

Flag of Freedom (October 16, 1909)

The capitalist press takes advantage of every opening to squirt its venom at the “red flag of treason and anarchy.” It is a historic fact that the battle of Bunker Hill and other battles of the American revolution were fought under the “red flag of treason and anarchy.”

The red flag was the symbol of the revolutionary spirit that gave us the republic.

All the fruit of the revolution is eagerly sought and claimed by the “sons and daughters of the revolution,” but the red flag under which the ragged continentals fought the Tory power of Great Britain is repudiated with scorn and hate as a vile and loathsome thing.

And why?

Because it is still the sign of progress and symbol of revolution; and the corn-fed, ham-fat bourgeoisie want no more revolution.

The revolution that put the bourgeoisie in power was great and its red flag was glorious; the revolution now under way, whose historic mission it is to drive the bourgeoisie out of power, is infamous and its red flag is treason.

In other words, the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class, glorify all the revolutions of the past and shake their fat fists at all the revolutions of the future. The capitalist class has been put in power by past revolutions; therefore, they are glorious. The capitalists yearn to remain in perpetual power; therefore, there must be no more revolutions.

The earth must come to a halt; evolution to a standstill; progress to a dead stop.

The capitalist class, Joshua-like,¹ has spoken and its command is as inexorable as the fiat of Jehovah. Revolution shall be no more! Haul down the red flag of revolt, the scarlet emblem of treason, the hated rag of the rabble!

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Another bit of red flag history is recalled by the great demonstration that occurred in Rome a few days ago, of which the press dispatches give

full account. September 27th was the 37th anniversary of the occupation of Rome by Italian troops² and the fall of the temporal power of the papacy.³ A tremendous celebration of the event took place and the red flag was everywhere in evidence. The Associated Press report from Rome says:

Armed men in the service of the pop have been on guard all day long at the entrances of the Apostolic palace, and the Vatican has been under the special protection of a detachment of royal troops, but there has been no active outbreak of anti-clerical sentiment.

* * *

There were two big parades this afternoon through the streets of the city, and the *red shirts* of the Garibaldian veterans were conspicuous in the throng. The first parade was official, and composed of the members of fifty local associations.... The other parade was popular and unofficial. It marched past the capitol, carrying banners inscribed with anti-clerical sentiments. *Returning, the crowd raised a red flag over the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius.*

During the day the police seized a number of anti-monarchist proclamations, and the walls of the city were placarded with appeals of the people to "complete the anti-clerical victory at the coming municipal elections."

The events of 37 years ago are celebrated in Italy every year, but this time there were indications that the populace would take advantage of the demonstrations to indulge the anti-clerical sentiments that of recent months have cause the Vatican authorities considerable anxiety.

The day was celebrated throughout the peninsula as well as in Rome.

When Garibaldi and his followers fought their historic battles for Italian independence and separation of the state from papal authority forty years ago, they carried red flags and wore red shirts as the emblems of revolt against the insufferable despotism of state and church. All over the world Garibaldi and his soldiers were cheered and urged on in their struggle for Italian independence and for freedom from the grasp of the church, and in no country were they more enthusiastically applauded than in the United States of America.

Garibaldi and his patriot followers were fighting tyranny and oppression, and they were fighting it as freedom-loving patriots have always fought it, under the red banner of revolt, and but for the spirit this hated standard symbolizes, the human race the world over would still be in abject slavery, cowering like whipped beasts beneath the lashes of their masters.

The red flag has always been hated by every tyrant ruler, every titled parasite, and every privileged robber of honest toil.

Forty years ago American editors whose veins still tingled with the blood of their own revolutionary sires cheered the red flag and the red shirts of Garibaldi and his revolutionary followers. They were not then the servile scribes of Standard Oil, the beef trust, the railroads, and other corporations as they are today. They had some manhood, some self-respect, and dared to salute the red flag of revolution which now, in their base and vulgar subserviency, “that thrift may follow fawning,”⁴ they renounce with all the venom of their craven apostasy.

“I remember distinctly,” writes Henry L. Drake, an old warrior of the cause, “the revolution in Italy; the red flag and the red-shirted Garibaldians, and the unstinted praise given them by the New York press and the Albany press, notably the New York Tribune, under Horace Greeley;⁵ the Albany Journal, under Thurlow Weed,⁶ and the Detroit Free Press, under Wilbur F. Storey.⁷ These and many others, the principal papers of the country, freely applauded the red flag and the red shirts as emblems of liberty in that great struggle.”

There has been no change in the red flag or in its character as a signal of protest and a harbinger of freedom. The change has been wholly in the vassal editors, so-called, more properly subsidized scribblers, who now affect to detest the principles their fathers avowed and his the flag they felt proud to honor.

One of the old-time New York editors, who achieved fame because of his rugged honesty, expressed intense disgust in his latter days because of the degeneracy of the American press. He was then connected with one of the New York dailies, known as an “independent” paper. Accosted by a friend one day who inquired if the paper was really independent he answered sharply: “Independent, hell! It’s simply an intellectual house of assignation.”

And that describes the general character of the plutocratic press, the capitalist cacklers against the red flag and the social revolution whose mission is the overthrow of wage slavery. But the red flag will continue to wave and the revolution will continue its march to victory.

¹ Joshua was said to have been the top assistant of Moses, who according to the Bible became the supreme leader of the Israelite tribes following the death of Moses.

² The papal city-state of Rome was occupied in September 1870, so 1909 would have marked the 39th anniversary of the event. It's October 2, 1870, annexation by Italy is regarded as the final event in the process of national unification.

³ Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) was an anti-papal Italian nationalist military leader who championed the cause of Italian unification.

⁴ From *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, by William Shakespeare, Act 3, Scene 2.

⁵ Horace Greeley (1811-1872) was one of the preeminent journalists of the nineteenth century, best known as the founder and editor of the *New York Tribune*, to which Karl Marx was an occasional contributor from 1852 to 1861. Greeley was a candidate for president of the United States in November 1872, heading the ticket of the Liberal Republican Party, winning six of 37 states in a loss to Republican incumbent Ulysses S. Grant.

⁶ Thurlow Weed (1797-1892) was a newspaper publisher from Albany, New York. Weed helped establish the Whig Party in the United States, in which he was one of the top leaders in New York state. Following the implosion of that party he cast his lot with the anti-slavery Republican Party in 1856.

⁷ Wilbur F. Storey (1819-1884) was an American newspaper editor who purchased his initial stake in the *Detroit Free Press* in 1853. He purchased the *Chicago Times* in 1861. A supporter of Stephen Douglas against Abraham Lincoln in the election of 1860, during the American Civil War he pursued a defeatist "Copperhead" political line, which led to the paper being shut down for several days in 1863.