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Ravachol
Ravachol's Forbidden Defense Speech
1892

Retrieved on June 1, 2009 from www.marxists.org

On trial for murder after a series of bombings, Ravachol attempted to give the following speech, not to deny his guilt, but to accept and explain it. According to contemporary accounts, he was cut off after a few words, and the speech was never delivered. He was guillotined shortly afterwards.

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Ravachol's Forbidden Defense Speech

Ravachol

1892

If I speak, it's not to defend myself for the acts of which I'm accused, for it is society alone which is responsible, since by its organization it sets man in a continual struggle of one against the other. In fact, don't we today see, in all classes and all positions, people who desire, I won't say the death, because that doesn't sound good, but the ill-fortune of their like, if they can gain advantages from this. For example, doesn't a boss hope to see a competitor die? And don't all businessmen reciprocally hope to be the only ones to enjoy the advantages that their occupations bring? In order to obtain employment, doesn't the unemployed worker hope that for some reason or another someone who *does* have a job will be thrown out of his workplace. Well then, in a society where such events occur, there's no reason to be surprised about the kind of acts for which I'm blamed, which are nothing but the logical consequence of the struggle for existence that men carry on who are obliged to use every means available in order to live. And since it's every man for himself, isn't he who is in need reduced to thinking: "Well, since that's the way things are, when I'm

hungry I have no reason to hesitate about using the means at my disposal, even at the risk of causing victims! Bosses, when they fire workers, do they worry whether or not they're going to die of hunger? Do those who have a surplus worry if there are those who lack the basic necessities"?

There are some who give assistance, but they are powerless to relieve all those in need and who will either die prematurely because of privations of various kinds, or voluntarily by suicides of all kinds, in order to put an end to a miserable existence and to not have to put up with the rigors of hunger, with countless shames and humiliations, and who are without hope of ever seeing them end. Thus there are the Hayem and Souhain families, who killed their children so as not to see them suffer any longer, and all the women who, in fear of not being able to feed a child, don't hesitate to destroy in their wombs the fruit of their love.

And all these things happen in the midst of an abundance of all sorts of products. We could understand if these things happened in a country where products are rare, where there is famine. But in France, where abundance reigns, where butcher shops are loaded with meat, bakeries with bread, where clothing and shoes are piled up in stores, where there are unoccupied lodgings! How can anyone accept that everything is for the best in a society when the contrary can be seen so clearly? There are many people who will feel sorry for the victims, but who'll tell you they can't do anything about it. Let everyone scrape by as he can! What can he who lacks the necessities when he's working do when he loses his job? He has only to let himself die of hunger. Then they'll throw a few pious words on his corpse. This is what I wanted to leave to others. I preferred to make of myself a trafficker in contraband, a counterfeiter, a murderer and assassin. I could have begged, but it's degrading and cowardly and even punished by your laws, which make poverty a crime. If all those in need, instead of waiting *took*, wherever and by whatever means, the self-satisfied would un-

derstand perhaps a bit more quickly that it's dangerous to want to consecrate the existing social state, where worry is permanent and life threatened at every moment.

We will quickly understand that the anarchists are right when they say that in order to have moral and physical peace, the causes that give birth to crime and criminals must be destroyed. We won't achieve these goals in suppressing he who, rather than die a slow death caused by the privations he had and will have to put up with, without any hope of ever seeing them end, prefers, if he has the least bit of energy, to violently take that which can assure his well-being, even at the risk of death, which would only put an end to his sufferings.

So that is why I committed the acts of which I am accused, and which are nothing but the logical consequence of the barbaric state of a society which does nothing but increase the rigor of the laws that go after the effects, without ever touching the causes. It is said that you must be cruel to kill your like, but those who say this don't see that you resolve to do this only to avoid the same fate.

In the same way you, *messieurs* members of the jury, will doubtless sentence me to death, because you think it is necessary, and that my death will be a source of satisfaction for you who hate to see human blood flow; but when you think it is useful to have it flow in order to ensure the security of your existence, you hesitate no more than I do, but with this difference: you do it without running any risk, while I, on the other hand, acted at the risk of my very life.

Well, *messieurs*, there are no more criminals to judge, but the causes of crime to destroy! In creating the articles of the Criminal Code, the legislators forgot that they didn't attack the causes, but only the effects, and so they don't in any way destroy crime. In truth, the causes continuing to exist, the effects will necessarily flow from them. There will always be criminals, for today you destroy one, but tomorrow ten will be born.

What, then, is needed? Destroy poverty, this seed of crime, in assuring to all the satisfaction of their needs! How difficult this is to realize! All that is needed is to establish society on a new basis, where all will be held in common and where each, producing according to his abilities and his strength, could consume according to his needs. Then and only then will we no longer see people like the hermit of Notre-Dame-de-Grace and others, begging for a metal whose victims and slaves they become! We will no longer see women give up their charms, like a common piece of merchandise, in exchange for this same metal that often prevents us from recognizing whether or not affection is sincere. We will no longer see men like Pranzini, Prado, Berland, Anastay and others who kill in order to have this same metal. This shows that the cause of all crimes is always the same, and you have to be foolish not to see this.

Yes, I repeat it: it is society that makes criminals and you, jury members, instead of striking you should use your intelligence and your strength to transform society. In one fell swoop you'll suppress all crime. And your work, in attacking causes, will be greater and more fruitful than your justice, which belittles itself in punishing its effects.

I am nothing but an uneducated worker; but because I have lived the life of the poor, I feel more than a rich bourgeois the iniquity of your repressive laws. What gives you the right to kill or lock up a man who, put on earth with the need to live, found himself obliged to take that which he lacks in order to feed himself?

I worked to live and to provide for my family; as long as neither I nor my family suffered too much, I remained what you call honest. Then work became scarce, and with unemployment came hunger. It is only then that the great law of nature, that imperious voice that accepts no reply, the instinct of preservation, forced me to commit some of the crimes and misdemeanors of which I am accused and which I admit I am the author of.

Judge me, *messieurs* of the jury, but if you have understood me, while judging *me* judge all the unfortunate who poverty, combined with natural pride, made criminals, and who wealth or ease would have made honest men.

An intelligent society would have made of them men like any other!