

Programme Communiste - The Commune was great because of what it was forced to be, not because of what its creators wanted it to be

In a way, we are very happy to note that, apart from the two events we know about, the commentators and masters of ceremonies of public opinion have almost muted the celebration of the centenary of the Commune. This saved us from witnessing once again the hypocritical comedy of the renegades who are the heirs of the Communards' executioners and their accomplices, from Thiers to Louis Blanc, that is to say, from seeing them unanimously pity and eventually exalt the martyrs of 1871 as victims, as defeated, precisely in the name of the thieves who were the cause of their crushing defeat.

It should not be believed that this half-silence is due to the explosive character of the history of the Commune or to the intrinsic difficulty of concealing with Kautsky's sleight of hand the brilliant analysis that Karl Marx gave in "The Civil War in France". In reality, it is attributable to the prostration of the proletariat and its total abandonment of the most elementary class watchwords, a situation which saves today's opportunism the trouble of artificially distorting the traditions and collective memories of the working class by "creatively developing" the original revolutionary theses, i.e. by transforming them into harmless maximalist-centrist drivel or reformist advocacy. For the moment (on the scale of history, it is really only a moment) the proletariat is deaf to what the Commune represented in the tradition of revolutionary struggle, deaf to the programmatic principles confirmed by this experience: the very term "dictatorship of the proletariat" being currently unintelligible to it, the renegades do not need to orchestrate a great campaign to demonstrate that this dictatorship and its historical manifestations will result from the organic development of democracy, from the parliamentary to the council form, or from the representative to the direct form, as the "extremist" petty-bourgeois, vermin brandishing the flag of spontaneism or workerism for the occasion, always dream of.

Of course, in these "extremist" petty-bourgeois circles shaken by the first foreboding shivers of a world-wide economic crisis, the various immediatist and anarchist groupuscules which constitute what is called "leftism" clearly present these two deviations and in this they continue a deep-rooted tradition of classic petty-bourgeois "contestation" which constituted one of the worst weaknesses of the communard movement - a weakness from which the Commune died; It is precisely for this reason that this "contestation" now claims - as it has always claimed - to embody the tradition of the Commune, to be the repository of its historical mission and to express its full meaning. A good reason indeed!

We conform to Marx's examination, which the Bolsheviks made entirely their own. In other words, for us, the true history of the Commune is not to be found in Lissagaray, nor in any other memoirist or later historian, but in the Address of the First International on "The Civil War in France", as well as in Lenin's "The State and the Revolution" and "The Renegade Kautsky", and in Trotsky's "Terrorism and Communism" and "The Lessons of the Paris Commune". Therefore, these deformations interest us only insofar as they will necessarily reappear during the foreseeable crisis of the world economy and the resumption of the class struggle that will be the consequence (but a consequence that is by no means mechanical) and which, in a more or less long term, will see the proletarian vanguard polarising around the International Communist Party; above all, they interest us only insofar as they constitute the reverse side of this "lesson of the counterrevolution" that Marxism drew once and for all from this experience of defeat that was the Commune, along with so many other experiences, all of them of defeat until today.

Marxism is an experimental science, not an empty, contingent, agnostic empiricism. As such, it studied the counterrevolutions as particular cases of experimentation "in vivo" (the bloody weeks of May 1871 in Paris and January 1919 in Berlin) of the process of constitution of the proletariat as a ruling class. To

present the question in a simple but not simplistic way, we have to remember that we can know the function of an organ either by observing it at work (and this is the case of the commune-state, the "Gemeinwesen" sketched out in Paris in the spring of 1871) or, even more often, by considering the effects of the absence of this organ. In the Commune, precisely, the catastrophic consequences of the absence of party and party dictatorship, not only for the constitution of the proletariat as a dominant class, but even simply for its action as a class, appear with striking evidence. Without a doubt, this is the crux of all our observations on the Commune, the focal point, for us miserable "dogmatists" and "Talmudists", of the inversion of praxis, i.e. of revolutionary action as such, the touchstone of the whole materialist-dialectical conception that Marxism has of history and therefore also the stumbling block to all kinds of opportunist counterfeits of history. In other words, it is the central point from which the whole range of possible tactical positions are deduced. It is therefore useless to insist on the fact that by putting the central question in its rightful place, we find ourselves in the company of Lenin and Trotsky, while those who prefer to draw other conclusions from the Commune can choose, if they do not openly claim to be followers of Thiers, between Mazzini and Bakunin.

Three Petty-Bourgeois Interpretations of the Commune

Far be it from us to make an abbreviated bibliography of the question: what we want to do is to underline some aspects that will contribute to highlighting the conclusions, drawn by Marx himself from the experience of the Commune, aspects that have escaped - and for good reason - the attention of the prostitute writers who would like to pass themselves off as the vestals of "impartial" historiography. So, without falling into quotations and bookish references, we will distinguish the three fundamental interpretations that historians have given of the Commune, or rather the three major attitudes they have taken towards it.

In spite of formal oppositions, each of these great attitudes presents points of contact with the other two, so much so that currents of different ideologies, though all petty bourgeois, have been able to agree on one or the other of them. We will leave aside the attitude of open hostility towards the Commune which is characteristic of the partisans of Versailles, but which many enlightened bourgeois of today find more intelligent to hide behind a petty-bourgeois type of "sympathy" more suited than hatred to fool the proletarians.

It must be admitted that these types of petty-bourgeois interpretation are based on several real aspects of the Commune, unfortunately detached from their context and from the historical movement to which they belong by a "critical" operation of a fundamentally idealist nature, since it refuses to consider realistically what the Commune could and should have been, in order to judge it solely on what some of its members wanted it to be.

The first of them presents the Commune as the last popular revolution, of the type of the revolutions of the "silly" nineteenth century, and in particular of Forty-Eight, as if June 1848 had not already been the hated revolution of the proletariat, the "ugly" revolution of the blousiers¹, opposed to the democratic, Victor-Hugolian revolutions of all the classes of the "people" as a bloc of antagonistic social forces. For them, the Commune is, in short, the last violent insurrection because it is the last "barricader" insurrection, as if the only possible form of insurrectional violence were the barricade of the democratic revolutions behind which the "crowd of citizens" awaits the spontaneous dissolution of the enemy, of the "henchmen of the tyrant"; as if the proletarian revolution should not have its Red Guard and its Red Army, as if it should not take power militarily and extend the civil war against the bourgeoisie on a scale that is not only national, but international! In reality, the barricades which had succeeded in February 1848 had already proved not only useless, but harmful in June 1848; in the

¹ French term denoting someone wearing a blouse, a worker. Particularly used for participants in the uprisings of 1870 and the Paris Commune.

Commune they played the role of a dangerous illusion, almost everyone thinking: "One will not dare...", which demonstrated "a contrario" the necessity for the purely proletarian revolution of a centralised attack, a thing all the more evident that at the beginning the Commune enjoyed a real military superiority, although the movement was not unleashed in generally favourable conditions.

The second attitude consists in presenting the Commune as a national-democratic, republican-patriotic fact, a logical continuation of the national defence against the Prussian "barbarians" and, moreover, the cradle of the republic "of all the world," of the republic freed from royalist and feudal obligations. This is the interpretation adopted by the PCF and the Stalinists in general who, with their usual impudence, do not miss an opportunity to make it an anticipation of the... French Resistance, of the Maquis² against the "Krauts" and the collaborators, thanks to the precedent of the francs-tireurs³.

The third interpretation considers the democratic-libertarian aspects of the Commune as exemplary and presents it as a model of federalist revolution and direct democracy which only failed because of the attempts, in vain moreover, to give it a dictatorial direction. It goes without saying that this position is shared not only by anarchists and social democrats, but also by official de-Stalinisers. As for the stupid and pre-Sorelian conception of the Commune as a "Latin revolution"⁴ opposed to Marx's Hegelian-Teutonic schematism, it obviously announces the theories of "national paths" to socialism.

In any case, one could extract from the Commune, in an abstract and arbitrary way, a whole series of "meanings", including that of an attempt at class conciliation!

All this, in our opinion, does not touch the real problem: what the Commune was by force of circumstance and independently of the thinking of its representatives. Just as, far from being fortuitous, its leadership was exactly what the circumstances allowed it to be, the deficiencies of this leadership cannot be conceived as mere accidents that do not affect the development of the movement and that can be disregarded in order to pay homage to spontaneity conceived in a mechanistic way. Indeed, to say that an adequate leadership was lacking is to say that the actualisation and conscious pursuit of the historical task of the proletariat was lacking, and therefore that a fully developed revolutionary praxis was lacking, i.e. the knowledge and use of adequate means to reach clearly defined goals ("without revolutionary theory, there is no revolutionary action").

The Limits of the Storming of Heaven

In the Commune there was thus a difference between the potential charge and force of the movement on the one hand and its manifestation on the other. A revolution undoubtedly proletarian in itself, the Commune could not be so in itself and for itself because of the by no means occasional lack of an apparatus capable of gathering and concentrating the received objective impulse. This is the place to recall Trotsky's image in the preface to his "History of the Russian Revolution":

"Without a guiding organisation, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam."

Naturally, "the piston-box" is the party, which does not create but directs the revolution, and which is not itself created either as a programme (historical party) resulting from the manifestation of the

² Rural guerrilla bands of French Resistance fighters, called maquisards, during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II.

³ Irregular military formations deployed by France during the early stages of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). The term was revived and used by partisans to name two major French Resistance movements set up to fight against the Germans during World War II.

⁴ It is distressing that this nonsense was formulated in "La Commune vécue" by the Blanquist Gaston Da Costa who had been Rigault's deputy in the Commune's police force.

irremediable contradictions of bourgeois society, nor as an organism constituted by a set of cadres which will form the staff of the proletarian army (formal party) resulting from an exasperation of social conflicts which, by a passage from quantity to quality, destroys in a vanguard of the working class the influence of the dominant ideology and class, and the centrifugal, particularistic and local tendencies.

This lack of programmatic clarity of the Commune is very well demonstrated by the fact that it adopted a set of formulas inherited from the past and ranging from the memory of the medieval communes to the Hébertist majority Commune of Ninety-Three. It should not be necessary to recall that, according to Marx (cf. "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", ch. 1), the premise for the social revolution to become aware of its own content and to orient itself accordingly is precisely the rejection of such reminiscences and the formulation of the historical mission proper to the proletariat, which is no longer a speaking instrument (*vocale instrumentum*) like the slaves, nor an order, nor a plebeian, but a quite particular class, since by its self-suppression it suppresses the whole mechanism of society divided into classes; a class which has no use for "Cahiers de doléances", which has no unacknowledged "rights" to be recognised, because its only claim as a historical class is the suppression of the situation, not legal, but effective, imposed on it by the mercantilisation of society and, in the first place, of labour power.

It is important to emphasise here that the superstitious attachment to past forms, an expression of the impotence to conceive of the overcoming and thus the dialectical abolition (*Aufhebung*) of capitalist relations, as well as the more or less metahistorical conditions of the society of producer-owners, characterise the leadership of the entire Commune. This explains Lenin's draconian judgement in 1905, according to which the Commune was "a revolutionary petty-bourgeois government", which indicates that the participation of workers' members in this government did not introduce any proletarian element into it on the political level, the measures taken remaining of a petty-bourgeois character as their origin condemned them to do. To illustrate this fact, it suffices here to give just one example, that of the policy of the Internationals (French members of the First International) towards the Banque de France, which Francis Jourde and Charles Besley⁵ protected, while the Blanquist group of the ex-Prefecture led by Rigault tried to take it over, even if it was by a coup de main, an intention rendered vain by the attitude of the "responsible" organs of the Commune occupied by the Proudhonians.

On March 18, 1908, Lenin summarised in a speech in Geneva the main points of the Marxist critique of the Commune by observing:

"The patriotic idea had its origin in the Great Revolution of the eighteenth century; it swayed the minds of the socialists of the Commune; and Blanqui, for example, undoubtedly a revolutionary and an ardent supporter of socialism, could find no better title for his newspaper than the bourgeois cry: 'The country is in danger!'

Combining contradictory tasks—patriotism and socialism—was the fatal mistake of the French socialists. In the Manifesto of the International, issued in September 1870, Marx had warned the French proletariat against being misled by a false national idea [...]

But two mistakes destroyed the fruits of the splendid victory. The proletariat stopped half-way: instead of setting about 'expropriating the expropriators', it allowed itself to be led astray by dreams of establishing a higher justice in the country united by a common national task; such institutions as the banks, for example, were not taken over, and Proudhonist theories about a 'just exchange', etc., still prevailed among the socialists. The second mistake was excessive

⁵ Francis Jourde, though not a revolutionary, was condemned by the Versailles courts, while the old Proudhonian (and millionaire) Charles Besley received a safe-conduct from the government to Switzerland after the Commune's defeat and later a dismissal.

magnanimity on the part of the proletariat: instead of destroying its enemies it sought to exert moral influence on them; it underestimated the significance of direct military operations in civil war, and instead of launching a resolute offensive against Versailles that would have crowned its victory in Paris, it tarried and gave the Versailles government time to gather the dark forces and prepare for the blood-soaked week of May."

A summary analysis of the forces making up the Communard leadership helps us to understand the ideological representations of the movement to which we have already alluded, and to demonstrate to what extent the inadequacy of the leadership amounted to a hiatus between the objective thrust and the subjective maturity. As Rosa Luxemburg said in her polemic against Bernstein, as a class in itself, an agglomeration of proletarian individuals, the proletariat is never ripe for revolution, and it is the crisis that orients it towards its guide and brain, the party. In the Commune we see, on the contrary, an "acephalous" revolution whose achievements correspond only in a tiny part to the pressure of the real movement, which of course does not exclude their importance, which is proportionate to the very importance of this movement: but if we confront it with the historical task of carrying out "the storming of heaven", to use Karl Marx's expression, this importance and this greatness become dialectically miserable.

Of course, the patriotic and nationalist component played a considerable role in the Commune, whose very premature and inopportune birth, according to Marx's well-known judgement, was part of the overall attempts to "radicalise" the government that replaced the "treasonous government" that "should have" defended France from the Prussian advance. Everyone knows that, in his diary, Blanqui himself had sunk not only into patriotism, but into chauvinism and racism, since he described the Germans as "pithécanthropes" coming out of black forests plunged into eternal medieval darkness, something truly unworthy of his pen, but unfortunately more than explicable. This nationalism was not, on the other hand, a transitory attitude, for the reactionary illusion which was to reach its peak in the formula of the "Latin revolution" and in the conviction that the most urgent task was to preserve its home - France - is quite characteristic of Blanqui's thought, and his polemics against Mazzini are almost exclusively centred on this leitmotif⁶.

The result was an absurd marriage of Blanquists and radical Jacobins in the Communard majority, with the practical result of blocking all the measures characteristic of the Blanquists, and thus the renunciation by Blanquism itself - except in isolated cases - of autonomous action. On the other hand, one cannot pass over in silence the indisputable fact, illustrated by numerous examples, that chauvinistic attitudes and inclinations towards the Sacred Union were very widespread and almost general within the French section of the First International. The patriotic attitude of this section of the International towards the Franco-Prussian war is well known, and contrasts with the internationalism firmly and rigorously observed by the German section led by Bebel and by the old Liebknecht. This chauvinist attitude of particular trade unions adhering to the International went as far as xenophobic provocation, the invitation to local bosses⁷ to persecute "foreign" proletarians, and in particular German ones, as "spies of the enemy", a sort of "To each his own Boche"⁸ before the letter⁹.

⁶ Cf. on this subject Engels' criticism of the "The Programme of the Blanquist Fugitives from the Paris Commune" in the "Volksstaat", No. 73, of 26 June 1874.

⁷ Cf. the Manifesto of Printers, Writers and Lithographers of 19 February 1877.

⁸ A derisive term used by the Allies during World War I, often collectively ("the Boche" meaning "the Germans"). It is a shortened form of the French slang portmanteau alboche, itself derived from Allemand ("German") and caboche ("head" or "cabbage").

⁹ Headline of the first legal "Humanité" of the PCF after the liberation of Paris in the second imperialist world war.

One could object, with the example of Jules Vallès and his journal, that the most Proudhonist elements did not fall into this chauvinist attitude, because they were generally hostile to the problem of nationalities (which, as Lenin was to demonstrate to Luxemburg, is in itself in no way revolutionary at any time and in any place), despite the occasionally racist attitude of Proudhon who wanted to solve the Jewish question à la Eichmann. It should not be forgotten that they substituted localist federalism for patriotism, being opponents of war between states to the same extent that they were opponents of revolution, i.e. of civil war.

Using almost the same words as Proudhon, who advocated "economic combination" in place of revolution, the opportunist Independent Labour Party (future pillar of the London Bureau) was castigated by Lenin in October 1916 for writing:

"We do not approve armed rebellion at all, any more than any other form of militarism and war".

And what Lenin replied to them is entirely valid against the Proudhonians:

"Is there any need to prove that these 'anti-militarists', that such advocates of disarmament, not in a small, but in a big country, are the most pernicious opportunists? And yet, theoretically, they are quite right in regarding insurrection as one 'form' of militarism and war. " (Against the Current).

Thus, if the Blanquists made a de facto united front with petty-bourgeois radicals with Montagnard delusions incapable of any historical perspective, the French section of the First International itself constituted a united front of various currents, with the predominance of petty-bourgeois tendencies such as Proudhonism and some Bakuninist nuances (Eugène Varlin) in the utopian perspective of class collaboration which was implied in the peaceful "economic combination" of the mutualists or cooperativists.

In any case, national conciliation was presupposed by all the tendencies of the Commune leadership, and not only by Proudhonians like Jourde-Beslay, or by "Jacobin" chatterboxes like Pyat and Miot, but even by one of the best and most far-sighted "left" Blanquists, Théophile Ferré, who in his otherwise very courageous and dignified declarations at the trial saw in the Commune a lawful attempt at national reorganisation that the "reactionaries" of Versailles had refused, thus forcing the Communards to resist.

Indeed, it was Versailles itself (and in particular its left wing, led by the same Louis Blanc who, long after the massacre of the Communards, would demand amnesty for the survivors) that "killed the conciliation", to use Vermesch's expression. It was she who demonstrated, with the complaisant support of Bismarck, that proletarians have no homeland; that the bourgeoisies, until then rivals for the monopolisation of markets, no longer have national enemies in the face of the insurgent proletariat, but federate into a single capitalist International; that the "advanced democracy" of Louis Blanc and his epigones competes with any Second Empire (we could say para-fascist in advance) in the repression of this workers' movement which gets out of the rut, i.e. which exceeds the limits of what the bourgeoisie itself can and must give in order to preserve its class power. In short, it was she who confirmed that "those who make revolutions half-heartedly dig their own grave", as Saint-Just had realised, with an intuition valid not only for the bourgeois revolution, but even more so for the proletarian revolution.

Without doubt, this petty-bourgeois orientation of the Commune leadership had a well-defined social basis, which is as true for the so-called "socialist" minority as for the "Jacobin" majority. But it would be quite wrong to conclude, as the anecdotal Rougerie does, for example, that all the

Communards were revolutionary petty-bourgeois, or even sans-culottes rather than proletarian insurgents: for these historians, violence and terror are always "Jacobinism", as if, as Kautsky claimed, imitated by these gentlemen even when they ignore it, the predominant character of the proletarian revolutionary was counterrevolutionary weakness, that is to say... Girondinism applied to the working class!

In reality, it was the weight of the petty bourgeoisie that prevailed over the workers' advance precisely because of the latter's lack of revolutionary preparation, which happened (it seems trivial to add) in many other revolutions and counterrevolutions, even where the proletariat had achieved the greatest "sociological" development with industrialisation, the classic example still being Germany of half a century ago. Moreover, historians should be reminded that Marx was not afraid to speak of the possibility and necessity of an autonomous policy of the proletarian class even during the first phase of the double revolution, as can be read in the famous "Address of the Central Committee of the Communist League" of March 1850. And Germany of 1848 was obviously rather less "industrialised" than France at the end of the Second Empire, with the permission of the sociologists!

In the "*Rabochaya Gazeta*", n° 4-5 of April 15, 1911, Lenin established the correct way to pose the question:

"Two conditions, at least, are necessary for a victorious social revolution—highly developed productive forces and a proletariat adequately prepared for it. But in 1871 both of these conditions were lacking. French capitalism was still poorly developed, and France was at that time mainly a petty-bourgeois country (artisans, peasants, shopkeepers, etc). On the other hand, there was no workers' party; the working class had not gone through a long school of struggle and was unprepared, and for the most part did not even clearly visualise its tasks and the methods of fulfilling them. There was no serious political organisation of the proletariat, nor were there strong trade unions and co-operative societies...."

The Absence of the Party

Not being able to express itself politically for lack of a party with an effectively communist programme, the French working class could not free itself from petty-bourgeois praxis either, and as a result it played a purely follow-the-leader role on many decisive occasions. However, if there was a lack of maturity of the proletariat, it was not because of its raw and statistical composition, but because of the absence of leadership, a fact which cannot be mechanically explained by the degree of economic development of France at the time. The abyss which, even under conditions of an international development of capitalism, can exist between the spontaneous movement of the working masses and the degree of development of the revolutionary party has been illustrated too well by Russia and Germany in our century for us to fall into this error. It might be added that it was also illustrated by England in the last century, and it will not be useless to remind the advocates of neo-Comtian sociology today that the communist party - obviously international - of the Manifesto began to be constituted among German exiles who were for the most part craftsmen of their state!

Leaving aside for the moment the impulses of the working class "base", we must say something about the only "socialist and revolutionary" political expression that has manifested itself, with - it is true - multiple uncertainties, among the different currents of the Commune: Blanquism. From Bernstein to the present day, opportunism on both the left and the right has always raged against Blanquism, or rather against what in Blanquism justified Marx's famous judgment:

"... the proletariat rallies more and more around revolutionary socialism, around communism, for which the bourgeoisie has itself invented the name of Blanqui. This socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the

necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations." ("The Class Struggles in France", book III, March 1850).

Marx, as well as Lenin, was accused of Blanquism because he called for the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, because he stressed the need to study and prepare for insurrection, because he spoke of it as an "art" which cannot be left to the initiative and much-vaunted "creativity" of the masses, but which on the contrary presupposes the prior organisation and direction of that force.

To Kautsky, who had a lot of sympathy for the anti-terrorism of the Proudhonians, but who was not far from a contradiction, having accused the Bolsheviks of... Proudhonism because of their alleged "utopianism", Trotsky replied in "Terrorism and Communism":

"With more foundation Kautsky might have compared us with the opponents of the Proudhonists, the Blanquists, who understood the meaning of a revolutionary government, but did not superstitiously make the question of seizing it depend on the formal signs of democracy. But in order to put the comparison of the Communists with the Blanquists on a reasonable footing, it would have to be added that, in the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, we had at our disposal such an organization for revolution as the Blanquists could not even dream of; in our party we had, and have, an invaluable organization of political leadership with a perfected programme of the social revolution. Finally, we had, and have, a powerful apparatus of economic transformation in our trade unions, which stand as a whole under the banner of Communism, and support the Soviet Government.."

To see to what extent the founder of the Red Army agreed with Lenin in considering that the "original sin" of the Commune lay in this absence of a revolutionary proletarian party, it suffices to reread "The Lessons of the Commune" which he wrote in February 1921, a year after "Terrorism and Communism", in front of which the "enlightened" and "informed" philistines of today, who would like to see this weapon definitively abandoned, can snigger as much as they like. Let us quote at length:

"The workers' party – the real one – is not a machine for parliamentary manoeuvres, it is the accumulated and organized experience of the proletariat. It is only with the aid of the party, which rests upon the whole history of its past, which foresees theoretically the paths of development, all its stages, and which extracts from it the necessary formula of action, that the proletariat frees itself from the need of always recommencing its history: its hesitations, its lack of decision, its mistakes.

The proletariat of Paris did not have such a party. The bourgeois socialists with whom the Commune swarmed, raised their eyes to heaven, waited for a miracle or else a prophetic word, hesitated, and during that time the masses groped about and lost their heads because of the indecision of some and the fantasy of others. The result was that the revolution broke out in their very midst, too late, and Paris was encircled. Six months elapsed before the proletariat had reestablished in its memory the lessons of past revolutions, of battles of yore, of the reiterated betrayals of democracy – and it seized power. [...]

If the power was found in the hands of the proletariat of Paris on March 18, it was not because it had been deliberately seized, but because its enemies had quitted Paris....The government fled Paris in order to concentrate its forces elsewhere. And it was then that the proletariat became master of the situation.

But it understood this fact only on the morrow. The revolution fell upon it unexpectedly.

This first success was a new source of passivity. The enemy had fled to Versailles. Wasn't that a victory? At that moment the governmental band could have been crushed almost without the spilling of blood. In Paris, all the ministers, with Thiers at their head, could have been taken prisoner. Nobody would have raised a hand to defend them. It was not done. There was no organization of a centralized party, having a rounded view of things and special organs for realizing its decisions.

The debris of the infantry did not want to fall back to Versailles. The thread which tied the officers and the soldiers was pretty tenuous. And had there been a directing party center at Paris, it would have incorporated into the retreating armies – since there was the possibility of retreating – a few hundred or even a few dozen devoted workers, and given them the following instructions: enhance the discontent of the soldiers against the officers, profit by the first favorable psychological moment to free the soldiers from their officers and bring them back to Paris to unite with the people. This could easily have been realized, according to the admissions of Thiers' supporters themselves. Nobody even thought of it. Nor was there anybody to think of it. In the midst of great events, moreover, such decisions can be adopted only by a revolutionary party which looks forward to a revolution, prepares for it, does not lose its head, by a party which is accustomed to having a rounded view and is not afraid to act.

And a party of action is just what the French proletariat did not have.

The Central Committee of the National Guard is in effect a Council of Deputies of the armed workers and the petty bourgeoisie... The Central Committee of the National Guard needed to be led... By means of the Councils of Deputies – in the given case they were organs of the National Guard – the party could have been in continual contact with the masses... its leading center could each day put forward a slogan which, through the medium of the party's militants, would have penetrated into the masses, uniting their thought and their will.

Hardly had the government fallen back to Versailles than ... The Central Committee imagined 'legal' elections to the Commune. It entered into negotiations with the mayors of Paris in order to cover itself, from the Right, with 'legality'.

Had a violent attack been prepared against Versailles at the same time, the negotiations with the mayors would have been a ruse fully justified ... But in reality, these negotiations were being conducted only in order to avert the struggle by some miracle or other. The petty bourgeois radicals and the socialistic idealists, respecting 'legality' ... hoped at the bottom of their souls that Thiers would halt respectfully before revolutionary Paris the minute the latter covered itself with the 'legal' Commune.

Passivity and indecision were supported in this case by the sacred principle of federation and autonomy. Paris, you see, is only one commune among many other communes. Paris wants to impose nothing upon anyone; it does not struggle for the dictatorship, unless it be for the 'dictatorship of example'.

In sum, it was nothing but an attempt to replace the proletarian revolution, which was developing, by a petty bourgeois reform: communal autonomy. The real revolutionary task consisted of assuring the proletariat the power all over the country... And to attain this goal, it was necessary to vanquish Versailles without the loss of time and to send agitators, organizers, and armed forces throughout France... Instead of this policy of offensive and aggression which was the only thing that could save the situation, the leaders of Paris attempted to seclude themselves in their communal autonomy: they will not attack the others if the others do not

attack them; each town has its sacred right of self-government. This idealistic chatter ... covered up in reality a cowardice in face of revolutionary action ...

Under the form of the 'struggle against despotic centralism' and against 'stifling' discipline, a fight takes place for the self-preservation of various groups and sub-groupings of the working class, for their petty interests, with their petty ward leaders and their local oracles. The entire working class, while preserving its cultural originality and its political nuances, can act methodically and firmly, without remaining in the tow of events, and directing each time its mortal blows against the weak sectors of its enemies, on the condition that at its head, above the wards, the districts, the groups, there is an apparatus which is centralized and bound together by an iron discipline. "

The Contradictory Aspects of Blanquism

Blanquism could not constitute a real party, a vanguard and guide of the class, insofar as it remained a voluntarist current which believed it possible to take power in any objective situation thanks to the audacious initiative of a group of conspirators, and insofar as it did not have a historical programme from which it could deduce its tactics, although following in the footsteps of Saint-Simon, L. A. Blanqui had personally arrived at the conception of the "withering away" and extinction of the state and the replacement of the government of men by the "administration of things". His vision of the dictatorship of the proletariat thus remained quite formal because it lacked any definite political and economic content, and was thus uprooted from its class terrain which, in a victorious revolution, appears in the form of the proletarian party taking power.

In the Marxist vision, the proletarian party exercises the dictatorship purely by the terror that its weapons inspire in its opponents, according to the magnificent expression of Engels ("On Authority", 1874) who reproached the Commune for not having made sufficient use of it. This party expresses the class programme and relies on the strength of the proletarian vanguard in such a way as to be able to repress not only the other classes, but even the backward layers of the working class itself. Instead, in Blanquism, the party was deprived of a class basis insofar as it was deprived of a programme, so that its conception of party power was reduced to that of the power of a sect of conspirators. This is why Engels was able to write the following lines, which have been completely misinterpreted later as "anti-substitutionist", as if the dictatorship of the proletariat, in order to merit this title, should not be exercised by a leading body identified with the party, the only force conscious of the future of the class and capable of guiding it in the direction of its historical mission, i.e., in the direction of what it is historically obliged to do in accordance with its function in society:

"From Blanqui's assumption, that any revolution may be made by the outbreak of a small revolutionary minority, follows of itself the necessity of a dictatorship after the success of the venture. This is, of course, a dictatorship, not of the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small minority that has made the revolution, and who are themselves previously organized under the dictatorship of one or several individuals." (Engels, "The Programme of the Blanquist Fugitives from the Paris Commune", Der Volksstaat, No. 73, 26 June 1874).

Having no class base in the proletariat for lack of an adequate programme and strategy, the Blanquists were obliged to look for it in an undifferentiated mass of "citizens" whose common characteristic was reduced very flatly to being "good republicans". The real meaning of Engels' criticism is therefore the reproach of interclassism and in no way of "substitutionism": history, including that of the Commune, has confirmed the diagnosis. When, in the preface to the address on "The Civil War in France" and in other texts, Engels imputes the political faults of the Commune to the Blanquists, it is not at all, as some historians have believed, because he imagined that the majority of the Commune was made up of Blanquists; it is because, being the only ones capable of understanding the need for certain essential

revolutionary measures, they prevented them from being applied in advance by forming a bloc with the conciliatory radical-Jacobin majority. In this respect, it is not useless to underline that Marx, who had understood the strategic inopportunity of an isolated movement like that of the Commune¹⁰, while preaching the need to go all the way once the movement had begun, distinguished very clearly between democratic conciliation which could only prelude proletarian defeat, on the one hand, and, on the other, the tactical compromise of which he speaks in his letter of February 22, 1881 to Domela Nieuwenhuis by saying that it was "the only thing that could be reached at the time" and which supposed or on the contrary the conquest of positions of force, like for example "the appropriation of the Bank of France", an act "enough to dissolve all the pretensions of the Versailles people in terror". The conciliatory attitude, on the contrary, hinders compromise and unleashes a conflict in which the proletarians find themselves without real leadership. The moderation which found an alibi in the support of the Blanquists and the Internationals was thus fatal even to the only immediate ends and made impossible any strategic retreat after having excluded the possibility of forcing the bourgeoisie to make a pact by taking hostages and, in the first place, that constituted by the Bank of France.

The Blanquists were not even capable of disassociating themselves from Félix Pyat, whose conciliatory and, objectively, treacherous attitude, even with regard to the purely military conduct of the conflict, had nevertheless been denounced several times by the rank-and-file militants in a number of interventions published, for example, in "Le Père Duchesne".

It is true that the libertarian minority of Proudhonian inspiration was politically alien to the revolution, as much or even more so than the Jacobin radicals, because just as petty-bourgeois as they were, it was certainly much more pacifist and localist; the political weight of this minority contributed greatly to the failure of the Commune's leadership by tilting the balance in favour of democracy, but unlike the case of the Blanquists, it cannot be said that the libertarians failed to live up to their own programme, as their attitude was in perfect conformity with it. On the contrary, it was the Blanquists who had proposed the demands found in Marx's "Address": rational use of the Central Committee before wasting time in communal elections, a march on Versailles, confiscation of money deposited in the banks, control of the press, effective counter-espionage, application of the hostage law, in short, the Terror, as Trotsky himself recognised in a passage systematically distorted by unfaithful translators:

"The measures of the police prefecture headed by had a terroristic character par excellence, although they were not always appropriate to the purpose".

The inadequacy, that is to say the insufficiency of these measures was due exclusively to the democratic character of the Commune, that is to say to the fact that its majority sabotaged these directives which emanated from a minority, not only within the communal leadership, but within Blanquism itself, for since Blanquist centralism was not organic centralism (the dictatorship of a programme), the physical absence of the "Old Man" had provoked a distressing confusion even among his followers.

Desperate Reactions against Democratic Impotence

It suffices to recall a few sessions of the Commune which clearly show that only a few Blanquists sought to oppose the incredible democratic impotence, the rivers of honey into which the Commune was sinking in the face of a ruthless counterrevolution whose first initiatives should have made it clear, even to the blind, that it was meticulously preparing the final massacre.

¹⁰ Cf. K. Marx's speech in Amsterdam on 8 September 1872: "The revolution must be carried out with solidarity; this is the great lesson of the French Commune, which fell because none of the other centres -- Berlin, Madrid, etc. -- developed great revolutionary movements comparable to the mighty uprising of the Paris proletariat."

On 24 April Rigault declared:

"Yesterday, in my absence, you declared that all members of the commune would have the right to visit all the prisoners. In agreement with the Control Committee which you have assigned to me, I ask you to reconsider yesterday's vote, at least with regard to the individuals held incommunicado. If you were to maintain your vote, I would be forced to resign, and I do not think that anyone else could accept such a responsibility under these conditions... When one has not seen the file of an imprisoned man, one can be moved by his words, by questions of family, of humanity, and help him to communicate with the outside world".

Spirit of 1793? Let us remember Lenin's attitude towards Gorky and Lunacharsky, let us reread Trotsky's "Their Morals and Ours"!

Rigault was rightly suspicious of the "revolutionaries" who sat in the Commune and whose dean was the Proudhonian Beslay and he proved on May 5 that there were agents provocateurs in the Commune such as the so-called Blanchet, a defrocked monk:

"You remember that it was agreed that when we had proceeded to the arrest of a colleague, we would make a report to the Commune; I am doing it today, not within forty-eight hours, but within two."

On the 17th, Rigault exclaimed in the same way:

"I am of the opinion that we should respond to the assassinations of the Versailles in the most energetic way, by striking the guilty and not the first to come... And I place on the same line the men who are in agreement with Versailles and the accomplices of Bonaparte... Your jurors must be a true revolutionary tribunal".

On all these occasions, the other Communards accused Rigault of "Bonapartism" and "despotism", and the historian Lissagaray, who sympathised with them, had the nerve to reproach the inconvenient procurator of the Commune with "the lack of efficiency of his measures" and to accuse him of having persecuted the old instruments of "Napoleon the Lesser" more than the real spies: slander, there will always be something left of it and the other "historians" did not fail to repeat Lissagaray on this point!

Despite the opposition which rendered most of their initiatives futile, Rigault and Ferré actually proved that they knew how to hit the target, as shown by the execution of G. Chaudey, executor of Proudhon's will, participant in international democratic congresses and responsible for the massacre of 22 January in front of the Hôtel de Ville, in short, a true prototype of an "advanced democrat" before the letter, and that of the Gallican archbishop Darboy, liberal, adversary of the dogma of pontifical infallibility, thus true "progressive priest", if not "working-class priest", whom Thiers with great political clairvoyance had refused to exchange with the "head" of whom the Commune lacked, Blanqui "the recluse".

The attitude taken by the most consistent Blanquists with regard to the Comité de Salut Public¹¹ is also very significant. In his declaration of vote, Rigault said

"to hope that the Comité de Salut Public will be in 1871 what it is generally believed, but wrongly, to have been in 1793",

¹¹ The formation of a Comité de Salut Public was proposed on 28 April by the Jacobins following the panic at Issy, to replace the second Executive Commission resulting from the reorganisation of the Communard government decided on 21 April following the first disasters, again on the initiative of the Jacobins.

namely the organ of the red terror of the proletariat¹². Rigault was not referring to the Hébertist tradition (illustrated by the work of G. Tridon, who belonged to the minority), but rather to the possibility existing in 1871, given the new content of the revolution on the agenda (the proletarian and no longer the bourgeois revolution), of making something other than a rhetorical echo of petty-bourgeois revolutionism (which unfortunately it was) out of the central organ of power. The minority, on the other hand, criticised the very principle of dictatorship and centralism, as an emanation of the hated "principle of authority", which entirely justifies Engels' criticism in the "Republican Almanac" of 1874¹³ and the criticism of "Père Duchesne" of 18 May taking up the arguments developed by Vaillant in his declaration of vote of 1 May, perhaps the clearest and most unambiguous of all:

"I do not share the illusion of the assembly that it has founded a political steering committee, a committee of public salvation, when it is merely renewing with a new label its executive committee of the early days. If the assembly wanted to have a real executive committee, which could really take charge of the situation, and deal with political contingencies, it should begin by reforming itself, ceasing to be a small, talkative parliament, destroying the next day at the whim of its fancy what it had created the day before, and throwing itself in the way of all the decisions of its executive committee. The Commune should be nothing more than an assembly of commissions meeting to discuss the resolutions and reports presented by each of them, listening to the political report of its executive committee, and judging whether this committee is fulfilling its duty, whether it knows how to give unity of impulse and direction, whether it has the energy and capacity necessary for the good of the Commune. To the Executive Committee would be referred the political affairs, to the various commissions all the affairs of their competence, and the meetings would be spent without useless incidents, taking resolutions and no longer discussing them. For an Executive Committee of this order, and the only one really worthy of bearing the title of Salut Public, which is moreover of no importance and which has the disadvantage of being a repetition, I will vote yes without sentences. In a word, it is necessary to organise the Commune and its action; to make action, the Revolution and not agitation, pastiche".

With Trinquet, Ranvier, Ferré, Rigault and a few others like Duval, the worker-general, member of the International, it was indeed practically a vanguard of Blanquism which opposed the libertarian caprices whose opportunist character it detected very well ("it is necessary to guillotine this heap of Girondins", Rigault would have exclaimed) and which thus came up against the palavering and inconclusive legalism and the conciliatory wait-and-see attitude of the majority, which did not understand the tasks that the Commune had been forced by necessity and completely against the wishes of its members to take upon itself. Faced with anarcho-democratism spewing its rage against the partisans of revolutionary dictatorship and class terror, Karl Marx's position is unequivocal, and we find it expressed

¹² Even Kautsky seemed to understand the 1793 Comité de Salut Public in this way, reproaching it for not having "achieved socialism"!

¹³ From On Authority, "Almanacco Repubblicano for the year 1874": "Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionists. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day if it had not made use of this authority of the armed people against the bourgeois? Should we not, on the contrary, reproach it for not having used it freely enough?

Therefore, either one of two things: either the anti-authoritarians don't know what they're talking about, in which case they are creating nothing but confusion; or they do know, and in that case they are betraying the movement of the proletariat. In either case they serve the reaction."

in his polemic against "La Révolution sociale" directed by Madame André Léo, wife of Benoît Malon, anarcho-reformist, whose declaration at the Lausanne Peace Congress he quotes:

"Raoul Rigault and Ferré were the two sinister figures of the Commune who, up till then (up till the execution of the hostages¹⁴), had not stopped calling for bloody measures, albeit in vain",

and to which he replies:

"From its very first issue, the newspaper hastened to put itself on the same level as Figaro, Gaulois, Paris-Journal, and other disreputable sheets which have been throwing mud at the General Council",

emphasising that this flattery of democratic and interclass pacifism by denigrating the martyrs of the revolution had been made

"at the very moment when Ferré was waiting in prison to be sent to the Satory post".

The opposition of the majority and the minority (unanimous on this point) to the activity of the most determined Blanquists then prevented the use of precious forces such as those of Duval, Dombrovsky (who would be wrongly suspected and would voluntarily go to his death to clear himself of the suspicion of treason), Wroblewsky, all valuable military leaders, and above all Rossel, a true military specialist who, unfortunately, was a bitter opponent of the Blanquists, the only forces capable of employing his strategic qualities, and who even opposed a "military dictatorship" under the control of the Comité de Salut Public whose ineptitude and heterogeneity he knew as well as the best Blanquists.

The Sentence to Passive Defence

Because of the absence of a revolutionary offensive strategy against Versailles, the Commune was condemned to return to passive defence on the barricades. The day after the Versaillais entered Paris, on 22 March, the Jacobin Delescluze called on the Parisians to march against the enemy, again speaking of showing him

"by their revolutionary energy that Paris can be sold, but that it can neither be surrendered nor defeated".

But while any victory appeared impossible, and Delescluze had no choice but to go and get himself killed, on the 25th of May, on one of the last barricades still holding out, and to die standing up as he had decided, the Blanquists Rigault, Ferré and Gois sought to the very end to give examples of revolutionary terror, because as Rigault said, sensing defeat and his own death after the execution of Chaudey, "that will be useful for the next time" - that is to say, for the next revolution.

Yet the Parisian movement that led to the Commune had initially demonstrated its ability to overcome this desperate tactic by a class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. As Engels said in his famous March 1893 introduction to "Class Struggles in France" ignobly disfigured by the opportunists who led German social democracy, the struggle in the streets

"will have to be undertaken with greater forces. These, however, may then well prefer, as in the whole great French Revolution or on September 4 and October 31, 1870, in Paris, the open attack to passive barricade tactics",

attack already experimented in the Great Bourgeois Revolution as well as in the revolutionary days of September 4 and October 31, 1870. If the Commune itself could be constituted, it was also by an active

¹⁴ It took place on 24 May three days after the Versaillais entered Paris, four days after the collapse of the Commune's military defence, at a time when the federalists already knew that they would be defeated and demanded the execution of the decree on hostages.

mobilisation quite different from the passive entrenchment behind vain barricades. If in June 1848, these barricades had not stopped the coalition of the bourgeois, the petty-bourgeois and the sub-proletariat launched in the hunt for the red hydra, it was absurd to expect a different result in May 1871¹⁵.

¹⁵ It should therefore be clear that Engels' refusal of the barricades responds to the fact that he advocates a truly insurrectionary strategy, based on a mobilisation of the most determined layers of the proletariat and directed not only politically, but militarily by the party. For Engels, one must consider the necessity not of a putsch, but of a real revolutionary civil war, likely to take on the character of a class war led by armies:

"But before such a change could be effected a proletarian dictatorship would become necessary, and the first condition of that was a proletarian army. The working classes would have to conquer the right to emancipate themselves on the battlefield. The task of the International was to organize and combine the forces of labour for the coming struggle." (Marx, Speech on the occasion of the 7th anniversary of the First International, 1871).

On this subject, we shall reproduce here only a few lines from Trotsky's admirable pages in the History of the Russian Revolution, Part 3, on "The Art of Insurrection", where he recalls these problems, and in particular the assimilation of Bolshevism and Yanquism carried out by the social democrats:

"Blanqui's mistake in principle was to identify revolution with insurrection. His technical mistake was to identify insurrection with the barricade. The Marxian criticism has been directed against both mistakes. Although at one with Blanquism in regarding insurrection as an art, Engels discovered not only the subordinate place occupied by insurrection in a revolution, but also the declining rôle of the barricade in an insurrection. Engels' criticism had nothing in common with a renunciation of the revolutionary methods in favour of pure parliamentarism, as the philistines of the German Social Democracy, in co-operation with the Hohenzollern censorship, attempted in their day to pretend. For Engels the question about barricades remained a question about one of the technical elements of an uprising. The reformists have attempted to infer from his rejection of the decisive importance of the barricade a rejection of revolutionary violence in general. That is about the same as to infer the destruction of militarism from considerations of the probable decline in importance of trenches in future warfare."

Of course, the Blanquists' penchant for barricades stemmed from their incomplete separation from democrats, "good republicans", etc., etc.... and in the Commune it delivered them to Miot-type charlatans. We are not talking about the "offensive" aspect of Blanqui's tactics, which were inconsistent because of his conviction that it would take only a handful of conspirators to destroy the bourgeois state.

This may seem false if we refer to the "Instruction pour une prise d'armes" of 1868, an extremely important document which marks a turning point in Blanqui's thought, but it is not if we consider that this text had no appreciable effect either on Blanquist militants or, for example, on the attempts to which Blanqui and more or less faithful followers were committed before the Commune.

Finally, it is necessary to recall the almost comical falsification which the right-wing Stalinist Santiago Carillo, present leader of the Spanish CP dissident from Moscow, has made of Engels' introduction in "Nuestra Bandera", supplement to No. 58, June 1968, p. 21. According to Carillo, who recognises that barricades "are a purely defensive tactic which leaves the initiative to the adversary", they would in certain cases have the advantage of provoking the "neutralisation" of bourgeois forces

"and even their passage at least partially into the camp of the democratic and revolutionary forces. Engels wrote in 1895 that it was mainly this point of view that should be considered in the future when examining the possibility of possible street battles".

For Carillo, who substitutes the interclassist national strike for the old insurrectionary general strike, Engels would have been in favour of barricades precisely because of the moral effect they have in the democratic revolution: he forgets that Engels always uses the imperfect tense, the revolution having ceased to be "democratic" to become proletarian as early as June 1848, and all the more so in May 1871, which is precisely what led Engels to call for an open attack. While the old reformists were thus falsely accusing Engels of excluding organised class violence and class terror under the pretext that he had declared the barricades obsolete, Carillo, renewing the falsification, hypocritically identifies Engels' position with a defence of the barricade insofar as it excludes organised violence and class terror! Although it shifts the factors, the operation thus leads to the same absurdity as that of the reformists, but it lends itself to the use of the proletariat as cannon fodder for the defence of bourgeois-democratic interests, as if in the 20th century this could mean anything other than the defence of capitalism itself. Carillo is indeed of the same vile race as those who spoke of the "red army" in relation to Chiang Kai-shek's troops and the militias and regular army of the Spanish Republic of 1936.

It is important to note - in agreement with all the collections of documents, newspapers, reports, etc. - that the rank-and-file militants, the clubists of the suburbs, etc., did not cease for a single moment to ask the question: "Why is the Commune so weak?" (quoted in the collection: *Lettres au "Père Duchesne" pendant la Commune de Paris*, Paris, Bureau d'Éditions, 1934, p. 23), to demand measures of terror, to plead for the march on Versailles. On the other hand, it is not difficult to find in many memoirs of the period the same attitude which proves that there was more "consciousness" in the mass than in the leadership, which announced an inevitable defeat, because it is the latter which should have channelled the impulse of the base and given it a completed programmatic and tactical expression. On the contrary, the Communard leadership remained below the level of its following, since in many cases it prevented the work of the few militants (a minority among the Blanquists themselves, as we have seen) who made themselves the interpreters of this workers' vanguard to which the "up-to-date" inklickers refused the qualification of proletarian and qualified it as "sans-culotte", according to the same criterion which allowed Kautsky to proclaim the Commune proletarian and the republic of the soviets of Russia "sans-culotte"!

We don't want to recount anecdotes, but to underline the falsity of the "concretist" legend according to which the "spontaneist" minority would have stuck to the movement of the most determined proletarian strata, it will not be useless to recall the episode recounted by Jules Vallès in his "Insurgé" with a truly anarchist candour. As he lamented in the company of Lefrançois and Longuet at the announcement by Genton (another valiant Blanquist shot at Satory) of the execution of Monseigneur Darboy, a young worker replied:

"So we'll know that if the Commune made its rulings as a joke, we applied them seriously... And then, all the same, my bullet made a hole in the heavens!"

After the Promethean image of Karl Marx's "storming the heavens". Of Karl Marx, where can we find a higher praise of the proletarian rebellion, which unfortunately only expressed itself in a very weakened and faded way during the Commune?

As always, the spontaneists grossly cheat when they exalt as the result of a free creation of the workers that which was only the consequence of petty-bourgeois and counterrevolutionary prejudices that opposed the demands expressed in a confused but vigorous way by the proletariat, the collective and impersonal "Jean Misère" of the workers' songs of the time, whom the objective conditions pushed to the social and therefore political movement - "fight or death, bloody struggle or nothingness" - sweeping aside all retrograde Proudhonian utopianism. And it is this same Jean Misère who, after the defeat, will go to the wall with a stoicism which the hangmen will tax with cynical effrontery, with "insolent resolution to end life rather than live by working", a sinister pun on the watchword of the Lyon insurgents: "Live by working or die by fighting".

Independently of individual attitudes, the political behaviour of the Proudhonist libertarians (and Proudhon is the spiritual father of Bernstein as much as of Bakunin, for opportunism characterised by immediatism is also invariant) was exactly the same as that of the Commune, which failed in its mission of leading the proletarian dictatorship. To apologise for them is therefore to exalt everything that caused the subjective weakness of the Commune and its fall without an effective struggle. It is therefore not surprising that the opportunists have always praised these aspects of the Commune, identifying them unscrupulously with the true dictatorship of the proletariat as opposed to the dictatorship exercised over the proletariat by the neo-Jacobins and the Blanquists. These people flatter the Commune precisely because it failed, they exalt the absence of the objective, but above all subjective conditions of victory or at least of an affirmation of the revolutionary dictatorship. This amounts in essence to exalting the counterrevolution of which Thiers was only the external agent, the

internal agent (no matter how good or bad the faith) having been the domination of petty-bourgeois and, in short, democratic currents.

As Trotsky said, Kautsky, representative of all kinds of opportunism,

"sees the main advantages of the Commune in features that we find are its misfortune and its fault ... We cherished the memory of the Commune in spite of the extremely limited character of its experience, the immaturity of its participants, the confusion of its programme, the lack of unity amongst its leaders, the indecision of their plans, the hopeless panic of its executive organs, and the terrifying defeat fatally precipitated by all these".

To this quotation from "Terrorism and Communism" it is worth adding another, taken from a pamphlet by Karl Radek, written in response to a pamphlet by Kautsky, entitled "Proletarian Dictatorship and Terrorism":

"Herr Kautsky gives two examples for the benefit of German readers of the way in which democracy has influenced manners: the violent dictatorship of the Jacobins which was bound to end in defeat because it sought to realize its illusions by force, and was therefore bound to mislead and brutalize the proletariat; and against this dark picture he places the bright and moral democratic dictatorship of the Commune of 1871 which has found a warm place "in the hearts of all who long for the liberation of mankind, and not least because it was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of humanity which animated the working class of the nineteenth century." We have shown that Kautsky's presentation is a mere juggling trick. The Paris Commune of 1793 represented no proletarian dictatorship, but a bourgeois one; and it was not "wrecked" on the impracticability of proletarian illusions, but fulfilled its great historical mission – the destruction of feudalism. The proletarian Commune of 1871, on the contrary, was wrecked after a two-months' existence by the confusion of its leaders who were full of illusions, and did not understand that the fight should have been carried beyond the walls of Paris. That which Kautsky calls the spirit of humanity was in reality the weakness of the leaders of the Commune, their irresolution in the face of an inexorable enemy.[...]

When Kautsky asserts that the Commune of 1871 has found a warm corner, thanks to its spirit of humanity in the hearts of all who long for the liberation of mankind, the old man mistakes his own womanish heart for the dauntless one of the proletariat. It is not because of its weakness (which he calls humanity) that the Commune has become the symbol of proletarian aspirations, but because it was the first attempt of the proletariat to seize power".

Revolution is inseparable from Party Dictatorship and Red Terror

If the double revolution in Russia succumbed under the weight of its initial democratic task, which was by no means negligible, and under the pressure of the forces of primitive accumulation embodied by Stalinism, it presented, as long as Bolshevism remained alive, the political conditions of permanent revolution. In the Commune, on the contrary, these conditions did not exist because of the absence of an autonomous communist movement with an adequate programmatic and tactical vision. This resulted in its national and democratic aspect, in contradiction with its base, since unlike the Russian revolution, it did not have to achieve the construction of capitalism. Together with the cycle of wars of national liberation, it closed the cycle of democratic revolutions, the two being one and the same.

This is its fundamental lesson, as Marx showed in "The Civil War in France" and as subsequent events have only confirmed. Whether hiding behind reformist or leftist arguments, any "national" and "democratic" path to socialism is tantamount to the death of the revolution. The proletarian revolution without party dictatorship, without real red terror, that is to say, the revolution as a joke wished by all liberals, democrats, libertarians, from Kautsky to the militants of the KAPD militants and Dutch

Tribunists, from Gramsci to the extra-parliamentary left of today, is only the last hope of the bourgeoisie in the event of a social revolt of the proletariat, only the prelude to new "bloody weeks" doomed to defeat (and of course the same applies to "socialism in one country" or localised to a few, and to every form of centrism).

All forms of immediatism asserted themselves in the leadership of the Commune and their effect condemned them definitively historically, just as the annihilation of the spontaneous impulse of the proletariat by the absence of adequate leadership has definitively condemned all forms of spontaneism. Without doubt, the party is only a necessary and by no means sufficient condition for victory, but its absence is in any case counterrevolutionary, because it is not without reason, and this reason is precisely one of those which make counterrevolution inevitable; on the contrary, even in unfavourable conditions, the presence of the party makes it possible to learn not only theoretical but practical lessons from defeat, and this is the condition for recovery, or at least for an orderly retreat preceding such a recovery. This has been proved with extreme clarity, on the one hand, by the years following the defeat of the Russian revolution of 1905 and leading to the victory of October 1917 and, on the other hand, by the objectively favourable situations (such as the first post-war period in Germany) which nonetheless led to counterrevolution because of the conditions which had impeded the formation of a genuine communist party, such as the domination of social democracy and especially of Kautskyian centrism.

Since its appearance, scientific socialism, revolutionary communism, has been fighting all the influences which hinder the constitution of the proletariat as a class (and therefore as a political party) and then as a ruling class, and which make it impossible. The great fear that the Commune inspired in the bourgeoisie testifies to the fact that the movement from which it was born was heading in this direction, and that if it did not achieve its goal, it was only because it lacked a direction that was not haphazard and heterogeneous, but that summarised the historical experience of the class. If Marx had not recognised this, the highest praise for the unconscious significance of the revolutionary potential of the Commune movement would have to be found in the floods of insults which the Maxime du Camp, the A. Dumas and other "journalist policemen, merchants of calumnies", as E. Pottier, poet of the "Internationale", said, threw up against it, and of which we have a good example in "L'orgie rouge", chapter of "Barbares et Bandits: la Prusse et la Commune", by Paul de Saint-Victor (Paris 1871), who writes:

"The insurrection of March 18... broke out suddenly, in the midst of the republic, in the midst of freedom, in the face of the invasion ranged in battle under the ramparts of Paris, against a freely elected assembly, against universal suffrage, against religion, against the bourgeoisie, against industry, against the family, against work, against everything that makes up the dignity, security and life of a people. It is neither to a despotism nor to an aristocracy that it declares war, but to civilisation, to society and to the fatherland. Its dogma is crude atheism, its doctrine is abject materialism, its programme is armed lazzarism, the expropriation of all classes by one, the equality of shares in the human feeding trough, the plundering of public and private wealth, thrown to the appetites and lusts of the proletariat..."

In what sense the commune is immortal

This is why we recognise in the Commune the still pale dawn of destruction of the Moloch of bourgeois liberties, before which burns its incense of democratic idealism, which has never been so well incarnated as by Gallifet and Noske. This is why Lenin wrote in April 1911, in the "*Rabochaya Gazeta*", No. 4-5:

"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".

This cause, the Commune was obviously not able to make it triumph, nor even to defend it with clairvoyance and conscience. The class lesson it taught is all the more incisive. And this lesson is, as we have always affirmed, even if it means being accused of dogmatism or even psittacism¹⁶, the most absolute confirmation of the central, irreplaceable role of the class party, characterised by a revolutionary position with regard to the seizure of power and the exercise of dictatorship and the tactical problems linked to it.

As Lenin recalled, there was not a sufficiently high level of productive forces in 1871, but this in no way justified a double revolutionary scheme, thus the revolutionary democratic character of the communist government was only a fatal weakness and an anachronism in which the weight of the past closed off the perspectives of the future. In the present framework of the Euro-American (and Japanese) world enclosed in the network of developed capitalism, there can no longer be any question of insufficient development of the productive forces, while the necessity of a convergence between the working vanguard driven into the streets by the exasperated contradictions of the regime and its political leadership remains entirely.

This leads us to the question of the coincidence of the crisis of capitalism and the maturation of the "formal" party on the international level. It will certainly not be solved tomorrow, and in order to solve it the embryonic organisation of revolutionary Marxists existing today cannot "invent" any organisational expedient, but must rely exclusively on the dictatorship of the programme within itself. This is the condition under which cadres can be formed who are really capable of leading the proletarian movement towards its revolutionary goals, which do not depend on the will of individuals, but on what the proletariat will be forced to do, provided it has the means to do so, namely a party leadership.

There is an unintentional irony in the verse of the anarchist Louise Michel ("Prison Song", May 1871):

"When the crowd today is silent

Like the ocean will roar,

That to die it will be ready,

The Commune will soar".

Certainly, the great problem is there. But when the proletariat, not the "crowd", the people, moves under the impulse of events, it must have at its head an international cohort of iron, without which the defeats of the past - such as that of the Commune - could only be repeated. Only then can a world victory won by a world general staff put an end to the painful history of the oppressed class, together with the bloody domination of capital and, in perspective, the leviathan of class society.

Source: "Programme Communiste ", N. 51-52, April-September 1971.

¹⁶ Speech or writing that appears mechanical or repetitive in the manner of a parrot.