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The Relations of Marx with Blanqui

(1928)

Marx and Engels were for a long time accused of Blanquism. Bernstein went still further. As early as 1898 he declared: “In Germany, Marx and Engels, on the basis of radical Hegelian dialectic, advanced a theory closely related to Blanquism.” Taking no account of their constantly stressed rejection of Putschism, Bernstein also declared “they (the writings inspired by Marx and Engels at the time of the Communist League. – D.R.) are throughout infused with a Blanqui-Baboeufist spirit.” [1]

The best proof of this contention, in Bernstein’s opinion, is supplied by the attitude which Marx took up towards the events of the February Revolution. While Bernstein regarded the party of Louis Blanc and of the Luxemburg Commission as the “only proletarian party,” Marx, on the contrary, regarded the Blanquists as such.

Bernstein appeals to the circular of the Communist League (Address to the Central Committee of the League in June, 1850), but he could point with even greater justification to the following sentences from Marx’s The Class Struggles in France - a passage which he quite overlooks, as also does Kautsky, who interprets the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” as a mere casual phrase, which Marx once accidentally uttered by a slip of the tongue, and not in the least as the very essence of Marxian revolutionary strategy.

“While the Utopians and doctrinaire Socialism (i.e., the Socialism of Louis Blanc and his kind – D.R.) subordinate the whole movement to one factor within it, put
the ruminations of a single pedant before common social production, and above all charm away the revolutionary class struggle and its requirements with petty tricks or big sentimentalities ... the proletariat is turning more and more to revolutionary Socialism, to that Communism to which the bourgeoisie itself has given the name of Blanquism”.

What is the content of this Socialism?

“This Socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary stage towards the abolition of all class differences, the abolition of the whole system of production on which they rest, the abolition of all the social conditions which correspond to these production relations, the destruction of all the ideas which arise out of these social conditions.” [2]

Bernstein resorted to an even more despicable trick in that he made as little use of other papers as of the MS. of Engels on Naturdialektik which was in his possession, an action which was calculated to destroy the very last doubt as to the “unholy” influence exercised upon Marx and Engels by the Hegelian dialectic. It came about in this way. Among the papers bequeathed to him by his old teacher there lay in peaceful concealment for three decades no less a treasure than an agreement with the Blanquists, signed by Marx and Engels with their own hands, according to which German, French and English Communists were to organise a “World League of Revolutionary Communists.”

In the very first paragraph of this document it says:–

“The aim of the association is the downfall of all the privileged classes, and the subjection of these classes to the dictatorship of the proletariat by maintaining the revolution in permanence until the realisation of Communism, which is the final form of organisation of human society.” [3]

The agreement was signed by Adam and Vidil on behalf of the Blanquists, by Willich, Marx and Engels for the German, and Harney for the English, Communists.

Let us compare it with the text of Section One of the Articles of the Communist League.

“The aim of the League is the downfall of the bourgeoisie, the rule of the proletariat, the abolition of the old bourgeois society based on class antagonisms, and the establishment of a new society without either classes or private property.” [4]

The difference is obvious. The “rule of the proletariat” is replaced by the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” the revolution is transferred into a “revolution in permanence” (“la révolution en permanence”).
The first change may be regarded as of an editorial nature, although it resulted from the experiences of the Revolution of 1848, and especially of the events in Paris between February 24 and the June days; the latter formed an addition, which, as I have already set out in another place, was first resolved upon after 1848-49, although the expression appeared in Marx’s early works on the lessons of the great French Revolution, particularly on the lessons provided by the Jacobins who supported “révolution en permanence.”

The agreement reproduced here is composed in the spirit of the famous circular of the Communist League. It is well known that the League did not live long, for as early as September, 1850, it had split into a Marx fraction and a Willich-Schapper fraction. Of the signatories to the agreement, Vidil appeared on the side of Willich and Adam, of Marx. The split in the Communist League was reflected in a split also in the ranks of the French “democratic Socialists,” among whom a considerable number were known to Louis Blanc, who was then striving after an understanding with the bourgeois Radicals. The Blanquists who were allied with him (Louis Blanc) saw themselves compelled, at the time of the Banquet of Equals (Banquet des Egaux), held in 1851, on the third anniversary of February 24, to keep secret the manifesto [5] received by them from the imprisoned Blanqui, in which he devastatingly criticised the attitude of Ledru-Rollin, and still more of Louis Blanc. We shall speak of these interesting episodes in the history of the emigration in greater detail elsewhere. Here we confine ourselves to drawing the attention of the reader to the numerous points of contact between Marx’s criticism of the provisional government of Lamartine, Ledru-Rollin and Louis Blanc, and that of Blanqui.

Appendix I

The World League of Revolutionary Communists
(Société Universelle des Communistes Révolutionnaires)

(1) The aim of the Association is the downfall of all the privileged classes and the subjection of these classes to the dictatorship of the proletariat by the maintenance of
the revolution in permanence until the realisation of Communism, which must be the final form of the organisation of the human community.

(2) To further the realisation of this aim, the Association will link together all the sections of the revolutionary Communist Party, disregarding national boundaries in accordance with the principles of republican brotherhood.

(3) The original committee of the League is constituted as a central committee, and it will set up committees wherever they may be necessary for the carrying out of the work which will be in touch with the central committee.

(4) No limit is set to the number of members of the League, but no member will be admitted who is not unanimously elected. In no case will elections be conducted by secret ballot.

(5) All the members of the League swear to maintain paragraph one of the present rules in the fullest sense. Any modification which might result in a weakening of the aims expressed in this paragraph releases the members of the League from their engagement.

(6) All the decisions of the society are to be adopted if they obtain a two-thirds majority of the voters.


Notes


2. Karl Marx, Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich, Berlin, P. Singer, 1911, pp.93, 94.

3. Cf. Appendix I.
