



MY TRIALS

Louise Michel

TRANSLATED BY MATTHEW LYONS



EDITIONS

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COMMUNE EDITIONS

PURVEYOR OF POETRY & OTHER ANTAGONISMS

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FIRST TRIAL

The Commune

PROCEEDINGS FROM *LA GAZETTE DES TRIBUNAUX*.

6TH MILITARY TRIBUNAL (*SEAT OF VERSAILLES*).

M. DELAPORTE PRESIDING,

COLONEL OF THE 12TH CAVALRY

Hearing of December 16, 1871.

The Commune did not have sufficient numbers to defend itself from the loyal men who made up the National Guard, so it established companies of children under the name “Wards of the Commune.” It tried to organize a battalion of Amazons; if this group was never formed, women could nonetheless be seen wearing military dress, more or less fanciful, rifles on their shoulders, preceding the battalions going to the ramparts.

Among those women who appear to have exercised a considerable influence in certain quarters, we note Louise Michel, former primary school teacher at Batignolles, who never ceased displaying a boundless devotion to the insurrectionary government.

Louise Michel is thirty-six years old; petite, brunette, with a very developed forehead which recedes abruptly; nose and chin very prominent; her features reveal an extreme severity. She is dressed entirely in black. Her strong enthusiasm is the same as in the first days of her captivity, and when she is led before the council, suddenly raising her veil, she stares fixedly at her judges.

Captain Dailly holds the seat of public prosecutor.

Maître Haussmann is appointed to assist the accused, who nonetheless declared that she refuses the aid of any lawyer.

The court clerk, M. Duplan, reads the following report:

It is in 1870, on the occasion of the death of Victor Noir, that Louise Michel began to express her revolutionary ideas.

An unknown school teacher with few students, it was not possible for us to know what her connections were and what part she played in the precursory events of the monstrous assault that terrified our unfortunate country.

It is unnecessary, certainly, to retrace in their entirety the incidents of March 18, and as point of departure of the accusation, we will limit ourselves to clarifying the part taken by Louise Michel in the bloody tragedy of which the Buttes-Montmartre and the rue des Rosiers were the theater. The accomplice in the arrest of the unfortunate generals Lecomte and Clement Thomas was afraid of seeing the two victims escape. "Don't let them go!" she cried with all her might to the wretches who surrounded them.

And later, when the murder had been carried out, in the presence, so to speak, of the mutilated corpses, she showed her complete joy at the spilled blood and dared to proclaim, "It serves them right." Then, beaming and satisfied with the good day, she goes to Belleville and to the Villette, to make sure "that the neighborhood remained armed."

She returns home the 19th, after having taken the precaution of shedding the federate uniform that could compromise her. But she feels the need to chat a bit about the events with her doorman.

"Ah!" she cries, "if Clemenceau had gotten to rue des Rosiers a few moments earlier, they wouldn't have shot the generals, because he was against it, being on the side of the Versailles."

At last, "the hour of the coming of the people has sounded." Paris, in the power of the foreigner and the scoundrels rushing in from all corners

of the world, declares the Commune.

As secretary of the society known for the “Improvement of Working Women through Work,” Louise Michel organizes the famous Central Committee of the Union of Women, as well as the vigilance committees responsible for recruiting paramedics and, at the final moment, working women for the barricades, perhaps even arsonists.

A copy of the manifesto found at the town hall of the 10th arrondissement reveals the role played by her in the aforementioned committees during the final days of the conflict. We reproduce verbatim this written work:

“In the name of the social revolution that we hail, in the name of the demand of the rights of work, equality, and justice, the Union of Women for the Defense of Paris and Care of the Wounded opposes with all its might the outrageous proclamation to the citizens, made public the day before yesterday by a group of reactionaries.

“Said proclamation holds that the women of Paris call on the generosity of Versailles and demand peace at all costs.

“No, it is not peace, but war to the death that the working women of Paris demand.

“Today conciliation would be treason. It would be to renounce all the working women’s aspirations demanding absolute social renewal, the annihilation of all currently existing legal and social relations, the abolition of all privilege, every exploitation, the substitution of the reign of work for that of capital, in a word, the emancipation of the worker by the worker!

“Six months of suffering and betrayal during the siege, six weeks of immense struggles against the allied exploiters, the waves of blood poured out for the cause of liberty, these are our titles of glory and vengeance!

“The current struggle can only have as its outcome the triumph of the people’s cause ... Paris will not shrink back, for it carries the flag of the future. The final hour has come! Make way for the workers! To the back with their torturers! Action! Energy!

“The tree of liberty grows, watered with the blood of its enemies! ...

“All united and unwavering, raised and enlightened by the suffering that the social crises carried in their wake, deeply convinced that the Commune, representing the international and revolutionary principles of the people, carries within it the seeds of social revolution, the women of Paris will prove to France and to the world that they too will know, at the

moment of utmost danger, at the barricades, on the ramparts of Paris, if the reaction would force the gates, how to give, like their brothers, their blood and their life for the defense and the triumph of the Commune, that is to say of the people! Thus victorious, even unto uniting themselves and understanding each other's common interests, working men and working women, all in solidarity by a last effort..." (This final sentence remained incomplete). "Long live the universal Republic! Long live the Commune!"

Including the jobs mentioned previously, Louise Michel directed a school at 24, rue Oudot. There, from her lectern, she professed, in her rare leisure time, the doctrines of free-thinking and sang to her young students the poetry fallen from her pen, among others the song entitled "The Avengers."

President of the Revolutionary Club, held at the church of Saint-Bernard, Louise Michel is responsible for the vote delivered during the session of May 18 (21 Floreal year LXXIX), and having for objective:

"The abolition of the magistrature, the obliteration of the Legal Codes, their replacement by a committee of justice;

"The abolition of religions, the immediate arrest of priests, the sale of their goods and that of the deserters and traitors who supported the wretches of Versailles;

"The execution of one important hostage every twenty-four hours until the release and arrival in Paris of Citizen Blanqui, appointed member of the Commune."

It wasn't enough, however, for this "ardent soul," as the author of an imaginative account that figures in the dossier likes to characterize her, to rouse the populace, applaud murder, corrupt children, preach fratricidal struggle, in a word to encourage all crimes; it was still necessary to lead by example and put herself on the line!

We also find her at Issy, at Clamart, and Montmartre, fighting at the front lines, firing gunshots or rallying the deserters.

Le Cri du peuple affirms as much in its April 14 edition:

"Citizen Louise Michel, who fought valiantly at Moulineaux, was injured at the fort of Issy."

Very fortunately for her, we hasten to acknowledge, Jules Vallès' heroine got out of that brilliant affair with a simple sprain.

What is the motive that pushed Louise Michel onto the fatal road of politics and revolution?

It is clearly vanity.

Illegitimate daughter raised by charity, instead of thanking Providence for having given her a superior education and the means to live happily with her mother, she indulges her fanatical imagination, her short-tempered nature and, after having broken with her benefactors, she rushes off for adventure in Paris.

The wind of Revolution begins to blow: Victor Noir has just died.

It's the moment to enter onto the scene. But Louise Michel is loath to play the role of cohort; her name must grab the public's attention and appear on the first line of misleading proclamations and posters.

Nothing remains for us but to give legal classification to the acts committed by this maniac since the beginning of the hellish crisis that France has just gone through until the end of the ungodly combat in which she took part among the tombs of the Montmartre cemetery.

She knowingly aided the culprits who arrested generals Lecomte and Clement Thomas in the acts perpetrated, and this arrest was followed by the bodily torture and death of these two unfortunate men.

Intimately linked with the members of the Commune, she knew all their plans in advance. She aided them with all her strength and with all her will. What is more, she aided them and often went beyond them. She offered to go to Versailles and assassinate the President of the Republic, in order to terrify the Assembly and, according to her, bring an end to the struggle.

She is as guilty as "Ferré the proud Republican," whom she defends in such a bizarre manner, and whose head, to use her expression, "is a challenge thrown to your consciences and the answer a revolution."

She excited the passions of the masses, preached war without mercy or rest and, a she-wolf hungry for blood, caused the deaths of the hostages through her diabolical plots.

Consequently, it is our opinion that there are grounds for bringing Louise Michel to trial for:

1. An offense, having as its goal the overthrow of the government;
2. An offense, having as its goal civil war in encouraging the citizens to arm themselves against each other;
3. For having, in an insurrectionary action, openly carried weapons and

- worn a military uniform, and made use of those weapons;
4. Forgery of private writing through impersonation;
 5. Use of a false document;
 6. Complicity through provocation and plotting the of assassination of persons held as hostages by the Commune;
 7. Complicity in illegal arrests, followed by bodily torture and death, in knowingly assisting the culprits of the deed in the acts they carried out.
- These crimes are provided for in articles 87, 91, 150, 151, 59, 60, 302, 341, 344 of the Penal Code and article 5 of the Law of May 24, 1834.

Interrogation of the Defendant

Judge: You have heard the acts of which you are accused. What do you have to say in your defense?

Defendant: I don't want to defend myself. I don't want to be defended. I belong entirely to the social revolution, and I declare that I accept responsibility for all my actions. I accept it completely and without qualification. You accuse me of being involved in the killing of the generals? To that, I would answer yes, if I had found myself in Montmartre when they wanted to fire on the people; I would not have hesitated to fire on those who gave orders like those; but as soon as they were prisoners, I don't understand why they were shot, and I consider that act as one of remarkable cowardice!

As for the burning of Paris, yes, I participated in it. I wanted to put up a barrier of flames to the invaders of Versailles. I had no accomplices, I acted on my own.

You also say that I am an accomplice of the Commune! Of course I am, since the Commune wanted social revolution above all, and social revolution is my dearest wish. What is more, I am honored to be counted among the promoters of the Commune which, in any case, was absolutely not, absolutely not involved, as you well know, with the assassinations and the burnings: I attended all of the meetings at the Hôtel de Ville, and I affirm that there was never any question of assassination or burning. Do you want to know who the real culprits are? The police. Later, perhaps, light will shine on these events for which it is today so natural for us to blame all the partisans of social revolution.

One day, I proposed to Ferré an invasion of the Assembly. I wanted two

victims, M. Thiers and myself, because I had made the sacrifice of my life, and I had decided to strike him down.

Judge: In a proclamation, you said that every twenty-four hours a hostage should be shot?

Answer: No, I only wanted to threaten. But why would I defend myself? I've already told you I refuse to do it. You are the men who are going to judge me; you're in front of me openly; you are men, and I, I am only a woman. And yet I look you straight in the face. I know very well that anything I tell you will not change my sentence in the slightest. Thus I have a single and final word before I sit down. We have never wanted anything but the triumph of the principles of the Revolution. I swear to it by our martyrs fallen on the field of Satory, by our martyrs I still acclaim openly here, and who will someday find an avenger.

Once again, I belong to you; do with me as you please. Take my life if you want it. I am not a woman who would dispute your wishes a single instant.

Judge: You declare that you did not approve of the assassination of the generals, and yet people say that, when you learned of it, you shouted, "They shot them. It serves them right."

A: Yes, I said that, I admit it. (I even recall that it was in the presence of citizens Le Moussu and Ferré.)

Q: So you approved of the assassination?

A: If I may, what I said is not proof. The words that I spoke aimed at encouraging the revolutionary impulse.

Q: You also wrote in newspapers. In *Le Cri du peuple*, for example?

A: Yes, I don't hide it.

Q: Every day these newspapers called for the confiscation of the clergy's property and other similar revolutionary measures. Such were your opinions, then?

A: Of course. But note that we had never wanted to take those goods for ourselves. We thought only to give them to the people for their well-being.

Q: You called for the abolition of the magistrature?

A: Because I always had in front of me examples of its errors. I remember the Lesurques affair and so many others.

Q: You acknowledge wanting to assassinate M. Thiers?

A: Certainly... I said it already and I say it again.

Q: It seems that you wore various costumes during the Commune.

A: I dressed as usual. I added only a red sash to my clothing.

Q: Didn't you wear men's clothing several times?

A: A single time: it was March 18th. I dressed as a National Guardsman, so I wouldn't attract attention.

Few witnesses were summoned, as Louise Michel did not dispute the actions with which she was charged.

Mme. Poulain, shopkeeper, was the first to be heard.

Judge: You know the accused? You know what her political ideas were?

A: Yes, monsieur le Président, and she didn't hide them. Quite fanatical, we always saw her in the clubs. She wrote in the newspapers.

Q: You heard her say, with regards to the killing of the generals, "It serves them right"?

A: Yes, monsieur le Président.

Louise Michel: But I already admitted the fact, it's pointless for the witnesses to attest to it.

Mme. Botin, painter.

Judge: Did Louise Michel inform on one of your brothers in order to force him to serve in the National Guard?

A: Yes, monsieur le Président.

Louise Michel: The witness had a brother, I thought him brave and I wanted him to serve the Commune.

Judge (to the witness): One day you saw the accused riding in a carriage strolling among the guards and saluting them like a queen, according to your expression?

A: Yes, monsieur le Président.

Louise Michel: But that can't be true, for I could never desire to imitate those queens, all of whom I want to see decapitated like Marie-Antoinette. The truth is that I was quite simply riding in a carriage because I suffered from a sprain that resulted from a fall that happened at Issy.

Mme. Pompon, doorkeeper, repeated everything that was in the defendant's account. Louise Michel was known as a fanatic.

Cécile Denéziat, no occupation, knew the defendant well.

Judge: You saw the accused dressed as a National Guardsman?

A: Yes, once, around March 17th.

Q: Was she carrying a rifle?

A: I said she was, but I don't recall this fact well.

Q: You saw her riding in a carriage among the National Guardsmen?

A: Yes, monsieur le Président, but I don't recall the details of this act very well.

Q: You have also said before that you think she was at the forefront when Clément Thomas and Lecomte were assassinated?

A: I can only repeat what I heard people say around me.

Captain Dailly takes the floor. He requests that the council remove the accused from society, for whom she is a continual danger. He drops the charges on all counts, except that of carrying open or concealed weapons in an insurrectionary movement.

Maître Haussmann, who spoke next, declared that because of the formal wish of the accused not to be defended, he would simply rely on the wisdom of the council.

Judge: Accused, do you have something to say in your defense?

Louise Michel: What I demand from you, you who claim to be the war council, who present yourselves as my judges, who do not hide like the Board of Pardons, from you who are military men and who judge me openly, it is the field of Satory that I demand, where our brothers have already fallen.

I must be removed from society; that's what you've been told to do. Well, the prosecutor is right! Since it seems that every heart that beats for freedom has no right to anything but a bit of lead, I demand my share! If you let me live, I will never cease crying out for vengeance, and I will denounce the assassins of the Board of Pardons to the vengeance of my brothers...

Judge: I cannot let you speak if you continue in that tone.

Louise Michel: I'm finished... If you are not cowards, kill me...

After these words, which caused a great stir in the audience, the council withdraws to deliberate. After a few minutes it returned in session, and, at the end of the verdict, Louise Michel is unanimously sentenced to deportation to a fortified place.

Louise Michel was led back in and informed of the verdict. When the clerk told her that she had twenty-four hours to apply for judicial review, she cried, "No! There is nothing to appeal. But I should prefer death!"

Observations

I will limit myself to pointing out a few errors:

1. I was not raised by charity but by my grandparents, who considered it right to do so.
- I left Vroncourt only after their deaths, and for me to prepare for my teaching diploma. I thought in this way I could be useful to my mother.
2. The number of my students in Montmartre was 150. This was recorded by the town hall at the time of the siege.
3. Perhaps it will be of use to state that, contrary to the description of my person made at the beginning of the proceedings in the *Gazette des tribunaux*, I am tall rather than short. In the times in which we live, it is fitting to only pass for oneself. —L.M.

SECOND TRIAL

Anniversary of Blanqui's Death

EXCERPTED FROM *L'INTRANSIGEANT*.
CORRECTIONAL POLICE.

Hearing of January 7, 1882

The first defendant called is Louise Michel. The courageous citizen is very calm. She answers the judge's questions with a slow voice and in a very precise manner.

"You are accused of insulting officers," M. Puget told her.

"It is rather for us to complain of abuse and insults," replied Louise Michel, "because we were very calm. Here is what happened and what no doubt explains my presence here:

"When we arrived at the police commissioner's building I saw several officers downstairs violently hitting a man. Not wanting to say anything to these overexcited officers, I climbed up to the second floor. There I found

two other officers who were calmer, to whom I said: ‘Go down there quick, someone is being murdered.’”

Judge: This story is at odds with the statement of witnesses we are going to hear.

Louise Michel: What I said is the truth. Besides, I’ve confessed to things much worse than this.

The witness called is a man named Conar, a police officer. He says that upon arriving at the police commissioner’s building he found two women, including Louise Michel, who told him: “You’re all murderers and goldbrickers.”

Louise Michel: It’s not true!

The officer persists in asserting the truthfulness of his account.

Louise Michel repeats that she has told the truth and can say nothing else.

In spite of the implausibility of the officer’s account, the court, in accordance with article 224 of the Penal Code, sentences Louise Michel to fifteen days in prison.

Note:

I am citing *L’Intransigeant* here, not to flaunt a more favorable write-up, but because the trial is not found in *La Gazette des Tribunaux*.

Our friends are right to find the words that are attributed to me unlikely. I said, “Someone is being murdered here,” instead of the slang that is ascribed to me – the word goldbricker is not in my vocabulary. —L.M

THIRD TRIAL

Demonstration on the Esplanade des Invalides

EXCERPTED FROM *LA GAZETTE DES TRIBUNAUX*.

ASSIZE COURT OF THE SEINE DISTRICT.

M. RAMÉ PRESIDING.

Hearing of June 21, 1883

I believe it unnecessary to give the text of the indictment. Here are the findings.

Louise Michel, Jean-Joseph-Emile Pouget, Eugène Mareuil, are accused:

1. Of having been, in March of 1883 in Paris, the leaders and the instigators of the looting, committed by band and by force, of loaves of bread belonging to the Augereau couple, who are bakers;
2. Of having been, at the same time and in the same place, the leaders and the instigators of the looting, committed by band and by force, of loaves of bread belonging to the Bouché couple, who are bakers;
3. Of having been, at the same time and in the same place, the leaders and

the instigators of the looting, committed by band and by force, of loaves of bread belonging to the Moricet couple, who are bakers.

Interrogation of Louise Michel

Q: Have you been prosecuted before?

A: Yes, in 1871.

Q: That ruling can no longer be mentioned. Those deeds were covered by the amnesty. Have you been prosecuted since?

A: I was sentenced to fifteen days in prison for the Blanqui demonstration.

Q: Do you take part in all the demonstrations?

A: Sadly, yes! I am always with the destitute.

Q: That's the reason you were at the demonstration on the Esplanade des Invalides. What result were you hoping for?

A: A peaceful demonstration is always unproductive, but I thought the government would use their usual means and that a demonstration would be swept away by cannon and it would have been cowardly of me not to go.

Q: You recruited your followers for that demonstration. Do you know Pouget?

A: I had met Pouget at some meetings.

Q: Pouget was your secretary. He was supposed to distribute brochures disseminating your ideas in the provinces. He gained a name as one of your followers.

A: They are not, properly speaking, followers. They are people who are curious about our ideas.

Q: You were the leader of a special little demonstration that followed the general demonstration, but we must first deal with the latter. You went to les Invalides and you met Pouget?

A: Yes, monsieur.

Q: Had you made plans with Pouget and Mareuil to go to the Esplanade?

A: No, monsieur, we met each other by chance.

Q: Weren't there only unemployed workers at this meeting?

A: Yes, monsieur.

Q: Did you think this demonstration could produce jobs?

A: I already told you no. I was there out of duty.

Q: The demonstration was dispersed. Wasn't it at this moment that you

wanted to stage your little demonstration?

A: It wasn't a demonstration; it was the cry of the workers that I wanted people to hear.

Q: You asked for a black flag?

A: Yes, I was brought a black rag.

Q: Who gave it to you?

A: A stranger.

Q: A black flag was found so easily and by chance on the Esplanade des Invalides?

A: All it takes is a black rag and a broomstick.

Q: It follows from this fact that the demonstration had been prepared in advance. Who prepared the flag?

A: No one. And this someone would be a person I wouldn't point out to you, as you well know.

Q: Didn't you leave the Esplanade with the intention of holding a demonstration?

A: I simply put myself at the head of a group.

Q: Were Pouget and Mareuil part of the group?

A: Yes, they were intent on protecting me.

Q: What was your aim in roaming through Paris with a black flag? Did you think you could get bread for the workers that way?

A: No, but I wanted to make people see that they didn't have any and that they were hungry. It was the flag of strikes, the flag of famines that I held.

The judge ordered the bailiff to take from the evidence table a black flag that Louise Michel recognized as the one she carried March 9th.

Q: You went to the boulevard Saint-Germain. Why did you stop in front of sir Bouché's bakery?

A: I kept on walking. The kids told me that the bakery was giving them bread. I didn't pay attention to these details.

Q: You claim that they were voluntarily giving away bread.

A: Yes, monsieur, the kids told us that they were giving them loaves of bread and money. I was even very humbled by it.

Q: What about the men armed with clubs, were they voluntarily given bread?

A: There was no one among us armed with clubs. They're not in the dock!

Q: You can't dispute the facts: the witness Bouché saw you at the head of a band, and fifteen or twenty individuals broke away in order to loot the shop, shouting, "Bread, work, or lead."

A: They weren't our men. That was staged by the police.

Q: You said in an interrogation that you don't see taking bread as a crime.

A: Yes, but I never took any of it. I would never take any even if I were dying of hunger.

Q: When you stopped at place Maubert, did you say to the police officer, "Don't harm us, we're only asking for bread"?

A: I did not say, "Don't harm us," but it's possible I said, "We're only asking for bread, we won't do you any harm."

Q: In short, the bakery of M. Bouché was completely looted.

A: I didn't even see a bakery. I don't know M. Bouché.

Q: The shop juts out into the street. It's blindingly obvious.

A: I was thinking only of poverty. I wasn't thinking about bakers' shops.

Q: Then you arrived in front of the bakery of M. Augereau?

A: I don't know M. Augereau.

Q: Did you raise your flag in front of that shop?

A: I could have raised and lowered it many times.

Q: Did you say, "Go"?

A: I could have said it. I must have said "Let's go" or "Let's march" several times. I don't remember.

Q: How many people did you have around you?

A: I don't know.

Q: To be brief, M. Augereau's shop was completely looted.

A: I don't know, and I'm surprised that M. Augereau is concerned with these problems. I've seen many other things looted and killed.

Q: So you're absolutely indifferent to the looting?

A: Yes, absolutely indifferent.

Q: Next you ended up on the boulevard Saint-Germain. Did you stop in front of the Moricet shop?

A: I don't know and I don't understand why you would ask me a question like that.

Q: Did you start laughing in front of the shop?

A: I don't know what could have made me laugh. Is it the misery of those

surrounding me? Is it the sad state of things that brought us back before 1789?

Q: In short, you claim you were uninvolved with all these deeds?

A: Yes, monsieur.

Q: But these three shopkeepers who were robbed claim that the crowd was obeying a signal.

A: That's absurd. To obey a signal it has to be agreed upon in advance. It would have to be known all throughout Paris that I would raise or lower the flag in front of the bakeries.

Q: Then it's a spontaneous action of the populace.

A: It's the work of a few children. The rational people who surrounded me were not involved with it.

Q: You left the demonstration at Place Maubert, leaving Pouget and Mareuil, who let themselves be arrested to save you, in the hands of the police. You disappeared.

A: My friends insisted that I not be arrested that day.

Q: Do you have knowledge of a pamphlet entitled *To the Army* that was distributed in the provinces by Pouget?

A: At a time when the Orleanists were openly recruiting people against the Republic, I wanted to recruit people for the Republic, and it's under my suggestion that this pamphlet was distributed. It was a cry for help!

Q: Do you have knowledge of the special studies of incendiary materials to which Pouget devoted himself?

A: Today everyone is interested in science. Everyone reads the *Revue scientifique* and tries to better the lives of the workers with it.

Q: We aren't here to make theories. Did you stay informed of the studies to which Pouget devoted himself?

A: I'm not interested in knowing whether or not someone reads scientific journals.

The judge proceeded to question Pouget.

The Witnesses

Bouché (Jules), baker, rue des Canettes: On March 9th, around one o'clock in the afternoon, twenty or so individuals took over my bakery. They were armed with leaded canes and demanded "bread or work!" I

said, "If you want bread, take it, but don't break anything."

Q: Do you recognize the defendant?

A: No, monsieur.

Q: Did you let them take your bread because you couldn't do otherwise?

A: There was nothing else I could do. Any resistance was impossible.

Q: Was it children who entered your bakery?

A: No, sir. They were rational men. (Laughter.)

Louise Michel: The people armed with leaded canes were not ours. I know where they came from.

Q: Where did they come from then?

A: The police. (Laughter.)

Mme Augereau, baker, rue du Four-Saint-Germain: In the afternoon of March 9th, Mme. Louise Michel stopped in front of my door. Someone shouted, "Bread! Bread!" These men came in and stole bread and cookies. They broke a plate and two window panes.

Q: Was it children who looted your shop?

A: Oh! There were more grown-ups than children.

Q: Where was Louise Michel while they were looting?

A: She was standing right in the middle of the street.

Q: Did you willingly give away your bread?

A: Oh no, monsieur.

Q: How many of them were there?

A: I couldn't say, but there were a lot of them. It was a real pillage.

Mlle. Augereau (Rosalie), rue du Four-Saint-Germain: On March 9th, we saw a band arrive, at the head of which there was a woman with a black flag, who came right in front of our shop and struck the ground with her flag. Someone said, "Go!" The house was taken over and everything was looted.

Q: (to Louise Michel) That's the second witness who saw you stop in front of the shop.

Louise Michel: I can't take these statements seriously. I can't, in front of serious men, discuss these things. (Laughter.)

Q (to the witness): Was it a woman's voice that said, "Go"?

A: Yes, monsieur.

Q: Were there other women in the crowd?

A: I didn't see any.

Moricet, baker, boulevard Saint-Germain, 125: On March 9th, I was sleeping when my granddaughter came to wake me up. The shop was filled with people. I saw a woman who was leaving with a black flag.

Mme. Moricet, baker, boulevard Saint-Germain, 125: On March 9th, the crowd gathered in front of my shop. At its head was Louise Michel, who stopped in front of the shop and struck the ground with her flag and started to laugh. They demanded bread or work! I started to give them bread, but they didn't hesitate to take it themselves and break everything.

Q (to Louise Michel): What do you think of that statement? Is it clear enough?

A: So clear I've never seen anything like it. (Laughter.) How could I have laughed? She completely dreamed it.

Q: I am here to say what I saw.

A: You're free to say what you like, but I'm free to say you dreamed it.

Q (to the witness): You didn't freely give your bread to those men?

A: No, monsieur, it's because they were making frightening gestures when they came in. They were shouting, "Work or bread!"

Louise Michel: Oh, they were so frightening! I was so frightening too! These women were hallucinating with fear. They saw Louise Michel as a sort of Hydra.

Cornat, police lieutenant of the 6th arrondissement: On March 9th, on learning that a band was roaming the arrondissement and letting out seditious cries, I went in pursuit of it and caught up at the Place Maubert. The band was led by Louise Michel, with Pouget and Mareuil at her sides. I apprehended these last two and Pouget called me a coward and a scoundrel. As for Louise Michel, she was able to slip away. Everyone was shouting, "Long live the Revolution! Down with the police!"

Q: Didn't Louise Michel say something to you?

A: She said to me, "Don't hurt me!"

Blanc, police officer of the 6th arrondissement: On March 9th, a watchman came to warn the police lieutenant that the bakery on rue des Canettes was being looted. We went in pursuit of the band and we reached them at Place Maubert. The police lieutenant stopped Louise Michel, who told him, "Don't hurt us, we're only asking for bread!" Pouget called the lieutenant of police a coward and a scoundrel. Mareuil cried out, "Down with the police! Down with Vidocq! Long live the

social revolution!” The assailants had leaded canes, revolvers, and knives.

Louise Michel: I never said, “Don’t hurt us,” but only, “We will not hurt you.” These men were very disturbed.

Q: You were the only one who kept your composure?

A: We’ve seen so much! I protest for the honor of the Revolution. Surely I have the right to point out discrepancies in the testimonies. I have never prostrated myself before anyone. I have never asked for mercy. You can say all you want, you can sentence us to prison, but I do not want you to dishonor us.

Hearing of June 22. Continuation of the Witnesses for the Prosecution.

Mlle. Moricet: On March 9th, I was in the shop with my sister and my mother, when I saw a band arrive in front of the house led by a woman armed with a black flag.

That woman stopped in front of the shop, struck the ground with her flag and started laughing!

The band immediately rushed into the shop, took all the bread and cakes that were there, then the plates and the windows were broken. I quickly looked for my father.

Q: You are sure you saw Louise Michel stop in front of the shop and laugh while she struck the ground with her flag?

A: Yes, monsieur.

Louise Michel: I’m ashamed to respond to things like that! If the little Mlle. Moricet brings in her sister, her cousin, her little brother, and anyone else she wants, I will not stop to respond to such petty things. I’ll wait for the prosecution’s closing speech to respond.

Mlle Moricet, sister of the preceding Moricet: I was in the shop with my mother. I saw, all of a sudden, a whole band with a woman at the head. It was madame. She started laughing while she looked at the shop and I even said to my mother, “Hey, she knows you!” At that moment everyone rushed into the shop and began looting it.

Louise Michel: I’ll repeat what I just said: it is shameful to see children reciting to the court the lessons their parents taught them.

Chaussadat, painter, quai du Louvre, heard at the request of the defense: On March 9th, I was at the corner of the rue de Seine, in front of the Moricet bakery, I saw the crowd arrive from far away, Mlle. Louise

Michel passed by without stopping. Later on I heard talk of the looting of the bakery (or rather, I saw bread being thrown).

Q: You don't call that looting?

A: I saw bread being thrown and the needy picking it up.

Louise Michel: I must thank the witness for paying homage to the truth!

Henri Rochefort, publicist: One day, while talking about the demonstrations of the month of March, Louise Michel told me that the newspapers had spoken much of a sum of around 60 francs that was found on one of the defendants. She added that the sum came from a collection made at a meeting. Louise Michel reported this to me at the moment she went to M. Camescasse's place to turn herself in. The same day, she confirmed to me the absolutely peaceful nature of the demonstration in which she was engaged. She had not even wanted to take the red flag. I was surprised at the accusation of looting brought against Louise Michel.

Vaughan, publicist: Mlle. Louise Michel, the very night of the demonstration, told me that her friend Pouget would be found to be the bearer of a sum of 60 to 70 francs that she herself had delivered to him and which was the product of a collection made at a meeting. I am pleased to express to Citizen Louise Michel my deepest sympathy.

Louise Michel: Citizen, I thank you and I will do my best to assure that no citizen will ever be ashamed of me.

Rouillon, neighbor of Louise Michel's mother: The citizen Louise Michel had no confidence in the outcome of the demonstration. She told me that before going there. The citizen only went there out of duty.

The witness next went into rather lengthy details on the violence and threats to which Louise Michel and her family have been subjected.

Louise Michel: You can see that our families are murdered in our homes, and it is permitted!

Meusy, editor of *L'Intransigeant*, confirmed what was reported by the witness Vaughan regarding the sum of 71 francs found on the defendant Pouget.

This was the last witness for the defense.

The floor is given next to the *Avocat-général*, Quesnay de Beaurepaire. Then M. Balandreau, attorney appointed to the defendant, declares that Louise Michel intends to defend herself.

Defense Speech of Louise Michel

It's a real political proceeding that is being brought against us. It's isn't us that they're prosecuting; it's the anarchist party that is being prosecuted through us. And that is the reason I had to refuse the offers to defend me made by Maître Balandreau and by our friend Laguerre who, not long ago, undertook to defend our friends from Lyon so warmly.

M. l'Avocat-général invoked the Law of 1871 against us. I will not bother to find out whether this Law of 1871 was made by the victors against the vanquished, against those they were crushing as a millstone crushes grain. That was the time when the National Guard was being hunted in the plains, when Gallifet was pursuing us into the catacombs, when the streets of Paris were piled on each side with corpses. There is one thing that surprises you, that appalls you, and it is a woman who dares to defend herself. People are not accustomed to seeing a woman who dares to think. People want, as Proudhon put it, to see a woman as either a housewife or a courtesan!

We carried the black flag because the demonstration was to be essentially peaceful, because it is the black flag of strikes, the flag of those who are hungry. Could we carry any other? The red flag is nailed up in the cemeteries and we only have the right to take it up when we can defend it. We cannot do that now. I've said it before and I repeat, it was essentially a peaceful demonstration.

I went to the demonstration. I had to go. Why was I arrested? I've traveled across Europe, saying that I do not recognize borders, saying that all of humanity has right to the heritage of humanity. And that heritage will not belong to us, accustomed to living in slavery, but to those who will have freedom and who will know how to enjoy it. That is how we defend the Republic. And when we are told that we are its enemies, we have only one response, that we have founded it upon thirty-five thousand of our corpses.

You talk of discipline, of soldiers firing on their officers. Do you believe, M. l'Avocat-général, that if, at Sedan, they had fired on their leaders who had betrayed them, they would not have done the right thing? We would not have had the rotteness of the Sedan.

M. l'Avocat-général talked a lot about soldiers. He praised those who brought the anarchist demonstrators back to their superiors. Are there a

lot of officers, a lot of generals, who turned in the gifts from Chantilly and the manifestos of M. Bonaparte? I'm not putting d'Orléans or Bonaparte on trial; we only put their ideas on trial. M. Bonaparte was acquitted and we are prosecuted. I pardon those who commit the crime; I do not pardon the crime. Is it not the law of the powerful that dominates us? We want to replace it with rights, and that is our crime in its entirety!

Above the courts, beyond the twenty years of forced labor that you can sentence us to, beyond the eternity of forced labor if you want, I see the dawn of freedom and equality breaking. Come on! You are fed up with it, you are disgusted with what is going on around you!... How can you calmly watch the proletariat suffer without end while others gorge themselves?

We knew that the demonstration at the Invalides would amount to nothing, yet it was necessary to go. Today we are in total destitution... We do not call this regime a republic. We would call a regime a republic where there is progress, where there is justice, where there is bread for all. But how does your Republic differ from the Empire? What is this talk of freedom of the courts when there is five years of forced labor in the end?

I did not want for the cry of the workers to be lost. You will do with me what you want. This isn't about me. It concerns a large part of France, a large part of the world, because people are becoming more and more anarchist. People are disgusted with the way power was used under M. Bonaparte. The people have already led many revolutions! Sedan ridded us of Bonaparte. The people led one on March 18th. You will no doubt see more of them, and it is for that reason that we march full of confidence toward the future! Without authority resting in the hands of a single person, there will be light, there will be truth, and there will be justice. Authority given to one person is a crime. What we want is the authority of all. M. l'Avocat-général was accusing me of wanting to be a leader. I have too much pride for that. I cannot abase myself and being a leader is an abasement.

Here we are some distance from M. Moricet and his bakery, and I'm having trouble returning to those details. Must we speak of those crumbs handed out to some children? It's not bread that we needed; it's the bread of work we were demanding. How can you imagine reasonable men having a good time taking a few loaves of bread? That some kids have been gathering crumbs, that's fine, but it is tiresome to discuss such unserious things.

I would prefer to return to great ideas. Let young people work instead

of going to cafés, and they will learn to fight to better the lives of the impoverished, to prepare the future. People recognize homelands only to make them a home for war. People recognize borders only to make of them an object to tamper with. The homeland, the family, we conceive them in a larger sense, spread wider. Those are our crimes.

We are in an era of anxiety. Everyone is seeking their own way. We say all the same: Come what may! Let freedom be realized! Let equality be achieved, and we will be happy!

The hearing is adjourned at five o'clock, and the proceedings continued the next day.

Hearing of June 23.

The floor is given to Maître Pierre, defense attorney for Pouget, then Pouget himself. Maître Pierre next defends Moreau, who had been arrested during the trial.

Maître Laguerre takes the floor last in favor of the three defendants who remained free.

After a few words of reply from M. l'Avocat-général, the judge asks the defendants if they have something to add in their defense. Louise Michel, alone, spoke in these terms:

I wish only to say a word. This trial is a political trial. It is a political trial that you will have to judge. As for me, you have given me the role of the primary defendant. I accept it. Yes, I am the only one responsible. It was a long time ago that I sacrificed myself and that the standard was gone for what could be agreeable or disagreeable to me. I see only the Revolution! That alone is what I shall always serve. I salute the Revolution! May it rise up over men instead of rising up over ruins!

At two forty-five the jury enters a room for deliberations. They come out at four fifteen.

The jury foreman reads the verdict. It is guilty, but mitigated by extenuating circumstances concerning Louise Michel, Pouget, and Moreau, alias Gareau. The other defendants are found not guilty.

As a result of this verdict, Mareuil, Onfroy, Martinet, and the woman Bouillet are immediately acquitted.

After half an hour of deliberation, the court hands down a judgment by

which it sentences the two defendants in absentia, Gorget and Thierry, each to two years in prison, Louise Michel to six years of solitary confinement, Pouget to eight years of solitary confinement, and Moreau, alias Gareau, to a year in prison.

Louise Michel and Pouget are additionally placed under police supervision for ten years.

Judge: Those of you condemned have three full days to appeal the sentences that have been handed down.

Louise Michel: Never! You imitate all too well the Empire's magistrates.

From the back of the room, violent protests greeted the sentencing of the accused. Some cries of, "Long live Louise Michel!" were heard, and it is in the midst of the noise and the most diverse cries that the audience adjourned.

The tumult continued outside and the citizen Lisbonne, who stood out for the vehemence of his protestations, is thrown out of the Palais de Justice. The crowd continues to stand about for some time on the Place Dauphine.

Note

Since I am addressing myself to the crowd today, I will say what I didn't think it was necessary to say in front of the prosecution; we were not seeking to move our judges to pity. That would be useless anyway, as we were judged in advance.

Not only did I not start laughing stupidly at a door, but, having left my mother who pleaded with me to wait until she is no longer alive to go to demonstrations, I had little desire to laugh.

As for choosing the Moricet bakery as bastion of a revolutionary movement, I have no need to defend myself against such an absurdity.

It is not a crumb of bread, but the harvest of the entire world that the human race needs, without exploiters and without exploited. —L.M

As for the burning of Paris, yes, I participated in it. I wanted to put up a barrier of flames to the invaders of Versailles. I had no accomplices, I acted on my own.

You also say that I am an accomplice of the Commune! Of course I am, since the Commune wanted social revolution above all, and social revolution is my dearest wish.