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# MARXIST STUDY COURSES

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Course 2.

# **History of the Working Class**

LESSON I.  
THE GREAT  
FRENCH REVOLUTION



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## GENERAL REVIEW OF COURSE 2.

THE period of revolutionary advance upon which the international working-class movement has entered greatly increases the interest of the workers in the history of that movement and of revolutions. The present course is designed to give a description of the principal stages in the history of the modern working-class movement; the movement of to-day, in the epoch of imperialism, will be illuminated by the history of England, France, Germany, and Russia, with particular reference to the economic and political history of those countries. The reader will also be given the most important facts in the more recent history of those countries, as well as of the United States of America and to some extent the countries of the East.

Of eighteen chapters, divided into eleven separate booklets, four deal with the pre-imperialist epoch. These (covering the Great French Revolution, Chartism, the Revolution of 1848, and the First International and the Paris Commune) are intended to give a picture of the bourgeois revolutions and the early stages of the labour movement. The following four chapters contain a review of economic development and the labour movement in England, Germany, France, and Russia up to the outbreak of the world war. A special chapter is devoted to the war itself and the Second International before and during the war.

The second half of the course (nine chapters) deals with the revolutionary movements and the working-class movement of the post-war years. Six chapters analyse the class struggles of Western Europe after the war and describe the activities of the Communist International, the history of its struggles and tactics. One chapter is devoted especially to the ideology and tactics of the Second International and the Amsterdam Trade Union International. The last two chapters deal with the colonial question; the first with the revolutionary movement in China, the second with the revolutionary movement in India.

This course is designed to show the reader how to

apply the dialectical, Marxist-Leninist method to historical facts, and should help to clarify in his mind the problems of the working-class movement of to-day.

There is a fairly extensive and varied literature on the history of the international working-class movement. But because of its extent, its character, and the variety of languages in which it is written, this literature is accessible only with great difficulty—if at all—to the proletarian reader; moreover, the literature dealing with a number of subjects included in one course is either inadequate, from the point of view of principle, too brief, or much too diffuse, so that several difficulties arise in its utilisation. The greater, therefore, should be the importance of this first attempt at a systematic textbook in this form.

Certain books to which reference may be made are, however, appended:

ADAMS, H. P. *The French Revolution* (elementary clear outline).

AULARD, A. *The French Revolution: a Political History* (4 volumes).

Deals with the origin and development of democracy and the Republic, 1789-1804. Written by the Paris Professor who died in 1928; deals mainly with the administrative and legislative side of the history of the revolution. Its standpoint is bourgeois—democratic and highly rationalistic: for this reason the author neglects the class struggle and regards the revolution above all as a movement for national unity and self-sufficiency.

KROPOTKIN, P. *The Great French Revolution*. Particularly valuable for its account of the peasants' part in the revolution, and its treatment of the land question generally.

MADELIN, L. *The Revolution*. A French narrative history.

MATHIEZ, A. *The French Revolution*. A comprehensive and well-written narrative and survey.

POSTGATE, R. W. *Revolution, 1789-1906*. Contains reprints of valuable documents bearing on the history of the Revolution. Biographies of prominent persons in the Revolution furnish a good means of studying the period. Among the most notable are L. Barthou on Mirebeau, H. Belloc on Danton, Robespierre and Marie-Antoinette, E. B. Bax on Marat, J. H. C. Clapham on the Abbé Siéyès, and L. Madelin on Danton. E. B. Bax's *The Last Episode of the French Revolution*, dealing with Babeuf and the conspiracy of the Equals, is of value for an understanding of the Socialist elements in the French Revolution.

MARX writes of the French Revolution mainly in the *Holy Family*. He refers, *inter alia*, to the connection between the proletarian movement in the revolution and the modern labour movement. In the year 1918 there appeared in the *Neuer Zeit*, XXXVI, Vol. I, No. 5, pp. 103-7, a collection by Herman Wendel of Marx's most important writings on the French Revolution.

## LESSON I

### THE GREAT FRENCH REVOLUTION (1789-99)

#### PLAN OF WORK AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

##### I. CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT AND THE OLD ORDER

*The development of trade—Nobility and clergy—The French bourgeoisie, and the groups within it—Artisans and workers—The bourgeoisie as the vanguard of the people—Bourgeois ideology of the eighteenth century—Beginnings of communist ideology.*

##### II. THE BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION

1. The first period: *The Revolution of the big bourgeoisie (1789-92)—Economic distress at the beginning of the revolution—The States General—July 14th and August 4th, 1789—The Social-economic policy of the National Assembly—The Constitution of 1791 and the Declaration of the Rights of Man—The butchery on the Field of Mars, July 17th, 1791—The Civil War in France.*

2. The second period: *The Jacobin Revolution and Dictatorship (1792-4)—The storming of the Tuileries on August 10th, 1792—The Convention—Girondists and Jacobins—September, 1792, to June 2nd, 1793—The Jacobin victory and the constitution of 1793—The revolutionary dictatorship—Fractional struggles among the Jacobins—The fall of Robespierre (9 Thermidor, 1794).*

3. The third period: *The Bourgeois Republic (1795-99)—The Convention of Thermidor—Babeuf and the conspiracy of Equals.*

##### III. THE LESSONS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

## A NOTE ON METHOD

Anyone beginning to study the history of the Great French Revolution should direct his attention principally to the following points :

1. The principal stages in the class struggle during the years of revolution.
2. The nature of the social and economic policy conducted by the bourgeoisie in power.
3. The way in which the petty bourgeoisie won power, the form of organisation which it assumed and the social and economic legislation of its revolutionary government.
4. The causes of the downfall of the petty bourgeoisie.
5. The nature of the bourgeois reaction which succeeded the revolutionary dictatorship.

There is at present a special branch of historical science devoted to the French Revolution. The history of the Revolution was written first by liberals (Mignet, Thiers, and others at the beginning of the nineteenth century), by radicals and democrats (Louis Blanc and Michelet in the middle of the nineteenth century), then by conservatives and reactionaries (Taine), by liberals again (F. Aulard towards the end of the nineteenth century), and finally by socialists (Jaurès, Kropotkin, Cunow, etc.). The leader of the most important western school now studying the Great French Revolution is the French professor Mathiez. This school is of interest because it studies the social and economic history of the Revolution, paying attention not only to the records of parliaments and of the struggles among the political groups therein, but also to the history of the working people and their struggle for economic equality ; it is not, however, a strictly Marxist school.

In Russia, more than in any other country (except, of course, France), particular interest has been displayed in the history of the Revolution. Special study circles were set

up to investigate the economic history of the Revolution, the history of the peasantry (cf. the works of Karejev, Lutchisky, Kovalevsky), the history of the working class (Tarlé). Almost all these historians were liberals and bourgeois democrats. In their work they separated the economic history of the Revolution from the history of its class struggle ; as against Marxism, their work represents a type of "vulgar" economism. It was only after October 1917 that there arose in Russia a strictly Marxist School for studying the social revolution of the bourgeoisie at the end of the eighteenth century, the rôle of the petty bourgeoisie, and the working masses in that revolution, in order to understand the development of the international social revolutions of the proletariat.

The modern bourgeois parliamentary state was finally established and consolidated in the second half of the nineteenth century, but on the European continent its foundations were laid in the Great French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, the social revolution of the French bourgeoisie. There is every justification for saying that up to October 1917 "there had never been, in the history of humanity, a more potent and far-reaching event than the French Revolution" (Tocqueville). Like the Russian Revolution it was neither in its causes nor in its results a merely "national" event.

Bourgeois society had been born while feudalism still prevailed. The bourgeois revolution marked the final breakdown of the mediæval order of society, condemned to death by the industrial transformation, not only in France, but all over Europe. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, France was not by any means the most highly-developed capitalist country in Europe ; in this respect it was far behind England. In England the rapidity of capitalist development had forced the government to introduce a number of changes in the interests of the bourgeoisie, which had carried out its

real revolution in the seventeenth century (1648). It was thanks to this circumstance that England was spared a revolution 150 years later. In Germany capitalism developed very slowly at first, and consequently the bourgeoisie put forward their demands only in a timid fashion. But in France the contradictions between the development of the forces of production and the growth of capitalist society on the one hand, and the political relations of the absolutist feudal state on the other, were so great that they could be solved only by revolution. Like the proletarian revolution in the twentieth century, the bourgeois revolution at the end of the eighteenth century began, not in the most highly-developed capitalist country, but in the country which, to use Lenin's words, represented the "weakest link in the chain" of the old order of society. As we shall see, historically France offered the most favourable conditions for the revolutionary overthrow of the old order.

#### I. CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT AND THE OLD ORDER

In the second half of the eighteenth century France was not entirely a country of natural economy; it was no longer a purely feudal State. Capitalism had already begun to develop, but the persistence of the pre-capitalist political relations put obstacles in the way of France's economic development, and the ruling powers of the *ancien régime* prevented agriculture, trade, and industry from fully utilising the possibilities of development. This gives some indication of the causes which made the revolution inevitable. In France, as in England, the conditions making for an industrial transformation, for the triumph of the machine, were in existence. The arrival and predominance of machinery in industry is everywhere accompanied by the same phenomena, irrespective of the peculiarities which result from the different social and economic history of each country.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE

On the eve of the Revolution France was a peasant country in which feudal conditions prevailed, that is to say, it was ruled by the nobility and the clergy. At least 92 per cent. of the population lived on the land, and there were very few really large towns. Paris had a population of 600,000, Lyons had 135,000 inhabitants. But in the rural districts, as in the towns, certain conditions making for the development of capitalist industry and trade were present. In the last few decades before the Revolution, economic development in France had proceeded fairly rapidly. Between 1716 and 1788 foreign trade increased at a remarkable rate; for the period 1717 to 1720 it amounted to 214.8 million livres, while for the period 1784 to 1788 it mounted to 1,011.6 million livres; at the same time the export of industrial products also increased from 45 million livres in 1716 to 133 million in 1789. It is clear, however, that by far the greater part of the exports consisted of agricultural products.

At that time the trading centres of France played a very important part both in the economic life of the country and in international trade. The flags of all nations could be seen at Marseilles, which served as a warehouse, not only for the southern provinces of France, but also for the centre coastal region of the Mediterranean Sea. Marseilles was also a centre for the most varied sorts of manufacture; it produced soap and dyes, fabrics and silk, cured hides, etc. Marseilles and a number of other towns in France were therefore centres of industrial activity as well as important trading stations.

Within the country itself, however, trade encountered great obstacles. At that time there was no free market, the whole country being divided up into provinces with different laws and different political institutions. The export of goods from one province to another was subject to high tariff duties and consequently trade be-

tween provinces was extremely difficult. For example, wine transported from Orleans to Normandy was subject to so many dues that by the time it reached its destination the price had risen to twenty times its original level. Trade in grain was particularly difficult. These obstacles, of course, hindered the development of capitalism, arousing great discontent among the rising capitalist class.

In agriculture, too, there were the same contradictions between feudal relations and the requirements of growing capitalist economy. Legally, the ownership of land in France—to an even greater extent than in Germany—was subject to the old feudal law: “No land without a lord.” Allodial property—that is, unrestricted private ownership in land, whose proprietor therefore was to a certain extent a sovereign lord (baron)—was a rare phenomenon.

The rest of the land was held under the feudal system, according to which the lord paramount, in return for certain obligations and dues, granted the use and enjoyment of the land to others who as a rule, in their turn, divided the land into still smaller holdings and rented them to peasant copyholders. Thus, in the course of the centuries, an entire hierarchy grew up, and every piece of land was burdened not with one master, but with a whole series. The peasant could not dispose freely of his land; he was not its actual proprietor; and he suffered further from several disadvantages in the matter of selling what produce was left to him after the payment of the various dues. For example, the lord of the manor was entitled to bring his products, such as wine or corn, to the market several weeks earlier than the peasant.

The ownership of land in France was distributed among four main groups. According to the report of Arthur Young, an Englishman who travelled through France in 1787-9, there were (a) possessors of small holdings; (b) tenants paying a rent in money; (c)

feudal proprietors; (d) cultivators of holdings originally hired for a money rent, but leased again to richer or poorer peasants, who, in return, paid half, or one-third, of the produce as rent—the so-called semi-tenants. This last group was particularly numerous, and the extent of this system bears witness to the strength of feudalism in France at the end of the eighteenth century. In his sketches<sup>1</sup> Arthur Young writes:

“In Flanders, Alsace, on the Garonne, and Béarn, I found many in comfortable circumstances . . . and in Bas Bretagne, many are reputed rich, but in general they are poor and miserable, much arising from the minute division of their little farms among all the children. In Lorraine, and the part of Champagne that joins it, they are quite wretched. I have, more than once, seen division carried to such an excess, that a single fruit tree, standing in about 10 perch of ground, has constituted a farm, and the local situation of a family decided by the possession.”

The peasants suffered not only from insufficient land; they were oppressed by a number of taxes, the most grievous being the tax on salt. Taxes claimed as much as two-thirds of the entire produce of the soil, while the privileged classes—the nobility and the clergy—were exempted from paying the majority of taxes. In addition to such feudal dues as service on the roads, in the stables, and in the army, the peasant was oppressed by most humiliating laws. For example, he could not kill the wild beasts that trampled his fields—which he was forbidden to enclose by fences—and destroyed the crops.

#### NOBILITY AND CLERGY

The predominant estate of the country, the nobility, did not exceed 147,000 in numbers, out of a total

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Young. *Travels in France*. Cambridge University Press. 1929. Page 295.

population of about 26 millions, but they consumed at least one-fifth of the total national income and, together with the king, owned three-fourths of the land. The nobility were divided into several groups—court, official, and feudal. They occupied all the leading positions in the State. The army officers' corps drew an annual salary of 46 million livres—two million more than the 145,000 soldiers who formed the body of the army.

The second estate, which controlled the great mass of the peasantry, included about 130,000 ecclesiastics. The composition of this body was, of course, of a varied character; economically powerful—about one-quarter of the French soil belonged to the church—the higher sections of the priesthood, the cardinals and abbots, had an annual income running into hundreds of thousands of livres. Between them and the poor village priests, with an income of about 800 livres a year, there was a wide gulf. But the priesthood as a whole, as an estate, ruled the masses of poor peasants.

Among the fifteen million peasants thus subject to the nobility and the church there were great differences. Some were still serfs—that is, actually living in a condition of slavery. Their land was subject to the law of *mortmain* (i.e. it was the inalienable property of the church). There were about 1,500,000 such peasants, practically all of whom lived on church land.

As a result of the development of capitalism in the countryside, differentiation grew up among the peasants, dividing them into rich peasants, middle peasants—the largest section—and small-holders, as well as agricultural labourers, who did not yet form a very large class. As a result of heavy taxation and bad harvests, a large number of peasants gave up their land, and about a third of the soil lay waste. These ruined peasants fled to the towns, or roamed the countryside as beggars and vagabonds.

## INDUSTRY

By the eve of the Revolution, French industry had reached the stage of manufacture, the merchant acting as organiser of industry. Peasant industry was very widespread. In the last hundred years before the Revolution, the total value of textile industry production increased at least fivefold, and this increase was almost entirely due to the development of village industry and manufacture. In the towns handicraft still flourished. In addition, there were, in several districts, a number of larger undertakings, such, for example, as the mines. At that time machinery did not play an important part in French national economy—it was just appearing on the scene. But by 1780 the conditions necessary for the introduction of machinery already existed. Technical inventions were gradually spreading, but this development of capitalist production should not blind us to the profound contradictions within French industry on the eve of the Revolution. Side by side with growing capitalism in the towns, organised handicrafts continued to exist. Industrial activity, like trade and agriculture—the whole capitalist development of the country—suffered greatly from State interference and every kind of feudal regulation. On the orders of the intendants—provincial representatives of the central government—linen and cloth were confiscated because they were produced in contravention of some legal provision. The industrialists, consequently, vigorously demanded the abolition of all regulations governing economic activity.

## THE FRENCH BOURGEOISIE

Different groups are to be distinguished within the rising French bourgeoisie. The financial bourgeoisie lived exclusively by the exploitation of the financial weaknesses of the government of the old régime: then there were the trading and industrial bourgeoisie; and finally the petty bourgeoisie. The financiers enriched them-

selves by making loans to the State and by acting as tax-farmers. They merely demanded that the government should bring the national finances into order and compel the State to pay its debts; their demands on the State went no further. Consequently they quickly went over to the side of the ruling class, once the Revolution threatened entirely to destroy the old order in the interests of the bourgeoisie. The strongest section of the bourgeoisie was formed by the merchants and industrialists, the capitalists of Marseilles, Bordeaux, Lyons, Nantes, who had grown rich from the colonial trade and the slave traffic and had now become the organisers of factories, manufactories, and domestic industry.<sup>1</sup> This was the class which rose to power. The merchants and industrialists were anxious to eradicate the remains of feudalism in trade and agriculture; though it is true that many of them were quite ready to compromise with the old order. Those bourgeois who had acquired landed property, and the manufacturers of luxury articles, desired no radical change, for their principal purchasers were found in the ruling class; but these small groups were lost in the mass of the bourgeoisie.

The trading and industrial bourgeoisie, up to the Revolution, stood at the head of those sections of the population known as the third estate and opposed the two ruling estates of the nobility and the clergy. In their struggles they relied for support on the great mass of the peasantry, who desired the abolition of feudal laws, and on the urban petty bourgeoisie, the handicraft workers, and small traders. Together, these two classes—the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie—composed the majority of the third estate and were, moreover, the most hostile to the old order, since they felt more acutely than any other section the burdens and inconveniences of the existing order of society.

<sup>1</sup> "Factories" use *power*, "manufactories" do not.

## HANDICRAFTSMEN AND WORKERS

The most militant elements within the petty bourgeoisie were the apprentices and the growing working class. As a distinct class, with its own ideology—its own world of ideas—opposed to that of the bourgeoisie—a proletariat in France did not exist on the eve of the Revolution. From the economic and political point of view, the proletariat had not yet broken down the barriers of its narrower group interests. The majority of the working class consisted of workers in domestic industry and in manufacture, and of apprentices in the different crafts. Their material conditions of life were extraordinarily bad. A minister of the old régime wrote:

"In general the wages of labour are too low, a large number of people being sacrificed to the private interests of a few. The apprentices in the clothing trade of Marseilles are fully justified in saying: 'We are unfortunate'."

If we put the purchasing power of the wages of a French worker at the beginning of the twentieth century as equal to a certain quantity of food, then, in comparison, wages in 1789 would buy less than half of that quantity. It is true that the apprentices were organised in their craft organisations, in the apprentice brotherhoods, peculiar mutual benefit associations of a semi-religious, semi-trade union character, but these unions were not strong enough to face up to the bourgeois class. Nor were strikes infrequent before the Revolution (e.g. in Lyons); they were put down with the help of the military. On the very eve of the Revolution, in April 1789, the workers of Paris destroyed the factories of the manufacturer Réveillon, a former worker, who had refused to raise wages in the hard winters of 1788-9.

Drawing a brief balance-sheet of the situation in France on the eve of the Revolution, and analysing the causes which gave rise to it, we can say with Jaurès:

"The peasants and the whole country rose against the old order, not only because of the decline in agriculture, but also because that old order prevented the development of capitalism. This was the main cause of the great French Revolution."

#### THE BOURGEOISIE AS THE VANGUARD OF THE MASSES

The bourgeoisie appeared as the guiding element in the Revolution: its historical leader. In the person of the Abbé Sièyes, it addressed to the country the question:

"What is the Third Estate? Everything. What has it been up to the present? Nothing. What does it demand to be? Something."

Sièyes as yet expressed himself cautiously. But in the course of the Revolution itself the bourgeoisie attempted to destroy the old order of society which delayed the development of capitalism; it soon tried to become everything; but that goal could only be reached with the help of the working masses.

At the end of the eighteenth century the bourgeoisie appeared as the vanguard of the people in the struggle against the old order, with a new world of ideas, a new world philosophy. They proclaimed the empire of reason, against the domination of religion and superstition; they were optimists who believed in the power of progress, in the moral virtue of humanity.<sup>1</sup> The basis for this new doctrine was provided by the theory of natural laws, by which was understood the law of a period that preceded feudalism, in which the law of force was still unknown to mankind. The bourgeoisie were convinced that the State and the social system were originally the result of an agreement among men, the result of a social contract, and that once the social

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent description of the "period of enlightenment" in France, see Chapter I of Engel's *Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science*.

order no longer corresponded with the requirements of citizens, they were justified in rising against the existing régime. In their efforts to overthrow the might of the feudal lords, the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century were friendly to the people, speaking of liberty and equality and fraternity. But the bourgeois was a proprietor, and this fact determined his entire outlook. Proud of his property and his bourgeois culture, he was an individualist. With all his friendliness to the people, he felt himself to be a member of the "upper ten thousand" and drew a sharp line between himself and the common people. In his revolutionary activity, the bourgeois of the eighteenth century formulated his theory of revolution from the past, from Greek and Roman history.<sup>1</sup>

#### BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Our present study is too brief to permit of a detailed account of the different representatives of bourgeois ideology in the eighteenth century: we can only refer to Voltaire, a thinker who took a prominent part in the struggle against certain dark aspects of the society of the eighteenth century, striving to convince the despots of the necessity of granting reforms in the interests of bourgeois development; to the physiocrats who represented the economic ideas of eighteenth-century France, upholding the principle of free competition as the "natural" one against all artificial regulations and control. The *Encyclopædia* of the eighteenth century—the *Handbook of Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*—gathered together all the knowledge of the world and co-ordinated it into a general system, in order that the work of past centuries might be made useful to future generations and that our descendants, enlightening their understanding, may be more virtuous and more happy" (Diderot, d'Alembert, etc.). The collaborators

<sup>1</sup> See Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. (1926 ed., p. 24.)

in this monumental work—the Encyclopædists—were the most famous bourgeois thinkers of France in the eighteenth century.

Political sciences were represented in that century by another great bourgeois thinker, Montesquieu (1689-1755), whose main work, *L'Esprit des Lois* (*The Spirit of Laws*), appeared in 1748. In order to protect the people from absolute rule, Montesquieu suggested the division of the State power into legislative, executive, and judicial. Each was to exist independently of the others so that each might exercise restrictive influence over the other two.

The petty bourgeoisie also had its representatives. Its philosopher was Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), the theoretician of democracy as it was visualised by the men of the eighteenth century, the theoretician of popular sovereignty. According to Rousseau, the State system was founded on the principle that “each gives himself up to society as a whole” and that, consequently, conditions are the same for all, and nobody has any interest in making them more difficult for others. The will of the majority is decisive. In the teachings of Rousseau we find revolutionary and reactionary ideas intermingled. Rousseau dreamed of democracy, and of a “return to nature,” to a golden age when men were still unaware of the degenerating effects of industry and town life. Rousseau's theory was of great importance in the years of the Revolution; the great revolutionaries at the end of the eighteenth century considered themselves to be his pupils.

#### BEGINNINGS OF A COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY

The eighteenth century also had a few representatives of communist thought. We would call to mind the priest Meslier (1664-1729), a communist and revolutionary of the early eighteenth century, who voluntarily exposed himself to death by starvation, and in his *Testament* bitterly denounced religion and inequality.

Meslier was a militant atheist. He demanded that labour should form the basis of society, and expressed the hope that “the great ones of the earth might be strangled with the guts of the priests.”

Communist ideas in reference to agrarian problems were represented by Morelly (1755, *Code de la Nature*) and Mably (1709-85). While Meslier's *Testament* is but very little known, Mably was much more popular; his chief work, *On Legislation*, appeared in 1776. He attributed all evil to private property in land, but, on the other hand, like most of the equalitarians<sup>1</sup> of the eighteenth century, he did not insist on the complete realisation of his communist ideals. His practical programme dealt chiefly with reforms: measures against luxury, determination of a fixed holding of land, etc. Up to that time communism was exemplified mainly in the form of agrarian laws, establishing universal right to the land and imposing limits on the utilisation and the ownership of the land under the family system. A comparison of the communist theory of the eighteenth century with bourgeois theories shows clearly the ideological helplessness of the proletariat as a class at that time. “The ruling ideas of any time are the ideas of the ruling class” (*Communist Manifesto*). The bourgeoisie had a clear idea of its superiority over the workers and put forward its ideas as eternal verities. The masses of the working people in the eighteenth century could not yet put up against these “eternal” truths their own class truths.

#### II. THE BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION

The history of the French Revolution can be divided into the following periods:

1. *From 1789 to 1792.* The epoch of the rule of the big bourgeoisie which, during the Revolution, tried to

<sup>1</sup> Adherents of equalitarian communism. Marx and Engel regarded them as primitive communists, who “based their ideals exclusively or mainly on the demand for equality.”

arrive at a compromise with the old order and very early proclaimed war on the masses.

2. *From August 10th, 1792, to July 27th, 1794.* In the revolutionary National Assembly and the Convention the monarchy was overthrown and the bitter struggle was carried on between the representatives of the trading and industrial bourgeoisie and those of the petty bourgeoisie. This was followed by the dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie, the reign of terror, the rule of the revolutionary government which destroyed the last relics of the old order and made an attempt to put into practice the ideal of an equalitarian republic.

3. *From 1795 to 1799.* After the downfall of the revolutionary government the epoch of the bourgeois republic began, ending with the bourgeois military dictatorship of Napoleon.

We shall now proceed to a brief survey of the history of the Revolution during these periods.

#### I. THE FIRST PERIOD: THE REVOLUTION OF THE BIG BOURGEOISIE, 1789-92

##### ECONOMIC DISTRESS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION

The fundamental antagonism between capitalist development in France and its feudal form of government was felt with particular intensity from the year 1783. From the winter of that year up to the beginning of the Revolution France suffered from a severe economic crisis. Contemporaries describe with horror the terrible harvest failures of 1788 and 1789.

"For two months," writes one of them, "the earth has been covered with snow and ice. Urban workers, agricultural labourers, handicraftsmen, and factory workers have been unable to work because of the extraordinarily heavy frosts. . . . The distress which the population has to face can scarcely be imagined."

The peasants and poor people in the towns complained that it was impossible to get bread. In addition to hunger riots among the masses, the discontent of the bourgeoisie (who, after the conclusion of the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786—the Eden Treaty,—began to feel British competition very acutely) became more evident, and they realised that in France the hegemony of the privileged classes had to be broken, just as it had in England in the seventeenth century.

The economic crisis brought in its wake a crisis in State finances which grew more severe from year to year as a result of the government's policy. One finance minister succeeded another; but not one of them was able to raise the means necessary to cover the deficit in the budget. The danger of bankruptcy became apparent to the whole country when, in 1781, Necker, Minister of Finance, published for the first time a statement of State income and expenditure. Louis XVI's next finance minister, Calonne, was also unable to cover the deficit—interest on State debts alone swallowed up almost half of the State income—or to introduce new taxation, taxation having increased by forty million livres in the preceding decade, and he felt himself compelled to request the king to convene a meeting of representatives of the Estates, which was to help the king to raise the means required. It was therefore decided to convoke the notables, the representatives of the French feudal aristocracy; but when this assembly, which met in 1787, proved incapable of placing at the disposal of the government the funds it required, while the State debt had risen to 4.5 milliards, resort was had to the old body known as the States General, which had not been convened since 1614.

##### THE STATES GENERAL

The States General was an assembly of 1,165 representatives of the three Estates, the Church, the nobility, and the burghers. The third estate had about twice

as many representatives as either of the other two (about 600 deputies). The assembly was opened on May 5th, 1789, and immediately turned its attention, not to the question of raising finance, but to that of altering the constitution in order to put an end to the rule of the privileged classes.

Ignoring the resistance of the government and the privileged estates, the third estate proceeded to transform the assembly into a national assembly, that is, an assembly where discussion was carried on by the three estates jointly, and members voted as individuals. On June 17th, 1789, a resolution was adopted by the representatives of the third estate, in which it was declared :

In view of the present state of affairs the title of National Assembly is the only suitable one, for the representatives here assembled are the only publicly and legally ratified representatives of the people, sent here directly by the whole nation.

#### JULY 14TH AND AUGUST 4TH, 1789

Thus, at its first decisive appearance on the stage of French history, the bourgeoisie laid the foundations of its parliamentary representation. But it could not have triumphed had it not been supported by the insurrection of the masses. On July 12th the people of Paris, profoundly affected by economic and political conditions, and urged on by their distress and the counter-revolutionary actions of the king, began to arm themselves, and on July 14th they stormed the Bastille, the fortified prison in the centre of the town. When the report of the fall of the Bastille reached the king, he exclaimed : " But this is indeed a revolt." A courtier replied : " No revolt, sire, but a Revolution." So the fate of the Revolution was decided by the spontaneous action of the people in city and village. For when the peasants learned of what was happening in Paris they, too, settled their accounts with the lords of the land,

storming castles, burning feudal documents, and declaring themselves free of all feudal obligations and dues. In the provincial towns the urban bourgeoisie set up autonomous municipal administrations, armed themselves, and organised a national guard.

Feeling the pressure of the revolutionary movement throughout the country, the majority of the national assembly, on the famous night of August 4th, 1789, proclaimed the abolition of feudal privileges and feudal burdens. One of the most brilliant popular publicists of the eighteenth century, Marat—" the Friend of the People"—wrote on this occasion with revolutionary wrath :

" If this renunciation was dictated by the spirit of pure benevolence, one has to remember how long it was before that benevolence was manifested."

The peasant question, the basic question of the Revolution, was not solved on August 4th. Liberation from feudal burdens, it is true, was proclaimed, but a distinction was drawn between personal feudal obligations, which were abolished without compensation, and other feudal obligations, which were to be abolished against a money payment. In this way, the feudal lord of yesterday became a capitalist landowner, who looked forward to transforming his old income into capitalist rent income. The Constituent Assembly, as the national assembly now called itself, in which the big bourgeoisie and the nobility predominated, was unwilling to accomplish a radical solution of the peasant problem, and was therefore unable to eliminate those factors in the situation which pushed the revolution in its later stages to civil war. It was decided that until the law of August 4th came into force, the peasants were to continue to pay their old dues and fulfil their old obligations. In other words, things were left very much as they were before the Revolution, except in so far as the masses themselves took things into their own

hands. A decree of 1790 declared: "The property of persons who have not paid the rent due from them for the past year may be auctioned, even if that rent should not be demanded from them for the present year." The assembly resorted to harsh measures when the peasants attempted to resist the execution of this decree.

By abolishing privileges in the matter of taxation, the Constituent Assembly took away the privileges of the priesthood, for the tithes were abolished and church lands declared confiscated; these lands, together with the domains of counter-revolutionary nobles, were formed into a State land fund, holdings in which were to be sold in order to supply the State with the finances it required and in order to attach the new proprietors to the Revolution.

Thus the bourgeoisie, in creating its State, acted in a somewhat revolutionary fashion. It held to the slogan of "expropriating the expropriators." The laws on the transfer of land passed by the Constituent Assembly contributed greatly to enriching the bourgeoisie. But several years of civil warfare were necessary before the peasantry, freed from feudal burdens, could really proceed to expropriating the lands of the church and of the nobility.

#### THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Another method by which the members of the bourgeoisie could enrich themselves was afforded by the *assignats*. These were State bonds issued in December 1789 to the value of 400 million livres, at first against the security of the entire national property. Possession of one of these bonds entitled the owner to a certain amount of land. After a time *assignats* became a sort of paper currency and legal tender—that is, they had to be accepted as money—and very soon they began to fall in value; that is to say, prices began to rise, and the bourgeoisie benefited not a little from this inflation.

By 1794 *assignats* to the extent of almost 8 milliards had been printed, and had fallen to about one-third of their nominal value. By 1796, 30 milliards were in circulation.

Once the Constituent Assembly had disposed of the peasant question, it turned its attention to the interests of the trading and industrial bourgeoisie. It abolished all obstacles to trade on the home market, dissolved the crafts, and urged the working class to submit obediently to the will of the bourgeoisie. Thanks to the reforms introduced by the Revolution, an improvement in the economic situation was noticeable at the end of 1790 and in the year 1791. The workers, too, by means of strikes, sought to improve their conditions. But the Constituent Assembly hastened to meet this movement, and on June 14th, 1791, passed a decree introduced by the deputy Le Chapelier, forbidding the workers to organise and prohibiting strikes. The Assembly gave as the reason for destroying workers' organisations that they would violate the principle of the equality of men. In answer to this, Marat, in the *Friend of the People*, cried:

"We are starving while those who suck our blood live in palaces, drinking choice wines, sleeping on down, travelling in golden carriages and often refusing, in the name of the Revolution, to pay a day's wages to the family of a wounded or fatally injured worker."

The workers soon understood that it was with their help that the Revolution had triumphed. In one of their appeals they wrote:

"In the days of July 12th to 14th [1789] the rich crawled into their cellars; but when they saw that the propertyless class carried through the Revolution alone, they came out of their holes, to treat us as rioters and to begin their intrigues; to keep their

comfortable places, they put on uniforms and epaulettes, and then they felt stronger and tried to suppress us completely."

THE CONSTITUTION OF 1791, AND THE DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN

The National Assembly, acting in the interests of the big bourgeoisie, now proceeded to work out a constitution, which became known to history as the constitution of 1791. It divided all citizens into two groups, the active and the passive. The right to elect deputies, to be a member of the National Assembly, to have a share in municipal administration, etc., was conferred only upon active citizens, that is to say, upon propertied people who paid a definite and fairly high direct tax amounting to not less than the wages for three days' labour. In addition, an elector, according to this law, had to possess some land or other immovable property. By these means the entire working class and the petty bourgeoisie were excluded from any share in the administration of the country. The protests of the workers and the poorer sections of the population, as well as the agitation carried on by Marat, were of no avail.

The narrow class character of the constitution of 1791 becomes more glaring when it is compared with the Declaration of the Rights of Man endorsed by the same assembly in August 1789: "Men are born free and equal and remain so. Social differences can only be justified on the grounds of the welfare of the whole. . . . The object of all civil association is the maintenance of the natural and inalienable rights of man. These are liberty, property, security, and resistance to every form of oppression."

To protect itself against the indignation of the "passive" citizens—the active participants in the Revolution—the Constituent Assembly declared a state of war against all independent movements of the people.

THE BLOOD BATH ON THE FIELD OF MARS, JULY 17TH, 1791

Protected by the bourgeois-aristocratic assembly, the king and the privileged estates prepared a counter-revolutionary conspiracy. On June 20th, 1791, the king attempted to escape to Varennes, on the frontier, in order to join the emigrants and the foreign armies and to declare war openly on the Revolution. But the patriots *en route* prevented the execution of this plan, and the king was brought back to Paris amid their hearty curses. The people of Paris then made an attempt to depose the king and declare a republic. On July 17th, 1791, on the field of Mars in Paris, a petition demanding a republic, put forward on the initiative of the famous democratic club of the Cordeliers, was laid upon the altar of liberty. But the Paris municipal administration answered this demonstration by declaring a state of siege, unfurled the red flag—at that time the standard of counter-revolution—and issued the order to fire upon the demonstrators.

The big bourgeoisie was afraid of popular republican agitation; it was anxious at that time to maintain the monarchy at any price. One of its representatives, Barnave, declared:

"I raise this fundamental question: Do we want to bring the Revolution to an end, or do we want to begin it all over again? You have declared all men equal before the law; you have sanctified civil and political equality, you have given back to the State everything that was taken away from the sovereignty of the people, but one step further in the direction of still greater freedom will mean the destruction of the throne, one step further in the direction of equality will mean the abolition of property."

Arguing along these lines, the Assembly, which, with the help of the people, had curbed the arbitrary power of

the monarchy, decided to invoke the assistance of absolutism in order to protect property and attack the people. The butchery of July 17th was followed by a period of police terrorism. Popular revolutionaries had to flee, like Danton, or go into hiding, like Marat. The further course of the great French revolution was now concerned not only with the struggle of the people, the workers in town and village, against the old order of society, but also with the struggle of these masses against the big bourgeoisie, which had allied with the old order for the struggle against the people. This conflict could only be settled by a new revolutionary rising.

"Consider the activity of the National Assembly," wrote Marat, "and you will see that it becomes active only after a rising of the people, that it introduces good laws only after a riot, but the moment peace is restored bad laws are passed."

The history of the Revolution from 1789 to 1791 offers direct confirmation of Bolshevik revolutionary tactics. The bourgeois revolution can only be successful in so far as the masses of the people take part in it as an active revolutionary force. The proclamation of the Constitution of 1791 did not end the Revolution, which only then really began. The peasant question had not been solved. The enrichment of the bourgeoisie had brought with it the impoverishment of the worker, the handicraftsman and large sections of the petty bourgeoisie.

#### THE CIVIL WAR IN FRANCE

The French Revolution was bound to arouse the hatred of feudal States; the absolutist governments of Europe rose against it, joined later by bourgeois-aristocratic England, which had no objection to raise to a constitutional France, but would not permit a democratic republic to be established there. The

popular movement in the country was driven forward by the hunger and distress of the masses, by the peasants' hatred of the landlords, the hatred of the poor for the rich, and by the war of the European coalition.

The spring and summer of 1792 mark a transitional period in the history of the Revolution. The bourgeoisie, as the masses began to realise more and more clearly, was by no means disposed to solve the fundamental political, social, and economic tasks of the Revolution, mainly because it feared the masses of the people. Thus the old order did not disappear, but was able to offer serious resistance to the Revolution. The masses now realised the necessity of taking the initiative out of the hands of the bourgeoisie. The *bloc* of the workers and petty bourgeoisie had to try to solve the problems of the Revolution, and they were solved, not within the four walls of the newly-elected legislative assembly where the bourgeoisie, as a result of the law concerning active and passive citizens, had the majority, but in civil warfare.

The right wing of the legislative assembly, which met on October 2nd, 1791, was formed by the constitutionalists, the representatives of the trading and industrial bourgeoisie, the deputies from the wealthy provinces, the departments of the Gironde, from Bordeaux and Marseilles, the so-called fraction of Girondists. The left minority of the assembly, whose chief strength lay in the communes of Paris, was composed of 136 Jacobins—so-called because they met in a Jacobin monastery—who soon assumed the leadership of the Revolution.

The discontent of the peasantry increased from day to day; in the starving towns the poor people were equally incensed at the self-seeking policies of the bourgeoisie. In a petition submitted to the legislative assembly in February 1792 a wholesale merchant named Delbier declared:

"My warehouses are fully stocked with sugar, coffee, indigo, cotton, etc.; before all France and Europe I demand that the assembly shall not prevent me from disposing of my property as I think fit, and from selling those goods at prices which I consider suitable. The goods are my own property."

The popular movement thus met its enemy not only in the form of the old feudal barons, but also of the new lords, the big bourgeoisie. Civil warfare broke out. From the summer of 1792 two classes fought each other: the victorious bourgeoisie, trying to exploit the Revolution for its own predatory interests and to carry through its demand for the abolition of restrictions on trade, and the urban petty bourgeoisie, which had now become the leader of the peasants and workers and demanded the complete abrogation of feudal rights and the limitation of capitalist accumulation. This does not mean that the petty bourgeoisie was anxious to abolish capitalist society. Equally with the Girondists, representatives of the bourgeoisie, the leaders of the petty bourgeoisie, the Jacobins, considered private property a sacred institution, but the Jacobins rejected the Girondist formula, that the right of property implied "the complete and inalienable right to dispose of that property according to the owner's own judgment." They declared that the right to dispose of property must be regulated by law, that certain limits must be placed to wealth. Thus the dispute concerned the limits of capitalist accumulation. The leader of the Jacobins, Maximilian Robespierre, whose authority increased greatly from the autumn of 1792, asserted that the Jacobins "did not wish to eliminate the rich, but to ensure that poverty received due consideration."

## II. THE SECOND PERIOD: THE REVOLUTION OF THE JACOBINS AND THEIR DICTATORSHIP (1792-4).

### THE STORMING OF THE TUILERIES, AUGUST 10TH, 1792

Before the character of the future order of society could be really determined, accounts had to be settled with the counter-revolutionaries at home and abroad. The king was still the rallying centre and head of the counter-revolution. It was in his name that the privileged classes rose and the European coalition (the alliance of the feudal governments of Austria, Prussia, and Russia) began war on France in April 1792, although formally it was France that declared war. The Girondists still hoped that the war would prevent the class struggle at home from coming to a head. But in order to annihilate the enemies of the Revolution within and without the country, it was necessary to mobilise the masses for a new rising against the monarchy. This insurrection—the storming of the Tuileries—took place on August 10th, 1792: it was headed by the municipality of Paris and supported by armed patriots, called the *fédérés*, who streamed from the provinces to Paris, and then on to the frontiers of France to fight the armies of the *émigrés* and feudal Europe. At first the French suffered serious defeats in the counter-revolutionary war. But after the monarchy fell on August 10th the revolutionaries declared war on the enemies of the people. The tasks of the external war now coincided with the problems of carrying the Revolution further at home. "The fatherland is in danger," was the cry of the Revolution. It was decided to arm all citizens, active and passive, for the fight against the enemy.

The insurrection of August 10th, 1792, besides abolishing the monarchy, destroyed the aristocratic constitution. France became a democratic republic, born in bitter struggle. When the Parisians, after the people had triumphed over the monarchy, learnt of the

new counter-revolutionary conspiracies, and of the victories of the allied armies, they decided to put an end to the counter-revolution at home before marching to the frontiers. On September 2nd and 3rd about 1,600 counter-revolutionaries in the prisons of Paris were executed by the revolutionary masses with the support of the municipal authorities of Paris. Having thus got rid of the enemy in the rear, the people marched off to the frontier, singing the *Marseillaise*, the hymn of the victorious Revolution. The Legislative Assembly attempted to resist the Revolution of August-September 1792; and the great majority of the Assembly, including the Girondists, tried to save the king. But the pressure of the people and the agitation conducted by Marat forced the Assembly to dissolve itself and to convene a revolutionary representative body, the Convention, which was elected by universal suffrage.

#### THE CONVENTION

Marx said that the history of the Convention is the history of the civil war in France. The Convention began its work on September 20th, 1792, and September 22nd was proclaimed the first day of the first year of the Republic.

The revolutionary minority of the Convention consisted chiefly of the Paris deputies, opposed by a considerable majority led by the moderate republican fractions, the representatives of trade and industry (the Girondists). The following decree with which the Convention began its work reflects this social composition:

“Only a constitution decided by the people is legal; person and property are protected by the nation; in so far as they are not changed, present laws remain in force; all officials remain for the time

being at their posts and all fixed dues and obligations must be met.”

The history of the Convention falls into four periods:

1. From September 1792 to June 2nd, 1793 (the victory of the Jacobins).
2. From June 1793 to April 1794 (the revolutionary dictatorship and the repulse of the coalition armies).
3. From the spring of 1794 to the fall of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor (July 27th), 1794.
4. The so-called Convention of Thermidor.

#### GIRONDISTS AND JACOBINS (SEPTEMBER 1792 TO JUNE 2ND, 1793)

The cardinal question which the Convention had to face in January 1793 was that of the monarchy. The Girondists tried to save the king and the monarchy because they believed that by these means they could put an end to the war of the poor against the rich. But the position of the king as head of the counter-revolution, and the proof of his negotiations with the representatives of the European Alliance, determined the fate of the monarchy. On January 21st, 1793, the king was executed. Then there arose between the Girondists and the Jacobins disputes about the fundamental social questions of the time, particularly the question of the peasantry, food supplies, and fiscal policy. The dispute between the Jacobin deputies—called the “Mountain” because of the elevated position they occupied in the hall—and the Girondists, centred round the questions whether all feudal burdens should be abolished without compensation; whether communal property should be left in the hands of the village community; whether war should be declared on speculators and those who held up supplies while waiting for a rise in price, whether a law should be passed fixing a minimum contribution of grain and other articles of urgent necessity; whether specially high

contributions should be demanded of the rich ; and, finally, whether political terrorism should be adopted at the moment. The Girondists opposed every attack upon property : they protested against special capital taxation, they opposed the introduction of a grain tax and defended the principle of free trade. But the Girondists remained at the helm only so long as the revolutionary armies won victories over the Allied troops. In the spring of 1793 victory turned to defeat. General Dumouriez, a leader of the army and a Girondist, went over to the Austrians. Owing to unskilful strategy, the revolutionary troops were forced to retreat, and the new revolution against the bourgeoisie became a fact.

" You want to know," said the younger Robespierre, brother of the Jacobin leader, " who sounded the alarm on June 2nd [the day when twenty-nine Girondist leaders were arrested] ? I will tell you : the treachery of our generals, the breach of faith which surrendered the camp of Famar to the enemy, the bombardment of Valenciennes, the disaffection introduced into the northern army. . . ."

" And the selfishness of the rich," added Marat.

#### THE JACOBIN VICTORY AND THE CONSTITUTION OF 1793

Civil war raged throughout the whole country. The Girondin deputies, driven from the Convention on May 31st and June 2nd, 1793, hurried to the provinces and there raised the standard of revolt (among the peasants of France rose against the Paris municipality and the Convention. But the peasantry and the urban poor saved the Revolution.

After the Jacobins had defeated the Girondists, they proceeded at once to draw up a new constitution, known as the Constitution of 1793. The new Revolution introduced universal franchise and the plebiscite. It declared that it was the duty of society to protect equality,

liberty, security, and property ; but in contradistinction to the authors of the 1791 constitution, the Jacobins, at Robespierre's suggestion, declared in their new constitution :

" Society owes support to needy citizens ; it provides them with work or secures to those incapable of work the means of existence."

This seemed to the revolutionary government to furnish a solution of the social problem.

But the acceptance of the constitution did not mean the end of the civil war. Since the country was still torn by dissension and struggle, the Convention decided to postpone the date when the new constitution should come into force until more peaceful times. France was now ruled by the dictatorship of the revolutionary government, but that government was sustained not merely because it had resort to terrorist measures, but because it was supported by the workers in town and village and pursued a broad social and economic policy.

As its first task in the summer of 1793, the Convention, in order to tackle the peasant problem, abolished all seignorial obligations and burdens without compensation, returned the communal lands to the village communities, and took measures to facilitate the sale of land from the State domains to the peasants. This agrarian legislation by no means represented an effort on the part of the Convention to establish a communist order of society in the countryside. The decree on the emancipation of the peasant from feudal burdens, promulgated on June 17th, 1793, declares that its provisions refer only to services and payments due to feudal superiors ; while the decree on communal lands, of June 10th, reads :

" It is not the object of the law to encroach upon legitimate private ownership, but merely to abolish the misuse of feudal power and the arbitrary seizure of land."

After the Convention had thus given its revolutionary solution of the peasant problem, it dealt in equally radical fashion with the question of supplies. Without wishing to abolish property, it did not shrink from attacking the interests of the capitalist bourgeoisie. In September 1793 a law was passed fixing maximum prices for grain and other essential articles; this was soon followed by strict legislation against speculation. The same decree, however, fixed maximum wages for the worker, both for piece work and for time work. The Convention also passed a number of laws on assistance for the unemployed, and pensions for the aged, and elaborated a programme of public works for those in distress.

Under stress of the bitter war against the internal and the external enemy, the Convention did not hesitate to employ methods of class terrorism. Saint-Just, a leader of the Convention and its representative for the army, wrote in an army order:

"The representative of the nation orders the Burgomaster of Strassbourg to raise, within the course of the present day, 100,000 livres from the town, to be drawn from the rich and used to support the poor patriots, the widows and orphans of the soldiers who have fallen in the cause of freedom. Those rich persons who do not contribute their money are to be placed in the pillory."

And here is another order:

"One hundred thousand men in the army are barefooted. It is ordered that during the course of the present-day footwear is to be taken from all the aristocrats of Strassbourg and 10,000 pairs of boots are to be brought to headquarters at 10 a.m. tomorrow."

#### THE REVOLUTIONARY DICTATORSHIP

To carry out these measures, social, economic, and political, to strengthen the revolution and facilitate the struggle against the enemy, a strong revolutionary governmental force had to be established. Formally, it was the Convention that embodied the governmental power of the Revolution, but the Convention ruled, not directly, but through the medium of the Committee of Public Welfare and the Committee of Public Safety. In these two bodies the real forces of the revolutionary government were concentrated. The Committee of Public Welfare governed with the help of commissars, despatched to the army and the provinces; it drew its strength from local Jacobin clubs, which excluded all those who did not support the Convention and to a certain extent became party organisations. With the help of local revolutionary committees, the vigilant eyes of the dictatorship in the localities, the Committee of Public Welfare dealt with the enemies of the Revolution. The method of the government was the method of terror, directed against all suspected persons, against all who, in the words of the decree promulgated on 22nd Prairial of the second year of the Revolution, "strive to abolish universal liberty, agitate for the establishment of the royal power and dissolution of the Convention; who are responsible for distress, who calumniate the government, not only the Convention, but individual leaders, the plenipotentiaries of the Revolution, against all those who spread lying rumours, encourage cowardice and undermine morals," etc.

By its very nature, the terrorism of the Convention was a class terror; it discriminated between the rich and the poor. Although in the annals of the revolutionary tribunals we may find the names of petty bourgeois and peasants; they are usually men who rose from the lower ranks of the people, men who sought their own aggrandisement out of the general distress of the

population. Such small people, condemned by the revolutionary tribunals, were apparently guilty of deliberate disorganisation of the national economy and the Revolution.

#### FRACTIONAL STRUGGLES AMONG THE JACOBINS

In the summer of 1794 the revolutionary terror bore fruit. The revolutionary armies repulsed the attacks of the enemy. The insurrections in the Girondist departments were suppressed, the counter-revolution had been tamed. But the social problem had not been solved and hunger was still rampant throughout the country. At this stage there arose a conflict among the different groups of the Jacobin coalition. On the right wing of the Jacobin *bloc* stood Danton and Desmoulins, representatives of the bourgeois intelligentsia, the "chaff" of the old trading bourgeoisie. This group included not a few who had grown rich by the Revolution. Danton himself, as A. Mathiez has demonstrated, was involved in speculations and had conducted negotiations with Pitt and previously with agents of the French king. In the centre of the *bloc* stood the group of Robespierre, Saint-Just, and Couthon, representatives of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie. On their left stood the adherents of Marat, Hébert, and Chaumette, extremely popular in the suburbs of Paris, representing the ruined sections of the petty bourgeoisie, the handicraftsmen, and the shopkeepers, as well as declassed elements from the intelligentsia. On the extreme left was the group of "levellers," led by Jacques Rous, Varlet, and Leclerc, representatives of the impoverished working and petty bourgeois masses of the capital.

At the end of 1793 and the beginning of 1794, that is, at a time when the Civil War was still being waged, the adherents of Danton advocated unity of the revolutionary front under the protection of property. They demanded that "force should be replaced by humanity,"

they demanded, as compromisers have done at all times, a combination of these two elements. "In the combination of these two," they said, "we see the salvation of the fatherland. . . ." The group which followed Hébert and Chaumette, who had their roots in the Paris municipality, insisted on a continuation of the terror. Since they had no definite social and economic programme (they demanded "practical equality") they emphasised the propaganda of atheism, of methods of intenser terror, of the negative aspects of the struggle against capitalism. It was from this group that there arose later the ideas of Babouvism (the teachings of Babeuf).

After Robespierre and his supporters had accomplished the chief task of the Revolution, the abolition of the feudal order of society, and, in the summer of 1793, had solved the negative problem of the Revolution, leaving the road clear for bourgeois development in France, they proceeded at the beginning of 1794 with their positive programme. According to his enemies, Robespierre wanted to "sans-culotte" everybody and everything, to reduce all to equality. From the fragment *Sur le système des Institutions Républicaines* left by Saint-Just, we learn that this theoretician of the Jacobin dictatorship desired the foundation of an agrarian republic—a "society of equal property-holders"—the abolition of poverty and the division of the land among the needy. Fundamentally this was only a reactionary Utopia, this "Realm of Virtue," where agriculture was to be the main occupation of the people. Early in 1794 the Convention, under the influence of Robespierre, issued a number of decrees (the decrees of Ventôse, the sixth month of the new calendar) according to which all the poor were to be registered and, as a means of solving the social problem, provided with land. The adherents of Robespierre completed their Utopian programme with a new religion, the Cult of the Supreme Being, which, in their own words, was to

preach "hatred against the ignoble and tyrannical, terror against despots and traitors, help and consideration for the unfortunate and weak, defence of the oppressed against the unrighteous."

A violent struggle soon broke out between the various Jacobin groups. In the autumn of 1793 the Jacobins had disposed of the "levellers" and their leader, the priest Jacques Roux. The "levellers" were not actually communists, although some did conduct propaganda for the idea of agrarian communism, but in the summer of 1793 the "levellers" were still striving for the inclusion in the Constitution of a reference to the struggle against the rich. The "levellers" laid great emphasis on economic demands, and therefore, after it had freed itself from the Girondists, the Convention hastened to get rid also of the "levellers," the "disorganisers of the Revolution."

J. P. Marat—one of the most interesting political personalities of the latter half of the eighteenth century—occupied a special rôle in the Revolution. He was murdered in July 1793, the first month of the revolutionary government, by a bourgeois fanatic, Charlotte Corday, but he exercised a powerful influence on the course of the Revolution.

Marat represented the poorer sections of the French people; he was the theoretician of the labouring population. The class character of the Revolution was clear to him. He knew that the Revolution was being made by the toilers and that the possessing class was making use of it against them. Marat formulated his philosophy of the Revolution in the following way:

"The plebs, i.e. the lower classes of the nations, are fighting alone against the upper classes. At the moment of insurrection the people smashed their way through every obstacle by force of numbers; but however much power they attain at first, they are defeated at last by upper-class plotters, full of skill, craft, and cunning. The educated and subtle intriguers of the

upper class at first opposed the despots: but only in order to turn against the people after they had wormed their way into its confidence and made use of its might, and to place themselves in the privileged position from which the despots had been ejected. Revolution is made and carried through by the lowest ranks of society, by workers, handicraftsmen, small shopkeepers, peasants, by the plebs, by the unfortunate, whom the shameless rich call the *canaille* and whom the Romans shamelessly called the proletariat. But what the upper classes constantly concealed was the fact that the Revolution had been turned solely to the profit of landowners, of lawyers and tricksters. . . . The people made the mistake of not arming itself adequately, and, above all, of failing to ensure that more than a section of the townsfolk were armed."

This is a brilliant summing-up of the history and the class nature of the Revolution. Marat demonstrated to the people in a striking way that the Revolution could only be successful with the help of dictatorship and terror. But Marat was only the representative and theoretician of the French people, the petty bourgeoisie of the end of the eighteenth century, supported by the proletariat. Marat promised the workers "good wages and good treatment." When he spoke to the peasant on the agrarian question, he proposed to round off his plot of land; when to the government, he suggested that the land should be divided among all patriots. Marat did not overcome the class narrowness of the French petty bourgeoisie and workers of the eighteenth century. But he was closely connected with the poorest toilers of the country and was a brilliant tactician and strategist of revolution.

In the winter of 1793 and the spring of 1794 the fractional struggles within the Convention became more acute, mainly because the Revolution was already saved and the programme of positive construction had now to be commenced. The adherents of Robespierre

and Danton got rid of the group of Chaumette and Hébert without much trouble, precisely because the latter had no social or economic programme and, despite the slackening of the civil war, clung to methods of terrorism. After having disposed of the adherents of Hébert, Robespierre, in order to realise his Utopian social programme, had also to deal with the followers of Danton, since on the question of property this group advocated principles similar to those of the Girondists. The execution of the Hébertists in March 1794 was followed in April of the same year by the execution of Danton and his adherents. Thus Robespierre got rid of his right as well as his left wing opponents, and the revolutionary government was isolated from the masses.

#### ROBESPIERRE'S FALL (9TH THERMIDOR 1794).

In April the government of the petty bourgeoisie, led by Robespierre, proceeded to carry out its own programme of social and economic measures. Within a few months, however, Robespierre himself followed his enemies to the guillotine. With the execution of Robespierre on the 9th Thermidor (July 27th), 1794, the history of the Revolution in France ends and the history of the counter-Revolution begins. It signified the triumph of the capitalist class over the petty bourgeoisie.

What was the cause of the downfall of the dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie? When speaking of the events of the 9th Thermidor we should not forget that a social and economic transformation had occurred in France during the years of the Revolution. The Revolution began in May 1789: Robespierre fell in July 1794. During that period the countryside underwent a complete transformation, for the peasantry became a class of free proprietors. The noble lords of the land had disappeared, but new bourgeois landowners took their place. In the towns the bourgeoisie grew stronger; a part of the petty bourgeoisie grew rich

by speculation in the national property and by supplying the army. Once the peasant had got his land and was freed from feudal burdens, he did not want the Revolution to go any further: only a small section of the petty bourgeoisie desired its continuation, but by now they had ceased to play a decisive part; the more so because the urban working class, whose position was growing worse and worse, was unable to create its own class organisation.

From the spring of 1794 the Revolution celebrated its victory over the counter-Revolution. The enemy had been driven back beyond the frontiers of France; the dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie had saved the bourgeois Revolution. But the growth of bourgeois society was hindered by the social experiments of the petty bourgeoisie. This was expressed very clearly by Courtois, a bourgeois speculator and enemy of Robespierre, in a speech delivered to the Convention on the 9th Thermidor itself:

"You dull-witted and bloodthirsty equalitarians," he said, "you will reach your goal only when you have sapped the foundations of all trading relations, when you have buried wealth and trade under your ruins, when, with your fantastic agrarian schemes you have changed 25 million Frenchmen into 25 million men living on 40 écus."

Courtois, a typical representative of the new bourgeoisie, accused Robespierre of wishing to limit capitalist accumulation. The French bourgeoisie was no longer satisfied with the ambiguous policy of the petty bourgeoisie which, on the one hand, annihilated feudalism and created the conditions necessary for the development of capitalism, while on the other hand it tried to impose limits on that development by introducing social reforms. It is true that Robespierre fought successfully against the open propaganda of agrarian communism, but at the same time he wanted to destroy the France of the bourgeoisie and transform it into an

agrarian republic of equal proprietors. It was this which brought down on him the hatred of the French bourgeoisie. In May and June 1794, in order to put through his programme, he tried to exclude from the Convention all the corrupt and morally discredited deputies; at the same time he tried to bring to book all those who reduced every problem of the Revolution to the demand for an intensification of the terror, and in consequence he encountered the solid resistance of all hostile left and right wing groups in the Convention, the remainder of the Gironde, the former Hébertists and the "levellers" from the suburbs of Paris, and finally the "Marsh," the centre group of the Convention, afraid of the new tasks of the Revolution and encouraged by the resistance of Robespierre's enemies.

On 9th Thermidor Robespierre was arrested. The Paris municipality rallied to his defence, but it was already too late, for he was unable to attract the workers of the capital to his side because, anxious not to violate the "constitutional liberties" of the popular representative body, he had hesitated to take the road of insurrection. On 10th Thermidor he was executed.

### III. THE THIRD PERIOD : THE BOURGEOIS REPUBLIC (1795-9)

#### THE CONVENTION OF THERMIDOR

France, in the period of 1795-9, was utterly different from the France of the old régime. New classes had come to power. The peasant was now an enemy not only to any counter-revolution, but also to any revolution; he was an adherent of order against all those who, whether from the left or the right, threatened him in the possession of his small holding. The French peasant was not only passive, but conservative. He would rise only at the threat of a return of the old lords of the land. During the régime of the bourgeois republic (under the

Directory) from 1795 to 1799 the old bourgeoisie again awoke to life. The Revolution had abolished crafts and monopolies; it had created a huge army of small proprietors. "They hold fast to their money-box," writes an historian, "and they will not risk it to take part in a street battle."

These men dreamed of a strong governmental power, of order and of a régime that would protect the Revolution against both the nobility and the "levellers." Thus a new conservative power grew up in the towns, strengthened by that part of the bourgeoisie (the new rich) who had gained their wealth by selling supplies to the army, and by speculating in the national property; their numbers were added to by the mass of people who lived at the expense of the Revolution. They were opposed to the restoration of the old order, but equally hostile to a continuation of the Revolution. The workers in the towns, the poor of Paris, Lyons, and the other industrial and trading centres of France, unlike all the other sections of the population, had not improved their position. Under the bourgeois republic they had a worse time than under the terror. Their state of mind, after 9th Thermidor, was one of political apathy. It is true that now and again, as for example, in the days of Prairial and Germinal, 1795, they came forward with the demand for bread and the constitution of 1793, but these were merely isolated outbreaks. The people of Paris no longer played the part they had done on August 10th, 1792, or in the days from May 31st to June 2nd, 1793.

The war was not yet at an end: from a war of defence it had become a war of aggression. Within the country royalist risings broke out. The peasants of the Vendée again unfurled the royal standard. The Jacobins of Paris raved about the constitution of 1793. In these circumstances a vacillating State power arose which has become famous in history as a system of see-saw politics; governmental power fluctuated between

the royalists and the democrats, and, as a result, the army and its leaders attained decisive importance. It was to the army that the new government, the Directory, turned for help when a royalist or democratic insurrection was to be suppressed. Finally, on 18th Brumaire, 1799, General Napoleon Bonaparte carried through his *coup d'état* to create a strong bourgeois government, imbued with the aim of protecting the achievements of 1789 against both royalist and democratic dangers.

#### BABEUF AND THE CONSPIRACY OF EQUALS

Before we conclude our survey of the history of the French Revolution, we must deal briefly with the history of an attempt at a revolutionary democratic transformation made in Paris in May 1796 under the leadership of Babeuf. It is true that this conspiracy was discovered by a spy before it had matured, but the historical significance of the attempt is great. Babeuf, editor of the *Tribune du Peuple*, was imprisoned on 9th Thermidor with other Jacobins (Darthé, Buonarrotti, etc.). He had worked out a plan for overthrowing the Directory in the name of the constitution of 1793.

The slogan, "Bread and the constitution of 1793," was extremely popular among the masses in the capital. But Babeuf's democratic conspiracy is distinguished from other Jacobin conspiracies in that it was carried on by communist revolutionaries. Babeuf's followers understood "that freedom is impossible without equality, that is, so long as private property exists." They wanted to abolish private property; but how was this to be done? Babeuf tried to connect his agitation with the needs of the masses, and he began the Revolution against property as a struggle against the constitution of the third year of the republic (1795) and against the government of the Directory. He demanded that laws should be introduced to prevent speculation and to grant a maximum of state assistance for the

poor. The insurrection was to be prepared by a secret directing body, and after the seizure of governmental power by the revolutionary minority the people were to elect a new convention and proceed to abolish private property. This was Babeuf's political programme. His social demands were less clearly formulated; his supporters were opposed to the reformist agrarian laws, wishing to establish a collective ownership of the land. "Down with private property in land," ran the *Manifesto of the Equals*: "the land belongs to nobody." Babeuf was opposed to inheritance and in favour of abolishing great individual wealth, arguing that every man should have the opportunity of satisfying his requirements. The individual should be paid, not for what he had done for society, since some were stronger than others, but according to his requirements. The communist programme of Babeuf's followers was, admittedly, confused. In one of their appeals to the people they wrote:

"We suggest to the rich that they should submit voluntarily to the demands of justice . . . and generously give their surplus to the people."

They believed that "the legislator should so act, that finally the people themselves are convinced of the necessity of abolishing property in the interest and to the advantage of the people." This was the new doctrine of the revolutionaries at the end of the eighteenth century. Babeuf's rising failed, and he and Darthé were executed, but the historical importance of this episode is very great. Babeuf is the link between the modern proletarian movement and the epoch of the dictatorship of the Convention. Moreover, Babeuf's ideas in the matter of communism represent an advance upon the ideas of Jacques Roux, Varlet, and the communist systems of the seventeenth century. Babeuf knew that social equality is not the same as formal equality before the law, and he was aware that it could

not be achieved before the seizure of political power. Babeuf's insurrection failed because the French proletariat in 1796 was not yet a class in the modern sense of the word: on the other hand, it proved that in the course of its development every democratic movement is closely bound up with social struggles. Babeuf's insurrection marked the highest point of the class struggle in the history of the Revolution.

### III. THE LESSONS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Bourgeois theoreticians frequently compare the proletarian Revolution in Russia with the Great French Revolution. They say that the Bolsheviks are repeating the Revolution of the eighteenth century, that the Russian Revolution will go the same road as the French Revolution; others maintain that the two Revolutions have nothing in common with each other. Neither the one nor the other is right. Both Revolutions were profound convulsive social upheavals, the one in the eighteenth, the other in the twentieth century; the one occurred before the period of the introduction of machinery, when no proletarian class as yet existed; its object was the establishment of bourgeois society; the other began in the epoch of capitalist decline, when the proletariat was the leader of the Revolution and took up the fight for socialism. Those who maintain (the social democrats and Trotskyists) that the U.S.S.R. will also witness its 9th Thermidor, that is, that capitalism will triumph in Russia, thereby deny the Marxist characterisation of the present age as the epoch of capitalist decline, and deny also the proletarian character of the Russian Revolution. They proceed from the Menshevik conception of that Revolution as a bourgeois-democratic revolution; we, on the other hand, see in it the beginning of the international socialist Revolution.

Let us now draw up the balance-sheet of the French Revolution and estimate the importance of the Jacobin

dictatorship in the history of the Revolutionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Marx formulated its significance in the following words:

"In the Revolution the bourgeoisie was the class that really stood at the head of the movement. The proletariat and the sections of society which did not belong to the bourgeoisie as yet possessed no interests not coincident with those of the bourgeoisie, and were not as yet in process of development as independent classes or parts of classes. Consequently, wherever, as in the France of 1793 to 1794, they opposed the bourgeoisie, they were actually fighting for the interests of the bourgeoisie, although in a fashion different from that of the bourgeoisie itself. The reign of terror in France was nothing but the plebeian form of the struggle against the enemies of the bourgeoisie—against absolutism, against feudalism and against the philistines." (Article in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, December 11th, 1848.)<sup>1</sup>

These words embody a striking description of the historical rôle of the Jacobins. Lenin, translating them into the language of to-day, wrote:

"The historians of the proletariat see in Jacobinism one of the highest stages reached by the oppressed class in its struggle for freedom. . . . Jacobinism in Europe,

<sup>1</sup> A masterly summary of the significance in world history of the French Revolution was given by Marx in the opening lines of the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, written in 1852: "Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Napoleon, the heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the great French Revolution, though they donned Roman garb and mouthed Roman phrases, nevertheless achieved the task of their day—which was to liberate the bourgeoisie and to establish modern bourgeois society. The Jacobins broke up the ground in which feudalism had been rooted and struck off the heads of the feudal magnates who had grown there. Napoleon established throughout France the conditions which made it possible for free competition to develop, for landed property to be exploited after the partition of the great estates, and for the nation's power of industrial production to be utilised to the full. Across the frontiers he everywhere made a clearance of feudal institutions, in so far as this was requisite to provide French bourgeois society with a suitable environment upon the continent of Europe."

on the frontiers of Europe and Asia (in Russia) in the twentieth century, would be the rule of the revolutionary class of the proletariat which, supported by the peasantry and with the existing material foundations for the movement towards socialism, could give not only all that is great and ineradicable that the Jacobins gave in the eighteenth century, but might also lead to the enduring world victory of the workers. . . . The Jacobin, who is indissolubly bound to the organisation of the proletariat and has understood his class interests—he is a Bolshevik.”

Thus highly did Lenin value Jacobinism in the history of the revolutionary movement of the oppressed classes at the end of the eighteenth century. At the same time he recognised its discordant class character and pointed out that the Russian Revolution differs from the great French Revolution precisely as the proletariat differs from the petty bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie is the class of the past; its revolutionary activity merely consolidated the foundations of bourgeois society; the proletariat is the class of the future, leading humanity from capitalism to socialist society.

After Robespierre's fall the bourgeois republic triumphed, abolishing one by one the democratic achievements of the Revolution; bourgeois society had defeated the *ancien régime*.

The present gives us a more profound understanding of the past. Familiarity with the course of the class struggle in the Russian Revolution makes it easier for us to analyse the historical peculiarities of the great French Revolution. It is easier for us to-day to understand the passions, the struggles, the victory of the Jacobins. We have learned to know the laws of revolutionary struggle from our own experience, and can rightly claim that our task of to-day was immeasurably greater than that which confronted the Jacobins at the end of the eighteenth century; they established bour-

geois class society: in Russia the foundations of classless communist society were laid. Up to the present all revolutions have transferred power from one dominant minority to another. The proletarian Revolution annihilates the power of the few and draws in to the government and administration of the country the majority of the workers. The French Revolution proclaimed equality before the law; the proletarian Revolution aims at real economic equality in society.

The difficulties which the proletariat has to face are, therefore, greater, for the character and conditions of the growth of bourgeois and communist society are radically different. Bourgeois economy and culture grew up within feudal society itself; the Revolution merely afforded them the possibility of free expansion. But under the system of capitalist exploitation it is extremely difficult for the proletariat to build up its class and militant organisations; it possesses neither the leisure nor the material means to create its own culture, so long as the possessing classes rule. The concentration of production under capitalism provides technical bases which the proletariat can use to build up socialism, but only after the proletarian Revolution has triumphed. Thus, even when the proletariat is the victor, it faces much greater problems than the bourgeoisie had to face; the conditions in which it has to struggle are much more difficult than those encountered by the bourgeoisie in carrying through the bourgeois Revolution.

The history of the Soviet Union shows that the chief work of the proletariat, when the Revolution is successful, lies in the economic sphere. The proletarian Revolution cannot stop at the measures of the petty bourgeois Jacobins; it must make a close study of economic development in order to move forward to classless communist society. If this is to be done, it is not enough to win the sympathies of the peasants—they must be drawn into the work of socialist construction; their

small individual holdings have to be transformed into large scale collective undertakings, which means that the village bourgeoisie has to be fought.

The Jacobins of the eighteenth century had no such great creative tasks to accomplish. These tasks imposed upon the proletariat as a condition of its success the necessity of protecting the organs of the proletarian dictatorship, of waging relentless warfare against all the agents, whether open or secret, of capitalist reaction, of developing organisations which give expression to the working-class will, and of correcting the errors which become manifest within the proletarian movement itself. The historical tasks to be accomplished by the proletarian Revolution are of such extraordinary complexity that they can only be fulfilled if the unity of the revolutionary proletarian ranks is preserved. Our Revolution differs from the French because its dominant power, its guiding force, is the proletariat. In the eighteenth-century Revolution the proletariat played the active part of providing the physical force, but it was not organised in a party, as were the proletarians of the Soviet Union, whose Party for decades had carried on a revolutionary class struggle, had learned from the experiences of European revolutions and had itself lived through three revolutions. The Jacobin club was not a party, but a loose association of various social groups, while the Bolshevik Party provided a disciplined leadership in the fight against the bourgeoisie. The Bolshevik Party represented, not one or another group of the proletariat, but the proletariat united as a class in its struggle against the bourgeoisie, in all its sections, including the petty bourgeoisie. The Communist Party cannot be a "free" association of differing tendencies, like the Jacobin club; it must be a united party exercising iron discipline—that is the fundamental lesson of the Revolution; therein lies the chief guarantee of the triumph of socialist re-construction and the victory over the capitalist order of society.