

Freedom

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THE LONDON STRIKES.

THE great revolt of the Dock Labourers and other workers of London, which for the last two weeks of August and the first two weeks of September absorbed public attention, is one of those incidents in the struggle between the haves and the have-nots which mould thought and influence progress. It originated in the action of a handful of men at the South West India Dock who ceased work on the 13th of August because their very moderate claim for a higher rate of wages and more favourable conditions of working was not granted. In the course of a few days the strike extended to the other docks and then, day after day, the strikers received accessions to their numbers from the wharf labourers, the lightermen and other kinds of riverside labourers. At the same time other workers quite outside the dock industry, took advantage of the agitation to demand better conditions for themselves. Coal porters and carmen, printers' labourers, iron workers, and their helpers, tin-plate workers, rope-making and jam factory girls, tobacco workers, orange porters, candle-makers, tailors, bricklayers and their labourers, basket-makers, chemical works employees, screw-makers, and other workers, ceased work and, like *Oliver Twist*, asked for more. In many cases they got it almost immediately; in others they had to hold out for a little while, but by the time the principal strike—that of the dockers—had ended on the 14th of September in a sort of compromise, by which the men employed on and after the 4th of November are to receive the advance in wages and better conditions asked for, the success of most of the other workers who had joined in the fray was assured.

A few days after the commencement of the struggle, John Burns was invited to address some of the meetings of the men. He accepted and from that time forward his energetic action in speaking to and for, as well as organising, the men, put him into the position of leader of the strike. He was ably supported by Tom Mann and many other comrades, with the result that a series of effective meetings were held on Tower Hill, at the Dock gates and elsewhere, including large demonstrations in Hyde Park on four succeeding Sundays. At one time, too, parades of the men from the east to and through the city took place daily. A committee to receive and distribute relief to the dockers on strike was formed and the funds began to roll in, not only from all parts of London and England, but also from Australia, whose generous citizens subscribed no less than £22,000.

Public opinion showed itself unmistakably on the side of the strikers. This we think goes to show that a general feeling of solidarity amongst the workers is growing and that very many of the non-workers are beginning to understand that every human being ought to have a chance to lead a human life. Even the Lord Mayor and some Members of Parliament, together with Cardinal Manning, declared that the demands of the dockers were justified. A milk vendor gave away 200 gallons of milk daily for some days in succession, a grocer gave away whole cheeses, a pawnbroker offered to take pledges without interest while the strike lasted, and a landlord actually declared his intention of not taking any rent for the period in which the men were unemployed. Some of the trade unions subscribed large sums; notably the London Society of Compositors paid £100 a week. How useful the reactionary can be to the revolutionary cause Mr. Norwood and his colleagues ably showed us. By their continual refusal to come to terms they fanned the flame of the revolt until at the height of the strike probably no less than 150,000 workers were affected.

The importance of the docker began to grow in the public estimation soon after the strike commenced and the distribution of provisions began to be hindered. Flour, meat, tea, sugar, coals, etc., were locked up at the docks and prices began to rise. Traffic in that important London thoroughfare the Strand, was stopped for weeks because the wood necessary for the paving was at the docks. It was realised that the despised unskilled worker was as necessary to society as the most eminent scientist. The attempts made to get men to take the strikers' places failed miserably. By an admirable system of picketting and other precautions, most of those outsiders who offered were dissuaded from going in, and nearly all the foreign sailors who were urged to do the work refused. The general feeling of these latter was expressed by the Chinaman who said, "S'pose you pay one sovereign one hour me no can do."

One of the most satisfactory features of the agitation was the apparent disappearance of the various Socialist bodies as such. The names of organisations seldom transpired, but Socialism and Socialists were everywhere. There was work for all and our comrades resolutely set to work to do it. Political humbug disappeared from the Socialist

programme as soon as our comrades in the various societies found themselves face to face with a live workers' movement. Evidently Socialism has passed out of the select circle period, has become too strong, too widespread to be managed by two or three groups with high-sounding names, and is penetrating the mass of the people. Federations, Leagues, Associations and Unions, so organised as to restrict the initiative of action to an elected few have been overshadowed in this strike movement by the individual action of their own members, and the common bond of union which the members of all these bodies seek has been found in the common cause. A fresh impetus has been given to the formation of independent societies and groups of Socialist workers. We are pleased, too, to see that the formation of several trade unions has resulted. Many thousands have been enrolled into the Dock Labourers Union; a Coal Porters and Carmen's Union has been started in the North of London; and Printers' Labourers, Laundresses, Bass Dressers, House Painters and Decorators, Hair Dressers and others have followed suit. These unions will all be useful in bringing the workers into line for the Social Revolution, and it is to be hoped they will not be spoiled by centralisation.

Strikes and trade unions can, of course, only palliate the evils of the existing system of society. But this palliation is in the right direction. Instead of leading the workers to rely upon parliament for assistance, it impresses upon them that "who would be free himself must strike the blow," and induces them to strive themselves for their own emancipation without regard to the visionary schemes of political tricksters. Said the *Star* during the course of the strike, "How will the best House of Commons in the world give the workers their rights if they are not themselves prepared to sustain and enforce them?" To this question we append another, "What is the good of your House of Commons to the workers if they have to sustain and enforce these same rights?" Surely it is good for nothing. Surely the worker should discard altogether his superstitious belief in the efficacy of state-help, refuse to sanction by his vote the iniquitous system of government, and rely upon the strength of his own arm and the clearness of his own head for his emancipation from the sweater, the rack-renter and the tax-collector. We think the workers are beginning to understand this, and we are sure these strikes will help them to do so.

THE SITUATION IN FRANCE.

(From our Paris correspondent.)

THE most important event to be noticed from the revolutionary Socialist point of view is without doubt the International Anarchist Conference which was held at Paris on Sundays, Sept. 1 and 8. This meeting resembled in no particular the preceding Authoritarian Congresses. There was no president, no bureau, no committee charged with the verification of the delegates' mandates, to bring up reports and do such-like useless things. The platform was absolutely free for every one to speak who wished, and the most admirable order existed during the two sittings, although the Salle du Commerce, which holds from five to six hundred persons, was quite full.

After a short speech from Tortellier inviting the comrades from other lands to express their ideas and to inform us about the Anarchist movement in their part of the world, Comrade Tarrida y Marmol, the delegate of several Spanish Anarchist-Collectivist groups, spoke. He described at length the origin of the Spanish Anarchist Federation, authoritarian at the commencement in spite of its Anarchist title; he very appropriately showed that Anarchy being equal liberty, it would be illogical to impose upon the groups such or such an economic form. Some might adopt the communist principle "taking at pleasure," others the collectivist principle "to each according to his work." But anyhow the Collectivist Anarchists of Spain, whose difference from the Communists is a diminishing quantity, have nothing in common with the authoritarian Collectivists of Germany and France.

Another Spanish delegate, an Anarchist Communist, reproached the Federation with formerly not supporting the martyrs of the *Mano Negra* ("Black Hand" Society), but the meeting persuaded the comrade to stop indulging in useless recriminations. Returning to general ideas he declared that theft from exploiters, desertion from the army and war against prejudice, are accepted by the Spanish Anarchists as good methods of combat.

Merlino followed with a close criticism of the attitude taken up by the authoritarian Socialists and of their ideal of society after the revolution. Their committees are to possess themselves of all power, decree

an abatement of 50 per cent. on mortgages, and give to the workers, formed like soldiers into regiments, the right to choose their directors. The wage-slaves will call themselves members of the community, the capitalists officials, and money labour-notes. Only names will have been changed. In an Anarchist Communist society people would have to occupy themselves with the organisation of wants and also with those problems—justice, morality, sociability, which the Marxists repel as matters of sentiment.

Malato, who succeeded him, read in the name of the Anarchist-Communist group of Bouglon (Lot et Garonne) a long manifesto explaining clearly the miserable situation of the French peasants, who before the end of the century will be forced by economic conditions to carry out an extensive jacquerie. We must, the manifesto concluded, develop the germs of revolt by all means—pamphlets, placards, colporteurs, etc.—and most important of all, occupy ourselves with the constitution of an Agrarian League on a purely Anarchist basis.

After an energetic exhortation by the German comrade, Werner, to struggle by all means against the ruling class, an English delegate spoke in English, Merlino translating afterwards. He said that although in England the Anarchists are not yet very numerous, they work actively in spreading their ideas of emancipation. He also referred to the London strike and the enthusiastic meeting decided to send a telegram to the workers over the Channel encouraging them to persevere in their fight with the capitalists.

After some words from a lady comrade, Elise, in support of carrying on a propaganda amongst women by women, an interesting debate commenced on the subject of Theft. Merlino considered it simply a changing of proprietors, leaving the question of individual property itself untouched. Tortellier, Brunet, Faure and Devertus approved of stealing from the rich as a method of carrying on the social war.

This question was again discussed at length at the second sitting. Then also Malato dealt with the attitude of Anarchists in case there should be a war. He urged upon comrades not to confine themselves to metaphysical discussions unintelligible to the masses, which tend to destroy the revolutionary feeling. We should seriously consider the eventuality of a war and seek for practical solutions. Too many comrades believed that we have only to let things go according to the course of events and that besides we can never penetrate the future. This is not correct; by the co-ordination of facts and from precise observations, going from the known to the unknown, we can foresee the future at any rate in its great features. Sociology is a science. He thought that in time of war declarations of principle would be insufficient. It would be necessary to act, being careful not to oppose the strength of the popular current. No matter with what motive, it was desirable to throw the mass against the great capitalists. In a word there must be action, action collective and immediate.

Comrade Paul Reclus did not think a war was imminent. The governments seemed to mutually distrust one another. Should there be a conflict, however, the proposal put forward by Malato was good. Going on to speak of the propaganda amongst the peasants he said he did not consider it practicable to do more than was done now, but in the day of revolution it would be necessary to hasten to send into the country the manufactured products that the capitalist régime has accumulated in the warehouses.

Comrade Elise read a paper on Theft, which she thought was only justifiable for propaganda purposes. There must be, she said, some Anarchist principles and morals. Comrade Ridoux, an individualist, affirmed on the other hand that Anarchy is the negation of morals and principles, and that egoism is, under varying forms, the basic principle of human nature.

Merlino gave a *résumé* of the ideas thrown out at the Conference. After him a German comrade declared, and not without reason, that two different camps are formed, that of the idealist Anarchists and that of the materialist Anarchists. He believes that a split will be inevitable in a little while.

We hope this prophecy will not be realised and that the liberty which the anarchist idea leaves to every one to act according to his temperament and his conceptions will maintain a fraternal accord. Besides materialism does not exclude a properly understood idealism. Büchner has said, the more we make abstract ideas of an imaginary future the more we are inclined to love the real world and to make it comfortable for our use, to embellish it, in fact to idealise it. But it is none the less true that a long period of inaction has thrown many of our friends into the cloudy paths of metaphysics. Abstractions of pure reason and sometimes effusions of sentimentalism make them forget the real world and neglect practical solutions. Their activity instead of being employed in determining facts and creating situations is only expended in a sort of cerebral gymnastics. They have there a mortal danger unless they rebel against it.

In the meantime the bourgeois parties and the authoritarian Socialists are stirred feverishly by the legislative elections which take place on September 22. At Clignancourt (18th arrondissement of Paris) General Boulanger is candidate in opposition to the Municipal Councillor Joffrin, the Possibilist. A third candidate without any chance, is Jules Roques, director of *L'Egalité*, who appears to have created a Socialist League only to bring about and support his candidature. But he is too acute and too thoughtful to delude himself. He is a very ambitious man; there is a snake in the grass. The general opinion is that Boulanger will be elected at Clignancourt and Rochefort at Belleville, where he is standing against Sigismund Lacroix and Camélinat.

Electoral ambitions have dislocated the Central Blanquist Committee. Granger having declared openly for Boulangism is patronised by the National Committee in the 19th arrondissement and will probably be elected. Vaillant and Susini are at the head of the anti-Boulanger

fraction. Perhaps, after all, it is only a deception, an apparent rupture, permitting the Blanquists to manoeuvre between the two currents. We must expect anything from the Red Jesuits.

The Boulangerist staff has had the shrewdness to choose republican candidates for Paris, and ultra-reactionary candidates for the provinces. The Bonapartists Lenglé, Dugué de la Fauconnerie and Cuneo d'Ornano are described in *L'Intransigeant* under the euphemism *républicains ralliés*; others quite as monarchical but less well known, are qualified *républicains d'origine*! Politics is a fine thing! Rochefort who made his entry into public life fighting against Cesarism, presents himself now as its would-be restorer.

It is probable that the government will obtain a majority in the provinces, but certainly we shall have a Rump Parliament that will be embarrassed in every sense. The bourgeois state will complete its suicide in the midst of useless and interminable discussions.

NEWS FROM SPAIN.

(From our Collectivist Anarchist Correspondent in Barcelona.)

As I have spoken in my preceding letters of the Anarchist movement in Spain, I will now say something about the middle-class political situation. We are now living under the régime of the Liberal Monarchy. Sagasta, ex-Minister of the Provisional Government of the Revolution of September 1868, ex-Minister of King Amadeo, ex-Minister of the Republic which survived after the *coup d'Etat* of January 3, 1874 and prepared the way for the Monarchical Restoration, has been Prime Minister since the death of Alfonso XII. He remains in power, partly because he knew how to elaborate a programme of Democratic Monarchy which includes universal suffrage and solves small difficulties while continually postponing the more important ones, and partly because of the attachment of the Regent who understands that her only means of remaining Queen is to keep in sympathy with the Liberals.

Our politicians are characterised by an unlimited passion for enrichment. All parties—from the “traditionalists” who sigh after the mediæval times, to the Federalists who dream of a universal federation of republics, are guided by a longing for personal power, and constitute so many sects, the prominent man of each considering himself the pontiff. Under such conditions politics is simply a means of satisfying personal ambition, and the Opposition—Reactionary as well as Radical—is moved by the most miserable trifles. The consequences of this are the complete neglect of all the public services; an immense deficit, never covered even by ruinous loans; a national debt capable of absorbing the whole of the wealth of the nation; the paralyzing of all branches of production; numerous cases of bankruptcy; and emigration to the extent of depopulating our villages and cities, thousands and thousands of workmen leaving for Brazil or La Plata. To give you an idea of the state of affairs, it is sufficient to say that during the last four months no less than 580 land owners in Granada, the richest province of fertile Andalusia, have been evicted by the State for arrears of taxes. The blackest despair has taken hold of our best educated men who exclaim, “Spain is dying! Dying is the nation which starves its workers!” While the anger of the masses finds expression in burning manufactories, granaries, corn-fields and forests, with terrible frequency. Such is our situation. The nation lives in misery and loses its old faith in religion, law and authority. Anarchism is welcome, as it holds out the hope of regeneration.

The enclosed programme of a Socialist competition [our Barcelona comrades have offered prizes, chiefly books, for the best essays on certain questions relating to Anarchist thought] will show you how we work for the scientific elaboration of Anarchist principles.

An Anarchist Communist paper, *La Revolucion Social*, has just appeared in Barcelona, which will certainly contribute to the triumph of truth and justice. Fortunato Serantoni, Calle de Magallanes, 53, Barcelona, is the publisher.

In a coming number of *El Productor* we propose to discuss the ideas in your article, “Is Communism Just?” Two of the contributors to *El Productor* recently made an excursion into the province of Valencia and held meetings at Valencia, Alcira and Alcoy. It was a triumph for our ideas. In Valencia they spoke in the hall of the Federalist Republicans, but neither there nor anywhere else has anybody come to contradict them. Another excursion of the same kind will soon follow.

THE PROPAGANDA.

A good deal of propaganda was done in the East End by Tom Pearson and W. Burrows of the Freedom group, during the strike period. Our comrades held many small meetings at which back numbers of *Freedom* and other Socialist literature were distributed.

ISLINGTON.—At the Britannia Coffee House, on Sept. 6, a debate took place between Tom Pearson and Christie (S. D.) on Anarchist Communism *v.* Social Democracy. Several interesting points were raised and further debate was agreed on.

SPITALFIELDS.—On Saturday September 7, at the Princes Street Hall, Tom Pearson addressed a meeting of tailors and cabinet makers on strike and was enthusiastically received. On Friday, Sept. 13, in the same hall, a meeting convened by the “Knights of Liberty” Anarchist Communist group, was held. There was a large attendance. The Freedom group was represented by Blackwell, who moved the resolution, and Pearson. The resolution which was unanimously adopted, declared that the wretched condition of the workers was due to government and private property, advocated the establishment of free associations of workers, and pledged the meeting to work with all other revolutionary Socialist groups for the speedy realisation of the Social Revolution.

REFLECTIONS UPON ANARCHISM.

SCIENCE is making tremendous progress in this century, but instead of science being the means of benefiting the people in every respect, it is used as a medium for inflicting misery and hardship upon those who are doomed to labour like slaves for a precarious existence. The inventions of science only give greater facilities to the privileged classes for increasing their happiness at the expense of terrible sufferings among that class which labours to produce the means whereby happiness is attainable. Machinery, instead of reducing the heavy labour of the working populace is used as a scientific mode of driving human beings from work and bread together; those who claim possession of the implements of production ruthlessly use every available means for throwing a number of industrial and agricultural labourers out of employment. So great has become the army of unemployed workers of every description that a Revolution is inevitable. But what are the new social conditions to be?

The society of the future will surely be based upon the principle of equality; an equality which recognises the human right of every individual to exercise to the full his powers of intellectual activity. There will be no need to curtail this complete freedom, for there will be no fear of the intellectual genius trying to make himself wealthy at the expense of others when production for the public use has taken the place of production for individual profit or personal gain.

Amongst the various schools of Socialist thought the State Socialist school insists upon the necessity of central government to regulate production and carry on public functions. This is the point upon which Anarchists and State Socialists differ. Both aim at the emancipation of man from his present slavery, but Anarchists refuse to recognise authority; State Socialists favour a certain system of officialism.

Now we believe that Anarchism might be put in practice without going through any form of State Socialism. The moment the commercial system breaks down, authority will cease to have any influence; and the people will be compelled to organise themselves without waiting to be told to do so, to produce commodities of every description for their own use. Such organisation will need no officials to drill the people into it. When the mass of the workers know what they require for their maintenance, they will voluntarily associate together to manufacture commodities for themselves without waiting to be ordered to do what natural instinct and intelligence tell them they must do or perish. And in that case what would be the use of government officials?

The more productive workers there are, the fewer the hours of labour necessary for producing commodities, and in an Anarchist society there would be very few non-producers. There would be no large army of government officials, soldiers, policemen, revenue officers, and such like to be supported at the cost of the labour of all the other workers. An advantage over State Socialism apparent to every one.

But we may be asked: Would every person be expected to do manual labour in an Anarchist society? Manual labour under capitalism is degrading for those who are forced to perform it because there is no other occupation open to them whereby they may secure a livelihood. Labour in a free society would not be degrading but honourable, for the labourer would feel his toil was essential to the happiness of the community. At present men work long hours because their employers want a profit out of their labour; but when employers are unknown and work is done for the well-being of the people collectively, then the hours of labour will be diminished to what is really necessary, and work which is wearisome to-day will become pleasant. No doubt every able-bodied person will be expected to do his three or four hours per day of productive labour, so as to enable the whole community to devote their leisure hours to the cultivation of their mental faculties. Cultivation of the intellect is almost impossible for our present manual labourers whose toil from morning till evening banishes all thought of mental training from their minds, and they would rather indulge in some kind of frivolous amusement to drive from them that heaviness and anxiety which labour, under our competitive institutions, brings upon them. And it would be considered very unfair in a free society, where men associated together as brothers and equals, that all the heavy labour should be shunted on to certain people's shoulders. If there were no class privileges secured by laws, men would never stand that sort of thing. The shirkers would find themselves left out in the cold and be forced by their own unsupplied needs to co-operate in the necessary manual labour. The hardships belonging to such labour to-day would soon begin to disappear when it was everybody's interest to invent means to get rid of them.

When Anarchists propound these ideas to unthoughtful mortals, they are very often told that some human beings would be too indolent even to labour three or four hours per day; and they are asked what would be done with the idlers under Anarchism, if there were no coercive methods used to make them comply with the natural obligations imposed upon all men, namely, to labour in order to live? We admit that there are many idle men and women to-day; but are they not mostly lazy because the work they are made to perform is repugnant to their nature? Any man turns against work that is forced upon him and does not suit his taste, and work which men are forced to undertake breeds the discontent that causes every one to revolt against what is likely to do them bodily harm. To-day men and women are doomed to violent and sustained exertion on insufficient food or to stick to monotonous routine work for hours and hours in close, gloomy workshops, or noisy, stuffy factories, which produce the most miserable nervous depression and blunt all the faculties—no wonder they shrink from such labour. But when this unnatural labour is no longer exacted, when a free society is an accomplished fact, then most of those who

refuse to labour at present for an employer, would most willingly throw off the garment of laziness which our society causes them to wear, and voluntarily assist in work which would require no continuous physical overstrain. Our social institutions breed laziness; Anarchism would turn indolence into a love for honest labour. Where then is the need for coercive methods to compel the indolent to work? If laziness is to be abolished, the evils responsible for it must cease to exist; if the evils remain, the consequences of the evils will go on increasing. Since our social conditions create evils out of which arises laziness, these conditions must be destroyed before the evils can be abolished. The only method by which this can be accomplished is by adopting an *Anarchical system of society*, wherein these evils will not be even known, much less fostered by unnatural coercive authority.

Now in a free society where all took their fair share of work, very little time would be taken out of each one's day by the business of producing food-stuffs, clothing, shelter, and such like for the general use; there would be a great deal of leisure. What would people do with it? When intelligent people have the privilege of utilising their spare time in whatever manner they think proper, the desire for further intellectual development grows from their original love of knowledge. And when the means of acquiring knowledge are at the disposal of everybody, the enthusiasm of the more intelligent will inspire the rest to strive after the intellectual development attained by the industrious and diligent students. Therefore the general level of man's mental faculties in an Anarchist society will soon be immensely superior to what they are to-day, when despair breeds an impulse in many individuals to resist any attempt to enlighten them upon topics relating to their social surroundings.

Nowadays, too, the world is full of nonsensical trash, disgusting to the searchers after truth. So-called philosophers write numerous volumes upon matters of little importance to those who suffer from the evils arising out of the social institutions which those philosophers write to defend. False men cannot write truthful matter; living in a false atmosphere they fail to sympathise with men and women longing to be freed from wage slavery and competition. The monopolisers of wealth and privilege have a whole army of literary supporters, whose efforts are devoted to the furtherance of principles detrimental to the masses upon whose labour they exist. And all those whose minds are nourished upon this vile literature are certain to entertain the erroneous ideas it is meant to instil, unless indeed they read for the purpose of dissecting the ideas expressed and pointing out the fallacious arguments used by the author in favour of the principles intended for dissemination among those who never think about what they read or ask themselves whether a writer's statements are true or false. Literature of this description would be eschewed in an Anarchist society; and instead of authors being obliged to waste their mental energy in writing matter acceptable to their pay-masters only, they would be encouraged to compose works containing matter which would elevate the reader's morals and sharpen his intellect.

Not only would literature be free from interested lies and mercenary clap-trap, but the different sections of the scientific world would be open freely to all those who are now prevented from taking part in scientific research. Why should scientific investigation be confined to a privileged few? Why should the wealth producers be prevented from sharing in its joys and honours? The people generally are, in these days, debarred from studying scientific problems or making themselves familiar with music and painting, sculpture and literature, or any other art in which the moneyed class alone can give their children a thorough education. But when monopoly vanishes and freedom takes its place, then the arts and sciences will become popular, and the entire community enjoy the benefits arising from their progress, progress which is fatally hindered whilst education in the higher subjects is a class privilege.

Society at present recognises the right of one man to domineer over another, because the persons who obey *allow* themselves to be treated as inferior to those whom society encourages to act as masters. But those who rule to-day cannot give any satisfactory account of the origin of their authority over their fellow citizens. Rulers and ruling classes have taken it upon themselves to reign over those willing to submit, and that submission denotes the utter foolishness of the governed. If an intelligent minority refused to be ruled by a minority of usurpers, they would have a much stronger moral position in refusing obedience than the rulers have for compelling it. The handful of men which refuses to be governed by usurpers, can boast of superior intelligence to those who patiently yield to the demands of ambitious and selfish individuals. Human beings were born to work harmoniously together, so as to provide each other with the necessities of life; and also to make each other's life as happy as possible. When a man attempts to over-rule another he displays an unspeakable amount of ignorance. And when pedantic individuals are induced to dictate to their so-called inferiors, the result is that a fierce desire for place and authority begins to burn within their hearts and flames ever higher and higher. Mankind being socially equal, authority should not be even mentioned, for intelligence can best guard the intelligent—under free conditions—against committing acts injurious to their neighbours.

Whilst ignorance reigned amongst the masses of the people they were content to believe that rulers and those in authority, kings, barons, priests, employers, had some sort of divine or natural right to tell them what to do and force them to do it. But the spread of knowledge, even the small amount of it current to-day, has been enough to change all that; to lead the people to question the right to rule, to challenge the usurpers of authority. A great many people are beginning to believe that every human being ought to have at his disposal every aid

to intellectual development, that he may acquire that knowledge whereby he would be enabled to control himself; his own instincts guided by his own reason would then be the best law for his conduct. At present the millions permit the hundreds to make hard and fast laws for them, laws in harmony, perhaps, with the views of the hundreds, but altogether at variance with the views and interests of the millions. In consequence the millions are continually struggling against laws repugnant to their natural instincts, repugnant to their ideas of right and of those natural laws by which alone mankind ought to be ruled. They obey, but obey perforce and against their conscience. And this evil is inseparable from a fixed code made by any set of men for others, for the human mind is continually developing and each can only find out for himself the line of conduct which is fitting to him at any given moment. It is impossible for others to fully realise his position and dictate to him. If this fact were recognised the office of the law-maker would be at an end and coercion would appear the monstrous outrage upon human equality and fraternity that it really is.

JOHN MARSHALL.

THE CENTENARY OF THE REVOLUTION.

II.

THE history of the great revolution, when properly understood, is the most striking illustration of what we Anarchists maintain, namely, that even during a revolutionary period, even with assemblies elected under the pressure of the revolted masses, the parliamentary representatives of the nation, far from promoting the accomplishment of the revolution, were like heavy shot attached to its feet. If the French peasants had expected their liberation from the feudal yoke from the National Assembly, or the Legislative Assembly, or even the Convention, they would have come out of the revolution under nearly the same burden as before. And if France had expected from her legislators the abolition of court rule, court rule would have been maintained almost in full.

Throughout the four years that the revolution lasted, it was entirely the work of the masses, acting under their own proper impulse *against* the orders received from their Paris leaders and compelling some of those leaders to follow—*against* the laws voted by the representatives of the nation. And yet we must remember that the representatives were elected by the masses; that the wealth-possessing classes abstained from the elections; that they fled from France or took no part in the elections which, in proportion as the revolution developed, fell more and more into the hands of the ardent revolutionists. After the massacres of September 22, 1792, the richer classes, terrorised by the events in the Paris prisons, took no part at all in the election of the Convention; and yet that body, so glorified by the middle-class historians, was the refuge of reaction.*

The masses revolted, notwithstanding the Draconian laws issued against the revolutionists by the successive Assemblies; and when they succeeded in compelling these Assemblies to recognise by law the facts already accomplished, they did so by means of armed demonstrations in the streets, by menaces launched from the lobbies of the House, where revolutionists regularly attended the sittings in order to exert pressure on their legislators, by armed irruptions of the crowds into the House, and by terrorising their so-called revolutionary representatives.

The Convention was no exception to the rule. To obtain from it the sanction of the total abolition of feudal rights and some measures to suppress the terrible speculation in grain and so prevent famine, the crowds of Paris proletarians had to meet on May 30, 1793, in their sections, to displace the Commune of Paris which was as bad a Parliament as the Convention, and to send their artillerymen to arrest or put to flight no less than one hundred and thirty-three members of the Convention, to terrorise, in short, the "toads of the marsh" (the centre) and to compel the left wing to accept the necessary revolutionary measures.*

The chief change due to the Great Revolution was, as we said in our preceding article, the abolition of feudal rights. So let us see how it was accomplished.

After the winter of 1788 the peasants no longer fulfilled the feudal obligations. Secret societies—quite informal and having nothing of the rigidity of the secret middle-class Republican societies which spread in Europe fifty years later—the "Jacques," the "Friends of the Black Ones," and so on, sprang up among the peasants themselves. Rents and taxes were not paid.

When the peasants saw that the central government became more and more disorganised, and that old forms of repression were dropping into disuse, they took advantage of that moment for openly shaking off the yoke of feudalism. And, in proportion as the government grew more and more disorganised at Versailles by the struggles between the Court and the Third Class, they grew bolder and bolder.

In some places the whole of the village went to the owner and notified him their refusal to submit any longer to the feudal obligations. In other places they besieged the castles, took possession of the *terriers* (the parchments on which their various obligations were inscribed) and burned them, sometimes also burning the castle together with the parchments. But in the great majority of cases, when the peasants themselves were not bold enough to make a decisive move, bands of bolder peasants—the poorest ones—coming from many villages, met together

and went over the country burning the castles of the lords and all the papers of their judges and governors.

However, it would be an error to imagine that the peasant insurrection spread all over France. All revolutions are made by minorities, and precisely therefore they are revolutions—that is, changes made much before the majority is ready to move for obtaining the change. So also it was in 1789. There were a few provinces in the east where two-thirds of the castles had been sacked, but there were whole provinces where the peasants simply grumbled without moving, awaiting the outcome of events. That tremendous change—the abolition of feudalism which has exercised so immense an influence upon all our century, was made, like all other changes, by a feeble but bold minority.

Long before the Parisians revolted, too, and took the stronghold of royalty and feudalism—the Bastille—the peasants already were revolting, and Chassin—one of the few writers who has looked in the archives for documents about the peasants' insurrections—is quite right in saying that even if Paris had been defeated on July 14th, 1789, feudalism nevertheless would have had to disappear. To reintroduce it, each village in the Eastern part of France must have been reduced to obedience by military force.

When the news of the peasants' outbreaks reached the National Assembly, what was its first move? The revolutionists of the Third Class so eager to launch the famous *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, came to the Assembly on August 4th with the proposal of new severe laws to suppress the peasants' rising. You may see it in the *Moniteur*. But happily enough the clergy and the nobility, better informed as to the violence of the movement in several provinces, and knowing that it would be impossible longer to maintain their feudal rights and the manorial jurisdiction, came forward to abdicate these rights. I will not say that some of them were not nerved by that enthusiasm which seizes even the most inveterate exploiters at such moments as France was living through in that year of 1789. Have we not heard of middle-class exploiters who, on the proclamation of the Paris Commune of 1871, were so much impressed by the *grandeur* of what happened during that memorable week that they said to Socialists: "Well, if a new departure must be made let it be. What's to be done?" There were enthusiasts amidst the French nobility as well, and on that night the enthusiasts took the lead. But then came the next day, when the cunning ones gained the upper hand, and in the series of decrees which were launched by the National Assembly on the following days, the whole work of the enthusiasts was brought to naught. The decrees still began with the words: "The feudal rights are abolished." But in the next lines of the decrees they were re-established; they were perpetuated.

The *personal* obligations only—those which had been falling into oblivion, those which the royal government before the revolution was no longer capable of enforcing—were abolished. The peasants were not any longer to beat the water of the ponds to prevent the frogs from disturbing the sleep of the lord of the manor—because in reality they were doing it no longer. But all obligations representing any *pecuniary* value and the tithes, were fully recognised and confirmed by law. The law simply left to the peasants the right of redeeming them—if the landlord would agree to the redemption and the amount of money to be paid could be agreed upon by mutual consent.

Only one of those decrees was fully brought into action—that which permitted the municipalities and the *bourgeois* militia to suppress the peasant outbreaks. That was done and the more willingly as the revolted peasants made no distinction between noble land-owners and middle-class owners, between "patriot" exploiters and non-patriot feudal lords, between hereditary seigneurs and those money-lenders and middle-class speculators into whose hands the land and the feudal rights had been transmitted. The peasants plundered the "patriots' castles" as well. And the middle classes were suppressing their outbreaks by the end of 1789 with even greater atrocities than the nobles ever did. In the Maconnais, Bourbonnais and so on they hanged them pitilessly. And when the peasants, learning from what had happened at Versailles, understood that the feudal rights really were abolished, and plundered the pigeon-houses of the lords, thirteen "poachers" were hanged in August, just about the time the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" was promulgated. Therefore, even the reactionist Mme. Stael could write: "The peasants are most dissatisfied with the feudal decrees. If they are not amended, the Jacquerie will recommence." And it recommenced. It recommenced six times—each time that the peasants saw that they could not obtain from their legislators the abolition of feudalism.

The Jacquerie began again and again, till in 1792 the abolition of feudal rights without redemption was voted by a *coup de main*, less than 200 members of the Assembly being present at the vote. It continued till, after the above-mentioned "cleaning" of the Convention by the guillotine, the remaining members, terrorised by the people of Paris, agreed to return to the peasants the lands enclosed by the landlords.

To obtain from the "revolutionary Convention" a simple recognition of the accomplished facts, the people had to send 34 of its members to the scaffold. That is what it means to trust to the so-called representatives of the nation in revolutionary periods.

Much more ought to be said with regard to that subject; but the narrow limits of our paper prevent us from going more into it. So let us simply advise our readers to re-read the history of the French Revolution from this point of view. It would be their tribute to the Centenary; and, whilst doing so, they would learn much more about what a revolution means than from all they can find in the whole of Socialist literature.

* We cannot but warmly recommend our friends who know French to read a most interesting work by Leverdays, "Les Assemblées Parlantes" ("The Talking Assemblies"), where they will find more about the Convention. It was published at Paris in 1883, by Marpon and Flammarion, and costs 3fr. 50c. (2s. 11d.)