

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 2, NO. 4.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, JULY 4, 1901.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

MANCHESTER INSURRECTIONS

By DANIEL DE LEON

SAID Carlyle sixty years ago, referring to that episode in the Chartist Movement which was called—rather derisively, we should say—the Manchester Insurrection: “A million of hungry operative men rose all up, came all out into the streets, and—stood there. What else could they do? Their wrongs and griefs were bitter, insupportable; their rage against the same was just; but who are they that cause these wrongs, who that will honestly make effort to redress them? Our enemies are we know not who or what; our friends are we know not where . . . Oh, if the accursed, invisible Nightmare, that is crushing out the life of us and ours, would take a shape—any shape that we could see and fasten on! A man can have himself shot with cheerfulness; but it needs first that he see clearly for what.”¹

The enemy, though trembling in his very pupils at the sight of that hungry million, could distinguish better. “Some thirteen unarmed men and women were cut down.” Only thirteen!—we do that sort of thing on a far grander scale here and now. But, observes Carlyle, “the treasury of rage, burning hidden or visible in all hearts ever since, is of unknown extent. ‘How ye came among us, in your cruel armed blindness, ye unspeakable County Yeomanry, sabers flourishing, hoofs prancing and slashed us down at your brute pleasure; deaf to all our claims and woes and wrongs; of quick sight and sense to your own claims only. There lie poor sallow workworn weavers, and complain no more now—Ye unspeakable: give us sabers too, and then come on a little!’”

Whereupon Carlyle—he who perceives quite clearly the “invisible Nightmare” on one side, but also the fatal blindness of the million on the other side—preaches a long sermon to the “Master Worker,” the “Captain of Industry,” on the heavenly beauty of human kindness, human justice, human heroism, etc. All very fine, very sentimental; but to all of which the “Master Worker,” like his fellow capitalist, the

¹ [Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*.]

“Master Idler,” remains as deaf as a pot of gold. In the capacity of the blind million to achieve its own emancipation Carlyle had evidently no faith, though he boldly prophesied the like of French Revolutions without number until the great, the powerful, the Kings of the Earth, should make up their minds to be good and have peace. And, indeed, though no such revolution as he predicted took place since he wrote, there have been many Manchester Insurrections on an enlarged scale, all on the sentimental lines so dear to Carlyle.

In those days, however, appeared two young men, better prophets, because true scientists. Sentiment they valued; sentimentalism they despised. One was Frederick Engels, the other Karl Marx. Engels then resided in England. He saw, like Carlyle, the Manchester Insurrection, but, unlike him, drew a philosophy from it based on the capacity of the proletarian masses to achieve their own emancipation. In the lurid light of Facts he showed the true nature of the class struggle and its inevitable outcome. In the same light, cast by facts observed on the Continent, Marx had arrived at the same conclusion. These two men met and as it were became one—one as the Proletarian Class is bound to be. The Social Revolution had at last found its mathematical expression.

True it is, of course, that, as Carlyle said: “A man can have himself shot with cheerfulness; but it needs first that he see clearly for what.” And precisely because this is true, it is of highest import that the man be cured of his blindness. No class-conscious Socialist will incite a Manchester Insurrection. And no “County Yeomanry,” no State Militia, no unspeakable armed gentry of any sort will come, sabers flourishing, hoofs prancing, to slash down at their brute pleasure a class-conscious Socialist proletariat.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded April 2006