

The Black Flag

Anonymous

August 12 1883

The “Black Flag”, *Le Drapeau Noir*, No. 1, August 12 1883.

To live free working or die fighting.

It’s not just as another challenge to bourgeois society that we gave the title *Drapeau Noir* [Black Flag] to this newspaper—bound to continue the struggle of the *Lutte*—and that we print here the immortal motto of our brothers the Canuts [in Lyon]. We also wanted to keep this glorious workers’ insurrection alive; to remind those who have already forgotten and to inform those who might still be ignorant. We wanted to warn the bourgeoisie that the only flag under which we will stand together now is the same one that poverty and desperation raised up in the streets of Croix-Rousse on November 21 1831 and that until the coming victory, we will have no other.

Our enemies couldn’t care less and our readers and supporters might give us a hard time, so they have to know—and we don’t have the right to keep them ignorant—why we are flying this flag, why we are adopting this emblem, why we are accepting what has, until now, been considered only a historical curiosity but absolutely inoffensive from a revolutionary standpoint.

We are not afraid to admit it, it will cost us—dearly—to abandon the scarlet banner of those defeated in May, to renounce the red flag of the brave men and woman of ’71, [in the Paris Commune], because we still shed tears for them and they still inspire us. We hold dear the stirring reminders of good times on those glorious anniversaries and the hate and vengeance that rises up on the dark dates. We haven’t forgotten those living in exile and prison, we whisper praise to them and dream of the coming triumph.

But there is something more convincing than all these ideas, stronger than principles, more powerful than theories.

What happens everyday clearly shows us that the red flag, so glorious in defeat, can in victory hide the ambitious dreams of the lowliest schemers in its blazing folds, as we see it has already cloaked a government and served as the banner of constitutional authority. That's how we knew that for us, mutinous everyday, rebellious every hour, it could provide nothing but confusion and illusion.

Of course, if we still wanted to fight out in the open, in the organized battles that until now the revolutionaries have always had the naïve pretension to engage in with their enemies, the red flag could become ours. It is, in fact, all pretty and scarlet, a fitting banner for such fights and battles. A good representation, like feudal coats or arms talking, of getting rid of the privileged castes in the huge mass of people, the complete disappearance of social inequality, the unification of all classes into one class of workers.

But this is not enough anymore. We're done with the misguided ways of the past regarding the purely practical domain of revolutionary action, just as in the speculative realm, perhaps, of emblems and symbols.

What we want now—and we say it without fearing of reprisal in any way—is a partisan war, the combat of the “lost children” in the streets, as relentless as they are dissipated, fighting in the shadows, but hitting the mark, the only logical war, the civil war—the only worthwhile war—the social war.

Therefore, it is to those who are suffering, to those who are holding their breaths under the ever-increasing burden of poverty whom we call. Let those who have had enough of exploitation and slavery, those who want to put an end to the political and economic domination that is crushing us, those who want to break forever the iron chains that bind and keep us separate forever, come to us.

We distance ourselves from all sentimentalism and all compromise. We are staring a duel to the death with bourgeois society. They cannot win. And by taking the Black Flag, by unfurling to the winds the dark folds of desperation, it is more than a warning, it is better than a call, it is the death of the old world that we are displaying, it is the inevitable promise of its coming end and it is, at the same time, for all the poor and wretched, for those wallowing in misery, for all those dying of hunger, the definite announcement of an era of happiness, justice, liberty and peace: it is ANARCHY.

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