

Evolution and revolution

By Charles Rappoport

The “New Method” is evolutionist. The “New Method” is reformist. The “New Method” stands above all for legality. In order to fully understand it in all its beauty, in all its power, we must first study its conceptions of evolution, reform, and *legal revolution*. Let us proceed in this order and commence with evolution.

The partisans of the “New Method”, quite honestly, without doubt, put certain stupidities into the mouths of revolutionists, which naturally appear to them quite in order. The revolutionists, they say, believe that the social revolution will be the result of a coup, a struggle with the police, or, better, to employ the favourite expression of (is it necessary to name the minister?) “the stroke of a magic wand”. The revolutionists are travestied as social magicians or miracle-workers; and the realists of state Socialism—in theory very idealist—never miss an occasion of showing their sovereign contempt for these dreamers of impossible catastrophes. They alone are in complete agreement with modern science, founded on the principle of evolution. The revolutionists are romanticists, Utopians. Has not Bernstein himself said that Marx even was but a common Blanquist?

What is the truth?

Let us first point out that all the great masters of contemporary Socialism, those very men who introduced into it the idea of evolution, and who have in some measure saturated the spirits of man with their ideas, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Ferdinand Lassalle, Peter Lavroff, were throughout their entire lives convinced revolutionists.

It is an incontrovertible fact, and we will prove it.

The social work of Marx has been compared with that of Darwin in the domain of Nature. In fact, his classic work, the *Manifesto*, which alone perhaps, of all books of our time, contains in a small space (some thirty pages) so many great and fertile ideas, develops quite a system of evolution in capitalist society. In the *Manifesto* we see Socialism burst forth, as the very consequence of things, from the very entrails of capitalist society. It is capitalism itself which fashions its own “grave-digger”, the proletariat organised as a class party.

The *Manifesto* concludes with the ultra-revolutionary declaration which follows:

“The communists consider it beneath them to cloak their ideas and designs. They declare openly that their end cannot be realised but by the *violent destruction* of the existing social order. *Let the ruling classes tremble before a communist revolution*. The workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to gain”.

Here we are very far from the theory “take care to make fear” (“Ayons peur de faire peur”) which has conducted its author to the ministry of commerce. Yet, Marx put to flight all the miracle-workers, all the manufacturers of little projects put forward as so many panaceas guaranteed to save society from the misery of capitalism. It is true that he had not foreseen the project for the participation of socialists in the central power of the bourgeois state, which renders the revolution altogether unnecessary, and, above all, dangerous. A revolutionary party which does not inspire its adversaries with fear is ripe for government. But, it will never “conquer the world”.

The idealist, Peter Lavroff, was in complete agreement with Marx, the materialist, on the question of violent revolution. Throughout all his glorious life he preached the Revolution in the name of reason, “justice and humanity”. He sought to establish scientifically that “every Socialist who thinks logically must be a revolutionist”. And he always added that the Revolution cannot be brought about without violence. Peter Lavroff introduced scientific philosophy into Russia, thus contributing more than anyone else to the overthrow of metaphysical and theological ideas in his country. He was the sworn enemy of miracles, and understood the miracle of social transformation by the word *participation*.

The partisans of legality are often pleased to quote a *Preface* of Engels where he traces a magnificent picture of the growth of the Socialist Party during the legal period. But the rascals forget to add that

Engels himself protested against the publication, declaring that his ideas had been falsified through the omission of a conclusion containing an affirmation thoroughly revolutionary.

The statement of Marx is likewise invoked, that in England the Revolution could be achieved pacifically and legally. In his preface to the English translation of *Capital*, Engels, on including the words of his great friend, wrote: "But he never omitted to mention that he doubted very much if the ruling classes in England would ever accede to a pacific and legal revolution" (*Capital*. Introduction. 1887). Otherwise stated: the revolution will be superfluous if the dominant classes are in humour for committing suicide. It is perfectly evident that Marx, who thoroughly understood the economic condition of England, wished to say nothing more than that all the material and technical conditions were at hand. In order to accomplish the Revolution nothing was wanted but the revolutionary lever. "Force is the midwife of every new society". The pains and violence of birth cannot be overlooked on the grounds that the embryo should be allowed to develop in an easy and regular manner. One might as well overlook volcanic eruptions on considering that modern geology has abandoned the catastrophic theory of the formation of the earth. The new-born will develop pacifically, "legally", but he comes into being *revolutionary*. The subterranean forces accumulate slowly, invisibly, but once arrived at a certain degree of intensity, they explode. "Revolutions in history are as necessary as tempests in nature", writes Malon, whom our good evolutionists do not qualify as "sectary". In truth, this class of "tempest" does not agree with ministerial combinations. But, since when do the phenomena of nature and history rest on the decrees of ministers, being "out of control".

In 1887 at the Congress of Saint-Gall, Bebel, who of course is nothing but a romantic dreamer, declared:

"He who says that the final end of Socialism will be realised in a pacific manner does not know the final end, or, mocks us".

Further. It is only during its scientific period that, based on the principle of evolution, Socialism becomes revolutionary. The great Utopians, Fourier, Owen, Saint-Simon were pacific in their methods. They preached the social transformation to make the "revolution" needless.

It was exactly at the time that the social reformers addressed the monarchs, assembled at Aix-la-Chapelle, soliciting their "Collaboration" in social reform in the name of "social conservation". That was also the good old time when the noble dreamer Fourier used to look daily for his "millionaire", pacific redeemer of suffering humanity.

The triumph of the truly realistic spirit was at the same time that of the revolutionary spirit. None but empiric minds who see no farther than the tips of their noses or who have some interest in cloaking historic truth, believe that revolution is contrary to evolution of which it is, in reality, only the fatal and irresistible outcome. Thus, *the Utopian period of Socialism was pacific. The scientific period adopts revolutionary tactics.*

Ferdinand Lassalle, who was the promoter of universal suffrage in Germany, a man of immediate action and pacific *par excellence*, recognised the revolution as a means of achieving any serious reform. He pointed out that many great reforms were brought about only by revolution. For him, as well as for every modern Socialist, revolution is but a moment, a period of crisis in the "normal" evolution of society, *an evolution which comes to a head.*

The abyss which our ministerialists seek to find between evolution and revolution under its sudden and violent form exists but in their imagination. But there exists an insuperable abyss between revolution and ministerialism.

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