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Local Action
May, 1887

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Before going further, let us sum up the conclusions at which we have arrived in our preceding articles. They are two, and each of them is of importance in enabling us to see what we brave to do.

We have established -- and if space permitted we might do so with a much greater display of arguments -- that we must rely for the accomplishment of the Social Revolution which we feel approaching all over the civilized world, neither on the present parliaments, nor on any representative bodies which might be summoned during a more disturbed period than the present. A mere change of Government would not necessarily be a revolution, even though the overthrow of the Government might be accompanied by acts of violence. European society is in need of a deep, thorough, economical transformation, and this cannot be accomplished by mere decrees. To have any chance of life, any change accomplished in the economical conditions must come from the very depths of the popular life itself -- it must result from the popular initiative.

To accomplish an economical revolution is not the function of a body of representatives. All that can be hoped from such a

body is that it will not oppose strong resistance to the action of the people, but under due popular pressure give its final sanction to accomplished facts. Never will such a body be capable of taking the initiative, for it is itself a compromise with the past and cannot even claim to be an outpost of the future. The French Convention of 1793 -- the ideal of so many Jacobinists -- did not do more than give its sanction to what the peasants already had accomplished, since they had retaken possession of the communal lands enclosed by the landlords, had ceased to pay the redemption for the feudal taxes, and had burned the charters by which they had formerly been bound. All these things being already done, the Convention -- under due pressure of the Paris workmen and clubs -- gave its sanction in the form of laws, consecrating the results of the peasants' revolt, it could not do more than that, because a body of representatives is a dead weight attached to the revolution -- not the leader of it.

Another conclusion which we arrived at was, that the tree action of the people towards the abolition of the existing monopolies on land, dwellings, railways, and capital will, in every way, be favored by the movements which will necessarily break out all over Europe before this century has come to an end. The immediate cause of these movements cannot be foreseen, and there is no need to know it beforehand. All we can and must know is, that thousands of causes contribute towards creating a revolutionary situation in Europe, and that there being such a situation, any cause may be the signal of widely spread revolts. The mass outbreaks which we have witnessed during the last few years are unmistakable tokens of the approach of the disturbed period.

These two conclusions being kept in mind, we may proceed further, and add now a third conclusion to the above.

Although no revolutionary movement can break out in Europe -- be it in France, Germany, Austria, or Russia -- without being closely followed by like outbreaks in other countries

ments separate cities and separate regions will make attempts at abolishing within their own spheres the monopolies of land and capital which are now so many obstacles in the way towards freedom and equality. The abolition of these monopolies will not be done by acts of national parliaments: it will be done, first, by the people of each locality; and the agreement between different localities will be the result of the accomplished facts.

As to the aims and the character which these movements may assume and ought to assume, they will form the subject of our next article.

"Command and obedience are but unfortunate necessities of human life: society in equality is its normal state. Already in modern life, and more and more as it progressively improves, command and obedience become exceptional facts in life, equal association its general rule. The morality of the first ages rested on the obligation to submit to power; that of the ages next following, on the right of the weak to the forbearance and protection of the strong. How much longer is one form of society and life to content itself with the morality made for another? We have had the morality of submission, and the morality of chivalry and generosity; the time is now come for the morality of justice. Whenever in former ages any approach has been made to society in equality, justice has asserted its claims as the foundation of virtue." -- *J. S. Mill.*

of Europe, we must be prepared to see these outbreaks taking very different characters in different countries. Germany most probably will try to overthrow the Monarchy and to introduce a Republican form of Government; and it is most. probable that attempts at substituting the present private ownership of land and great industrial concerns by State ownership will be made in the same country. But State ownership and State help to associations of workmen would not find much echo in this country, and still less in France, or in Spain. In France, the revolution will almost. undoubtedly proceed by proclaiming independent communes which communes will endeavor to accomplish the economical transformation within their walls, or rather within their respective surroundings. And in Spain, the whole history of the country is an unceasing struggle for the independence of provinces and municipalities -- a struggle which has its causes deeply rooted both in the former history and in the present wide differences of economical conditions in different parts of that country. State ownership and State's rule find no support even from the present political parties of Spain, still less will they find it in the new economical conditions. Add to these another example; while in this country we see the middle-classes seeking the support of working men in order to break down the power of the landed aristocracy, no such coalition is possible any longer in France. There the upper middle-classes stand in open and direct conflict with the Socialist working-men -- a circumstance which obviously will impart, as it already has in 1848 and 187l, new and quite different features to the movement.

To dream that the next revolution may follow *one* single program all over Europe, is thus a fallacy.

But again, to imagine that in each separate State, all the nation will rise at a given moments as one man, with one uniform practical program, would be also to cherish an illusive and dangerous dream. Of course, all that is possible will be done by Socialists to awaken everywhere, in their respective countries,

the consciousness of the masses; to enlighten them as to the bad effects of the present monopolization of land and capital. When general interest in public affairs will be more awakened by great events, these ideas will spread still speedier than they spread now. But, nevertheless, there still will be wide differences in the views held in different parts of each country as to how far, and at what a speed, the abolition of monopolies must go, and to what measures most urgently need to be taken in hand at once. A nation is a complex being, and to expect uniformity where multiformity reigns would be to take an utterly erroneous view of public affairs.

One of the deputies of the Scotch miners to the last Miners' Congress loudly proclaimed the other day that whatever the palliative measures they might discuss at their Congresses. the Scotch miners consider that justice will be only done to their claims when they come to be in possession of the mines they are now working in.

Suppose that after a serious discussion of the whole question in their small clubs and in their local congresses, the Scotch miners come to the conclusion that the time has arrived to take possession of the Scotch mines, and elaborate some scheme as to the working out of these mines, sharing the produce of their labor with none of the land-grabbers, nor profit-grabbers. And suppose that the Northumbrian, or the Welsh miners, the Sheffield cutlers, and the Manchester weavers, cannot yet be brought to the same views. Must the Scotch miners wait until the whole of the British nation be converted to their ideas? Must they wait until a representative body, composed of heterogeneous elements mostly looking towards the past, happens to elaborate some scheme for the transfer of the mines into the miners' hands? Is it not preferable that they should act for themselves, make a new start, lay down the basis of a new organization, and preach by example? And is it not moat probable that they really will do so? All human progress has been realized in this way. A practical application

of new principles is the only possible means of convincing most people of their applicability, showing at once their advantages and their possible defects.

Or, suppose again, the inhabitants of Paris, discussing the dwelling question with all the eagerness it deserves, come to this conclusion -- that the houses of Paris cannot continue to belong to their present owners, not having been built by them, and deriving their immense value, not from the improvements the present owners have made in these houses but from the labor which has been expended on Paris by generations past and present, as well as from the very presence of two million of people at Paris. Suppose they arrive at the conclusion that these houses must become like the streets the common property of all the inhabitants -- and the probabilities are that they soon *will* -- must they wait until thirty-five millions of Frenchmen arrive at the same conclusion? Or, having proclaimed their independent commune, will they not act much more wisely if they organize themselves in order to take possession of these houses and for making use of them in the most equitable way for the greatest benefit of all the community?

People may write as much as they like about discipline; they may dream as much as they like about uniformity. Practical life takes another course. The inhabitants of Paris *will* take possession of the Paris houses, whatever be the course taken by the inhabitants of Bordeaux; and they will organize themselves for the best use of the houses; and if the above-mentioned ideas grow with the Scotch miners, it is most probable that they will act in that direction. Separate cities, mining basins, and industrial regions will make independent starts, and then -- but only then -- they will enter into agreements with their neighbors, for deriving from their local action, the best possible advantages for the whole of the commonwealth.

We might multiply the examples; we might go further on into this study; but what has already been said will probably convince most of our readers that during the next great move-