

*Foreword to the English Editions*

When 150 years ago, in March 1871, the young Paris proletariat attempted to “storm heaven”, fiercely put down by the bloody reaction of the French bourgeoisie - in agreement, on that occasion, with the Prussian invader to crush their common deadly enemy - it was once again clear, as is written in the *Manifesto*, that the history of all hitherto existing societies is “the history of class struggle”.

At the time, the bourgeoisie and the capitalist mode of production of which it was the product were living through their ascending phase in the full expansion of the productive forces, and their state and democracy were established, still on a national scale, as the triumphant political tools of their rule.

As early as 1848, the working class, which had begun to take its first steps just a few decades before, had had to pay a tragic price for its illusion that its political battle could be fought in agreement with the bourgeoisie, albeit with its more liberal and progressive currents. With the Commune, whatever remained of that ingenuous hope was swept away by cannon fire, while it was clear, on the contrary, that “workers of all countries, unite!” was not just a simple appeal to feelings of solidarity, but a fundamental scientific synthesis, a vital requirement for revolutionary strategy.

It lasted for only two months. And yet an unreplaceable legacy of experiences was concentrated in the short span of that ardent season, in the heart of Paris. It definitively resolved, when put to the test, a series of fundamental theoretical issues of socialism. It was the first attempt to create a new world: a revolution, according to what Marx

stated in his first draft of the text, “not *against* this or that – *legitimist, constitutional, republican, or imperialist – form of state*”, but against the state itself. It was against this “supernatural abortion of society”, the tool of the “war engine of capital against labour”, for the “resumption by the people for the people of its own social life”.

If it is true, as it is true, that the existence of classes is historically linked only to specific epochs of the development of the productive forces, that revolution had to “smash” the state machine of class oppression because, explains Lenin in *The State and Revolution*, “the State is unnecessary and cannot exist in a society in which there are no class antagonisms”.

The trend of history therefore marches towards the extinction of classes and the state, and the Commune, in that direction, was according to Marx “a thoroughly expansive political form, while all the previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive”. It wanted “to abolish that class property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few”. It wanted to transform “the means of production ... now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour”; to the point of making them become the fulcrum of the conscious activity of a society of producers no longer divided into classes. It wanted communism, a world of free, equal people, incompatible with the existence of every form of state, because, as Lenin again recalled in *The State and Revolution*, “so long as the state exists there is no freedom” and “when there is freedom, there will be no state”.

It was to affirm this historic necessity that the Communards took the field, in order to give birth to a completely new political form: “the dictatorship of the proletariat”, a workers’ state, a transitory power in the passage to the abolition of all classes and all states. For this reason that heroic attempt was angrily suppressed by a bourgeoisie which considered class rule and, therefore capital rule, perennial.

Among victories and defeats, the essential meaning of that battle has crossed the whole century of the imperialism

of wars and revolutions, to repropose itself today even stronger and more topical in the face of a world that has profoundly changed in the meantime. Having reached the peak of its development, the bourgeois epoch has for some time been living through ever more disruptive convulsions linked to its inevitable end. Up to the point of seeing the very foundations of its ideological creed vacillate under the pressure of irreversible trends that reveal its theoretical, political and social fragility. It is a creed that finds itself disproved precisely in its strongholds, in the bewilderment of the political, academic and journalistic establishments that have always propagandised it and that are now asking themselves questions disconsolately in the face of the crisis of that liberal order they have always boasted of.

Without any doubt, it is the liberal state, its powers, its imperialist democracy and its representative institutions that are being questioned. They have been overwhelmed by a widespread collapse of confidence and pessimism regarding their real possibility of redemption... a state of mind that, in the old powers, reflects the reaction to a huge power shift, which is exacerbating their decline, while China's imperialist rise as a new continental giant proceeds irrepressibly.

At the same time, that young class that raised its head 150 years ago to fight a hopeless battle at the time, has enormously swollen its ranks, to the point of becoming the majority of the human race. It is a world class, which guarantees an unparalleled material force for the internationalist principle only ideally brandished at the time.

The lesson that comes from those men, from their heroism as from their defeat, has long been a precious chapter in the revolutionary movement's theoretical legacy and struggle. This lesson is more alive than ever in the unprecedented task of entrenching a Leninist Party in the European imperialist metropolis. It is a vital need for looking to the world and preparing ourselves in time for the big new Communes that, in the future, our world class will inevitably be called upon to face.

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