

K. MARX

THE  
EIGHTEENTH  
BRUMAIRE  
OF  
LOUIS BONAPARTE



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
Moscow 1948

KARL MARX

THE  
EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE  
OF  
LOUIS BONAPARTE



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
MOSCOW 1948

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

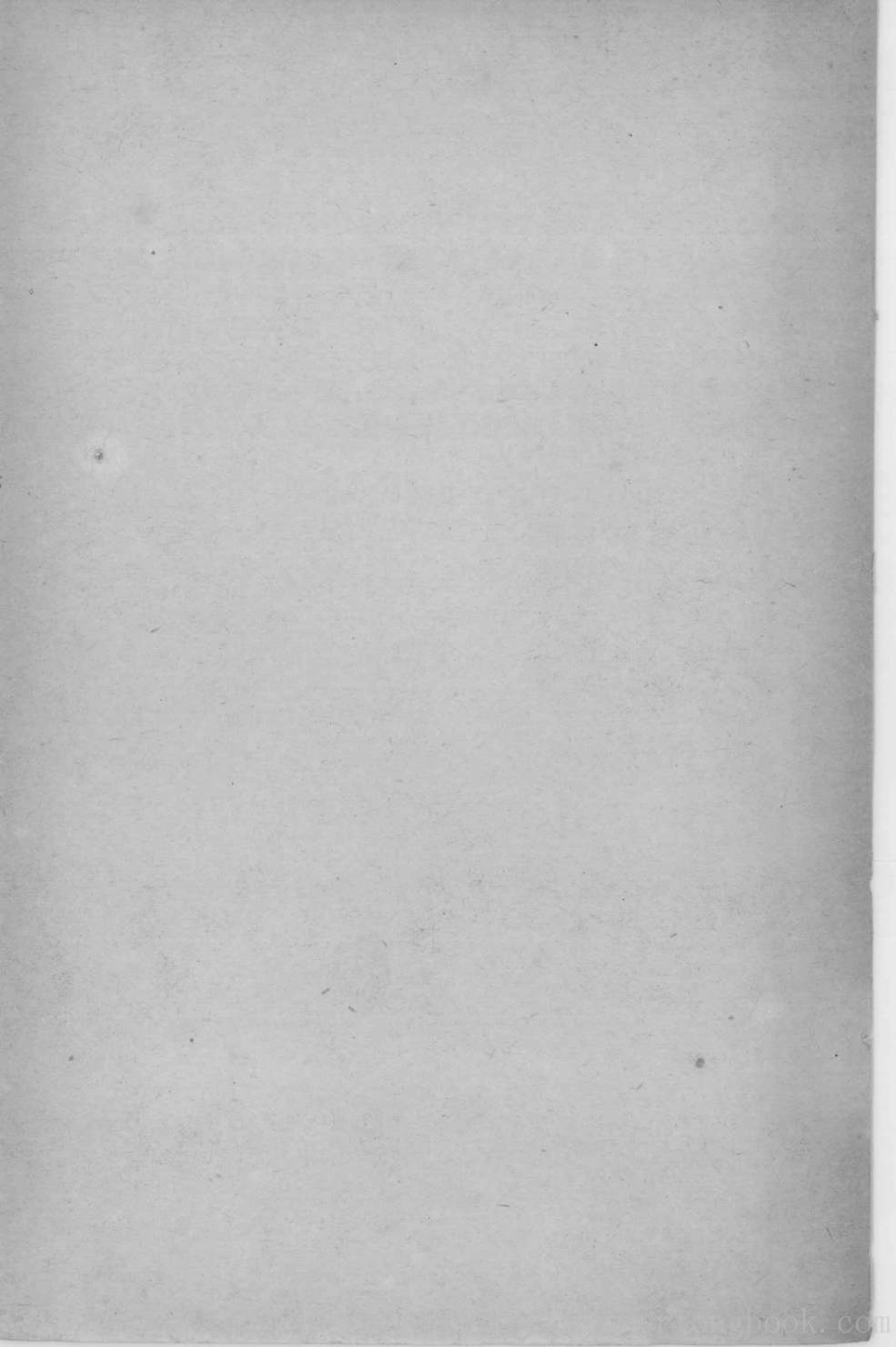
The present English translation of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* by Karl Marx has been rechecked with the third German edition (Hamburg 1885) prepared by Engels.

11008

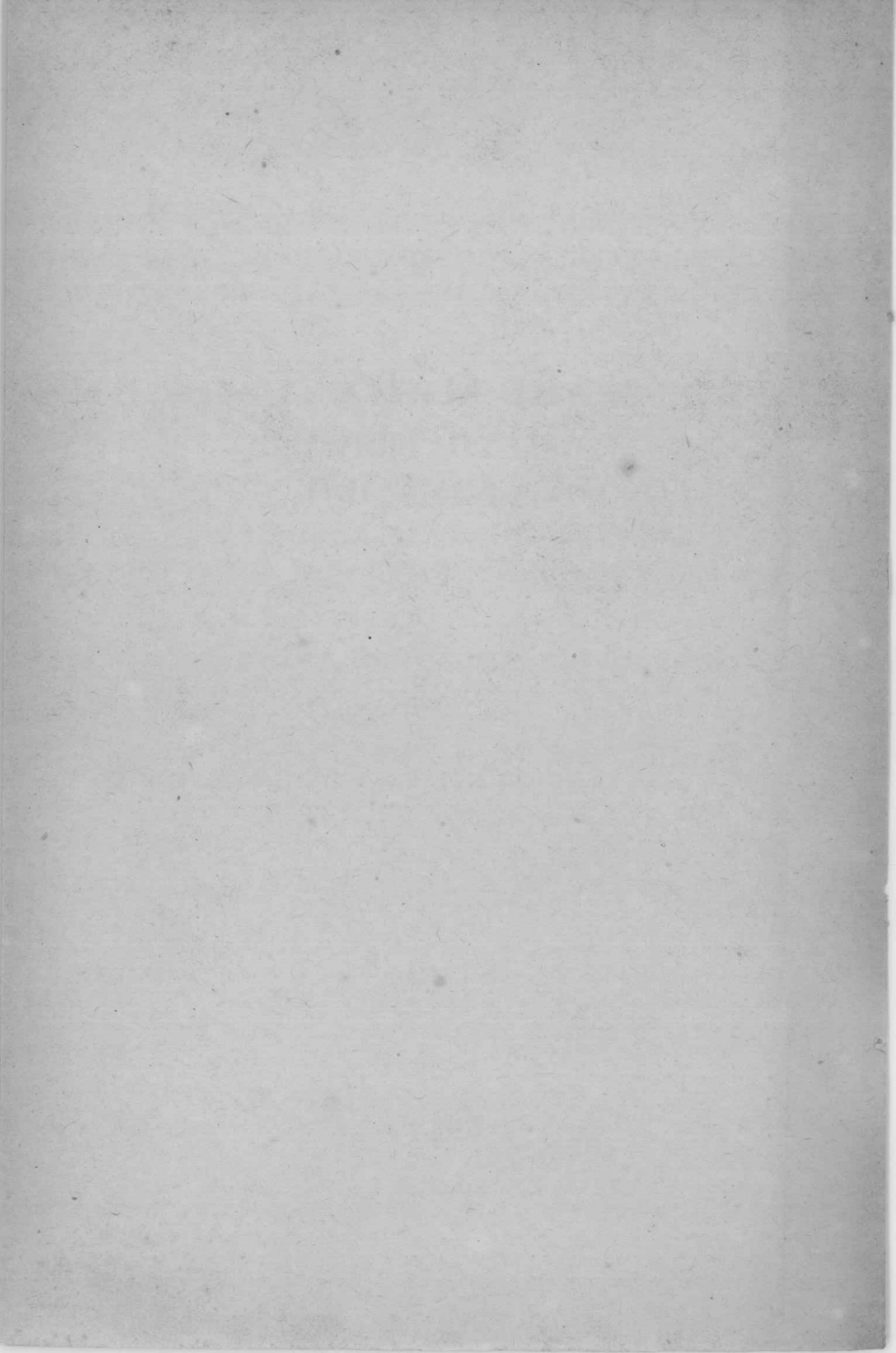
*Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION . . . . .	7
ENGELS' PREFACE TO THE THIRD GERMAN EDITION . . . . .	11
THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE OF LOUIS BONAPARTE	
I. . . . .	15
II. . . . .	29
III. . . . .	48
IV. . . . .	70
V. . . . .	86
VI. . . . .	112
VII. . . . .	141



**KARL MARX**  
**THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE**  
**OF LOUIS BONAPARTE**





AUTHOR'S PREFACE  
TO THE SECOND EDITION<sup>1</sup>

MY FRIEND Joseph Weydemeyer,<sup>2</sup> whose death was so untimely, intended to publish a political weekly in New York starting from January 1, 1852. He invited me to provide this weekly with a history of the *coup d'état*.<sup>3</sup> Down to the middle of February, I accordingly wrote him weekly articles under the title: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile Weydemeyer's original plan had fallen through. Instead, in the spring of 1852 he published a monthly, *Die Revolution*, the first number of which consists of my *Eighteenth Brumaire*. A few hundred copies of this found their way into Germany at that time, without, however, getting into the actual book trade. A German publisher of extremely radical pretensions to whom I offered the sale of my book was most virtuously horrified at a "presumption" so "contrary to the times."

From the above facts it will be seen that the present work took shape under the immediate pres-

---

<sup>1</sup> The Second Edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* appeared in Hamburg in 1869.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> Military commandant of the St. Louis district during the American Civil War. [Note by Karl Marx.]

<sup>3</sup> Of December 2, 1851. See also p. 15, note 3.—Ed.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 15, note 3.—Ed.



sure of events and its historical material does not extend beyond the month of February (1852). Its republication now is due in part to the demand of the book trade, in part to the urgent requests of my friends in Germany.

Of the writings dealing with the same subject and appearing approximately *at the same time* as mine, only two deserve notice: Victor Hugo's *Napoléon le Petit* and Proudhon's *Coup d'État*.

Victor Hugo confines himself to bitter and witty invective against the responsible author of the *coup d'état*. The event itself appears in his work like a bolt from the blue. He sees in it only the violent act of a single individual. He does not notice that he makes this individual great instead of little by ascribing to him a personal power of initiative such as would be without parallel in world history. Proudhon, for his part, seeks to represent the *coup d'état* as the result of an antecedent historical development. Unnoticeably, however, the historical exposition of the *coup d'état* is transformed into a historical *apologia* for its hero. Thus he falls into the error of our so-called *objective* historians. I, on the contrary, demonstrate how the *class struggle* in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part.

A revision of the present work would have robbed it of its peculiar colouring. Accordingly I have confined myself to mere correction of printer's errors and to striking out allusions now no longer intelligible.

The concluding sentence of my work: "But if the imperial mantle finally falls on the shoulders of Louis Bonaparte, the bronze statue of Napoleon will crash

from the top of the Vendôme Column,"<sup>1</sup> has already been fulfilled.

Colonel Charras opened the attack on the Napoleon cult in his work on the campaign of 1815. Subsequently, and particularly in the last few years, French literature made an end of the Napoleon legend with the weapons of historical research, of criticism, of satire and of wit. Outside France this violent breach with the traditional popular belief, this tremendous mental revolution, has been little noticed and still less understood.

Lastly, I hope that my work will contribute towards eliminating the stock phrase now current, particularly in Germany, of so-called *Cæsarism*. In this superficial historical analogy the main point is forgotten, namely, that in ancient Rome the class struggle took place only within a privileged minority, between the free rich and the free poor, while the great, productive mass of the population, the slaves, formed the purely passive pedestal for these combatants. People forget *Sismondi's* significant remark: The

---

<sup>1</sup> The Vendôme Column was erected in 1806-10, as a memorial to the victories of the armies of Napoleon I in 1805. It was cast from 1,200 cannon taken by Napoleon I in his various battles. A statue of Napoleon I was placed at the top of the column.

In the concluding sentence of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx predicts that Louis Bonaparte's coming to power would put an end to the cult of Napoleon I—the Napoleonic legend. It was not only in the sense of which Marx writes in his Preface of 1869 that this prophecy came true. Fifteen months after Marx had written these lines, Louis Bonaparte was dethroned; and half a year after that the Vendôme Column was destroyed, by decision of the Paris Commune, as "a monument of barbarism, a symbol of brutal force and false glory, a fortification of militarism, a repudiation of international law, a perpetual insult of the vanquished by the victors." After the defeat of the Commune, the column was restored.—Ed.

Roman proletariat lived at the expense of society, while modern society lives at the expense of the proletariat. With so complete a difference between the material, economic conditions of the ancient and the modern class struggles, the political figures they produce can likewise have no more in common with one another than the Archbishop of Canterbury has with the High Priest Samuel.

*Karl Marx*

London, June 23, 1869

ENGELS' PREFACE  
TO THE THIRD GERMAN EDITION<sup>1</sup>

THE FACT that a new edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* has become necessary, thirty-three years after its first appearance, proves that even today this little book has lost none of its value.

It was in truth a work of genius. Immediately after the event that struck the whole political world like a thunderbolt from the blue, that was condemned by some with loud cries of moral indignation and accepted by others as salvation from the revolution and as punishment for its errors, but was only wondered at by all and understood by none—immediately after this event Marx came out with a concise, epigrammatic exposition that laid bare the whole course of French history since the February days in its inner interconnection, reduced the miracle of December 2 to a natural, necessary result of this interconnection and in so doing did not even need to treat the hero of the *coup d'état* otherwise than with the contempt he so well deserved. And the picture was drawn with such a master hand that every fresh disclosure since made has only provided fresh proofs of how faithfully it reflected reality. This eminent understanding

---

<sup>1</sup> The third edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* appeared in Hamburg in 1885.—Ed.

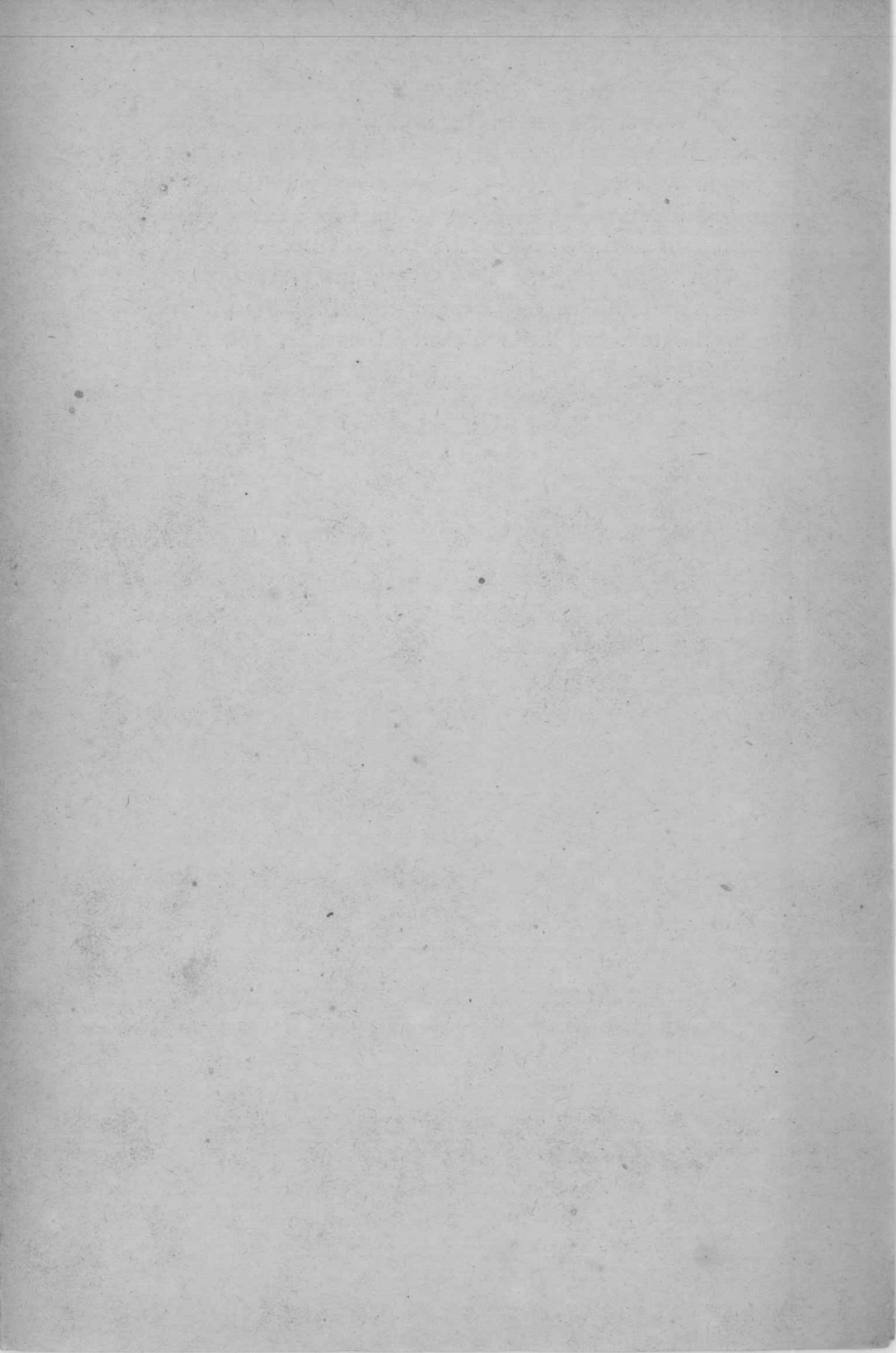
of the living history of the day, this clear-sighted appreciation of events at the moment of happening, is indeed without parallel.

But for this, Marx's thorough knowledge of French history was needed. France is the land where, more than anywhere else, the historical class struggles were each time fought out to a decision, where, consequently, the changing political forms within which they move and in which their results are summarized have been stamped in the sharpest outlines. The centre of feudalism in the Middle Ages, the model country of homogeneous monarchy, resting on estates, since the Renaissance, France demolished feudalism in the Great Revolution and established the unalloyed rule of the bourgeoisie in a classical purity unequalled by any other European land. And the struggle of the upward-striving proletariat against the ruling bourgeoisie appeared here in an acute form unknown elsewhere. This was the reason why Marx not only studied the past history of France with particular predilection, but also followed her current history in every detail, stored up the material for future use and consequently events never took him by surprise.

In addition, however, there was still another circumstance. It was precisely Marx who had first discovered the great law of motion of history, the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain, are in fact only the more or less clear expression of struggles of social classes, and that the existence and thereby the collisions, too, between these classes are in turn condi-

tioned by the degree of development of their economic position, by the mode of their production and of their exchange determined by it. This law, which has the same significance for history as the law of the transformation of energy has for natural science—this law gave him here, too, the key to an understanding of the history of the Second French Republic. He put his law to the test on these historical events, and even after thirty-three years we must still say that it has stood the test brilliantly.

*Frederick Engels*





## THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE OF LOUIS BONAPARTE <sup>1</sup>

### I

HEGEL remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. Caussidière for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the Mountain<sup>2</sup> of 1848 to 1851 for the Mountain of 1793 to 1795, the Nephew for the Uncle. And the same caricature occurs in the circumstances attending the second edition of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in German in the magazine *Die Revolution*, Heft I, New York, 1852.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> *The Mountain*: This was the name given in the Convention (the National Assembly of the Great French Revolution) to the Jacobins, who represented its radical wing, because the benches they occupied were situated high up. During 1848-51 the petty-bourgeois radical-democratic party of Ledru-Rollin appropriated this designation.—Ed.

<sup>3</sup> On the Eighteenth Brumaire of the year VII (according to the calendar introduced in the period of the Great French Revolution), or November 9, 1799, Napoleon I carried out a *coup d'état* whereby he overthrew the Directory and made himself dictator, assuming the title of First Consul. The Republic, the most important political achievement of the Great Revolution, was abolished. By "the second edition" of the Eighteenth Brumaire, Marx means the *coup d'état* carried out by Louis Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon I, on December 2, 1851.—Ed.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795. In like manner a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can produce freely in it only when he is able to find his way in it without recalling the old and to forget his native tongue in the use of the new.

Contemplation of this conjuring up of the dead of world history reveals at once a salient difference. Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Napoleon, the heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time in Roman costume and with Roman phrases, the task of unchaining and setting up modern