

# The revenge of the bourgeoisie

"THE wholesale executions continue indiscriminately. Prisoners are taken down in batches to certain places where firing parties are stationed and deep trenches dug beforehand. At one of these, the Caserne Napoleon, since last night, *five hundred* persons have been shot. There are invariably *women and boys* among them... Prisoners are soon disposed of by a volley and tumbled into a trench, *when if not killed by the shots, death from suffocation* must soon put an end to their pain... Two thousand dead bodies are collected around the Pantheon."

London Evening Standard,  
June 1871

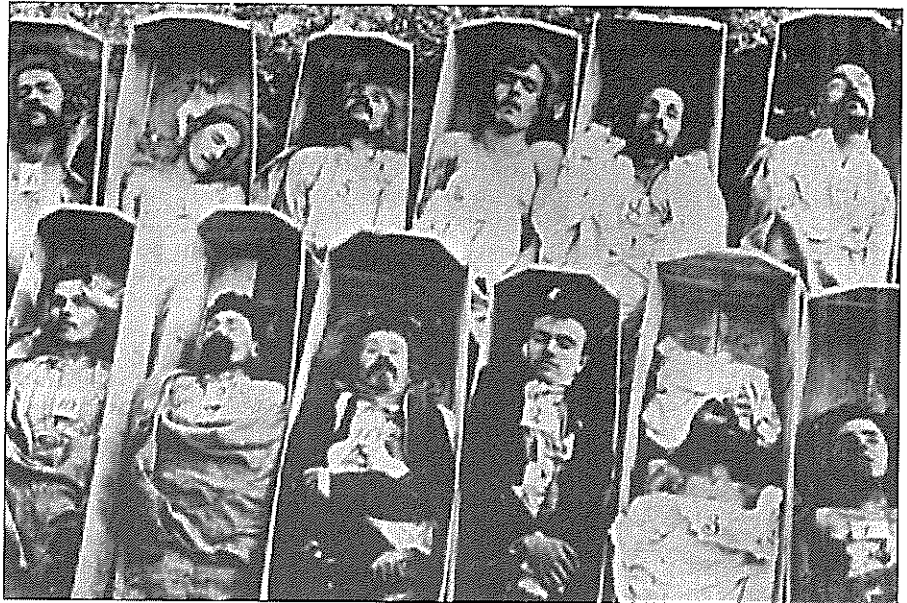
By William Morris

FELLOW-WORKMEN, no doubt you have often wondered why we Socialists hold in such high honour the men and women who fought and died in Paris nineteen years ago. By the ordinary newspapers, the "reptile press", you are told that they were red-handed ruffians, idle miscreants... that the crimes they committed were so monstrous, that shooting down in cold blood 35,000 men, women and children... was only a slight punishment compared to what they really deserved. Now, what were they, and what did they do?

They were the people of Paris. Neither the "highest" nor the "lowest" — neither aristocrats nor criminals, those inevitable fruits of inequality — they were the *People!* And what they did was to fight for their freedom... It was for this they were butchered then; it is for this they are condemned and vilified now.

The Empire which had paralysed France was dead. The "Republic" which had taken its place was a shameful pretence, a treachery...

... They tried to seize the cannon of the National Guard, the volunteers of Paris;



"They were the people of Paris... what they did was fight for their freedom."

cannon bought and paid for with the willing pence of the men who had used them during the siege [of Paris by the Prussian Army, Franco-Prussian War, 1870] in defending their homes. Paris rose, and declaring herself guardian of the Republic, took possession of her own. ... Her oppressors fled. ... Paris was left in the hands of her people.

The Commune... was proclaimed... Workmen, professional men, shopkeepers, pressed into its service. For the first time there was no thought of classes, the proletariat took its due place in the conduct of affairs. For two months there was no crime, no vice, no poverty and no oppression. "Each for all; all for each," was the rule of life.

The privileged classes in all countries were alarmed. If... the example of Paris were to be followed elsewhere! ... The Governments of Europe looked on, *while the German Government helped that of Versailles to draw an iron ring round Paris, within which the greatest tragedy of*

*modern times was to be consummated.* The soldiers of the Second Empire picked from those regiments most brutalised by their training, partakers in the atrocities of Africa and Mexico, were hurried back from their German prisons and hurled against the "rebels." ... Weak and wounded from the recent horrors of her siege, Paris held out bravely, but at length was beaten down; falling even then by treachery rather than by force. Then a dreadful massacre began — women, children, sick and wounded, unarmed men... felt the fury of outraged respectability, the revenge of shaken monopoly. By the order of the bourgeois government, at the instance of civilised capitalists to secure the endangered supremacy of property, deeds of savage cruelty were done, from which the most barbarian despot might well have recoiled. The attempt of the empire of the common people to do without their masters was bloodily punished and put down.

Written for the  
Socialist League, 1890

## Extracts from the press

● "IT is at the Bourse [Stock Exchange] that there was to-day the largest numbers of executions. The doomed men who attempted to resist were bound to the iron railing."

Paris Français, 28 May 1871

● "ELEVEN waggon loads of dead bodies have been buried in the common ditch of

Issy. No quarter was given to any man, woman or child. Batches of fifty and one hundred at a time are shot."

Paris Français, 28 May 1871

● "THE column of prisoners was drawn up, four or five deep, on the footway facing to the road. General Marquis de Galliffet and his staff dismounted and commenced an inspection.

Walking down slowly and eyeing the ranks, the General stopped here and there, tapping a man on the shoulder, or beckoning him out of the rear ranks. In most cases, without further parley, the indi-

vidual thus selected was marched out into the centre of the road, where a small supplementary column was thus soon formed... It was evident that there was considerable room for error.

A mounted officer pointed out to General Galliffet a man and a woman for some particular offence. The woman, rushing out of the ranks, threw herself on her knees, and, with outstretched arms, protested her innocence in passionate terms. The General waited for a pause, and then with most impassable face and unmoved demeanour, said: 'Madame, I have visited every theatre in Paris, your acting will have no effect on me'...

# The left and the Commune

By Frederick Engels

THE MEMBERS of the Commune were divided into a majority, the Blanquists, who had also been predominant in the Central Committee of the National Guard; and a minority, members of the International Working Men's Association, chiefly consisting of adherents of the Proudhon school of socialism. The great majority of the Blanquists were at that time socialists only by revolutionary, proletarian instinct; only a few had attained greater clarity on principles, through Vaillant, who was familiar with German scientific socialism. It is therefore comprehensible that in the economic sphere much was left undone which, according to our view today, the Commune ought to have done. The hardest thing to understand is certainly the holy awe with which they remained standing respectfully outside the gates of the Bank of France. This was also a serious political mistake. The bank in the hands of the Commune — this would have been worth more than ten thousand hostages. It would have meant the pressure of the whole of the French bourgeoisie on the Versailles government in favour of peace with the Commune. But what is still more wonderful is the correctness of much that nevertheless was done by the Commune, composed as it was of Blanquists and Proudhonists. Naturally, the Proudhonists were chiefly responsible for the economic decrees of the Commune, both for their praiseworthy and their unpraiseworthy aspects; the Blanquists were responsible for its political commissions and omissions. And in both cases the irony of history willed — as is usual when doctrinaires come to the helm — that both did the opposite of what the doctrines of their school prescribed.

Proudhon, the socialist of the small peasant and master craftsman, regarded association with positive hatred. He said of it that there was more bad than good in it; that it was by nature sterile, even harmful, because it was a fetter on the freedom of the worker; that it was a pure dogma, unproductive and burdensome, in conflict as much with the freedom of the worker as with economy of labour; that its disadvantages multiplied more swiftly than its advantages; that, as compared with it, competition, division of labour and private property were economic

forces. Only in the exceptional cases — as Proudhon called them — of large scale industry and large establishments, such as railways, was the association of workers in place.

By 1871, large-scale industry had already so much ceased to be an exceptional case even in Paris, the centre of artistic handicrafts, that by far the most important decree of the Commune instituted an organisation of large-scale industry and even of manufacture which was not only to be based on the association of the workers in each factor, but also to combine all these associations in one great union; in short, an organisation which, as Marx quite rightly says in *The Civil War*, must necessarily have led in the end to Communism, that is to say, the direct opposite of the Proudhon doctrine. And therefore, the Commune was the grave of the Proudhon school of socialism. Today this school has vanished from French working-class circles; here, among the Possibilists no less than among the "Marxists" Marx's theory now rules unchallenged. Only among the "radical" bourgeoisie are there still Proudhonists.

The Blanquists fared not better. Brought up in the school of conspiracy, and held together by the strict discipline which went with it, they started out from the viewpoint that a relatively small number of resolute, well-organised men would be able, at a given favourable moment, not only to seize the helm of state, but also by a display of great ruthless energy, to maintain power until they succeeded in sweeping the mass of the people into the revolution and ranging them round the small band of leaders. This involved above all, the strictest, dictatorial centralisation of all power in the hands of the new revolutionary government. And what did the Commune, with its majority of these same Blanquists actually do? In all its proclamations to the French in the provinces, it appealed to them to form a free federation of all French Communes with Paris, a national organisation which for the first time was really to be created by the nation itself. It was precisely the oppressing power of the former centralised government, army, political police, bureaucracy, which Napoleon had created in 1798 and which since then had been taken over by every new government as a welcome instrument and used against its opponents — it was precisely this power which was to fall everywhere, just as it had already fallen in Paris.

## Extracts from the press contd.

It was not a good thing on that day to be noticeably taller, dirtier, cleaner, older, or uglier than one's neighbours. One individual in particular struck me as probably owing his speedy release from the ills of this world to his having a broken nose...

Over a hundred being thus chosen, a firing party was told off, and the column resumed its march, leaving them behind. A few minutes afterwards a dropping fire in our rear commenced, and continued for over an hour. It was the execution of these summarily convicted wretches."

London Daily News,  
8 June 1871

● "A GREAT number were buried in the square round St. Jacques-la-Boncherie; some of them very superficially.

In the daytime the roar of the busy streets prevented any notice being taken; but in the stillness of the night the inhabitants of the houses in the neighbourhood were roused by distant moans, and in the morning a clenched hand was seen protruding through the soil. In consequence of this, exhumations were ordered to take place...

That many wounded have been buried alive I have not the slightest doubt. One case I can vouch for.

When Brunel was shot with his mistress on the 24th ult., in the courtyard of a house in the Place Vendôme, the bodies lay there until the afternoon of the 27th. When the burial party came to remove the corpses, they found the woman living still, and took her to an ambulance.

Though she had received four bullets, she is now out of danger."

London Evening Standard,  
8 June 1871

LA COMMUNE ET LES ENNEMIS DE LA COMMUNE



LA COMMUNE ET LES ENNEMIS DE LA COMMUNE

"The Commune is harassed by ignorance and reaction."