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# The Revolutions of 1848 and the Historical Foundations of Marxist Strategy

By David North

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*In July 2011, the Socialist Equality Party (US) held a summer school in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The school opened with a lecture given by David North, the SEP national chairman and chairman of the International Editorial Board of the* World Socialist Web Site *, on "The Revolutions of 1848 and the Historical Foundations of Marxist Strategy." The report is particularly timely in light of the recent bloody military crackdown in Egypt, and we publish it below for the first time.*

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We will devote this week to a study of the Theory of Permanent Revolution. It is not difficult to justify our concentration on this subject. The events of the past half year—above all, the revolution in Egypt—impart an intense relevance to this theory. The social dynamic of events in Egypt can be understood only on the basis of this theory. As always, the various bourgeois and petty bourgeois "left" organizations respond to these events by mouthing the emptiest democratic rhetoric.

Thus, the French NPA [New Anti-capitalist Party] last January affixed its signature to a joint communiqué, also signed by the Greens, the Unitary Left, the French Communist Party, the Left Party, and the Socialist Party. It stated: "We demand that the French government and the European Union cease their explicit or implicit support for the Tunisian regime and support a *true democratic transition* ." At the same time, the social interests that motivated the Pabloite call for a "true democratic transition" [with the assistance of Sarkozy and the EU] found expression in a statement of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, which declared, in the midst of the mass demonstrations: "The question for us now is, 'How can we stop this explosion of pillage, which is becoming intolerable? These kids are not only attacking the property of the Trabelsi family, but police stations, and everyone's property."

An NPA statement, titled "Tunisia: The Social and Democratic Revolution is Underway," declared:

Only the constitution of a provisional government, without any representatives of the Destourian regime, tasked with preparing free and democratic elections, run under a new Electoral Code, to a Constituent Assembly will allow Tunisians to take back their destiny and create an order that is just and profitable for the majority. If the people aspire one day to live, destiny has no choice but to bend to its will.

In the midst of the mass demonstrations in Cairo in January, the ISO featured an interview with Mostafa Omar, a leader of the Opposition, who praised ElBaradei because of his "new movement for democracy," and his National Association for Change (NAC).

On February 1, the Revolutionary Socialists sought to encourage illusions in the army, declaring that: "A people's army is the army that protects the revolution." It continued: "Everyone asks: 'Is the army with the people or against them?' The army is not a single bloc. The interests of the soldiers and junior officers are the same as the interests of the masses.

Among the defining characteristics of the petty-bourgeois parties is a contemptuous disregard for history. They are aware that a review of great historical experiences would disrupt their opportunist and reactionary politics. But without a thoroughgoing knowledge of the history of revolutionary struggles, it is not possible to comprehend the present world situation and to develop a strategy for socialist revolution in the twenty-first century.

The twentieth century can be legitimately described as the Age of Permanent Revolution. This is appropriate as both a definition of the objective social logic of the great revolutionary upheavals of the last century and as the central theoretical and strategic issue underlying all the political struggles over revolutionary strategy in the international workers' movement. In an essay recalling his encounters with Trotsky during the hearings of the Dewey Commission in April 1937 in Coyóacan, on the outskirts of Mexico City, the American novelist James T. Farrell described the great revolutionary as "a man of history in the sense that most of us are not, and

cannot be." This description—or, more correctly, definition—of Trotsky contained a profound insight.

In what sense was Trotsky "a man of history"? Of course, he was a major figure in many of the greatest events of the twentieth century. Trotsky was the principal strategist and organizer of the 1917 October Revolution that brought the Bolshevik Party to power and led to the establishment of the Soviet Union, the first workers' state in history. He became in 1918 the commander of the Red Army, which he led to victory over the forces of counterrevolution in the course of a three-year-long civil war. In 1923, Trotsky initiated the political struggle within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that led first to the formation of the Left Opposition and, later, to the Fourth International. Trotsky was, without question, one of the towering figures of the last century. I would argue that he was the greatest political figure of the twentieth century, and that his influence on history will prove to be the most enduring. The new mass socialist movement of the working class that will develop in this century will be based, to a great extent, on the theoretical and political conceptions of Leon Trotsky.

But when Farrell defined Trotsky as a "man of history," I think he meant more than that Trotsky was a major historical figure. He was, rather, speaking of the relation of history to Trotsky himself; of the place of history in Trotsky's thought and actions, and even in the constitution of his personality. Trotsky, of course, made history; but, in so doing, he lived with an extraordinary degree of self-conscious awareness of the place and significance of his activity—and that of his comrades and the revolutionary workers' movement to which he was utterly devoted—in a vast historical process of social transformation. Like an astronomer who looks up at the evening sky, knowing that his own planet occupies a place within the immense galaxy that he is observing, Trotsky was intensely aware of the broader historical continuum, spanning decades and even centuries, within which the work of the revolutionary socialist movement unfolded.

History lived in Trotsky. Judging from his writings, I believe that he almost felt as if he *had been* in Paris in 1793, in 1848 and in 1871. His reading of history was not passive. In his mind he debated with Danton and Robespierre as if they were contemporaries. It is true, as Lunacharsky noted, that Trotsky observed his own actions in the mirror of history. But there was not a trace of subjectivism or self-aggrandizement in his historically oriented self-consciousness. Passionately engaged in the struggles of his time, he continuously related contemporary developments to historical experiences. Moreover, Trotsky sought to understand the impact and implications of the program and policies for which he fought on the future evolution of the revolutionary struggle. As he stated upon the founding of the Fourth International, a revolutionist "carries on his shoulders a particle of the fate of mankind." It was this unceasing dynamic interaction in his thought of the present, past and future that made Trotsky a "man of history."

But it must be said that Trotsky was part of a generation of revolutionaries for whom the endless reworking of historical experience was an essential component of theoretical and political work.

With the recent publication of *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution*, the valuable collection of documents assembled and translated by historians Richard Day and Daniel Gaido, we are able to understand more completely the evolution of revolutionary Marxist thought that led to Trotsky's analysis of the driving forces of the Russian Revolution and his conclusion, more than a decade before the victory of the Bolsheviks, that the overthrow of the Russian autocracy would lead, more or less directly, to the seizure of power by the working class in a socialist revolution. The volume contains important essays, not only by Trotsky, but also by Plekhanov, Ryazanov, Mehring, Luxemburg, Parvus and Kautsky. These documents contribute to a deeper understanding of the development of the most advanced and comprehensive formulation of the Theory of Permanent Revolution—that developed by Trotsky in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution.

Among the most striking features of these essays is the manner in which they seek to relate their analysis of the unfolding Russian Revolution, in the early years of the first decade of the twentieth century, to the antecedent revolutionary events—the Great French Revolution of 1789-94, the Revolutions of 1848, and the Paris Commune of 1871. Of course, to the generation that was to pass through the experience of 1905, neither the Paris Commune nor the Revolutions of 1848 belonged to an all that distant past. In terms of time span, the Paris Commune was no more distant to the year 1905 than 1977—the year of Tom Henehan's assassination—is to today. And even 1848 was not particularly remote. Only 57 years separated the revolutionary upheavals of that *annus mirabilis* ("Year of Wonders") from 1905. A similar stretch of time would take us back no further than the early years of the Eisenhower administration. In the European socialist movement at the turn of the twentieth century, there remained not only veterans of the Paris Commune, but also participants in the Revolution of 1848. Wilhelm Liebknecht, Bebel's older co-founder of the Social Democratic Party of Germany and a participant in the struggles of 1848, lived until 1900. Adolf Sorge, the close friend of Marx and Engels who participated in the Baden uprising in Germany, lived until 1906.

Of course, the veterans of the French Revolution of 1789-94 had long before departed from the scene. But the impact of that event—economic, social, political and ideological—was so immense that its shadow still loomed over Europe (and looms to this day!). Certainly, in a political sense, the modern world was forged in the Great French Revolution. All of the great struggles of that titanic event, which its participants fought with such passion, prepared the ground for, and anticipated, the revolutionary struggles of the future. It was in the cauldron of that revolution that even the essential terminology of modern social struggles emerged. The advocates of radical social change—the so-called "Mountain"—sat to the left of the presiding officer in the Estates General; the conservatives and reactionaries sat on the right. But in addition to the terms "left" and "right," the phrase "permanent revolution" owes its origin to the French Revolution. As pointed out by Richard Day and Daniel Gaido in their introduction to *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution*, the concept of " *revolution en permanence* " derived from the famous oath, taken on a Versailles tennis court by representatives of the Third Estate in June 1789,

which pledged that the National Assembly would exist, wherever its members were assembled, regardless of attempts by the monarch to dissolve it. In other words, the National Assembly of the Third Estate declared its permanence!

More important than its contribution to the terminology of modern politics, the French Revolution destroyed the social and economic foundations of feudalism, cleared a path for the establishment of a bourgeois state and the development of capitalism that led, inevitably, to the emergence of the working class and the class struggle in its modern form. Indeed, it was in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Jacobin dictatorship in July 1794 that the first premonition of the revolutions of the future found expression—in the "Conspiracy of Equals" led by Gracchus Babeuf, which was the first attempt to realize social equality through conscious revolutionary action.

This is not a subject that can be addressed adequately in this lecture, but one must note that the Revolution not only led to the socio-economic transformation of France; it provided the impulse for an enormous advance toward a scientific understanding of the objective driving forces of historical development, from which Marxism eventually emerged. After the French Revolution, the immense significance of material interests, property and class conflict in the background of political life became increasingly clear to the more advanced thinkers.

At any rate, the impact of economic changes, including industrialization, led to new forms of social conflict that transformed the premonitions of revolution into something far more substantial. As early as 1806, a strike by building workers took place in Paris. In 1817, hat-makers in Lyons went on strike to protest the lowering of wages. There were significant strikes by Parisian artisans and manufactory workers between 1825 and 1827. In 1830 popular protests in Paris led to the fall of King Charles X. However, the beneficiaries of this "Revolution" were the financiers. The conditions of the developing working class, especially weavers, deteriorated. Taxes on the common people were raised and wages lowered. The growing anger finally exploded in November 1831 in the form of an armed uprising by the workers of Lyons. For several days, government soldiers were driven out of the city. Even though the government was able, after several days, to reestablish control, the bourgeoisie was traumatized by the emergence of class struggle, arising from the resistance of a newly formed proletariat, which threatened capitalist property interests.

The regime that ruled in France was a bourgeois monarchy, presided over by Louis Philippe, whose official title was King of the French—a veiled acknowledgment that the French Revolution and the decapitation of Louis XVI, and later removal of his younger brother, Charles X, had not been entirely in vain. Louis Philippe's father, the ill-fated Philippe Egalité, was a cousin of Louis XVI who broke with the royal family during the Revolution and actually voted for the king's execution. However, this did not save him from suspicions that he was, or might become, an instrument of royalist counterrevolution, and Philippe Egalité was guillotined in

November 1793. At any rate, his son eventually ascended to the monarchy, but under political and social conditions vastly different to those that had existed prior to 1793.

Louis Philippe sought to emphasize the bourgeois character of his regime by wearing a frock coat and sporting an umbrella. But his "bourgeois" regime served faithfully the interests of only one section of the bourgeoisie, the powerful financial elite. This left other sections of the bourgeoisie, particularly those connected with industry and manufacturing, dissatisfied with the state of affairs. The corruption of the financial elite knew no bounds, to the extent that it undermined the industrial development of France. There exists no greater description of French society under Louis Philippe than that provided by Karl Marx in *The Class Struggles in France* :

Since the finance aristocracy made the laws, was at the head of the administration of the state, had command of all the organized public authorities, dominated public opinion through the actual state of affairs and through the press, the same prostitution, the same shameless cheating, the same mania to get rich was repeated in every sphere, from the Court to the Café Borgne, to get rich not by production, but by pocketing the already available wealth of others. Clashing every moment with the bourgeois laws themselves, an unbridled assertion of unhealthy and dissolute appetites manifested itself, particularly at the top of bourgeois society—lusts wherein wealth derived from gambling naturally seeks its satisfaction, where money, filth and blood commingle. The finance aristocracy, in its mode of acquisition as well as in its pleasures, is nothing but the *rebirth of the lumpenproletariat on the heights of bourgeois society* ." [Marx and Engels *Collected Works*, vol. 11, pp. 50-51]

But beyond the Court and the Bourse, opposition was steadily building to the existing regime, not only in France but throughout Europe. Since the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815, political reaction had prevailed throughout the continent. The architect of the system of reaction was the Austrian nobleman, Prince Metternich. A critic told Metternich that his means of preserving the status quo "consist of a forest of bayonets and fixed adherence to things as they are. To my mind, by following these lines we are playing into the hands of the revolutionaries." [ *1848: Year of Revolution*, by Mike Rapport (New York, 2008), p. 13] But Metternich knew of no other means to defend a decayed and dying social order.

In historical retrospect, the signs of an approaching revolution were everywhere. In May 1839 the "Society of Seasons," with 900 members led by August Blanqui and Armand Barbès, attempted an insurrection in Paris. They managed to seize the Town Hall and proclaim a provisional government. But the uprising that they had hoped to inspire failed to materialize. Its leaders were captured and sent to prison. But more enduring in their impact than these early experiments in direct action by small numbers of committed militants was the intellectual revolution in the sphere of economic theory and philosophy. Mention should be made in particular of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's 1840 book, whose title posed the question "What Is Property?" To which he gave the succinct and provocative answer: "Property is Theft."

Another path-breaking work was a lengthy essay entitled *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, written in 1843, which began by noting that "Political economy came into being as a natural result of the expansion of trade, and with its appearance elementary, unscientific huckstering was replaced by a developed system of licensed fraud, an entire science of enrichment." [Marx and Engels CW, vol. 3, p. 418] Its author was the 23-year-old Friedrich Engels. He was soon to write an even greater work, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* .

But the most important of the intellectual developments of the 1840s occurred in the sphere of philosophy, where the critique of the idealist philosophy of Hegel by the young Karl Marx initiated a revolution in thought that would, in time, provide the intellectual substance for the mass revolutionary movement of the international working class. As his own writings show, Marx was aware, at a very early stage of his work, of the explosive implications of his abstract theoretical labors. "The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force," he wrote in early 1844, "but theory, also, becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses." [Volume 3, p. 182] Marx further declared, a few pages later, "The *emancipation of the German* is the *emancipation of the Human being*. The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy,* its *heart* is the *proletariat* ." [187]

By 1845 Marx and Engels had developed the materialist conception of history, which established that revolutions are not the product of well-organized conspiracies carried out by determined leaders and their followers. They are the necessary outcome of a complex socioeconomic process, in which the development of the productive forces comes into irrepressible conflict with the existing social relations within which they had heretofore developed. Thus, the source of revolution was to be found not in the movement of ideas, but in the socioeconomic organization of society, conditioned by a certain level of the development of the productive forces. The contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the existing social relationships finds political expression in the class struggle, which in modern society assumes the principal form of the conflict between the bourgeoisie, which owns the means of production, and the proletariat, the working class, which possesses only its ability to work.

In 1847, Marx and Engels joined the League for the Just, which soon became the Communist League. They were assigned by the League to write a program in late 1847, in the form of a Manifesto, which, as we all know, came to exercise a not inconsiderable influence on the course of world history.

By the time the *Communist Manifesto* was published, Europe was on the verge of a political explosion. Independent of the labor of socialist theoreticians, capitalism was in the throes of a major economic crisis that had a devastating impact on broad sections of the working population. The years 1846-47 witnessed human suffering on a scale greater than during any previous period in the nineteenth century. The economic crisis was compounded by a crop failure that produced

widespread famine. In Ireland more than 21,000 people died of starvation, and hundreds of thousands fell victim to such diseases as typhus and cholera. People were reduced to living off the carcasses of dead animals. In Belgium, 700,000 people lived on public relief, and there were thousands more who were dependent on charity. In Berlin and Vienna the desperate conditions led to clashes between the people and the armed authorities. In France, bread prices rose dramatically and those of potatoes doubled. The unemployment rate skyrocketed.

The popular unrest in France intensified political tensions between the regime of Louis Philippe and a growing opposition movement consisting of various bourgeois political tendencies, including liberals who resented the dictatorship of financial interests and the exclusion of industrial interests from positions of power, and more democratic tendencies that favored, with greater or lesser degrees of fervor, the formation of a republic. Among the better-known and more radical representatives of these tendencies was Alexandre-Auguste Ledru-Rollin (1807-1874), who acquired, due to the ferocity of his oratorical attacks on the regime prior to 1848, support among French workers. He founded a newspaper, *La Réforme*, which developed a substantial readership. Another figure with a large popular following was Louis Blanc (1811-1882), who was known as a socialist—though his concept of socialism reflected the influence of utopian thinkers such as Robert Owen, Saint-Simon and Étienne Cabet. He believed that progress flowed naturally from the perfectibility of man. Socialism would be achieved not through violent revolution, which he opposed, but through the impeccable logic and persuasive power of his oratory. Prior to the outbreak of revolution, Blanc met from time to time with Engels, who found it difficult to take him and his hodge-podge of ideas entirely seriously. For example, in a letter to Marx in March 1847, Engels makes the following comment about Blanc's *History of the French Revolution*: "A wild mixture of correct hunches and unbounded craziness. I only read half of the first volume ... It makes a curious impression. Hardly has he surprised one with some nice observation when he falls head over heels into the most dreadful lunacy." [CW , vol. 38, p. 115]

During the autumn and winter of 1847-48, bourgeois oppositional tendencies organized what were called "banquets"—an early form of $10 a plate dinners--to attract popular support. Prices were steadily lowered to increase attendance. The radical Ledru-Rollin and socialist Louis Blanc organized their own joint banquets to attract broader middle class and working class participation. The wealthy and conservative bourgeois opposition was not altogether comfortable with the banquet campaign. They did not relish the prospect of an open clash with the regime of Louis Philippe, and they especially feared that the banquets were encouraging, against their better sense, mass struggles outside the control of the propertied interests. Adolph Thiers, who would eventually go down in history as the implacable enemy of the Paris Commune, warned that he sensed the presence of the red flag of revolution under the tablecloths of the banquet tables! The bourgeoisie, even as it urged one or another form of democratic reform, feared the intervention of the working class into political struggle.

This fear within sections of the bourgeoisie was an expression of the profound changes in the structure of French (and, more broadly, European) society since the Great Revolution of 1789-94. When the representatives of the Third Estate assembled in Versailles in 1789, the class divisions within the popular opposition to the feudal regime remained undeveloped. In its confrontation with Louis XVI, the bourgeoisie did not have to contend with the specter of a socialist opposition based on the working class—an opposition that threatened not only feudal property, but capitalist property as well. This enabled the bourgeoisie to adopt a far more determined revolutionary attitude toward the Old Regime in the 1790s than it would a half-century later. However, it must be noted that the extreme radicalism of the Great Revolution was derived not from the bourgeoisie—which generally sought to work out a political compromise with Louis XVI—but, rather, from the mass of the urban population, the so-called *sans culottes*, from whom the Jacobin leaders obtained their principal support. It was their repeated insurrectionary uprisings that drove the Revolution further and further to the left.

By 1848, as we have discussed, the political conflict between the bourgeois opposition and the regime of Louis Philippe was immensely complicated by the emergence of the working class. This change in French and European society would prove to be of decisive significance in the Revolutions of 1848. Even though the bourgeois liberals found themselves in opposition to the existing regimes, the depth of their opposition and of their commitment to democracy was circumscribed by their greater fear of the socialist aspirations of the working class. These contradictions—between the democratic pretensions of the bourgeoisie and their material interests, between a bourgeoisie committed to the defense of capitalist property and a working class without property determined the outcome of the Revolutions of 1848.

The political crisis of the regime of Louis Philippe had been long in the making. De Tocqueville issued a prescient warning in January 1848 that the regime was courting revolution. However, few could have imagined that it would take only three days of insurrectionary violence to bring about the collapse of the whole rotten structure. The King himself brushed off de Tocqueville's warning with a flippant jest: "The Parisians won't start a revolution in winter," he said. "They storm things in hot weather. They stormed the Bastille in July, the Bourbon throne in June. But in January and February, no." [Quoted in *Karl Marx: Man and Fighter*, by Boris Nicolaevsky and Otto Maenchen-Helfen (Penguin Books, 1973), p. 149]

The trouble began with the government's attempt to prevent the holding of a huge opposition banquet, which was scheduled to take place on February 22, 1848. Prices had been cut to attract a large turnout. The government then retreated, and agreed that the banquet could be held in a wealthy neighborhood near the Champs Elysées, but on the condition that it disband itself almost immediately. Many of the bourgeois organizers were willing to accept this humiliating condition, not simply because they feared the regime, but also because they were fearful of stirring huge crowds into action. However, Ledru-Rollins and his supporters in the *Réforme* group refused to back down. They issued a call to Parisians, urging them to assemble at the *Place de la Madelaine*

on the morning of February 22 and march *en masse* up the Champ Elysées to the banquet venue. This appeal was opposed by virtually all the newspapers identified with the bourgeois opposition, which regarded the entire enterprise as an adventure that would lead to a clash with the regime and end in a bloody rout of the protesters.

A confrontation did take place. Unruly crowds overturned omnibuses and destroyed street lamps. But the police and National Guard seemed capable of handling the situation. On the evening of the 22nd, Louis Philippe was confident that the situation was under control. But the crowds were even larger the next day. There were growing signs of mutiny in the National Guard, especially within the regiments from poorer districts. Then, on the evening of February 23rd, the workers of Paris went into revolt. They gathered more than eight million paving stones and cut down more than 400,000 trees. By the morning of February 24, approximately 1500 barricades had been erected all over the city. Louis Philippe had hoped that he could contain the protests by dismissing his prime minister, Francois Guizot. But the gesture came too late. Surveying the situation in Paris, and recalling the fate of his illustrious family in the last revolution, Louis Philippe abdicated and fled the country. The revolution had been victorious, and it had cost less than 500 lives!

But who and what would take the place of the deposed monarch? The bourgeoisie and the better off sections of the middle class were not entirely certain that they welcomed victory. The bourgeois opposition had sought to apply pressure on Louis Philippe and compel him to grant some sort of electoral reform. But now they had a revolution on their hands, with the expectations and aspirations of masses of workers aroused by their successful overthrow of Louis Philippe. Most of the well-established representatives of the liberal bourgeois opposition were shocked and confused by the rapid turn of events. One of the few who managed to retain his political equilibrium was Alphonse de Lamartine, a well-known Romantic poet, who made use of his literary skills to express, with exalted rhetoric, the prosaic and egotistical aspirations of the French bourgeoisie. The early stages of every revolution witness the ascendancy of such figures, masters of grandiloquent rhetoric that lend to banal platitudes an air of profundity. Seventy years later, that role would be played in the Russian Revolution by Alexander Kerensky. In the immediate aftermath of the abdication and flight of Louis Philippe, and amidst great confusion and under immense pressure from the populace, Lamartine proclaimed, from a balcony of the Hôtel de Ville, the establishment of the Second Republic. Lamartine actually opposed the proclamation of a republic. But the Parisian masses, who were well aware that they had gained nothing from the overthrow of Charles X in 1830, were determined not to be cheated again of the fruits of victory.

The new Provisional Government, which was to hold power pending elections, consisted almost entirely of conservative representatives of the bourgeoisie. The only figure with a radical identity was Alexandre Ledru-Rollins. Louis Blanc demanded that Ledru-Rollins be included in the

government, but only managed to secure the appointment of himself and a worker, known as Albert, as secretaries of the Provisional Government.

For the bourgeoisie, the new Republic was, essentially, a political structure that would continue to defend its class interests. But the working class demanded that the government assume the characteristics of a *Social Republic* that would restructure society in the interests of the working people. At first, the Provisional Government sought to encourage hope—or, as it turned out, illusions—that the new Republic would strive to improve the conditions of the working people. On February 25, the new government pledged "to guarantee a living wage for the workers. It pledges itself to guarantee every man the right to work." This announcement was greeted with enthusiasm. Proudhon wrote: "What are you called, Revolution of 1848?" The answer? "My name is the Right to Work." A week later, on March 2, the government enacted another law that established a 10-hour workday in Paris and eleven hours in the rest of the country. Still another law abolished "sweated labor," which was the widespread practice in which a labor contractor would accept a job at an agreed upon price and then hire laborers on a temporary basis to do the actual work at a much lower wage. The contractor realized, thereby, an exorbitant profit off the labor of others. As we can see, 175 ago, a practice that has now become a widespread method of doing business, and, indeed, has led to the establishment of innumerable profitable businesses known as "temp agencies," was considered intolerable.

These reform measures were very popular, but, as it soon emerged, the Provisional Government established no effective means of enforcing them. Louis Blanc had originally called for the establishment of a Ministry of Labor and Progress. This was rejected by the Provisional Government. Instead, as a compromise, it created a Commission of Labor, which met in the Luxembourg Palace (hence the name by which it was commonly known, the Luxembourg Commission) under the direction of Louis Blanc. It possessed only the authority to investigate and consult on the condition of labor. As weeks passed, the workers became increasingly frustrated with the impotence of the Commission.

It was the issue of jobs that emerged as a central source of conflict between the Provisional Government and the workers. Louis Blanc had urged the creation of "Social Workshops" that he originally conceived as a sort of cooperative structure that would provide meaningful jobs. The National Workshops provided nothing really but useless "make work," if anything at all. They paid a minimum wage of two francs daily for make work when it was available, or 1.5 francs when there was no work. While failing to address the problem of jobs in a manner that satisfied the workers, the scheme was unpopular outside Paris, particularly among the vast rural population, which came to believe that its taxes were subsidizing the idleness of Parisian workers. This, as weeks passed, played into the hands of reactionary bourgeois politicians, who were seeking to incite the rural masses against the urban working class.

As the first flush of enthusiasm faded, the political situation turned more and more against the workers. Lamartine and other bourgeois politicians, who had been terrified by the social forces released by the February Revolution, schemed incessantly against the workers. As one historian has written, Lamartine (the bourgeois leader):

had plunged into the first battles with a mixture of confidence and amateurishness, but it was not long before he began to regard the poor, wretched proletariat as a serious enemy, and directed his efforts more to charming than to convincing it. … He acquired a horror of the masses … [ *1848: The Making of a Revolution*, by Georges Duveau (New York: 1967), p. 85]

Initially, the workers had looked toward elections as a means of securing sympathetic representation in the national assembly. However, they soon realized that if the elections were held too soon, before the revolution had time to influence the consciousness of the rural masses, the results would be highly unfavorable. The bourgeoisie made the same calculation, and it came to the conclusion that the elections should be held as soon as possible. A mass demonstration was held by workers on March 17, with the aim of pressuring the Provisional Government to delay the elections. They only secured the agreement of the Provisional Government for a delay of two weeks. And when they were held, the elections produced, as the workers had feared, an overwhelmingly conservative result. The mass of peasants who went to the polls on April 23 voted largely as they were instructed to do by local dignitaries and priests.

The political climate turned sharply to the right. The mood of the bourgeoisie, angered by the demands of the workers and their socialist slogans, was captured by Gustave Flaubert in his novel, *Sentimental Education* .

Arnoux was trying to prove that there were two sorts of Socialism, a good and a bad. The industrialist could not see any difference between them, for the word ‘property’ sent him into a fury of indignation.

‘It’s a right consecrated by Nature. Children cling to their toys; every people, every animal on earth shares my opinion; the lion itself, if it had the power of speech, would call itself a landowner! Take my case, gentlemen: I started with a capital of fifteen thousand francs. Well, you know, I got up regularly at four o’clock in the morning every day for thirty years! I had the very devil of a job to make my fortune. And now they come and tell me that I can’t do what I like with it, that my money isn’t my money, that property is theft!’

‘But Proudhon…’

‘Oh, don’t talk to me about Proudhon! If he were here I think I’d strangle him!’

He would indeed have strangled him. After the liqueurs especially, there was no holding Fumichon; and his apoplectic face looked as if it were on the point of exploding like an artillery shell.

The newly elected National Assembly set out to provoke the workers with ever more hostile measures. The National Workshops became the focus of rightwing agitation. All the economic problems confronting France, the public was led to believe, were caused by the National Workshops and the pandering to workers' demands. By June, the phrase "This can't go on" was on the lips of countless capitalists and petty bourgeois. The government prepared for a showdown with the workers. Lamartine's confidence that he could deal with the workers had been fortified by the assurances of Ledru-Rollin that he would stand on the side of the government in a confrontation with the working class.

On June 21, the Government announced that workers between the ages of 18 and 25 who were in the National Workshops would be compelled to join the army. Other workers, who had been resident in Paris for less than six months, were to be dropped from the rolls of the National Workshops and sent out of the city. These measures threatened the workers with starvation. On June 23, open hostilities erupted in Paris. Barricades were set up all over the city, much of which fell under the control of the insurgents. The fighters lacked any sort of clearly articulated socialist perspective. They were driven to struggle by the desperation of their situation. The battle raged for four days. The National Guard, with recruits drawn from all parts of France, and who were brought to the city by train, was under the command of General Cavaignac. He was a supporter of the Republic, who did not consider himself a reactionary. But he did not flinch from turning his artillery on the barricades. Nearly five hundred insurgents were killed in the fighting. As many as 1000 National Guardsmen fell in the battle. But the worst came after the insurrection had been suppressed. The insurgents were hunted down and as many as 3000 were slaughtered in cold blood. Another 12,000 people were arrested, and many hundreds of them were eventually deported to labor camps in Algeria.

Alexander Herzen, one of the early Russian socialists, who observed the carnage in Paris, wrote of the events in June: "Murder in those days became a duty; the man who had not dipped his hands in proletarian blood became suspect in the eyes of the bourgeoisie." He later added: "Moments like this make one hate for a whole decade, seek revenge all one's life. *Woe to those who forgive such moments* ."

The terrible June Days exposed the real state of social relations in the era of capitalism, and the class struggle between bourgeois and worker. The events of 1848 in France revealed the brutal reality of class conflict that lay concealed behind the fine bourgeois slogans of democracy, republic and liberty. As Herzen, examining the social psychology of the bourgeois liberals, wrote in 1849:

For a long time the liberals played happily with the idea of revolution, and the end of their play was February 24th. The popular hurricane swept them up to the top of a high steeple from which they could see where they were going and where they were leading others. Glancing down at the abyss that opened before their eyes, they grew pale. They saw that what was crumbling was not only what they had considered prejudice, but also everything else—what they considered true and eternal. They were so terrified that some clutched at the falling walls, while others stopped half-way, repentant, and began to swear to all passers-by that this was not at all what they had wanted. This is why the men who proclaimed the republic became the assassins of freedom; this is why the liberal names that had resounded in our ears for a score of years or so, are today those of reactionary deputies, traitors, inquisitors. They want freedom and even a republic provided that it is confined to their own cultivated circle. …

Since the Restoration, liberals in all countries have called the people to the destruction of the monarchic and feudal order, in the name of equality, of the tears of the unfortunate, of the suffering of the oppressed, of the hunger of the poor. They have enjoyed hounding down various ministers with a series of impossible demands; they rejoiced when one feudal prop collapsed after another, and in the end became so excited that they outstripped their own desires. They came to their senses when, from behind the half-demolished walls, there emerged the proletarian, the worker with his axe and his blackened hands, hungry and half-naked in rage—not as he appears in books or in parliamentary chatter or in philanthropic verbiage, but in reality. This 'unfortunate brother' about whom so much has been said, on whom so much pity has been lavished, finally asked about what was to be his share in all these blessings, where were *his* freedom, *his* equality , *his* fraternity? The liberals were aghast at the impudence and ingratitude of the worker. They took the streets of Paris by assault, they littered them with corpses, and then they hid from their *brother* behind the bayonets of martial law in their effort to save *civilization and order* ! [ *From the Other Shore*, (London: 1956), pp. 59-60)]

For Marx, the crushing of the working class in Paris was an event of world historical significance. This confrontation between the two great classes in modern society arose from the irreconcilable character of their interests. The *social republic* was a fantasy. "The bourgeoisie had to refute, arms in hand, the demands of the proletariat," Marx wrote. "And the real birthplace of the bourgeois republic is not the *February victory*; it is the *June defeat* ." [CW, vol. 10, p. 67] The demands of the working class had forced the bourgeois republic, Marx continued "to come out forthwith in its pure form as the state whose admitted object it is to perpetuate the rule of capital, the slavery of labor. Having constantly before its eyes the scarred, irreconcilable, invincible enemy—invincible because his existence is the condition of its own life—bourgeois rule, freed from all fetters, was bound to turn into *bourgeois terrorism* ." [Ibid, p. 69]

The events in France marked a great historical turning point. Before February 1848, revolution had simply meant the overthrow of the form of government. But after June, Marx declared, revolution meant the "overthrow of bourgeois society." [Ibid, p. 71]

The Revolution in France would have provided sufficient political drama for any normal year. But 1848 was anything but normal. The February Revolution electrified restive populations throughout Europe, and set into motion an unprecedented wave of mass struggles—in Italy, Germany, Austria and Hungary. There was also significant unrest in Switzerland, Denmark, Rumania, Poland and Ireland. Even in England, the bastion of bourgeois rule, the radical movement of the Chartists reached its climax.

All of these struggles are of great historical significance, and their outcomes were to have far-reaching consequences for the political and social evolution of Europe. But, from the standpoint of the origins and development of the Theory of Permanent Revolution, the events in Germany are of the greatest significance.

For reasons of time, it is possible to present today nothing more than the briefest of outlines of the German Revolution. The February Revolution in Paris undoubtedly provided the political and moral impulse for the March uprising in Berlin, which, let us briefly note, occurred only a few days after an uprising in Vienna. The Hohenzollern dynasty in Prussia was deeply shaken. If the pattern of the Great French Revolution of 1789-94 were to be followed, the German bourgeoisie would prosecute its struggle against the dynastic regime to carry out the essential tasks of its *bourgeois* revolution: the overthrow of the monarchy and all the political remnants of feudalism, the liquidation of the old principalities and unification of the German people in a large national state; and the establishment of a democratic republic.

But, as it turned out, the German bourgeoisie proved incapable and unwilling to carry out any of these tasks. The story of 1848 in Germany was the betrayal of the bourgeois revolution by the German bourgeoisie. What underlay this betrayal? A noted historian, William Langer, has written:

Marx and Engels, reflecting on the German situation in January 1848, asked themselves whether the bourgeoisie of any country had ever been in a more splendid position to carry on its struggle against the existing government. They were referring, of course, to the widespread distress and unrest and to the apparent failure of the liberals to take advantage of their opportunity. But these liberals—progressive officials, the upper stratum of the intellectuals and professional man, and especially the new business class—were as reluctant in Germany as they were elsewhere to provoke revolution. Remembering the excesses of the 1793 Terror in France, they dreaded a major upheaval almost as much as did the princes and the aristocrats. [ *The Rise of Modern Europe: Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852*, by William L. Langer (New York: 1969), p. 387]

It was not only the example of the events of 1793-94 that terrified the German bourgeoisie. The contemporary developments in France raised all too clearly the specter of a socialist revolution, which threatened capitalist property and the foundations of bourgeois rule. All the actions of the political representatives of the German bourgeoisie, as well as the more radical representatives of

the German petty bourgeoisie, were constrained by their fear of the proletariat. A determined struggle against all the remnants of feudalism in the economy and political structure, directed toward the national unification of the German states on a democratic basis, would have required the revolutionary mobilization by the bourgeoisie of the working class and peasantry. But, given the development of capitalism and an industrial working class during the previous half-century, such a mobilization posed too great a danger to the bourgeoisie's class interests. It preferred to seek a compromise with the aristocracy at the expense of the working class.

The epitome of bourgeois liberal cowardice was the Frankfurt Parliament, which met in the Church of St. Paul. Its delegates—consisting of innumerable professors and lawyers—talked endlessly and accomplished nothing of significance. The Parliament willingly surrendered the initiative to the Prussian aristocracy and rejected the utilization of revolutionary measures to achieve the unification of Germany. It left this task to the reactionary Prussian regime, which later carried it out under the leadership of Bismarck.

In the bourgeois betrayal of its "own" bourgeois revolution, Marx and Engels excoriated the role played by the left-talking petty-bourgeois radicals, who, at every critical point in the struggle, turned against the working class. Engels characterized their role in the events of 1848-49 with unsparing accuracy:

The history of all political movements since 1830 in Germany, as in France and England, shows that this class is invariably full of bluster and loud protestations, at times even extreme as far as talking goes, as long as it perceives no danger; faint-hearted, cautious and calculating as soon as the slightest danger approaches; aghast, alarmed and wavering as soon as the movement it provoked is seized upon and taken up seriously by other classes; treacherous to the whole movement for the sake of its petty-bourgeois existence as soon as there is any question of a struggle with weapons in hand—and in the end, as a result of its indecisiveness, more often than not cheated and ill-treated as soon as the reactionary side has achieved victory. [CW, vol. 10, p. 150]

In March 1850, Marx and Engels summed up the political lessons of the 1848 Revolution in a document known as the *Address to the Central Authority of the League*. This extraordinary document sought to establish, on the basis of the revolutionary experiences of the previous two years, the independent interests and historic role of the working class in the democratic revolution. Marx and Engels insisted that the working class must, under all conditions, maintain its political independence from not only the bourgeois parties, but also the parties and organizations of the democratic petty bourgeoisie. They stressed the underlying social conflict that placed the working class at odds with the middle class democrats:

Far from desiring to transform the whole of society for the revolutionary proletarians, the democratic petty bourgeois strive for a change in social conditions by means of which the existing society will be made as tolerable and comfortable as possible for them. …

… While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible … it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. [CW, vol. 10, pp. 280-81]

Marx and Engels concluded their address with the declaration that the battle cry of the proletariat must be "The Revolution in Permanence." [Ibid, p. 287]

More than a half-century later, the experiences and lessons of 1848 would be analyzed and reworked by the great theoreticians of the Russian Social Democratic Party and the Second International, as they sought to understand the political dynamics and historical tasks of the Russian Revolution.