

A SHORT HISTORY
OF THE
PARIS COMMUNE

BY
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PARIS COMMUNE

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PREFACE.

The Commune of Paris is the one event which Socialists throughout the world have agreed with single accord to celebrate. Every 18th of March witnesses thousands of gatherings throughout the civilised world to commemorate the (alas! only temporary) victory of organised Socialist aspiration over the forces of property and privilege in 1871.

The Commune, it is said, did little of a distinctively Socialistic character; it made many mistakes; it was infatuated with the idea of decentralisation. All this is true. What constitutes the importance of the Commune in history is not certainly the measures that it enacted, is not even its admirable conduct of the administration of a great metropolis under circumstances of extreme difficulty; it is the fact that the Commune is a landmark as being the first administration manned by the working classes, having for its more or less conscious aim the reorganisation of Social conditions—the transformation of a Civilised Society into a Socialist Society. It is this question of aim as symbolised by the Red Flag, which is the central one. For, however nebulous may have been the views of some of those that took part in it, that such was the aim of the movement has been recognised by friends and foes alike.

What meant the blood-frenzy of the Versaillese? What meant the tacit or avowed approval of the capitalistic press throughout the civilised world, at the most hideous carnage known to history, but the desperate rage of threatened class interests? We all recognise that those who died under the Red Flag in 1871 died for Socialism, and a nobler army of martyrs no cause has ever had.

In dedicating this little book to the Social-Democratic Federation, I should say that its initiation is due to my old friend Harry Quelch, now editor of *Justice*, in the columns of which journal it originally appeared in serial form.

THE PARIS COMMUNE.

I. INTRODUCTION.

In an historical sketch of the events of the movement known as the Paris Commune of 1871, it is desirable to start with the endeavour to fix that movement in its true historical perspective.

Now, the Paris Commune occupies a peculiar position in the history of the proletarian movement. It forms the culmination of the first period of modern Socialism—a period in which the elements of prior movements were still clinging to it. The distinction between Socialism and Anarchism had not as yet fully emerged; the Anarchistic-Individualistic doctrines of Proudhon still had adherents within the Socialist party; while Bakunin was regarded as one of the pillars of the International. The old French Red Republican party, of which the Commune was the outcome and expression, was a very mixed concern. In addition to the elements above referred to, there were archæological survivals of the ideas of '48, and even of the Jacobins of the Great Revolution. This first period of modern Socialism dates from the foundation of the Communist League and the issue of the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels in 1847, and closes with the practical extinction of the old International in 1873. After the great work of the International in the Commune, it did nothing worth speaking of, although much feared by the authorities on the Continent. But apart from the socialist movement in its proper sense, it is necessary, in order to fully understand the strains which composed the Paris Commune, to note more particularly its relation to the general revolutionary movement of '48 and to the French national revolutionary tradition. The European Revolution of 1848 was the culmination of the bourgeois revolutionary movement which began in the sixteenth century, and which in England partially, though very imperfectly, succeeded in breaking down the monarchical bureaucracy veneered with Feudalism—into which the mediæval political system had become transformed—at the close of the seventeenth century. On

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the Continent, however, this transitional political order of things, based on the power of the reigning monarch (in Germany, prince or duke) and his functionaries was not even “scotched,” much less killed, before the end of the eighteenth century. In the general reaction which succeeded the French Revolution it was temporarily resuscitated with slight modifications, but it suffered again a partial reverse in 1830–2, and from that time forward the irresistible wave of middle-class ascendancy gathered its forces till it swept all before it in the great revolutionary year. The middle class was backed by the proletariat, as yet politically undifferentiated from it, and constituting, so to say, the body of the progressive party, which the middle-class leaders claimed to direct as its head.

One of the main features of the popular movement of '48 was “patriotism,” by which was understood centralisation—the “United Germany,” “United Italy,” “Independent Hungary” mania, and the rest. All the united, independent, and patriotic balderdash, over which so much rhetorical froth and so many gallons of good black ink were expended, has since been realised. They have it now, all for which they strove. And what good has come of all the centralising bureaucratisation that the patriotic “forty-eighter” orated, struggled, gushed, and wept for by turns as the goal of human aspiration? These precious “united” nationalities are now groaning under the united and independent military and administrative budgets of their respective beloved fatherlands. One would think, if one is to risk one’s skin at all in a revolutionary enterprise, it were better to save it for something more worth having than the sorry result for which most of the Continentals of '48 were so eager to risk theirs!

In 1848 the present constitutional basis of Europe was established, and since then the middle-class “advanced” movements have become more and more moderate as the class itself has become politically dominant and settled down. The revolt of even the small middle-classes has, since '48, disappeared, its main object having been attained, such changes as the poorer section of the class demand, with few exceptions, having been striven for by peaceful and constitutional methods. In 1848, in short, the bourgeoisie, which had long been economically dominant, put the finishing touch to its political emancipation.

Yet the '48 Revolution, though predominantly a middle-class concern, is signalised by the first appearance of the proletariat in conscious opposition to the middle-class—to wit, in the German Communist League and the Paris insurrection of June in that year. The former of these movements was the beginning of Socialism; the latter, though, as above said, a conscious class-movement, was, in its form and general character, rather a survival of the original revolt of the French proletariat during the great Revolution than the beginning of any new departure on the part of the French working-classes, notwithstanding that the immediate “plank” was Louis Blanc’s scheme. Indeed, at this time and for some years later, “scientific Socialism,” as we understand it to-day, was practically unknown in France, the brilliant essays of Proudhon being the nearest approach to anything of the kind.

It remains to say a few words on the revolutionary tradition in France. Amongst the working-classes of the large towns—notably of Paris, of course, but also of Lyons, Marseilles, and other places—the remembrance of the power and position of the then young proletariat during the great years of the Revolution, 1792 to 1794, had lingered on ever since, now and again bursting out in somewhat aimless revolt, and again slumbering for awhile, but always there. The party of the people embodying this tradition, which, of course, from time to time absorbed new ideas of a Socialistic nature as they arose, became definitely constituted in 1848, and was known after that year as the Red Republican Party, from the fact that, in the June insurrection, the red flag was adopted by the insurgents (I believe at the suggestion of Louis Blanc, when the national workshop system was the immediate question at issue) and everywhere acclaimed as the banner of the class-conscious proletariat and of Socialistic Republicanism, in opposition to the tricolour, which was that of the middle-classes and of bourgeois or political Republicanism. Such was the origin of the flag which is now, the world over, the great ensign of the modern Socialist movement.

In addition to the active Red Republican Party and its popular leaders, there has always existed in France a class of men who have made the history of the great Revolution their life-study. These men naturally conceive of every revolution as modelling it-

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self on the lines of the French Revolution of 1789–96. Their influence has reacted on the popular movement and its leaders, and confirmed the natural bias of every Frenchman to try and re-live and re-act the greatest epoch in his national history, the general outlines and prominent names of which he is familiar with from his youth up.

In addition to the foregoing influences, there was, of course, that of the International, and with it, the Marxists, who had been industriously propagandising among the Parisian working-classes for five or six years past, and who made their influence felt at the time we are speaking of.

Such was the amalgam of tendencies and ideas—Proudhonism, neo-Jacobinism reminiscences of '48, with a recent infusion of the modern Socialism of Marx—which in various proportions went to constitute the mental background alike of the leaders and the rank and file of the French Red Republican Party in 1871, at the time when it established the Commune of Paris.

II. PROLOGUE.

The shoddy splendour and the all-penetrating corruption of the second French Empire had been overtaken by their Nemesis. After the defeat at Sedan came the Revolution of September 4th, which gave the Empire its parting kick, and established, provisionally at least, the Republic. The Germans were soon in full march upon Paris, and the incapable and (from the point of view of its mandate) treacherous "Government of National Defence" just established, was organising, Trochu at its head, the resistance. The members of the Government did not believe in the possibility of defending the capital, and wanted to capitulate, while the working classes, and a large proportion of the smaller middle-classes, were mad for war to the knife. It is difficult as to this point to feel much sympathy with either side. For my own part I am utterly unable to appreciate the enthusiasm of M. Lissagaray for the stupid chauvinistic frenzy of the general population of Paris in wishing to sacrifice untold thousands of lives in a more than doubtful attempt to drive back "les Prussiens" for the sake of rehabilitating the tarnished military glory of "la patrie"; while on the other hand nothing can excuse Trochu and his consorts, the bourgeois political notabilities, for accepting a definite mandate, and then not only not doing their best for success, but distinctly riding for a fall.

On September 20th, Paris was invested, and the four months' siege began. The popular excitement within the city during the whole time was intense. The population resolutely declined to believe in the possibility of the city being taken, and at every reverse threatening demonstrations against the impotent Provisional Government were made. Twice a revolution was on the point of being accomplished—on October 31st, 1870, and on January 22nd, 1871. Of course, resistance to the foreign enemy was what was uppermost in all minds, and the demands of the Parisian masses for the establishment of a Commune were largely based on reminiscences of the wonders effected in this connection by the first Paris Commune in 1792–3. On October 31st, the Hôtel de Ville, the seat of the Government, was invaded by an angry crowd, some demanding a committee of public safety, some the revolutionary Commune. The National Guards, disgusted, refused to come to the Govern-

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mental assistance. The members of the Government were made prisoners, and Flourens and Blanqui, the two well-known popular leaders, for a few hours got the upper hand. But it was impossible to effect anything. Anarchical confusion and a babel of tongues reigned throughout the municipal headquarters. Finally, towards evening the reactionists succeeded in stirring up some battalions of the National Guard to release and reinstate the members of the Government. They used the names of Flourens and Blanqui as a bogey to scare the timid and the middle-class. Thus the day ended in a *fiasco* from a revolutionary point of view. The resuscitated Government was compelled, however, to proclaim an amnesty to all who had played a part in the proceedings, but subsequently, in violation of all pledges, Blanqui was arrested, and, after the siege, put on his trial for the share he had taken, and Flourens was arrested and imprisoned within a few days. The result of October 31st was to strengthen the hands of the Government of National Defence, which, following the example of the deposed Emperor, demanded and obtained a plebiscite of Parisians in its favour. Hence the old, useless sorties continued as before.

Christmas came and the New Year, but the defence got no forwarder. At last, on January 20th, Trochu summoned the mayors of the 20 arrondissements of the city, and declared all further holding out impossible. The chauvinist Parisians were struck dumb with indignation at the idea of surrender, but the next day the mayors were again summoned, and informed that the General Staff had decided not to make another sortie, and, in short, that it was absolutely essential to open negotiations with the enemy at once. On the night of the 21st, the Government, after a heated and lengthy discussion of the situation, replaced Trochu by another General, Vinoy. Early the next morning found Flourens at liberty, his prison having been stormed by a friendly battalion of "Nationals." Meanwhile the authorities were taking every precaution against the threatened proletarian insurrection. But by midday of the 22nd the call-drum was beating in the Batignolles district and elsewhere, and early in the afternoon the Hôtel de Ville was surrounded by hostile National Guards and an angry crowd demanding the Commune. The Hôtel de Ville was defended by *gardes mobiles*, who were replied to by "Nationals," and a fusillade lasting three-

quarters of an hour ensued, involving over thirty killed, after which a body of gendarmes appeared, and the insurgents retreated and dispersed, leaving about a dozen prisoners in the hands of the authorities. A few days later, the city was formally surrendered, the terms having been signed, and on the 29th of the month the German flag was hoisted on the forts.

The elections which were now held for the purpose of ratifying the terms of peace were carefully manipulated by the reactionary elements throughout the provinces—although Paris remained stoutly Republican—and showed an enormous clerical and monarchical majority. This so-called “National Assembly,” not content with fulfilling its mandate of settling the terms of peace, at once set about openly scheming for the overthrow of the Republic. The so-called pact of Bordeaux established a concordat between the two rival royalist factions under the leadership of the old Orleanist Minister, Adolphe Thiers, who was immediately constituted chief of the Executive by the Assembly.

The next thing to do was to deal with the armed populace, the workmen and small middle class, in the shape of the various bodies of National Guards throughout the country, above all the most numerous, most determined, and owing to its position, most influential of them, the National Guard of Paris. In stipulating the surrender of Paris, Jules Favre, acting for the Government of National Defence, had arranged for the retention of their arms by the Paris Nationals. This was not done out of any affection for the citizen soldiers, but because the Government well knew that any attempt to disarm this proletarian army would be met by a resistance they had no adequate means of dealing with, and which would not improbably have upset them and all their schemes, especially the terms of surrender, which were regarded by all classes as already humiliating enough. But as soon as the conditions of peace were definitely settled, the hostility of the new Assembly to Republican Paris became marked, and the intention of crushing all revolutionary elements, first and foremost the National Guard, was openly shown. The people organised on their side. The city, from the beginning of February to March 18th, was, as it were, sullenly standing at bay against the Assembly and the Government, which did not as yet dare its great coup—the disarmament.

III. THE 18TH OF MARCH.

As already stated in the last chapter, the Assembly of reactionary bourgeois riff-raff and aristocratic fossils, hurriedly elected at the beginning of February for the sole purpose of concluding peace, had no sooner met at Bordeaux than it began insulting the deputies for Paris. The terms of peace ratified, it resolved to continue its functions as a legislative body in defiance of the limitation of its mandate. But this was not all. The insults to Paris culminated when the Assembly passed a resolution to decapitalise the metropolis and transfer itself and the Government to Versailles. This was the last straw, which came on the top of a number of other things. Rumours were confirmed of the projected immediate suppression of the only resource of the workmen, their 1s. 3d. a day as National Guards, of their impending disarmament, and, as if of set purpose to drive them on to starvation and despair, of the undelayed enforcement of all overdue bills and all arrears of rent suspended during the siege.

Throughout February the International and other workmen's and revolutionary associations had been active, and the indignation of the smaller bourgeoisie at the conduct of the Government of National Defence, and their irritation at the attitude of the new Assembly as regarded Paris and the Republic, made them lend their passive, where not active, support to the popular movement. Various mass meetings were held and committees formed—the upshot of which was the constitution of the Central Committee of the National Guard, three members being elected for each arrondissement. There were also some sub-committees, the most important being that of the Montmartre division, having its office in the Rue des Rosiers, and which has sometimes been mistaken for the Central Committee itself. The Central Committee was composed entirely of obscure men, till then utterly unknown to public life, but elected for their integrity and practical capacity by the comrades of their district.

The suppression of Red-Republican journals by General Vinoy, the treacherous condemnation to death of Flourens and Blanqui for the part taken by them in the affair of the 31st of October, coming on the 11th of March, the same day that the resolution to decen-

tralise Paris became known, gave further edge to the popular fury and to the determination to resist. From this time to the 18th the storm was visibly impending; but the Central Committee, backed by the International and the workmen's organisations, declared that the first shot should be fired by the other side.

There were at this stage three distinct elements in the Parisian movement—(1) The element of Municipal patriotism, the desire to see Paris remain paramount in France, possessing a municipal council with extensive local powers; (2) The determination to protect the Republic, as such, from the obvious Monarchical conspiracy being planned against it; and (3) The definitely Socialist Revolutionary element represented mainly, though not exclusively, by the International. The small middle-class, as might be expected, were in general moved by the first two objects; but, as we shall see, as the Revolution proceeded, its Socialistic *telos*, implicit from the first, came more and more to the fore, till in two or three weeks it had completely absorbed the whole movement. It is desirable to point this out, as there is a fatuous Fabianesque type of quibbler who has occasionally tried to exaggerate the first two elements, which had their share at the inception of the Commune, in order to discount its Socialistic character. It is this same sort of insufferable quidnunc who is always enlightening the public mind on the true significance of Socialism, explaining that it only means the General Post Office somewhat exaggerated—nothing more whatever.

Thiers and his Ministers, members of the old National Defence gang, arrived in Paris on the 15th of March, and at once set about their measures for the great step of the disarmament of the popular force of the Metropolis. The proceeding relied upon the gullibility or imbecility of the Parisians to an incredible extent. The Government had, at the most, 25,000 considerably demoralised and otherwise not very reliable troops, while the National Guard numbered nearly 100,000 men, and although some few battalions might possibly have been gained over to the Assembly, yet they were an insignificant number as against those loyal to the Central Committee. Under these unfavourable conditions, Thiers, prompted, it is said, by the big financial thimble-riggers of the Bourse, decided to begin operations. The first thing to be done was to seize the cannon; and accordingly the order was secretly given, on the 17th, for

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250 pieces of ordnance to be removed from Montmartre. It was all but executed by surprise at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 18th by a couple of brigades of the regular army, scarcely any resistance being offered.

But though the cannons were seized while the people were asleep, with a fatal want of foresight the Government omitted to provide any means of transport, and while this was under way Montmartre awoke and began to take in the situation. The walls were covered by a placard, in which the ominous word "order" appeared—a word which, as we all know, generally spells bloodshed. The women were the first to move, it is said, and surrounded the cannon, apostrophising the soldiers, who hesitated. Meanwhile the *rappel* was beaten by a couple of drums throughout the district and bodies of Guards began to roll up. Stragglers of the "regulars" joined them, and the whole throng penetrated up to the Buttes Montmartre, defended by a brigade under General Lecomte, some of the foremost men of which made signs of fraternisation. Lecomte, seeing this, ordered the recalcitrants under arrest, at the same time threatening them with the words, "You shall receive your deserts." A few shots were exchanged between federals and regulars, without doing much harm, when suddenly a body of Guards, the butt end of their muskets up, accompanied by a motley crowd of women and children, debouched from the neighbouring street, the Rue des Rosiers. Lecomte gave the order to fire three times. His men stood immovable. The crowd pushed forward and fraternised with the troops, who immediately afterwards seized the ruffian with his officers. The soldiers whom he had just before arrested wanted to shoot him forthwith, but some Nationals rescued him and took him to the headquarters of the staff of the National Guard, where they made him sign an order for the evacuation of his positions.

Similar incidents occurred with the other brigades. There was hardly any resistance to the insurrection. The soldiers fraternised on all sides. In three hours, i.e., by 11 o'clock, all was over, almost all the cannon recaptured, almost all the battalions of the National Guard afoot, joined by numbers of regulars—in short, the insurrection was master of the field. The Government, in spite of proclamations and adjurations, could do nothing; a few hundred men were

the most that rallied to them.

Thiers, seeing the whole of Paris against him, insisted upon the immediate evacuation of the city, including the forts on the south, by the Government and remaining troops. He escaped by a back door from the Hôtel de Ville to Versailles. The insurrection, it will be observed, now that it had come, was a purely spontaneous popular movement. The Central Committee did not meet till comparatively late in the day. This lack of preparation and organisation had its drawbacks, however, in spite of the immediate success, as we shall presently see.

At half-past four in the afternoon, a general who had had a hand in the slaughtering of the insurgents in 1848, Clément-Thomas by name, was arrested. There were many who tried to rescue him from a summary execution, crying, "Wait for the Committee!" "Constitute a court-martial!" but without avail. The old martinet was thrust against a wall in the Rue des Rosiers, and riddled with bullets from twenty chassepots. Though the scoundrel doubtless deserved his fate, it is to be regretted that the formality of a trial was not observed, as the score against him was an old one. The same observation does not apply to Lecomte, who had been seized in flagrante delicto in the morning, ordering a massacre. This cowardly miscreant, when the door of the room where he was confined was burst open by an angry crowd, grovelled on his knees, spoke of his family, and whined for mercy. What had he cared for the fathers of families among his would-be victims to the cause of "order" of a few hours before? He was taken outside, and justice was summarily dealt out to him. Of course, the bourgeois journals everywhere bellowed lordly at the execution of these two rascally bandits of their cause.

The Central Committee and the staff of the National Guard now began to take measures for occupying the Government offices and the chief strategical positions. In the evening Jules Ferry slunk off after Thiers. Jules Favre subsequently made his escape. Late at night Vinoy succeeded in getting off his troops from the various barracks of Paris with their baggage and ammunition. Versailles was, of course, the rallying point of the whole crew. Allowing the Government and troops to slip through their fingers was the first serious mistake made by the Insurrection. This was owing to lack

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of discipline, organisation, and preparedness. Nothing would have been easier, if the Committee had been active and alert, than to have closed all the gates, arrested all the Governmental authorities, civil and military, to await their trial. The “little man,” Thiers, and all the rest would have been then under their thumb. This only proves that though a popular ebullition may indeed *make* a revolution, yet that without organisation it will very soon *make a mess* of it.

IV. THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND THE REACTION.

The 19th of March saw the red flag waving over the Hôtel de Ville and all the public buildings of the city. The Revolution had triumphed, but it had made its first mistake; it had allowed the heads of the Government to escape with the elements of an army. The Central Committee was supreme, but stupefied by its sudden accession to absolute power. Two of the members alone had the presence of mind to suggest the only course to retrieve the previous day's mistake, viz., to march at once on Versailles, then virtually at their mercy, disperse the Assembly, and arrest the ringleaders of the Reaction. The others hung on legal technicalities. Meanwhile the clearing of the Government offices and the transference of yet more military to Versailles still went on. But the Committee (to its honour in one sense) was too eager to abdicate its functions and proceed to the elections for the Commune, to think of shutting the gates, or indeed of anything else. In order to legalise the situation and put the Revolution right with the rest of France, the co-operation of the deputies for Paris and of the mayors was resolved to be sought, in concert with whom the Committee wished to proclaim the elections.

The Thiers crew now played out their last card, in the final number which they issued of the *Journal Officiel*, alleging the Committee to have "assassinated" in cold blood the Generals Lecomte and Clément-Thomas, and asking whether the National Guard would take upon itself the responsibility for these "assassinations." The Committee, to its credit, did not allow itself to be bullied into disavowing these righteous, if too hasty, acts of popular justice; but confined itself to inserting a note in the new number of the *Journal Officiel* (which from this day passed into its hands), explaining its true position with respect to them. The Governmental appeal had little effect on the National Guard, though it was followed by the defection of the Quartier Latin (the students), hitherto to the fore in all revolutions, but the essentially bourgeois character of which, despite its bohemian veneer, became now clearly apparent.

The delegation of mayors who came to the Hôtel de Ville, after much debating, failed to effect anything. Clémenceau, who was their spokesman, urged the Committee to abdicate its functions to

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the deputies and mayors, who would use their best offices to obtain satisfaction for Paris from the Assembly. Varlin, one of the Committee, explained that what was wanted was no mere municipality, but a quasi-autonomous Paris, with police and legislative power, united to the rest of France by the bond of federal union alone. Even good Socialists like Milliere and Malon doubted the expediency of the Committee's initiative. It was finally decided that the Committee in its turn should send four delegates to the Radical deputies and mayors assembled in the Town Hall of the 2nd Arrondissement. This they did; but after several hours' wrangling, in which Louis Blanc, Clémenceau, and other Radicals, to their shame, giped at the Committee as an insurrectionary body, refusing to treat with it on an equality, no understanding was arrived at, and the delegates left. Next morning the mayors made a final attempt to get possession of the Hôtel de Ville, and sent one of their number to demand it of the Committee. The latter refused to abdicate until a Commune had been elected, and forthwith issued a proclamation that the elections would be held on the following Wednesday, the 22nd. It was only too obvious that a surrender to the deputies and mayors meant a complete knuckling down to Thiers and his Assembly.

The next thing for the Committee to do was to reorganise the public services, purposely thrown into as much disorder as possible by their late occupants prior to their flight. The Government hoped thereby to render it impossible for their successors to carry on the administration of the great metropolis. The newcomers, however, set bravely to work, and overcame all obstacles of this kind. But meanwhile the Committee, not realising that they were about to enter on a life-and-death struggle, had committed a military blunder which practically sealed the fate of the Revolution. Between Paris and Versailles, on a hill a little to the right, lies the largest and most strategically-important of the forts Mont Valérien. This had been abandoned on an order from Thiers, made during his flight—he, with a civilian's lack of knowledge of fortification, believing it not to be worth holding. As a matter of fact, it was the military key to the whole position. For 36 hours it remained empty; but the Committee, instead of at once placing a strong garrison there, regarded it as a matter of subsidiary importance, and con-

tented themselves with some vague and lying assurances (as the event proved) of its having been occupied, together with the other forts, given by a portentous, half-crazed officer named Lullier, who, by his swagger, had imposed upon them and acquired thereby the temporary command. The military staff at Versailles, wiser in their generation, had meanwhile forced an order for its re-occupation from Thiers, and the morning of the 20th found Mont Valérien well munitioned and occupied by 1,000 Versaillese soldiers.

On the 21st the Central Committee suspended the sale of pledged goods, forbade landlords to evict their tenants until further notice, and prolonged the voucher bills for a month. The same day the Radical deputies and mayors made a protest against the elections announced for the next day, as illegal—falsely alleging, at the same time, that the Assembly had guaranteed the maintenance of the National Guard, the municipal elections at an early date, and other things. The Press and all the Respectability of the capital joined in a chorus of denunciation of the elections and of the Committee's action. A rabble of swell mobsmen and fancy men paraded {in} the Place de la Bourse, shouting "Down with the Committee!" "Long live the Assembly!" The hostility of a few of the arrondissements was so great that it became necessary to postpone the elections till the following day.

All this time Versailles, its recently-arrived Assembly, and all their hangers-on, were in a state of abject and grovelling panic. News came in of revolts in several towns of the departments, and there was an hourly dread of the approach of the battalions of the National Guard. The subsequently confirmed forger, Jules Favre, delivered an harangue in the Chamber, denouncing the insurrection in choice expletives and bristling with threatenings and slaughter at Paris—an harangue which the cowering crew of terrified reactionists applauded with wild extravagance, almost falling on the forger's neck in their enthusiasm.

The next day the black-coated rabble spoken of above, together with some journalists and others, with Admiral Suisset at their back, again set forth, many of them with arms concealed in their clothes, this time towards the Place Vendôme, the object being to expel the National Guards from that position under cover of a peaceful demonstration. Spying two sentries of the National

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Guard, they made for them and nearly murdered them. Seeing this, about 200 Guards promptly took up their position at the top of the Rue de la Paix. They were greeted with savage cries, and sword-sticks were levelled at them. Bergeret, their leader, repeatedly summoned the rioters to retire, without avail. Finally, seeing the “Nationals” indisposed to use force, the rioters took courage and drew their revolvers, killing two of the Guard and wounding seven others. The muskets of the “Nationals” then went off, leaving a dozen dead, and a large number of revolvers, sword-sticks, and hats in the street. The mob scattered in all directions, yelling. Of course, ever on the alert for a pretext for a howl at the movement, the bourgeois press everywhere made immense capital out of this incident. *Punch’s* celebrated special constable—who says to the Chartist, “If I kill you, mind, it’s nothing; but if you kill me, by George! it’s murder”—wasn’t in it with the journalists on “respectable” middle-class newspapers on this occasion.

V. THE ELECTION OF THE COMMUNE.

Notwithstanding the slight rallying of the bourgeois and reactionary arrondissements referred to in the last chapter, it was impossible for "order" to effect any real foothold within the city. In a day or two the "loyal" National Guards who were going to do such wonders for the Assembly melted into nothing. The Committee sent battalions of National Guards into all the reactionary quarters, and quiet, if not "order," inside Paris at least, was re-established.

A few days previously two members of the Committee, Varlin and Jourde, had, through Rothschild, obtained a million francs from the Bank of France. This was now exhausted with the initial expenses of organising the public services, and the wages of the National Guard. The Committee again sent Varlin and Jourde to the Bank for supplies, but this time they were received with insults, and gentle persuasion in the shape of a couple of battalions of the National Guard had to be forwarded in order to effect a disbursement. This question of the Bank was a crucial one. Its treatment at the hands of the Committee, and a few days later at those of the Commune, who followed in the same steps, showed a childish want of grasp of the situation, and constituted the third fatal blunder of the Revolution. There was enough in specie and in securities in the Bank to have bought up the whole of the Versailles army. In addition to this, there were 90,000 titles of depositors to serve as hostages for the good behaviour of the Government as representing the middle-classes throughout France. The Committee, and afterwards the Commune, instead of seizing the whole concern, allowed the management to remain, with its entire staff, barring the Chief Governor, who had fled, and went cap in hand from time to time to solicit the requisite funds. The sub-governor by a little diplomacy succeeded before long in nobbling an old gentleman named Beslay, who though no more than a Radical bourgeois had had the pluck to stick gallantly to Paris, yet who, in spite of his personal honesty, had all the prejudices of his class when financial matters were concerned. He was, nevertheless, selected as go-between with the Bank and the Revolution. But to return to the days of March. The mayors now concentrated all their efforts to-

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wards trying to further postpone the elections. These had, after two postponements, been definitely fixed by the Committee for Sunday, March 20th. At last the insults toward Paris, and the general attitude of the Assembly, having disgusted many even of the moderate Republicans, there was a disposition to compromise on the part of the mayors, and the 30th was proposed. The Committee, however, stuck to the 26th, and eventually five mayors, including Clémenceau and Floquet, finding resistance hopeless, reluctantly signed a manifesto sanctioning the elections. The rest did not protest, though they kept steadily aloof. The adhesion of the mayors, such as it was, gave the elections the cachet of technical legality.

On the Sunday, 287,000 men accordingly went to the poll(s), and the Paris Commune was elected and proclaimed amid general rejoicing. On the Monday there was a muster of National Guards (arms piled up in front of them) and civilian electors, in the “place” of the Hôtel de Ville to greet the newly-installed representatives of Paris. Salutes of cannon, bands playing the *Marseillaise*, and enthusiastic shouts made the welkin ring. The spies of Versailles declared the whole of Paris infected. The members of the new Commune appeared again and again on the balcony of the Hôtel de Ville in response to the deafening shouts which demanded them. Amongst the elected, although the majority were Revolutionists, and, at least up to their lights, Socialists, there were a small number of bourgeois Liberals and Radicals chosen, but these very soon found an excuse for backing out of an enterprise which they saw they could not manipulate as they had hoped. At the first meeting of the Commune, the before-mentioned well-meaning bourgeois Beslay was chosen President by virtue of his seniority, and, it must be admitted, made a not altogether bad opening speech. The Commune next day proceeded to apportion itself in committees. There was an Executive Committee composed of Lefrancais, Duval, Félix Pyat (the old forty-eight, with a reputation which he owed to the rhetoric he talked and penned), Bergeret, Tridon, Eudes, and Vaillant (the Blanquist, now member of the Chamber). The other committees were Finance, of which Varlin and Jourde were members, Justice, Public Safety, Labour Exchange, Victualling, Foreign Policy, Public Works, and Education.

One of the first acts of the Commune was to grant a complete release from all rent from October, 1870, to July, 1871. Thus a vast number of poor people were relieved from a crushing liability which they were utterly unable to meet without ruin. This was all very proper as far as it went, but the Commune omitted to perform two important duties which the situation imperatively demanded, the first was to issue a clear and easily intelligible manifesto explaining its programme and plan of action. The second and, if anything, still more serious omission was not keeping in touch with the provinces, which immediately after March 18th, had shown the most favourable signs of sympathetic action with Paris. Lyons, Marseilles, St. Etienne, Narbonne, Toulouse, and other towns started Communes, some of them, notably Marseilles and Narbonne, with considerable chances of success. But they received no support or even communications from the head centre of the movement. As a consequence, isolated materially and morally, they most of them came to grief in a few days. Marseilles and Narbonne held out the longest, but in a fortnight the whole Communistic movement in the provinces was dead. Thiers and his Versailles, again wise in their generation, left no stone unturned to detach the provinces from all sympathy with Paris, and issued notices to all the prefects, maligning Paris and the Revolution, misrepresenting every fact and fabricating every lie.

Having succeeded in rooting out the Commune in the provinces, Thiers proceeded to stop all goods trains for Paris and to cut off all the postal communications. Rampont, the postmaster, received orders to violate the undertaking he had entered into with Thiers, the postal delegate of the Committee, and to disorganise the postal service. The stupid Committee and Commune, hoping to the last that peace would be preserved, took no further steps for the eventuality of war. The Assembly, on its side, proceeded steadily organising the isolation of Paris and consolidation of their army, which was now strengthened by several regiments of released prisoners of war from Germany. By the end of March all the "moderate" members of the Commune had resigned, with the exception of old Beslay. The international character of the movement was accentuated by the unanimous confirmation of the election of Frankel, the Austrian, in the 13th Arrondissement. Meanwhile,

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the “respectable” population, the friends of “order,” were migrating en masse to Versailles.

VI. THE WAR BEGINS WITH DISASTER FOR THE COMMUNE.

On April 1st Thiers officially declared war in a circular sent to the Prefects, and the same day, without any warning given to Paris, the Versaillese opened fire upon the town. The Parisians were in consternation at the recommencement of the siege. No one had thought that matters would really come to this pass. Everywhere within the city was bustle and confusion. The military commission of the Commune placarded the following:—"The Royalist conspirators have attacked—our moderate attitude notwithstanding. Our duty is to defend the city against this wanton aggression." That day but little was done. The Versaillese attacked and drove off an inadequate garrison of Federals at Courbevoie, taking five prisoners, one a lad of 15, all of whom they murdered in cold blood. This was the beginning of the series of atrocities perpetrated by those fiends in human shape which culminated in that sublimest tragedy in modern history, the "bloody week."

After much discussion a sortie was decided upon by the military authorities of the Commune for the next day. That night Cluseret was appointed delegate of war, in company with Eudes, one of the military men of the situation. The National Guard, suddenly called upon to act, was in a state of great disorganisation, often without staff officers or any guiding spirit, and much confusion resulted in consequence. At length, at midnight, three columns were got together. The plan was to make a strong demonstration in the direction of Reuil as a blind for a column under Bergeret and Flourens to operate on the right, while Eudes and Duval, respectively, were to command those on the centre and the left. Unfortunately, these excellent men had never commanded a battalion in the field before, in addition to which the sub-officering, as before said, was hopelessly defective. The elementary requisites of a campaign were neglected; artillery, ambulances and ammunition-waggons were everywhere else except where they should have been. At about three o'clock on the morning of April 3rd, Bergeret's column, 10,000 men strong, but with only eight cannon, reached the bridge at Neuilly. They proceeded quite coolly on their way, under the range of Mont Valérien, every National Guard believing it to be in the possession

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of the Commune, when suddenly shells burst from the great fortress, spreading death and destruction in the ranks of the Federals and severing the column into two halves. Panic, confusion, and cries of "Treachery" overwhelmed everything.

I well remember my astonishment at the headlong folly of the Federals' confidence in Mont Valérien being safe, since the English papers had days previously published the information of its occupation by the Versaillese. It seemed incredible that what was known to us over here should have been utterly unknown to those on the spot and most immediately interested. The fact was the leaders did know that Mont Valérien was lost to the Commune, but hoped the troops of the line would refuse to fire, and so kept the fact secret. The memory of how the linesmen had fraternised on March 18th, and reports as to the untrustworthiness of the Assembly's soldiers, now reinforced by regiments from Germany, had deceived them. They forgot that for this important fort Thiers' military staff had selected their men, and they forget, moreover, that insubordination in the interior of a fortress is a very different thing from insubordination in the open street under the moral pressure of a sympathetic crowd ready to protect the insubordinate from the vengeance of their superior officers. This deception, however well-intentioned it may have been, was little less than criminal under the circumstances. Most of the Guard scattered in all directions, and finally found their way back to Paris, only about 1,200 remaining with Bergeret, and pushing on. They were supported by Flourens, who, with only a thousand men (the rest having straggled off, such was the state of discipline), routed the Versaillese vanguard, and occupied the village of Bougival. A whole Versaillese army corps was directed against this detachment, and the Parisian vanguard had to fall back on Reuil, where a few men had held the position, the object being to cover Bergeret's retreat. Flourens was here surprised with his staff, and this noble-hearted people's hero was killed, his head cleft with a sabre. Poor Flourens was a type of revolutionist of whom we have few now-a-days left. Many there are now who understand the economic question better than Flourens, but none we know who have quite that old-world chivalrous devotion to the Revolution which this remarkable man had, and which so endeared him to the impressionable working-

classes of Paris. Of a well-to-do middle-class family, Flourens' impulsive nature led him in his early youth to join an insurrection against the Turks in the Levant. During the latter part of the Second Empire he was, next to Rochefort, the most prominent people's agitator. His untimely death threw a gloom over all Paris, and heightened the effect of the defeat.

The centre column under Eudes was not more successful than the others. Duval, through mismanagement, was left unsupported, and had to surrender. He was murdered by order of Vinoy, in spite of pledges given to the contrary. Crowds of Guards returned disheartened in the evening. The only good point, from a military point of view, in the day's proceedings was the supplying of Fort Issy with cannon through the energy and thoughtfulness of Ranvier. The disaster of April 3rd, however, notwithstanding all, had the effect of stirring up the whole latent resisting strength of the National Guard. Next day all the forts were manned. The Commune even gained a few points, within a day or two re-occupying Courbevoie, and holding the bridge of Neuilly, but it was not for long. There was no lack of heroism. The Porte Maillot held out for weeks under the fire of Mont Valérien. Yet to the onlooker versed in military lore it was evident that the situation meant a prolonged death agony for Paris. With Mont Valérien lost there was no hope. In a few days the Commune was everywhere on the defensive. Meanwhile strict care was taken by the Versaillese to prevent any tendency favourable to Paris from manifesting itself at Versailles. Officers who merely expressed regret at the fratricidal struggle were secretly murdered by order of the villains with whom the whole of the "respectable" classes of Europe sided.

On April 6th took place the funeral of those killed in the disastrous sortie of the 3rd, and an imposing sight it was. Two hundred thousand accompanied the catafalque to the Père la Chaise cemetery. Five members of the Commune, headed by the old hero of '48, Delescluze, followed as chief mourners. At the grave, the aged man, the father of the Revolution, spoke a few words, after which the vast concourse dispersed. From this time forward the history of the Commune is largely a history of military blunders and incapacity allied with bravery and good intentions. We shall, however, deal very briefly with the purely military side of the movement, as that

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has mainly a local and temporary interest, and, moreover, cannot be properly understood without a large map of Paris and its environs.

VII. CONCERNING VARIOUS MATTERS.

Cluseret now entered upon his duties as delegate of war. His name was already known to Englishmen, owing to his connection with the Fenian attack on Chester Castle, in 1867. He is regarded by many active participators in the Commune as at once insincere and incapable. The latter charge seems to be fairly made out; as to the former I am not prepared to offer any opinion. There were two main plans of defence possible to be adopted, that of the outer enceinte, with its forts, redoubt, etc., but which required more men, more means, and more military experience than the Commune had at its disposal, and that of the inner enceinte, the ramparts, which if effectively carried out would have made Paris practically impregnable. Cluseret and the Commune adopted neither, but messed about with both, neutralising the one by the other.

The cowardly assassinations of Flourens and Duval had excited everyone. In deference to public opinion the Commune ordered the seizure of hostages in full accordance with the practice recognised by war. Unfortunately, the first hostages they could have had had been allowed to escape at the outset of the movement. However, Darboy, the Archbishop of Paris, Lagarde, his grand-vicar, Duguerry, Curé of the Madeleine, Bonjean, Presiding Judge of the Court of Appeal, Jecker, a financial politician responsible for the Mexican expedition, and a few Jesuits were laid by the heels. A decree and a proclamation were then issued threatening reprisals in the event of any further murders on the part of the Versaillese. But the decree remained a dead letter. The Versaillese continued their cold-blooded assassination of prisoners, and no reprisals were taken. As I propose devoting a separate chapter to the consideration of the whole question of the hostages, I shall say no more here.

The fatal incapacity and weakness of the Commune now for the first time became apparent in internal and external policy. Ever since its first sitting, however, it had become increasingly evident that it was below the level of the situation. Beyond two or three comparatively unimportant decrees a fortnight showed no constructive work done.

Meanwhile immense heroism was displayed at certain points of the outworks by the Federal troops. The Porte Maillot, a frightful

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position, exposed to the full fire of Fort Valérien, was held for seven weeks by successive relays of men. It was now that that marvel of self-devoting intrepidity, Dombrowski the Pole, appeared upon the scene. This man, by his calm fearlessness and dashing courage, performed incredible feats with the slenderest means. He swept the Versaillaise from Asnières, while his equally heroic brother took the Castle of Bécon, and, what was still more, routed the troops of Vinoy when they attempted to recover it. But these isolated flashes of momentary success could not materially affect the situation.

Talk of conciliation went on all the time, and many were the efforts made by well-intentioned persons (e.g., the “Union Syndicale,” and the “League of the Rights of Paris”) to bring about an understanding. But Thiers would have none of it. He would hear of no compromise, not even of a truce or armistice, nothing but unconditional surrender.

On April 16th the complementary elections for the Commune—necessitated by the vacation of 31 seats through death, double elections, and resignations—were held. The change was very marked from the March 26th. Instead of the 146,000 who had appeared at the polls in the same arrondissements on the previous occasion only 61,000 voted now. It was felt that all hope of peace was at an end, and that all who voted were voting for war to the knife with Versailles. The inactivity and vacillation of the Commune up to this time had also alienated many sympathisers.

After these elections, on the 19th, it was finally decided to issue a political programme. This programme, which was supposed to be drawn up by a commission of five members, was mainly the work of a journalist, Pierre Denis, assisted by Delescluze. The former, a writer in Jules Vallés’ *Cri du Peuple*, was fanatical on the question of federal autonomy, and this he managed to place in the forefront of the new declaration which demanded the recognition of the republic, and the autonomy of the township or commune (irrespective of its size) throughout France. In the first instance, however, it was only the autonomy of Paris which was called for. The rest of France was to follow suit as best it could. The rights of the Commune were defined as including the voting of the budget, of taxation, the organisation and control of the local services, magistracy, police, and

education, the administration of communal wealth, etc., in short, to all intents complete autonomy. A central council of delegates from the various communes throughout France was referred to, but its functions were nowhere defined. It was apparently forgotten that without adequate safeguards such a council would have been a hopelessly reactionary body, owing to the fact that the large majority of the small rural Communes would have voted under Clerical influence. The idea was for the complete autonomy of Paris in all internal affairs to be forthwith recognised, and that of the other Communes, throughout France to follow, apparently as demanded.

As an International Revolutionist I have been always strongly sympathetic with all movements for local autonomy as most directly tending to destroy the modern "nation" or centralised bureaucratic State, and if the movement had been properly organised in co-operation with the other large towns in the earlier days of March a decentralising programme, properly worked out, might have formed the common political basis. Now, however, it was too late. The idea of constituting Paris a solitary island in the midst of the ocean of provincial France in the vague hope that other islands would spring up in time of themselves, and form an archipelago, was little better than a crude absurdity. The manifesto contained some good passages, probably the work of Delescluze, but as it stood it was ill-timed and not to the point. Nevertheless it was accepted almost without discussion by the Commune, so perfunctory had its proceedings become.

There were now two distinct parties within the council of the Commune, the so-called "majority" and "minority." These originated in the first instance over a hot discussion on the question of the verification of the elections of the 16th, and tended, as is the wont of such factions, to become increasingly bitter and personal. The Commune soon became split up into cliques which alternately dominated, and which still further exacerbated the situation by their mutual recriminations and intrigues. In this way the defence was paralysed, and decrees, good or bad, remained more often than not an empty form.

All this time the Versaillese were organising their attack, and getting into military order the reinforcements they were almost daily receiving from Germany, consisting of troops who after their

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defeat and detention in German garrison towns were perfectly ready to take part in a successful campaign against anybody, no matter whom. The army of Versailles at the end of April amounted to 130,000 men, and more were coming in. Bismarck and the German military authorities had been only too anxious to offer Thiers and the French bourgeoisie every assistance within their power to crush their common proletarian foe.

VIII. THE INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY OF THE COMMUNE.

As already observed, the Commune had organised itself at starting into nine Commissions or delegations. These consisted of a victualling department, a department of municipal services, of finance, of war, of public safety, of justice, of external affairs, of education, and of labour. The first, the provisioning department, did not offer any special difficulties until the end of April, when Thiers ordered the stoppage of all provision trains for Paris, and even after that it was possible to keep the town supplied through the neutral zone between the German and Versaillese armies. Besides, the city itself contained enough food to have sustained a long siege if necessary. The department of public or municipal services involved the general superintendence of public offices such as the Post Office, the Telegraphs, the Mint, the official printing press, the hospitals, the greater number of the subordinate members of the staff of which had been induced to remain or return. Theisz, a workman, took the direction of the Post Office, which involved the most trouble, owing to its having been intentionally thrown into disorder by its late director. The wages of all employees were at once raised, and the hours shortened. In well-nigh all these services the "superior officials" had made off, thus leaving the work of directing them in the hands of the workmen administrators placed there by the Commune.

Camélinat, bronze worker, took over the Mint, and admirably carried on the business of coining bullion and of engraving postage-stamps. The hospitals were re-organised and re-manned by an old revolutionist named Treilhard. The Commission of Finance was presided over by Jourde, who had been a clerk and accountant. Varlin, a workman agitator, energetic and devoted to the cause, was also an invaluable member of this Commission, which had the task of raising and distributing the requisite funds for the payment of all the services, including the National Guards, and the war expenses generally. The whole was managed by workmen and small clerks at workmen's wages, and not at the salaries of "boss" middle-class financiers. The department of war, with Cluseret at its head, seems unluckily to have been the worst conducted of any.

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Here everybody was at cross purposes. Continual wrangling over the possession of the cannon resulted in a lot of artillery remaining useless. Ammunition of wrong calibre was often distributed. Important posts were left unrelieved. The commissariat was, moreover, hopelessly disorganised. The barricades which it had been decided to construct were made regardless of any intelligible strategical plan. There was a fatal tendency for the several departments to overlap in their functions, which were not precisely enough defined. This was especially noticeable between the war and police (public safety) departments.

The department last mentioned was under the direction of Raoul Rigault, an ardent young Revolutionist, but without experience and unfitted for such an important post. What was worse was that he had with him a lot of flighty young men who exacerbated matters. With such colleagues as these, Ferré, Regnard, the chief secretary of police (whose imposing appearance rests in the memory of some of us who used often to meet him in the British Museum at the end of the seventies), and such more solid men, were hopelessly handicapped in their influence. In the matter of the Picpus Convent, where racks, cages with women in a frightful state shut up in them, skulls with hair on, and other evidences of criminal practices were unearthed, nothing was done beyond transferring the nuns to St. Lazare. Decrees of the Commune were not given effect to. Journals suppressed in the morning were allowed to be sold in the evening. The only thing that was not forgotten by this department as by the whole movement was the humanitarian idea and the so-called Christian (?) principle of doing good to those that revile you and persecute you. The Commune through this delegation supported the wives and families of the men who were fighting against it, saying "the Commune has bread for all misery and care for all orphans."

Allied with the Commission of Police and Public Safety was that of Justice. The Commune ordered that every arrest should be at once notified to this department. As regards punctiliousness in the matter of property the department of Justice, like the Commune, showed itself almost pedantic, returning the cash-box of a gas company (!) seized in a search for hidden arms on the company's premises. It dismissed a commissary for having sequestered, po-

lice-fashion, the money found on Gustave Chaudey when arrested for having ordered the firing from the Hôtel de Ville on January 22nd.

The delegation of Justice further instituted a rigorous inquiry into the state of the prisons, and the motives for the arrest of all persons detained. This latter led to a conflict between the two departments and to the resignation of Raoul Rigault after having been admonished by Delescluze for his careless conduct of the important functions entrusted to him. With all his faults, however, it cannot be said that this young man erred on the side of harshness.

The delegation of the Exterior was established mainly for the purpose of enlightening the provinces, too long neglected, and counteracting the influence of Versailles, which diligently fed them with lies. By the time it got into working order, however, the important movements which followed March 18th had been crushed, and it did little or nothing to give direction to, or even to keep alive, the sporadic agitation which broke forth in various places during the ensuing weeks. It despatched a few emissaries indeed, but for the most part obscure Parisians utterly unknown in the localities where they were sent. Seeing that the sole chance of the Commune lay in creating powerful diversions by means of the armed populace of the large provincial towns, the lukewarmness of the action taken is simply incredible. It must be said, nevertheless, on behalf of the Commission itself that the sum of 100,000 francs (£4,000) allowed it by the Commune was ridiculously inadequate for the work of stirring up the whole of provincial France, which was what it ought to have done.

The Education Department, though it, of course, at once suppressed religious teaching and emblems in schools, never got beyond the stage of preparation in any constructive programme. It was supposed to be organising a scheme of primary and secondary education, but has left no trace behind it. Elise Réclus and Benoit Gastineau took excellent charge of the "Bibliothèque Nationale," and Gustave Courbet, the painter, with a committee of artists, superintended the museums and picture-galleries. Some of the arrondissements were more active than the Education Committee itself. One of them, at its own motion, instituted free clothing and feeding for the children. Another, in an excellent memorandum,

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declared it the mission of the school of the Revolutionary Commune to teach children to love their fellow creatures, to love justice, and to bring home to them the duty of improving themselves, not for the sake of personal advancement, "but in the interests of all." At the same time teachers were instructed in future to exclusively employ "the experimental and scientific method, that which starts from facts physical, moral, and intellectual."

The delegation which did most work and which succeeded more than any other in giving expression to the Socialistic principles embodied in the revolution of March 18th was undoubtedly that of "Labour and Exchange," presided over by our Austrian comrade, Léo Frankel. This delegation systematically set to work to collect and arrange information concerning the condition of labour, and the precise relations existing in all trades between employer and workman. It was also entrusted with the revision of the Customs and the transformation of the fiscal system. Its report recommended the return of pledges to all necessitous persons and the suppression of the pawnshops, since the Revolution of the Commune implied the speedy establishment "of a social organisation giving serious guarantees of support to workmen out of employment." The Commune, it proclaimed, implied the rescue of workmen from the exploitation of capital.

The Labour department further procured the prohibition of night work for bakers, and made fines and stoppages of wages illegal. At its instigation the Commune decreed the confiscation of factories and workshops not in actual use, and their immediate handing over to trade syndicates of workmen to be conducted on a co-operative basis. This decree, although defective enough in its details, nevertheless, for the first time in history, affirmed the principle of the expropriation of the capitalist class by the working class, and it is for this reason of epoch-making importance. Unfortunately time and circumstances did not allow of its being carried into effect.

And what was the city of Paris like during the Commune? Quiet, peaceful, and, what is more, almost wholly free from crime. The last fact is admitted by friends and foes alike. Middle-class Englishmen with no sympathy for the Commune have been reluctant witnesses to the safety and good order maintained throughout the

whole city during the two months that the Revolution was master. Quarters, where at other times when "order" prevails, assaults are of frequent occurrence and prostitution is rife, could be traversed without molestation of any kind night or day. While the Versailles organs were daily demanding the wholesale slaughter of Parisians, one looks in vain through all the revolutionary journals for a single bloodthirsty suggestion. The churches, closed for the farce of a Christian worship, no longer seriously believed in, and become solely the instrument for maintaining popular ignorance and subserviency, we find transformed into public halls, in which the pulpits, hung with red, are occupied by preachers of the gospel, not of Christ, but of Revolutionary Socialism. Revolutionary hymns are sung to organ accompaniment. The Tuilleries, the late home of the vulgar and ostentatious profligacy of king and emperor, are now used to serve as free concert rooms for the people. Such was the Paris of the Commune!

IX. THE FREEMASONS, THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND ROSSEL.

The last serious attempt at conciliation between Versailles and Paris was made by the Freemasons on April 21st. They were received coldly by Thiers, who assured them that, though Paris were given over to destruction and slaughter, the law should be enforced, and he kept his word. A few days after they decided in a public meeting to plant their banner on the ramparts and throw in their lot with the Commune. On the 29th, accordingly, 10,000 of the brethren met (55 lodges being represented), and marched to the Hôtel de Ville, headed by the Grand Masters in full insignia and the banners of the lodges. Amongst them the new banner of Vincennes was conspicuous, bearing the inscription in red letters on a white ground, "Love one another." A balloon was then sent up, which let fall at intervals, outside Paris, a manifesto of the Freemasons. The procession then wended its way through the boulevards and the Champs Elysées to the Arc de Triomphe, where the banners were planted at various points along the ramparts. On seeing the white flag on the Porte Maillot the Versaillese ceased firing, and the commander, himself a Freemason, received a deputation of brethren, and suggested a final appeal to Versailles, which was agreed to. The "chief of the executive," of course, hardly listened to the envoys, and declined to further discuss the question of peace with anyone. They might have known before that such would have been their reception. The little smug bourgeois fiend was already scenting the proletarian blood he so longed to shed. This last formal challenge having been made and rejected, the Freemasons definitely took their stand as combatants for the Commune.

Millière, who had worked hard to organise the provincials in Paris ever since the early part of April, induced the "Republican Alliance of the Departments," consisting of provincials residing in Paris, to give a formal adhesion to the Commune, 15,000 men accompanying Millière to the Hôtel de Ville, after having voted an address to the departments. This was on April 30th. The same afternoon news arrived of the evacuation by the Federals of the fort of Issy, which had been the result of a surprise. A few remained behind, however, one of them a lad at the entrance, with gunpow-

der and a train, prepared to blow himself up rather than surrender the fort. As soon as the news was known reinforcements were sent, and the Versaillese driven from the park surrounding the fort and the fort itself was reoccupied. This affair, notwithstanding that it had no immediate military consequences, turned a sudden light on to the way the defence was being conducted, and led to the arrest of Cluseret in the evening.

It also led indirectly to the carrying out of a project mooted some days before, of the creation of a "Committee of Public Safety." Here we see the old revolutionary tradition asserting itself. It was formally expressed by that old votary of the revolutionary tradition, Félix Pyat, who gave as a reason for it that a "Committee of Public Safety" belonged to the period which first produced the "Republic" and the "Commune." This adoration of phrases and historical shibboleths is so thoroughly French, and has so often been the bane of French popular movements, that it is worth specially noting. However, whatever its name, the general feeling as to the necessity of some centralised power was for the moment paramount. The permanent Executive Commission of the Commune, in spite of its having been reorganised, had proved utterly ineffective in superintending things. In its latest form it consisted of Cluseret, Jourde, Viard, Paschal Grousset, Frankel, Protot, Andrien, Vaillant, and Raoul Rigault. In the end, the establishment of the Committee of Public Safety was voted by 45 to 23. This question brought to an issue the quarrel between the so-called "majority" and "minority" on the Commune. The majority, led by Félix Pyat, and containing all the archæological reconstructors and mere sentimentalists, as also the Blanquists (with the exception of Tridon), voted for the Committee. The minority, including the most clear-headed Socialists of the Hôtel de Ville, voted against it. When the question came of selecting the men to serve on it, the minority refused to take any part. Ranvier, Arnaud, Meillet, Gérardin, and Pyat were then elected by the "majority" alone. This squabble had the most disastrous effects outside, as it for the first time revealed to the world the dissensions and personal recriminations long brewing in the council-room.

On the same evening that Cluseret was arrested (April 30th) Rossel was appointed Delegate of War in his place. Rossel was a

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disappointed young officer who had served during the Franco-German war, and thought himself unduly neglected by the military authorities. On the look-out for a job in which he might distinguish himself, and full of bitterness towards his old superiors, he came to Paris and took service under the Revolution. He neither knew nor cared anything for the cause, and frankly confessed, when interrogated by the Commune, that he did not understand what Socialism meant, but that he hated the Government which had signed away two French provinces to the "Prussians," and was willing to support any movement for its overthrow. In the teeth of Cluseret's incapacity, and, as some thought, treachery, a young officer with a certain military reputation, and able to talk with an air of authority on the situation, seemed a godsend to the men of the Hôtel de Ville. Rossel wanted to carry things with a high hand in military martinet style, however, and from the first showed an utter lack of savoir faire in his dealings with the citizen-soldiery, the National Guard. In spite of his pretensions the improvement on the Cluseret regime was not obvious. Rossel gave orders one day and revoked them the next. He started on a system of barricades, connecting the three chief strategic positions within the city—Montmartre, the Trocadéro, and the Panthéon—but never saw to its carrying out. The Versaillese had meanwhile opened new batteries, and the line of fire was slowly but steadily drawing closer round Paris. Matters were complicated by the Central Committee, the personnel of which had been almost entirely changed from what it was originally by trying to inter-meddle and squabbling with the war Commission. Issy was in a few days reduced to a heap of ruins, and finally evacuated on May 9th. Rossel, the same evening, with an indiscretion which had all the appearance of being intentional, had placarded all over Paris, as if it had been the news of a victory, the words, "The tricolour floats over the fort of Issy abandoned by its garrison." He immediately after wrote a letter in which he endeavoured to clear his military reputation by abusing the organisation of the military services. These were bad enough in all conscience, but Rossel knew the position of affairs when he accepted the responsibility, and there is conclusive evidence that he did not make the best of things, even bad as they were. He wound up by sending in his resignation, and asking for a "cell at Mazas."

X. THE LAST DAYS OF PARIS.

In addition to their military operation, the Versaillese were not indisposed to rely on the work of spies in endeavouring to effect an entry into the city by means of treachery. These gentlemen, however, quarrelled among themselves, mutually denounced each other to their employers, and, in spite of the big promises which each made in turn, they effected nothing beyond consuming some few hundred thousand francs of governmental money. They were most of them "old soldiers," including one or two naval officers, reactionary National Guards, and Chevaliers d'Industrie. Some of them having attempted to corrupt Dombrowski, they were denounced by him to the Committee of Public Safety. This was about the last attempt made by Thiers to gain over Paris by treachery. He saw it was no use.

Meanwhile the discussions in the council-room between the "majority" and "minority" in the Commune were, unhappily, going on more acrimoniously than ever. Rossel, in spite of his demand for a "cell at Mazas," and of his parole not to escape, slunk off and hid himself in a safe retreat, whence he was to be fetched out some three weeks later by the Versaillese, by that time masters of Paris. His arrest was decreed, however, almost unanimously by the Commune at the opening of its sitting of the 10th of May. The next item on the agenda on this occasion was the reconstruction of the redoubtable Committee of Public Safety, which, after eight days' existence, had been, by general consensus of opinion, voted a failure. The "minority" seized the opportunity for holding out the right hand of fellowship; but the "majority," led by Félix Pyat, who was in the chair, persisted in their attitude of suspicion, and the schism in consequence became more accentuated than ever. The Committee was reconstructed, but again only with members of the "majority." Ranvier, Gambon, Delescluze, Arnaud, and Eudes were the men chosen. Delescluze was afterwards made Chief of the War Office; Billioray, an insignificant member of the "majority," occupying the vacancy thus created on the Committee; Raoul Rigault again went into the Department of "security," this time as Procurator of Police; while Theophile Ferré was made Prefect, Cournet (son of an old revolutionist of '48, killed in a duel in London), who had origi-

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nally replaced Rigault in the Prefecture of Police, having resigned.

The new Committee of Public Safety ordered the demolition of Thiers's house in Paris, which was forthwith effected. There was not much use in this, seeing that the Assembly was sure to have it rebuilt at the national expense, and a decree was, of course, immediately passed at Versailles to this effect. The Commune, however, and all belonging to it, seemed to think it bore a charmed life; and hence, without seriously applying themselves to the one serious question of the hour, the defence of Paris, went on passing decrees of a useful {useless?} and ornamental nature—many of which were excellent in themselves, but few of which were timely.

Among the best of what may be termed the “symbolical” measures, was a decree passed by the Commune on April 12th for the destruction of the Vendôme Column. Although preparations for carrying it out were forthwith set about, owing to various delays these were not completed for more than a month. Accordingly, it was not before May 16th that the great emblem of French Jingoism actually kissed the earth. Erected to celebrate the victories of the first Napoleon in his wars of wanton aggression, it was very properly regarded as a standing insult, not only to every other European nationality, but, before all, to a Revolution based on the principles of Internationalism. So the afternoon of May 16th saw a large assemblage of Parisians in the Rue de la Paix and in the Place de la Concorde, the roofs of the houses and the windows being occupied with sightseers, watching anxiously, and not without apprehension, the operations, with the formidable array of ropes leading up to the final tug which should lay prone the emblem of aggressive patriotism. At five o'clock a National Guard affixed the tricolour to its proper place, the gallery at the top of this piece of shoddy magnificence, and a few minutes later the national flag, the statue of Napoleon, and the column itself were alike lying in fragments on a vast bed of dung, appropriately prepared for them. The apprehensions proved unfounded, and the overthrow was accomplished without any noteworthy mishap.

On the 15th, the previous day, the dispute between the “minority” and “majority” had reached a climax in the withdrawal of the former under cover of a manifesto anent the “Public Safety,” which declared the Commune to have abdicated its functions into the

hands of an irresponsible Committee. "As for us," it went on to say, "we, no less than the 'majority,' desire the accomplishment of political and social reconstruction; but, contrary to its notions, we claim the right to be solely responsible for our acts before our electors without sheltering ourselves behind a supreme dictatorship which our mandate permits us neither to accept nor to recognise." The manifesto further went on to state that the signatories, in order not to give rise to further dissension in the Council room, proposed retiring into their arrondissements, there to organise the resistance to the common enemy. The manifesto concluded with a generous expression of the conviction that "we all, majority or minority, notwithstanding our divergences as to policy, pursue the same object, political liberty, and the emancipation of the workers." "Long live the Social Republic! Long live the Commune!"

The manifesto bore the signatures of Beslay, Jourde, Theisz, Le-français, Girardin, Vermorel, Clémence, Andrieu, Serrailier, Longuet, Arthur Arnould, Clément Victor, Auriol, Ostyn, Franckel, Pindy, Arnold, Vallés, Tridon, Varlin, and Courbet. Malon subsequently gave in his adhesion.

The conduct of the minority in withdrawing at this critical juncture deserves the severest censure. The reason given was absurd. They had themselves voted for the second committee. This pedantic Parliamentarism and horror of dictatorship moreover was utterly ridiculous in the crisis through which the movement was passing. The composition of the Committee may have been open to objection, and, as a matter of fact, it proved itself sufficiently incapable. But in principle there is no doubt whatever, that a strong dictatorship was just what the situation demanded. The Committee failed, if for no other reason than because it contained no man strong enough to "dictate." There is no gainsaying that this action of the minority in allowing their personal spleen to get the better of them, even granting that provocation had been given, was a great blow to the influence of the Commune, both internally and externally, and was naturally the occasion of much "crowing" on the part of the friends of "order" at Versailles and elsewhere. Most of the signatories seem to have felt they had committed a blunder almost as soon as the document was issued, and two days later, the 17th, saw the majority of them back at the Hôtel de Ville notwith-

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standing their virtual resignation. The public meetings they had called the previous evening in the arrondissements; had by no means endorsed their action. This sitting of May 17th was the fullest the Commune ever had, 66 members answering to their names. Unhappily it was mainly occupied with personal recriminations between the two factions, till it was abruptly terminated at seven o'clock in the evening by the blowing up of the powder manufactory in the Avenue Rapp, which shook Paris from end to end. Was this disaster due to an accident, or was it the result of treachery? No one knows to this day.

XI. THE ENTRY OF THE VERSAILLESE.

Sunday, May 21st, was one of those glorious spring days in which the avenues of the Champs Elysées and the Tuilleries Gardens show up in the clear air a splendour of young foliage, to which hardly another capital in Europe than Paris can offer a parallel. This afternoon a monster open-air concert was being held under the trees in the Tuilleries Gardens by order of the Commune, for the benefit of the widows and orphans of National Guards slain in defence of Paris. Thousands of Parisians in holiday attire thronged the grounds. At the close of the performance a staff-officer of the National Guards announced from the platform another concert at the same time and place for the following Sunday. Alas! What a different scene was that following Sunday destined to present—a murky rainfall, Paris enveloped in thick smoke, blood running in the gutters, corpses and human remains piled-up, encumbering the streets. How many of those workmen and their families then peacefully enjoying themselves were never to see another Sunday! At the very moment the above announcement was made the bandits of “order” were within the city unknown to those responsible for its safety. This is how it happened. The defence had become more completely disorganised than ever since the defection of Rossel. A large extent of the enceinte, including several gates was completely undefended. The Versaillese on their side had unmasked a formidable array of breech-batteries on the previous day. The sound of these, hour after hour, on the defences was insufficient to make the Parisians realise that the end was at hand.

The first detachment of Government troops entered at the gate of St. Cloud, one of the undefended points, at about three o'clock. Dombrowski, who for the last fortnight had been at the head of the now hopelessly disintegrated defence, was apprised of the state of affairs one hour later by an officer of the National Guard. He at once issued an order to the war office for seven cannon, for the immediate mobilisation of the best battalions, and had the Auteuil Gate occupied. Soon after, other points were occupied by National Guards, and the gate at the Jena bridge was barricaded. Dombrowski, of course, lost no time in communicating with the Committee of Public Safety, which in its turn sent Billioray to inform

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the Commune. At that moment the Commune was trying Cluseret, on the impeachment of one of its members, Miot, but the charge of treachery being supported only by loose gossip was already falling through before the arrival of Billioray. The message the latter brought was received with consternation, the proceedings in hand were hurriedly concluded, and Cluseret acquitted. But instead of at once entering upon a serious discussion of the situation which might have led to a decision as to some definite plan of defence, the council practically broke up into groups of desultory talkers till eight o'clock struck, and the chairman formally proclaimed the proceedings at an end. *It was the last sitting of the Commune of Paris.* Every member to his arrondissement was now the fatuous cry. Instead of at once passing a resolution declaring the Commune as sitting in permanence, which was the obvious thing to do—thereby giving a centre and rallying point to the defence—the Commune abandoned the Hôtel de Ville, deliberately committed suicide, and with this act of self-destruction sounded the death-knell of revolutionary Paris. The last hope lay in a strong, well-organised rally of all the forces at the disposal of the Commune within the city, with the construction of a system of barricades connecting the three chief strategic points, Montmartre, the Trocadéro, and the Panthéon. Instead of a concentrated effort, all was confusion at this critical moment. Everyone left the Hôtel de Ville for his arrondissement. Energy was not lacking, but it showed itself when too late and was dissipated in isolated disorganised action. The Committee of Public Safety fairly lost its head, not knowing which way to turn. Delescluze at the War Office remained calm, and quieted the Commune with the assurance that the street-fighting would be favourable to the Parisians.

The chief of the general staff, Henri Prudhomme, then sent for the commander of the observatory on the Arc de Triomphe, who declared he could see nothing of the Versailles, whereupon a placard was issued casting doubt on the fact of the entry. At eleven o'clock at night, however, a member of the Commune riding down one of the outer streets near the enceinte, the Rue Beethoven, found the lights out and his horse stumbling in pools of blood. Ominous black figures lay against the wall, which proved to be corpses of murdered National Guards. At midnight General Cissey

with a body of men scaled the ramparts at another undefended point and entered without encountering any resistance. They then opened several gates from the inside, and by dawn the Versaillese army was streaming into the city at five distinct apertures. Paris woke to find the 15th arrondissement captured, Passy and the Trocadéro occupied by Versaillese, and Versaillese shells even falling in the centre of the city. There was a veritable *sauve qui peut* from the outposts yet held. "This is a war of barricades," was the cry, "each man to his own arrondissement." Such little discipline as had survived was now at an end. The anarchic element came everywhere to the front. A suicidal placard was issued by Delescluze (one is sorry to say) full of claptrap about the naked arms of the people being more than a match for all the military strategists in the world, pouring contempt on organisation and "learned manoeuvrers," and, in short, giving official sanction to the scatter-brained idiocy of the impromptu demagogue and the worst elements in the National Guard.

Early in the morning the War Office was evacuated, Henri Prudhomme neglecting, by a piece of criminal carelessness, to destroy the official documents, and thereby sending thousands to death and exile. The shopkeepers were beginning to take down their shutters in the inner parts of the city, not even yet fully realising the state of affairs, but soon closed up again, upon reading Delescluze's proclamation and finding that the roar of the cannon came not from outside but from within the fortifications. Barricades, were hurriedly thrown up in different quarters without any system, and for the most part only just as the Versaillese were seen to be threatening the position.

At nine o'clock a few members of the Commune, insufficient to form a quorum, presented themselves at the Hôtel de Ville, and separated after a desultory conversation without anyone so much as suggesting any definite scheme of defence. Proclamations abounded on every wall—calls to arms, assurances of victory, demands for barricades. It would be useless without a map of Paris to describe in detail the slow but steady progress of the invaders on this day (Monday, May 22nd). Suffice it to say that the same characteristics were apparent in the street defence, only in an acuter form, that we have recorded as present when the battle was raging

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round the enceinte—the same limitless bravery, in some cases young boys fighting with desperation, the same impossibility of getting reinforcements, cannon, and ammunition when and where required. The heights of Montmartre were the main stronghold left to the Commune, now that the Trocadéro was gone and the Panthéon threatened. As a position Montmartre was very strong, and, with a properly directed defence, might have held the enemy at bay for many days. But everywhere was the same cry, “We must defend our own quarter.” Nevertheless, as evening drew near barricades sprang up in every direction. Paris did indeed seem to be rising en masse. This deceived many who even still sincerely believed in victory.

Meanwhile the ferocious Assembly was voting by acclamation that the “Chief of the Executive” and the army had merited well of the country, and hilariously exulting in the orgy of carnage promised them by the infamous old man.

XII. THE BARRICADES.

The night of Monday-Tuesday was a night of silent preparation (all too late) and of gloom. In all quarters the pickaxe was to be heard removing paving stones and digging the foundations of barricades, which rose by the hundred. Men, women, and children were at work. Now began that enthusiasm, that limitless courage and contempt of death—displayed in defence of an ideal—the colossal proportions of which dwarf everything similar in history, and which alone suffices to redeem the sordidness of the nineteenth century. Here was a heroism in the face of which the much-belauded Christian martyrs cut a very poor figure. The Christian died believing that the moment the tooth or claw of the panther tore open his throat was the moment of his transition to a new and endless personal existence of honour and glory. His steadfastness was purely selfish. The Communist workman believed that the moment the ball of the Versaillese soldier struck his heart his personal existence came to an end for ever. Yet he was willing to surrender himself completely for a future that meant the happiness of his class and a nobler life for humanity, but which he himself would never see. Yes, this unparalleled devotion, this gigantic heroism of the whole working-class of Paris, was indeed magnificent, but, alas! it was not war. Had Cluseret, had Rossel, had the Committee of Public Safety but organised a comparatively simple system of barricades and made due preparations beforehand, a few well-equipped battalions of National Guards might have saved the situation. But no one had taken the trouble to see to this. Everything had been let run to confusion. Finally, the senseless cry of “Every man to his arrondissement!” when every man ought to have been out of his arrondissement at strategical points, settled matters. An immense number of barricades were thrown up, without system, in each arrondissement, and heroically defended, without method, with the inevitable sequel of capture and massacre, and thus was the Paris of the Revolution annihilated piecemeal. It is useless to go in detail over the sad tale of barricade after barricade, protected for hours, sometimes for two or three days, by a handful of men, only at last to be overwhelmed by a whole regiment of “regulars,” or may be taken in flank, as often happened with barri-

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caedes impregnable to direct attack. So incredible did it appear to the enemy that the defenders of Paris should have made no effective preparations for his reception, that they should have had no organised plan of defence, that up to Tuesday evening it was only with great hesitation the Versaillaise pressed forward. They suspected their unresisted entry and capture of important positions to hide a trap for the annihilation of the whole Versaillaise army once fairly inside the city—by means of ambushades, underground mines, or what not. Unfortunately, their fears were utterly groundless and their caution wholly unnecessary.

At one time on the Monday a few well-directed shells from Montmartre and the Pantheon might have annihilated two of the main columns of the Versaillaise army, which had met each other and got entangled with their artillery on the Place de Trocadéro. But Montmartre remained silent. At ten o'clock on the Monday night the Ministry of Finance behind the Tuilleries blazed up, the first of the great conflagrations. It took fire from the Versaillaise shells directed against the Federal entrenchments on the terrace of the Tuilleries, the vast masses of documents in the upper storeys supplying combustible material which effectually spread the flames. Early on the Tuesday morning Bismarck surrendered the neutral ground and the Porte St. Ouen to another division of the Versaillaise army which poured into Paris—a proof, if such were needed, of the hollowness of the sham sentiment called “patriotism” as against the solidarity of real class interest. The “patriotic” French bourgeois was ready to lick the boots while imploring the aid of the hated “Prussien” against the French proletaire. Meanwhile, before the common danger the men of the Commune rose above the petty squabbles and personalities of the Council room, the public meeting, and the street. Members of the “majority” and “minority” met in generous rivalry who could do the most. But how little there was to be done! Cluseret was powerless; La Cécilia, an old general of Garibaldi's and a man of some military capacity, was not obeyed, and could not get artillery or ammunition for important positions. Montmartre, the almost impregnable fortress, was defended by a few hundred disorganised Federals. The few pieces of artillery on the height had been allowed to get into disorder, and were little better than useless. Before mid-day on Tuesday Mont-

martre was captured in a mere walk-over, scarcely one effective blow having been struck in its defence. The Batignolles had been already occupied earlier in the morning. On Montmartre took place the first of the wholesale massacres of the "bloody week." Forty-two men, women, and children were taken to the Rue des Rosierès, and butchered as a holocaust to the manes of the scoundrels Lecomte and Clément Thomas. The soldiers tried to force them all to kneel; but one woman with a child in her arms refused to kneel, shouting to her companions, "Show these wretches that you know how to die upright!"

On the south side of the Seine the forces of the Commune made a rather better show. A Polish exile named Wroblewski, who knew something of military matters, extemporised a rough system of defences which served to keep the enemy at bay for a while over a considerable area. Wroblewski's ultimate idea was to concentrate the whole defence on this left bank under cover of the forts, the gunboats of the Seine and the Pantheon, and he proposed this plan to Delescluze. But it was impossible to rally matters in accordance with any tactical scheme extending beyond the material immediately at hand and the exigencies of the moment, so complete was the disintegration of the defence. Lisbonne, the member of the Commune, commanded a body of Federals in the Pantheon quarter. He achieved wonders with small means, defending the approaches to the Luxembourg for two whole days. The Committee of Public Safety issued a placard calling upon the Versaillese soldiery to refuse to fire on their brothers of Paris. The "Central Committee" did the same. But it was of no avail. By the Tuesday night scarcely the half of Paris remained to the Commune. The Versaillese, no longer apprehensive of snares, were pushing boldly forward in every direction.

In the course of the evening Raoul Rigault, maddened by the horrors he saw perpetrated on all sides by the friends of "order," but acting on his own responsibility alone, went to St. Pelagie and ordered Gustave Chaudey, accused of having instigated the firing from the Hôtel de Ville in January, to be taken out into the prison yard and shot, together with three gendarmes. They had all been taken as hostages, and their lives had been forfeited a thousand times, but the Commune had spared them with its usual criminal

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good nature in such matters. Things were now going from bad to worse with the defenders of the Commune. To absence of superintendence insufficiency of ammunition was now added, in many cases want of food. Conflagrations now broke forth in all quarters of Paris, lighting up the midnight sky, some caused by the shells of the Versaillese, some caused by the action of the Communards to defend themselves from unseen enemies on the roofs and upper storeys of houses whence they were fired upon.

XIII. THE "COMMUNE OR DEATH".

The horror of these nights cannot be described. The glare of a hundred conflagrations reflected in pools of blood; corpses and human remains wherever the eye lighted; the half of Paris, one vast, hideous, dreamlike hell, against the reality of which Dente's imagination seems feeble! Such a scene of horror was barely known to history before; the proscriptions of Sylla, the destruction of Jerusalem, the Sicilian Vespers, St. Bartholomew, the sacking of Magdeburg—all pale before this blood orgy of the propertied class of France, which had the approval, tacit or avowed, of the same class throughout the world—a class that, while it could day after day witness unmoved the indiscriminate torture and butchery of countless hecatombs of human beings whom it imagined were hostile to its class interests—could, nevertheless, with a refinement of cynicism, pretend to snivel and caterwaul over a single archbishop!

One corpse lay that night of Tuesday-Wednesday in the Hôtel de Ville on a bed of blue satin, a solitary taper at its head, before which the hurry and scurry of the headquarters was stilled; before which all involuntarily bowed their heads. It was the body of Dombrowski, who had been mortally wounded during the afternoon. Towards morning the corpse was transferred to the Père Lachaise Cemetery. As it passed the barricades all Federals presented arms. At the July column a halt was made, and hundreds of National Guards crowded round to get a last sight of their devoted commander. Thus did this valiant soldier of the people pass into history.

The Tuilleries were blazing all this night, as also the "Legion of Honour," the "Council of State," and other public buildings. From early morning of the Wednesday desperate battles were fought at the Palais Royal, the Bank, the Bourse, and the Church of St. Eustache. At nine o'clock a.m., while a few members of the Commune, who had assembled at the Hôtel de Ville, were discussing the situation and contemplating the abandonment of the Municipal Palace, flames shot forth from the roof—how and by whom kindled nobody knew. In an hour the whole place was one vast furnace. The Hôtel de Ville destroyed, everything was now transferred to the Mairie of the 11th Arrondissement. This day (Wednesday, the

24th), the official journal of the Commune appeared for the last time.

All surviving semblance of organisation, discipline, or plan was thenceforward practically at an end. Frenzied despair, panic, and anarchy reigned supreme. What remained of the defence was now further hampered and obstructed by the sham-equality craze so congenial to ignorant minds of an anarchist turn. Officers going with important messages which brooked not a moment's delay were seized and compelled to carry hods for barricades, with the words, "There are no more epaulettes to-day," and "Why shouldn't you help to make barricades as well as we?" and the like foolery. To argue that such a thing as "division of functions" was necessary to the success of any social undertaking would, of course, have been useless. So one more nail was hammered into the coffin of the Parisian defence. The shooting of spies, real and supposed, occurred now and then; for at last the good-natured and long-suffering Paris workman had been driven mad with rage and suspicion as the accounts poured in of the fiendish orgy of blood which for four whole days had been carried on in the occupied quarters with the applause of the miscreants at Versailles, who, through their spokesman Thiers, dared to say of this horde of cowardly assassins, "Our valiant soldiers conduct themselves in a manner to inspire the highest esteem" (!). In order to give a plausible colour to the inclusion of women in the massacres, the myth of the Pétroleuses was now invented. Relationship to a National Guard, a mere expression of horror, a tear shed for a friend, was an excuse for instant butchery. The murderers, officers and men, developed a collective blood-lust which seems almost incredible, and before which the possibly mythical figure of the notorious Whitechapel murderer dwindles into insignificance. To compare these wretches with any members of the animal kingdom, let alone with human savages, would be more than unjust to the beast or the savage. They were incarnations of the criminal instinct in civilised man. At last, what was left of the National Guards of Paris, who for well nigh two months past had been turning the other cheek to the smiter, pulled themselves together. They bethought them of the three hundred hostages, taken as a guarantee that the laws of war should be observed but not a hair of whose heads had been touched, notwithstanding that

prisoners had been murdered without intermission at Versailles during the whole time, and that now, to crown all, for four days every quarter of Paris occupied by the Versailles army had been converted into a shambles, with its thousands of victims—men, women, and children—whose mutilated corpses lay heaped up pell-mell in the streets. These three hundred hostages were under lock and key at the prison of La Roquette, whither they had been removed the previous day from Mazas. As a last resort Théophile Ferré, the head of the Public Security Department, decided to try and stem the tide of butchery by a reprisal. But did he follow the example of the assassins of “order” and command the whole three hundred hostages to be shot out of hand? Certainly not! He selected only six of the most prominent of the bulwarks of “order.” These he indicated to be led out and executed. When the question arose as to who should form a platoon, dozens crowded round, each with a dear relation or friend to avenge—one a father, another a brother, a third a wife. Finally, a firing party of thirty was selected. The six hostages, the Archbishop Darboy, Bonjean, the presiding judge of the Court of Appeal, Daguerry, curé of the Madeleine, and three Jesuits were led out into the Quadrangle. That distinguished father in God, “Monseigneur” Darboy, rather collapsed under the weight of the crown of martyrdom (as presumably he regarded it) about to be bestowed upon him. He did not show any special eagerness to enter the heavenly kingdom. Bonjean, the High Court judge, fainted and had to be carried out. Before giving the order to fire Ferré pointed out to them that it was not the Commune which was responsible for their deaths, but their friends of Versailles, who were deliberately playing the part of fiends.

Meanwhile the conflagrations increased wholesale. Theatres and churches were alike involved. One whole bank of the Seine showed up like a wall of flame. But the quarters where the red flag was displayed became fewer and fewer. Everywhere was the tricolour. Immediately a barricade was taken the tricolour was hoisted. The defence was now mainly in the hands of Wroblewski, who did his utmost to piece together the shattered fragments, but, of course, in vain. A Versaillese officer was caught spying round the Bastille and was shot, an event announced by the arch-villain Thiers at Versailles with brazen impudence as “without respect to the laws

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of war.” On Friday evening, the 26th, at sunset, poor Delescluze, half dead with illness and fatigue, seeing all was hopeless, walked out of the Mairie of the 11th Arrondissement with his scarf round his waist and a cane in his hand, and mounted the barricade at the Château d’Eau, only a moment afterwards to fall under the hail of bullets directed against it. He could not survive another defeat, he had said a few hours before, referring to the June days of ’48. Thus this noble old Revolutionist died, in death, as in life, true to his faith. Delescluze perhaps never quite intellectually grasped the meaning of modern Socialism. But his true instincts throughout his disinterested public career more than made up for any lack of intellectual clearness. Let us hope that one day the Place du Château d’Eau, where he died, may bear his statue—the day when Paris is one of the centres of a Socialist Europe.

XIV. THE COMMUNE IS DEAD!

As the defence receded, the tide of massacre rose higher and higher. Denunciations poured in on all sides. Organised hunts were made in the occupied quarters, and every available building was choked with prisoners, who were taken out in batches and shot, in some cases being mowed down with the mitrailleuse, and buried half-dead. Through the night was heard the agonised cries of the wounded and mangled. From the Friday evening the whole defence centred in Belleville. Saturday showed a murky fog and rainfall, brought on by the firing. The heroism grew with the hopelessness of the situation. Barricades were defended to the last man. Asked by an English journalist what he was dying for, one of the defenders promptly replied, "For Human Solidarity." On this day Millière was taken and shot on the steps of the Panthéon by order of General Cissey. They tried to force him on his knees as a homage to the Capitalistic Civilisation he had attacked. His last cry was "Long live Humanity." Millière had taken no part in the Commune, but had been untiring in his endeavours to bring about an understanding. He had, however, exposed the misdeeds of the villain Jules Favre, and that was a sufficient ground for his murder.

The Bastille was captured at 2 o'clock on the Friday. Scarcely more than Belleville and La Villette now remained. The 11th Arrondissement had been evacuated at midnight on Thursday. By the terms of a Convention arranged between the Duke of Saxony and the Versaillese, the Germans now cut off the Federal retreat on the North and East. Thus did the heads of the French Government conspire with their official enemy to destroy Paris. Ranvier was now the soul of the defence, by word and deed encouraging all. The news every minute arriving of the blood-lust of the Versaillese vampires, which spared neither the doctors nor nurses, and promises of immunity on surrender being treacherously violated, lashed the defenders to a frenzy of suspicion and rage. In the evening forty-eight of the hostages, ecclesiastics and gendarmes, imprisoned at La Roquette, were removed along the Rue Haxo to the Cité Vincennes. The crowd insisted upon their summary execution, even threatening some members of the Commune who tried to at least obtain a respite for them. They were accordingly shot in the quadrangle.

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It must be remembered that these men represented the corruption and oppression of the Empire in their worst forms. All this time it may be mentioned, too, the Versaillese prisoners taken were simply interned in churches and other places, not a hair of their heads being touched. Many of the supposed members and officers of the Commune were shot by the wretches of Versailles in the persons of passers-by who happened to bear a slight resemblance to them, sometimes several times over. Poor Raoul Rigault unfortunately was not to escape. He was recognised in the Rue Gay-Lussac entering a house, was dragged out, and taken to a Versaillese officer who interrogated him. Rigault's only reply was, "Long live the Commune! Down with the assassins." He was immediately thrust against a wall and shot. In spite of his faults he was as brave and devoted to the Revolution as any, and his heroic death will doubtless be remembered to him in ages to come.

Perhaps the most pathetic of all the deaths of prominent men in the Commune was that of Varlin, who was seized in the Rue Lafayette and dragged to the Buttes Montmartre, his hands tied behind his back, and subjected to a hail of blows, insults, and sabre-cuts, for a whole hour. Long before arriving at his destination one side of his face was a mass of blood, the eye torn from the socket. The last part of the way he was carried, unable to walk. Arrived at the Rue des Rosiers the wretches dashed his brains out with the butt ends of their muskets. Varlin was a young workman who had devoted all his leisure time to study, a clever organiser, and one of the best and most active members of the Commune.

By Saturday night only a portion of Belleville remained to the defence. The murky rainfall and dense clouds of smoke of the Sunday morning disclosed but a few streets still holding out. In London that Sunday morning was bright, the commons on the south side showing in their early summer green. Firing still went on from behind a few barricades in the early hours of Sunday, and it was not, in fact, till near midday that the last barricade, that of the Rue de Paris, was taken. This street will be memorable as the last entrenchment of the partisans of the Commune. It was defended by a single man for a quarter of an hour, all his companions having fallen. Wonderful to relate, this last combatant escaped with his life. The fort of Vincennes alone remained now—a solitary out-

post—and that surrendered at discretion on the following day, Monday, May 29th.

The Commune was now dead. Order reigned in Paris. Smoking ruins, corpses, and desolation were all that met the eye. One side of the Seine ran red with blood. The gutters ran blood. The roads were red with blood, as though the soil had been London clay. Clouds of flesh-flies rose from the heaps of corpses; flocks of crows hovered over the charnel house. Paris now subjugated, the assassins could organise the slaughter at their leisure. It has been proved that these massacres were arranged at Versailles before the entry of the troops, and, indeed, the utterances of Thiers were of themselves quite sufficient to show this. Strange it is that to an extent unparalleled in any other movement the vilifiers of the Commune succeeded immediately in travestyng the situation and giving currency to the grotesque notion among the unthinking of the Commune as responsible for the horrors of its own suppression! Never before has a murderer been so successful in casting the obloquy of his own foul crime upon his innocent victim whose mouth he has closed in death. It began immediately, even on the spot. Paschal Grousset has related to me how, passing through a courtyard, he heard a woman with a child in her arms saying in a tone of indignation, “Oui, oui, mon petit, nous nous rappellerons la Commune, n’est ce pas?” (“Yes, yes, my child, we shall remember the Commune, shan’t we?”). This was within sound of the mitrailleuses as they were slaughtering the hapless partisans of the Commune wholesale. To think that the Commune, whose chief crime was its ill-judged mildness and humanity, should ever have become regarded as the agent of bloodshed by anyone!

The city was now divided into four military districts, under the commands respectively of Generals Vinoy, Ladmirault, Cisse, and Douai. In each numerous prévôtal courts were established, which worked all day organising the butcheries. The property of the murdered men was plundered by the soldiery. It sufficed to wear a blouse, to have deplored the carnage, let alone to have ever spoken or written a word in favour of the rights of workmen, to be drafted into one of these murder dens and instantly dispatched. Everywhere might be seen columns of prisoners being led to the shambles. Foremost among the wretches who took a delight in the

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fiendish work was the debauched Bonapartist scoundrel Gallifet. The description by the *Daily News* correspondent of this monster's deeds of blood as witnessed by him has been often quoted. He ordered some hundreds of old men, women, and children out of a column of which he was in charge, and had them shot down. This dastardly ruffian now occupies a high position in the French army. At last all prisoners were taken to one or two specially-appointed places to be mowed down. These wholesale massacres went on till June 3rd, when they were stopped, mainly from fear of pestilence through the accumulation of corpses, which it was impossible to dispose of. The executions of those condemned by the permanent tribunal, which took place on the plain of Satory, outside Paris, continued till the end of the year. Meanwhile, with 30,000 proletarians butchered in cold blood crying for vengeance, the Assembly assisted in a solemn thanksgiving service for the restoration of "order."

XV. THE CIVILISED WORLD AND ITS “THRILL OF HORROR.”

We have seen that the Commune had one special fault, that of a fatuous moderation in all its doings; we have seen that probably never since history began have any body of men allowed themselves and theirs to be treated as lambs in the slaughterhouse with more lamblike forbearance and absence of retaliation than the Commune and its adherents; we have seen this illustrated by the incredible fact that up to the last, amid all the slaughterings of Communists, the vast majority of the hostages and prisoners in its hands remained unscathed. We have seen, on the other hand, the Versaillese, under Thiers, organising with a cold-blooded deliberation and ferocity an orgy of blood for weeks in advance, keeping their hands in the while by isolated murders of prisoners of daily occurrence; in short, deliberately planning and carrying out a crime unexampled in history, compared to which the worst Anarchist “outrage” of our days is but as the pressure of a suckling’s gums is to the rending of a tiger’s maw. Having seen this, it remains to consider, in view of the facts, the attitude of the “civilised world” as expressed in its accredited organs, in other words the public opinion of bourgeois society. Now this public opinion, judging by its indignant eloquence over the infantile attempts of silly youths and others to feebly emulate the exploits of Thiers and the miscreants of Versailles in the line of cold-blooded murder (e.g., at the Liceo Theatre and the Café Terminus), we might have imagined would have been animated at the very least to some energetic remonstrances. Such an expectation would have shown an ingenuous ignorance of the ways and the manners of a class public opinion, and its hired press lackeys. Not only was there no remonstrance, but as if by a concerted action, “Society” and its press began, not in France alone, but equally throughout the “civilised world,” to pour forth abuse, not on the murdering Versaillese, but on the murdered Communards.

The orgy of carnage perpetrated by the Versailles troops was everywhere hailed as a glorious victory of “order.” The “Commune” was at once stamped as a bye-word of breath-baiting unutterable horror. The execution of a handful of hostages out of some hun-

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dreds, the single act of retributive justice exercised by the adherents of the Commune, was a godsend to the bourgeois classes, as they wanted something to hang their vituperation upon, and otherwise they would have had to go on ranting anent the execution of their sainted heroes Lecomte and Clément Thomas, or else on the wickedness of the National Guards in the Rue de la Paix in daring to resent being prodded with sword-sticks, and riddled with the revolvers of the “respectable” mob which attacked them, both of which incidents were getting rather worn. It is true it did not much matter, as the “respectable” world was prepared to swallow anything against the Commune, and with or without the hostage business the villainy of the Commune would have been equally great in its eyes. But still, the death of the hostages came as a good “stalking horse” for the sham “horror” and bogus “indignation” so extensively manufactured in Fleet Street and other places where they print on occasions when the voice of threatened class-interests makes itself heard. An Archbishop was slain! Not merely a man, or a priest, or even a bishop, but actually an archbishop! If that does not “thrill” us what would? What mattered it that he was a hostage for the lives of tens of thousands of innocent persons previously murdered in cold blood, including many children, at whose massacre the “civilised world” did not experience any symptom of that “thrill of horror and indignation” which invariably afflicts it when a representative of its own class interests is killed!

It is a noteworthy circumstance how this “thrill of horror” accompanied by “indignation,” “detestation,” “abhorrence,” and the rest of the vocabulary of penny-a-lining telegraphese, symptoms invariably following the assassination of some head of a State, never show themselves on the murder of a common domestic man through the official agency of the said State. For example, the “civilised world” duly thrilled over the knife in the late M. Carnot’s liver, but we failed to observe any “thrill” after the recent fiendish murder by the cavalry officer of the Italian soldier Evangelista. Yet had the attempt on Signor Crispi’s life been successful the “horror and indignation” tap would doubtless have been turned on as usual. Again, we did not notice any special symptoms of a “thrill of horror” over the deliberate shooting of a harmless passer-by by a Prussian sentry last year, for which the said sentry was specially

rewarded by his sovereign! Had, instead, the sovereign had the misfortune to be shot at and killed by a political malcontent, we imagine the “civilised world” would have “thrilled” properly, with all the recognised accessory symptoms. If the prognosis and diagnosis of these “thrills of horror” be studied, it will be seen that they regulate themselves in a singularly accurate manner in accordance with the danger to the existing order of society which the bourgeois thinks he sees in the nature of the act supposed to cause them. The murder of soldiers by their officers, and on occasion the shooting of harmless passers-by by sentries, are simply regrettable incidents of “military discipline,” a thing necessary to the existence of the modern bureaucratic State. Besides, no matter what the acts they commit, it would be subversion of all “order” to thrill with horror at anything done by “heads of States,” or even inferior Government functionaries in their official capacity.

At the time of the Commune I was not up to all this. Accordingly my innocent surprise at the number of mere domestic human lives it must take to equal that of an archbishop was considerable.

It was not for some time that I saw the full meaning of all the crocodile tears and caterwauling over the handful of hostages—not only that it was meant to drown the silent appeal for vengeance of the thousands of slaughtered workmen whose murder had led up to the retributive execution in question, but that this wholesale brew of horrific emotion (?) formed part of a tacitly understood, though none the less definite policy of the bourgeois world according to which moral judgments are to be dictated solely by political expediency, and the requisite sentiment pumped up to order.

The present Anarchist madness, of course, gives plenty of scope for the well-calculated fabrication of these newspaper and platform hysterics. The facts of the case are simply that the Anarchists in their foolish attempts to overthrow, by individual acts of violence, the existing order of society, can be as cruel and unscrupulous as the governing classes can in their efforts to maintain it. The firing into unarmed crowds by which non-combatants are as likely to be killed as anyone else is certainly unjustifiable, yet it is universally recognised as a legitimate act of the Executive. We, as Social-Democrats, condemn the acts of the Anarchists, and we also condemn many of the acts of existing Governments—for instance,

capital punishment and panic-made laws. We believe the “potting” of the “heads” of States to be a foolish and reprehensible policy, but the matter does not concern us as Socialists. We have our own quarrel with the Anarchists, both as to principles and tactics, but that is no reason why, as certain persons seem to think, we should put on sackcloth and ashes and dissolve ourselves in tears because, say, M. Carnot or the head of any other State has been assassinated by Anarchists. What is Carnot to us or we to Carnot that we should weep for him? We do not specially desire the death of political personages, while we often regret their slaying on grounds of expediency, if on no others. But at the same time Socialists have no sentimental tears to waste over the heads of States and their misfortunes. To the Socialist the head of a State, as such, is simply a figure-head to whose fate he is indifferent—a ninepin representing the current political and social order, If one of these skittles is bowled over, another will be put up in its place. To talk about the “head of the State” when alive as merely the representative of an impersonal political entity, to talk of him when executing some cruel function in the name of “law and order” as a mere mechanical figure “doing his duty,” and, when assassinated, as “the man, the brother and the father of his family,” over whose fate we are supposed to weep our eyes out, is a little too thin. Every sphere of life has its dangers, the chief danger attending the headship of a Government being assassination. The aspirant to this lucrative and “honourable” office and his friends should recognise this fact beforehand, and discount the risk in the general average, just as the soldier or the sailor discounts the risks attending his calling. As it is, the heads of States cannot be congratulated on the courage, either moral or physical, with which they face this comparatively slight danger.

The foregoing remarks are necessary as the “thrill of horror” in its varied forms is one of the stock properties of Reaction, by which it seeks to thimblereg public opinion, and hitherto unfortunately with only too much success. People are told by their papers that they are feeling “thrills of horror” till they really think they are, the journalist who pens the gasping leaders meanwhile laughing up his sleeve, knowing it is all “business.” These observations are specially appropriate to the subject in hand, as never was there a

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more barefaced or more successful attempt made by the governing classes of the world to bluff their own hideous crime by trumping up a sham horror at their victims than in the “civilised world’s” verdict on the Commune of Paris.

XVI. THE HOSTAGES.

That there was never, throughout all history, an execution more completely justified than that of the hostages by the despairing adherents of the Commune must be apparent to every unbiassed mind. This the purveyors of public sentiment cooked up at the cheapest rate knew perfectly well, but their master, bourgeois class-interest, demanded, as we have seen, that they and all true bourgeois should pretend to regard this simple and, judged by their own standard, even grossly inadequate, act of judicial retribution as an unspeakable atrocity. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ!* As for the argument that the hostages in their personal capacity were technically innocent, the bourgeois should have bethought himself of this when the practice of seizing hostages for the good behaviour of the enemy was revived by the German military authorities during the war. The idea of innocent French citizens being killed for the misdeeds of those who wore the national uniform, never evoked any special protest, that I am aware of, from the sensitive middle-class conscience or from that of its press. For the rest, I altogether fail to see where the injustice comes in, when, *in a state of war*, the *official* representatives of the enemy are regarded and treated as identified with the policy and acts of the party they represent. That is surely a logical consequence of the position held by them. That this was the view ostensibly taken by the German military authorities, the pious King of Prussia, afterwards Emperor William, at their head, and tacitly acquiesced in by the middle-class conscience throughout the world, bars criticism of the hostage incident on grounds of principle. Most of the hostages, e.g., Darboy, the Archbishop, Bonjean, the judge of the Court of Cessation, Jecker, the high financier, and the gendarmes, were fair “representatives” of the “enemy,” of church, State, police and capitalism in their most aggressive forms. However, this point is not worth discussing. Those who howled loudest knew that the action of the Commune was justified, but as with the wolf and the lamb, the typical bourgeois is bound by his traditions and class interests to make out the Commune and all connected with it as having been in the wrong, and he will continue to do so, despite all facts and arguments to the contrary. After all, the best advice to give the authorities of the modern State is “kill not that ye be not killed.” The, in this respect,

criminally fatuous Commune allowed the Versaillese a free butcher's bill of thousands of its supporters. It was only when, not content with this, they ran it up to tens of thousands, that some of the Commune's adherents were wicked enough to attempt, as they hoped, to check the slaughter by a reprisal consisting of a few tens. The middle-class apparently thinks that its own governing bodies ought to have the uninterrupted enjoyment of an *unlimited*, and exclusive, monopoly of killing, as regards its opponents. This demand is surely a little bit strong, even for a dominant class.

The facts, however, tend to show not merely that the Versaillese were absolutely indifferent to the fate of these precious hostages, respecting whose death the "civilised world" (*read* dominant class-interest) raised so hideous a caterwauling, but that some of them rather wished such a consummation than otherwise. Thus Barthelemy St. Hilaire, Thiers' secretary, when their danger was pointed out to him, cynically replied, "We can do nothing! So much the worse for them!"

Thiers deliberately rejected an offer to exchange five of the hostages, including the sainted Archbishop, for the single person of Blanqui! This was refused, partly, perhaps, at the instigation of the Ultramontane Catholics, who were strong in the Assembly, and to whom Darboy, who was a Gallican, i.e., who favoured an independent attitude of the French clergy towards the papal pretensions, was by no means a persona grata. By his death they would kill two birds with one stone; get a Christian martyr on the cheap, and probably obtain for one of their own men the wealthy diocese of Paris. The negotiation was conducted on the side of the hostages by a fellow named Lagarde, the Vicar-General of Darboy. This perjured poltroon and worthless wretch, after having given his parole d'honneur, swearing by all he professed to hold sacred that he would return "even though it were to be shot," when he found the negotiations fall through, caring only for his own safety, resolved to leave his colleagues to their fate. He refused to come back. Darboy himself, when apprised of the resolution of his Vicar-General, refused to believe it. "It is impossible," said he, "M. Lagarde has sworn to me himself that he would return without fail." The prayers and entreaties of the old prelate were of no avail; Lagarde persisted in his refusal. That at the very last the Versaillese

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thought the execution of the hostages would be advantageous as a stalking-horse to cover their bloodthirsty designs, and hence purposely refrained from rescue, is strongly evidenced by the fact that, although masters of nearly all the approaches to the prison of La Roquette for twelve hours before the execution took place, they made no attempt to penetrate into the building.

The Versailles vengeance, as already stated, lasted, uninterrupted, till the end of the year. Ferré, abused, bespattered, and calumniated by the press-lackeys of capitalism, died on November 28th like a Communist, an atheist, and a hero. Rossel, beslavered by the same press-lackeys, who recognised in him one of themselves, a hopeful middle-class young man on the make, was shot together with him, after having first betrayed and then calumniated the Commune in the hope of favour from high quarters. He died like a bourgeois, a Christian, and a poltroon. But though the constant stream of judicial murders slacked off at the end of 1871, it must not be supposed that they ceased. There were several "executions" on the plain of Satory during the year 1872, the last three persons shot for participation in the Commune having met their deaths so late as January 22nd, 1873. All these unhappy victims perished after a farcical trial on "evidence" which would be laughed out of any English court, in most cases convicted of participation in events which they had no more to do with than the readers of this history. The statements of suborned witnesses, every calumny, however absurd on the face of it, was eagerly accepted and gloated over by the courts-martial and the press. Not content with murder, the vile French bourgeoisie had the dastardly meanness in more than one case to blacken their victims' character with foul insinuations which they did not even pretend to prove. A board of assassins was established composed of the greatest reactionists in the Chamber called the "Commission of Pardons" whose function it was to confirm the sentences of the courts-martial. These murders, be it remembered, were not done in the heat of combat or even immediately after the victory, but were carried on continuously for more than six months, and sporadically for a year longer. And the same people who applauded or, at least acquiesced in these horrors without protest, pretend to stand aghast at the depravity of a Vaillant or a Caserio!

XVII. THE LESSONS OF THE COMMUNE.

The great general lesson taught us by the failure of the Commune of 1871 is the supreme necessity of an organisation comprising a solid body of class-conscious proletarians and other Socialists well acquainted with each other, whose views are clearly defined, who know what they want, and who have, at all events, some notion of the course to pursue on an emergency. Had there been such a body of men in Paris in February and March, 1871, the subsequent course of events might have been very different. As a consequence of the heterogeneous nature of the elements comprising the Central Committee, divided councils prevailed, and any dishonest or incapable person (as, for instance, Lullier) who only made himself sufficiently busy could obtain a momentary ascendancy which at a critical juncture may be fatal.

The importance of not taking men on their own estimation alone, was, moreover, never realised, either by the Committee or the Commune. Had the Committee not trusted Lullier, but seen to the occupation of Mont Valérien itself, one of the greatest military blunders would have been avoided. Had there been a leading body of men to have given a head to the insurrection of March 18th, the gates of Paris would have been immediately closed, and the already disaffected troops would never have been suffered to slip through the fingers of the insurrection and form the nucleus of a hostile army at Versailles. The Ministers, the officers, in short all the civil and military functionaries of the Government would have been simultaneously arrested, and preparations made for trying the guilty.

The Assembly and the Government had been collectively guilty of a crime, even from the ordinary point of view. They had violated the conditions under which they were elected, their mandate being solely to ratify the forms of peace, and then to appeal to the country on the constitutional issue. Instead of this they had virtually usurped the powers of a constituent assembly with the avowed intention of crushing all Republican, Democratic, and Socialistic aspirations throughout France, and especially of striking a blow at Paris, which they regarded as the head-centre of such aspirations—in other words, they were traitors to the country.

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They had chosen as their leader the “head of the Executive,” Louis Adolphe Thiers, probably the cleverest, most hypocritical, and most unscrupulous villain that ever defiled the page(s) of history. As stated in Chapter III., owing to the remissness of the Central Committee, the chief of the monarchical conspiracy at Versailles was allowed to escape with the other Ministers from Paris instead of his having been arrested on March 18th. Had he, with the rest, been taken and tried, they might have been condemned and the execution of their sentence held over pending events. The Commune would then have had effective hostages. For the Versaillaise would have thought twice of massacring prisoners if they had felt convinced that the first instance of the kind would have been answered by the peremptory execution of (say) Adolphe Thiers. The Commune wished the war to be carried out on decently humane principles. This was excellent in intention, but would not work without the bargain being endorsed by both belligerents. It was a criminal weakness on the part of the Commune not to shape its conduct by the fact that the Versaillaise were determined to conduct the war upon wild-beast principles. But the best hostage of ail, for the Commune, was the Bank of France. As M. Lissagary well says, the bank, the civil register, the domains, and the suitors’ fund, were the tender points on which to hold the bourgeoisie. Had the Committee or the Commune seized the bank with its millions, and the registers of 90,000 depositors throughout France, Versailles must have capitulated. Instead of doing this, they allowed themselves to be bamboozled by a well-intentioned old fool like Beslay, who in his turn was made a tool of by De Plœuc, the sub-governor of the bank, the result being that the vast financial resources at the disposal of the Commune remained virtually untouched.

No one among those engaged in the Revolution we have been describing seemed to appreciate the French maxim “À la guerre, comme à la guerre” (in war, as in war), and the scrupulosity of all concerned as to laying hands on the property or persons of their adversaries allowed the cause no chance. No one seemed even to appreciate adequately the ethics of insurrection—that an insurrectionary administration which has succeeded in establishing itself, becomes by that very fact (from the point of view of the insurrec-

tion) the sole rightful repository of power for the time being, and that the Government, against which the insurrection was directed, becomes in its turn the rebel power, to be crushed in the most expeditious manner possible. The Assembly and the Ministers were rebels not to be parleyed with but suppressed. The Committee, instead of negotiating, should have at once thrown the whole force of the National Guard upon Versailles, then weak in resources, and dispersed the Assembly. This was the only reasonable tactics after having made the initial blunder of letting the Ministers escape, followed by the elements of an army. Instead, they allowed a whole fortnight to be frittered away in abortive attempts at negotiations which the Versaillaise gladly protracted till they had organised their military forces, and made their arrangements with the German authorities for the rapid delivery of the prisoners of war. Of the later blunders we have already said enough in describing the course of the defence.

One of the most unfortunate characteristics of the leaders of the Commune was their sensitiveness to bourgeois public opinion. The first thing for the leader of a revolutionary movement to learn is a healthy contempt for the official public opinion of the "civilised world." He must resolutely harden his heart against its "thrills of horror," its "indignation," its "abomination," and its "detestation," and he must learn to smile at all the names it will liberally shower upon him and his cause.

To aid in breaking the force of the representatives of the established order in press and on platform, it is necessary to have a vigorous party press which will place matters in their true light before that mixed and nebulous section of public opinion possessed of wavering or of no definite principles, but which, in default of thinking and examining into facts for itself, takes the impress of any statement that it finds repeated a few times without very decisive and publicly-made contradiction. The deliberate perversion of facts and the distorted judgments of the bourgeois journals anent the Commune were too impudently flagrant to have passed muster as they did, even with the ordinary mind, had there been a Socialist press to expose them, such as we now have, for example in Germany.

But the dominant classes, though they may succeed, by aid of their wealth and power, in perverting the truth for the time, can do

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no more. The proletariat once conscious of its class-interests, and knowing what these interests imply, will not forget the pioneers in the struggle for liberty. Already March 18th has become throughout the civilised world the greatest day in the Socialist calendar. The wonder is, indeed, not so much that the great capitalist class, possessing the monopoly of every organ of public opinion, of the whole press, and of every hall and meeting place, were able to drown the voice of truth and justice by their noisy bluff and bullying, but rather that despite all the clamour, and without any Socialist press at the time worth speaking of, the true meaning and facts of the Commune should have come to light as much as they did. But so it was. There were a few honest middle-class men to be found who, though caring nothing for the Commune, and with no sympathy for its aims, yet refused to join in the great class-conspiracy of vilification, and who, at all events up to their lights, spoke the truth as to what they had seen and heard in Paris under the red flag, who bore witness to the noble disinterestedness of the defenders of the cause, and to the foulness of their persecutors.

For the rest, if there is one lesson which the Commune has been the indirect means of teaching all who are willing to learn, and for which alone all Socialists should owe it a debt of gratitude, it is this: It has taught us all that the opinion of the "civilised world," as voiced by the leader-writers of its great organs of the press, and the speakers on the platforms of its great party meetings, alike in its moral judgments, its political judgments, and its social judgments, has, in spite of all seeming diversity, one thing only as its final measure and standard—the interests, real or imagined, of the dominant capitalist class.

THE END.