

The Provisional Government which emerged from the February barricades necessarily mirrored in its composition the different parties which shared in the victory. It could not be anything but a compromise between the different classes which together had overturned the July throne, but whose interests were mutually antagonistic. The great majority of its members consisted of representatives of the bourgeoisie. The republican petty bourgeoisie was represented by Ledru-Rollin and Flocon, the republican bourgeoisie by the people from the *National*,<sup>1</sup> the dynastic opposition by Crémieux, Dupont de l'Eure, etc. The working class had only two representatives, Louis Blanc and Albert. Finally, Lamartine in the Provisional Government, this was at first no real interest, no definite class; this was the February Revolution itself, the common uprising with its illusions, its poetry, its visionary content and its phrases. For the rest, the spokesman of the February Revolution, by his position and his views, belonged to the *bourgeoisie*.

If Paris, as a result of political centralisation, rules France, the workers, in moments of revolutionary earthquakes, rule Paris. The first act in the life of the Provisional Government was an attempt to escape from this overpowering influence by an appeal from intoxicated Paris to sober France. Lamartine disputed the right of the barricade fighters to proclaim a republic on the ground that only the majority of Frenchmen had that right; they must await their votes, the Paris proletariat must not besmirch its victory by a usurpation. The bourgeoisie allows the proletariat only one usurpation—that of fighting.

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Even the memory of the limited aims and motives which drove the bourgeoisie into the February Revolution was extinguished by the proclamation of the republic on the basis of universal suffrage. Instead of only a few factions of the bourgeoisie, all classes of French society were suddenly hurled into the orbit of political power, forced to leave the boxes, the stalls and the gallery and to act in person upon the revolutionary stage! With the constitutional monarchy vanished also the semblance of a state power independently confronting bourgeois society as well as the whole series of subordinate struggles which this semblance of power called forth!

By dictating the republic to the Provisional Government and through the Provisional Government to the whole of France, the proletariat stepped into the foreground forthwith as an independent party, but at the same time challenged the whole of bourgeois France to enter the lists against it. What it won was the terrain for the fight for its revolutionary emancipation, but by no means this emancipation itself.

In common with the bourgeoisie the workers had made the Feb-

## The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850

KARL MARX

France opened the round of revolutions of 1848 in Europe.\* The Parisian workers figured importantly in the French revolutionary events from their opening in February, when King Louis Philippe was forced to abdicate, through the June workers' insurrection, which was suppressed with great ferocity by General Cavaignac's forces. Later, the national election of December 10, 1848, brought to the French Republic's presidency Napoleon's nephew, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, who in 1851 made himself emperor by *coup d'état*.

In this most mordantly brilliant of his revolutionary pamphlets, first published in 1850 as a series of articles in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx not only coined such well-known phrases as "Revolutions are the locomotives of history"; he portrayed the French workers' action as the debut of a coming Europe-wide proletarian revolution, and interspersed his narrative of France's 1848 revolution with passages of broader import that illuminate key points in his thought. These passages have been gathered together in the selection presented here.\*\*

With the exception of only a few chapters, every more important part of the annals of the revolution from 1848 to 1849 carries the heading: *Defeat of the revolution!*

What succumbed in these defeats was not the revolution. It was the pre-revolutionary traditional appendages, results of social relationships which had not yet come to the point of sharp class antagonisms—persons, illusions, conceptions, projects from which the revolutionary party before the February Revolution was not free, from which it could be freed not by the *victory of February*, but only by a series of *defeats*.

In a word: the revolution made progress, forged ahead, not by its immediate tragicomic achievements, but on the contrary by the creation of a powerful, united counter-revolution, by the creation of an opponent in combat with whom, only, the party of overthrow ripened into a really revolutionary party.

To prove this is the task of the following pages.

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\* See Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848 in France*, see Section I of *1848: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) for a general survey. The French experience is covered in chapters I-VI.

\*\* For a summary by Marx of the

events of 1848 in France, see Section I of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, pp. 594-603, below.

1. A newspaper which appeared in Paris in 1830-51.

ruary Revolution, and *alongside* the bourgeoisie they sought to secure the advancement of their interest, just as they had installed a worker in the Provisional Government itself alongside the bourgeois majority. *Organise labour!* But wage labour, that is the existing, the bourgeois organisation of labour. Without it there is no capital, no bourgeoisie, no bourgeois society. A *Special Ministry of Labour!* But the Ministries of Finance, of Trade, of Public Works—are not these the *bourgeois* Ministries of Labour? And *alongside* these a *proletarian* Ministry of Labour had to be a ministry of impotence, a ministry of pious wishes, a Luxembourg Commission. Just as the workers thought they would be able to emancipate themselves side by side with the bourgeoisie, so they thought they would be able to consummate a proletarian revolution within the national walls of France, side by side with the remaining bourgeois nations. But French relations of production are conditioned by the foreign trade of France, by her position on the world market and the laws thereof; how was France to break them without a European revolutionary war, which would strike back at the despot of the world market, England?

As soon as it has risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly in its own situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own deeds drive it on. It makes no theoretical inquiries into its own task. The French working class had not attained this level; it was still incapable of accomplishing its own revolution.

The development of the industrial proletariat is, in general, conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie. Only under its rule does the proletariat gain that extensive national existence which can raise its revolution to a national one, and does it itself create the modern means of production, which become just so many means of its revolutionary emancipation. Only its rule tears up the material roots of feudal society and levels the ground on which alone a proletarian revolution is possible. French industry is more developed and the French bourgeoisie more revolutionary than that of the rest of the Continent. But was not the February Revolution levelled directly against the finance aristocracy? This fact proved that the industrial bourgeoisie did not rule France. The industrial bourgeoisie can rule only where modern industry shapes all property relations to suit itself, and industry can win this power only where it has conquered the world market, for national bounds are inadequate for its development. But French industry, to a great extent, maintains its command even of the national market only through a more or less modified system of prohibitive duties. While, therefore, the French proletariat, at the moment of a revolu-

tion, possesses in Paris actual power and influence which spur it on to a drive beyond its means, in the rest of France it is crowded into separate, scattered industrial centres, being almost lost in the superior numbers of peasants and petty bourgeois. The struggle against capital in its developed, modern form, in its decisive aspect, the struggle of the industrial wage-worker against the industrial bourgeois, is in France a partial phenomenon, which after the February days could so much the less supply the national content of the revolution, since the struggle against capital's secondary modes of exploitation, that of the peasant against usury and mortgages or of the petty bourgeois against the wholesale dealer, banker and manufacturer, in a word, against bankruptcy, was still hidden in the general uprising against the finance aristocracy.

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Thus in the approaching *mêlée* between bourgeoisie and proletariat, all the advantages, all the decisive posts, all the middle strata of society were in the hands of the bourgeoisie, at the same time as the waves of the February Revolution rose high over the whole Continent and each new post brought a new bulletin of revolution, now from Italy, now from Germany, now from the remotest parts of South-Eastern Europe, and maintained the general ecstasy of the people, giving it constant testimony of a victory that it had already forfeited.

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The workers were left no choice; they had to starve or let fly. They answered on June 22 with the tremendous insurrection in which the first great battle was fought between the two 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 asunder.

It is well known how the workers, with unexampled bravery and ingenuity, without leaders, without a common plan, without means and, for the most part, lacking weapons, held in check for five days the army, the Mobile Guard, the Paris National Guard, and the National Guard that streamed in from the provinces. It is well known how the bourgeoisie compensated itself for the mortal anguish it suffered by unheard-of brutality, massacring over 3,000 prisoners.

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The official representatives of French democracy were steeped in republican ideology to such an extent that it was only some weeks later that they began to have an inkling of the significance of the June fight. They were stupefied by the gunpower smoke in which their fantastic republic dissolved.

The Paris proletariat was forced into the June insurrection by the bourgeoisie. This sufficed to mark its doom. Its immediate, avowed needs did not drive it to engage in a light for the forcible overthrow of the bourgeoisie, nor was it equal to this task. The *Moniteur* had to inform it officially that the time was past when the republic saw any occasion to bow and scrape to its illusions, and only its defeat convinced it of the truth that the slightest improvement in its position remains a *utopia* within the bourgeois republic, a utopia that becomes a crime as soon as it wants to become a reality. In place of its demands, exuberant in form, but petty and even bourgeois still in content, the concession of which it wanted to wring from the February republic, there appeared the bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: *Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class!*

By making its burial place the birthplace of the *bourgeois republic*, the proletariat compelled the latter to come out forthwith in its pure form as the state whose admitted object it is to perpetuate the rule of capital, the slavery of labour. Having constantly before its eyes the scarred, irreconcilable, invincible enemy—invincible because his existence is the condition of its own life—bourgeois rule, freed from all fetters, was bound to turn immediately into *bourgeois terrorism*. With the proletariat removed for the time being from the stage and bourgeois dictatorship recognised officially, the middle strata of bourgeois society, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasant class, had to adhere more and more closely to the proletariat as their position became more unbearable and their antagonism to the bourgeoisie more acute. Just as earlier they had to find the cause of their distress in its upsurge, so now in its defeat.

If the June insurrection raised the self-assurance of the bourgeoisie: all over the Continent, and caused it to league itself openly with the feudal monarchy against the people, who was the first victim of this alliance? The Continental bourgeoisie itself. The June defeat prevented it from consolidating its rule and from bringing the people, half satisfied and half out of humour, to a standstill at the lowest stage of the bourgeois revolution.

Finally, the defeat of June divulged to the despotic powers of Europe the secret that France must maintain peace abroad at any price in order to be able to wage civil war at home. Thus the peoples who had begun the fight for their national independence were abandoned to the superior power of Russia, Austria and Prussia, but, at the same time, the fate of these national revolutions was made subject to the fate of the proletarian revolution, and they were robbed of their apparent autonomy, their independence of the great social revolution. The Hungarian shall not be free, nor the Pole, nor the Italian, as long as the worker remains a slave!

Finally, with the victories of the Holy Alliance, Europe has taken

on a form that makes every fresh proletarian upheaval in France directly coincide with a *world war*. The new French revolution is forced to leave its national soil forthwith and *conquer the European terrain*, on which alone the social revolution of the nineteenth century can be accomplished.

Thus only the June defeat has created all the conditions under which France can seize the *initiative* of the European revolution. Only after being dipped in the blood of the *June insurgents* did the tricolour become the flag of the European revolution—the *red flag!* And we exclaim: *The revolution is dead!—Long live the revolution!*

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December 10, 1848, was the day of the *peasant insurrection*.<sup>2</sup> Only from this day does the February of the French peasants date. The symbol that expressed their entry into the revolutionary movement, clumsily cunning, knavishly naïve, doltishly sublime, a calculated superstition, a pathetic burlesque, a cleverly stupid anachronism, a world-historic piece of buffoonery and an undecipherable hieroglyphic for the understanding of the civilised—this symbol bore the unmistakable physiognomy of the class that represents barbarism within civilisation. The republic had announced itself to this class with the *tax collector*; it announced itself to the republic with the *emperor*. Napoleon was the only man who had exhaustively represented the interests and the imagination of the peasant class, newly created in 1789. By writing his name on the frontispiece of the republic, it declared war abroad and the enforcing of its class interests at home. Napoleon was to the peasants not a person but a programme. With banners, with beat of drums and blare of trumpets, they marched to the polling booths shouting: *plus d'impôts, à bas les riches, à bas la république, vive l'Empereur!* No more taxes, down with the rich, down with the republic, long live the emperor! Behind the emperor was hidden the peasant war. The republic that they voted down was the *republic of the rich*.

December 10 was the *coup d'état* of the peasants, which overthrew the existing government. And from that day on, when they had taken a government from France and given a government to her, their eyes were fixed steadily on Paris. For a moment active heroes of the revolutionary drama, they could no longer be forced back into the inactive and spineless role of the chorus.

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In France, the petty bourgeois does what normally the industrial bourgeois would have to do; the worker does what normally would be the task of the petty bourgeois; and the task of the worker, who

<sup>2</sup>. Marx refers to the election of Louis Napoleon, for whom the peasants voted en masse. [A. T.]

accomplishes that? No one. In France it is not accomplished; in France it is proclaimed. It is not accomplished anywhere within the national walls; the class war within French society turns into a world war, in which the nations confront one another. Accomplishment begins only at the moment when, through the world war, the proletariat is pushed to the van of the people that dominates the world market, to the van of England. The revolution, which finds here not its end, but its organisational beginning is no short-lived revolution. The present generation is like the Jews whom Moses led through the wilderness. It has not only a new world to conquer, it must go under in order to make room for the men who are able to cope with a new world.

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So swiftly had the march of the revolution ripened conditions that the friends of reform of all shades, the most moderate claims of the middle classes, were compelled to group themselves round the banner of the most extreme party of revolution, round the *red flag*.

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\* \* \* Since its dreams of the peaceful achievement of its socialism—allowing, perhaps, for a second February Revolution lasting a brief day or so—the coming historical process naturally appears to it as an *application of systems*, which the thinkers of society, whether in companies or as individual inventors, devise or have devised. Thus they become the eclectics or adepts of the existing socialist systems, of *doctrinaire socialism*, which was the theoretical expression of the proletariat only as long as it had not yet developed further into a free historical movement of its own.

While this *utopia, doctrinaire socialism*, which subordinates the total movement to one of its moments, which puts in place of common, social production the brainwork of individual pedants and, above all, in fantasy does away with the revolutionary struggle of the classes and its requirements by small conjurers' tricks or great sentimentality; while this doctrinaire socialism, which at bottom only idealises present society, takes a picture of it without shadows and wants to achieve its ideal athwart the realities of present society; while the proletariat surrenders this socialism to the petty bourgeoisie; while the struggle of the different socialist leaders among themselves sets forth each of the so-called systems as a pretentious adherence to one of the transit points of the social revolution as against another—the *proletariat* rallies more and more round *revolutionary socialism*, round *communism*, for which the bourgeoisie has itself invented the name of *Blanqui*. This socialism is the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictator-*

3. Marx is referring to such moderate French 1848 events with his scheme of forms of socialism as that of Louis "social workshops." [R. T.]

ship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations.

The scope of this exposition does not permit of developing the subject further.

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Just as the period of crisis occurs later on the Continent than in England, so does that of prosperity. The original process always takes place in England; it is the demerger of the bourgeois cosmos. On the Continent, the different phases of the cycle through which bourgeois society is ever speeding anew occur in secondary and tertiary form. First, the Continent exported incomparably more to England than to any other country. This export to England, however, in turn depends on the position of England, particularly with regard to the overseas market. Then England exports to the overseas lands incomparably more than the entire Continent, so that the quantity of Continental exports to these lands is always dependent on England's overseas exports at the time. While, therefore, the crises first produce revolutions on the Continent, the foundation for these is, nevertheless, always laid in England. Violent outbreaks must naturally occur rather in the extremities of the bourgeois body than in its heart, since the possibility of adjustment is greater here than there. On the other hand, the degree to which the Continental revolutions react on England is at the same time the barometer which indicates how far these revolutions really call in question the bourgeois conditions of life, or how far they only hit their political formations.

With this general prosperity, in which the productive forces of bourgeois society develop as luxuriantly as is at all possible within bourgeois relationships, there can be no talk of a real revolution. Such a revolution is only possible in the periods when both these factors, the *modern productive forces* and the *bourgeois productive forms* come in collision with each other. The various quarrels in which the representatives of the individual factions of the Continental party of Order now indulge and mutually compromise themselves, far from providing the occasion for new revolutions are, on the contrary, possible only because the basis of the relationships is momentarily so secure and, what the reaction does not know, so bourgeois. From it all attempts of the reaction to hold up bourgeois development will rebound just as certainly as all moral indignation and all enthusiastic proclamations of the democrats. A new revolution is possible only in consequence of a new crisis. It is, however, just as certain as this crisis.