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On Democracy in France

A fragment of a fragment

Mikhail Bakunin

1876

Translator's note: There are some genuinely fragmentary bits and pieces among the Bakunin texts, including this piece, which appears in a manuscript, copied by Max Nettlau and dated January-February 1876, but seems to have been composed in late 1870 or early 1871, probably in connection with *The Knouto-Germanic Empire*. I had worked through most of this before realizing it was probably from an earlier period, and I'll just pass the finished portion along until I can return to the longer fragment in that other context.

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Translation by Shawn P. Wilbur.

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Nevertheless we see today in France, this noble country of France, which seems to have received the mission of undertaking, for the profit of the entire world, much more than for its own profit, experiments most bold and often most cruel, to attempt one last effort to establish itself despite all the shackles which enchain it, in a republican and frankly democratic State. Made cautious by so many recent catastrophes, the republican party

deploys some qualities that we had not previously known. It seems to have completely contained, if not stifled in its breast the ardor of its heroic age, that *furia francese* [fury of the French] that made them take by storm the positions that appeared most invincible, and execute in a few days the things that seemed most impossible. It has replaced it with a reflective action, with a calculated slowness that revealed at the same time a great deal of firmness, perseverance, coherence [esprit de suite] and patience. It knows how to wait; having learned to contain and govern itself, it has finally become today a perfectly disciplined party, led by skillful leaders, proper to lead it to triumph.

Moreover, everything in France seems to conspire in its favor. In that dreadful Assembly of Versailles, where the most miserable instincts that dishonor human nature, and beyond that all the incompetence, cruelty, cowardice, impotence and stupidity had made a rendezvous to kill France, all the other parties show their natures, all leave veiled, forgiven. No intrigue de Mr.[Buffet?], the damned soul of the Jesuits, nor all the authority of the brave Marshal Mac-Mahon, their sword-bearer, would know how to guard its strength, nor its life. And alone, the republican party has safeguarded, at least in part, its reputation, its honor.

It is true that it bears in itself an indelible stain on its brow. It is also impossible to have taken part in that Assembly without having received its share of shame and muck. The republicans of Versailles have witnessed as spectators if not indifferent, at least very reserved and especially very silent in the face of the massacres of the heroic population of Paris. What am I say, mute, – they have spoken in order to vote some thanks to those who massacred... Very few republican delegates have abstained, and it is precisely not those who, making courage cheap, are today called intransigents.

The republicans, deputies of the Assembly of Versailles, have since struggled to wipe away their treason and crime by making some unheard of efforts to save the Republic. they have succeeded

and they present themselves today before the nation that, forgetful and generous as always, seems to have pardoned them. It is more than likely that in the next elections the republican party will triumph, so much more so as all the parties to which they are opposed are properly no longer parties, but filthy and miserable intrigues, having stupidity for ensign, and no other serious basis than Jesuitico-Roman Clericalism, that is to say the tombstone of France.

Thus, according to all the probabilities, we will soon see the establishment of a serious republic in France, moderate at first, then, undoubtedly, more and more radical. We will end with the attempt to establish a republican State on very broad democratic bases. But is such a State viable? Is it possible? The whole question is there.

It would doubtless be possible, if beside or rather below the political question, there was not the eternal question of economics...