to seek novel sensations, there are people who lend a willing ear to the song of the anarchist siren. Among the Paris “companions” there are already not a few men quite *comme il faut*,⁷ men about town who, as the French writer, Raoul Allier, says, wear nothing less than patent leather shoes and put a green carnation in their buttonholes before they go to meetings. Decadent writers and artists are converted to anarchism and propagate its theories in reviews like the *Mercure de France*, *La Plume*, etc. And this is comprehensible enough. One might wonder indeed if anarchism, an essentially bourgeois doctrine, had not found adepts among the French bourgeoisie, the most blasé of all bourgeoisies.

By taking possession of the anarchist doctrine, the decadent, *fin-de-siècle*⁸ writers restore to it its true character of bourgeois individualism. If Kropotkin and Reclus speak in the name of the worker, oppressed by the capitalist, *La Plume* and the *Mercure de France*, speak in the name of the *individual* who is seeking to shake off all the trammels of society in order that he may at last do freely what he “wants” to. Thus anarchism comes back to its starting point. Stirner said: “Nothing for me goes beyond myself.” Laurent Tailhade says: “What matters the death of vague human beings, if thereby the individual affirms himself.”

The bourgeoisie no longer knows where to turn. “I who have fought so much for Posivism,” moans, Emil Zola, “well, yes! after thirty years of this struggle, I feel my convictions are shaken. Religious faith would have prevented such theories from being propagated; but has it not almost disappeared today? Who will give us a new ideal?”

Alas, gentlemen, there is no ideal for walking corpses such as you! You will try everything. You will become Buddhists, Druids, Sirs, Chaldeans, Occultists, Magi,

⁶ A world in which everyone is bored.

⁷ In proper form.

⁸ Up-to-date.

The Bourgeoisie, Anarchism and Socialism

Theosophists, or Anarchists, whichever you prefer — and yet you will remain what you are now — beings without faith or principle, bags, emptied by history. The ideal of the bourgeois has lived.

For ourselves, Socialists, we have nothing to fear from the anarchist propaganda. The child of the bourgeoisie, anarchism, will never have any serious influence upon the proletariat. If among the anarchists there are workmen who sincerely desire the good of their class, and who sacrifice themselves to what they believe to be the good cause, it is only thanks to a misunderstanding that they find themselves in this camp. They only know the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat under the form which the anarchists are trying to give it. When more enlightened they will come to us.

Here is an example to prove this. During the trial of the anarchists at Lyons in 1883, the workingman Desgranges related how he had become an anarchist, he who had formerly taken part in the political movement, and had even been elected a municipal councilor at Villefranche in November, 1879 “In 1881, in the month of September, when the dyers’ strike broke out at Villefranche, I was elected secretary of the strike committee, and it was during this memorable event . . . that I became convinced of the necessity of suppressing authority, for authority spells despotism. During this strike, when the employers refused to discuss the matter with the workers, what did the prefectural and communal administrations do to settle the dispute? Fifty gendarmes, with sword in hand, were told off to settle the question. That is what is called the pacific means employed by governments. It was then, at the end of this strike, that some workingmen, myself among the number, understood the necessity of seriously studying economic questions, and, in order to do so, we agreed to meet in the evening to study together.”⁹ It is hardly necessary to add that this group became anarchist.

That is how the trick is done. A workingman, active and intelligent, supports the program of one or the other bourgeois party. The bourgeois talk about the well-being of the people, the workers, but betray them on the first opportunity. The workingman who has believed in the sincerity of these persons is indignant, wants

⁹ See report of the anarchist trial before the Correctional Police and the Court of Appeal of Lyons; Lyons, 1883, pp. 90–91.

The Bourgeoisie, Anarchism and Socialism

to separate from them and decides to study seriously “economic questions.” An anarchist comes along, and reminding him of the treachery of the bourgeois, and the sabers of the gendarmes, assures him that the political struggle is nothing but bourgeois nonsense, and that in order to emancipate the workers political action must be given up, making the destruction of the State the final aim. The workingman who was only beginning to study the situation thinks the “companion” is right, and so he becomes a convinced and devoted anarchist! What would happen, if pursuing his studies of the social question further, he had understood that the “companion” was a pretentious ignoramus, that he talked twaddle, that his “ideal” is a delusion and a snare, that outside bourgeois politics there is, opposed to these, the political action of the proletariat, which will put an end to the very existence of capitalist society? He would have become a Socialist. Thus the more widely our ideas become known among the working classes, and they are thus becoming more and more widely known, the less will proletarians be inclined to follow the anarchist. Anarchism, with the exception of its “learned” housebreakers, will more and more transform itself into a kind of bourgeois sport, for the purpose of providing sensations for “individuals” who have indulged too freely in the pleasures of the world, the flesh and the devil.

And when the proletariat are masters of the situation, they will need only to look at the “companions,” and even the “finest” of them will be silenced; they will have only to breathe to disperse all the anarchist dust to the winds of heaven.

The End