

Defense Speech

Sante Caserio

1894

After assassinating French president Sadi Carnot in order to avenge the execution of Auguste Vaillant for throwing a bomb in the Chamber of Deputies, he delivered this, his final speech, at his trial.

Gentlemen of the jury, I'm not going to defend myself but rather explain my action.

While still young I learned that present society is poorly organized, so poorly that every day many unfortunates commit suicide, leaving wives and children in the most terrible distress. Workers in their thousands look for work and can't find any. Poor families beg for their food and shiver from the cold. They suffer the worst poverty. The youngest ask their poor mothers for food and the latter can't give them any because they don't have anything. The few things that were in the house were already sold or traded. All they can do is ask for alms; they're often arrested for vagabondage.

I left my native land because I was often brought to tears upon seeing little girls of eight or ten forced to work fifteen hours a day for a miserable wage of twenty centimes. Young women of eighteen or twenty also work twenty hours a day for a laughable salary. And this doesn't only happen to my compatriots, but to all workers who sweat all day long for a morsel of bread while their labor brings in money in abundance. The workers are forced to live under the most wretched conditions and their food consists of a bit of bread, a few spoonfuls of rice, and water. And so when they reach the age of thirty or forty they're dying of fatigue and die in hospitals. What's more, as a consequence of their poor diets and overwork these sad creature are devoured in their hundreds by pellagra, an illness that, in my country, attacks, as the doctors say, those who are malnourished and who lead a hard and deprived existence.

I saw that there are some people who are hungry and some children who suffer while food and clothing are abundant in the cities. I saw several great industries full of clothing and wool products and I also saw warehouses full of wheat and corn that would be suitable for those who needed them. And from another point of view, I saw thousands of people who don't work, who produce nothing, and who live thanks to the labor of others; who every day spend thousands of francs to amuse themselves; who corrupt the daughters of workers; who own lodgings with forty or fifty rooms, twenty or thirty horses, and several servants: in a word, all the pleasures of life.

I believe in God, but when I see such inequality among men, I recognize that it isn't God who created man but man who created God. And I discovered that those who want their property respected have an interest in preaching paradise and hell and keeping the people in a state of ignorance.

A short time ago, Vaillant threw a bomb in the Chamber of Deputies in protest against the current system of society. He killed no one and only wounded a few people. But bourgeois justice condemned him to death. And not satisfied with the condemnation of the guilty man, it pursued the anarchists and arrested, not only those who knew Vaillant, but even those who attended an anarchist lecture.

The government didn't think of their wives and children. It didn't consider that a man held in a cell isn't the only one to suffer, that his little ones ask for bread. Bourgeois justice didn't trouble itself with these innocents, who don't even know what society is. It's not their fault if their fathers are in prison; all they want to do is eat.

The government went so far as to search people's private homes, to open personal letters, to prohibit lectures and meetings and practiced the most infamous oppression against us. Even today hundreds of anarchists are arrested for having written an article in a newspaper or for having expressed an opinion in public.

Well then, if the government employs guns, chains, and prisons against us, must we anarchists, who defend our lives, remain locked in our houses? No. On the contrary, we answer governments with dynamite, bombs, the stylus, and the dagger. In a word, we must do all we can to destroy the bourgeoisie and government. Gentlemen of the jury, you who are the representatives of bourgeois society, if you want my head, take it. But don't think that in doing so you are stopping the anarchist movement.

Beware: man reaps what he sows.

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