SOCIALISM FROM THE ROOT UP.

CHAPTER XII.—THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871, AND THE CONTINENTAL MOVEMENT FOLLOWING IT.

Is dealing with the great event of the Paris Commune, we must take for granted a knowledge of the facts, which are in a brief form accessible to all since the publication by the Socialist League of its pamphlet on that subject.

As we have stated before, the International was founded in 1864, under the leadership of Beesly, Marx, and Oger. In 1869, at the Congress of Basle, Marx drew it into the compass of Socialism; and though he had been somewhat induced to remain a member of the International, it became at once decidedly Socialist and revolutionary, and its influence was very considerable.

The communes of 1848 and 1871 expressed the feeling of solidarity of labour was very clearly shown by the noble protest made by the German Socialists against the war with France, in the teeth of a "patriotic" feeling so strong in appearance that it might have been expected to silence them as a class. The result was, however, to offer at least a chance for action to the rapidly increasing Socialist party, if they could manage to take advantage of it, to get into their hands the political power; and under the influence of the Internationalists, the French Socialists determined to take action if an immediate opportunity offered. Neither did the opportunity fail. The final defeat of the French army at Sedan brought on the fall of the Empire; and eight years later we have now a republic with the invaders, whom the men of the Empire had challenged. But a resistance was organised by Gambetta, at the head of a stock-jobbing clique, whose interests, both commercial and political, forbade them to let the republic be established. It would find a ready market for a people determined to be feoffed no longer. This resistance, sustained by the success with which this clique played on the sham patriotic or jingoism of the great majority, was always quite hopeless from a military point of view, and brought the country to the verge of ruin.

It also necessarily involved the German siege of Paris, the result of which was to throw a great deal of power into the hands of the city proletariat, since they at least were in earnest in their resistance to their foreign enemy, and the theatrical resistance necessary to the ambition of the political adventurers who posed as their leaders could not do one decent face to put upon it without their enthusiasm. In October, while the Stade de Lille was in full swing, a rising headed by Blanqui nearly succeeded in overthrowing the bourgeois domination; and after the siege the possession of arms, especially cannon, by the proletariat, in the hands of whom the dispossessed army under the leadership of the Internationalists afforded the opportunity desired by the Socialists. On the failure of Thiers' attempt to disarm Paris—whether he expected it to succeed, or only designed it as a trap to enable him to fall with more force of arms on Paris—on this failure the insurrection took place, and the Central Committee, largely composed of members of the International, got into their hands the executive power, a great deal of which they retained during the whole of the existence of the Commune. Their position was strengthened by the fact that, apart from their aims towards the economical freedom of the proletariat, in their aspirations towards genuine federalisation they were, in appearance at least, in accord with the Radicals who wished to see an advanced municipalism brought about.

As the movement progressed, it became more and more obvious that if the resistance to Thiers and the attempt to establish municipal independence had been through the influence of Socialist influence on the proletariat: the Radicals, therefore, were forced by the march of events into alliance with the Socialists. The Socialists, however, unscrupulously, by the enactment of measures distinctly Socialist nature were passed, involving the suspension of contract and abolition of rents; and both in these matters and in the decentralisation which was almost the watchword of the Commune, the influence of the Socialists was marked. Also, although the opportunity for the establishment of the Commune was given by the struggle against foreigners, the international revolutionary aspirations were not shared by the representatives of foreigners in the Council of the Commune and in command of its troops. And though in itself the destruction of the Vendome Column may seem a small matter, yet considering the importance attached generally, and insanely, by the masses to such symbols, the removal of the base-piece of Napoleonian upholstery was another mark of the determination to hold no parley with the old jingo legends.

It should be noted that the things which took place in other towns in France were not so much variations of the thought of the bourgeois, which at first found itself powerless before the people, but rather the result of owing to a want of fuller development of Socialism and lack of organisation of the masses. The whole revolt was at last drowned in the blood of the workers of Paris. Certainly the immediate result was to crush Socialism for the time by the destruction of a whole generation of its most determined revolutionists; and it was a victory of the vengeful revenge, to which the vengeance in its fury of revenge has, as we can now see, tended to strengthen the progress of Socialism, as they set the seal of tragedy and heroism on the minds of the workers of the Commune, and made its memory a rallying point for all future revolutionists.

However, the fall of the Commune involved that of the International. The immediate failure of its action was obvious, and blinded people to its indestructible principles. Besides, a period of great commercial prosperity visited the countries of Europe at this time. The Franco-prussian war had nearly broken Germany, and the defeated power was being turned over and over by the German bourgeois in their merry game of "beggar-my-neighbour." England was at the height of her "lending and bonds"—a label which she has since discarded. Continental it became at once decidedly Socialist and revolutionary, and its influence was very considerable.

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