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Their Peace

Le Rétif

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The idea of war is on everybody's mind nowadays. People are already calling up visions of battlefield horrors, towns on fire, corpses strewn along the roads, decimated regiments and famine and fear in the peaceful cities... Just imagining that a repetition of these sights is possible bewilders and stuns the population. War is beautiful in the stories of Ch. D'Esparbès and the novels of Capitaine Danrit. War is glorious in the history books. In reality it is horrible and everyone knows it. The weak and spineless, just thinking about it, are quick to declare their love for peace...

It is a universal song. Insurrectionaries, syndicalists, honest libertarians, radical bourgeois and nationalists all proclaim in unison their unflagging devotion to Peace...

They're pacifists. Everyone is a pacifist. In the interest of progress, industry, commerce and the arts. Because peace increases the prosperity of the nation. And for a thousand other reasons. For, it is understood that not one of these pacifists would dare say openly: I am an enemy of war because I love life and I value my life.

It is natural. At the heart of pacifism there is neither will nor intelligence; there is only fear and hypocrisy. The sincere are scared.

The others, having nothing else in mind but their personal interests, use it without scruples. Therefore, we have to witness this paradoxical picture: while the Peace Congress is being held, the organizers are building armor.

But let's not sit around putting them on trial. Let's just mention the large number of friends of peace. They are legion who ask that there be peace in the world. Tolerance and peace! etc. Homais and Tartempion speak of nothing else. And the anarchist who is not captivated by big words wonders: Is peace — their peace — really so beautiful?

* * *

We are enjoying it at the moment, so we can examine it at leisure, appreciate it, savor it. Those like Frédéric Passy, Charles Richet and Anatole France have sung its praises to us in different ways. That's the theory for you. Alas! Down here in the real world, theory and practice are two different things. Peace, as they picture it, is a pretty blonde girl with a big smile... a little silly? They are careful not to show what is hiding behind it: Barracks, Prisons, Hospitals and Whorehouses. Their peace!

But its order, their bloody order, that Thiers reinstated by shooting the federates of the Commune and that Clemenceau supports with the precious pageant of Narbonne cuirassiers and Draveil police. The bourgeoisie peace requires that you respect the established laws for it, that you suffer hunger and oppression for it; and when you transgress their will, they bring back peace with whips, swords and rifles... The social peace condemns the workers for one word or one gesture of disobedience; it imprisons the journalists who speak too freely; it mercilessly hunts down the uncontrollable and stubborn. Under the pacifist bullets the proletariats have fallen many a time. And Ferrer. And so many of ours in Russia or Japan have died on the pacifist gallows!

That's what is called 'moral' or political order.

It is completed by the economic peace. In other words: respect for property, respect for the owner, servility before the rich, honesty. Here are the factories where they kill children, where they destroy people by overwork and sickness. Here are the poor sections of the big cities, areas that reek, where there is a perfect harmony of Alcoholism, Tuberculosis and Syphilis.

And here, right next door, is the Palace of Money, shrewd master that everything bows to. Economic peace! Translate: prostitution, famine, degeneration...

Ah, our wonderful pacifists have got balls when they show us the dreadful account of war. Napoleon (they teach us) cost Europe five million human lives. We would like to know how many lives are sacrificed everyday in their peace!

Let them tell us how many children have been killed in their glass and textile factories in the north. How many workers have been murdered by occupational illness, deprivation — misery? Let them try to show us the account of happiness, of life, of joys peacefully crushed in the institutional gears of Authoritative Capitalism!

We want to judge their peace in full knowledge!

* * *

Their peace is as murderous as war. It is a peace of death. It requires as much blood and sweat and human flesh to build the fortunes of Rothschild, Bunau Varilla, Pereire et Cie as it does to make up the empires of the most insane conquerors.

Weren't there once made little hypocritical wars in which the cowards knocked each other down like traitors? One against all — all against one: that's the summary of the stupid struggle of men against each other. All the brutalities and social forces have been united against each individual. Public opinion watches him, maliciously. His fellowmen — his competitors — lie in wait for the slightest mistake to jump on him. The laws enslave him; the strongest exploit him; the weakest hate him.

Pitiless war between employees and owners, between the German and French peddlers, between Potin and Damoy, between the red politician and his adversary.

They bad-mouth, they slander, they accuse, under their breath. Then blind Law steps in and destroys the loser. While the winners congratulate themselves with sweet and gentle words.

War, armies in collision, the undisguised, brutal mass murderer, is worse, no doubt. But the peace today is vile, absurd and criminal.

We deny war because we love life deeply. For the same reason we want no more of this peace. On both sides we find ourselves among death even though all our strength, our hopes, our will aspires toward life!

And it is in the name of this — in the name of our life first of all! — that we rebel against the rule of pacifist hypocrisy and warlike brutality. Our existence would be so beautiful if it weren't for the nefarious stupidity of the masters and slaves!

Therefore, it is in spite of them that from now on we want to make our lives beautiful. Let our revolt tend toward this: to live according to our thoughts, freely, intelligently, fraternally: among ourselves, at least, to establish a true peace that will make us stronger and happier.