

## THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT

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It was the proletariat whose fight won for the bourgeoisie victory over all the other classes of society in the more developed countries of Europe; it is up to the proletariat alone to break this rule in turn, and to proclaim the rule of its own class—the class that no longer has any other class below it. The desperate protests raised everywhere against this prospect by the leaders of the so-called radical opposition will not change the course of events and will not make possible any conciliation between opponents who can only annihilate each other.

The proletariat and the bourgeoisie are both the offspring of steam—the products of modern industry; they have been shaped by the latter, and the other elements of society dissolve more and more into these two antitheses. The power of *feudalism* has been broken, even though the medieval rubbish of privilege has not been removed everywhere. The proud nobleman has been forced to give up the ways of his forefathers and adopt the *bourgeois* way of life. The *petty bourgeoisie* is everywhere on the threshold of bankruptcy. The guild regulations, still cherished with so much solicitude in Germany and even restored by Prussia's romantic king, have proved ineffective against the superior power of big capital. Every business crisis throws thousands of small owners into the ranks of the proletariat; a single new machine can ruin whole branches of business. But the disappearance of the petty bourgeoisie means the disappearance of the class which has up to now formed the bridge between bourgeoisie and proletariat and which, while it did not reconcile the contradictions between them, at least veiled them.

However, it is an old principle of experience that no social class, even if the ground under its feet is already giving way, abandons its hope that it will be restored to its former position as long as its demise is not an accomplished fact. And there has never been a dearth of fools to make a system out of these ignorant hopes. They would sacrifice a whole process of development to their philanthropic fantasies, if only the world would accommodate itself to their whims for a single day.

Today there is no longer any branch of business which is secure against the inroads of big industry. Even where the machine cannot penetrate, the continuing division of labor is enough anyway to turn man into a machine himself and to replace the work of a man more and more by the cheaper work of women and children.

Modern industry concentrates capital in fewer and fewer hands because, in contrast to medieval hand labor, it can only be undertaken with large financial means. It is natural that for the great mass of those who have been robbed and

degraded from independent workers into machines, only the worst sides of this development have made themselves felt. The first and crudest opposition to this development vented itself therefore in the destruction of machines, and it was above all the factory workers who resorted to this in order to improve their lot. Their opposition became more intelligent only when they had proved the fruitlessness of this and other means of individual resistance. Every new attempt had only served to make them feel even more strongly their dependence on industry and the impossibility of ever emancipating themselves from it, since they were the first to suffer from its ups and downs. But every new attempt had also woven firmer ties among the various sections of the proletariat. They came to know their community of interest; in a word, they came to feel that they were a class, one which could gain victory only together with industry and not against it.

Gradually they were joined by those workers who, although still employed in petty-bourgeois production, did not cling to it with the ignorant and tenacious obstinacy of the privileged masters. In the beginning, their opposition too had been directed against further development; their ideal was the re-establishment of the artisan crafts, the dissolution of big industry, the dissolution of society into a big artisan association; and by preference they joined with those who, like W. Weitling, knew how to combine these reactionary hopes into a system, or they let themselves be misused and exploited by those who knew how to flatter their naive ideas. But only a few violent upheavals were needed to destroy this dream-world, and in the Old World these false leaders were soon abandoned by the mass of the workers.

Modern industry not only concentrates capital in fewer and fewer hands, it also concentrates the masses at certain points. In this way it brings about a far greater increase in population, while on the other hand it makes human power more and more superfluous through its constant expansion of machine work. The so-called "surplus" population—i.e. that part which present-day society can no longer employ and consequently for which it can no longer provide—is growing every day. Thereby the state of war in which present-day society finds itself becomes permanent, until the overthrow of the existing relationships comes about, and the exploitation of the masses for the benefit of a small minority is brought to an end.

"Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence. The serf, in the period of serfdom, raised himself to membership in the commune, just as the petty bourgeois, under the yoke of feudal absolutism, managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern laborer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling

class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an overriding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society."

The rule of the bourgeoisie has to be removed, but not in order to return to the Middle Ages or divide up capital or destroy the machines, but in order to bring the benefits of industrial achievements to all of society. The constantly progressing concentration of capital and the instruments of production in the hands of individuals can reach its final goal only through concentration in the hands of the state. Modern industry has arrived at the degree of development of which it was capable within the boundaries which private property sets everywhere. The ever-growing intensity of business crises shows that the productive forces are close to breaking down these boundaries, just as the rise of industry destroyed medieval forms of production. Just as only social or state property can take the place of private property, so only state production can take the place of private production. The "violation of property" which precedes this transformation is the same as that which we see daily committed by large capital against small capital, the difference being only that in the latter case it is done in the interest of individuals and in the former case in the interest of the whole society.

It is quite plain that there cannot be here any question of gradual, peaceful transitions. It is a struggle for existence in which the bourgeoisie stakes everything in order to save everything, and into which the proletariat is driven ever and again by want and unbearable pressure, until it finally succeeds in tearing down the barriers which keep it from enjoying the riches of this earth. The petty bourgeoisie plays the role of the philistine, timid but sometimes driven to despair, who at one moment is pushed by similar pressures to the side of the proletariat, and at another is turned into a traitor to those who had just been his fellow fighters by the smallest concession to his dirty self-seeking. If this class succeeded for a moment in conquering power for itself, then haplessly and helplessly it would have to join one or the other of the "extreme" parties and submit to its leadership—since all of its own tendencies stand in contradiction with the real course of development.

The rule of the proletariat has nothing in common with the rule of a Vandal-like barbarism; on the contrary, the proletariat is the only class which is in a position to step into the entire legacy of the bourgeoisie, since its own welfare depends on the continued development of this legacy. It is the last class that will exercise rule, for with the abolition of all class privileges all remaining classes will dissolve into it, just as even now it absorbs all creative elements of the other classes who have achieved a theoretical understanding of the historical movement. With the rule of the proletariat there comes to an end every political rule whatsoever, for the basis of such rule is the class struggle.

"In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

If a revolution is to be victoriously carried through, it will require a concentrated power, a dictatorship at its head. Cromwell's dictatorship was necessary in order to establish the supremacy of the English bourgeoisie; the terrorism of the Paris Commune and of the Committee of Public Safety alone succeeded in breaking the resistance of the feudal lords on French soil. Without the dictatorship of the proletariat which is concentrated in the big cities, the bourgeois reaction will not be done away with.

*(Translated by Horst Dubnke and Hal Draper)*