

The Coming Upheaval

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This concluding passage from Marx's anti-Proudhon tract *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) closes a discussion which takes England as the representative case of a revolution-bent country. It gives a vivid preview of the revolutionary upheaval towards which Marx believed that the class struggle in all capitalist countries was irresistibly moving. It was, in a way, *Capital's* conclusion stated in advance. Note the Hegelian terminology in Marx's depiction of the proletariat becoming, in and through the warfare of labor and capital, a class not only in itself but also "for itself," i.e., collectively conscious of itself and its revolutionary aims as a class.

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Economic conditions first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.

An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society. For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side. Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself. The organization of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society.

Does this mean that after the fall of the old society there will be a new class domination culminating in a new political power? No.

The condition for the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of every class, just as the condition for the liberation of the third estate, of the bourgeois order, was the abolition of all estates and all orders.

The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude

classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society.

Meanwhile the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution. Indeed, is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition of classes should culminate in brutal "contradiction," the shock of body against body, as its final *dénouement*?

Do not say that social movement excludes political movement. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social.

It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that "*social evolutions*" will cease to be "*political revolutions*." Till then, on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be:

Combat or death: bloody struggle or extinction. It is thus that the question is inexorably put.¹

1. George Sand, *Jean Ziska. A Historical Novel*.