

at the abolition of the pawn-shops themselves, which were in opposition to the right of the worker to the instruments of labor and to credit. The liquidation of the pawn-shops was to be followed by the regulation of unemployment. The victims of the war, and the needy and helpless were paid voluntary pensions from the public treasury. The social character of the Commune became more apparent from day to day, or, as the pamphlet on the Civil War puts it: "Its own existence as a working body constituted its great social measure." Besides all this, however, the political measures of the Commune likewise assured the working class freedom of movement. The state of siege was at once lifted and a general amnesty declared for all political crimes and offenses. Church and state were strictly separated. The clerical estates were transformed into national property, the support of church organizations by the public treasury ceased. The church was separated from the schools, and the latter were cleansed of all religious symbols, dogmas and prayers. A complete revolution of marriage and family rights was contained in the provisions recognizing as binding any union of a man and woman living together as mates and paying all soldier's widows alike regardless of the form in which the marriage had been consummated. The Commune burned the guillotine and tore down the Vendome column—an act that constituted a declaration of war against the entire nationalistic tradition—that famous symbol of war and radical persecution which Napoleon I. had made out of captured cannon after his victory over Austria in 1809. Foreigners enjoyed all the rights of citizenship. Foreigners even held important posts in the Commune, since "the flag of the Commune is that of the world-republic," a declaration of principles that was of greater import and significance than any that had heretofore been uttered by any revolution.

But the Commune went on to change fundamentally the entire machinery of state and administration. The military and the police disappeared. The standing army and conscription were abolished and the national guard declared the only authorized armed force. The Commune held supreme power, being at the same time a legislative and an executive organ, not a parliamentarian but a working body. All offices had to be administered on laborers' pay, thus avoiding once and for all the danger of reviving a bureaucratic class.

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The bourgeois class and the members and adherents of the old government became enraged at this state of affairs. This Commune was not only a workers' government, it constituted the worst violation of the rights of citizenship, an abuse of political power. This Communism was nothing more than barbarism and savagery, this rule of the rabble in reality the tyranny imposed by an insignificant minority over deluded, ignorant masses. This rage of the bourgeoisie is the most effective answer to the doubts that have been occasionally expressed as to whether the Commune was actually a working-class government, as the memorial on the Civil War declares. Reference is usually made to the large number of petty-bourgeois individuals among the members of the Commune as well as to the confused

minds and the mere talkers who frequently appeared on the scene. Whenever there was an important question to be decided, long discussions and hot debates would take place, so that actually one could gain the impression that the Commune was not only without a program but even without guiding principles.

But strong as were the internal dissensions and violent as was the struggle of various factions for leadership, the spirit of the workers prevailed and asserted itself throughout. The workers impressed their stamp upon the Commune. And just as it is sufficient for an accurate answer to the question of whether the Commune was actually and essentially a government of the working-class, to point to the decrees of the Commune, so the government at Versailles with the unerring instinct of ruling classes for maintaining their positions of power, recognized on the very first day the fundamental difference of the new and the old power and the total incompatibility of the two forms. The old government with its headquarters at Versailles at once called a strike of all officials, in order to deal the Commune a death-blow at its very beginning, and the upper bureaucracy willingly responded. As at a common signal the various administrations—city tax bureau, roads commission, street-lighting department, public charities, postal and telegraph service—ceased to function. The trade halls, the markets, all the intricate digestive and respiratory organs of the great metropolis suddenly became paralyzed. The example of the officials was followed by a part of the bourgeois population, like the physicians and a portion of the professional personnel of the hospitals. But within two days this manoeuvre was completely played out, due to the energy of the Commune and the readiness of the lesser officials and the petty-bourgeois elements to co-operate.

What stand did the Commune take in connection with the war? The traditional revolutionary conception of France would have demanded a defense of the inviolability of the national territory. But with the conclusion of peace on the part of the bourgeoisie the question of the war was likewise settled as far as the proletariat was concerned. In view of the desire of the bourgeoisie and the peasantry for peace and in view of the exhaustion of the petty-bourgeois, any attempt to resume the defensive struggle would have encountered the united opposition of all France. The Commune adapted itself to this situation. In its very first declaration the Commune declared that it considered the war at an end and that its only dispute now was with Versailles. The future universal world-republic of the proletariat, it was assumed, would eventually cope with the policy of conquest of Bismarck. And so the call for the Commune acquired a new and changed significance. Paris in arms and the rapidly arming forces of reaction stood facing one another on the hard ground of power and reality.

The Paris Commune, surrounded though it was by a world of enemies, nevertheless permitted itself to commit two fatal errors. It neglected the necessary military safeguards and omitted the seizure of the Bank of France. The troops of the Versailles government were permitted to withdraw in full force

and completely armed from Paris; important strategic posts were left unguarded; the organization of the defense was placed in incompetent and undependable hands; there was no definite plan against Versailles. The Bank of France at that time possessed a capital of three billion francs besides 90,000 deposits. The seizure of this institution would have delivered the entire bourgeoisie of France into the hands of the Commune and might possibly have caused the government at Versailles to plead for negotiations. Even the adherents of Proudhon in the Commune seemed to have forgotten that their master had placed at the head of his program the demand for the suppression of the Bank of France.

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On April 2, the Versailles government was already prepared to begin its attack upon Paris. An attempted sally of the Communards failed, and only a few days later the government troops forced the passage at Neuilly. Beginning with May 6th, Paris was again inclosed on all sides, as in the days of the German siege. On May 9th the first of the forts surrendered, on the 14th the second fell; eight days later the Versailles troops set foot upon the ground of the city itself. Then began the street fighting. The struggle became more bitter day by day. Then the Prussians opened the neutral zone they were occupying, enabling the troops of Versailles to attack the Communards in the rear and flank. The last struggle was the more intense for its hopelessness. It was only on the eighth day that the last defenders succumbed on the heights of Belleville and Menilmontant. The government troops instituted a terrible massacre. Whoever was caught in the national guard uniform, whoever wore army shoes, whoever showed on his clothing traces of military facings since ripped off, was shot at once. The rifles of the soldiers were not equal to the bloody task. So the prisoners were gathered in crowds and finished off by means of artillery fire. The "citizens' guard" appeared on the scene—the national guard of the forces of law and order—showing off their armbands as a mark of honor for being permitted to direct the executions. Toward the end of the struggle, the Prussians surrounded the hunted game. Their officers drove back to the executioners all those soldiers of the federated legions who attempted to cross the line. This mass slaughter lasted until the early days of June, the summary executions well into the middle of the month. The military admitted 17,000 executions. From May 21 to May 30, the representatives of law and order gathered some 40,000 prisoners, including numerous women and children. There were counted no less than 400,000 denunciations, of which a large share may be credited to the press. The press rejoiced that there are 100,000 voters less than there were in the February elections! And Thiers stood up proudly in the national assembly to announce: "We are honest people. Law will be administered according to the common statutes. We shall have recourse only to the law."

The Commune lay shattered and lifeless on the ground. It failed because of the support given by

the foreign foe to the bourgeois government of France, because of the unrestrained animosity of the rural population, because of the unwillingness to co-operate and the indecision of the workers and petty-bourgeoisie of the other French cities. It failed not because the economic status of the country had not attained sufficient maturity, but because the re-classification of society, conditioned by the methods of production, had not yet developed in a sufficient degree, because the industrial worker had not yet acquired a position of sufficient strength in society to remain permanently in power. The Commune failed because it was impossible for it to conquer.

Without number were the victims who died in the prisons, for after the defeat of the Commune there broke out a perfect orgy of "justice." Thousands were sent away to the watery wastes of the Pacific Ocean. When the parliament ended its term in 1876 it shortened a few prison sentences and granted 600 pardons. This was the extent of its mercy. And when the new Chamber with its republican majority went into session, it too refused amnesty to the Communards. And as late as the winter of that year the military courts tried cases and inflicted death penalties for participation in the May battles. And yet the bourgeoisie spilled the blood of the people in vain; in vain did they condemn innumerable youths and aged men to rot in prison hells, in vain did they deliver women and girls into the hands of the Bagno of New Caledonia. From the graves of these thousands have sprouted all the more profusely and richly the seeds of revolution, and out of the blood and flames and smoking ruins of Paris, that mother of the European Revolution, arose the reality of proletarian dictatorship, of the free Commune, lighting its inextinguishable fires in every corner of the globe.

(To be concluded)



Revolution