

Frederick Engels 1895

Introduction to Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850*

“... there could be no doubt for us, under the circumstances then obtaining, that the great decisive battle had commenced, that it would have to be fought out in a single, long and vicissitudinous period of revolution, but that it could only end in the final victory of the proletariat....

But history has shown us too to have been wrong, has revealed our point of view at that time as an illusion. It has done even more; it has not merely dispelled the erroneous notions we then held; it has also completely transformed the conditions under which the proletariat has to fight. The mode of struggle of 1848 is today obsolete in every respect ...

All revolutions up to the present day have resulted in the displacement of the rule of one class by the rule of another; but all ruling classes up to now have been only small minorities in relation to the ruled mass of the people. One ruling minority was thus overthrown; another minority seized the helm of state in its stead and refashioned the state institutions to suit its own interests. ...

History has proved us wrong, and all who thought like us. ...

With this successful utilisation of universal suffrage, however, an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation, and this method quickly took on a more tangible form.

...

And so it happened that the bourgeoisie and the government came to be much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers' party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion. ...

Rebellion in the old style, street fighting with barricades, which decided the issue everywhere up to 1848, was to a considerably extent obsolete.

Let us have no illusions about it: a real victory of insurrection over the military in street fighting, a victory as between two armies, is one of the rarest exceptions. And the insurgents counted on it just as rarely. ...

all the conditions of the insurgents' side have grown worse. An insurrection with which all sections of the people sympathise will hardly recur; in the class struggle all the middle strata will never in all probability group themselves around the proletariat so exclusively that in comparison the party of reaction gathered round the bourgeoisie will well-nigh disappear. The “people”, therefore, will always appear divided, and thus a most powerful lever, so extraordinarily effective in 1848, is gone....

Does the reader now understand why the powers-that-be positively want to get us to go where the guns shoot and the sabres slash? Why they accuse us today of cowardice, because we do not take without more ado to the streets, where we are certain of defeat in advance? Why they so earnestly implore us to play for once the part of cannon fodder? ...

We are not that stupid. ... The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of masses lacking consciousness is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul. The history of the last fifty years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long, persistent work is required, and it is just this work that we are now pursuing.”

- Engels, *Introduction to Marx's "The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850"* (1895),
Marx-Engels, *Selected Works*, Volume One, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1969