

AN INTRODUCTION TO
THE PARIS COMMUNE

by

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ON MARCH 18, 1871, the workers of Paris seized power and ruled for two months: it was the first workers' dictatorship in history. Mr. Jellinek shows us this happening; we see the Communards in life and action, in their struggles and their heroic death. The notes which follow here are merely a brief summary of previous history, intended as a framework for the story told in the book.

I: THE FIRST COMMUNES

"Commune is a new and extremely bad name; it releases vassals from their due servitude." (GUBERT DE NOGENT, 1115.)

The *commune* is the unit of local government in France, whether that unit is the municipality of a big town, with its mayor and borough council, or a country village. Walking round a French village, you find that notices of the sort issued by our parish councils are here posted up by the mayor for the *commune*. Municipal elections in England are *communal* elections in France.

This word has a long revolutionary history—it is akin to our word "common"—common rights, common land, common council, the commonalty, the common people, the House of Commons. Common rights and common council, however, arose in a much older stage of society than the medieval "communes" in Europe, which are part of the revolutionary history of the bourgeoisie in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The traders and artisans of the towns—the earliest bourgeoisie—usually had a long struggle of many successive phases before they won freedom from the exploitation of their feudal lord or bishop. What they wanted was to be free in their persons and their property—quit of the lord's rents and tolls, of his mill and of his market dues, of his power over their families, of forced labour, conscription and fines—free ultimately to conduct their own trade, administer their own justice and bear arms in their own defence. At a stage when commerce was rapidly expanding, the townsmen, in order to defend threatened rights¹ or to achieve new ones, would unite to form *communes*, i.e. sworn pacts of mutual aid—"sworn conspiracies" as the lords called them; one edict forbids "communes, constitutions or conspiracies." The *commune*, therefore, frequently though not invariably, began as "a tumult of the people," a Council of Action and something more—the municipality under arms. The citizen militia of Paris, the National Guard of 1789 and 1871 (p. 65) had a long tradition behind it.

Not that Paris itself had required a "sworn conspiracy" to gain its early liberties; Paris was the city of the kings of France, who from about 1100 to 1300 fostered its trade and ensured considerable privileges to its burgesses and their chief representative, the provost of merchants—mayor. In France and in England the king generally encouraged the growth of the towns, partly because he wanted their money, partly to counter-balance the dangerous strength of the great feudal princes and barons. But when merchant capitalism had developed far enough to require more unified national system of state power and to produce within the towns themselves sharp divisions of the "common people" into rich and privileged and poor and unprivileged citizens; then, when the feudal princes had half destroyed themselves by civil wars, the king himself began to dominate industry and the full independence of the self-governing towns rapidly

disappeared.² The tradition of united action, at first only with one's fellow townsmen, remained, however; it began later—slowly to grow into the unity of the common people, of the Third Estate.³

Paris and its mayor, Étienne Marcel, struggled bravely in the 14th century against the encroachments of the king, but they were defeated. Henri IV (1589–1610) reduced their freedom still further, and by the 18th century the provost and municipal councillors—rich bourgeois—were either nominated by the king or holding hereditary office. "Henri IV reconquered the people of Paris," said Bailly, the first mayor after the revolution, to Louis XVI: "now the people have reconquered their king." The red and blue of the city of Paris were united with the royal colour, white, in the tricolore.

II: THE GREAT REVOLUTION (1789–1795) AND THE COMMUNE OF 1792

"The definite opposition of the bourgeoisie to the people naturally only begins when the bourgeoisie ceases to be opposed to the clergy and nobility as the Third Estate." (MARX)

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the absolute monarchy,⁴ born in the decline of feudalism and at first an aid to merchant capitalism, was sucking the life from every class except the privileged orders who supported it—the Church and the great landowners, faced now by the rising bourgeoisie.

A fifth of the land of France was held by the Crown, a fifth by the Church and a fifth by the nobility. The big landowners did nothing for agriculture and merely consumed their rents and dues. Cultivation—poverty-stricken and primitive—was almost entirely carried on by the peasantry—the bulk of the population. Nominally, the majority of them had ceased to be serfs before 1789, but the feudal dues, tithes and tolls exacted even from the peasant "proprietor," and still more from the tenant, by his lay or ecclesiastical overlords, kept him without liberty, bound to the soil. According to moderate estimates he paid sixty out of every hundred francs in dues, tithes, and taxes. The nobles evaded the payment of seven-eighths of their quota of the poll-tax; the peasants paid their quota eight times over. Thousands died annually of starvation. Between 1700 and 1715 the population even declined by a million. Eating grass was not uncommon; black bread and water were good fare.

Trade, industry, finance and taxation were controlled in each district by the king's officer, the *intendant*.⁵ In the towns, industry, carried on domestically or in small workshops, was still more or less in the hands of the guilds—but the guilds had to conform to national regulations made by the king's minister. Bled by government taxation, choked with debt, and faced by the competition of new royal monopoly manufacturers outside the guild system altogether, the corporations lost their ancient devotion to the

Crown. The new manufacturers were equally discontented, for without the king's license not a workshop could be set up.

There was one thing that the richest merchant had in common with the poorest peasant and artisan—all alike they belonged to the Third Estate, the common people, and could claim no privileges from the law or the tax assessor. Of the two privileged orders, the clergy and the nobility, the clergy, with a fifth of the land, paid no taxes at all; the nobles, generally exempt, were only expected to provide something in emergencies; they assessed themselves. Clergy and nobility together—the ruling class of about 250,000 out of a total population of 17 or 18 millions—contributed practically nothing to the budget, the unprivileged Third Estate everything. The upper ranks of the nobility and clergy spent their time in Paris at the fantastically extravagant Court; the lower ranks of both orders were poor.

There was neither freedom of the Press nor liberty of the subject. The vast State machine, its huge army and hordes of officials, "this frightful body of parasites, wound," as Marx says, "like a caul about the body of French Society . . . clogging its every pore."

"Civil liberty," wrote one of the great men of the century, Montesquieu, "interests the human race more than anything else in the world." Voltaire's devastating criticism of society, Diderot, the unflinching man of science and pioneer materialist, Rousseau and his *Social Contract*—the doctrine of equality and the rights of man, the ideal state of free and equal citizens bound together in fraternity—these and others were preparing "the human race" for another stride forward. And in England the artisans in their secret Corresponding Societies, the heroic booksellers like Hetherington and Watson, who were to spend year upon year in jail for selling Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* to the workers, were soon to be doing their share.

If, despite her fetters, eighteenth century France was the first power in the world, her rival, England, had rapidly taken second place. When the Napoleonic war came, it was the third war in the century, to say nothing of the American War of Independence, fought between these two for markets and raw materials—for Italian silk and German flax, for West Indian and Levantine cotton and Indian piece goods and the fine merino wool of Spain. The artisans and journeymen who fought and starved for the Revolution were the producers of the finest luxury goods in the world—clocks, furniture, porcelain, jewellery, silks, velvets, cambrics and linen, embroideries and finest cloth, wines, brandies and delicate foods.

From 1750 onwards things rushed to the crisis; the old order made some attempts to change, but too late. Commerce always expanding, English competition always growing; capitalist farming just beginning to develop, bringing enclosures of common lands and dispossession of small landholders; English manufactured goods flooding the country after the Eden treaty of

1786; famine; state bankruptcy. For the first time in 173 years parliament, the States-General, was summoned. The king wanted money; the bourgeoisie wanted democratic liberties and relief from taxation; the peasants wanted free land and relief from feudal dues.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

1789. May 5. States-General meets; privileged orders insist on voting apart from Third Estate, who adjourn and take an oath to "meet in all places and under all circumstances till we have made the Constitution." Of their 595 representatives, 365 are lawyers; 179 functionaries; 142 merchants, mayors and small landlords; 40 "cultivators." June 17. Joined by lower clergy and lesser nobles they declare themselves the "National Assembly." As troops refuse to disperse them the king has to recognise them. Municipal organisations—city councils—rapidly appear.
- July 11. Dismissal by king of democratically inclined finance minister, Necker, arouses fears. Workers organise in their municipal "districts"—(wards); they seek arms.
- July 13. "Districts" invade Town Hall and decide to set up permanent committee of delegates from the 60 districts of Paris; each to furnish 200 (later 800) citizens to serve as militia controlled by committee: origin of National Guard. (See p. 65).
- July 14. "Districts" seize 30,000 muskets, with cannon, etc., from Invalides, soldiers refuse to stop them. Taking of the Bastille, great political prison. July: National Guard formed with Lafayette as leader.
- July. Peasants burn castles and title deeds specifying feudal dues.
- Aug. 4. Feudal dues "abolished," but only nominally. Declaration of the Rights of Man: Liberty, Property, Security and Resistance to Oppression. Property an "inviolable and sacred right." Freedom of opinion, speech, etc.
- Oct. 5. Food situation very bad; paper currency worthless. Demonstration of women shouting for bread enters Palace and forces king's return from Versailles.
- Dec. 14. Municipalities constituted all over France. Church lands confiscated.
1790. Clergy to take oath of obedience to State and be elected. Trial by jury introduced. King takes oath to constitution at great fête on anniversary of taking of Bastille. Clergy in revolt.
1791. Constitution only leaves veto and limited executive power to king, but limits franchise to middle class and makes it impossible for workers to be representatives in Assembly. Reaction begins, Driving force of workers organised in their "districts" alarms bourgeoisie; attempt at suppression fails; reorganisation in sections only makes them more efficient. Press is muzzled. Fresh elections. Legislative Assembly. Guilds abolished but trade associations made illegal. (all combinations forbidden). Decree obliging peasants to pay feudal dues leads

to peasant insurrections. Desperate economic situation; bread riots; finance minister Necker flees.

PARTIES IN THE REVOLUTION

Girondists and *Jacobins*. In the Legislative Assembly there were 509 royalist or "constitutional" members and 136 bourgeois revolutionaries. This revolutionary bloc later split up into Rights and Lefts. The Rights were the "Girondists," representing big merchant interests with the professional men and intellectuals attached to them, and led by the deputies from La Gironde, the great wine growing province with its deep sea port of Bordeaux. The Lefts got their name of the "Mountain" because they occupied the top benches of the gallery; they represented the lesser merchants, professional men, intellectuals and some small landowners or "cultivators," like Danton. Radical forces like those of the Mountain were more numerous in Paris than anywhere else and constituted the main driving force of the "Districts" in the early stages, their great rallying point was the Jacobin Club, so-called after the former Convent of the Jacobins in which it met. The Jacobins were spearhead of bourgeois revolution; highly centralised organisation with 2,000 branches (clubs) in France.

Unrepresented in the Assembly were the artisans, journeymen and small shopkeepers of Paris who became the driving force of the Commune of 1792. Their best known leader was Hébert, with his paper, *Père Duchesne*, written in the free language of the streets. The Hébertistes were known as the *Enragés*—the Furious. Hébert was guillotined by the Jacobins (Robespierre) when they suppressed the Commune in 1794. (More details below.)

1792. Prussia and Allies make war on France. Period of intervention and wars of revolution begin. Girondist Ministry declares war on Austria. Marseilles revolutionaries march to Paris to enlist for war—and first singing of "Marseillaise." Provocative manifesto of Prussian Duke of Brunswick, demanding French submission to their king. King vetoes decrees banishing non-juring priests and forming camp of pikemen near Paris. Lafayette, first leader of National Guard, now reactionary, attempts to crush Jacobins; fails.

Aug. 3. Forty three "sections" demand deposition of king.

Aug. 10. *The Commune of Paris*.

The "sections" turn out the weak Commune Council,⁶ organise attack on Tuilleries Palace, imprison the king. Leaders of the Commune: Danton, Marat, Hébert, etc. Commune compels purge of Royalists from Assembly—reconstituted as National Convention. Commune's aim is deposition of king, whose foreign Allies make him dangerous. Successes of Allied interventionists; royalist rising of Vendéan peasants. Purge of Royalists in prisons, known as "September Massacres." (Cf. p. 371.)

Sept. Revolutionary armies victorious at Valmy and Jemappes.

First French Republic proclaimed.

1793. Jan. Execution of Louis XVI.

Feb. Britain and Holland join Allies against France; in March: Spain and the Empire. Convention declares war on them all.

March 10. Girondist Ministry sets up Revolutionary Tribunal: death penalty for those who propose any laws "subversive of territorial, commercial or industrial property" or provoke "violation of property" by their writings. This is intended to muzzle the Commune which proposed heavy taxation of the rich. Military defeats; Girondist General Dumouriez, victor of Valmy, deserts to enemy; peasant revolts spreading. Convention sets up Committee of Public Safety, ten men with supreme revolutionary authority and Committee of General Security. (*Sûreté Generale*, police).

May 18. Convention attempts to suppress Commune altogether; then sets up Commission to inquire into affairs of Commune and arrests workers' leader Hébert (*Père Duchesne*). 42 "sections" rise in insurrection and insist on arrest of 31 Girondist leaders. Control of Convention passes to Jacobins. Many Girondists now join royalists.

July. Marat, "Friend of the People" and Jacobin leader, murdered by Charlotte Corday.

Jacobins abolish feudal dues without compensation and declare right of municipalities to common lands taken by lords. Fixed maximum food prices and graduated taxation to fall on rich. They sold Crown lands, however, not in small lots, but to whoever chose to buy, thus strengthening one of the classes most opposed to them.

April, 1793 to July 27, 1794. The so-called "reign of terror" directed by the Jacobins, especially Robespierre. (Cf. p. 371.)

March, 1794. Even the "Left" Jacobins fear the power of the working masses and their leader, Hébert (*Père Duchesne*) and hate the Commune. As centralised power of Committee of Safety grows, power of the Commune diminishes. Finally Robespierre feels strong enough to suppress it; Hébert is guillotined. By this act Robespierre alienates for ever the possible support of the workers to the Left of him. Himself attacked by the Rights, he sends Danton and Camille Desmoulins to the scaffold.

July 27 (9th Thermidor). Robespierre overthrown and executed. Republican armies victorious; Committee of Public Safety dissolved. Reign of reaction "Thermidor" follows—maximum prices abolished, revolutionaries massacred, constitution of 1793 destroyed, workers entirely excluded from franchise.

The Great Revolution broke open the path for a new world—its influence went far beyond France, as we can see by looking at our own working-class history. Within France itself the two classes which gained by the smashing up of the feudal system were the bourgeoisie and the peasants. The "plebeians," the

artisans, journeymen and small shopkeepers, gained nothing—except experience.

The internal struggles, the course of the Revolution from 1789 to 1795, show how once the general grip of the feudal system is removed, the bourgeoisie “comes out against the people.” The contradiction is revealed between the still abstract ideas of universal liberty, equality, fraternity, and the concrete realities of a system of production involving the “sacred” rights of private property. Many of the Girondists had played a leading part in the ideological preparation of the revolution, they included thinkers like Condorcet, noble spirits like Madame Roland, but the organisation of liberty and equality, except for their own class, proved too much for them. They represented only the upper-middle class, hence their impotence in face of “the people,” resort to futile schemes of local autonomy, federalism, etc. In face of feudalism, however, the “rights of property” was itself a revolutionary demand. The Jacobins united far wider masses—small bourgeoisie and peasants—hence could achieve abolition of feudalism.

It was the Girondists who hung the death penalty over those who attacked the rights of property—hoping thus to muzzle the Commune. Many of them joined the Royalists after 1793.

Incapable of governing, the Girondists welcomed the diversion of war, but could not conduct it efficiently. France had to fight in any case, for she was surrounded by feudal monarchs or trade rivals who wanted to stop the rot, save monarchy, and, especially in the case of England, seize French markets and colonies. It was the great achievement of the Jacobins that they organised the defence of France against the whole Coalition of interventionists and also carried through the bourgeois revolution itself. “Proletarian historians,” wrote Lenin in the year of the Russian Revolution, “regard Jacobinism as the greatest expression of an oppressed class in its struggle for Liberation.” The “terror” (cf. p. 371) was a necessary instrument at a time when the French armies were falling back and royalists were waiting in Paris to welcome the foreign enemy as saviours. Robespierre, honest and “incorruptible,” carried out this work; but when the revolutionary armies were victorious, it became superfluous and Robespierre was overthrown by the Right.

The bible of the Jacobins was Rousseau, their slogan was Social equality, but they could not see beyond the rights of private property; at that period the individual capitalist, artisan or cultivator was still the dominant factor in every form of production. Unable to solve the problems of unemployment and high prices, they turned more and more against the “Furious,” the Hébertistes, the plebeians; thus their social basis steadily narrowed. The Girondists tried to gag the Commune, but Robespierre beheaded its leaders. Therefore he could no longer look for help to the plebeians when he fell into the hands of the Right.

At this period the proletariat was only just coming into being, though, as in England, there was a centuries old tradition of secret and illegally organised journeymen’s clubs and associations: the *Compagnonnages* (*compagnon, mate*) were trade associations, the germ of the future trade unions. By the law of 1791 all trade associations were forbidden; the workers were also excluded from the franchise. Yet it was they who had carried through all the great actions of the Revolution on the streets of Paris—the taking of the Bastille and the attack on the Tuilleries and imprisonment of the king—it was they who, through the Commune, drove the Jacobins on to complete the bourgeois revolution itself. They were overthrown for demanding a share in the rights of property and for trying to turn the revolutionary war into an offensive instead of a defensive; into a war to make allies of other peoples suffering from feudalism.

But they had no separate programme; *Père Duchesne* is the great de-bunker, the rude *Sansculotte* (without breeches); his unforgivable sin was that he attacked the rich; but he has not many constructive ideas to propose.

It is only after the Revolution that the great Utopian Socialists begin to hint at the clue: the ideals of liberty equality and fraternity cannot be fulfilled unless the system of production is organised in such a way as to make liberty equality and fraternity possible.

But just at the end of the Great Days, in 1795–1796, when reaction is doing its work, a new figure appears on the scene—“Gracchus” Babeuf: “Equality is the motto of the Republic; the Jacobins failed to obtain Social Equality; therefore we must have Communism.” In 1796 he is arrested while organising the “conspiracy against the Directory,” the third of the risings of the starving and betrayed Parisian workers in those years, 1795–1797. In 1797 he is executed. His follower, Buonarrotti (p. 30) writes his life. That biography inspires one of the greatest of our Chartist writers, Bronterre O’Brien, who translates it into English.

III : NAPOLEON THE DICTATOR (1795–1815)

Incapable, because of their divisions, of ruling for themselves, the bourgeoisie unite in support of a dictatorship, which began as a Directory of five.

1795. The Directory

1799. Napoleon Bonaparte, by his *coup d'état* of the 18th Brumaire (Nov. 9th) becomes consul and dictator.

1804. Napoleon I. emperor.

1814. Allied armies take Paris. Napoleon abdicates. Exiled to Elba.

1815. Napoleon escapes from Elba. The “Hundred Days.” Defeat at Waterloo.

With brief intervals, France’s wars lasted from 1791 to 1815.

Napoleon I was a supreme dictator for the bourgeoisie. Outside

France's frontiers his armies shattered the old feudal barriers as they conquered or disorganised state after state; Prussia and the Rhineland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, were awakened to a new sense of unity and nationality. Within the frontiers he organised a unified state power, created a new bureaucracy responsible to himself (prefects, prefectures, etc.) and a uniform code of law—the great statute book of the bourgeoisie, the code Napoleon. Industry must be developed at all costs—markets snatched from the great enemy, England. To increase credits for industry, he fostered the barely developed banking system and founded the Bank of France; he subsidised inventors; and feared, says Chaptal, even the smallest unrest among the workers, “more than a lost battle.”

Napoleon introduced the system of the *livret*—the passport which every wage-worker had to carry, showing his record from his last employer; this encouraged a system of police control which only the Commune of 1871 broke down. The 1791 law making trade unions illegal was continued and provisions were added making striking and picketing penal offences and decreeing that only the employer's word as to the amount of wages due could be valid in a court of law. This remained until 1868.

Despite all his efforts, however, Napoleon's refusal to trade except with vassal states, the loss of colonies and markets to England and the number of enemies and struggles abroad had so injured French commerce that industry and construction could not repay his credits; the banks collapsed; the high protective tariffs alienated customers: he was no longer the hope of the bourgeoisie when he was defeated at Waterloo.

IV: CLASS STRUGGLES. THE ARMY OF THE WORKERS FIRST APPEARS. 1815-1870

1814-1824. Louis XVIII. (1815 “The Hundred Days”—Napoleon's escape from Elba and defeat at Waterloo.)

1824-1830. Charles X.

1830-1848. Revolution. Louis Philippe becomes king: “The July Monarchy.”

1848. Revolution.—The February Days.—The Second Republic.

In June the proletariat appear in armed struggle on the streets of Paris. The four days fighting, June 22-26 are known as “The June Days.” From June to December, Paris is in a “state of siege”—dictatorship of the Republic.

1849. Louis Napoleon, nephew of Bonaparte, becomes president of the Republic.

1851. Coup d'état of Louis Napoleon who becomes dictator and emperor.

1851-1870. Emperor Napoleon III. “The Second Empire.”

1871. The Third Republic. The Paris Commune.

On the land there were now three classes. (1) Returned emigré nobles, to whom Charles X (1820-1830) gave an indemnity of

a milliard francs; even before 1820 they had already made good about half their land losses. Many of the confiscated estates had never been granted away and were now regained or bought. (2) The new class of capitalist landowner exploiting commercial crops. (3) About 20 million independent peasant proprietors, whose total share was less than (1) and (2) together, but who were still relieved of all feudal dues and Church tithes and therefore content. They had also got back (in the possession of the *communes*) commons, wastes and forest lands to the extent of about a tenth of the total area of France.

“This newly formed class was the many-sided expansion of the bourgeois régime beyond the gates of the towns; the inauguration of that régime upon a national scale.”

(MARX: *Eighteenth Brumaire.*)

Louis XVIII (1814-1824) and Charles X (1824-1830) were the brothers of the guillotined King Louis XVI. They were the returned Bourbons who had “learnt nothing and forgotten nothing.” Their supporters were the big landowners, the “Legitimists.” Their methods of reactionary government were too extreme, their basis of support too narrow for the France of that day. Charles X was overthrown by the revolution of 1830 and Louis Philippe (1830-1848), a member of the Orleanist branch of the Bourbons, became king with the support of the new interests of high finance and large-scale industry and commerce—“capital, with its retinue of lawyers, professors and orators.” This was the “July Monarchy”; in order to establish it the workers took up arms and fought in the streets of Paris on behalf of the bourgeoisie. They were cheated again: Charles X had given the franchise to a select minority; Louis Philippe, who was expected to enfranchise the majority of citizens, raised the total to 184,000 out of a population of over 30,000,000. In 1832 a demonstration of workers bearing a red flag with “liberty or death” inscribed upon it, was shot down by troops.

The July Monarchy, says Engels, was “a joint-stock company for the exploitation of French national wealth, the dividends of which were divided among ministers.”

The policy in general was high protective tariffs for the benefit of agriculture (corn and beet sugar) and large-scale manufacture (iron, steel, silk, textiles). The industrial revolution had begun and was slowly continuing—always retarded very much by the shortage of coal and the feeble infancy of banking. Weaving remained a domestic industry till 1850, but there was a big development of textiles. By 1851 there were about 1,200,000 workers in large-scale industry and in domestic industry, 1,548,334 masters, 1,434,224 journeymen and apprentices and 1,730,468 women. Paris, the centre of the luxury trades, was still largely a town of small workshops, as Engels found when he tried to form his Communist

circles there just before the publication of the Communist Manifesto and the Revolution of 1848.

After 1830 the old *compagnonnages* declined and in the '30's the workers begin to form revolutionary and illegal "Societies of Resistance."⁷ In 1831 there were big silk weavers' strikes in Lyons and these domestic workers took up arms and drove the troops out of the town. After two days' fighting, they were crushed by the forces under Napoleon's old general Marshal Soult. They rose again in 1834 and were defeated after a bloody struggle lasting several days.

In these years we have St. Simon (works: 1802-1825) and Fourier (1820) first putting out their exposure of the capitalist system and the class struggle and pointing the way to Socialism. In 1839 Louis Blanc puts forward the theory of the "right to work," (*L'Organisation du Travail*) for which the great proletarian battle is waged on the Paris streets in the June Days, 1848. Louis Blanc's co-operative workshops for the unemployed were an inadequate solution, but in 1936 "the right to work" was embodied in the constitution of a state governing a sixth of the globe—the workers and peasants' state of the Soviet Union.

The chief factors which make for instability throughout the whole period are: (1) the infantile development of banking and the consequent dictatorship of the finance aristocracy and big bourgeoisie; this enrages the smaller manufacturers and industrialists—it is they who become the strength of the Republican Party; (2) the high protective tariffs on manufactured goods, and raw materials, which at such an early stage of industrial development never suit all alike; (3) the high protection of agriculture, resulting in dear bread. The antagonism of country and town remains as before.

In 1847, the great commercial and industrial crisis in England directly affected France, which had bad harvests as well. The crisis made the domination of the finance aristocracy yet more intolerable. In February, 1848, Louis Philippe was overthrown and the Second Republic came into being as a general revolt against the financiers, and on the basis of universal suffrage. This time the workers, who had again fought and won the victory, appeared to be about to reap some reward; 20,000 of them marched to the Town Hall demanding a Ministry of Labour. The "Luxembourg Commission" was set up to find a way of improving the lot of the workers: Louis Blanc presided over it. "National workshops" were eventually set up in which the unemployed were allowed to earn a wretched pittance. This was grudged them by the thrifty bourgeois, who was himself in despair at the continued crisis. The workshops were abominably organised and infuriated the workers; the bourgeoisie, regarding them as a wasteful concession which had been forced from the Government, were equally bitter.

Finally, after the general elections were safely over, the

"fraternal" government prepared to end this Socialist nonsense once for all. Unmarried men were ordered out of the workshops.

"The workers were left no choice: they had to starve or start to fight. They answered on June 22 with the tremendous insurrection in which the first great battle was joined between the two great classes that split modern Society. It was a fight for the preservation or annihilation of the bourgeois order. The veil that shrouded the republic was torn to pieces." (ENGELS. *Class Struggles in France*.) For the first time, artillery was used in street fighting; the dead were computed at 16,000 by the British Ambassador.

It was here that, in place of the petty, and even bourgeois demands put forward in February, there arose for the first time in history "the bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working-class!"

"Only after baptism in the blood of the June insurgents did the tricolour become the flag of the European revolution—the red flag." (ENGELS.)

"The bourgeois republic was victorious. There rallied to its support the financial aristocracy, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, the army, the slum proletariat (organised as the Garde Mobile), the intellectuals, the clergy and the rural population. The Parisian proletariat stood alone. Over 3,000 were massacred after the victory, and 15,000 were transported without trial." (MARX: *Eighteenth Brumaire*.)

During the June days, all the classes and parties united against the proletariat called themselves the Party of Order and adopted the ancient watchwords, Property, the Family, Religion, Order. "The proletarians were stigmatised as the party of Anarchy, Socialism, Communism." But henceforth whenever one of the numerous sections of the Party of Order attempted a struggle for its own class interests "it was defeated to the accompaniment of the cry: 'Property, the Family, Religion, Order!'" The mildest democratic demands were "an attack on Society" "anathematised as Socialism." (ibid.)

The two main fractions of the ruling class—big landowners and big capitalists

"instinctively realised that, although the republic was the perfected expression of their political dominance, it simultaneously undermined their Social foundation, for it brought them face to face in the open field with their enemies of the subjugated class. . . . There was no king to act as a stalking horse . . . no possibility of confusing the issues by their subsidiary struggles with one another and with the crown. It was because they were not sure of their own strength that they recoiled from the conditions of unqualified class rule and longed for the revival of less complete . . . and therefore less dangerous forms of domination." (ibid.)

Unable to govern for itself, the bourgeoisie was once more preparing to hand over to a dictator. Louis Napoleon was made

President, December 10, 1848, and after two years of strife and confusion, struggle of different sections for control of the army, etc., Napoleon by his *coup d'état* of December 2, 1851 becomes dictator and emperor. Parliament (the "Corps Legislatif") is left without power. Rapid progress in industry, banking, joint stock company formation and speculation. The railway system comes into being. The proletariat develop further. Vast corruption at Court—unstable foundation.

Here the story opens in Chapter I. What follows is merely a summary of the chief points.

V : EVENTS OF 1870-1871

1870. *July 15.* France declares war on Prussia.
July 27. Manifesto of the International Workingmen's Association.
Aug. 12. Decree enrolling almost the whole able-bodied population of Paris in the citizen militia, the National Guard.
Sept. 1-3. Defeat at Sedan. Emperor Napoleon III a prisoner.
Sept. 4. Republic proclaimed. Provisional Government formed mainly of Liberals, with Royalists or reactionaries as its most powerful members.
Sept. 14. The working class sections of the National Militia, suspecting that they are to be used as subsidiary police, form Central Committee of delegates from 20 district battalions and later issue a programme of action. (pp. 65-73.)
Sept. 20. Siege of Paris begins. Lasts 135 days of worst winter known; famine and epidemics.
Oct. 28. Fall of Metz; surrender of Marshal Bazaine.
Oct. 30. Government empowers Thiers to negotiate armistice and surrender of Paris.
Oct. 31. Workers' insurrection led by Blanqui and Flourens invades Town Hall, demands municipal elections and immunity for insurgents. Government gives pledges and breaks both. Negotiations fail as Bismarck's confidence in the Government is shaken by the insurrection.
1871. From January onwards the cry of "Make way for the people, make way for the Commune" grows. (p. 81.)
Jan. 10. The Royalist Governor of Paris, Trochu, openly expresses his hope of killing off 10,000 or so of the obstinate workers' sections by organising a mass sortie on the besieging Germans: "the National Guard will consent to peace only after losing 10,000 men." The sortie is mis-managed; only 3,000 dead and wounded left on the field. Trochu resigns.
Jan. 22. A further attempt at insurrection led by the Blanquists is quenched by Government troops—seven citizens of the National Guard killed.
Jan. 27. Armistice signed. Food in Paris for only four days more. Terms include election of National Assembly to settle peace terms; surrender of northern and eastern Paris forts; disarming of troops within city, except the National Guard (which is still

believed to be bourgeois and respectable) to maintain order. (p. 84.)

February. Elections for National Assembly result in return of about 420 Royalists out of 630 members. In Paris the International, the Federation of Syndical Workers and the Central Committee of the National Guard put forward candidates, "in the name of a new world," standing for "the political accession of the workers, the overthrow of Governmental oligarchy and industrial feudalism." None are elected.

National Assembly accepts Peace Terms: indemnity, cession of Alsace-Lorraine and the entry of the German troops into Paris. National Guard to retain arms and assist in policing city. 40,000 other troops allowed to remain.

Revolt of Paris workers against government surrender grows; discipline of National Guard breaks down, bourgeois battalions largely disband themselves. New Central Committee of the Federated battalions of the workers' 20 districts formed with democratic organisation, elected battalion commanders, regular meetings, right of recalling delegates, etc. (p. 91.)

March 1. Prussians entry into Paris completely boycotted—empty streets, closed doors—thanks to International, Central Committee and the Syndicates.

March 10, 11. Peace being signed, Government shows its hand. Blanqui and Flourens condemned to death (in absence); Left Wing press suppressed. Decree that war suspension of rent payments ends immediately and that bills of exchange which had fallen due during war moratorium must be paid with interest in two days. Small traders faced with ruin. (pp. 96, 97.) Seat of Government to be not Paris but Versailles—former royal city (like Windsor). These provocations unite middle class and workers against provincial landowners of Assembly. (p. 98).

March 18. Government troops sent to recapture 400 guns with which workers have fortified heights of Montmartre; troops here and at other key points fraternise with revolutionaries. Central Committee, master of Paris, occupies Town Hall.

March 19. Central Committee announces municipal elections to elect Paris Commune on March 28. This delay of 10 days gives Thiers time to collect forces. Central Committee organises food supplies, communications, transport, etc., for city despite sabotage, etc., of civil servants. (p. 166.)

March 28. Commune elected. Central Committee retires. For composition of Commune see p. 173. The Commune proclaimed at the Town Hall; songs of the great revolution sung—"Marseillaise" having been prohibited for 18 years.

April 2 and onwards, Versailles troops start attacking outskirts of Paris; also constant bombardment of Paris. Prussian Government urged to hasten release of prisoners to assist in recapture

of Paris. From the beginning of May these troops give ascendancy to Government.

Throughout April decrees were issued by the workers' dictatorship.

The special police, conscription and the standing army were abolished; every citizen capable of bearing arms was to be enrolled in the people's army—the sole armed force. All officials, including judges, were to be elected by the vote of all concerned, and subject to recall. Their salaries and that of all members of the Commune were fixed at a working-class level; the Church was to be separated from the State and its property nationalised—religion was to be a matter of individual conscience. Rents from October 1870 to April, 1871, were remitted; the sale of pawned goods was prohibited (the pawnshops were later closed, on the ground that they deprived the worker of his instruments of labour); night-baking was forbidden; plans for taking over factories closed by owners and running them co-operatively. But:

“ By far the most important decree of the Commune instituted an organisation of large-scale industry, and even of manufacture . . . not only based on the association of workers in each factory but also aimed at combining all these associations in one great Union . . . an organisation which . . . must necessarily have led in the end to Communism.”⁸

April 30. Reorganisation of Commune. “ Committee of Public Safety ” or Executive Committee? Crucial point. (p. 243.)

May 21–28. The final battle of Paris. Defeat of the Commune.

Last stand of the National Guard in the Cemetery of Père Lachaise; 147 shot in cold blood at the Wall of the Federals.

The numbers killed, transported, imprisoned: See pp. 370–71, 378–81.

¹ London formed a commune to resist King John's attempted encroachments and made him swear an oath to it in 1193. “ The Mayor and Commune of the City of London ” remained the style on official documents for over a century, when it was superseded by “ The Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council of the City of London.”

² In England, for provincial towns, after the fifteenth century.

³ Estate = status. The three estates: clergy, nobility, and “ all the rest.” There were rigid distinctions in dress and privileges. Estates-General was the name for the French Parliament before the Revolution.

⁴ Louis XIV (1643–1715); Louis XV (1715–1774); Louis XVI (1774–1792).

⁵ Transformed by Napoleon I into the prefect, prefecture.

⁶ Commune = delegates from each Paris district; 82 commissars mandated by the districts formed the revolutionary Commune.

⁷ Trade unions were tolerated after 1868 but not fully legalised till 1884. See p. 49, etc.

⁸ Engels: Preface (1891) to Marx's *Civil War in France*.