

MARX KARL

THE EIGHTEENTH
BRUMAIRE OF LOUIS
BONAPARTE

Karl Marx
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of Louis Bonaparte

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Translator's Preface

"The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" is one of Karl Marx' most profound and most brilliant monographs. It may be considered the best work extant on the philosophy of history, with an eye especially upon the history of the Movement of the Proletariat, together with the bourgeois and other manifestations that accompany the same, and the tactics that such conditions dictate.

The recent populist uprising; the more recent "Debs Movement"; the thousand and one utopian and chimerical notions that are flaring up; the capitalist maneuvers; the hopeless, helpless grasping after straws, that characterize the conduct of the bulk of the working class; all of these, together with the empty-headed, ominous figures that are springing into notoriety for a time and have their day, mark the present period of the Labor Movement in the nation a critical one. The best information acquirable, the best mental training obtainable are requisite to steer through the existing chaos that the death-tainted

social system of today creates all around us. To aid in this needed information and mental training, this instructive work is now made accessible to English readers, and is commended to the serious study of the serious.

The teachings contained in this work are hung on an episode in recent French history. With some this fact may detract of its value. A pedantic, supercilious notion is extensively abroad among us that we are an "Anglo Saxon" nation; and an equally pedantic, supercilious habit causes many to look to England for inspiration, as from a racial birthplace Nevertheless, for weal or for woe, there is no such thing extant as "Anglo-Saxon" – of all nations, said to be "Anglo-Saxon," in the United States least. What we still have from England, much as appearances may seem to point the other way, is not of our bone-and-marrow, so to speak, but rather partakes of the nature of "importations." We are no more English on account of them than we are Chinese because we all drink tea.

Of all European nations, France is the one to which we come nearest. Besides its republican form of government – the directness of its history, the unity of its actions, the sharpness that marks its internal development, are all characteristics that find their parallel here best, and vice versa. In all essentials the study of modern French history, particularly when sketched by such a master hand as Marx', is the most valuable one for the acquisition of that historic, social and biologic insight that our country stands particularly in need of, and that will be inestimable during the

approaching critical days.

For the assistance of those who, unfamiliar with the history of France, may be confused by some of the terms used by Marx, the following explanations may prove aidful:

On the 18th Brumaire (Nov. 9th), the post-revolutionary development of affairs in France enabled the first Napoleon to take a step that led with inevitable certainty to the imperial throne. The circumstance that fifty and odd years later similar events aided his nephew, Louis Bonaparte, to take a similar step with a similar result, gives the name to this work – "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte."

As to the other terms and allusions that occur, the following sketch will suffice:

Upon the overthrow of the first Napoleon came the restoration of the Bourbon throne (Louis XVIII, succeeded by Charles X). In July, 1830, an uprising of the upper tier of the bourgeoisie, or capitalist class – the aristocracy of finance – overthrew the Bourbon throne, or landed aristocracy, and set up the throne of Orleans, a younger branch of the house of Bourbon, with Louis Philippe as king. From the month in which this revolution occurred, Louis Philippe's monarchy is called the "July Monarchy." In February, 1848, a revolt of a lower tier of the capitalist class – the industrial bourgeoisie – against the aristocracy of finance, in turn dethroned Louis Philippe. The affair, also named from the month in which it took place, is the "February Revolution". "The Eighteenth Brumaire" starts with

that event.

Despite the inapplicableness to our affairs of the political names and political leadership herein described, both these names and leaderships are to such an extent the products of an economic-social development that has here too taken place with even greater sharpens, and they have their present or threatened counterparts here so completely, that, by the light of this work of Marx', we are best enabled to understand our own history, to know whence we came, and whither we are going and how to conduct ourselves.

D.D.L. New York, Sept. 12, 1897

I

Hegel says somewhere that that great historic facts and personages recur twice. He forgot to add: "Once as tragedy, and again as farce." Caussidiere for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the "Mountain" of 1848-51 for the "Mountain" of 1793-05, the Nephew for the Uncle. The identical caricature marks also the conditions under which the second edition of the eighteenth Brumaire is issued.

Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living. At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past, assume their names, their battle cries, their costumes to enact a new historic scene in such time-honored disguise and with such borrowed language Thus did Luther masquerade as the Apostle Paul; thus did the revolution of 1789-1814 drape itself alternately as Roman Republic and as Roman Empire; nor did the revolution of 1818 know what better to do than to parody at one time the year 1789, at another the revolutionary traditions of 1793-95 Thus does the beginner, who has acquired a new

language, keep on translating it back into his own mother tongue; only then has he grasped the spirit of the new language and is able freely to express himself therewith when he moves in it without recollections of the old, and has forgotten in its use his own hereditary tongue.

When these historic configurations of the dead past are closely observed a striking difference is forthwith noticeable. Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, St. Juste, Napoleon, the heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the old French revolution, achieved in Roman costumes and with Roman phrases the task of their time: the emancipation and the establishment of modern bourgeois society. One set knocked to pieces the old feudal groundwork and mowed down the feudal heads that had grown upon it; Napoleon brought about, within France, the conditions under which alone free competition could develop, the partitioned lands be exploited the nation's unshackled powers of industrial production be utilized; while, beyond the French frontier, he swept away everywhere the establishments of feudality, so far as requisite, to furnish the bourgeois social system of France with fit surroundings of the European continent, and such as were in keeping with the times. Once the new social establishment was set on foot, the antediluvian giants vanished, and, along with them, the resuscitated Roman world – the Brutuses, Gracchi, Publicolas, the Tribunes, the Senators, and Caesar himself. In its sober reality, bourgeois society had produced its own true

interpretation in the Says, Cousins, Royer-Collards, Benjamin Constants and Guizots; its real generals sat behind the office desks; and the mutton-head of Louis XVIII was its political lead. Wholly absorbed in the production of wealth and in the peaceful fight of competition, this society could no longer understand that the ghosts of the days of Rome had watched over its cradle. And yet, lacking in heroism as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless had stood in need of heroism, of self-sacrifice, of terror, of civil war, and of bloody battle fields to bring it into the world. Its gladiators found in the stern classic traditions of the Roman republic the ideals and the form, the self-deceptions, that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the narrow bourgeois substance of their own struggles, and to keep their passion up to the height of a great historic tragedy. Thus, at another stage of development a century before, did Cromwell and the English people draw from the Old Testament the language, passions and illusions for their own bourgeois revolution. When the real goal was reached, when the remodeling of English society was accomplished, Locke supplanted Habakuk.

Accordingly, the reviving of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; it served the purpose of exaggerating to the imagination the given task, not to recoil before its practical solution; it served the purpose of rekindling the revolutionary spirit, not to trot out its ghost.

In 1848-51 only the ghost of the old revolution wandered

about, from Marrast the "Republicain en gaunts jaunes,"¹ who disguised himself in old Bailly, down to the adventurer, who hid his repulsively trivial features under the iron death mask of Napoleon. A whole people, that imagines it has imparted to itself accelerated powers of motion through a revolution, suddenly finds itself transferred back to a dead epoch, and, lest there be any mistake possible on this head, the old dates turn up again; the old calendars; the old names; the old edicts, which long since had sunk to the level of the antiquarian's learning; even the old bailiffs, who had long seemed mouldering with decay. The nation takes on the appearance of that crazy Englishman in Bedlam, who imagines he is living in the days of the Pharaohs, and daily laments the hard work that he must do in the Ethiopian mines as gold digger, immured in a subterranean prison, with a dim lamp fastened on his head, behind him the slave overseer with a long whip, and, at the mouths of the mine a mob of barbarous camp servants who understand neither the convicts in the mines nor one another, because they do not speak a common language. "And all this," cries the crazy Englishman, "is demanded of me, the free-born Englishman, in order to make gold for old Pharaoh." "In order to pay off the debts of the Bonaparte family" – sobs the French nation. The Englishman, so long as he was in his senses, could not rid himself of the rooted thought making gold. The Frenchmen, so long as they were busy with a revolution, could not rid then selves of the Napoleonic

¹ Silk-stocking republican

memory, as the election of December 10th proved. They longed to escape from the dangers of revolution back to the flesh pots of Egypt; the 2d of December, 1851 was the answer. They have not merely the character of the old Napoleon, but the old Napoleon himself-caricatured as he needs must appear in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The social revolution of the nineteenth century can not draw its poetry from the past, it can draw that only from the future. It cannot start upon its work before it has stricken off all superstition concerning the past. Former revolutions require historic reminiscences in order to intoxicate themselves with their own issues. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to reach its issue. With the former, the phrase surpasses the substance; with this one, the substance surpasses the phrase.

The February revolution was a surprisal; old society was taken unawares; and the people proclaimed this political stroke a great historic act whereby the new era was opened. On the 2d of December, the February revolution is jockeyed by the trick of a false player, and what is seer to be overthrown is no longer the monarchy, but the liberal concessions which had been wrung from it by centuries of struggles. Instead of society itself having conquered a new point, only the State appears to have returned to its oldest form, to the simply brazen rule of the sword and the club. Thus, upon the "coup de main" of February, 1848, comes the response of the "coup de tete" December, 1851. So won, so

lost. Meanwhile, the interval did not go by unutilized. During the years 1848-1851, French society retrieved in abbreviated, because revolutionary, method the lessons and teachings, which – if it was to be more than a disturbance of the surface-should have preceded the February revolution, had it developed in regular order, by rule, so to say. Now French society seems to have receded behind its point of departure; in fact, however, it was compelled to first produce its own revolutionary point of departure, the situation, circumstances, conditions, under which alone the modern revolution is in earnest.

Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, rush onward rapidly from success to success, their stage effects outbid one another, men and things seem to be set in flaming brilliants, ecstasy is the prevailing spirit; but they are short-lived, they reach their climax speedily, then society relapses into a long fit of nervous reaction before it learns how to appropriate the fruits of its period of feverish excitement. Proletarian revolutions, on the contrary, such as those of the nineteenth century, criticize themselves constantly; constantly interrupt themselves in their own course; come back to what seems to have been accomplished, in order to start over anew; scorn with cruel thoroughness the half measures, weaknesses and meannesses of their first attempts; seem to throw down their adversary only in order to enable him to draw fresh strength from the earth, and again, to rise up against them in more gigantic stature; constantly recoil in fear before the undefined monster

magnitude of their own objects – until finally that situation is created which renders all retreat impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out:

"Hic Rhodus, hic salta!"²

Every observer of average intelligence; even if he failed to follow step by step the course of French development, must have anticipated that an unheard of fiasco was in store for the revolution. It was enough to hear the self-satisfied yelpings of victory wherewith the Messieurs Democrats mutually congratulated one another upon the pardons of May 2d, 1852. Indeed, May 2d had become a fixed idea in their heads; it had become a dogma with them – something like the day on which Christ was to reappear and the Millennium to begin had formed in the heads of the Chiliasts. Weakness had, as it ever does, taken refuge in the wonderful; it believed the enemy was overcome if, in its imagination, it hocus-pocused him away; and it lost all sense of the present in the imaginary apotheosis of the future, that was at hand, and of the deeds, that it had "in petto," but which it did not yet want to bring to the scratch. The heroes, who ever seek to refute their established incompetence by mutually bestowing their sympathy upon one another and by pulling together, had packed their satchels, taken their laurels in advance payments and were just engaged in the work of getting discounted "in partibus," on the stock exchange, the republics for which, in the silence of their unassuming dispositions, they had carefully

² Here is Rhodes, leap here! An allusion to Aesop's Fables.

organized the government personnel. The 2d of December struck them like a bolt from a clear sky; and the 'peoples, who, in periods of timid despondency, gladly allow their hidden fears to be drowned by the loudest screamers, will perhaps have become convinced that the days are gone by when the cackling of geese could save the Capitol.

The constitution, the national assembly, the dynastic parties, the blue and the red republicans, the heroes from Africa, the thunder from the tribune, the flash-lightnings from the daily press, the whole literature, the political names and the intellectual celebrities, the civil and the criminal law, the "liberte', egalite', fraternite'," together with the 2d of May 1852 – all vanished like a phantasmagoria before the ban of one man, whom his enemies themselves do not pronounce an adept at witchcraft. Universal suffrage seems to have survived only for a moment, to the end that, before the eyes of the whole world, it should make its own testament with its own hands, and, in the name of the people, declare: "All that exists deserves to perish."

It is not enough to say, as the Frenchmen do, that their nation was taken by surprise. A nation, no more than a woman, is excused for the unguarded hour when the first adventurer who comes along can do violence to her. The riddle is not solved by such shifts, it is only formulated in other words. There remains to be explained how a nation of thirty-six millions can be surprised by three swindlers, and taken to prison without resistance.

Let us recapitulate in general outlines the phases which the

French revolution of February 24th, 1848, to December, 1851, ran through.

Three main periods are unmistakable:

First – The February period;

Second – The period of constituting the republic, or of the constitutive national assembly (May 4, 1848, to May 29th, 1849);

Third – The period of the constitutional republic, or of the legislative national assembly (May 29, 1849, to December 2, 1851).

The first period, from February 24, or the downfall of Louis Philippe, to May 4, 1848, the date of the assembling of the constitutive assembly – the February period proper – may be designated as the prologue of the revolution. It officially expressed its own character in this, that the government which it improvised declared itself "provisional;" and, like the government, everything that was broached, attempted, or uttered, pronounced itself provisional. Nobody and nothing dared to assume the right of permanent existence and of an actual fact. All the elements that had prepared or determined the revolution – dynastic opposition, republican bourgeoisie, democratic-republican small traders' class, social-democratic labor element—all found "provisionally" their place in the February government.

It could not be otherwise. The February days contemplated originally a reform of the suffrage laws, whereby the area of the politically privileged among the property-holding class was

to be extended, while the exclusive rule of the aristocracy of finance was to be overthrown. When however, it came to a real conflict, when the people mounted the barricades, when the National Guard stood passive, when the army offered no serious resistance, and the kingdom ran away, then the republic seemed self-understood. Each party interpreted it in its own sense. Won, arms in hand, by the proletariat, they put upon it the stamp of their own class, and proclaimed the social republic. Thus the general purpose of modern revolutions was indicated, a purpose, however, that stood in most singular contradiction to every thing that, with the material at hand, with the stage of enlightenment that the masses had reached, and under existing circumstances and conditions, could be immediately used. On the other hand, the claims of all the other elements, that had cooperated in the revolution of February, were recognized by the lion's share that they received in the government. Hence, in no period do we find a more motley mixture of high-sounding phrases together with actual doubt and helplessness; of more enthusiastic reform aspirations, together with a more slavish adherence to the old routine; more seeming harmony permeating the whole of society together with a deeper alienation of its several elements. While the Parisian proletariat was still gloating over the sight of the great perspective that had disclosed itself to their view, and was indulging in seriously meant discussions over the social problems, the old powers of society had groomed themselves, had gathered together, had deliberated and found an unexpected

support in the mass of the nation – the peasants and small traders – all of whom threw themselves on a sudden upon the political stage, after the barriers of the July monarchy had fallen down.

The second period, from May 4, 1848, to the end of May, 1849, is the period of the constitution, of the founding of the bourgeois republic immediately after the February days, not only was the dynastic opposition surprised by the republicans, and the republicans by the Socialists, but all France was surprised by Paris. The national assembly, that met on May 4, 1848, to frame a constitution, was the outcome of the national elections; it represented the nation. It was a living protest against the assumption of the February days, and it was intended to bring the results of the revolution back to the bourgeois measure. In vain did the proletariat of Paris, which forthwith understood the character of this national assembly, endeavor, a few days after its meeting; on May 15, to deny its existence by force, to dissolve it, to disperse the organic apparition, in which the reacting spirit of the nation was threatening them, and thus reduce it back to its separate component parts. As is known, the 15th of May had no other result than that of removing Blanqui and his associates, i.e. the real leaders of the proletarian party, from the public scene for the whole period of the cycle which we are here considering.

Upon the bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe, only the bourgeois republic could follow; that is to say, a limited portion of the bourgeoisie having ruled under the name of the king, now the whole bourgeoisie was to rule under the name of the

people. The demands of the Parisian proletariat are utopian tomfooleries that have to be done away with. To this declaration of the constitutional national assembly, the Paris proletariat answers with the June insurrection, the most colossal event in the history of European civil wars. The bourgeois republic won. On its side stood the aristocracy of finance, the industrial bourgeoisie; the middle class; the small traders' class; the army; the slums, organized as Garde Mobile; the intellectual celebrities, the parsons' class, and the rural population. On the side of the Parisian proletariat stood none but itself. Over 3,000 insurgents were massacred, after the victory 15,000 were transported without trial. With this defeat, the proletariat steps to the background on the revolutionary stage. It always seeks to crowd forward, so soon as the movement seems to acquire new impetus, but with ever weaker effort and ever smaller results; So soon as any of the above lying layers of society gets into revolutionary fermentation, it enters into alliance therewith and thus shares all the defeats which the several parties successively suffer. But these succeeding blows become ever weaker the more generally they are distributed over the whole surface of society. The more important leaders of the Proletariat, in its councils, and the press, fall one after another victims of the courts, and ever more questionable figures step to the front. It partly throws itself it upon doctrinaire experiments, "co-operative banking" and "labor exchange" schemes; in other words, movements, in which it goes into movements in which it gives up the task of revolutionizing

the old world with its own large collective weapons and on the contrary, seeks to bring about its emancipation, behind the back of society, in private ways, within the narrow bounds of its own class conditions, and, consequently, inevitably fails. The proletariat seems to be able neither to find again the revolutionary magnitude within itself nor to draw new energy from the newly formed alliances until all the classes, with whom it contended in June, shall lie prostrate along with itself. But in all these defeats, the proletariat succumbs at least with the honor that attaches to great historic struggles; not France alone, all Europe trembles before the June earthquake, while the successive defeats inflicted upon the higher classes are bought so easily that they need the brazen exaggeration of the victorious party itself to be at all able to pass muster as an event; and these defeats become more disgraceful the further removed the defeated party stands from the proletariat.

True enough, the defeat of the June insurgents prepared, leveled the ground, upon which the bourgeois republic could be founded and erected; but it, at the same time, showed that there are in Europe other issues besides that of "Republic or Monarchy." It revealed the fact that here the Bourgeois Republic meant the unbridled despotism of one class over another. It proved that, with nations enjoying an older civilization, having developed class distinctions, modern conditions of production, an intellectual consciousness, wherein all traditions of old have been dissolved through the work of centuries, that with such

countries the republic means only the political revolutionary form of bourgeois society, not its conservative form of existence, as is the case in the United States of America, where, true enough, the classes already exist, but have not yet acquired permanent character, are in constant flux and reflux, constantly changing their elements and yielding them up to one another where the modern means of production, instead of coinciding with a stagnant population, rather compensate for the relative scarcity of heads and hands; and, finally, where the feverishly youthful life of material production, which has to appropriate a new world to itself, has so far left neither time nor opportunity to abolish the illusions of old.³

All classes and parties joined hands in the June days in a "Party of Order" against the class of the proletariat, which was designated as the "Party of Anarchy," of Socialism, of Communism. They claimed to have "saved" society against the "enemies of society." They gave out the slogans of the old social order – "Property, Family, Religion, Order" – as the passwords for their army, and cried out to the counter-revolutionary crusaders: "In this sign thou wilt conquer!" From that moment on, so soon as any of the numerous parties, which had marshaled themselves under this sign against the June insurgents, tries, in turn, to take the revolutionary field in the interest of its own class, it goes down in its turn before the cry: "Property, Family, Religion, Order." Thus it happens that "society is saved" as often

³ This was written at the beginning of 1852.

as the circle of its ruling class is narrowed, as often as a more exclusive interest asserts itself over the general. Every demand for the most simple bourgeois financial reform, for the most ordinary liberalism, for the most commonplace republicanism, for the flattest democracy, is forthwith punished as an "assault upon society," and is branded as "Socialism." Finally the High Priests of "Religion and Order" themselves are kicked off their tripods; are fetched out of their beds in the dark; hurried into patrol wagons, thrust into jail or sent into exile; their temple is razed to the ground, their mouths are sealed, their pen is broken, their law torn to pieces in the name of Religion, of Family, of Property, and of Order. Bourgeois, fanatic on the point of "Order," are shot down on their own balconies by drunken soldiers, forfeit their family property, and their houses are bombarded for pastime – all in the name of Property, of Family, of Religion, and of Order. Finally, the refuse of bourgeois society constitutes the "holy phalanx of Order," and the hero Crapulinsky makes his entry into the Tuileries as the "Savior of Society."

II

Let us resume the thread of events.

The history of the Constitutional National Assembly from the June days on, is the history of the supremacy and dissolution of the republican bourgeois party, the party which is known under several names of "Tricolor Republican," "True Republican," "Political Republican," "Formal Republican," etc., etc. Under the bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe, this party had constituted the Official Republican Opposition, and consequently had been a recognized element in the then political world. It had its representatives in the Chambers, and commanded considerable influence in the press. Its Parisian organ, the "National," passed, in its way, for as respectable a paper as the "Journal des Debats." This position in the constitutional monarchy corresponded to its character. The party was not a fraction of the bourgeoisie, held together by great and common interests, and marked by special business requirements. It was a coterie of bourgeois with republican ideas-writers, lawyers, officers and civil employees, whose influence rested upon the personal antipathies of the country for Louis Philippe, upon reminiscences of the old Republic, upon the republican faith of a number of enthusiasts, and, above all, upon the spirit of French patriotism, whose hatred of the treaties of Vienna and of the alliance with England kept them perpetually on the alert. The "National" owed a large

portion of its following under Louis Philippe to this covert imperialism, that, later under the republic, could stand up against it as a deadly competitor in the person of Louis Bonaparte. The fought the aristocracy of finance just the same as did the rest of the bourgeois opposition. The polemic against the budget, which in France, was closely connected with the opposition to the aristocracy of finance, furnished too cheap a popularity and too rich a material for Puritanical leading articles, not to be exploited. The industrial bourgeoisie was thankful to it for its servile defense of the French tariff system, which, however, the paper had taken up, more out of patriotic than economic reasons the whole bourgeois class was thankful to it for its vicious denunciations of Communism and Socialism For the rest, the party of the "National" was purely republican, i.e. it demanded a republican instead of a monarchic form of bourgeois government; above all, it demanded for the bourgeoisie the lion's share of the government. As to how this transformation was to be accomplished, the party was far from being clear. What, however, was clear as day to it and was openly declared at the reform banquets during the last days of Louis Philippe's reign, was its unpopularity with the democratic middle class, especially with the revolutionary proletariat. These pure republicans, as pure republicans go, were at first on the very point of contenting themselves with the regency of the Duchess of Orleans, when the February revolution broke out, and when it gave their best known representatives a place in the provisional government.

Of course, they enjoyed from the start the confidence of the bourgeoisie and of the majority of the Constitutional National Assembly. The Socialist elements of the Provisional Government were promptly excluded from the Executive Committee which the Assembly had elected upon its convening, and the party of the "National" subsequently utilized the outbreak of the June insurrection to dismiss this Executive Committee also, and thus rid itself of its nearest rivals – the small traders' class or democratic republicans (Ledru-Rollin, etc.). Cavaignac, the General of the bourgeois republican party, who command at the battle of June, stepped into the place of the Executive Committee with a sort of dictatorial power. Marrast, former editor-in-chief of the "National", became permanent President of the Constitutional National Assembly, and the Secretaryship of State, together with all the other important posts, devolved upon the pure republicans.

The republican bourgeois party, which since long had looked upon itself as the legitimate heir of the July monarchy, thus found itself surpassed in its own ideal; but it came to power, not as it had dreamed under Louis Philippe, through a liberal revolt of the bourgeoisie against the throne, but through a grape-shot-and-canistered mutiny of the proletariat against Capital. That which it imagined to be the most revolutionary, came about as the most counter-revolutionary event. The fruit fell into its lap, but it fell from the Tree of Knowledge, not from the Tree of life.

The exclusive power of the bourgeois republic lasted only

from June 24 to the 10th of December, 1848. It is summed up in the framing of a republican constitution and in the state of siege of Paris.

The new Constitution was in substance only a republicanized edition of the constitutional charter of 1830. The limited suffrage of the July monarchy, which excluded even a large portion of the bourgeoisie from political power, was irreconcilable with the existence of the bourgeois republic. The February revolution had forthwith proclaimed direct and universal suffrage in place of the old law. The bourgeois republic could not annul this act. They had to content themselves with tacking to it the limitation a six months' residence. The old organization of the administrative law, of municipal government, of court procedures of the army, etc., remained untouched, or, where the constitution did change them, the change affected their index, not their subject; their name, not their substance.

The inevitable "General Staff" of the "freedoms" of 1848 – personal freedom, freedom of the press, of speech, of association and of assemblage, freedom of instruction, of religion, etc. – received a constitutional uniform that rendered them invulnerable. Each of these freedoms is proclaimed the absolute right of the French citizen, but always with the gloss that it is unlimited in so far only as it be not curtailed by the "equal rights of others," and by the "public safety," or by the "laws," which are intended to effect this harmony. For instance:

"Citizens have the right of association, of peaceful and

unarmed assemblage, of petitioning, and of expressing their opinions through the press or otherwise. The enjoyment of these rights has no limitation other than the equal rights of others and the public safety." (Chap. II. of the French Constitution, Section 8.)

"Education is free. The freedom of education shall be enjoyed under the conditions provided by law, and under the supervision of the State." (Section 9.)

"The domicile of the citizen is inviolable, except under the forms prescribed by law." (Chap. I., Section 3), etc., etc.

The Constitution, it will be noticed, constantly alludes to future organic laws, that are to carry out the glosses, and are intended to regulate the enjoyment of these unabridged freedoms, to the end that they collide neither with one another nor with the public safety. Later on, the organic laws are called into existence by the "Friends of Order," and all the above named freedoms are so regulated that, in their enjoyment, the bourgeoisie encounter no opposition from the like rights of the other classes. Wherever the bourgeoisie wholly interdicted these rights to "others," or allowed them their enjoyment under conditions that were but so many police snares, it was always done only in the interest of the "public safety," i. e., of the bourgeoisie, as required by the Constitution.

Hence it comes that both sides—the "Friends of Order," who abolished all those freedoms, as, well as the democrats, who had demanded them all – appeal with full right to the Constitution:

Each paragraph of the Constitution contains its own antithesis, its own Upper and Lower House-freedom as a generalization, the abolition of freedom as a specification. Accordingly, so long as the name of freedom was respected, and only its real enforcement was prevented in a legal way, of course the constitutional existence of freedom remained uninjured, untouched, however completely its common existence might be extinguished.

This Constitution, so ingeniously made invulnerable, was, however, like Achilles, vulnerable at one point: not in its heel, but in its head, or rather, in the two heads into which it ran out—the Legislative Assembly, on the one hand, and the President on the other. Run through the Constitution and it will be found that only those paragraphs wherein the relation of the President to the Legislative Assembly is defined, are absolute, positive, uncontradictory, undistortable.

Here the bourgeois republicans were concerned in securing their own position. Articles 45-70 of the Constitution are so framed that the National Assembly can constitutionally remove the President, but the President can set aside the National Assembly only unconstitutionally, he can set it aside only by setting aside the Constitution itself. Accordingly, by these provisions, the National Assembly challenges its own violent destruction. It not only consecrates, like the character of 1830, the division of powers, but it extends this feature to an unbearably contradictory extreme. The "play of constitutional powers," as Guizot styled the clapper-

clawings between the legislative and the executive powers, plays permanent "vabanque" in the Constitution of 1848. On the one side, 750 representatives of the people, elected and qualified for re-election by universal suffrage, who constitute an uncontrollable, indissoluble, indivisible National Assembly, a National Assembly that enjoys legislative omnipotence, that decides in the last instance over war, peace and commercial treaties, that alone has the power to grant amnesties, and that, through its perpetuity, continually maintains the foreground on the stage; on the other, a President, clad with all the attributes of royalty, with the right to appoint and remove his ministers independently from the national assembly, holding in his hands all the means of executive power, the dispenser of all posts, and thereby the arbiter of at least one and a half million existences in France, so many being dependent upon the 500,000 civil employees and upon the officers of all grades. He has the whole armed power behind him. He enjoys the privilege of granting pardons to individual criminals; suspending the National Guards; of removing with the consent of the Council of State the general, cantonal and municipal Councilmen, elected by the citizens themselves. The initiative and direction of all negotiations with foreign countries are reserved to him. While the Assembly itself is constantly acting upon the stage, and is exposed to the critically vulgar light of day, he leads a hidden life in the Elysian fields, only with Article 45 of the Constitution before his eyes and in

his heart daily calling out to him, "Frere, il faut mourir!"⁴ Your power expires on the second Sunday of the beautiful month of May, in the fourth year after your election! The glory is then at an end; the play is not performed twice; and, if you have any debts, see to it betimes that you pay them off with the 600,000 francs that the Constitution has set aside for you, unless, perchance, you should prefer traveling to Clichy⁵ on the second Monday of the beautiful month of May.

While the Constitution thus clothes the President with actual power, it seeks to secure the moral power to the National Assembly. Apart from the circumstance that it is impossible to create a moral power through legislative paragraphs, the Constitution again neutralizes itself in that it causes the President to be chosen by all the Frenchmen through direct suffrage. While the votes of France are splintered to pieces upon the 750 members of the National Assembly they are here, on the contrary, concentrated upon one individual. While each separate Representative represents only this or that party, this or that city, this or that dunghill, or possibly only the necessity of electing some one Seven-hundred-and-fiftieth or other, with whom neither the issue nor the man is closely considered, that one, the President, on the contrary, is the elect of the nation, and the act of his election is the trump card, that, the sovereign people plays out once every four years. The elected National Assembly

⁴ Brother, you must die!

⁵ The debtors' prison.

stands in a metaphysical, but the elected President in a personal, relation to the nation. True enough, the National Assembly presents in its several Representatives the various sides of the national spirit, but, in the President, this spirit is incarnated. As against the National Assembly, the President possesses a sort of divine right, he is by the grace of the people.

Thetis, the sea-goddess, had prophesied to Achilles that he would die in the bloom of youth. The Constitution, which had its weak spot, like Achilles, had also, like Achilles, the presentiment that it would depart by premature death. It was enough for the pure republicans, engaged at the work of framing a constitution, to cast a glance from the misty heights of their ideal republic down upon the profane world in order to realize how the arrogance of the royalists, of the Bonapartists, of the democrats, of the Communists, rose daily, together with their own discredit, and in the same measure as they approached the completion of their legislative work of art, without Thetis having for this purpose to leave the sea and impart the secret to them. They ought to outwit fate by means of constitutional artifice, through Section 111 of the Constitution, according to which every motion to revise the Constitution had to be discussed three successive times between each of which a full month was to elapse and required at least a three-fourths majority, with the additional proviso that not less than 500 members of the National Assembly voted. They thereby only made the impotent attempt, still to exercise as a parliamentary minority, to which in their mind's

eye they prophetically saw themselves reduced, a power, that, at this very time, when they still disposed over the parliamentary majority and over all the machinery of government, was daily slipping from their weak hands.

Finally, the Constitution entrusts itself for safe keeping, in a melodramatic paragraph, "to the watchfulness and patriotism of the whole French people, and of each individual Frenchman," after having just before, in another paragraph entrusted the "watchful" and the "patriotic" themselves to the tender, inquisitorial attention of the High Court, instituted by itself.

That was the Constitution of 1848, which on, the 2d of December, 1851, was not overthrown by one head, but tumbled down at the touch of a mere hat; though, true enough, that hat was a three-cornered Napoleon hat.

While the bourgeois' republicans were engaged in the Assembly with the work of splicing this Constitution, of discussing and voting, Cavaignac, on the outside, maintained the state of siege of Paris. The state of siege of Paris was the midwife of the constitutional assembly, during its republican pains of travail. When the Constitution is later on swept off the earth by the bayonet, it should not be forgotten that it was by the bayonet, likewise – and the bayonet turned against the people, at that – that it had to be protected in its mother's womb, and that by the bayonet it had to be planted on earth. The ancestors of these "honest republicans" had caused their symbol, the tricolor, to make the tour of Europe. These, in their

turn also made a discovery, which all of itself, found its way over the whole continent, but, with ever renewed love, came back to France, until, by this time, if had acquired the right of citizenship in one-half of her Departments – the state of siege. A wondrous discovery this was, periodically applied at each succeeding crisis in the course of the French revolution. But the barrack and the bivouac, thus periodically laid on the head of French society, to compress her brain and reduce her to quiet; the sabre and the musket, periodically made to perform the functions of judges and of administrators, of guardians and of censors, of police officers and of watchmen; the military moustache and the soldier's jacket, periodically heralded as the highest wisdom and guiding stars of society; – were not all of these, the barrack and the bivouac, the sabre and the musket, the moustache and the soldier's jacket bound, in the end, to hit upon the idea that they might as well save, society once for all, by proclaiming their own regime as supreme, and relieve bourgeois society wholly of the care of ruling itself? The barrack and the bivouac, the sabre and the musket, the moustache and the soldier's jacket were all the more bound to hit upon this idea, seeing that they could then also expect better cash payment for their increased deserts, while at the merely periodic states of siege and the transitory savings of society at the behest of this or that bourgeois faction, very little solid matter fell to them except some dead and wounded, besides some friendly bourgeois grimaces. Should not the military, finally, in and

for its own interest, play the game of "state of siege," and simultaneously besiege the bourgeois exchanges? Moreover, it must not be forgotten, and be it observed in passing, that Col. Bernard, the same President of the Military Committee, who, under Cavaignac, helped to deport 15,000 insurgents without trial, moves at this period again at the head of the Military Committees now active in Paris.

Although the honest, the pure republicans built with the state of siege the nursery in which the Praetorian guards of December 2, 1851, were to be reared, they, on the other hand, deserve praise in that, instead of exaggerating the feeling of patriotism, as under Louis Philippe, now; they themselves are in command of the national power, they crawl before foreign powers; instead of making Italy free, they allow her to be reconquered by Austrians and Neapolitans. The election of Louis Bonaparte for President on December 10, 1848, put an end to the dictatorship of Cavaignac and to the constitutional assembly.

In Article 44 of the Constitution it is said "The President of the French Republic must never have lost his status as a French citizen." The first President of the French Republic, L. N. Bonaparte, had not only lost his status as a French citizen, had not only been an English special constable, but was even a naturalized Swiss citizen.

In the previous chapter I have explained the meaning of the election of December 10. I shall not here return to it. Suffice it here to say that it was a reaction of the farmers' class, who had

been expected to pay the costs of the February revolution, against the other classes of the nation: it was a reaction of the country against the city. It met with great favor among the soldiers, to whom the republicans of the "National" had brought neither fame nor funds; among the great bourgeoisie, who hailed Bonaparte as a bridge to the monarchy; and among the proletarians and small traders, who hailed him as a scourge to Cavaignac. I shall later have occasion to enter closer into the relation of the farmers to the French revolution.

The epoch between December 20, 1848, and the dissolution of the constitutional assembly in May, 1849, embraces the history of the downfall of the bourgeois republicans. After they had founded a republic for the bourgeoisie, had driven the revolutionary proletariat from the field and had meanwhile silenced the democratic middle class, they are themselves shoved aside by the mass of the bourgeoisie who justly appropriate this republic as their property. This bourgeois mass was Royalist, however. A part thereof, the large landed proprietors, had ruled under the restoration, hence, was Legitimist; the other part, the aristocrats of finance and the large industrial capitalists, had ruled under the July monarchy, hence, was Orleanist. The high functionaries of the Army, of the University, of the Church, in the civil service, of the Academy and of the press, divided themselves on both sides, although in unequal parts. Here, in the bourgeois republic, that bore neither the name of Bourbon, nor of Orleans, but the name of Capital, they had found the

form of government under which they could all rule in common. Already the June insurrection had united them all into a "Party of Order." The next thing to do was to remove the bourgeois republicans who still held the seats in the National Assembly. As brutally as these pure republicans had abused their own physical power against the people, so cowardly, low-spirited, disheartened, broken, powerless did they yield, now when the issue was the maintenance of their own republicanism and their own legislative rights against the Executive power and the royalists I need not here narrate the shameful history of their dissolution. It was not a downfall, it was extinction. Their history is at an end for all time. In the period that follows, they figure, whether within or without the Assembly, only as memories – memories that seem again to come to life so soon as the question is again only the word "Republic," and as often as the revolutionary conflict threatens to sink down to the lowest level. In passing, I might observe that the journal which gave to this party its name, the "National," goes over to Socialism during the following period.

Before we close this period, we must look back upon the two powers, one of destroys the other on December 2, 1851, while, from December 20, 1848, down to the departure of the constitutional assembly, they live marital relations. We mean Louis Bonaparte, on the-one hand, on the other, the party of the allied royalists; of Order, and of the large bourgeoisie.

At the inauguration of his presidency, Bonaparte forthwith

framed a ministry out of the party of Order, at whose head he placed Odillon Barrot, be it noted, the old leader of the liberal wing of the parliamentary bourgeoisie. Mr. Barrot had finally hunted down a seat in the ministry, the spook of which had been pursuing him since 1830; and what is more, he had the chairmanship in this ministry, although not, as he had imagined under Louis Philippe, the promoted leader of the parliamentary opposition, but with the commission to kill a parliament, and, moreover, as an ally of all his arch enemies, the Jesuits and the Legitimists. Finally he leads the bride home, but only after she has been prostituted. As to Bonaparte, he seemed to eclipse himself completely. The party of Order acted for him.

Immediately at the first session of the ministry the expedition to Rome was decided upon, which it was there agreed, was to be carried out behind I the back of the National Assembly, and the funds for which, it was equally agreed, were to be wrung from the Assembly under false pretences. Thus the start was made with a swindle on the National Assembly, together with a secret conspiracy with the absolute foreign powers against the revolutionary Roman republic. In the same way, and with a similar maneuver, did Bonaparte prepare his stroke of December 2 against the royalist legislature and its constitutional republic. Let it not be forgotten that the same party, which, on December 20, 1848, constituted Bonaparte's ministry, constituted also, on December 2, 1851, the majority of the legislative National Assembly.

In August the constitutive assembly decided not to dissolve until it had prepared and promulgated a whole series of organic laws, intended to supplement the Constitution. The party of Order proposed to the assembly, through Representative Râteau, on January 6, 1849, to let the Organic laws go, and rather to order its own dissolution. Not the ministry alone, with Mr. Odillon Barrot at its head, but all the royalist members of the National Assembly were also at this time hectoring to it that its dissolution was necessary for the restoration of the public credit, for the consolidation of order, to put an end to the existing uncertain and provisional, and establish a definite state of things; they claimed that its continued existence hindered the effectiveness of the new Government, that it sought to prolong its life out of pure malice, and that the country was tired of it. Bonaparte took notice of all these invectives hurled at the legislative power, he learned them by heart, and, on December 21, 1851, he showed the parliamentary royalists that he had learned from them. He repeated their own slogans against themselves.

The Barrot ministry and the party of Order went further. They called all over France for petitions to the National Assembly in which that body was politely requested to disappear. Thus they led the people's unorganic masses to the fray against the National Assembly, i.e., the constitutionally organized expression of people itself. They taught Bonaparte, to appeal from the parliamentary body to the people. Finally, on January 29, 1849, the day arrived when the constitutional assembly

was to decide about its own dissolution. On that day the body found its building occupied by the military; Changarnier, the General of the party of Order, in whose hands was joined the supreme command of both the National Guards and the regulars, held that day a great military review, as though a battle were imminent; and the coalized royalists declared threateningly to the constitutional assembly that force would be applied if it did not act willingly. It was willing, and chattered only for a very short respite. What else was the 29th of January, 1849, than the "coup d'etat" of December 2, 1851, only executed by the royalists with Napoleon's aid against the republican National Assembly? These gentlemen did not notice, or did not want to notice, that Napoleon utilized the 29th of January, 1849, to cause a part of the troops to file before him in front of the Tuileries, and that he seized with avidity this very first open exercise of the military against the parliamentary power in order to hint at Caligula. The allied royalists saw only their own Changarnier.

Another reason that particularly moved the party of Order forcibly to shorten the term of the constitutional assembly were the organic laws, the laws that were to supplement the Constitution, as, for instance, the laws on education, on religion, etc. The allied royalists had every interest in framing these laws themselves, and not allowing them to be framed by the already suspicious republicans. Among these organic laws, there was, however, one on the responsibility of the President of the republic. In 1851 the Legislature was just engaged in framing

such a law when Bonaparte forestalled that political stroke by his own of December 2. What all would not the coalized royalists have given in their winter parliamentary campaign of 1851, had they but found this "Responsibility law" ready made, and framed at that, by the suspicious, the vicious republican Assembly!

After, on January 29, 1849, the constitutive assembly had itself broken its last weapon, the Barrot ministry and the "Friends of Order" harassed it to death, left nothing undone to humiliate it, and wrung from its weakness, despairing of itself, laws that cost it the last vestige of respect with the public. Bonaparte, occupied with his own fixed Napoleonic idea, was audacious enough openly to exploit this degradation of the parliamentary power: When the National Assembly, on May 8, 1849, passed a vote of censure upon the Ministry on account of the occupation of Civita-Vecchia by Oudinot, and ordered that the Roman expedition be brought back to its alleged purpose, Bonaparte published that same evening in the "Moniteur" a letter to Oudinot, in which he congratulated him on his heroic feats, and already, in contrast with the quill-pushing parliamentarians, posed as the generous protector of the Army. The royalists smiled at this. They took him simply for their dupe. Finally, as Marrast, the President of the constitutional assembly, believed on a certain occasion the safety of the body to be in danger, and, resting on the Constitution, made a requisition upon a Colonel, together with his regiment, the Colonel refused obedience, took refuge behind the "discipline," and referred Marrast to

Changarnier, who scornfully sent him off with the remark that he did not like "bayonettes intelligentes."⁶ In November, 1851, as the coalized royalists wanted to begin the decisive struggle with Bonaparte, they sought, by means of their notorious "Questors Bill," to enforce the principle of the right of the President of the National Assembly to issue direct requisitions for troops. One of their Generals, Leflo, supported the motion. In vain did Changarnier vote for it, or did Thiers render homage to the cautious wisdom of the late constitutional assembly. The Minister of War, St. Arnaud, answered him as Changarnier had answered Marrast – and he did so amidst the plaudits of the Mountain.

Thus did the party of Order itself, when as yet it was not the National Assembly, when as yet it was only a Ministry, brand the parliamentary regime. And yet this party objects vociferously when the 2d of December, 1851, banishes that regime from France!

We wish it a happy journey.

⁶ Intelligent bayonets

III

On May 29, 1849, the legislative National Assembly convened. On December 2, 1851, it was broken up. This period embraces the term of the Constitutional or Parliamentary public.

In the first French revolution, upon the reign of the Constitutionals succeeds that of the Girondins; and upon the reign of the Girondins follows that of the Jacobins. Each of these parties in succession rests upon its more advanced element. So soon as it has carried the revolution far enough not to be able to keep pace with, much less march ahead of it, it is shoved aside by its more daring allies, who stand behind it, and it is sent to the guillotine. Thus the revolution moves along an upward line.

Just the reverse in 1848. The proletarian party appears as an appendage to the small traders' or democratic party; it is betrayed by the latter and allowed to fall on April 16, May 15, and in the June days. In its turn, the democratic party leans upon the shoulders of the bourgeois republicans; barely do the bourgeois republicans believe themselves firmly in power, than they shake off these troublesome associates for the purpose of themselves leaning upon the shoulders of the party of Order. The party of Order draws in its shoulders, lets the bourgeois republicans tumble down heels over head, and throws itself upon the shoulders of the armed power. Finally, still of the mind that it is sustained by the shoulders of the armed power, the

party of Order notices one fine morning that these shoulders have turned into bayonets. Each party kicks backward at those that are pushing forward, and leans forward upon those that are crowding backward; no wonder that, in this ludicrous posture, each loses its balance, and, after having cut the unavoidable grimaces, breaks down amid singular somersaults. Accordingly, the revolution moves along a downward line. It finds itself in this retreating motion before the last February-barricade is cleared away, and the first governmental authority of the revolution has been constituted.

The period we now have before us embraces the motliest jumble of crying contradictions: constitutionalists, who openly conspire against the Constitution; revolutionists, who admittedly are constitutional; a National Assembly that wishes to be omnipotent yet remains parliamentary; a Mountain, that finds its occupation in submission, that parries its present defeats with prophecies of future victories; royalists, who constitute the "patres conscripti" of the republic, and are compelled by the situation to uphold abroad the hostile monarchic houses, whose adherents they are, while in France they support the republic that they hate; an Executive power that finds its strength in its very weakness, and its dignity in the contempt that it inspires; a republic, that is nothing else than the combined infamy of two monarchies – the Restoration and the July Monarchy – with an imperial label; unions, whose first clause is disunion; struggles, whose first law is in-decision; in the name of peace,

barren and hollow agitation; in the name of the revolution, solemn sermonizings on peace; passions without truth; truths without passion; heroes without heroism; history without events; development, whose only moving force seems to be the calendar, and tiresome by the constant reiteration of the same tensions and relaxes; contrasts, that seem to intensify themselves periodically, only in order to wear themselves off and collapse without a solution; pretentious efforts made for show, and bourgeois frights at the danger of the destruction of the world, simultaneous with the carrying on of the pettiest intrigues and the performance of court comedies by the world's saviours, who, in their "laissez aller," recall the Day of Judgment not so much as the days of the Fronde; the official collective genius of France brought to shame by the artful stupidity of a single individual; the collective will of the nation, as often as it speaks through the general suffrage, seeking its true expression in the prescriptive enemies of the public interests until it finally finds it in the arbitrary will of a filibuster. If ever a slice from history is drawn black upon black, it is this. Men and events appear as reversed "Schlemihls,"⁷

⁷ The hero In Chamisso's "Peter Schiemihi," who loses his own shadow.

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