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Preface to “Socialist Documents”

Charles Malato

1904

You have invited me, dear comrade, to add a few lines to the documentary work you’ve just finished. I do it gladly, although this work can do very well without any comments, remarks or prefaces because you let the socialists speak for themselves in their different times and it’s up to the reader to draw conclusions.

Yes, it’s true that, like every living thing, socialism has suffered its evolution, that it is no longer the heroic epic begun by Babeuf and Darthé nor the pure, wonderful, harmonic dream of Fourier. In the fierce battle of ambitions and desires that fills up our governmental and capitalist world, it has become the label of a new party that, after the conservatives, after the opportunists, after the moderates, is trying in its turn to come to power. So now, goodbye to the final speeches on social transformation! The Neo-Rulers, with hearty appetites because they waited so long, would divide up the lucrative offices and create new ones at the expense of the workers with a gusto recalling the famous minister scene in ‘Ruy Blas’ [by Victor Hugo, 1838].

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“Temps Nouveux”, 1904, translated by Michael Shreve

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This transformation of a party of the people into a party of the government, i.e. of authority and exploitation, has been shown to us in history time and time again. It's Christianity, born of the great revolts of the oppressed at the heart of Roman society and which, diverted from its original path by ambition or opportunism, little by little blanketed with the futile subtleties of Greek philosophy and Oriental superstitions, becomes the most tyrannical of religions. It's the 15th century reform that once the Anabaptists and Zwinglians — i.e. the revolutionaries — conquered, ended up in the sectarian pietism of the Protestant churches. It's the republican ideal that, great and social with Marat, the Hébertists and the Enragés, whose wreckage is encountered again in the communist conspiracy of Babeuf, finally ends up, one development after another, in the consecration of a bourgeoisie oligarchy, leaving an enormous proletariat doomed to forced labor or to famine, in the midst of grandiloquent fictions and majestic democratic pretences.

Today, it's the socialist deviation. Anarchists, take care not to get sidetracked, tomorrow, in your turn!

This pamphlet comes at the right time, when the Congress of Amsterdam has brought to light the evolution of the head socialists who are most influential on bourgeoisie radicalism. This, too, for a quarter of a century has evolved towards opportunism: the Jaurès then were called Gambetta. Today is like yesterday; let not tomorrow be like today!

But Guesde who was a member of Parliament without bringing about the social revolution, Plekhanov who repudiated the heroic Russian terrorists, Iglesias who dared, during the great strike in Barcelona, to speak of being allied to the assassin police against the anarchist upstarts, are they qualified to condemn the 'Moderationism' of Jaurès? Are the German social-democrat chiefs qualified, those who slander the anarchist martyr Reinsdorf and after having declared, 'Negotiation is betrayal!' pile up the proofs of loyalism to the Kaiser, declaring in the end that its government was the best?

Are the Italian socialists qualified, whose party with Turati, already joined to the monarchy and directing their combative fervor against the anarchists, are ready to stuff their wallets?

At the sight of these regressive revolutions, of these deviations of individuals and parties there would be cause for discouragement and boundless pessimism, if we didn't figure that names and labels could lose their value, even come to mean the opposite of what they used to mean, but that the human tendency to well-being, liberty and the light of understanding remains indestructible, intimately bound to the very life of humanity.

The conclusion that we can draw from this is that if we want to realize our ideas, make these dazzling visions that are stirred up in our brain a reality, we have to act. For us to take refuge in a kind of absolute philosophy outside of real life without acting on its events would be suicide. For us, like the socialists, to commit to the parliamentary machinery that has emasculated or corrupted them would be another type of suicide.

Our role is to remain among the masses to stir them up, to act constantly, through propaganda of course, but even more through action, the very mother of ideas, only touch the masses to make them start thinking and moving. So that a social deed not be accomplished without us giving the word, let's multiply the campaigns against all the institutions that serve as a support to the present society. Neither flatterers nor enemies of the people, let's stay with the people to enlighten them and encourage them, expending ourselves for no other profit but the satisfaction of our minds and hearts. Like that we will head to revolution!