

The first duty of Socialists

By Charles Verecque

Our class can only supplant another in controlling Society when it becomes conscious and organised. When the bourgeoisie brought about their revolution, they had been ready for it for a long time. Doubtless they didn't amuse themselves by looking into all the details of the Society they were about to establish, but they knew what it was they had to realise in order to throw down all obstacles in the way of their development.

The working class, which is at the present time the lowest and the most downtrodden, can only acquire cohesion and strength and finally reach the goal aimed at, by organising and at the same time becoming class-conscious. This is the position they (the workers) must resolutely take up. They must, so far as possible, completely detach themselves from all sections of the bourgeoisie, republican as well as reactionary, inasmuch as all these sections have, each in turn, deceived, bought, exploited and massacred them, and equal each other in defending the capitalist system, and in crushing down the proletariat.

What the workers have got to do is to establish their own party, as a class party: their only hope of freedom being their own united and disciplined forces.

The two things in question then are: education and organisation. It is to these that Socialists are directing their efforts. So long as the workers form the "tail", the following of any section whatsoever of the bourgeoisie, they will remain tame and incapable of gaining their freedom. They will merely secure the ends of those very bourgeois against whom they think they are fighting; and since they are not looking after their own interests, they will either forget those interests or be unable to distinguish them.

It is incontestable that the political colours in which the bourgeoisie wrap themselves are only a means to bind the workers more closely to them, in order to keep intact their political power, and, consequently, their rule over Society.

Since 1789 the bourgeois have been masters of political power in France: every section—legitimet, royalist, imperialist, and republican of different degrees—has had its turn in arranging matters.

This power could have—ought to have—changed hands, but it has remained the business of the same class, the bourgeoisie, divided into sections for the purpose of sharing profits, but all of them united in order to defend these profits against the attacks of the workers.

Accordingly the workers ought never to favour any political colour borne by no matter what section of the bourgeoisie. The same ditch should be dug between the radicals and the workers, as between the workers and "reactionaries". In what respect do the radicals differ from the last named? They are, perhaps, in favour of more advanced reforms, but like the "reactionaries", they are all for keeping intact the *status quo*. That is enough to condemn them, and they must be fought just like the others.

In their struggle for the possession of political power, the workers should be and remain by themselves, in order to constitute the class army which the course of events will allow them to throw against and rout the bourgeois army. Besides, the class struggle teaches the proletariat that only to know the bourgeoisie is to treat its members as the enemy, and fight them upon every ground. This is what the congress at Marseilles in 1879 wanted to do.

At a time when Socialist doctrines were completely unknown, the workers might still cling to the skirts of these gentlemen, the bourgeoisie, awaiting at their hands a modification or change in their own wretched existence. Today, after 30 years of propaganda of scientific Socialism such an attitude is impossible of justification.

The organisation of the workers into a class party has been forced to shape itself in a two-fold way—one by way of trade unions, the other in politics.

Even as the very conditions of their labour, conditions under which production and distribution of commodities are carried on, force the workers to join unions in order to defend themselves against longer hours of work and lower wages, in a word to *defend* themselves against the masters; just so, with

a view to *overcoming* the master class, are they obliged to look beyond their extremely limited everyday horizon, and form themselves into a political party, the Socialist Party, for the transformation of society by the socialisation of its productive forces.

The part to be played by the Socialist Party is one of adopting every useful means for gaining recruits, by propaganda and organisation; above all to spread far and wide, both in the towns and in the countryside, the idea of the political and economic expropriation of the bourgeoisie. By it the class consciousness of the workers must be awakened, in this way leading them towards their definite emancipation.

In order to bring about the speedy triumph of the socialist revolution, the thinkers of the working class must become familiar with Socialist principles and conclusions.

That is why the Socialist Party ought not to neglect any occasion that arises in order to marshal the workers under the red flag for an attack on bourgeois Society. Under actual present-day conditions the Socialist Party is only, to use an expression of Guesde's, a kind of drill-sergeant and recruiting officer, and can only act as such, teaching and gaining recruits by every means in its power.

In order to lead up to it, the next social revolution needs a proletariat well taught and organised. To become conscious of its absolute right to every form of social wealth, and to be gathered into one class party; these are the two conditions which a proletariat intent on transforming Society must necessarily fulfil.

It cannot be too often repeated that what keeps the proletariat from its emancipation is the fact of its ignorance. If it could only understand it would free itself. The new form of Society is ready to take shape under its direction and for its benefit. Its consent is the only thing lacking. The daily task of Socialists is therefore to prepare the workers for the historic mission which they have to accomplish.

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