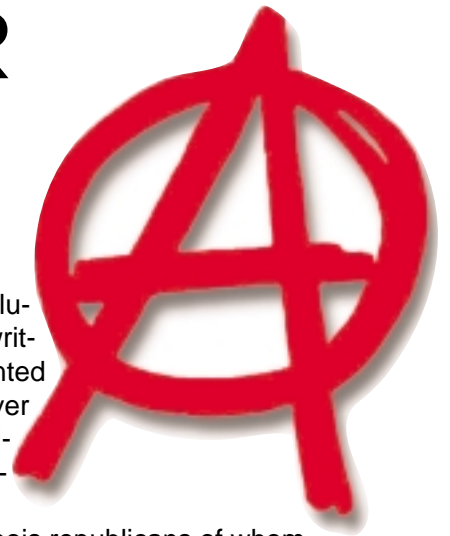


THE CLASS WAR

(1870)

by Mikhail Bakunin



Except Proudhon and M. Louis Blanc almost all the historians of the revolution of 1848 and of the coup d'état of December, 1851, as well as the greatest writers of bourgeois radicalism, the Victor Hugos, the Quinets, etc. have commented at great length on the crime and the criminals of December; but they have never deigned to touch upon the crime and the criminals of June. And yet it is so evident that December was nothing but the fatal consequence of June and its repetition on a large scale.

Why this silence about June? Is it because the criminals of June are bourgeois republicans of whom the above named writers have been, morally, more or less accomplices? Accomplices in their principles and therefore indirectly accomplices to their acts. This reason is probable, but there is yet another that is certain. The crime of June struck workers only, revolutionary socialists, consequently strangers to the class and natural enemies of the principles that all these honourable writers represent. The crime of December attacked and deported thousands of bourgeois republicans, the social brothers of these honourable writers and their political co-religionists. Besides, they themselves have been its victims. Hence their extreme sensibilities to the December crimes, and their indifference to those of June.

A general rule: A bourgeois, however red a republican he be, will be much more keenly affected, aroused and smitten by a mishap to another bourgeois were this bourgeois even a mad imperialist than by the misfortune of a worker, of a man of the people. There is undoubtedly a great injustice in this difference, but the injustice is not premeditated. It is instinctive. It arises out of the conditions and habits of life that exercise a much greater influence over men than their ideas and political convictions. Conditions and habits, their special manner of existing, developing, thinking and acting; all their social relationships so manifold and various, and yet so regularly convergent towards the same aim; all this diversity of interest expressing common social ambition and constituting the life of the bourgeois world, establishes between those who belong to this world a solidarity infinitely more real, deeper, and unquestionably more sincere than any that might come between a section of the bourgeoisie and the workers. No difference of political opinions is sufficient to overcome the bourgeois community of interests. No seeming agreement of political opinions is sufficient to overcome the antagonism of interests that divide the bourgeoisie from the workers. Community of convictions and ideas are and must ever be subsidiary to a community of class interests and prejudices.

Life dominates thought and determines the will. This is a truth that should never be lost sight of when we wish to understand anything about social and political phenomena. If we wish to establish a sincere and complete community of thought and will between men, we must find it on similar conditions of life, or on a community of interests. And as there is, by the very conditions of their respective existence, an abyss between the bourgeois world and the world of the worker, the one being the exploiting world, the other the world of the victimized and exploited, I conclude that if a man born and brought up in the bourgeois environment wishes to become sincerely and unreservedly the friend and brother of the workers, he must renounce all the conditions of his past existence; and outgrow all his bourgeois habits. He must break off his relations of sentiment with the bourgeois world, its vanity and ambition. He must turn his back upon it and become its enemy; proclaim irreconcilable war; and throw himself wholeheartedly into the world and cause of the worker. If his passion for justice is too weak to inspire him to such resolution and audacity, let him not deceive himself and let him not deceive the workers. He can never become their friend and at every crisis must prove their enemy. His abstract thoughts his dreams of justice will easily influence him in hours of calm reflection when nothing stirs in the exploited world. But let the moment of struggle come when the armed truce gives place to the irreconcilable conflict, his interests will compel him to serve in the camp of the exploiters. This has happened to our one-time friends in the past. It will happen again to many good republicans and socialists who have not lost their attachment to the bourgeois world.

Social hatreds are like religious hatreds. They are intense and deep. They are not shallow like political hatred. This fact explains the indulgence shown by the bourgeois democrats for the Bonapartists. It explains also their excessive severity against the socialist revolutionaries. They detest the former much less than the latter because of the pressure of economic interests. Consequently they unite with the Bonapartists to form a common reaction against the oppressed masses.

SOLIDARITY IN LIBERTY

(1867)

From this truth of practical solidarity or fraternity of struggle that I have laid down as the first principle of the Council of Action flows a theoretical consequence of equal importance. The workers are able to unite as a class for class economic action because all religious philosophies, and systems of morality which prevail in any given order of society are always the ideal expression of its real, material situation. Theologies, philosophies and ethics define, first of all, the economic Organisation of society; and secondly, the political organisation, which is itself nothing but the legal and violent consecration of the economic order. Consequently, there are not several religions of the ruling class; there is one, the religion of property. And there are not several religions of the working class: there is one, the piety of struggle, the vision of emancipation, penetrating the fog of every mysticism, and finding, utterance in a thousand prayers. Workers of all creeds, like workers of all lands, have but one faith, hope, and charity; one common purpose overleaps the barriers of seeming hatreds of race and creed. The workers are one class, and therefore one race, one faith, one nation; this is the theoretical truth to be induced from the practical fraternal solidarity of the Council of Action Organisation. Church and State are liquidated in the vital Organisation of the working class, the genius of free humanity.

It has been stated that Protestantism established liberty in Europe. This is a great error. It is the economic, material emancipation of the bourgeois class which, in spite of Protestantism, has created that exclusively political and legal liberty, which is too easily confounded with the grand, universal, human liberty, which only the proletariat can create. The necessary accompaniment of bourgeois legal and political liberty, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, is the intellectual, anti-Christian, and anti-religious emancipation of the bourgeoisie. The capitalist ruling class has no religion, no ideals, and no illusion. It is cynical and unbelieving because it denies the real base of human society, the complete emancipation of the working class. Bourgeois society, by its very nature of interested professionalism, must maintain centres of authority and exploitation, called States. The labourers, by their very economic needs, must challenge such centres of oppression. The inherent principles of human existence are summed up in the single law of solidarity. This is the golden rule of humanity, and may be formulated thus: no person can recognise or realise his or her own humanity except by recognising it in others and so co-operating for its realisation by each and all. No man can emancipate himself save by emancipating with him all the men about him.

My liberty is the liberty of everybody. I cannot be free in idea until I am free in fact. To be free in idea and not free in fact is to be revolt. To be free in fact is to have my liberty and my right, find their confirmation, and sanction in the liberty and right of all mankind. I am free only when all men are my equals (first and foremost economically.). What all other men are is of the greatest importance to me. However independent I may imagine myself to be, however far removed I may appear from mundane consideration by my social status, I am enslaved to the misery of the meanest member of society. The outcast is my daily menace. Whether I am Pope, Tsar, Emperor, or even prime Minister, I am always the creature of their circumstance, the conscious product of their ignorance, want and clamouring. They are in slavery, and I, the superior one, am enslaved in consequence.

For example if such is the case, I am enlightened or an intelligent man. But I am foolish with the folly of the people, my wisdom stunned by their needs, my mind palsied. I am a brave man, but I am the coward of the peoples' fear. Their misery appals me, and every day I shrink from the struggle of life. My career becomes an evasion of living. A rich man, I tremble before their poverty, because it threatens to engulf me. I discover I have no riches in myself, no wealth but that stolen from the common life of the common people. As privileged man, I turn pale before the people's demand for justice. I feel a menace in that demand. The cry is ominous and I am threatened. It is the feeling of the malefactor dreading, yet waiting for inevitable arrest. My life is privileged and furtive. But it is not mine. I lack freedom and contentment. In short, wishing to be free, though I am wise, brave, rich, and privileged, I cannot be free because my immediate associates do not wish men to be free; and the Mass, from whom all wisdom, bravery, riches, and Privileges ascend, do not know how to secure their freedom. The slavery of the common people makes them the instruments of my oppression. For we to be free, they must be free. We must conquer bread and freedom in common.

The true, human liberty of a single individual implies the emancipation of all: because, thanks to the law of solidarity, which is the natural basis of all human society, I cannot be, feel, and know myself really, completely free, if I am not surrounded by men as free as myself. The slavery of each is my slavery.

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