LOUIS BLANC AND LOUIS PUJOL

R. W. Postgate, whose fascinating book, "Revolution: 1789 to 1906," was reviewed in last month's PLEBS, *has promised to write for us a series of short biographical studies of revolutionary leaders. Here is the first, which deals with two very different men whom events, for a brief period, brought into touch with one another.*

IN October, 1811, J. J. Louis Blanc was born. His father had been executed during the Terror, and the little boy learned to dislike and fear the Jacobins. He received the usual education of a boy of the middle classes, and in the reign of Louis Philippe came to Paris as a journalist. His was, perhaps, the first alert mind to be struck by the grim realities of the growing industrialism of France. While Godefroy Cavaignac, Armand Marrast and the other romantic Republicans of the time were contemplating the ideal Republic, re-

reading Rousseau and Robespierre, and fighting for the restoration of 1793, Louis Blanc did a strange and new thing. He went about the workshops collecting facts. He studied economic statistics. He saw the proletariat and capital already in opposition; but most of all he was struck by the suffering of the workers. In 1839 he published his greatest work, *The Organisation of Labour*, in which he outlined a system of co-operative workshops, supported by the State, which would eventually drive out the private capitalist and bring about what was then called "the Social Republic." These proposals he accompanied by a really able destructive analysis of the effects of capitalist competition and a nightmare-like picture of the capitalist struggle for existence in industry, where the competing workers and employers fight for life as the stifling prisoners did in the Black Hole of Calcutta. His book was like a thunderbolt in "advanced" circles. Edition after edition was called for, and the Republicans were forced to revise all their thoughts and programmes. From sentimental believers in violence they had to become, willy-nilly, the defenders of the

workers, with an industrial programme. Blanc easily became their most distinguished publicist and by his *History of the Revolution* and *History of Ten Years*, definitely joined himself with extreme Republicans and forsook his Girondin traditions.

A pleasant, if rather sterile, life of agitation was brought to a sudden end in the February of 1848. Unexpectedly, with the suddenness of a bomb explosion, the people of Paris rose, drove out the King and proclaimed the Republic. A haphazard list of names read to the crowd became the Provisional Government, and among these names was Louis Blanc's. With the exception of Albert, his doglike follower, all the rest were more "to the Right" than Blanc.

As the tumult abated slightly, this little, dapper, conceited man found himself in the rather alarming position of the representative of the proletariat. His position and mind remind one forcibly of those of a member of the National Guilds League to-day. He had a "plan" or a system to bring the revolution. He was not a worker himself, but he was anxious that the workers should adopt and criticise his plan, and was really willing to serve them. He was also notably unfit to be a revolutionary leader; he was as irresolute in action as he was fearless in theory. His first act, as would be a Guildsman's to-day, was to call together the representatives of the workers and ask them for their support and advice. He summoned the first Soviet—the Assembly of Workers' Delegates at the Luxembourg. But (unlike to-day) the assembly was not a meeting of obstinate and opinionated delegates of firmly-rooted workers' associations, but the chance representatives of an infantile proletariat. The working-class first began to acquire form and consciousness under Blanc's hands: the Luxembourg Assembly was an enormous and rather risky step forward. And so the delegates reflected the unripeness of the workers; they were unable to criticise or suggest —they accepted uncritically all Blanc said. They undertook certain trade union functions, and did a good deal of propaganda; for the rest, they confined themselves to going through Blanc's proposals, based on the *Organisation of Labour*, and approving them clause by clause. The completed report was handed to the National Assembly when it met.

But while the workers were sitting at Blanc's feet, their governors were not idle. The Right Wing gained an immense majority in the Assembly. Louis Blanc was excluded from the new Government. The Luxembourg report was ignored. After various provocations, the irresponsible leaders of the Paris clubs headed a foolish attempt to dissolve the Assembly, which met with disaster. The Luxembourg delegates withdrew from the public eye. At the same time, also, Louis Blanc's influence declined rapidly. The workers were convinced that his eloquent appeals to the members of the Chamber were useless and revolution was again brewing.

So when the storm burst and the bourgeois Republicans turned machine-guns on the proletarian insurrection of June, Louis Blanc had no share in the workers' revolt. He was taken by surprise and had nothing to do but make broken-hearted appeals in the Assembly. After the workers' defeat he fled to England.

Twenty years and more later, after the fall of Napoleon III, he returned to France. To his admirers it was like finding the charred stick of a used rocket. The brilliance and daring of the young man of '48 had vanished. Nothing was left but a garrulous and likeable little old gentleman, of Liberal views. He lived comfortably and easily in France until his death at the age of nearly 70, and when

the papers said "Louis Blanc's Death," it came to many as a strange and sudden reminder of their youth, of the days when their hopes were high and France and the Republic were young.

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Louis Blanc was the living thought of the Revolution of '48. A few stray notes, preserved by chance, have kept for us some record of one of the actual leaders of the workers in the June battles. Hardly, perhaps, even a leader of that unorganised and dimly-conscious mass, but one whom accident placed in their front line. His name was Louis Pujol.

He was a typical Frenchman, a fellow of Cyrano de Bergerac. He knew nothing of social theory, or the class war, or the proletariat; courage and a touch of dramatic instinct were his only qualifications for leadership. Wine and women he loved, too much indeed, and bragging and rioting. But he saw a struggle going on and he threw his sword on the side of the weaker and joined in the great adventure of the Revolution.

He had spent many years as an army "bad lot," brave but undisciplined. 1848 brought him freedom. He was a violent orator and had published* before the June days a rather ranting *Prophecy of Days of Blood*, which shows a slight literary talent run to seed. Then the Assembly decided in June to close down the National Workshops, where thousands had found an insufficient livelihood, and let the workers starve, and wages reach their economic level. The workers, led by the delegates of the Luxembourg Assembly, showed they were going to fight. They demanded an interview with Marie, Minister of Public Works, and a delegation was introduced, headed by Pujol.

Marie was a whiskered, flabby-faced bureaucrat, who, like many weak men, took refuge in violent language. Pujol had hardly begun his speech when Marie interrupted him, saying he would not hear a man who had taken part in the earlier attempt to dissolve the Assembly. He pushed Pujol aside and asked the other delegates to speak. At once Pujol was awake: "No one speaks here before I do," he cried. The delegates murmured their support. Marie angrily said: "Are you this man's slaves?" Pujol replied: "You are insulting the people's delegates." Then Marie lost his temper. "Your heads are turned. It is Louis Blanc's system. We won't have it." Pink with rage, he seized Pujol's arm and shouted—"Do you realise you are speaking to a member of the Executive Power?"

Pujol threatened to withdraw, and Marie calmed down long enough to let him make a short speech about the February revolution and the misery of the workers. Then, finally, Marie spat out this—"Listen to this! If the workers refuse to obey the Assembly, we shall make them by force—by force, do you understand?"

The delegation left and Pujol reported the interview to the packed crowds in the street. He named 6 o'clock that evening (June 22) as the time for a final meeting in the Place du Panthéon, and 5,000 or more met there and swore "to be faithful to the holy flag of the Republic." They formed a column which marched through the East End of Paris by torchlight, collecting recruits till it reached some ten thousand. Late at night, in the Place du Panthéon, Pujol dismissed them with the words: "To-morrow here at 6 o'clock."

*P. 211 of my *Revolution*: 1789 to 1906.

Next morning Pujol and his followers kept their appointment. He watched for a little while in silence the enormous, fluctuating crowd; then called on them to follow him. He led them to the place where the Baſtille had once ſtood. He ſtood on the plinth of the column built to celebrate its fall, and reminded the crowd that they were at the tomb of the firſt martyrs to liberty. At his demand they bared their heads and every man knelt. Then he said:

"Heroes of the Baſtille! The heroes of the barricades have come to kneel at the foot of the monument erected to make you immortal. Like you, they have made a revolution at the price of their blood. But their blood has been barren. The revolution muſt be begun again." Then he turned his eyes down to the people. "Friends, our cause is that of our fathers. They carried on their banners the words: Liberty or Death. Friends—Liberty or Death!"

Then he led them up the boulevard to the Rue St. Denis. Here the column ſtopped and chiefs, appointed how we do not know, led detachments which ſcattered across the city, building barricades. In an hour Paris briſtled with well-defended barricades.

The reſt of the ſtory is three days' ſavage battle with the Paris garriſon, ending with a proletarian defeat, rounded off by the ſhooting of priſoners, arreſts and deportations. Pujol, who fought bravely with the rank and file, was to be deported to Cayenne, but his ſiſter was able to get Louis Bonaparte to conſent to his being impriſoned at Toulon. Soon after he was included in a general amneſty, but had to fly in 1853 to Spain, where he took part in the abortive Spaniſh Revolution. The Madrid Junta gave him the poſt of "Hiſtoriographer," but when the revolution collapſed he had to fly again and arrived in London at the end of 1855.

He very nearly ſtarved there, but lived by teaching. And he was alſo unfortunate in his love affairs for the firſt time. One of his miſtreſſes ran away with her own brother. He finally "married in the Engliſh manner" (ſay the notes of his life, maliciouſly) a pretty and ſilly Engliſh girl. Reſtleſs as ever, he went with this miſtreſs to America. What happened to him I do not know. It is ſaid that he died in the Mexican war. But the laſt we really know of him is that he left for America in the year 1858.

Then he paſſes out of our ſight, a wine-lover, a woman-lover, and a braggart, but a brave and honeſt man, a private whom accident made a leader. One out of many forgotten, whom chance has caused to be remembered, he vaniſhes from our knowledge with a laugh and the ſnatch of a bawdy ſong.

Bibliographical: Louis Blanc: *Organiſation du Travail* (Clarendon Preſs, 5s.), *Hiſtoire de Dix Ans* (O.P.), *Hiſtoire de la Révolution de* 1848 (O.P.), *Hiſtoire de la Révolution Françaiſe* (O.P.), and innumerable leſſer works. In my *Revolution, 1789 to* 1906, Documents 68 and 84 give his own outline of his ſyſtem.

Louis Pujol: Document 94 in my *Revolution* (his "Prophecy"). *Bulletin de la Société d'Hiſtoire de la Révolution de* 1848, I, 133 (notes of an interview with Balaqué, a friend of Pujol's).

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