

Marx: "The Civil War in France"

"The Paris Commune" chapter was read in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, L. Simon, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Other parts from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/>

Key:

M = Marx

[] = my comment

() = parenthetical argument made by the author

Introduction (from marxists.org)

this was all an address to the Workingman's International, widely circulated

Introduction (Engels)

emphasizes the proletarian character of the Commune 2

1848 bourgeoisie establishes parliamentary government to advance their interests 3

workers aid in the fight for the new parliamentary government, but after it is won the bourgeoisie drives the workers to insurrection in order to disarm them 3

lesson: when the workers challenge the bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie will be brutal in response [as they were after the Commune] 3

much corruption in the regime after 1848, actually Louis Bonaparte's Second Empire after 1851, culminating in Prussian invasion in 1870 4

1871: workers of Paris had been armed through a national guard during Prussian war; they retain those weapons during Prussian presence 5

Thiers, head of lame-duck French bourgeois government at Versailles, seeks to disarm workers of Paris, who resist and hold Paris 5
declare Commune March 28, 1871

abolished army in favor of an all-citizen national guard 5

reopened closed factories under worker control 6

made a series of fiat-like proclamations 6-7

very much a working-class-led movement, for Engels 7

held hostages 7

when the Thiers government regained control of Paris, they massacred the workers en masse 8

Marx's First Address

working class character of the issue 1

democracy is an idea the workers' international is actively claiming 3

[of course the liberal regime claims it too, and accuses the Commune of being outlaws]

because it enacts the people's (i.e. proletariat's) power to decide 4

a new society is emerging with the working class as its soul 5

Marx's Second Address

lots of historical background on the decades leading up to the Commune--to wit: bourgeois conspiracy to use the State to advance bourgeois interests, which = oppressing the working class 1-5

workingmen's parties and internationals were central players in the drama (though they often spoke *in-stead* of the workers themselves) 6

the bourgeois state republic has really just taken the place of the *ancien*

regime and it did not at all liberate workers (quite the opposite of course) 7
the goal of M's politics is the emancipation of labor 7
this is done by stirring the working classes to action, they cannot remain
passive, they must actively struggle for their own emancipation 8

Marx's Third Address

a republic proclaimed by Paris workers in September 1870 1
Prussians at the gate, working class needed to be armed, trained 1
but soon an armistice meant that the Thiers government, "the Party of
Order," sought to disarm the Parisian working class 5
conspiracy between the *ancien regime* (i.e. assembly of ruralists) and the
bourgeoisie (national assembly) to subjugate the working class 8-9
enrichment of the Thiers government politicians as payment for their
oppressing the working class 10
Bismarck stays out of the scheme to disarm Parisian workers 10

Marx's Third Address, continued

armed workers were usurping state property, Thiers said 1
workers hold Paris, keep arms, declare Commune on March 18, 1871 3
were not *that* violent, comparatively [hmmm...] 3
should have marched on Versailles when they had the chance 6

Marx's Third Address, continued

[This is M's analysis of the Paris Commune, read in the Simon collection]

Ed.:

The Prussians were basically in charge of much of NE France, not yet having
taken Paris, when the workers of Paris declared the Commune (March 1871) 301
M was of mixed opinion on the Commune actually 301
knew that seizing the State was not the solution 301
M: key is to transform the MoP to be instruments of free and associated
labor 301
the Commune != the revolutionary society [but there is a sense that it is
an opening salvo in the struggle toward that society] 301
that is a long-term struggle through which people work out their own
emancipation 301
this piece is Marx's longest exploration of what the dictatorship of the
proletariat might be like 302

Marx:

M quotes a declaration from the Commune that emphasizes that the workers are
"taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs" 302
"by seizing upon *governmental* power" 302
M: "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery,
and wield it for its own purposes" 302
specifically, the post-French-Revolution government, built by the
bourgeoisie, under control of parliament 302
the bourgeoisie developed this State power over time to be its instrument,
as the capitalist economic base developed 303
State power is [fundamentally] a repressive power 303
the idea that the bourgeoisie's victory 1948 ('social republic') over the
ancien regime would be good for workers did not last 303
the bourgeoisie consolidated their power and created the 'party of

order' to mercilessly defend their class interest 303
the peasants/rural producers were a nominally important interest under the Empire (post 1851?) 304
but the Empire's corruption was evident, and the Prussians gutted it 304
the Commune was the *real* 'social republic' for M, designed to ultimately supercede class rule 304
got rid of the Army, tried to institutionalize the National Guard: everyone armed, all serving as soldiers 304
municipal councillors chosen by **universal suffrage**, entirely **recallable** 305
judges too 305
councillors were paid workingmen's wages 305
education institutions opened to all, not run by the State 305
science returned to the people [D&G, royal science deposed] 305
the idea was that once the Commune was established, then in the provinces "the centralized Government would...have to give way to the self-government of the producers" [i.e. peasants] 305
through [imagined, not existent?] rural communes 305
all would send deputies to the national delegation in Paris 306
[this was all just the idea (and a paternalistic one): it did not have time to actually happen]
there was some idea that there would still have to be a (very few) central government functions [not specified by M], but these functions would be decided on/carried out by deputies that were tightly recallable by the people 306
universal suffrage is stressed as a key feature of the newly imagined governing institutions 306
[the importance of such suffrage is stressed in M's "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" as well]
the idea is that we must embed all government functions closely in the activity of people themselves 306
the antagonism that the Commune had for State power is not the same thing as the struggle against over-centralization [?] 306
the Commune's Constitution restores governing functions to the social body, instead of leaving them as the province of the State 'parasite' 306
the idea was that the Paris workers would be the intellectual leaders, and the rural peasants would follow [very G: *dirigente*] 307
workers as 'trustees' of the interests of the peasants 307
M: Commune was right to tell the peasants that its victory was their only hope 309 [ugh]
b/c the bourgeoisie was oppressing them 309
and, true enough, the gentry did worry that the Commune's success could cause an uprising among peasants 310
[though of course that uprising against the gentry, if ended in the peasants being brought under a worker-State regime, would have not emancipated them]
the Commune's goal was to create "really democratic institutions" 307
it was an *expansive* political form: not *repressive*, not an instrument of class power, but "the political form...under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor" 307
uprooting class, and class rule: everyone a worker, classes dissolve

307

expropriate the expropriators, transform the MoP into the
“instruments of free and associated labor” 308

cooperative production must be done correctly 308

turn impossible Communism into possible **Communism** by uniting
cooperative societies who will regulate national production
under a common plan, thus taking production under their own
control 308

the Commune was not utopia [i.e. not the final stage of history], working people
must struggle for their own emancipation 308

the struggle is not about realizing *a priori* ideals, it is about setting
free elements of the new society with which the old society is already
pregnant 308

the Commune was about working men taking over from “Governmental
privilege” the management of the revolution [and society] 308

the working class is the only class capable of such initiative 309

not the middle class 309

Commune was international 311

Commune’s success was its existence, its experimentation with democratic
government by the people 311

it did issue fiat prohibitions 311

it arrested some who neglected their duties 312

it was not conceived of (and narrated) as infallible, as sovereign: it was
presented as an ongoing process, as transparent, tied directly to the
people themselves 312

during the Commune the streets were safe without police 313

Marx’s Third Address, continued

The Fall of Paris

The Thiers government tried to get the Prussians to retake Paris from the
workers, but Bismarck refused 1

Commune asked the Thiers government for recognition, but they passed repressive
laws instead: declared Commune not rebels but assassins, criminals 2-4

and a small # at that, i.e. the occupation of Paris was not general, but
carried out by a vanguard 4

it was merely the “usurpation of a handful of criminals” 8

Thiers feigned at offering amnesty to the most, who he said were not
involved 5

used the new repressive laws to justify the massacres when Paris fell 6

i.e. the massacres were carried out under full State authorization 7

M: when you rise up against the bourgeoisie, you see just how ruthless they are
6

M says that by contrast the Commune was quite moderated in its violence 8

even though it was fighting a justifiable war 9

and even though they did execute some generals 10

Commune made peace with Prussia 11

but Prussia conspired with Thiers to put down Commune. Lesson: the
bourgeoisie knows no national borders 12

but the producing many will defeat the appropriating few 12

class struggle is *the* front of battle for the future 13

the Commune was only the opening salvo 13

Postscript (Engels)

Comune divided into Blanquists (strict discipline, vanguardist, centralization, hoping to draw the rest into action) and the Proudhonists [not described by Engels, presumably more liberatarian, Federalists, decentralizers] 3

Commune tried to combine the various small associations of workers into one big union [which Engels thinks, and, E thinks M thinks] would have led 'inevitably' to communism [what a moron (E)] 4

E thinks the Proudhon school [which would have opposed such a union and favored federations of small associations instead?] thus was shown to be wrong 4

and yet the majority Blanquists *actually* tried to form a free federation with other communes 4 [which seems to show the *relevance* of Proudhon's idea]

Commune showed that merely seizing the old state machine was not the way 4-5
the working class must do away with that machinery 5

recall is emphasized as a key tool 5

American model of government, for instance and by contrast, is alienated and bourgeois 5

bourgeoisie has transformed the State from servants to society to masters of society, which he says was an inevitable feature of all previous States 5

the Commune avoids this transformation with two "infallible" [idiot] techniques: universal suffrage to elect offices; right of recall by citizens 6

[the fact that he thinks these are infallible is very sad]

M describes in detail [he doesn't] the "really democratic state" that the Commune created 6

in Germany there is a superstitious reverence for the State [cf M's "Critique of Hegel"] 6

people think the move from hereditary monarch to democratic republic is a huge move, but it is not 6

the State is nothing but a machine for one class to oppress another 6

[if we read 'class' as 'any group' here, we have a good idea. But of course E can only read it as economic class, and so when we abolish those, the State will be nothing to worry about]

so the proletariat has to lop off the State's worst elements, so that a new society, with free social conditions, can grow in its absence, and we can leave the State on the trash heap 6

General Thoughts

Engels seems to have come in Marx's wake here and revalorized the idea of the state in general, or at least softened Marx's early ontological critique of the state-form...E prefers here to talk about the problems with the bourgeois State in particular, rather than the State in general, and so he leaves thought more open to conceiving of a state that is not bourgeois that follows on from the bourgeois State, that is a feature of a society beyond capitalism. Hence we get here the idea of a "really democratic state," as though the state is a neutral tool that is perfectly able to be democratic, it's just that it is not allowed to be because the bourgeoisie use the state to preserve their dominance in the economic sector. Thus the claim that the bourgeois state is democratic is absurd, but E leaves us with the implicit argument that the state *could be* democratic, if only we could get the bourgeoisie out of the way. The state should be able to be democratic, no problem, just install a few 'infallible'

rules...