

In the Wings

Zo d'Axa

1895

The police roundup of April, 92¹ will remain historic.

It is the earliest among the cynical attacks on freedom of thought in modern times.

We now know the behind the scenes story of the affair.

The government wanted to take advantage of the emotions stirred up by the explosions at the Labau barracks and on the Rue de Clichy in order to include all revolutionary militants in one gigantic political trial. The ministry and its docile procurators claimed that certain opinions constituted complicity: The writer explaining that the fact that there are those who are disinherited fatally leads to theft became a criminal himself; a thinker explaining the reasons behind propaganda of the deed became the secret associates of the lighters of the tragic fuses.

The philosopher no longer has the right to preach indulgence and to conceive facts without vertigo.

Society rid itself of those of its members who are so corrupted as to want it to be better than it is.

Ruling reaction could finally enjoy in peace and lets its remorse sleep- or at the very least its doubts, which will no longer be kept awake by the words of party-poopers.

The moment was carefully chosen.

The dynamite attacks terrorized the capitalist bourgeoisie, more frightened perhaps for its real estate than for itself. It was the eve of the threatening demonstrations of May. They were afraid. And the cowardly crowd would surely have applauded every summary execution.

The roundups took place.

Particularly aimed at the anarchists, these arrests also fell on men so independent as to reject every label, even that of anarchist. And so it was that I was apprehended, though I've never set foot in a public meeting or frequented any groups. Though I wasn't part of any sect or school, was ON THE OUTSIDE, i.e., isolated, a seeker of the beyond, a shaker-up of ideas, that was enough. If lack of respect was truly combative, that sufficed. All agitation had to cease. One evil-doer the less: I was arrested.

Perfidiously conducted, the affair was cloaked in a legal appearance. The code is so elastic that they applied to us article 265 and those that follow it, aimed at associations of malefactors.

¹1892

“Art. 266. This crime exists by the sole fact of the organization of bands or the correspondence between them and their chiefs or commandants, or of conventions tending to account for or distribute or share the products of crime.”

Now do we understand the insinuations of the judge who spoke about a “list of addresses” and “the sending of money?”

“Art. 267. Even if this crime is not accompanied by any others the authors, directors of the association and the commanders in chief or the subaltern of these bands shall be punished with forced labor.”

The delightful prospect of the penal colony opened before us.

It is obvious that we couldn't count on the impartiality of the judges. The orders had been given. Even if we could prove not only that we weren't cut-purses, but that no organization among us existed — not even from a political point of view — the tribunals would strike us without a care.

One point alone was put in doubt. In order for the operation to succeed it was indispensable that the other nations put their refractory nationals through an analogous trial.

But what the French Republic premeditated, Holland, England and Germany were too ashamed to do. The old monarchies didn't cede to the incitement of a young republic that dreamed of reconstituting the International in reverse. There were unsuccessful negotiations. The hunt of the free man wasn't decreed throughout Europe. Our fallen democracy felt that it couldn't do worse than the worst autocrats.

The opportunist government hesitated, became embarrassed, like a poorly hardened rogue — and didn't dare push things to the bitter end.

That day it said to itself: game postponed!

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