

Legality and Revolution

by Jules Guesde

Because, with the International, we shout warnings of the pitfalls to the workers of France, whom it is sought to divert from political action under the pretexts of the general strike and other operations of the holy ghost of Anarchism, some of the bourgeois press conclude that we have more and more the physiognomy of a parliamentary party. According to them we have renounced revolutionary procedure.

But then—you will think—there must be rejoicing among the conservative genus; surely the fatted calf already turns on the spit for the return of the collectivist sheep to the fold of legality.

Hasten to correct yourselves. Our brave quill-drivers start from what they call our rally or conversion to parliamentarism to denounce us with greater vehemence, and to vanquish us under the redoubled fire of their anathemas.

What, then, is this mystery? And how explain such contradictory language? Quite simply by this—which is not at all mysterious—that our adversaries do not believe a word of what they tell their readers. They know that far from turning the back to the revolution we maintain and impel the army of the workers in the revolutionary road, when, instead of allowing it to engage itself in the blind alley of a systematized strike, we show it the political power—the state—to be conquered.

This conquest is, indeed, an indispensable condition of the social revolution, in other words, of the transformation of capitalist property into social property. It is only after and by the political expropriation of the capitalist class that its economic expropriation can be achieved, as is recognised by the common programme of Socialists the world over.

In order to restore the means of wealth production to the producers, there must be a proletariat having become the government and making law. It remains now to be seen how from being as now a governed class, the workers can and will become the governing class. The ballot, which has already installed us in numerous *Hôtels de Ville* and which has put an important minority into the Palais Bourbon is the first means. But will it be the sole?

No more than we believed this yesterday do we believe it to-day. But since when, because it will not be all, must legal action be therefore nothing? Far from excluding each other, electoral action and revolutionary action complete each other, and have always completed each other in our country where—for all parties—the victorious insurrection has been but the consequence, the crowning of the ballot.

The antagonism that it is sought to establish—useless to enquire why—between the suffrage which commences and the stroke of force which terminates, has never existed except in the hollowest of phrases. History, all history, is there to demonstrate that the *deviations from legality* have always and necessarily been preceded by the usages and employment of that legality as long as it served as a defensive—and offensive—arm to the new idea, to the new interests in their recruitment, and while the revolutionary situation had not yet been produced.

It was legally and electorally that Orleanism prepared its advent to power. That, however, did not prevent it finally coming to musket shots in a three days' battle. The

“glorious” three days immortalised by the July column.

It was legally, electorally, that Bonapartism installed itself at the Elysée. But this did not prevent it from employing force—and what force! The rifle killing Baudin, and the cannon shattering the Boulevard Montmartre—in order to move into the Tuilleries as the third and last Empire.

The Republic was no exception to this rule. Twice (under the July monarchy and under the Empire) it legally and electorally constituted its army and partly gained the country. But this again did not prevent the Republic, in order to become the 1907 government presided over by M. Fallières, from having to pass through a violent accouchement by means of the *forceps* of street battles.

Well! Socialism to-day is legalist, electoralist, by the same title as all other political parties which have preceded it, and which are at present coalesced against it with what remains of their virility. We do not pretend to innovate, we content ourselves with the means of struggle and victory which have served others and of which we will serve ourselves in our turn. If anything is particularly idiotic it is the divergence that has been made between the *means*, divided into legal and illegal, into pacific and violent, in order to admit the one and exclude the other.

There is not, and there never will be, other than a single category of means, determined by circumstances: those which conduct to end pursued. And these means are always revolutionary when there is a question of a revolution to be accomplished.

The vote, however legal it may be, is revolutionary when on the basis of class candidatures it organises France of labour against France of capital. Parliamentary action, however pacific it may be, is revolutionary when from the height of the tribune of the *Chambre* it beats the call to the discontented of the workshop, field and counter; and when it drives capitalist society to bay in the refusal or powerlessness of the latter to give the workers satisfaction.

Anti-revolutionary, reactionary in the highest degree, would the riot on the other hand be, in spite of its character of illegality and violence, because by furnishing the popular blood-letting that moribund capitalism needs for survival, the riot would put back the hour of deliverance. Not less anti-revolutionary, not less reactionary—and for the same reason—is all attempt at general strike that is condemned, through working-class and peasant divisions, to the most disastrous and abortive results.

The duty of the Socialist Party is to avoid as a snare, as a machination of the enemy or to the profit of the enemy, all that which in spite of its scarlet and explosive character would mislead and uselessly exhaust our forces of the first line; and to use parliament, as we use the press and the meetings, in order to complete the proletarian education and organisation, and to bring to a conclusion the revolution that is prepared by this end of at social order.

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