

ON THE CENTENNIAL OF THE COMMUNE OF PARIS

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I

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE COMMUNE OF PARIS

The Commune of Paris,¹ declared March 18, 1871, and succumbed to superior forces May 28, 1871, appears to be the first attempt in history to identify the proletariat with state power, i.e. *to organize, mould and consolidate the proletariat as the ruling class*. The Commune, as such, claims distinction to being history's first «dictatorship of the proletariat».² In the course of its stormy existence, seventy-two days to be exact, the Commune went the route in furnishing future socialist practice with its first organizational forms, however primitive and spontaneous they may be. The Commune, as such, emerges as an extremely interesting case study in the field of socialist state administration.

Engels once remarked that the demands put forth and realized by «proletarian Paris»³ and her Commune, however unclear and

(1) To be referred to, hereafter, as the Paris Commune or, just simply, the Commune.

(2) To this effect, Engels remarks: «..Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentleman, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat..» (Karl Marx-Frederick Engels, **Selected Works**, Vol. I, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., England, 1962, p. 485).

(3) The «proletarian» nature of Paris arises out the following fact: «..Thanks to the economic and political development of France since 1789 [and especially during the rule of Louis Bonaparte] Paris had been placed... in such a position that no revolution could break out

confused,⁴ amounted, in the final analysis, «*..to the abolition of the class antagonism between capitalists and workers..*»⁵ What specific forms did these demands take? How were they transformed into a series of measures which, in the final analysis, brought into existence history's first dictatorship of the proletariat? What were the specific organizational forms of this dictatorship of the proletariat? Written on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the 1871 Paris Commune, this article claims to be nothing more than a preliminary step in the direction of reconstructing, mentally, the administrative structure of the Commune.

What, actually, did the 1871 Paris Commune accomplish?

For one thing, and most important of all, the Commune proved that «*..the working-class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes..*»⁶ The working-class, in order to bring into existence a proletarian state apparatus and to protect its newly-acquired power, has to seize upon bourgeois state power, annihilate its repressive organs and restore the legitimate functions of this apparatus «*..to the responsible agents of society..*»⁷ In performing this vitally essential act, the working-class «shatters» the bourgeois state machine.

Secondly, the Commune, in shattering the bourgeois state apparatus and then reconstructing a purely proletarian machine, destroyed the ridiculous bourgeois belief that Administrative Capacity (with a capital A and C) is God's exclusive gift to the bourgeoisie and those privileged enough to receive bourgeois schooling. That same Commune, in view of the fact that capitalism has highly simplified the day-to-day chores of state administration, placed the so-called «bourgeois prerogative of Administrative Ca-

there without assuming a proletarian character, that is to say, without the proletariat, which had bought victory with its blood, advancing its own demands after victory..» (*Ibid.*, p. 474)

(4) The vagueness and confusion characterizing the economic and political decisions of the Commune, results from the fact that the Blanquists and adherents of Proudhon dominated the decision-making organs of the said body. Economic decisions bore the ideological heritage of Proudhon, while political decisions carried traces of Blanqui's train of thought.

(5) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 474.

(6) *Ibid.*, p. 22.

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 520.

capacity», i.e. ability to administer, «*..within the reach of anybody who can read and write and knows the first four arithmetical rules..*»⁸

Thirdly, in the course of its attempt to replace the ubiquitous organs of bourgeois state power with a proletarian apparatus, the Commune devised the most effective means and methods of safeguarding working class power against the continual threat of re-bureaucratization, i.e. it improvised sure-fire methods of protecting «*..itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment..*»⁹ These improvisations gave rise, on the one hand, to the primitive organizational forms of proletarian power, and, on the other, to the basic administrative principles regulating the organization and functioning of a proletarian state apparatus.

Yet, it is common knowledge that the Paris Commune was declared and came into existence under conditions of «siege and civil war».¹⁰ The inability of the Commune to settle down into a smoothly-running machine, the power structure of the Commune, incessant conflict between the formal and *de facto* centres of gravity of power, etc., reflect the demands and pressures of «emergency» conditions. Hence, in analysing the administrative structure of the 1871 Paris Commune, we encounter the apparent dilemma of trying to impress the fleeting sequences of a motion-picture on one single still.

II

BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES GUIDING COMMUNAL ADMINISTRATION

The Paris Commune, in a wide variety of fields, ranging from state administration to social policy, was «*..the direct antithesis to the Empire..*»¹¹ Hence, in order to reach a full and proper understanding of the Commune, one has to understand the Second Empire, 1851 to 1870, and what it stands for.¹²

(8) V. I. Lenin, «The State and Revolution», **The Essential Left**, Unwin Books, England, 1963, p. 237.

(9) Marx-Engels, **op. cit.**, Vol. I, p. 483.

(10) Reference to «Prussian Siege» and «Paris-Versailles War».

(11) Marx-Engels, **op. cit.**, Vol. I, p. 518.

(12) For further info. cf. Kurthan Fişek, «On Bureaucracy», **Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi**, Vol. XXV, No. 2, April-June 1970, Ankara, pp. 78-89.

On December 2, 1851, Louis Bonaparte, adventurer *par excellence*, and spokesman for the dregs and debris of bourgeois society, laid hold of state power, destroyed the last stronghold of «joint bourgeois rule», i.e. the Parliamentary Republic, 1848 to 1851, and raised the curtains for what Marx called «*..the ferocious farce of the Restored Empire..*»¹³ The Second (Restored) Empire, among other things, represents «*..strong and unlimited government..*»¹⁴ and «*..an all-powerful and innumerable bureaucracy..*»¹⁵ The Second Empire, by its very nature and in full accordance with the resurrected «*idées napoléoniennes*», derives its distinguishing birthmark from a complete subordination of all organs of bourgeois state power to the will and supremacy of «bourgeois» France's enormous military-bureaucratic machine, an apparatus conveniently created by *Napoleon Bonaparte* in 1798. Thus, under the Second Empire, the administrative- executive apparatus, which had first prepared the class rule of the bourgeoisie and then become the direct instrument of the ruling classes, came to monopolize, and be identified with, state power. To this effect, Marx remarks that «*..only under the Second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent..*»¹⁶

On March 18, 1871, the proletarians of Paris, in an attempt to «*..render themselves masters of their own destinies..*»¹⁷ latched on to governmental power and proclaimed the Paris Commune. What they actually seized was an apparatus which had completely detached itself from society, a machine of repression which lorded over the society it had originally been intended to serve, an executive power which commanded an «*..army of officials numbering more than half a million individuals..*»¹⁸ As the direct antithesis of the Empire, the Commune was, therefore, burdened with the historical mission of reversing the process of the state's «detachment from society» into a process of «attachment to society», of identifying state power with the masses, and of returning state power to its original status of «servant to society». In attempting to do so, the Commune, by the very interests of its class, was compelled to adopt a series of measures which, in the final analysis, would abolish bureaucracy, and would protect the Commune against its own

(13) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 491.

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 338.

(15) *Ibid.*, p. 338.

(16) *Ibid.*, p. 333.

(17) *Ibid.*, p. 516.

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 284.

representatives. These measures, altogether four, appear to be the basic principles of organization regulating Communal Administration.

The first principle is «Fusion of Powers», as contrasted to the bourgeois practice of «separation of powers». The Paris Commune, formed of municipal councillors and operating on a committee-basis,¹⁹ «..was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time..»²⁰ Thus, the Commune, by concentrating state power in the hands of a single organ comprised of the «elected representatives» of the people, abolished the bourgeois-parliamentary practice of «separation of powers», tore down the artificial barriers between the elected representatives and the «professional administrators», and ultimately improvised the most effective method of combatting bureaucracy, i.e. a return to direct democracy. To this effect, Lenin remarks:²¹

Representative institutions remain, but parliamentarism, as a special system, as a division of labour between the legislative and executive functions, as creating a privileged position for its deputies, no longer exists .

The second principle is the declaration of all public officials elective, responsible and subject to recall, at a moment's notice, as contrasted to the feudal practice of hierarchic investiture and the bourgeois-bureaucratic practice of «permanent positions». The Commune was declared March 18, 1871, and the first elections to the Commune were held March 26, 1871, on the basis of «..universal suffrage of all concerned, subject to the right of recall at any time by the same electors..»²² Thus, the Commune, by replacing investiture and permanency with «universal suffrage», and by subjecting every single public office-holder, from the uppermost echelons to the lowest, to this specific method of filling public office, developed yet another antidote against bureaucracy. As to how this principle would operate, Marx remarks:²³

Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal

(19) In socialist administrative practice, working-committees are formed for the performance of specific tasks, with each and every member of the organization a committee-man (cf. Part III)

(20) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 519.

(21) Lenin, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

(22) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 484.

(23) *Ibid.*, pp. 520-521.

suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business. And it is well known that companies, like individuals, in matters of real business, generally know how to put the right man in the right place, and, if they for once make a mistake, to redress it promptly.

*The third principle of Communal Administration is the abolition of all sinecures, honoraria, representative allowances, etc., and the discharge of public duty for «workmen's wages», as contrasted to the tremendous pecuniary privileges hitherto enjoyed by «Officials Of The State». The Paris Commune decreed the lowering of all payments to the level of workmen's wages, on the first of April, 1871, and, three days later, abolished all sinecures and forms of additional payment. Thus, the Commune, by destroying all motives of a pecuniary nature, dealt the final and fatal blow to bureaucracy, drew an effective barrier to career-hunting, and cleared the administrative soil of all discriminatory traces between the «elected representatives of the people» and the «professional administrator». Lenin, in connection with this act of the Commune, matter-of-factly remarks:*²⁴

The lowering of the pay of the highest State officials seems simply a naive, primitive demand of democracy.

The fourth, and probably most important, principle of Communal Administration is democratic centralism, as contrasted to the military and official centralism of bourgeois state power, and the «Federalist» tendencies of Bakounin and Proudhon. The Paris Commune, in its attempt to properly combine central guidance with local municipal liberty, and to «organize the unity of the nation»²⁵ by way of a voluntary fusion of the proletarian communes, has been mistaken, by certain parties,²⁶ for «..an attempt to break up into a federation of small states... that unity of great nations which...has now become a powerful coefficient of social production..»²⁷ As we propose to go into the details, later on, of how the principle of «democratic centralism» was activated, the following passage on «federalist tendencies» will suffice for the time-being:²⁸

(24) Lenin, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

(25) Term used by Marx.

(26) Reference to philistines Proudhon, Bakounin and Bernstein.

(27) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 521.

(28) Lenin, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-195.

Federalism is a direct fundamental outcome of the anarchist petty middle-class ideas... Only people full of middle-class «superstitious faith» in the State can mistake the destruction of the bourgeois state for the destruction of centralism... Bernstein simply cannot conceive the possibility of voluntary centralism, of the voluntary union of the communes into nation... He [Marx] properly uses the phrase «to organize the unity of the nation», so as to oppose the conscious, democratic, proletarian centralism to the capitalist, military, official centralism.

Recapitulating briefly, (1) fusion of powers, (2) universal suffrage in filling public office, (3) discharge of public duty for workmen's wages, and, finally, (4) democratic centralism appear to be the four basic principles, on which the administration of Communal life was based.

III

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE PARIS COMMUNE

On March 18, 1871, with the Prussian armies still stationed on the outskirts of the city, and the Thiers government, under pretenses of realizing «a just and honourable peace», incessantly demanding that the proletarians of Paris surrender their arms, the Central Committee of the Paris National Guard «..proclaimed Paris to be an autonomous Commune... [and] transformed itself into a provisional government..»²⁹ Thus, from March 18 onwards, until after the first elections to the Commune, March 26, 1871, the *Central Committee of the Paris National Guard* appears to be the undisputed centre of gravity of political power in the Commune, i.e. the vanguard of proletarian Paris. On March 28, 1871, the Central Committee (National Guard) submitted its resignation to the newly-constituted Paris Commune; thus, by way of formality, the centre of gravity of political power shifted towards the Commune, an elected body which was to be executive and legislative at the same time. On March 29, 1871, the Paris Commune, by its very nature, and for the simple reason that it was to be a «working body», *elected a central committee from among its own members*, delegated the entirety of its authority and powers to this newly-formed executive body, and reorganized itself on the basis of «working com-

(29) Max Beer, *The General History of Socialism and Social Struggles*, Russell and Russell Inc., New York, 1957, p. 137.

mittees». Thus, the *Central Committee of the Paris Commune*, with its newly-acquired powers of co-ordination and guidance, emerges as the new centre of gravity of Communal power. Yet, the Paris Commune, in face of mounting crisis, and despite the necessary alterations in its power structure, never came to resemble anything like a harmonious, co-ordinated, and smoothly-running machine. On May 9, 1871, the day of panic at Fort Issy, the Central Committee (Paris Commune) voted, 45 as against 23, the creation of the *Council of National Safety*. Elected from among the members of the central committee, and comprising its most radical elements,³⁰ the Council of National Safety, to the very last day of Communal existence, fully dominated the economic, political and administrative life of Paris.

The highly confused and incessantly changing power structure of Communal Administration, subject to daily improvisations and the direct consequence of emergency conditions surrounding the Commune, prevents us from forming an accurate picture of the actual relations of power and authority, in Paris, from March 18 to May 28, 1871. It can be stated definitely, however, that *the «formal» and «de facto» centres of gravity of power seldomly, almost never, coincided.*

A. The Supreme Organs of State Power :

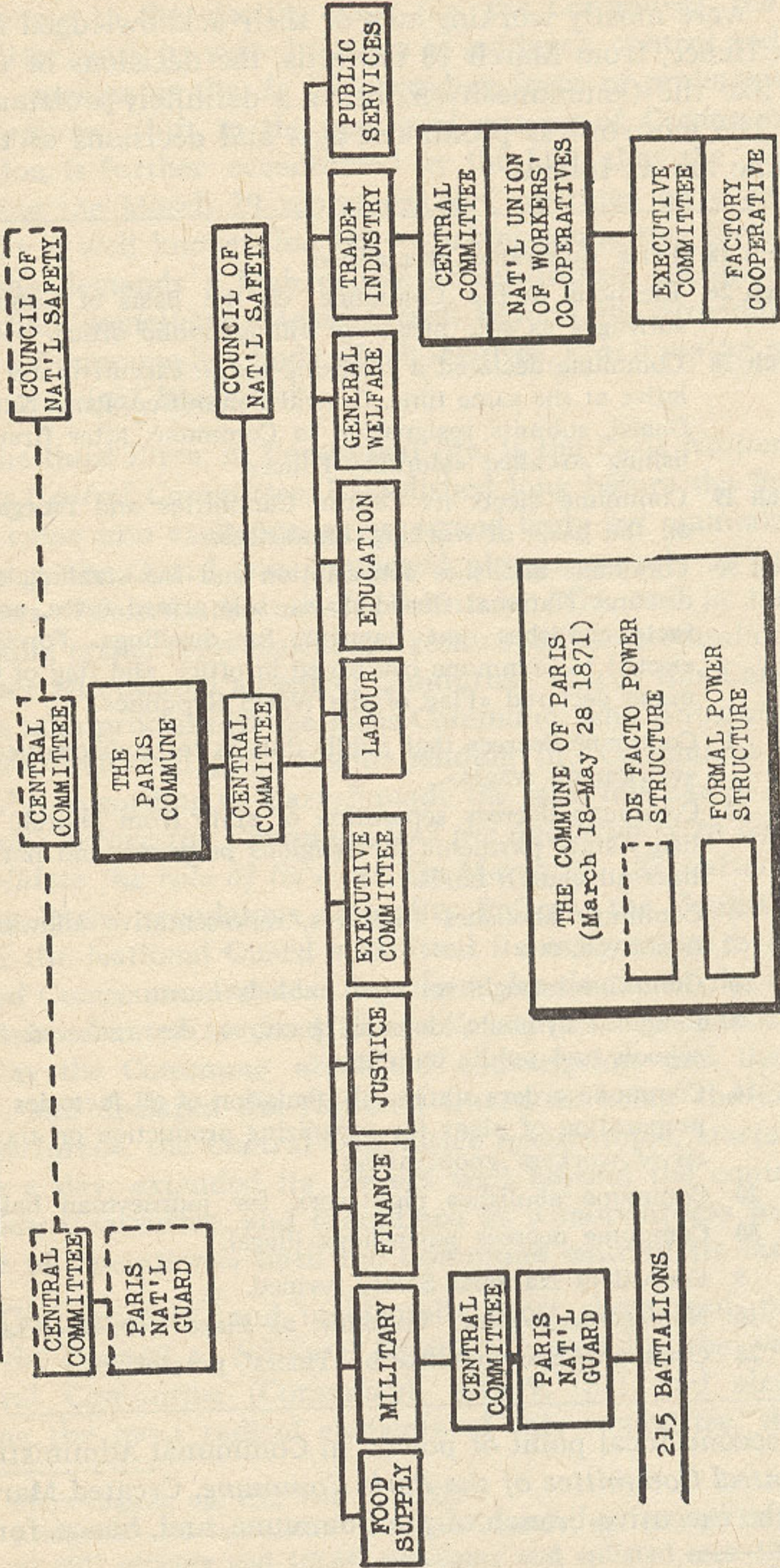
The supreme organ of state power, from its proclamation onwards, appears to be that embodiment of executive and legislative power, *The Commune of Paris*. Proclaimed March 18, 1871, and elected March 26, 1871, «*..the Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms..*»³¹ In order to realize its claims to being a working-body, the Commune, on March 29, 1871, announced the establishment of its Central Committee, and elaborated further plans for a division of labour, by regrouping its own members under ten sub-committees. According to Bourgin and Adamov, these committees were to perform the day-to-day tasks of Communal Administration and «*..corresponded to the ministries of the former regime..*»³² The deputies to the Commune, elected on the basis of one for every twenty thousand popu-

(30) G. Bourgin-A. Adamov, *Paris Komünü*, tr. A. Tokatlı-G. Üstün, Ağaoğlu Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1968, p. 43.

(31) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 519.

(32) Bourgin-Adamov, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

ORGANIZATIONAL FORMAT OF THE COMMUNE OF PARIS



THE COMMUNE OF PARIS
(March 18-May 28 1871)

DE FACTO POWER STRUCTURE

FORMAL POWER STRUCTURE

lation,³³ were mostly working-men or their acknowledged representatives. Hence, from March 18 onwards, the decisions of the Commune, like the Commune itself, bears a definitely-proletarian character. The more-or-less prominent acts and decisions of the Paris Commune are as follows :

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|-----------------|---|
| March 18 | Paris Commune proclaimed. |
| March 26 | Elections to the Commune, on the basis of «universal suffrage» as sole means of filling public office. |
| March 28 | Commune declared a «working-body», executive and legislative at the same time. Central Committee, Paris National Guard, submits resignation to Commune, after first abolishing so-called «Morality Police». |
| March 29 | Commune elects its Central Committee and reorganizes on the basis of working-committees. |
| March 30 | Commune abolishes conscription and the standing army, declares National Guard, Paris, sole armed force, and de facto abolishes rent payment for dwellings. Foreigners elected to Commune confirmed in office, and flag of Commune declared «Flag of the World Republic». |
| April 1 | Commune decrees that public duty is to be discharged for «workmen's wages». |
| April 2 | Commune decrees separation of state from church, abolishes state payments for religious purposes, and nationalizes all church lands. |
| April 4 | Commune abolishes sinecures, representative allowances, honoraria, etc. |
| April 6 | Guillotine brought out and publicly burnt. |
| April 8 | Religious symbols, dogmas, pictures, etc. removed from schools and public buildings. |
| April 16 | Commune orders statistical tabulation of all factories, and preparation of plans for organizing production on the basis of workers' cooperatives. |
| April 20 | Commune abolishes night-work for journeyman bakers. |
| April 30 | Commune decrees pawnshops illegal. |
| May 9 | Council of National Safety formed. |
| May 16 | Napoleonic «Victory Column», at Place Vendôme, razed, |
| May 28 | Commune exterminated by Thiers' praetorians. |

The second focal point of power, in Communal Administration, is the *Central Committee of the Paris Commune*. Created March 29, 1871, as the executive branch of the Commune, and, hence, formally

(33) *Ibid.*, p. 31.

subordinate to the electing body (i.e. the Commune), the Central Committee, with its vested powers of guidance, control and co-ordination, emerges as the *de facto* guiding force of proletarian Paris. This apparent shift in the centre of gravity of Communal Administration is further accentuated by the fact that the Commune, following the March 29 reorganization, operates on a committee-basis. It is well known that the «working-committee form of organization» demands a high degree of centralized guidance and co-ordination, something extending well beyond the providing capacities of a Commune-like body which involves, «..as a matter of course, local municipal liberty..»³⁴

The third force, in Communal life, is the *Paris National Guard and its Central Committee*. Established long before the Paris Commune came into existence, as an armed body for maintaining public order, the Guard was composed almost entirely of proletarian elements. Towards the end of February, 1871, and in the face of mounting crisis, representatives from constituent battalions³⁵ came together and elected a central committee. It was this Central Committee who proclaimed the Paris Commune, who transformed itself into a provisional government pending the Communal Elections, and who, according to Marx,³⁶ made the fatal mistake of calling for elections *before the Commune had the opportunity to confirm and consolidate the rule of its class*. On March 28, 1871, after first abolishing Paris' scandalous «Morality Police», the Central Committee of the National Guard submitted its resignation to the newly-elected Commune, and two days later, by decree of the Commune, was subordinated to the *Military Committee*. On March 30, 1871, the day the Commune abolished conscription and the standing army, and declared the National Guard as being the city's «sole armed force», the Central Committee reassembled, started meeting twice a day, extended its powers well beyond the control of the Military Committee, and functioned as a more-or-less independent «base of operations» until the Commune emitted its last breath.

The strongest, and incidentally most short-lived, power pole was the *Council of National Safety*. Created by the vote of the Central Committee (Commune), May 9, 1871, and elected from among the most radical elements of this committee, the Council

(34) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 521.

(35) Altogether 215 battalions (Bourgin-Adamov, *op. cit.*, p. 128), consisting of 6507 officers and 162,647 non-coms and enlisted men (*Ibid.*, p. 54)

(36) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 463.

represents a nineteen-day monopoly over state power. With Thiers' praetorians³⁷ getting closer and closer, and the death-knells of the Commune getting louder and louder, the activities of the Council of National Safety were restricted, on the whole, to a self-defeating agenda—to conduct, as best as it could, the lost war against Versailles, and to salvage, what it may, from among the healthy elements of a city on the verge of panic.

B. Committees and Economic Structure of the Commune

The Communal decree of March 29, 1871, announcing the decision to reorganize the Paris Commune on the basis of *working-committees, formed for the purpose of performing a specific task, with each and every member of the Commune a committee-man*, remains, to this very day, one of the most praiseworthy *accomplishments of the Commune and the archetype of socialist organization*. These working-committees, ten altogether, and corresponding to the «ministries» of the former regime, were the following: (1) Executive Committee, (2) Military Committee, (3) Committee of Food Supply, (4) Finance Committee, (5) Justice Committee, (6) Trade and Industry Committee, (7) Committee of Public Services, (8) General Welfare Committee, (9) Labour Affairs Committee, and (10) Educational Committee.³⁸ In view of the limited nature of available material, a detailed analysis of the structures and interrelations of the various committees, seems to be out of question; a few relevant points, however, immediately catches one's attention. To begin with, the Paris Commune never had «*..a ministry of Foreign Affairs, worthy of its name..*»³⁹ This was one of the most apparent weaknesses of the Commune, considering that all foreign delegations remained in Paris throughout the civil war. Secondly, the Central Committee (Commune), in an attempt to consolidate its powers of control and coordination, decreed, on April 21, 1871, that «*..a representative of the Executive Committee had been appointed to every other committee..*»⁴⁰ Thirdly, it had been decided that the Paris National Guard, through the agencies of the Military Committee, would come under the control of the Central Committee (Commune)—what actually occurred was the

(37) Reference to Versailles Army. Name used, in ancient Rome, for the bodyguard of a general or emperor.

(38) Bourgin-Adamov, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

(39) *Ibid.*, p. 57.

(40) *Ibid.*, p. 43.

exact opposite. Fourthly, due to the inadequacy of finances, most of the working-committees remained inactive. It has been recorded that a great part of the income realized by the Commune, went to finance military operations— 33 million francs out of a total of 42 million, to be exact.⁴¹ Yet, despite a multitude of shortcomings, the «working-committee form of organization» performed miracles, so to speak. It was through these committees that

the Commune made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions, cheap government, a reality, by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure— the standing army and State functionalism⁴²

The all-important problem of organizing economic activity, in general, and production, in particular, remained unsolved. However, assuming that the Communal decree of April 16, 1871, was intended to provide the Commune with a rough draft of its prospective economic structure, certain vague conclusions can be drawn as to how the Communards proposed to emancipate labour from the fetters of capitalism. To begin with, a statistical tabulation of all factories and workshops was ordered. With nothing else to go on, this attempt can be interpreted as an implicit intention, on the part of the Commune, to superimpose, on economic activity, *that guidance made possible only by «central planning»*. In continuation, the decree demanded that all factories and workshops, beginning with those already closed down by the manufacturers, be organized as workers' cooperatives, and that plans be drawn up for their eventual assembly under a National Union of Workers' Cooperatives. This National Union, formally subordinate to the «Trade and Industry Committee», and thereby to the Central Committee of the Commune, would eventually operate as the sole guiding force of the economy and inevitably be transformed into a highly centralized and democratic «planning body». All reflections on the intended pattern of economic organization, from this point on, become highly speculative, for *«..this attempt was incapacitated with the advent of streetfighting..»⁴³*

C. Organization of «The Unity of the Nation» :

The Paris Commune died, as it was born, a relatively large sore-spot on the «bourgeois» body of France, without being able to

(41) *Ibid.*, p. 54.

(42) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 522.

(43) Bourgin-Adamov, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

realize the great majority of its intentions. Had it succeeded, it would have gone about organizing «the unity of the nation», establishing the vitally-essential alliance between the working-class and the peasantry, and eventually allying Paris to the rest of France.⁴⁴ As to how this would have been achieved, Marx remarks:⁴⁵

The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the *great industrial centres of France...* In a rough sketch of national organization which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet... The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris... The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organized by the Communal Constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the State power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself.

IV

OMMISSIONS AND ERRORS OF THE COMMUNE OF PARIS

On May 28, 1871, Working Man's Paris, unable to withstand the frenzied attacks of the Versailles Army, passed away, «..as the glorious harbinger of a new society..., [into] the great heart of the working class..»⁴⁶ What factors precipitated the downfall of the Commune?

The Commune made two fatal mistakes, the first economic, the second political. As mentioned earlier, the economic and political

(44) The Commune appears to have put the cart before the horse, so to speak. Engels remarks that the Blanquists, «..brought up in the school of conspiracy, and held together by the strict discipline which went with it..., started out from the viewpoint that a relatively small number of resolute, well-organized men would be able..., not only to seize the helm of state, but also by a display of great, ruthless energy, to maintain power until they succeeded in sweeping the mass of the people into the revolution..» (Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 482). The Commune, under the influence of Blanqui's train of thought, seems to have grabbed at the first chance of seizing the helm of state, without, **first** gaining the support of the peasant masses. From the very outset of the Commune, chances of receiving such support seemed very slim. The consequences justified the dim prospects.

(45) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 520.

(46) *Ibid.*, p. 542.

decisions of the Commune bore traces of the ideological heritages of Proudhon and Blanqui, respectively. Proudhon's general attitude towards banking institutions, particularly those of the bourgeois, an attitude tempered with superstitious awe and haloed with holy reverence, reminds one of the familiar expression: Ask a fool to pray, and he will crack his skull kneeling. As to the effects of this attitude on the Communards, Engels remarks:⁴⁷

The hardest thing to understand is certainly the holy awe with which they [the Communards] remained standing respectfully outside the gates of the Bank of France... The Bank in the hands of the Commune—this would have been worth more than ten thousand hostages. It would have meant the pressure of the whole of the bourgeoisie on the Versailles government in favour of peace with the Commune.

The political mistake, equally fatal, was the underestimation of the vital significance of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry—a mistake which becomes all the more important, considering that the great majority of France's population consists of semi-proletarian rural elements.⁴⁸ True, the Commune had told the «*..peasants that 'its victory was their only hope'..*»⁴⁹ but, this proved to be less than enough. Shortly after March 18, 1871, revolutionary outbreaks occurred in Lyons and Marseilles, aimed at proclaiming communes, but, these attempts were immediately and instantly crushed by the Versailles troops. Thus, the Paris Commune was born, lived and died as a revolutionary speck on a vast expanse of bourgeois oceans, without being able to settle down into a smoothly-running machine and complete what it had started out to accomplish.

(47) *Ibid.*, p. 481.

(48) Reference made to middle— and small-holding, i.e. parzellen, peasants.

(49) Marx-Engels, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 525.