

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



The Commune Commemoration

At South Place

Freedom Press

April 1, 1891

Freedom Press
The Commune Commemoration
At South Place
April 1, 1891

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 5 – No. 43,
retrieved on August 29, 2019, from RevoltLib.com.
Freedom Press, London

theanarchistlibrary.org

If a densely crowded meeting and sustained enthusiasm are criteria of a successful meeting, the gathering at South Place Institute on the eighteenth of March, convened by the Anarchist groups of London, must be considered as preeminently successful. Moreover it was one of the most international meetings ever held in this or any other country, speeches being delivered in the English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Yiddish languages. Before the speaking began there was a brisk sale of Freedom, Die Autonomic, The Workers' Friend, Herald of Anarchy, Commonweal, Free Russia, The Anarchist Labor Leaf and other revolutionary and Anarchist papers. A very large number of the Dew pamphlet, "The Commune of Paris" was also disposed of, besides a good many copies of "Law and Authority," "The Wage, System," and other Communist and Anarchist pamphlets in English and German.

One of the most pleasing things about these commemoration meetings is the great number of old familiar faces one sees. Comrades whose life and work lies apart throughout the year gather

together on the occasion of such a meeting as this, and unite in keeping up the annual celebration. The South Place meeting was no exception to the general rule. Some of us noticed many old friends and comrades with whom it has been our pleasure to work for the cause of Socialism in the past and whom we had not seen since the last South Place meeting.

Of course, as is customary at Anarchist gatherings, we dispensed with the authority of the chair and the stupid practice of passing resolutions. The result was that the meeting was; throughout a striking example of the order which results from an absence of government, the only interruptions experienced by the speakers being the applause which greeted the voicing of the common hope for the future.

Speeches were made by J. Blackwell, E. Malatesta, R. Burnie, Trunk, Louise Michel, Prodi, Kropotkin, H. Davis, Yanovsky, and J. Turner.

J. Blackwell pointed out that the reason we celebrate the 18th of March is because we recognize that the people of Paris on that day acted as the advance guard of the army of the workers, and gave out the watchword of the future, setting to up who come after them the task of achieving the workers' liberty. They acted not only for Paris or for France but for every country, and therefore it was that thousands of similar meetings were being held that night in every part of the world to commemorate their victory of yesterday, and to herald our victory of to-morrow. The Eighteenth of March was a tremendous victory, not only for the workers, but for the Anarchist principle itself, because the people of Paris acted purely on their own individual initiative without any orders from above or preconcerted action. If this victory was not followed up, it was because the Parisians were still dominated by the prejudices of the old society and after destroying one government had foolishly erected another. The Eighteenth of March was a surprise not only to the government which was overthrown but to the workers who took-part in the insurrection. In the coming May Day -similar surprises

bly be the outcome if British troops were in the same position. The general idea was, that the English soldiers would be rather enemies of the people than anything else.

DUBLIN.-The Dublin Socialist Union held all anniversary meeting in commemoration of the Commune of Paris on Thursday, March 19th, at 87, Marlboro' Street. Addresses ,it the work of the Commune, its sacrifices, the reasons of its failure, were delivered by T. Fitzpatrick, O. Gorman, Hamilton, Wechsleder, and Nordbohm. The speech of Wechsleder was very impressive.

FRENCH ANARCHISTS AND THE CONSCRIPTION.

THE progress of our ideas among the conscripts and the army generally in France continues. In France, as in most continental countries, every young man of sound bodily health, has to draw lots to see

(TO BE CONTINUED)

might be in store for us. There would, in all probability, be enormous demonstrated in some places, and huge strikes commenced in others.. If the governments did not lose. their heads, probably all would pass over quietly, but it was very likely they would as on the Eighteenth of March commit some stupid act of Oppression which would rouse the wrath of the people, in which case they would be swept away as the middle-class government of Paris had been swept away twenty years ago,

E. Malatesta said that like all revolutionary movements the Commune, contained the germ of the future but this germ had been strangled by the nomination of a government. This government proclaimed territorial decentralization. Instead of One government in France there would have been 36,000, each of which would be based on the same authoritarian principle. From the Socialist point of view it did nothing. It protected property, and, if it had lasted longer, would have been compelled to act against the people like all other government,. Nevertheless the Commune had an immense significance. It was not ideas which caused acts but acts which caused ideas. In Italy the Socialist propaganda was started by Bakunin in 1864. He gathered around him about fifteen Socialists and they did not increase in number until the Commune of 187 1, but then, through that act, they began to count by thousands. We are a party of action and we must never forget it. If a great act takes place our number, increase rapidly. If not, the progress is but slow; indeed we are likely to lose ground. Another thing to be learned from the Commune is that we should give great attention to popular movement,- And tendencies. We cannot expect that the people will rise with a definite communist and anarchist program. A revolution never begins with a settled program. That of '89 began with cries of "Long live the King." So with regard to the great movement which is now being prepared. The people clamor for eight hours, but eight hours will never be realized, and because their demand is so small that is no reason why we should stand aloof. We must mix with the people and

show them how to expropriate and how to attack authority. If we are with the people and share their dangers, they will better understand our ideas and better realize them.

Burnie said that looking back over twenty years, what struck one first was the manner in which the Commune proving as it seemed a failure and quenched in blood, yet had in the highest sense succeeded, since that great act of propaganda had, like all propaganda by deed, made more Socialists than any amount of speaking and writing. It was perhaps well that it faded at the time, since those that made it, the Parisian people, were still unconscious of the real way to end their misery. Thanks to their unconscious teaching we were learning, all workers were learning. that that misery was only to be ended by, as our comrade Malatesta once expressed it, "putting property in common by a tumultuous Revolution." If in so doing, we used violence, we need not be so timid about the matter as the Communards. We should only use what violence was necessary to take the rich robber, from our throats. The time through which we were passing was like this month of March, gray, cold and bitter, made so by the robbers, yet summer, the glorious summer After the Revolution, was Surely coming. We might not all see it, but even if we died (if we had the courage) A the struggle, like our martyrs we should know we had not died in vain, but helped in the last and final Revolution which Would give place to the glorious Epoch of Rest.

Trunk expressed his gratification at the growth of Anarchist opinion, as expressed in the fact that this year, such an important and successful meeting had been organized by the Anarchist groups, whereas before. Commune celebrations in London had been held only by Socialists or Social Democrats. The Commune had taken place because the people of Paris felt a longing for freedom and although their attempt had been drowned in blood the ideas continued to progress. He hoped the next revolution would be free from the mistakes which they had made in guarding private property. We must tell the people that, whether they work

to take revenge upon the brutal capitalist-, under whose rule the Communard: were slain. The meeting closed with singing "The Marseillaise" and with three cheers for the Social Revolution. Much literature ,old, including three dozen of our new pamphlet.

A commemoration meeting was also held at the looms of the Socialist League, Grosvenor Street.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.-March 22nd, Comrade Kaper opened a discussion on the Paris Commune. The opening was a very interesting review of the Commune and the events which led up to it. Great interest was evinced by the asking of many questions afterwards.

NORWICH.-March 22nd, a large open-air morning meeting in Market Place was hold to commemorate "The Commune of Paris." Speakers, Sutton and Swash. Much literature was sold, and great enthusiasm shown by the audience. An evening commemoration was arranged, but, owing to the bad weather, was not so successful. It was addressed by C. Mowbray and others.

EDINBURGH.-March 17th. the Scottish' Socialist Federation celebrated the Paris Commune" in Labor Hall. A member of the Commune, Leo Melliet, was in the chair. Phillipe Lebeau, who had been transported for his share in the memorable event, was also present. Revolutionary speeches and songs, as usual.

THE BRISTOL SOCIALISTS celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the Paris Commune on 20th March, when an interesting lecture was given by Edward J. Watson, Fabian Society. J. Sharland, A.S.E., presided. The lecturer, after giving a graphic description of the revolt of the 18th March, dwelt upon the construction of the Commune and the acts performed by it. He did not believe the uprising was a failure, for we were now reaping some of the fruits from the seeds fertilized by the blood of the Communards. Mistakes no doubt were made, but education teaches us to avoid those pitfalls in the event of power being again seized by the proletariat. A spirited discussion followed, the point of dispute principally turning on the action of the noble French guards. and what would proba-

YARMOUTH.-March 15th.-There were commemorative meetings held morning and evening in the Gladstone Hall, and in the afternoon there was a large meeting on the Quay. The morning meeting was addressed by C. W. Mowbray, from London, whose revolutionary sentiments were received with loud applause. Some questions were asked after the address, and readily answered. Socialist songs were sung at the opening and close, accompanied by Comrade Harvey Moore on the piano. The out-door meeting was addressed by Harvey Moore, Comrade Poyntz, from Norwich, and some local comrades. These were also the speakers at the evening meeting, where revolutionary songs alternated with the speeches, making the hall ring again. At all the meetings there was a brisk sale of -Freedom, Commune of Paris, Wage System, Workman's Question, and Commonweal.

HULL.-Here the comrades commemorated the Commune all the week.)March 18th.-International Club Members held -a meeting. Sunday, March 22nd.-A new and splendid banner, with the motto, -Workers of all countries, Unite," was unfurled at the morning open-air commemoration meeting on Drypool Green. Speakers were Andrew Hall, from Sheffield, J. Sketchley, and Gustav Smith. In the evening, at some place, another meeting was held, these being the beginning of the open-air campaign this year. March 21st.-J. Sketchley lectured on "The Paris Commune" before a large and enthusiastic audience. This meeting concluded with dancing and singing. We note that the comrades at Hull have copied our sketch of -What the Communes of 1871 Were" on the backs of their handbills.

MANCHESTER.-At the 1. W. M. Club, 25, Bury New road, March 21st, a public meeting in memory of the Paris Commune was held. Speakers: Shure, Diemshitz, Feigenbaum, Stockton, and Barton. The club was crowded to overflowing, so that the late comers had to remain on the stairs. A resolution was passed condemning the action of the French Government of '71 against the Commune, and further, all consent were appealed to for all

eight hours (or twelve hours, as long as private property exists they are slaves.

Louise Michel said she believed the coming revolution would be terrible in its force and widespread in its effects. We should remember that we, too, were thieves and oppressors, inasmuch as we possessed food to nourish us and clothes in which we could attend these Commemorative Meetings, whilst outside in the vast city of London were a great mass of fellow creatures unfed and unclad. - No eight hours' day of labor could alleviate the misery that exists. Ali law, all authority must vanish before the people could hope for victory - a victory which meant the Conquest of the whole world; and Internationality was the great force that would carry us to this victory. Long live Internationality!

Prodi said that although twenty years had elapsed since the Paris insurrection, the Commune remained as an example of revolutionary energy and audacity. If we direct as much energy against governments of all kinds and against property, the reign of the exploiters will be at an end.

P. Kropotkin's speech we give in full in another column, as it deals with points just now of special interest in the English Socialist Movement. After speaking in English, he said a few words in Russian, warning his countrymen of the futility of merely constitutional movement to relieve the misery of their unhappy country.

H. Davis, said the aspirations of the Communards were as humane as those of their foes were devilish. The Communards liberated their prisoners. It is to the many acts of generosity and humanity that some have ascribed their failure, wrongly, for they were merely crushed by superior military force and their humanity was admirable. Compare the peaceful and humanitarian proclamation of the Commune with the bloodthirsty proclamation of the Versailles (I Government, whose scathing tongue of revenge seems to pierce into the very hearts of the people. The mistakes of the Communards were mistakes we should have made if we had been living then and been in their position; that we may avoid such in the fu-

ture before us let us prepare for the coming change. Let us educate ourselves, and try to arouse others to do the like, in principles of true freedom, of Anarchy. Let each try to inspire the group with which he lives and works with a belief in the necessity for personal initiative; for organization may help, but it cannot initiate. The entire destruction of monopoly is the one thing, to work for, monopoly bolstered up by military government. Let every worker speak out against government worship, which is a worse superstition than theology, whether his master likes it or not.

Yanovsky, speaking in Yiddish, said that the Commune would have done much if its only result had been to bring about such meetings as this; meetings where workers of all nationalities dropped national prejudice and united to protest against their common foe-Capitalism. The Commune had failed because the world of the workers was not yet ripe to receive and carry out the idea it embodied. The Commune was especially interesting to us as Anarchists because of its spontaneity, because it showed how, when the people are strongly moved, they can act effectively without leaders or organized preparation. Let us see to it that the next outbreak of the Commune, wherever it occurs, may find the workers of the world ready to imitate and support it.

John Turner said, What all eve-opener such a view of the Commune as, that put forward by the speakers to-night must be to any of the audience who might only have heard of it through the lying reports of the capitalist, press. Yet even in the Times for 1871 something of the truth might be gleaned by any one who compared the Paris reports with the tone of the leaders commenting thereupon. Since the Commune the ideals of Socialism and free mutual agreement have made vast progress among the workers. Some people deprecated Trade Unions, but was it not a fact that they taught the workers to rely on their own strength rather than (on government. When the Commune is again proclaimed will it, not be. better for the (lockers to work the docks, the gas-workers to control the gas-works, the bakers to manage the bread-making than to entrust the

general management of everything to ever such a clever County Council, who will have very little personal acquaintance with any of the matters they vote about.

The meeting was concluded by Mrs. Primer's delightful singing of the "Marseillaise," English version, the audience enthusiastically taking up the chorus.

A letter was read from Comrade Morton regretting, that he was prevented from attending the meeting by illness, and sympathetic telegrams were received from Hull and Sheffield. The collection to defray expenses amounted to L3 0s. 7 1/2d. Reports of other Commune Commemoration Meetings will be found below.

March 17th, the London Socialist League celebrated the Commune of Paris in the Hall in Darner Street. Speakers: Mowbray, Nicoll, Charles, Burnie, Turner, Coulon, and Louise Michel. There was, a crowded and enthusiastic audience. The meeting concluded by singing the "Marseillaise," and with hearty cheers for the Social Revolution.

S.D.F. COMMUNE CELEBRATION.-There was a crowded meeting at St. Andrews' Hall, Newman Street, on Thursday, March 19, the occasion of the Social Democratic celebration of the Commune. Barrows was "in the chair," though nobody seemed any the better on that account. Quelch who proposed the resolution, remarks "that the man who will not take the trouble to put a piece of paper into a box to record his vote, will not take the trouble to keep the barrel of a rifle clean."

"The man who will not take the trouble to put a piece of paper in the ballot box to has probably found out the fraud and is that much wiser than Quelch. G. B. Shaw made a painful effort to say something upon a subject that Seemed to have but little interest for him. Connel and Hyndman both made forcible speeches which were enthusiastically received. So also was the speech of our Comrade Louise Michel, at the, Conclusion of which the strong Anarchist sympathies of the audience were manifested.