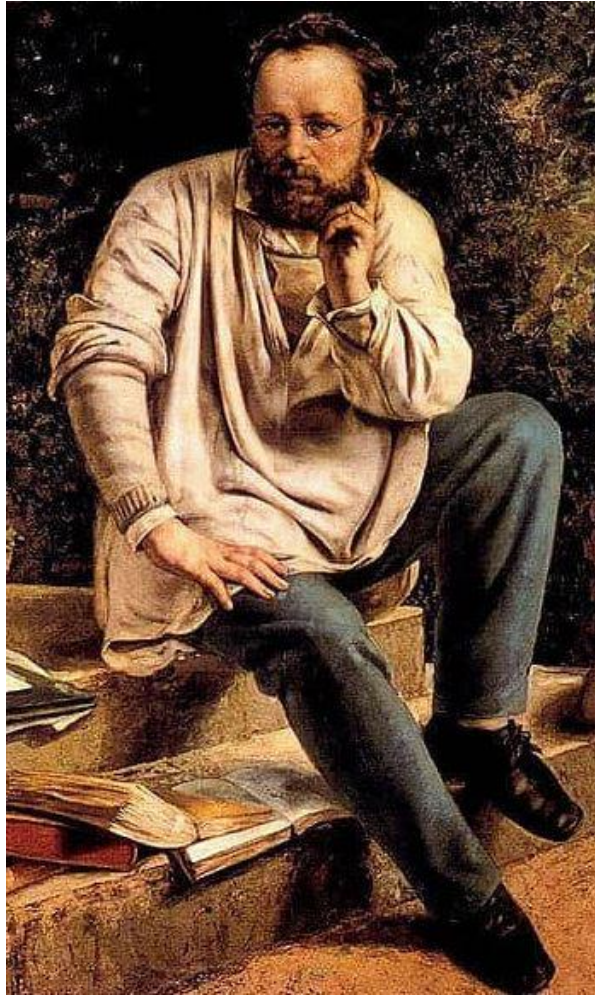


Black Flag

Anarchist Review

“Property is theft!” **“I belong to the Party of Labour
against the Party of Capital”**

**“Capital, whose
mirror-image in
the political
sphere is
Government, has
a synonym in the
religious context,
to wit,
Catholicism... an
attack upon one
is an attack upon
the others”**



**“From above...
signifies power;
from below
signifies the
people. On the
one hand we
have the actions
of government;
on the other, the
initiative of the
masses”**

**“Whoever lays
his hand on me
to govern me is
a usurper and
a tyrant: I
declare him my
enemy.”**

**“Political
economy –
that is,
proprietary
despotism –
can never be
in the wrong:
it must be the
proletariat”**

**“There will no longer be nationality, no longer
fatherland, in the political sense of the words: they will
mean only places of birth. Whatever a man’s race or
colour, he is really a native of the universe; he has
citizen’s rights everywhere.”**

“I am an Anarchist”
“Property is despotism”

**“The conclusion is that government can never be revolutionary quite simply because it is
government. Society alone, the masses armed with their intelligence, can create revolution”**

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 1809-1865

Spring 2025

Volume 5

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Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of *Black Flag* in 2025!

Following on from our Kropotkin special of Autumn 2022, we mark the 160th anniversary of the death of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon – and the 185th anniversary of him writing “I am an anarchist” – with an issue dedicated to his contribution to anarchism. Needless to say, this is not to suggest that we embrace his ideas uncritically – his views on women (to take an obvious example) are so backward as to be misogynistic. Yet, Bakunin considered his own ideas as “Proudhonism widely developed and pushed right to these, its final consequences” and many revolutionary anarchists since have engaged fruitfully with his ideas, separating the wheat from the chaff.

The first comprehensive collection of Proudhon’s writings only appeared in 2011, with the anthology *Property is Theft!* although selections of his writings did appear in various collections of anarchist writings. This issue builds upon that collection, although we start with articles on Proudhon from a variety of periods. These discuss his ideas and address various claims made against him and his ideas. As will be seen, much of the “conventional wisdom” regarding him is often wrong, incomplete (selective!), exaggerations or lacking context (whether historical or textual).

Then we turn to works by Proudhon. These are split into three eras – those written between 1840 and 1847, those from 1848 to 1851 (the February Revolution) and then those from 1852 to 1865 (the federalist period). These are mostly new translations and hopefully supplement the material already available, showing why Proudhon is still relevant and deserves to be taken seriously even if we reject certain aspects of his ideas or recognise their limitations. We do not expect or desire that all of Proudhon’s ideas are accepted, simply that we gain a better understanding of them and why he was, during his lifetime and for years after his death, so influential in European socialist and labour movements. He deserves better than the smug dismissal of Marxists – and those anarchists who consider credibility in those circles as more important than knowing our history and ideas. As will become clear, Proudhon can be considered the first modern socialist and was a trail-blazer on many ideas which are a staple of anarchist theory and practice.

For those interested in finding out more on Proudhon, then Shawn P. Wilbur (libertarian-labyrinth.org) has done sterling work on translating his writings. Also of note is the *Property is Theft!* website (property-is-theft.org).

If you want to contribute rather than moan at those who do, whether it is writing new material or letting us know of on-line articles, reviews or translations, then contact us: blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk

On Proudhon

“But then came Proudhon: the son of a peasant, and, by his works and instinct, a hundred times more revolutionary than all the doctrinaire and bourgeois Socialists, he equipped himself with a critical point of view, as ruthless as it was profound and penetrating, in order to destroy all their systems. Opposing liberty to authority, he boldly proclaimed himself an Anarchist by way of setting forth his ideas in contradistinction to those of the State Socialists.”

– Michael Bakunin

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon played a key role in the development of anarchism as a socio-economic theory, not least its name. Many of the ideas we associate with anarchism in its revolutionary form (collectivist, communist, syndicalist) were first raised by him – indeed, many presumed “Marxist” notions can be found in his writings before they were echoed or developed by Marx (without acknowledgement, of course). As such, his ideas are relevant for radicals past and present – and unsurprisingly they have proved much discussion over the years.

We start with two contemporary French feminist-socialists, Jeanne Deroïn (1805-1894) and Jenny d’Héricourt (1809-1875) rightly taking him to task for his sexist views, noting their atrocious nature and how they contradict his egalitarian views. Others critiquing his reactionary position include André Léo (*Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 4 No. 2 [Summer 2024]) and Joseph Déjacque (*Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 1 No. 2 [Summer 2021]). Patriarchy, in short, hardly fits with anarchy.

Next is an article from *Freedom* which introduces his ideas on workers’ associations to its (predominantly) anarchist-communist readers. Given that at the time his works were most associated with Individualist Anarchism, this was a significant article. This is followed by leading American Individualist anarchist Benjamin R. Tucker’s short refutation of attempts by French neo-royalists to appropriate Proudhon to their reactionary proto-fascist ideology. On a similar theme, we then reprint a critique by Italian anti-fascist Nicola Chiaromonte of the suggestion that Proudhon can best be understood as a fascist, as expounded by American liberal J. Salwyn Schapiro. While much referenced by Marxists, Chiaromonte shows well the baselessness of Schapiro’s claims (although more, much more, could be written on Schapiro’s dishonesty).

We then turn to Daniel Guérin, Trotskyist turned libertarian communist, who more than any helped bring Proudhon’s ideas to the attention of radicals in the second half of the twentieth century. While his account is not without its flaws and errors, it is still an excellent introduction to why Proudhon remains of interest to all genuine socialists. Guérin’s enthusiasm for his ideas on self-management will hopefully be catching

Then to more recent accounts. We reprint an account of Proudhon’s views of property, possession and socialisation which seeks to set the record straight on his economic ideas. Then an Australian anarchist’s debunking of a sadly all-too-familiar Leninist diatribe against anarchism which unthinkingly lifts its nonsense from Hal Draper. We end with a discussion of four claims made against Proudhon which seeks to base criticism on a more accurate basis than they usually are, covering housing reform, democracy, his anti-Semitism and organising credit.

Letter to Proudhon

Jeanne Deroin

January 1849¹

Monsieur,

I know that, preoccupied most especially with questions of political economy, you have not accepted all the consequences of the principles on which our social future rests.

You are one of the most formidable adversaries of the principle of equality – a principle which does not allow unjust exclusion and privileges of sex.

I know that you do not wish to recognize the right of women to civil and political equality. This right, which contains in it the abolition of all social inequalities, of all oppressive privileges.

But I also know that this opposition on your part is founded on a respectable motive. You fear that the application of this principle seriously undermines the holy laws of morality.

If it was demonstrated to you that you are in error, I believe, Monsieur, in your honesty, in your sincere love for truth, and I do not doubt that you would use all your influence on the minds of the people, to destroy the direst of prejudices which hinder the march of humanity on the road of progress.

You will yourself be the firmest supporter, the most ardent defender that holy cause – that of all the weak, and all the oppressed.

I appeal to you, Monsieur, to examine more seriously all the aspects of this great question, so important in this epoch of transition where our social regeneration is prepared.

Permit me to present to you some observations on this subject. The superiority of your knowledge and intelligence is one more reason for me to hope that they will be received with kindness.

As a Christian socialist, I would say, like you, Monsieur, *rather housewives than courtesans*, if I wasn't certain that a great number of women become courtesans only to escape the necessity of being housewives.

Poor women, who would perhaps be preserved from shame if we found for them a place between the necessity of being housewives or courtesans, which would have favoured the right to work over the run of the household.

To your dilemma, Monsieur, I will oppose another which is an axiom for me: slave and prostitute, or free and chaste, for woman there is no middle ground.

Prostitution is the result of the slavery of women, of ignorance and poverty.

Do not suppress any more the development of their most noble faculties; promote the free development of their intelligence; give a noble aim to their activity, the weaknesses of the heart and the digressions of the imagination will no longer be anything to fear.

You want to strengthen the links of the family, and you divide it: man in the forum or the workshop, woman at home by the hearth. Separated from their husbands and children, from their father and brothers, women, as in the past, will be consoled in their isolation and servitude by dreaming of the celestial homeland, where they would have the freedom of the city, where there would no longer be inequality or unjust privileges. Abandoned by you to the influence of the confessional, they will entwine you in a mysterious, and all your efforts towards progress will be vain; you will fight without success for liberty like those Polish barons who refused to free their serfs. You will try uselessly to establish equality between citizens: society is based on the family, and if the family remains based on inequality, society will always go back to its rut, and re-enter, as you say, *the natural order of things*. Since the origin of the world there have been slaves and masters, oppressed and tyrants, privileges of sex, of race, of birth, caste and fortune, and it always will be as long as you refuse to practice fraternity towards those that God has given you as sisters and companions.

You ask what the mission of woman will be outside of the family? She will come to help you reestablish order in that great, but badly administered household that we call the State, and to substitute a just division of the products for the permanent spoliation of the severe labours of the proletarian. The mother worthy of that name is predisposed to love the weak and suffering, but she is occupied with solicitude to preserve equally all her children from cold and hunger, and to give rise to a mutual sympathy in their heats; she will do for the great social family what she does in her home when she will widen the egoistic circle of domestic affections by rising to the height of humanitarian questions.

I strongly desire, Monsieur, for you to share my profound conviction, that no serious reform can be accomplished in an enduring manner without the application of that great principle of the right of women to civil and political equality, which is the basis of our social redemption.

Please accept, Monsieur, the assurance of my highest consideration.

¹ <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/working-translations/jeanne-deroin-to-proudhon-january-1849/>

A Woman's Philosophy of Woman; or Woman Affranchised

Jenny P. d'Héricourt

1864²

Proudhon

[...]

Ah! you persist in maintaining that woman is inferior, minor! you believe that women will bow devoutly before the high decree of your autocracy! No, no; it will not, it cannot be so. To battle, M. Proudhon! But let us first dispose of the question of my personality.

You consider me as an exception, by telling me that, if it were necessary to decide on my thesis by comparison between a host of men and myself, the decision would be, doubtless, in favour of my opinions. Mark my reply:

“*Every true law is absolute.* The ignorance or folly of grammarians, moralists, juriconsults, and other philosophers, alone invented the proverb: There is no rule without an exception. *The mania of imposing laws on Nature, instead of studying Nature's own laws, afterwards confirmed this aphorism of ignorance.*” Who said this? You, in the “Creation of Order in Humanity.” Why is your letter in contradiction with this doctrine?

Have you changed your opinion? Then I entreat you to tell me whether men of worth are not quite as exceptional in their sex, as women of merit in theirs. You have said: “Whatever may be the differences existing between men, they are equal, because they are human beings.” Under penalty of inconsistency, you must add: Whatever may be the differences existing between the sexes, they are equal, because they form a part of the human species—unless you prove that women are not a part of humanity. Individual worth, not being the basis of right between men, cannot become so between the sexes. Your compliment is, therefore, a contradiction.

I add, lastly, that I feel myself linked with my sex by too close a solidarity ever to be content to see myself abstracted from it by an illogical process. I am a woman—I glory in it; I rejoice if any value is set upon me, not for myself, indeed, but because this contributes to modify the opinion of men with respect to my sex. A



Jenny d'Héricourt (1809-1875)

woman who is happy in hearing it said: “*You are a man,*” is, in my eyes, a simpleton, an unworthy creature, avowing the superiority of the masculine sex; and the men who think that they compliment her in this manner, are vainglorious and impertinent boasters. If I acquire any desert, I thus pay honour to women, I reveal their aptitudes, I do not pass into the other sex any more than Proudhon abandons his own, because he is elevated by his intellect above the level of foolish and ignorant men; and if the ignorance of the mass of men prejudices nothing against their

right, no more does the ignorance of the mass of women prejudice anything against theirs.

[...]

Yes; until now, man, in subordinating woman, has been her tyrant and enemy. I am of your opinion when, in your first “Memoir on Property,” you say that, so long as the strong and the weak are not *equals*, they are *strangers*, they cannot form an alliance, *they are enemies*. Yes, thrice yes, so long as man and woman are not equals, woman is in the right in considering man as her *tyrant* and *enemy*.

“The most rigorous justice cannot make woman the EQUAL of man.” And it is to a woman whom you set in your opinion above a host of men, that you affirm such a thing! What a contradiction!

“It is *an infatuation* for women to demand their right!” *An infatuation* like that of slaves, pretending that they were created freemen; of the citizens of ‘89, proving that men are equal before the law. Do you know who were, who are the infatuated? The masters, the nobles, the whites, the men who have denied, who do deny, and who will deny, that slaves, citizens, blacks, and women, are born for liberty and equality.

“The sex to which I belong is incapable of understanding and governing itself,” say you!

Prove that it is destitute of intellect;

² <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/53937/pg53937-images.html>

Prove that great empresses and great queens have not governed as well as great emperors and great kings;

Prove against all the facts patent that women are not in general good observers and good managers;

Then prove that all men understand themselves perfectly and govern themselves admirably, and that progress moves as if on wheels.

“Woman is neither the *half* nor the *equal* of man; she is *the complement that finally makes him an individual*; the two sexes form *the human androgynus*.” Come; seriously, what means this jingle of empty words? They are metaphors, unworthy to figure in scientific language, when our own and the other higher zoölogical species are in question. The lioness, the she-wolf and the tigress are no more the halves or the complement of their species than woman is the complement of man. Or Nature has established two *exteriorities*, two wills, she affirms two unities, two entireties not one, or *two halves*; the arithmetic of Nature cannot be destroyed by the freaks of the imagination.

Is equality before the law based upon *individual* qualities? Proudhon replies in the “Creation of Order in Humanity”:

“Neither birth, nor figure, *nor faculties*, nor fortune, nor rank, nor profession, nor talent, nor anything that distinguishes individuals establishes between them a difference of species; all being men, and *the law regulating only human relations, it is the same for all*; so that to establish exceptions, it would be necessary to prove that the individuals excepted are *above* or *beneath* the human species.”

Prove to us that women are *above* or *beneath* the human species, that they do not form a part of it, or, *under penalty of contradiction*, submit to the consequences of your doctrine.

You say in the “Social Revolution;”

“Neither conscience, nor reason, nor liberty, nor labour, pure forces, *primary and creative faculties*, can be made mechanical without being destroyed. Their reason of existence is in themselves; in their works they should find their reason of action. In this consists the human person, a sacred person, etc.”

Prove that women have neither conscience, nor reason, nor moral liberty, and that they do not labour. If it is demonstrated that they possess the *primary and creative faculties*, respect their human person, for it is sacred.

In the “Creation of Order in Humanity,” you say:

“Specifically, labour satisfies the desire of our personality, which tends invincibly to make a difference between itself and others, *to render*

itself independent, to conquer its liberty and its character.”

Prove then that women have no special work, and, if facts contradict you, acknowledge that, it inevitably tends to *independence, to liberty*.

[...]

It is true that your attitude in this question makes you *the ally of the dogmatism of the Middle Age*; it is true that the *official representatives* of this dogmatism avail themselves, at the present time, of your arguments and your name to maintain their influence over women, and through them over men and children; and this in order to revive the past, to stifle the future. Is this your intention? I do not believe it. You are, in my eyes, a subverter, a destroyer, in whom instinct sometimes gets the better of intellect, and from whom it shuts out a clear view of the consequences of his writings. Formed for strife, you must have adversaries; and, in default of enemies, you cruelly fall on those who are fighting in the same ranks with yourself. In all your writings, one feels that the second part of education – that which inspires respect and love of woman – is completely wanting in you.

Let us come to your letter.

You reproach me with having made *forty paralogsms*; it was your duty at least to have cited one of these. However, let us see.

You say: between man and woman there is a separation of *the same nature as that which the difference of race establishes between animals*.

Woman, by nature and destination, is *neither associate, nor citizen, nor functionary*.

She is, until marriage, only *apprentice*, at most, *under-superintendent* in the social workshop; she is a *minor* in the family, and *does not form a part of the commonwealth*.

You conceive of no destiny for her outside of the household: she can be only *housewife* or *courtesan*.

She is incapable of *understanding and of governing herself*.

To make a paralogism is to draw a conclusion from false premises; now did I conclude from such in saying:

In order that all these paradoxes may become truths, you have to prove:

That man and woman are not of the same race;

That they can be reproduced separately;

That their common product is a mixed breed or a mule;

That difference of races corresponds to difference of rights.

You have to define for us an association, and also the nature of a citizen or a functionary.

You have to prove that woman is less useful than man in society;

That, at the present time, she is necessarily a housewife, when she is not a courtesan;

That she is destitute of intellect, that she knows nothing of government.

You pretend that woman has not a right *to demand for herself special legislation*.

Was I guilty of a paralogism in pointing out to you that it is not she, *but you*, who demand this, since you lay down as a principle the inequality of the sexes before human law?

All that you say relatively to the *pretended* inferiority of woman and the conclusions which you draw from it applying to human races inferior to our own, it would be easy for me to demonstrate that the consequence of your principles is the *re-establishment of slavery*. The nearest perfect has the right to take advantage of the weakest, instead of becoming his educator. An admirable doctrine, full of the spirit of progress, full of generosity! I compliment you most sincerely on it.

You say that labour specialised is the great emancipator of man; that labour, conscience, liberty, and reason, find only in themselves their right to exist and to act; that these pure forces constitute the human person, *which is sacred*.

You lay down the principle that the law is the same for all; so that, to establish exceptions, it would be necessary to prove that the individuals excepted are *above or beneath* the human species.

You say that social equilibrium is the equalisation of the strong and the weak; that all have the same rights, not through that which distinguishes them from each other, but through *that which is common to them, – the quality of human beings*.

Was I guilty of paralogisms in saying to you:

Then you cannot, by reason of her weakness or even of a supposed inferiority, exclude woman from equality of right: your principles interdict it, unless you prove:

That she is superior or inferior to the human species, and that she does not form a part of it;

That she is destitute of conscience, of justice, and of reason; that she does not labour, that she does not execute specialties of labour.

It is evident, that your doctrine concerning general right is in contradiction to your doctrine concerning the right of women; it is evident that you are very inconsequent, and that, however skilful you may be, you cannot extricate yourself from this embarrassment.

In what you call an answer, there are a few passages that are worth the trouble of pausing to consider.

You ask *what impels the bravest, the most distinguished among us to an assault on paternal and marital supremacy*.

You do not comprehend the movement, or you would have said *masculine supremacy*.

In my turn, I ask you:

What would have impelled Proudhon, a Roman slave, to play the part of Spartacus?

What would have impelled Proudhon, a feudal serf, to organise a Jacquerie?

What would have impelled Proudhon, a black slave, to become a Toussaint L'Ouverture?

What would have impelled Proudhon, a Russian serf, to take the character of Poutgachef?

What would have impelled Proudhon, a citizen of '89, to overthrow the privileges of the nobility and the clergy?

What would impel Proudhon ... but I will not touch on reality.

What would Proudhon have replied to all the holders of *prerogatives* and *supremacy*, who would not have failed on their part to have put to him the naïve question: "Ah! what does this vile slave, this unworthy serf, this audacious and stupid citizen want of us, then? *To which of our faculties, our virtues, our prerogatives does he aspire? Is this the cry of his outraged nature, or an aberration of his understanding?*"

The answer that Proudhon would make, is that which will be made to him by all women who have attained majority.

There is in the brain of woman, say you, an organ which the masculine mind alone is capable of setting in motion. Render the service then to science of pointing it out and demonstrating its manner of working. As to the other organ of which you speak, it is its inertia, doubtless, that has caused it to be defined by some, *parvum animal furibondum, octo ligamentis alligatum*. Before choosing anatomical and physiological facts as proofs of your assertions, consult some learned

physician; such is the counsel given you, not only by my *obstetrical*, but also by my *medical sagacity*.

You offer to acquaint me with your *direct* and *positive* observations. What, Sir! has it been possible for you in a few weeks to delve into the depths of the healthy and the diseased organisation! to go through the whole labyrinth of functions implicated in the questions. It is more than miraculous; despite my good will, I cannot believe it, unless you prove that you are a *prophet* in communication with some deity. Shall I tell you what I really think? It is that you have studied these matters neither *directly* nor *indirectly*, and that it belongs to me to tell you *that you do not understand woman; that you do not know the first word of the question*. Your five or six *purely* moral and intellectual autopsies prove only one thing; namely, your inexperience in physiology. You have naïvely mistaken the scalpel of your imagination for that of science.

With regard to autopsies, you tell me that you are awaiting my promised work, in order to make mine. It would be doubtless a great honour to be stretched on your dissecting table in such good company as you promise me, but the instruction of my future readers does not permit me to enjoy this satisfaction. I shall not send my book to press until your own shall have appeared, for I, too, intend to make your autopsy; dissect me therefore now; I promise you on my side that I will perform my duty conscientiously, properly and delicately.

“Woman,” you say, “being weaker than man with respect to *muscular force*, is not less inferior to him with respect to INDUSTRIAL, ARTISTIC, PHILOSOPHICAL AND MORAL POWER; so that if the condition of woman in society be regulated, as you demand for her, *by the same justice as the condition of man*, it is all over with her; she is a slave.”

Terrible man, you will be then always inconsistent, you will always contradict yourself and facts!

What do you hold as the basis of right? *The simple quality of being human*; everything that distinguishes individuals disappears before right. Well! even though it were true that women were inferior to men, would it follow that their rights were not the same? According to you, by no means, if they form a part of the human species. There are not two kinds of justice, there is but one; there are not two kinds of right, there is but one in the absolute sense. The recognition and respect of individual autonomy in the lowest of human beings as well as in the man and woman of genius is the law which should preside over social relations; must a woman tell you this!

Let us now examine the value of your series of *man and woman*.

With respect to the reproduction of the species, they form a series; this is beyond dispute.

As to the rest, do they form a series? No.

If it were a law that woman is *muscularly* weaker than man, the strongest woman would be weaker than the weakest man; facts demonstrate the contrary daily.

If it were a law that women are inferior to men in *industrial power*, the most skilful woman would be inferior in industrial pursuits to the least skilful man; now facts demonstrate daily that there are women who are excellent manufacturers and excellent managers; men who are unskilled in and unsuited to this kind of pursuits.

If it were a law that women are inferior to men in *artistic power*, the best female artist would be inferior to the most indifferent male artist; now facts daily demonstrate the contrary; there are more great female than male tragedians; many men are mediocre in music and painting, and many women, on the other hand, remarkable in both respects, etc., etc.

What follows from all this? That your series is false, since facts destroy it. How did you form it? The process is a curious study. You chose a few remarkable men, in whom, by a convenient process of abstraction, you beheld *all* men, even to cretins; you here took a few women, without taking into account in the slightest degree any differences of culture, instruction, and surroundings, and compared them with these eminent men, taking care to forget those that might have embarrassed you; then, deducing generals from particulars, creating two entities, you drew your conclusions. A strange manner of reasoning, truly! You have fallen into the mania of *imposing rules on Nature*, *instead of studying Nature's rules*, and deserve that I should apply your own words to you: “The greatest part of the philosophical aberrations and chimeras have arisen from attributing to logical series *a reality that they do not possess, and endeavouring to explain the nature of man by abstractions*.”

Still, if this were to strengthen your doctrines concerning the *basis* of right, it might be comprehended; but it is to overthrow them!

You transform yourself into a Sphinx, to propose to me a riddle. “What is that right,” you say, “*which is not justice, and which, notwithstanding, would not exist without it*, which presides over the relations of both sexes, the *jus strictum* governing only individuals of the same sex. If you divine it, you will have given me the cause.”

It is not necessary to be *the great Apollo*, to divine that it is the *right of grace, of mercy*, towards an inferior that is not armed with strict right.

If I have divined rightly, you have simply begged the question by supposing *that resolved which I dispute*. I maintain that there is only one *right*, that *one single right presides over the rights of individuals and of*

sexes, and that the right of mercy belongs to the domain of sentiment.

You wish it proved that the new emancipators of woman are the most elevated, the broadest, and the most progressive minds of the age. Rejoice, your wish is accomplished: a simple comparison between them and their adversaries will prove it to you.

The emancipators, taking woman in the cradle of humanity, see her marching slowly towards civil emancipation. The intelligent disciples of progress, they wish, by extending a fraternal hand to her, to aid her in fulfilling her destiny.

The non-emancipators, denying the historical law, regardless of the progressive and parallel movement of the populace, woman, and the industrial arts towards enfranchisement, wish to thrust her back far beyond the Middle Age, to the days of Romulus and the Hebrew patriarchs.

The emancipators, believing in individual autonomy, respecting it, and recognising it in woman, wish to aid her to conquer it. Judging of the need that a free being has of liberty by the need that they have of it themselves, they are consistent.

The non-emancipators, blinded by pride, perverted by a love of dominion as unbridled as unintelligent, desire liberty only *for themselves*. These egotists, so suspicious of those that menace their own freedom, wish half the human species to be in their chains.

The emancipators have enough heart and ideality to desire a companion with whom they can exchange sentiment and thought, and who can improve them in some respects and be improved by them in others; they love and respect woman.

The non-emancipators, without ideality, without love, chained to their senses and their pride, despise woman; and wish to have in her only a *female, a servant, a machine to produce young ones*. They are *males, they are not yet men*.

The emancipators desire perfection of the species, in a three-fold point of view: physical, moral, and intellectual. They know that races cannot be improved without selecting and perfecting the mothers.

The non-emancipators are bent upon something quite different from the improvement of the species: let their children be lacking in intelligence, malicious, ugly, or deformed; they think much less of this than of being

masters. Do they know enough of physiology to have reflected that the faculties *depend on organisation*, that organisation is capable of modification, that modifications are transmitted, that woman has a great share in this transmission, a greater share, perhaps, than that of man? It is therefore *essential* to place her in a condition to perform this great function in the manner most useful to humanity.

The emancipators desire humanity to go forward, to vibrate no longer between the past and the future; they know the influence that women possess, first over children, then over men; they know that woman cannot serve progress *unless she finds it to her interest to do so*; that she will find it so only through liberty; that she will love it only if her intellect is elevated by study, and her heart purified from the petty selfishness of home by the predominating love of the great human family. As they desire the end sincerely, they sincerely desire the means; so long as half the human race shall labour as it is doing to destroy the edifice constructed by *a few members* of the other half; so long as half the human race, *the one that secretly*

governs the other, shall have its face turned towards the past, the landmarks that point to the future will be threatened with being torn up. Do you consider it a crime in the emancipators to comprehend this, to seek to conjure down the peril; and do you consider a virtue in the non-emancipators the foolish pride that places a cataract over their eyes?

A few words more, and I shall have done. You would rather, you say, that I should not assume castigating airs with you. But have you really the right to complain of it, you who have constituted yourself the chief whipper-in of the economists and the socialists? I shall never go so far towards you as you have gone towards them. You must resign yourself to my abrupt, sometimes harsh style. I am implacable towards whatever appears to me false and unjust; and were you my brother, I should not war against you less sharply; before all ties of affection and family, should come the love of justice and humanity.

[...]

VII

PROUDHON. "The law regulating only human relations, *it is the same for all*; so that, to establish exceptions, it will be necessary to prove that the individuals excepted are of superior order, or inferior to the human species." – *Creation of Order in Humanity*.

AUTHOR. Now you admit that woman is neither superior nor inferior to the human species, but is identical in species with man; the law is therefore the same for her as for man.

PROUDHON. I draw the contrary conclusion, *because man is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. A contradiction, Master.

PROUDHON. “Neither figure, nor birth, nor *the faculties*, nor fortune, nor rank, nor profession, nor talent, *nor anything which distinguishes individuals apart*, establishes between them a difference of species: all being men, and the law only regulating human relations, it is the same for all.” – *Id.*

AUTHOR. Now, woman is in essence identical with man; she differs from him only in manners and qualities which, according to you, by no means make her differ in essence; once more, therefore, the law is the same for her as for man.

PROUDHON. It is logical; but I conclude the contrary, *because man is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. A contradiction, Master.

PROUDHON. “Social equilibrium is the equalisation of the strong and the weak. So long as the strong and the weak are not equal, they are *strangers*, they cannot form an alliance, they are *enemies*.” – 1st *Memoir on Property*.

AUTHOR. Now, according to you, man is the strong and woman the weak of an identical species; social equilibrium ought therefore to *equalise* them, that they may be neither strangers nor enemies.

PROUDHON. It is logical; but I claim that they should be *made unequal* in society and in marriage. Man should have the prepotence, *because he is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. A contradiction, Master.

PROUDHON. “From the identity of reason in all men, and the sentiment of respect which leads them to maintain their mutual dignity at any cost, follows equality before justice.” – (*Justice, Vol. III, etc.*) All are born free: between individual liberties there is no other judge than equilibrium, *which is equality*; the identity of essence does not permit the creation of a hierarchy. – *Vol. II, the whole of the 8th Study*.

AUTHOR. Now, woman is in essence identical with man. She is born free; between her and man there is, therefore, no other judge than equality; it is not permissible, therefore, to establish a hierarchy between them.

PROUDHON. It is logical. But I conclude, on the contrary, that it is necessary to create a hierarchy between the sexes, and to give the prepotence to man, *because he is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. A contradiction, Master.

PROUDHON. “The dignity of the human soul consists in being unwilling to suffer any one of its powers *to subordinate* the others, to require all to be at the service of the collective whole; this is morality, this is virtue. Whoever speaks of harmony or agreement, in fact, necessarily supposes terms in opposition. Attempt a hierarchy, a prepotence! *you think to create order, you create nothing but absolutism*.” – *Justice, Vol. II*.

AUTHOR. Woman, according to you, forms with man an organism, that of justice. Now, according to you, the two halves of the androgynus have different qualities, which are required to harmonise with each other in equality under pain of creating absolutism instead of order; the feminine faculty is therefore required to form an equipoise with the masculine faculty.

PROUDHON. It is logical; but I conclude that the dignity of the humanitarian androgynus lies in subjugating the feminine faculty and creating despotism, *because man is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. A contradiction, Master.

PROUDHON. “Justice is the respect spontaneously felt for and *reciprocally guaranteed* to human dignity, in *whatever person* and whatever circumstance it may be found compromised.” – *Justice, Vol. I*.

AUTHOR. Now, woman is a human being, possessing a dignity which should be respected and guaranteed by the law of reciprocity; therefore one cannot be wanting in respect to feminine dignity without being wanting in justice.

PROUDHON. It is logical; but although woman is a human being, identical in species with man, and although I believe that there is no other basis of right than equality, I nevertheless affirm that the dignity of woman is inferior to that of man, *because he is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. A contradiction, Master.

PROUDHON. “Right is to each the faculty of exacting from others respect for human dignity in his person,” duty is “the obligation of each to respect this dignity in another.” – *Justice, Vol. I*.

AUTHOR. Now, woman being identical in species, man possesses a dignity *equal* to hers; therefore she should be respected in her dignity, that is, in her person, her liberty, her property, her affections; this is her right as a human being, and man cannot deny it without failing in justice and in his duty.

PROUDHON. It is logical. But I claim that woman has not the right which my principles attribute to her; that man alone has rights, *because man is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. A contradiction, Master.

PROUDHON. “Liberty is an *absolute* right, because it is to man what impenetrability is to matter, a condition *sine qua non* of existence.” – 1st *Memoir on Property*.

AUTHOR. Now, woman is a human being, she has therefore an *absolute* right to liberty, which is her condition *sine qua non* of existence.

PROUDHON. It is logical. But I conclude, on the contrary, that woman has no need of liberty; that this condition *sine qua non* of existence for our species, does not regard one half of the species; that man alone cannot exist without liberty, *because he is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. A contradiction, Master.

PROUDHON. "Equality is an absolute right, *because without equality, there is no society.*" – *Id.*

AUTHOR. Now, woman is a human and social being; she has an absolute right, therefore, to this equality, without which she would be but a Pariah in society.

PROUDHON. It is logical. But I nevertheless conclude from this that woman has no more right to equality than to liberty. That, although of the same species as man, and consequently amenable to the law of equality, nevertheless she is not amenable to it, and should be unequal and in subjection to man, *because he is the stronger*.

AUTHOR. Fie, Master! To contradict yourself thus is disgraceful to your reputation. It would be better to maintain that woman has not the same rights as man, because she is of a different species.

PROUDHON. Woman is bound to feel that she does not possess a dignity equal to that of man; in the association formed between them to produce justice, *the notions of right and duty shall be no longer correlative*. Man shall have all rights, and shall accept only such duties as it shall please him to recognise.

AUTHOR. Reflect that man, after having denied the dignity and the right of woman, will labour to stultify her more and more in the interest of his despotism!

PROUDHON. That does not concern me: the family should be immured: the husband is priest and king therein. If, as in the case with all liberty oppressed, the woman grows restive, we will tell her *that she does not know herself, that she is incapable of judging and ruling herself*; that she is a cypher; we will outrage her in her moral worth; we will deny her intellect and activity: and by dint of intimidating her, we will succeed in forcing her to be silent: for man must remain master, *since he is the stronger*!

AUTHOR. Deny and insult us, Master, this does us no harm: the lords of the Middle Age employed this method with their serfs, your sires ... we are now

indignant at them. Slaveholders employed and still employ this method with the blacks, and the civilised world is indignant at them, slavery is restricted, and is on the way to disappear.

Meanwhile, I point out your contradictions to my readers; your authority over minds will be thereby lessened, I hope.

Those who claim, in accordance with the major of the preceding syllogisms, that you found right upon identity of species, an abstraction of individual qualities; that you believe right and duty correlative; that you desire

equality and liberty, will be quite as nearly right as those who claim, in accordance with the conclusion of the same syllogisms, that you base right upon force, superiority of faculties; that you accept inequality and despotism, deny individual liberty and social equality, and do not believe in the correlation of right and duty.

If it is painful to you to have fallen into contradictions so monstrous, believe that it is not less painful to me to be forced, in the interest of my cause, to point them out to the world.

Having taken in hand the cause of my sex, I was under obligations to parry your attacks by turning

against yourself your allegations against us.

It was necessary to do this, not by denials and declamations which prove nothing, or by affirmations without proofs, according to your method of proceeding; but by opposing to you science and facts; by making use only of the rational method which you extol without employing it, by charging you often with contradicting yourself when proofs *de facto* would have demanded too much detail and time.

You accuse women of *taking chimeras for realities*. I have proved to you that you deserve this reproach, since your theory is in contradiction to science and facts.

You accuse women of *erecting unreal analogies into principles*.... I have proved that you have done so as well, in deducing from the *pretended* absence of physical germs in woman, the absence of intellectual and moral germs.

You accuse woman of *reasoning wrongly*.... I have brought you face to face with your own principles, that you might draw from them contradictory conclusions.

You accuse woman of creating nothing but *medleys, monsters*.... The anatomy of your theory proves that you know how to do so quite as well.

**If it is painful to you
to have fallen into
contradictions so
monstrous, believe
that it is not less
painful to me to be
forced, in the
interest of my cause,
to point them out to
the world.**

You accuse woman of lacking intellect, of want of justice, virtue, chastity.... I appeal from you to yourself, and you say positively the contrary.

Where you are fantastic, contradictory, I, *a woman*, appeal to logic.

Where you are wanting in method, I, *a woman*, employ scientific and rational method.

Where you contradict your own principles, I appeal to these same principles to judge and condemn you.

Which of us two is the more reasonable and more rational?

My modesty suffers, I acknowledge, at the thought that I have played the part of *Minerva shaming Ulysses of his paradoxes and his profligacies*. At last, this tiresome part is ended!

I have addressed so many harsh things to you in so firm and resolute a tone, that I should be sorry to quit you without a few friendly words coming from my heart. You ought to be fully convinced of my sincerity, for

you see that you have to deal with a woman who shrinks from no one; who is never intimidated, however great may be her opponent, or whatever name he may bear. You may be my adversary: I shall never be your enemy, for I regard you as an honest man, a vigorous thinker, one of the glories of France, one of the great men of our Comté, always so dear to the heart of her children; lastly, one of the admirations of my youth. You and I belong to the great army that is assaulting the citadel of abuse, and endeavouring to mine and sap it; I do not shun this solidarity. Is it so necessary that we should fight? Let us live in peace; I can entreat it of you without stooping, since I do not fear you. Understand one thing that I tell you without bitterness: that you are incapable of understanding woman, and that by continuing the struggle, you will inevitably range her under the banner of the anti-revolutionists.

Your pride has set enmity between you and woman, and you have bruised her heel: no one would be more sorry than I to see her crush your head.

Proudhon's Mutualism and Anarchism

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, February and March 1902

[I]

Notwithstanding the fatal influence of the dialectical metaphysics of Hegel, Proudhon has been able to develop all the ideas which were already expressed in his first memoir on property. We have in mind not only his famous and at once striking and courageous aphorisms, such as:

“Slavery is assassination,”

“Property is theft,”

“God is the evil,”

but also the claims which, though not his exclusively, were however formulated and developed for the first time by him in his works, and which may be reduced to the following three fundamental principles of the whole philosophy of Proudhon:

1. Economic, social liberty of the individual, which he expresses so well by saying: “Man protests against being organized and treated as a tool.” If we remember the events of these last forty years, be they manifestations, struggles for communal liberty or acts of individual revolt; or, finally, the emancipating tendency in philosophy (W. Wundt, H. Spencer, J. S. Mill, Guyau and others); in literature, poetry, drama, fiction Whitman, Ibsen, Mackay, Hauptmann, Tolstoy and Zola in late years), it will be recognised how correct Proudhon was in affirming this truth.¹

¹ Prof. W. Wundt, “Relation of Philosophy, etc.,” 1889. J. S. Mill “On Liberty.” M. Guyau, “La Morale sans sanction ni obligation.” Tolstoy and Ibsen, Hauptmann and Mackay are

In reality, humanity by its best representatives is always aspiring towards a social order where man will be free, not “organised” by authoritative prescriptions given in the name of some stupid fictions known as God, or State, or Majority.

As quoted by Proudhon, J. J. Rousseau said: “It is against natural order that the smallest number should be governed by the largest.”²

2. The second principle defended by Proudhon in opposition to the more or less authoritative systems which were in vogue before the sanguinary days of June, 1848, is mutualism in production and exchange. According to Proudhon, his *Workers Associations*, free organisations of absolutely free men, had to replace the future organisation of authoritarian Communism as well as the slavery of the capitalist wage-system. It is just for his opposition to the authoritarian Communism of a Socialist State, for his assertion of the right of each member of these freely organised groups of workers to dispose freely of the products of his labour, that Proudhon was treated as bourgeois and individualist. Is it necessary to say that it was a misunderstanding?

At the time that he was engaged in his polemics, often unjust, against the Communists and revolutionary Socialists, he could have been reproached, it is true, that he preached simply individualist co-operation. But the serious political events of the period, the sanguinary struggle for the social reforms of that time are far from

well known for their glorification of the individual and of liberty in morality and politics.

² “L'idée générale de la Révolution” 1851 page 280.

us at present, and we can judge better than the two opposing parties – both sincerely Socialist and certainly both ardent defenders of the people.

What did Proudhon understand by Mutualism? Neither more nor less than the collectivism adopted in 1868 by the great International Workingmen's Association.¹

“In face of the persons and families whose work forms the object of the association, the society (of free producers) has as rules:

“That each individual employed in the association, man, woman, child, head of an office, foreman, worker, apprentice, has an undivided right on the society.

“That he has the right to successively fill all its functions, all its grades, according to fitness of sex, talent seniority;

“That his education, his instruction and his apprenticeship must consequently be so arranged as to enable him to properly hear his share of repugnant and difficult duties, to follow a course of technical work and instruction, and be assured at the period of maturity of an encyclopedian fitness and a sufficient income;

“That the functions are elective and the rules submitted to be adopted by the members;

“That the salary is proportioned to the nature of the function, to the importance of the talent, to the extent of the responsibility;

“That each member participates in the benefits as well as in the charges of the society in proportion to his services;

“That everyone is free to leave the association at his own will, consequently to demand his account and liquidate his rights, and reciprocally the society is always at liberty to accept new members.

“These general ideas furnish the solution of two important problems of social economy: that of the collective force and that of division of labour.”²

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It is obvious that Proudhon is far enough from the individualists of our days. Not only does he recognise a pact, a social contract between free associates, but he recognises also collective education, elections for offices, work, even all difficult tasks, always collective. Concerning the accusations of parliamentary Collectivists, I believe that the majority do not know by whom the Collectivist idea was formulated. Whilst the ambitious and the aspirants for power in a Collectivist State calumniate Proudhon in order to draw from him the attention and sympathy of the proletariat so that the

latter should not see that the real Collectivism has been conceived outside of any bureaucratic and authoritarian regulations, Proudhon, borrowing the idea of Collectivity from the Saint Simonists, like Fourier took all measures to guarantee the complete liberty of each member. The aspirants for power do their utmost to prevent the masses from seeing that the system of *phalansteres* of Fournier, the Communism of Robert Owen or the Collectivism of Proudhon had to come into realisation as a true Socialist organisation by society itself by the suppression of the State and its officials, including future

legislators and administrators of Collectivism.

In his ideas on social organisation as well as in others, Proudhon differs absolutely from the legendary individualist. Far from denying organisation altogether, he wished to substitute for the State an autonomous society, for political organisation economic organisation, for central administration “Workers’ Associations” federated on an Anarchist basis or, according to his own expression, on the principle of “self-government.” The sixth and seventh parts of his constructive work, *General Idea, etc.*, bear the titles: “Organisation of economic forces” and “Dissolution of the government in an economic organisation.”

[II]

Before quoting Proudhon's own opinions, I will remind the reader that the tendency to abolish the political and authoritarian State was a common feature of all Socialist schools. From Saint Simon, who first of all insisted strongly on industrial organisation, to V. Considerant and the Fourierist school, all agreed on the abolition of the political State in a Communist or phalansterian society. The most brilliant pupil of Saint

¹ By a strange misunderstanding Collectivism is often attributed to Marx, who was and remained all his life purely Communist.

² “L'idée générale de la Révolution,” page 256-257.

Simon, Auguste Comte, in his *Opuscles* (1819-1825) explains briefly but very clearly the philosophical and general basis of human progress in history. These ideas, developed by him later on in his *Cours de philosophie positive*, inspired the great English historian-philosopher H. T. Buckle. They were reflected in the works of the Socialists of that period as well as in Proudhon's, and later on in Marx who wanted even to appropriate them under the ridiculous term of materialist explanation of history. According to A. Comte, "social organisation depends always on the condition of civilisation, and the progress of civilisation itself is subject to a certain law." The aim of human activity, individual or collective, says he, is "to act upon natural forces..... in order to modify them the advantage of humanity..... to develop collectively this natural tendency, to regulate and harmonise it in order that useful action be as great as possible..." In a barbarous society, "industry being in its *childhood*, society was compelled to make war the aim of its activity..... And all modifications obtained in civilisation have been the results of the always growing progress of science and industry."

In accordance with the philosophy of his time, Proudhon states that: "The laws of social economy are independent of the will of man and of legislation: it is our privilege to recognise them, our dignity to obey them (p. 255). Above the governmental machinery, under the shadow of political institutions, far from the attention of statesmen and priests, society slowly and silently produced its own organisation; it created a new order, the expression of its vitality and autonomy....."

"This organisation has as principles:

"1st. The indefinite perfectibility Of the individual and of the race;...

"6th. Universality of well-being,

"Its forms of action are:

"(a) *Division of labour* (classification by *industries*);

"(b) Collectivity, organised workers replacing the army;

"(c) Commerce, a concrete form of contract which replaces law..."

In order to define contract, Proudhon quotes again from Rousseau: "To find a form of association which defends and protects with all its strength the community, the individual and the welfare of each associated member, and by which *each individual uniting himself with all, obeys only himself*, and remains as free as before." (p. 129)

For a man who had such general ideas it was but natural to deny State and Authority, not only in the past but present society. Progress and development of humanity being considered as the result of the mode of production

and of exchange, and these latter as consequences of "the always growing progress of science and industry" (A. Comte), it became absolute logic to attack, not such or such forms of government, but really the principle of authority in general. That is what he has done whilst attacking even the most advanced Socialists, which is much to be regretted, evidently, as it did much wrong to Socialist parties as well as to Proudhon himself. But if one considers the ideas themselves and not the Socialist struggle, it must be recognised that he was then the most consistent of all, especially when saying:

"Dissolve, immerse and absorb the political or governmental system into the economic system by reducing, simplifying, decentralising and suppressing one after the other all the wheels of that great machine called government or State" (p. 196).

The same principles of mutualism in individual transactions, of collectivism in production, of individual and social liberty, of free and spontaneous organisation in national life, Proudhon applied to international relations. From then dates his ardent propaganda of the federalist principle.

"Truth is everywhere; science is the unity of the human race. If thus science, but no religion or authority, is accepted in each country as rule for the society as highest arbitrator of interests, government being reduced to nothing, all legislators of the universe will agree. No more will there be nationality or fatherland in the political sense of the word, only birth-places. Man, of whatever race or colour he may be, will be really native of the universe; city rights are for him acquired everywhere" (p. 329).

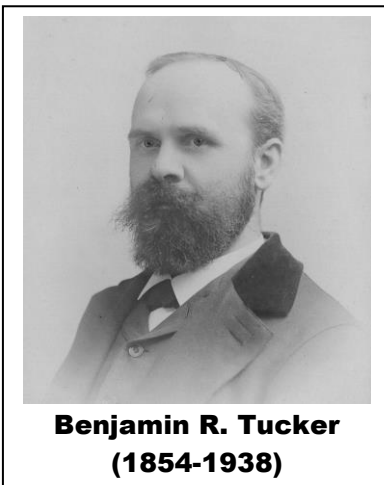
Reading these admirable passages which under the influence of French delegates who were nearly all Proudhonists and mutualists, became the basis of the sublime statutes of the International, it is natural to ask oneself for what reason this thinker, to whom we are indebted for so many humanitarian ideas, was so much calumniated? The answer is simple. Proudhon is calumniated by the defenders of oppression and of privilege, by reactionists who want to keep the people in ignorance. Formerly reactionists acted in the name of God and Church. In our days they do their work in the name of the Communist State and of metaphysical *dialectics*. Especially the aspirants for power in a future slavish society where everyone will be incorporated in the "labour army, especially for agriculture," the apostles of metaphysical ignorance felt and still feel animosity and rage against Proudhon; they it is who having set themselves the task, calumniate him as they calumniate all who, sharing his ideas, call themselves like Proudhon: Anarchists.

Proudhon and Royalism

Benjamin R. Tucker

The New Freewoman: An Individualist Review, 10 October 1913

For some years past there has been developing in France a new reactionary force, which may be described as the party of neo-royalism. Though its aim is to undermine the republic by ruse and overthrow it by force, restore the Orleanist dynasty, and place Monseigneur le Duc d'Orleans on the throne, it is distinguished from the older royalism by the fact that its leaders, many of whom formerly belonged to the most advanced political factions, are atheists in private yet stout upholders of the Church of Rome, and will look to their king to institute, under the guidance of the pope, a *régime* of decentralization that shall guarantee numerous individual liberties now more and more endangered by democracy and socialism. It is growing in importance, and has a daily organ, "L'Action Française," edited by Leon Daudet, and numbering among its contributors the philosopher of the party, Charles Maurras, a young man of high culture and ability. It has converted at least one Academician, Jules Lemailre, who on all possible occasions shout *A bas la République!* and *Vive le Roi!* in company with its fighting force, *Les Camelots du Roi*, whose members promptly voice a hot resentment whenever contemptuous opponents, in printing the name of this army of conspirators, spell *Roi* with a *y*, and thus offer insult to their modernism. One of the methods of propagandism practised by these agitators is the attempt to enrol among their apostles all the great dead who, if living, would look with scorn upon their ways and works. Every great writer who has criticised democracy and who, being in his grave, cannot enter protest, is listed as a royalist, a nationalist, and an anti-Dreyfusard. Chief among these helpless victims is the foremost of all Anarchists, to whom these impudent young rascals constantly refer as *notre grand Proudhon*. Indeed, they have formed a *Cercle Proudhon*, which publishes a bi-monthly review under the title, *Cahiers du Cercle Proudhon*. On the whole, I am glad of this, because it advertises Proudhon, leads people to read his works, and thereby, in the end, will render all misinterpretation futile, especially in France, which, of all the great nations (England alone excepted), least understands and appreciates Proudhon, and where, on January 19, 1915, his works will fall into the public domain and consequently will appear in cheap editions. (It is interesting to note, by the way, how this miserable copyright business retards progress by burying the most important progressive writings for more than half a



Benjamin R. Tucker
(1854-1938)

century.) Of course democracy is an easy mark for this new party, and it finds its chief delight in pounding the philosopher of democracy, Rousseau. Now, nobody ever pounded Rousseau as effectively as Proudhon did, and in that fact the *Cercle Proudhon* finds its excuse. But it is not to be inferred that, because Proudhon destroyed Rousseau's theory of the social contract, he did not believe in the advisability of a social contract, or would uphold a monarch in exacting an oath of allegiance. On the contrary, after demonstrating the falsity of Rousseau's claim that existing society is founded on contract, he

proceeded to find fault with existing society for the very reason that it is not so founded, and endeavoured to substitute for existing society, or to develop out of it, or to dissolve it in, a society having voluntary contract for its base. All this, however, is carefully concealed by the *Cercle Proudhon*. It freely quotes and prints Proudhon's attacks on Rousseau, but utterly ignores the affirmative statements of its stolen hero. To expose this fraud I present here an extract from Proudhon's most representative work, *Idée générale de la Révolution au dix-neuvième*.

"Reason, assisted by Experience, discloses to man the laws of Nature and Society; then it says to him:

"These laws are those of necessity itself. No man has made them; no man imposes them upon you. They have been gradually discovered, and I exist only to bear testimony to them.

"If you observe them, you will be just and good.

"If you violate them, you will be unjust and wicked. I offer you no other motive.

"Already, among your fellows, several have recognised that justice is better, for each and for all, than iniquity; and they have agreed with each other to mutually keep faith and right – that is, to respect the rules of transaction which the nature of things indicates to them as alone capable of assuring them, in the largest measure, well-being, security, peace.

"Do you wish to adhere to their compact, to form a part of their society?"

“Do you promise to respect the honour, the liberty, and the goods of your brothers?”

“Do you promise never to appropriate, either by violence, or by fraud, or by usury, or by speculation, the product or the possession of another?”

“Do you promise never to lie and deceive, either in justice, or in business, or in any of your transactions?”

“You are free to accept or to refuse.

“If you refuse, you become a part of the society of savages. Outside of the communion of the human race, you become an object of suspicion. Nothing protects you. At the slightest insult, the first comer may lift his hand against you without incurring any other accusation than that of cruelty needlessly practised upon a brute.

“On the contrary, if you swear to the compact, you become a part of the society of free men. All your brothers enter into an engagement with you, promise you fidelity, friendship, aid, service, exchange. In case of infraction, on their part or on yours, through negligence, passion, or malice, you are responsible to each other for the damage as well as the scandal and the insecurity of which you have been the cause: this responsibility may extend, according to the gravity of the perjury or the repetitions of the offence, even to excommunication and to death.

“The law is clear, the sanction still more so. Three articles, which make but one – that is the whole social contract. Instead of making oath to God and his prince, the citizen swears upon his conscience, before his brothers, and before Humanity. Between these two oaths there is the same difference as between slavery and liberty, faith and science, courts and justice, usury and labour, government and economy, non-existence and being, God and man.”

Leaving out the words “good,” “wicked,” “brute,” and “Humanity,” which are mere surplusage here, this extract, I think, would have been acceptable even to Max Stirner as a charter for his “Union of the Free,” an appreciation of the importance of which is necessary to a complete appreciation of Stirner’s political philosophy. If Miss Marsden knows of any idea originating in America, or developed there, of greater moment or larger dimensions than that presented in this page from France, she will do me a

very great service in pointing it out. (In any case, it amply serves to demolish the audacious claim of the neo-royalists. If, in face of it, it should be decided that Proudhon is their property, we might well say, without doing violence to current terminology as Proudhon did when he said it: *La propriété c’est le vol*. With it in hand, the Anarchists answer to Charles Maurras and all his followers: No, the author of *Idée générale de la Révolution au dix-neuvième siècle* is not your great Proudhon; he is OURS.

All this, however, is carefully concealed by the *Cercle Proudhon*. It freely quotes and prints Proudhon’s attacks on Rousseau, but utterly ignores the affirmative statements of its stolen hero.

The second effect of property is despotism. Now, since despotism is inseparably connected with the idea of legitimate authority, in explaining the natural causes of the first, the principle of the second will appear.

What is to be the form of government in the future? I hear some of my younger readers reply: “Why, how can you ask such a question? You are a republican.” “A republican! Yes; but that word specifies nothing. *Res publica*; that is, the public thing. Now, whoever is interested in public affairs — no matter under what form of government — may call himself a republican. Even kings are republicans.” —

“Well! you are a democrat?” — “No.” — “What! you would have a monarchy.” — “No.” — “A constitutionalist?” — “God forbid!” — “You are then an aristocrat?” — “Not at all.” — “You want a mixed government?” — “Still less.” — “What are you, then?” — “I am an anarchist.”

– *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (1840)

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: an uncomfortable thinker

Nicola Chiaromonte

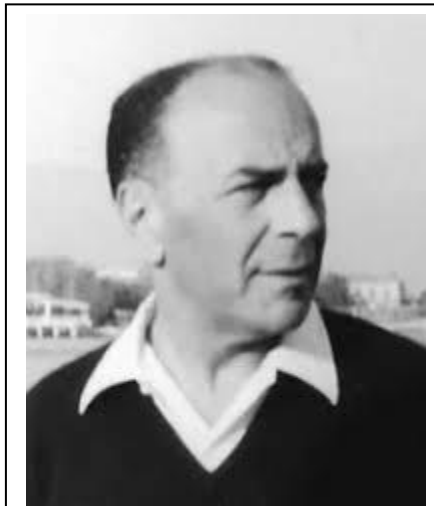
Politics, January 1946

Said Fouché: “Give me a scrap of paper with a man’s signature, and I will have him executed”. This may be a basic principle of State Police procedure, but in intellectual affairs it is simply no good.

By quotations carefully extracted from their context, Mr. Schapiro¹ attempts to prove that Proudhon was: 1) “a harbinger of Fascist ideas... (who) sounded the Fascist note of a revolutionary repudiation of democracy and socialism... the intellectual spokesman of the French middle- class” ; 2) a supporter of dictatorship in general, and of Louis Napoleon in particular; 3) an antisemite; 4) an enemy of the American Negroes; 5) an advocate of war; 6) an enemy of the Common Man; 7) an antifeminist.

The first charge is proved by Mr. Schapiro in the following way: Proudhon was a petty-bourgeois and a harbinger of Fascism because he did not believe in the Marxist notion of “class struggle”, or in that of a violent revolution crowned by the victory of the proletariat, while he saw that in modern times a violent revolution could only mean dictatorship and the triumph of some kind of middle class. But Marx and the socialists, adds Mr. Schapiro, were wrong anyway, insofar as they did not fully understand the nature and the historical role of the middle class, while Proudhon’s “inharmonious” insights have been borne out by contemporary events.

From all this, one thing is strikingly evident, namely that while Mr. Schapiro does not himself believe in the validity of Marxist notions, he uses them to define Proudhon and to show that he was, if not so wrong after all, then bad. This gives his argument a peculiar twist. Because from a marxist point of view it may be correct to say that Proudhon was a petty bourgeois, a traitor and a Fascist, since he did not believe in class warfare, in the dictatorship of the proletariat, and such things. But if one thinks that marxist notions are wrong anyway (and on such a fundamental point as the historical role of the various classes), then we are entitled to ask that he judge Proudhon on some other clearly defined



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(1905-1972)**

grounds, and on the basis of what Proudhon actually meant.

It is my contention that Proudhon’s arguments (bad or good, that’s another story) are stated with perfect clarity in his work for anybody who is willing to make the necessary effort to understand them. If I had to restate them in a few words, I would say that Proudhon’s fundamental concern was to discover in the actual workings of human society a truth that would not be a “class” truth, so that the triumph of social justice would be a triumph of Reason, not of violence, a creation of society itself, not in any way an imposition from above, whatever name the “above” might have – God,

State coercion or Class Dictatorship. This truth he called Justice, and he meant both the “idea” and the concrete reality of Justice present, in a positive or in a negative way, in every social situation. This idea inspires his whole work, and Proudhon gave it an unsystematic but very impressive treatment in the two thousand pages of *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Eglise*. These two thousand pages are completely neglected by Mr. Schapiro, who on the other hand makes an abundant use of excerpts from Proudhon’s correspondence treating them as if they were meant to be theoretical formulas, and not personal opinions personally and privately expressed.

From Mr. Schapiro’s essay, furthermore, one would learn that Proudhon was an anarchist, but nothing at all about the substance and essential meaning of Proudhon’s relentless fight against what he called *le principe gouvernemental*. It becomes then far too easy for Mr. Schapiro to hang Proudhon in effigy for being a supporter of dictatorship on the basis of his attitude toward Louis Napoleon. That such an accusation could be uttered at all is so preposterous that it would be unbelievable if we did not have so many examples today of how completely intellectual prejudice (and the obdurate will to talk formulas instead of sense) can twist the judgement of respectable people.

¹ J. Salwyn Schapiro, “P. J. Proudhon, Harbinger of Fascism” (*The American Historical Review*, July 1945).

To understand Proudhon's attitude toward Louis Napoleon nothing is needed but to read what he wrote on the subject keeping in mind what really happened in that tragic year, 1848. There was, among other things, the rage, the despair, the utter contempt for socialist and democratic politicians, in a man who, as early as 1840, had seen defeat, dictatorship, and also war, coming *because* of the immense stupidity of demagogues who (drunk with visions of 1793 and barricades) were ready to send the workers to be slaughtered for the sake of empty phrases and petty ministerial changes. Which was what they did in June, 1848.

Not to speak of the fact that the famous pamphlet *La Révolution démontrée par le Coup d'Etat* was so much of a bonapartist pamphlet that its author was forbidden to publish anything on political matters after that; and not to mention the other well-known fact that Proudhon was in jail for three years and in exile for seven years because of his strenuous fight against bonapartism, I would maintain that his attitude toward Louis Napoleon was fundamentally clear, and also intelligent and very honest. He saw with perfect lucidity (as Mr. Schapiro himself grants) that the combination of a government machine of which only the authoritarians understood the nature, and of a mass of people left in a state of chaotic disillusionment and bewilderment, would unavoidably spell dictatorship, Empire, and eventually war. For Proudhon, it was by no means a question of middle class against proletariat. In fact, he stressed over and over again how the inertia (or "passive support") of the disgusted workers had been an essential factor in the success of the Coup d'Etat, while the "liberal" middle class disliked intensely the idea of losing the political franchises which they themselves, through the hands of their sons and husbands and fathers, had helped to destroy in the persons of the Parisian workers. Moreover, what Proudhon meant when he said that Louis Napoleon could be "the Revolution or nothing" was not to express faith in a man whom he had opposed with all his strength and for whom he had no respect whatsoever, but rather to proclaim his conviction that, Napoleon or no Napoleon, the Revolution could not be stopped, and that the ridiculous Cesar had no choice but to go willingly in its direction or to be dragged along by historical necessity.

With the best men of his time, Proudhon saw (with wide open eyes and without any sentimentality or illusion about the actual vicissitudes of history) the immense social upheaval of modern times in the form of "irresistible progress". That upheaval was to him such a fundamental and evident fact, and it coincided to such a

point with the necessity of Truth itself, that it would have been grotesque for him to think that a Monsieur Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte could be anything but its tool. Political fury, intellectual boldness, and his love for grandiose visions, often led Proudhon to make statements that might sound queer, or even absurd. But after all, if Proudhon is known for something, it is for his unbounded hate for any form of coercion. In order to admit that he meant to *support* the dictatorship of Louis Napoleon, one would have to assume that he nourished some obscure personal ambition. At that very moment, anyone who has any familiarity with his life and works

would hear the echo of the thundering words he once threw in the face of Monsieur Thiers, in Parliament: "Monsieur Thiers, I am ready to tell the whole story of my life here from this tribune. I challenge you to do the same".

So far, so good. Mr. Schapiro's attack on Proudhon appears to be the result of misunderstanding and lack of sympathy, rather than of deliberate hostility. But when he comes to Proudhon, the advocate of war, antisemite

and anti-Negro, he is being inexcusably devious, and should know much better.

Proudhon's *La Guerre et la Paix* is a passionate effort to see clearly into "the mysterious bonds that unite might and right". In order to do that, the author starts out by taking for granted that war *is* in human nature, that in war humanity has really sought to appease, in an obscure and fearful way, the need for justice by which it is possessed. Everybody who has read the book knows that its first part takes the deliberate form of an apology for war. As a matter of fact, such an approach is typical of Proudhon, and constitutes one of the most original characteristics of his method, which is, in a sense, truly Socratic. But everybody who has read the book also knows that it ends with the demonstration that, while war can only be understood and justified as a violent search for justice in society, never can justice be achieved through war, but only through the establishment of real just relations between men and between nations, and that there can be neither justice nor peace except in a free federation of peoples.

Mr. Schapiro just ignores all that. And his attitude would not be correctly described if one did not stress that only a couple of pages before accusing Proudhon of being a warmonger he had accused him of being a traitor to the proletariat and an enemy of socialism because Proudhon did not believe in violent revolution. Evidently, Mr. Schapiro prefers to assume that Proudhon was a man without any intellectual or moral

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consistency to wondering a little about what he, Mr. Schapiro himself, is writing.

In the same book, speaking on the eve of the American Civil War, Proudhon states quite bluntly that this “war of liberation” will not liberate the Negroes, that they will, in the best hypothesis, pass from one kind of slavery into another, and that, all considered, it would be better for them to remain under their Southern masters and strive for their freedom through betterment and self-education than be liberated by the Northern *armies*. One is free to disagree completely with such an opinion. But, if one knows Proudhon at all, one will also know on what assumption the statement is uttered. The assumption is the basic one for Proudhon: that it is worse than meaningless to say or imply that man can be “liberated” by any machinery whatsoever, governmental or other. Man, according to him, can only be helped to liberate himself by his fellow men, in the course of common life and common effort. It may be that Proudhon on the American Civil War was guilty of hasty generalization (although I understand that there are a few people today who would be ready to grant that he was right). But Mr. Schapiro is, to my knowledge, the only person who has ever thought of accusing the great heir of the eighteenth century *philosophes* of being “anti-Negro”.

As for anti-semitism, Mr. Schapiro’s indictment of Proudhon’s on this account is based on the fact that Proudhon uses several times the word “Jew” in connection with bankers, the Stock Exchange, financial capitalism, and institutions of a similar kind. Besides the fact that the connection was not, after all, altogether arbitrary and without foundation, one might as well label Voltaire as an antisemite because, since he disliked the Bible with some intensity, to him the word “Jew” was, to all practical purposes, synonymous with superstition.

On the other hand, there would be no point in denying that Proudhon was antifeminist. Alexander Herzen, who had an immense respect and love for Proudhon, was quite incensed by the narrowness of his views on the rights of women and on the family as an institution. Certainly, when he speaks of women and of family discipline under the father, Proudhon shows the worst side of his peasant nature. Not only that, but, by going back to the Roman notion of a family founded on an inflexible patriarchy, he also contradicts the very substance of his social philosophy which is from one

end to the other a relentless attack against the philosophical and social foundations of Roman and Napoleonic law.

There is one point, however, on which I am ready to yield to Mr. Schapiro not only willingly, but also with great enthusiasm. This is when Mr. Schapiro says that Proudhon was “an enemy of the Common Man”. Yes, thank God, he was. Proudhon hated the “common” man, he hated the “average” man, he hated the “class” man, he hated profoundly and mercilessly any kind of fiction by which straight, unalloyed, naked human reality could be hidden, distorted, warped – hence oppressed and suppressed. Moreover, Proudhon was not at all a lover of humanity. He was something better. He was a man himself, a thinking man and a free man.

On the whole, since Mr. Schapiro has chosen to depict Proudhon by way of arbitrary quotation, he might as well have accused him of being also:

- (1) an enemy of free nations, because to him the Polish and Italian patriots were muddle-headed sentimentalists who assumed that freedom from foreign domination plus some form of constitutional government would automatically mean real freedom and the idyll of nationhoods, while he, Proudhon, thought that the arithmetical operation would rather be: nationalism plus a reinforced State equal despotism, war, and the disruption of any hope for European unity;
- (2) a nationalist, because, on the strength of the aforesaid conviction, he vehemently criticized Napoleon III and his Italian “war of liberation” as being completely at loggerheads with the French “national interest” which it was supposed to further, since the French nation could not possibly have any interest in the formation of a new military State at its frontier;
- (3) a supporter of “law and order”, because he repeatedly maintained that “political Government” actually meant social anarchy, while free association and the “federal principle” were the only possible basis of real law and real order in society;
- (4) a philistine, because he attacked some of the foremost writers and artists of his time, Victor Hugo, George Sand and Delacroix among others, as being “immoral and false”;
- (5) a futurist, because, writing on art, he not only upheld Courbet as a great painter but also attacked the “absolutistic cult of Form”, predicted that “truthful

The mere fact that, after having been buried so long ago under the terrifying epitaph: “PETTY BOURGEOIS”, he is still being called names seems a sufficient testimony to the vitality and truthfulness of what is left to us of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

artists will be persecuted as enemies of Form and of public morality”, and outlined a notion of “critical idealism” in which truth about the human world and rejection of moral, social and artistic conventions were united in a way which is not far from the way of Tolstoi and of Van Gogh.

In fact, all this, together with Mr. Schapiro’s attack, simply points out Proudhon’s great originality as a thinker: his tenacious refusal to take things for granted; his eagerness to discover new aspects of reality as well as new ways of demonstrating the truth in which he believed; and, when arguing, his constant ability to argue his own case starting from the very grounds of his adversary – which is one of the aspects of his Socratism, and leads him to make statements that could easily be shown to come very near to certain fundamental notions of modern philosophy.

There is, however, a more general question involved in all this. It does not specifically concern either Mr. Schapiro or Proudhon, but rather the two entirely different types of attitudes represented by them. What is striking in Mr. Schapiro’s case is that he is unable to give a satisfactory account of the type of complex approach represented by Proudhon. Why?

I think it is impossible to understand Mr. Schapiro’s attitude if one does not assume that what he is actually asking for is a one-track, monolithic theory, a theory giving all the answers, complete with instructions how to prove it, and also to disprove it.

Such a theory would have to be built on a level of half-truths dogmatically asserted. Mr. Schapiro, one suspects, would have liked to be able to reduce Proudhon’s ideas to a statement of the kind: “The world is bad because financial credit is not given freely. The free credit bank would make it good”. He would then have had the choice of saying: “After all, it is not nonsensical, since free credit would certainly be a good thing” – or else (like Marx) of getting indignant and treating Proudhon as a nincompoop who wants to solve

the social question with the one magic stroke of free credit. The important point, in both cases, would be that one would not have to deal with “contradictory and inharmonious” statements, but only with simple-mindedness.

Fortunately, Proudhon is far from being the kind of comfortable thinker Mr. Schapiro (and a few others) like to deal with. He is the kind of thinker who, because he believes in truth, feels free to challenge everything short of truth. For Proudhon practical solutions cannot be but partial, and the essence of the social problem is that it remains open. In fact, what one finds at the root of Proudhon’s thought is the unshakeable conviction that human society constitutes an ever present and ever resurgent problem, which might or might not have a final solution, but in any case requires above everything else that it be kept open throughout the vicissitudes of history. This is, for Proudhon, the mission of the honest man and of the intellectual, and can only be fulfilled through intellectual freedom and actual common work.

*

Still, to defend Proudhon against a certain kind of misunderstanding seems superfluous. The mere fact that, after having been buried so long ago under the terrifying epitaph: “PETTY BOURGEOIS”, he is still being called names seems a sufficient testimony to the vitality and truthfulness of what is left to us of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *homme du peuple*.

For those interested in a more detailed debunking of Schapiro’s frankly dishonest argument, we recommend “Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Anarchism” in *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Volume 1 Number 2 (Summer 2021)

If I were asked to answer the following question: *What is slavery?* and I should answer in one word, *It is murder*, my meaning would be understood at once. No extended argument would be required to show that the power to take from a man his thought, his will, his personality, is a power of life and death; and that to enslave a man is to kill him. Why, then, to this other question: *What is property?* may I not likewise answer, *It is theft*, without the certainty of being misunderstood; the second proposition being no other than a transformation of the first?

– *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (1840)

Proudhon, Father of Self-Management

Daniel Guérin

Proudhon oui et non (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1978)

In pondering the problems of workers' associations or, as we say today, self-management, Proudhon¹ was one of the very first to try and answer the question already discussed by other social reformers of the 19th century and which men today, with even more puzzlement, ask themselves: *who should manage the economy?* Is it private capitalism? Is it the State? Is it the associated workers? In other words, three options presented themselves, and still present themselves: free enterprise, nationalisation, socialisation, that is to say self-management.

A statist solution and a libertarian solution

Proudhon was, from 1848, the ardent promoter of the third solution.² He thus separated himself from most of the socialists of his time, supporters, at least on a transitional basis, of management by the State. Their spokesman was Louis Blanc, in his booklet on the *Organisation of Labour* (1840).³ Louis Blanc was Proudhon's *bête noire*, in the absence of Marx and Engels, whose *Communist Manifesto*, written in German at the end of 1847, did not come to his attention. In this *Manifesto*, which is influenced by Louis Blanc, we read:

“Centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State.”

State centralisation returns like a mantra:

“Centralisation of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank, with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.



Daniel Guérin (1904-1988)

“Centralisation, in the hands of the State, of all means of transportation.

“Organisation of industrial armies, particularly for agriculture.”

It is true that the authors of the *Manifesto*, still following in the footsteps of Louis Blanc, envisaged a further stage, no longer statist, but libertarian, when the proletariat, having destroyed classes, and thus class antagonisms, political power would cease to exist, the State would disappear and production would be managed by the associated workers.

But the end of the transitional statist period is relegated to a distinct future, more or less considered “utopian” and as a

result, one feels exempt from having to delve, prematurely, into the problems of workers' self-management. Quite to the contrary, Proudhon considers self-management as a concrete, immediate problem; he outlines its functioning in detail. A somewhat utopian approach at the time, [it is] much more relevant today.

Before setting out Proudhon's conception of workers' self-management, it is necessary to briefly recall, by contrast, his rejection of an “authoritarian” management of the economy. As he was unable to read the *Communist Manifesto* and was only imperfectly familiar (notably through *The Poverty of Philosophy*, written in French) with Marxian thought, it was mainly against Louis Blanc, his compatriot and direct adversary, that he multiplied his attacks:

cooperatives initially aided and run by the State but eventually controlled by the workers themselves. These cooperatives would reform capitalism away by out-competing capitalist firms, leading to the end of competition by planning. Following the Revolution of 1848, Blanc became a member of the provisional government which formed National Workshops (*Ateliers Nationaux*) to provide work for the unemployed. Their closing led to the June Days uprising. (Editor)

¹ Paper presented at the Proudhon Symposium (Brussels, November 24-25, 1965).

² While the 1848 Revolution undoubtedly saw workers' associations come to the forefront of his ideas as a consequence of the opportunity for their creation on a wide basis, Proudhon's support for self-management and association had appeared in his earlier works, including *What is Property?* (1840) and *System of Economic Contradictions*. (1846) (Editor)

³ Louis Blanc (1811-1882) was a French socialist politician, journalist and historian. He called for the creation of

“The State is the patrimony, it is the blood and life of Louis Blanc. Snuff out the State, Louis Blanc is a dead man.” “The economic revolution accomplished, can the government, the State, still exist? With the economic revolution (...) the State must entirely disappear.”¹ The instruments of production and exchange should not be managed by the State. Being to the workers who use them “what the hive is to the bees”, their management should be entrusted to workers’ associations.² Only then “large industry, which, through the alienation of collective force, had reduced the wage-worker to a condition worse than that of the slave, becomes one of the principal organs of liberty and public prosperity.”³ “We, associated producers or in the process of association,” proclaims Proudhon in the style of a manifesto, “we do not need the State (...) Exploitation by the State is always monarchical, always wage-labour (...) We do not want the government of man by man any more than we want the exploitation of man by man. Socialism is the opposite of governmentalism. (...) We want these associations to be (...) the initial nucleus of this vast federation of companies and societies, united in the common bond of the democratic and social republic.”⁴

Small and Large Industry

The “workers’ association” is the newborn of 1848. The February Revolution saw the birth in Paris and Lyon of a spontaneous flowering of workers’ productive associations. This nascent self-management is, for the Proudhon of 1848, much more than the political revolution, the “revolutionary fact”. It was not invented by a theoretician, preached by doctrinaires. It was not the State that gave the initial impulse. It was the people. And Proudhon urges the workers to organise themselves in a similar way throughout the Republic, to attract to themselves, first small property, small commerce and small industry, then large property and large enterprises, then the largest operations (mines, canals, railways, etc.) and, in this way, “to become masters of everything.”⁵

Today, we tend to remember Proudhon only for his inclinations, naïve certainly, anti-economic without a doubt, to ensure the survival of small craft and

commercial enterprises. Certainly, there is no shortage of texts in which Proudhon takes the side of small producers. He had given a postscript of one of his writings the title “Apotheosis of the middle class” and he had “dreamed of a reconciliation of the proletariat and the middle class.”⁶ In his posthumous book, *Theory of Property* he will make the following statement: “The purpose of workers’ associations is not to replace individual activity with associated activity [*l’action sociétaire*], as was foolishly believed in 1848, but to ensure that all entrepreneurs in small and medium industry, as well as small owners, benefit from discoveries, machines, improvements and processes otherwise inaccessible to middling enterprises and fortunes.”⁷

But Proudhonian thought is ambivalent on this point. Proudhon, too often contradictory, criticises property, a source of injustice and exploitation, while at the same time celebrating it in so far as he sees in it a guarantee of personal independence. Moreover, he is too often confused with the “small so-called Proudhonian coterie” which, according to Bakunin, had formed around him in the last years of his life. This rather reactionary clique was a “stillborn”.⁸ It tried in vain, in the First International, to oppose private ownership of the means of production to collectivism. And if it did not live long, it was mainly because the majority of its followers, easily convinced by Bakunin’s arguments, were not long in abandoning their supposedly Proudhonian conceptions for collectivism.

Moreover, the last handful of “mutualists”, as they called themselves, only partially rejected collective property: they only fought it in agriculture, given the individualism of the French peasant; but they accepted it in transport and, in terms of industrial self-management, they were demanding the thing whilst rejecting the name.⁹ If they were so afraid of the name, it was, above all, because the temporary united front formed against them by the collectivist disciples of Bakunin and certain “authoritarian” Marxists, barely disguised partisans of statist management of the economy – such as Lucraft¹⁰ at the Basel Congress – was not reassuring. Marxist defamation did the rest,

¹ *Idée générale de la révolution au XIXe siècle*, 1851, éd. Rivière, 1923, pp. 363-364. [“Resistance to the Revolution: Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux”, *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, 479-80]

² *Ibid.*, pp. 266-278, 329. [“General Idea of the Revolution”, *Property is Theft!*, 579-84, 595]

³ « Manifeste électoral », *Le Peuple*, n° 4, 8-15 November 1848, in *Mélanges, 1848-1852*, 1868, t. I. [“General Idea of the Revolution”, 585]

⁴ *Ibid.*, an almost identical passage is to be noted in *Idée générale...*, p. 280. [“Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*”, *Property is Theft!*, 376-378; “General Idea”, 585]

⁵ *Manifeste électoral*, cit. [“Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*”, 375]

⁶ Post-scriptum of 1851 to *Les Confessions d’un révolutionnaire*, 1849, éd. Rivière, 1929.

⁷ *Théorie de la propriété*, 1866, p. 183.

⁸ Bakounine, *Œuvres complètes*, t. I, première partie, p. 241.

⁹ James Guillaume, *Le Collectivisme de l’Internationale*, Neuchâtel, 1904, p. 12.

¹⁰ Benjamin Lucraft (1809-1897) was a craftsman and advocate of Chartism who was a founder member, and sometime chairman, of the General Council of the International Workingmen’s Association. He was a delegate to the Brussels Congress of 1868 and the Basle Congress of 1869, at which he not only advocated land nationalisation but he further argued for the large-scale cultivation of the land by the State on behalf of the people, as against peasant proprietorship. (Editor)

attributing to Proudhon the somewhat retrograde views of his epigones.

In fact, Proudhon moves with his times. As the late Pierre Hautmann points out in his masterly thesis¹, “He has often been presented as hostile to the very principle of large-scale industry. Quite wrongly. Without doubt, at the sight of the Moloch factory – as of the all-pervasive State – he sketches a reflex of fear which makes him lean, by reaction, towards small-scale production and decentralisation. But, as far as economic life is concerned, one would be mistaken in imagining that he is hostile to the principle of large-scale production. On the contrary, he will insist at length, and sometimes in enthusiastic terms, on the need for powerful workers’ associations for production, their role and their magnificent future. He therefore accepts, he even wants large-scale industry (...) But his purpose is to humanise it, to exorcise its evil power, to socialise it by handing over its destiny to a ‘community of workers, equal, free and responsible.’”

Proudhon understands that it is impossible to go back.² He is realistic enough to see, as he confides in his *Carnets* [Notebooks], that “small-scale industry is as foolish a thing as small-scale cultivation.” For large modern industry, requiring a large number of workers and extensive mechanisation, he is resolutely collectivist: “Large-scale industry and large-scale cultivation must in the future be born from association.”³ In *General Idea of the Revolution in the 19th Century* (1851), he repeatedly refers to this modernist conception: “Workers’ companies, a protest against wage-labour, are called upon to play a considerable role in our future. This role will consist mainly in the management of the great instruments of labour, and in certain tasks, which [require] both a great division of functions, a great collective force (...) [such as the railways].”⁴

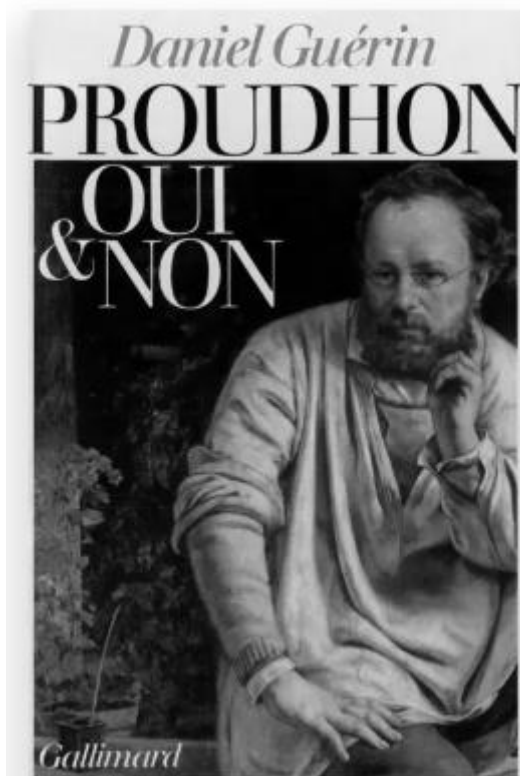
The author of *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church* (1858) was indignant that he had been made to appear as an opponent of technical progress.⁵ In his last

work, published shortly after his death, *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes*, he confirmed once again: “The running of railways should have been entrusted to companies of workers.” “Whether it is a question of large-scale production, manufacturing, mining, metalworking, shipping, it is clear that there is a need for association: no one disputes this anymore.”⁶

The legend of a Proudhon who was simply “petty-bourgeois” therefore needs to be corrected.

Self-management foreseen in detail

Going into the specifics of workers’ self-management, Proudhon lists, with remarkable precision, its essential conditions:⁷



Every associated individual has an undivided right in the assets of the company.

Every worker must assume his share of the repugnant and painful duties.

He must go through a series of labours and skills that provide him with an encyclopaedic education. (I found a similar recommendation in an 1830 issue of Robert Owen’s journal, *The Cooperator*) Proudhon is absolutely determined to “make the work go through the entire series of the activities of the industry to which he is attached”. “Thus the division of labour can no longer be a cause of degradation for the worker; on the contrary, it is the instrument of his education and the guarantee of his security.”⁸

Here, Pierre Hautmann, commenting on Proudhon, remarked that for Marx it is the “automatic workshop” – today we would say automation – which, through the division of labour and the reduction of working hours, both pushed to the extreme, which allow every man to achieve his “complete development”. The machine taking over from man, de-alienation will take place, not in work, but in leisure. Proudhon is not very attracted by such a perspective. For him, man is essentially a producer. He would like him to be constantly at work. We are at the antipodes of the famous *Right to be Lazy*

¹ Pierre Hautmann, *Proudhon, sa vie et sa pensée, 1809-1849*, thèse principale (inéédite), 1961, pp. 681-682.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 994-995, based on unpublished notes from Proudhon’s *Cours d’économie* [Course in Economics].

³ *Carnets*, t. 3, 1946, p. 114.

⁴ *Idée générale...*, pp. 178, 275. [“General Idea of the Revolution”, 558, 583]

⁵ *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Église*, 1859-1860, éd. Rivière, 4 vol., 1930, cit., t. III, pp. 489-493.

⁶ *De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières*, 1865, éd. Rivière, pp. 171, 190.

⁷ *Idée générale...*, pp. 277-283, 329. [“General Idea of the Revolution”, 583-6]

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-283, 329; – Hautmann, Proudhon..., cit., p. 996.

by Paul Lafargue. For the fierce puritan, for the Saint Paul of socialism that is Proudhon, *leisure* is not far from being synonymous with *lechery*.¹ He expects the “de-alienation” from a mode of production that would give the worker a synthetic view of the labour process.²

Proudhon stresses in *Justice*: “The spirit is no longer in the worker, it has passed into the machine. What should produce the workers’ virtue has become their stupefaction.” These evils could only be corrected “if the collective forces alienated for the profit of a few exploiters returned to labour as a whole.”³ Proudhon counted upon an increase of productivity under self-management, thanks to the joy of de-alienated work.

After this digression, let us resume the list of the essential conditions of self-management, still according to Proudhon:

Positions are elective and regulations are subject to the approval of the associates.

Remuneration is proportional to the nature of the role, to the significance of the skill, to the extent of the responsibility. Every associate participates in the profits in proportion to his services.

Everyone is free to leave the association at will, to have his account settled and his rights liquidated.

The associated workers choose their leaders, their engineers, their architects, their accountants. Proudhon insists on the fact that the proletariat still lacks [certain] abilities. It must be recognised that “the working class is still, through the insufficiency of its views and its inexperience in business, incapable of managing such great interests as those of commerce and great industry, and consequently not risen to its own destiny. Men are lacking in the proletariat.”⁴ Hence the need to associate with self-management “industrial and commercial notables” who would initiate the workers into the discipline of business and would be remunerated by a fixed salary: there is “room for everyone under the sun of the revolution.”⁵

In passing, let us note that this libertarian conception of self-management is the antithesis of the paternalistic and statist self-management as set out by Louis Blanc in a draft decree of 15 September 1849.⁶ The author of the *Organisation of Labour* wanted to create workers’ associations under the aegis of the State, financed by the State. He envisaged for them an authoritarian distribution of profits, broken down as follows:

25% to a capital depreciation fund;

25% to a social relief fund;

25% to a reserve fund;

25% to be shared between the workers.

Proudhon wants nothing to do with a self-management of this kind. Associated workers must not “submit to the State,” but “be the State itself.”⁷ “Association (...) can do everything, reform everything without the assistance of power, overwhelm and subjugate power itself.” Proudhon wishes to “progress to government through association, not to association through government.”⁸ He warns against the illusion that the State, as dreamt of by the “authoritarian” socialists, could tolerate free self-management. How, indeed, could it tolerate “alongside a centralised power the formation of enemy centres”? Hence this prophetic warning: “Nothing is feasible by the initiative, by the spontaneity, by the independent action of individuals and collectives as long as they are in the presence of this colossal force with which the State is invested by centralisation.”⁹ Proudhon, in fact, anticipates here the drama of contemporary self-management, attempted and unsuccessful, within the framework of a more or less dictatorial State, whether in Yugoslavia, Algeria, or elsewhere.

It is the libertarian conception, and not the statist conception, of self-management that prevailed in the congresses of the 1st International. At the Lausanne congress (1867), the rapporteur, the Belgian César de Paepe, having proposed to make the State the owner of the enterprises to be nationalised, Charles Longuet, then a libertarian, stipulates: “Agreed, on the condition that it is clearly understood that we define the State: [as] the collectivity of citizens (...), also that these services are not administered by functionaries of the State, (...) but by workers’ companies (...)” The debate resumed the following year (1868) at the Brussels Congress and the same rapporteur this time took care to provide the requested clarification: “Collective property would belong to society as a whole, but it would be licenced to workers’ associations. The State would no longer be anything more than the federation of the various groups of workers.” Thus clarified, the proposal is adopted.¹⁰

However, the optimism that Proudhon showed in 1848 with regard to self-management will be cruelly belied by the lessons of facts. The illusions he had nurtured gradually faded. Their decline can be followed in his *Carnets*.¹¹ In October 1850, he wanted to have

¹ Cf. « Proudhon, refoulé sexuel », see *below* [in *Proudhon, Oui & Non*], p. 195.

² Marx, *Misère de la philosophie*, pp. 136 et seq. of the original edition; - Pierre Hautmann, op. cit., pp. 998-999.

³ *De la Justice...*, III, p. 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵ *Idée générale...*, cit.

⁶ *Confessions...*, ch., éd. Rivière, pp. 257-260.

⁷ « Manifeste de la démocratie anarchiste », *Peuple*, 22, 26 et 31 mars 1848, reproduced in *Solution du problème social*, 1868.

⁸ *Carnets*, t. 3, 1968, pp. 211, 312.

⁹ *De la capacité politique...*, pp. 329, 403.

¹⁰ Jacques Freymond, *La Première Internationale*, 1962, t. I, pp. 151 and 365-465.

¹¹ These extracts from the *Carnets* did not appear in the paper presented at the 1965 symposium.

confidence again: “We must wait for a final submission, the outcome of the various attempts at workers’ associations that are being made in Paris. The People will be more adept than us. They will go far.”¹ A few days later, he is already torn between hope and doubt: “Workers’ associations are on the agenda (...) Everyone is courting them. They will end up doing good business, if they know how to mine the seam. (...) There will be disappointments, Then, once the number has become somewhat significant, they will assist each other; because universal association is impossible.”²

But, during the course of 1851, the worsening of the counter-revolutionary process went hand in hand with the decline of the associations. Proudhon did not hesitate to call them “pure childishness.” And he comments acidly: “The managers confess *in petto*, and in private, their impotence, the radical impotence of the working class. A wicked method of emancipation.”³ A little later: “Workers’ Associations. They progress poorly. They produce (...) *much less, more expensively*; they are inferior on all points.”⁴ Then the complaints follow one after the others: “Workers’ societies: mediocre; few succeed. Pettiness, distrust, petty vanities and ambitions.” And this distressing remark: “If the bourgeoisie took charge of the matter, it would be ten times more advanced.”⁵

And the bean-counter who slumbers in Proudhon grumbles: “*Workers’ associations*. They are not working well. Those who received capital from the State have devoured it, and nothing shows for it. In their inventories they value their products at *the selling price*; they price their workdays very high [*ils portent leurs journées très haut*], so that after the deductions are made, there is nothing left for general expenses, nothing for the reserve and profits.”⁶

In 1853, probably because the working class had allowed Louis-Napoleon’s coup d’État to take place without reacting, Proudhon become even more corrosive: “The ignorant, insolent, intractable, stubborn

worker wants to be master: master of the mills and factories which he is incapable of running.”⁷

But, in this harsh criticism, it is not always easy to distinguish between the technical and the political. For Proudhon reproaches certain associations above all for absorbing the individual, for undermining freedom, for being centres of “communism”, for taking inspiration from Fourier, Louis Blanc, Pierre Leroux, for selfishly aspiring to “a workers’ feudalism”, for constituting a nursery of “chiefs” who “work to maintain their domination.” And he predicts: “All these smoke-filled ant-hills will soon dissipate.” These workers’

associations “will never be anything but *associations of masters*, like the others.”⁸

In addition, it is the imperial power that it working to undermine workers’ associations. They are “neglected, repressed, under the pretext of conspiracy.”⁹

A few years later, in 1857, Proudhon would make a disenchanting assessment of the still surviving workers’ associations. Their inspiration had been naïve, illusory, utopian. They had paid the price of inexperience. They had fallen into particularism and exclusivism. They had functioned as a collective employer, suffering the practice of ideas of hierarchy and supremacy. All the abuses of

capitalist companies “were exaggerated still further in these so-called fraternal companies.” They had been torn apart by discord, rivalries, defections, betrayals. Their managers, once initiated into business, had withdrawn “to set up on their own as bosses and bourgeois.” Elsewhere, it was the associates who had demanded the sharing of the products. Of several hundred workers’ associations created in 1848, nine years later there were only twenty.

To the narrow and particularist mentality that he denounces, Proudhon opposed a conception of “universal” and “synthetic” self-management. For the task of the future was much more than “the grouping of a few hundred workers into societies”, it was nothing less than “the economic reconstruction of a nation of 36 million souls.” Future workers’ associations should,

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¹ *Carnets*, t. 4, p. 53.

² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁷ *Carnet* n° 10 (unpublished), p. 194.

⁸ *Carnets*, t. 3, pp. 138, 274; t. 4, pp. 17, 90, 232, 283, 360.

⁹ *Carnet* n° 10, p. 460.

“instead of acting for the benefit of a few,” work for all. Self-management therefore requires “a certain education” of the self-managers. “You are not born an associate, you become one.” The most difficult task of associations was “to civilise the associates.” What they lacked was “men from the working masses who had learned in the schools of the exploiters to do without them.” It was less a question of forming a “mass of capital” than a “resource of men.”¹

Who owns the enterprises?

On the legal plane, Proudhon had initially considered entrusting workers’ associations with the ownership of their enterprises. Later he would reject this initial conception and distinguish (in a posthumous writing²) between property and possession. Property is absolutist, aristocratic, feudal, despotic; possession is democratic, republican, egalitarian: it consists of the usufructuary enjoyment of an inalienable and non-transferable concession. Producers would be entrusted with their instruments of production. They would not be their owners. This “superior formula” of possession would combine all the advantages of property and association, without any of their disadvantages. What would succeed property would be a federative co-ownership assigned, certainly not to a State, but to all the producers united in a vast agricultural and industrial federation. The economic federation would provide “counter-balance” to the State, a State no longer wiped off the Proudhonian map, for once, but regenerated from top to bottom.

And Proudhon gets excited about the future of self-management thus revised and corrected: “It is not a vain rhetoric that states it, it is economic and social necessity: the moment approaches when we will only be able to progress under new conditions (...) Classes (...) must be resolved into one and the same association of producers.”³

Exchange on what basis?

On what basis should exchanges between the various workers’ associations be undertaken? Proudhon, at first, argued that the exchange value of all commodities could be measured by the amount of labour required to produce them.⁴ The various productive associations would sell their products at cost price. Workers paid in “labour notes” would buy the goods at the estimated cost price in hours of work from exchange outlets or social stores. Larger exchanges would be carried out

through a clearing house or Bank of the People, which would accept the labour notes as payment. This Bank would also act as a credit institution. It would lend to productive workers’ associations the sum necessary for their smooth running. These loans would be granted without interest.

This conception called *mutualism* was somewhat utopian, and in any case difficult to implement in a capitalist regime. The Bank of the People, founded by Proudhon at the beginning of 1849, managed to obtain some 20,000 members in six weeks but its existence was short. Certainly, as we have seen, the meteoric rise of Prince-President Louis Bonaparte had something to do with it. It was, furthermore, chimerical to believe that mutualism would spread like wildfire, to exclaim like the Proudhon of the time: “It was truly the new world, the promised society⁵ which, grafting itself onto the old one, transformed it little by little!” Pierre Hauptmann was right, it seems, to stress in his principal thesis the illusory character of this mutualism of the years 1846-1848. But he may have burdened Proudhon a little too heavily, by the insistence with which he evokes his youthful sins, which were to be quickly amended by more concrete and more positive views on workers’ self-management.

As for remuneration based on the evaluation of working hours, it was, in various ways, questionable. Around 1880, the “libertarian communists” of the school of Kropotkin, Malatesta, Élisée Reclus, Carlo Cafiero, etc., will not fail to criticise it. First of all, it was unfair in their eyes. “Three hours of Peter’s work,” Cafiero objected, “can often be worth five hours of Paul’s work.”⁶ Other factors than just duration come into play in determining the value of work: intensity, professional and intellectual training, etc. Account should also be taken of the worker’s family responsibilities. The same objections are found in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* written by Karl Marx in 1875, but suppressed by German social-democracy until 1891 and which the “libertarian communists” of the 1880s were therefore unaware of when they argued against Proudhon.

Furthermore, the Kropotkin school maintains that the worker remains, in a collectivist regime, a wage-earner, a slave of the community that buys and monitors his labour-power. Remuneration proportional to the hours worked by each person cannot be, we are told, an ideal, at most a temporary stopgap. We should do away with a

¹ Series of quotes taken from the *Manuel du Spéculateur à la Bourse*, 3rd ed., 1857, “Conclusion”.

² *Théorie de la propriété, passim*.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Guérin here repeats the very common, but in correct, notion that Proudhon advocated “labour-notes” (pricing by time) as first asserted by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. In fact, he urged the expansion of “bills of exchange” (denominated in Francs) and workers’ associations as the means by which

workers would secure their full product as income. See Iain McKay, “Proudhon’s Constituted Value and the Myth of Labour Notes,” *Anarchist Studies* 25: 1 (Summer 2017). (Black Flag)

⁵ Promise: Promised land.

⁶ Carlo Cafiero, “Anarchy and Communism,” *A Libertarian Reader* (Active Distribution, 2023) I: 248. This speech originally appeared in *Le Révolté*, 13 and 27 November 1880. (Black Flag)

morality drawn from accounting books, with the philosophy of “credit and debt.” This form of remuneration proceeds from a mitigated individualism in contradiction with the collective ownership of the means of production. It would be incapable of bringing about a profound and revolutionary transformation of man. It would be incompatible with “anarchy”. A new form of possession would require a new form of remuneration. The services rendered to society would not be assessable in monetary units. Needs should be placed above services. All products created by the work of all should belong to all and each should freely take his share. To each according to his needs, such should be the motto of “libertarian communism”.¹

But Malatesta, Kropotkin and their friends seem to have ignored that Proudhon himself had anticipated, at least in part, their objections and, eventually, revised his initial conception. The *Theory of Property*, published after his death, explained that it was only in his *First Memoir*, that of 1840², that he had advocated equal pay for equal work: “I had forgotten to say two things: first, that work is measured by its duration and intensity; second, that the wage of the worker should not include either the amortisation of his education expenses and the work he has invested in himself as an unpaid apprentice, nor the insurance premium against the risks he runs, which are far from being the same every profession.” Proudhon would claim to have “remedied” this “oversight” in his subsequent writings, where he compensates for unequal costs and risks through cooperative mutual insurance societies.³

Let us note here that Proudhon does not consider the remuneration of the members of the workers’ association as a “wage”. but rather as a *distribution of profits*, freely decided between the associated and co-responsible workers. Otherwise, we would not be

released from wage-labour and self-management would be emptied of all content.

The “libertarian communists” of the 1880s also believed they had to criticise Proudhon’s mutualism and Bakunin’s more consistent collectivism for not wanting to prejudice the form that the remuneration of work would take under a socialist regime. These critics seemed to lose sight of the fact that the two founders of anarchism were precisely concerned not to prematurely lock society into rigid frameworks. They wanted, on this point, to reserve the greatest latitude for the workers’ associations. For Bakunin, collectivism has to be put into practice “in various forms and conditions, which will be determined in each locality, in each region and in each commune by the degree of civilisation and by the populations’ will.”⁴

But the justification for this flexibility, this rejection of hasty solutions, was provided by the “libertarian communists” of 1880 themselves, against their impatient anticipations, when they agreed and stressed that, in their choice of ideal regime, “work would produce much more than is needed for all.” It is

only when the age of abundance opens that “bourgeois” norms of remuneration could give way to specifically “communist” norms. But *not before*.⁵

Writing, in 1884, the Programme of an anarchist international, which was still in limbo, Malatesta agreed that communism would be immediately feasible only in very limited sectors and that, “for the rest”, it should accept “on a transitional basis” collectivism. “Communism, to be achievable, requires a great moral development in the members of a society, an elevated and profound sense of solidarity that the revolutionary impulse may not be enough to produce, especially since, in the beginning, the material conditions favouring such a development will be lacking.”⁶

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¹ Malatesta, *Programme et organisation de l'Association internationale des travailleurs*, Florence, 1884; Kropotkin, *La Conquête du pain*, 1892, *passim*; the same, *L'Anarchie, sa philosophie, son idéal*, 1896, pp. 27-28, 31; the same, *La Science moderne et l'anarchie*, 1913, pp. 82-83, 103. [Malatesta, “Program and Organization of the International Working Men’s Association”, *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* (AK Press, 2014); Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (AK Press, 2024); *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal* (Freedom Press, 1887); *Modern Science and Anarchy* (AK Press, 2018)]

² Proudhon’s *First Memoir* on property is better known as *What is Property? (Black Flag)*

³ *Théorie de la propriété*, p. 22.

⁴ Bakounine, *Œuvres*, éd. Stock, t. VI, p. 401.

⁵ Cf. Marx, *Lettre sur le Programme de Gotha*, cit.; Lénine, *L'État et la Révolution*. [Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*; Lenin, *The State and Revolution*]

⁶ Malatesta, cit. [Malatesta, “Program and Organization of the International Working Men’s Association”, 47]

After Malatesta, the anarchist Fernand Pelloutier, who became a revolutionary syndicalist, would be even more categorical: “Nobody believes (...) that the next revolution will achieve pure anarchic communism. By the fact it will doubtless break out before anarchist education is completed, men will not be mature enough to be able to organise themselves definitely. We must take men as they are, as the old society will bequeath to us.”¹

The pros and cons of competition

Amongst the norms inherited from the bourgeois economy, there is one whose preservation in a collectivist or self-managed economy raises thorny problems, namely competition. Just as in Proudhon’s eyes individual ownership of the products of labour is for the producer a guarantee of his personal independence, competition, he says, is “the expression of social spontaneity”, the guarantee of the “freedom” of associations. In addition, it constitutes, for a long time to come, an irreplaceable stimulant, without which an “immense relaxation will succeed the ardent tension of industry (...)”. “Remove competition (...), society, deprived of motive force, stops like a pendulum whose spring is slackened.”² And Proudhon proposed practical guidelines: “With respect to society, the workers’ company undertakes to always supply at the price closest to the cost price the products and services that are requested of it (...). To this end, the workers’ company prohibits any [monopolistic] coalition, submits to the law of competition, holds its books and records at the disposition of society which retains, as a sanction of its right of control, the ability of dissolving it.”³ “Competition and association rely upon each other (...). The most deplorable error of socialism is to have regarded it [competition] as the overturning of society. It cannot (...) be (...) a question of destroying competition (...). It is a question of finding its equilibrium, I would willingly say its police.”⁴

This attachment to the principle of competition earned Proudhon the sarcasm of Louis Blanc: “We cannot understand those who have imagined some mysterious coupling of the two opposing principles. Grafting association onto competition is a poor idea: it is replacing eunuchs with hermaphrodites.”⁵ Louis Blanc wanted to “arrive at a uniform price” fixed by the State and prevent any competition between workshops of the same industry. Proudhon retorted that price “is only regulated by competition, that is to say by the ability of

the consumer to do without the services of the one who overcharges them.”⁶

Proudhon, of course, does not hide from himself the evils of competition, which he has, moreover, described in superabundant detail in his *Philosophie de la misère*. He knows that it is a source of inequality. He admits that “in competition, victory is assured to the largest battalions.” As long as it is “anarchic” (in the pejorative sense of the term), as long as it is exercised only for the benefit of private interests, it necessarily engenders civil war, and, ultimately, oligarchy. “Competition kills competition.”⁷

But, in Proudhon’s opinion, the absence of competition would be no less pernicious. He cited the example of the tobacco board. This monopoly, by the very fact it is exempt from competition, is too expensive a service, its productivity is insufficient. If all industries were subject to such a regime, the nation, he said, could no longer balance its revenues and expenses.

But competition as dreamt of by Proudhon is not the competition left to itself of the capitalist economy, but a competition endowed with a higher principle which “socialises” it, a competition which would operate on the basis of a fair exchange, in a spirit of solidarity, a competition which, while safeguarding individual initiative, would bring back to the collectivity the wealth which capitalist appropriation currently diverts from it.⁸

Obviously, there is an element of utopia in this conception. Competition, the so-called market economy inevitably produce inequality and exploitation, even if one could start from a situation of perfect equality.⁹ In conclusion, it seems that competition can only be coupled with workers’ self-management on a temporary basis, as a necessary lesser evil, while waiting for:

1) that a mentality of “sincerity of exchange”, as Proudhon said¹⁰, has developed amongst the self-managers;

2) and, above all, that society has passed from the stage of scarcity to that of abundance, at which point competition would lose its *raison d’être*.

But in this transitional period it seems desirable that competition should be limited, as has been attempted, at present, in Yugoslavia, to the sphere of the means of

¹ Fernand Pelloutier, “L’anarchisme et les syndicats ouvriers”, *Les Temps nouveaux*, 2-8 November 1895.

² *Philosophie de la misère*, I, pp. 182, 217. [“System of Economic Contradictions”, *Property is Theft!*, 206, 196-7; *Les Confessions d’un révolutionnaire* (Garnier: Paris, 1851), 248]

³ *Idée générale...*, p. 281. [“General Idea of the Revolution”, 585]

⁴ *Philosophie de la misère*, I, 218. [“System of Economic Contradictions”, 203]

⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 195, 209. [“System of Economic Contradictions”, 204, 200]

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 218.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, t. II, p. 414.

consumption, where it has, at least, the advantage of defending the interests of the consumer.¹

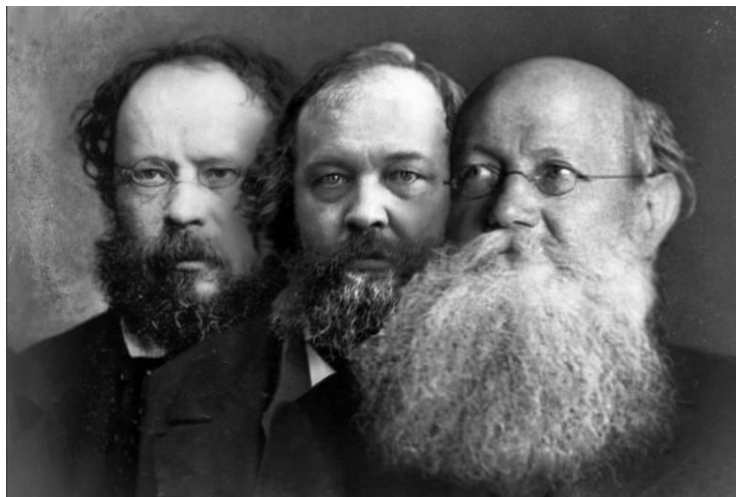
However, competition in that country has too often led to excesses and irrationalities that authoritarian opponents of the market economy like to denounce. Useful both as a stimulant to the spirit of enterprise and as a means of combating the high cost of living, it has too often fostered amongst Yugoslav self-managers a selfish and quasi-capitalist mentality, from which concern for the general interest was absent. It should be noted that workers' self-management in Yugoslavia has been criticised by the Cubans and the Chinese, precisely because of its inability to reconcile competition and socialism.

Long before today's "authoritarians" denounced the coupling of self-management and competition, the "libertarian communists" of the 1880s had attacked a collectivist economy of the Proudhonian type, based on the principle of struggle, where it would only restore equality amongst the competitors at the beginning. Competitive struggle would necessarily involve winners and losers; the exchange of products would end up being done according to the principle of supply and demand, "which would be to fall into competition, into the bourgeois world." This language is very similar to that used against the Yugoslav experience by some of its detractors in the communist world: they believed that they had to blame self-management for the hostility that the competitive market economy inspires in them. This was the case, for example, of "Che" Guevara who was wary of self-management because he saw it as synonymous with competition.²

A unitary socialisation

The thorny problem of the relationship between self-management and competition is still far from being resolved. We will leave it to professional economists to debate this issue and to practical experience on the ground to draw conclusions.

Proudhon, to return to him, sees full well that management by workers' associations can only be



Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin

unitary. He insists on the "need for centralisation and unity." He asks the question: "Do not workers' companies for the exploitation of large industries express unity?" "What we put in place of government is industrial organisation. What we put in place of political centralisation is economic centralisation." Self-management is for Proudhon society finally "living, organised", "the highest degree of freedom and order that humanity can achieve." And, in a beautiful flight of

fancy, he exclaims: "Here we are free, freed from our embryonic shell. All relations are turned upside down. We are changing our existence. Such is the Revolution in the 19th century."³

Nevertheless, Proudhon, despite his concern for unity, fears authoritarian planning (and this is why he instinctively prefers competition

inspired by solidarity). But anarchism has since become, in a more consistent way, the advocate of democratic and libertarian planning, developed from the bottom-up, by the federation of self-managed enterprises.

This is the way Bakunin foresaw the prospects for planning on a global scale that are open to self-management: "Workers' cooperative associations are a new fact in history; we are witnessing their birth today, and we can only foresee, but not determine at this time, the immense expansion that they will undoubtedly take and the new political and social conditions that will arise from them in the future. It is possible and even very probable that, one day going beyond the limits of communes, provinces and even present States, they will give a new constitution to the whole of human society, divided no longer into nations but into industrial groups." Thus they will form "an immense economic federation", with, at the summit, a supreme assembly. In the light of "the data, as broad as precise and detailed, of world statistics", they will combine supply with demand to steer, determine and distribute between different countries the production of world industry, so that there will be no more, or almost no more, commercial or industrial crises, forced stagnation, disasters, no more sorrows or wasted capital."⁴

¹ Albert Meister, *Socialisme et autogestion, l'expérience yougoslave*, 1964, p. 334.

² Cf. on this subject Ernest Germain (Ernest Mandel), "La loi de la valeur, l'autogestion et les investissements dans

l'économie des États ouvriers", *Quatrième Internationale*, February-March 1964.

³ *Idee générale...*, pp. 202-203, 301-302, 342, 369, 420, 428. ["General Idea of the Revolution", 591-2]

⁴ « Programme de la Fraternité révolutionnaire », cit.

A socialist sector and a private sector

The Proudhonian conception of management by workers' associations contains a serious ambiguity. It is not always specified whether self-management groups would remain in competition with capitalist enterprises, in brief if, as was said around 1963 in Algeria, the socialist sector would coexist with a private sector or whether, on the contrary, production as a whole would be socialised and placed under self-management.

Bakunin, unlike his master Proudhon, whose thinking is still hesitant on this point, is a consistent collectivist. He clearly sees the dangers of a coexistence of the two sectors. The workers, even associated, cannot form funds capable of fighting against the great bourgeois funds. And, on the other hand, there is a danger that within the workers' associations themselves there will arise, through the contagion of the capitalist environment, "a new class of exploiters of the labours of the proletariat", which, moreover, Proudhon himself has foreseen.

Self-management contains within itself all the seeds of the economic emancipation of the working masses, but it will only be able to really grow these seeds, Bakunin asserts, when "capital, industrial establishments, raw materials and instruments of work (...) become the collective property of the productive workers' associations, both industrial and agricultural, freely organised and federated amongst themselves." "Social transformation can only be carried out in a radical and definitive way by means that act upon the whole of society", that is to say, by a social revolution transforming individual property into collective property. In such a social organisation, the workers would be collectively their own capitalists, their own bosses. Only "things that really serve personal use" would remain individual property.¹

Until the social revolution is accomplished, Bakunin, while admitting that cooperatives for production have the advantage of accustoming workers to organise themselves, to run their own affairs, and that they create the first seeds of collective workers' action, considers that these islands in the midst of capitalist society can have only limited effectiveness.² This is the opposite position to that of Proudhon who, having deluded himself about the rapid absorption of the capitalist economy by workers' self-management, underestimates the importance of labour unionism and gives too little consideration to the right to strike.³

Conclusions

In conclusion, Proudhon's views on self-management do not, of course, form a perfectly adjusted,

homogeneous body of doctrine, free of all hesitation and ambiguity. Far from it. Contradictions abound.

There is a mutualist Proudhon who defends, exalts, tries to preserve the small independent producer from the relentless wheel of progress, and there is a resolutely collectivist Proudhon who does not hesitate to march with his time, with technical progress, with machinery, with large-scale industry.

There is an optimistic Proudhon who, in 1848, showers flowers upon the spontaneously born workers' associations, and there is a pessimistic Proudhon who, a few years later, will severely assess their failure.

There is a fanciful Proudhon who imagines mutualism capable of partial application within the capitalist regime itself and who persuades himself that the socialist sector, through its own dynamism, would spread like wildfire, and there is a much more realistic and reticent Proudhon on this point.

There is, as regards the legal regime of property in self-management, a disintegrationist Proudhon who, initially, envisages entrusting it to the workers' associations themselves, according to the principle: "the factory to the workers", and there is an integrationist Proudhon who, later, will prefer to hand it over to all producers, united in a vast agricultural and industrial federation.

There is a simplistic Proudhon, who proposes a very questionable definition of the value of labour, and there is a more subtle Proudhon who then admits that the duration of work cannot be the only basis of calculation and who strives to repair what he calls his "oversights".

There is a Proudhon who puts private property on trial, and there is a Proudhon who exalts it, just as there is a Proudhon who celebrates the virtues of competition and a Proudhon who insists on its evils. He only very rarely manages to make a true synthesis of contradictory notions, and that is why he only claims to *balance* the *antinomies*.

There is a decentralising and federalist Proudhon, who is wary of all planning, for fear of resurrecting authority, and there is a Proudhon who does not hesitate to advocate economic centralisation, who emphasises the unitary character of production.

There is a Proudhon who, by affirming the capacity of the working class and the duty it has to radically separate itself from bourgeois institutions, opens the way to modern worker syndicalism, and there is a Proudhon who underestimates struggles for demands, because he privileges the formation of productive workers' co-operatives. When he alludes to a "vast agricultural and industrial federation", he refrains from

¹ Bakounine, *Œuvres*, éd. Stock, t. V, pp. 216-218. *Œuvres complètes*, I, 2e partie, article in *Al Rubicone* du 3 January 1872.

² *Ibid.*, t. I, 2e partie, p. 73.

³ Georges Gurvitch, *Proudhon et Marx : une confrontation*, 1964, p 113.

further exploring this notion, which, in his writings, remains inarticulate and vague.

There is a Proudhon who, in the first part of his career, is only concerned with *economic* organisation, who is wary of everything that touches on *politics*, and there is a second Proudhon who will cease to neglect the problem of territorial administration, who will base it upon the autonomous commune, without however linking in a sufficiently precise and coherent way the communal power, on the one hand, to the workers' associations for production, on the other.

Finally, there is a Proudhon who categorically rejects any form of State – to the point of refusing all funding of workers' associations by a socialising State – and there is also a Proudhon, who has become more federalist than anarchist, who seems to reckon with the State.

These are, briefly recalled, some of the shortcomings and deficiencies of Proudhonian thought with regard to workers' self-management.

But, alongside these weaknesses, what lucid views, what prophetic anticipations. The reader of Proudhon, if he is aware of the concrete problems that have been posed, in our day, by the attempts to put self-management into practice, can draw usefully from his writings.

Learning self-management

Almost all the difficulties that form the drama of contemporary self-management are foreshadowed, described, in Proudhon's work; they are the subject of prophetic warnings: whether it is a question of the incompatibility of the all-pervasive State and free self-management, whether it is question of the shortage of men prepared for self-management, of the lack of technical managers, whether it is a question, at least for a transitional period, of a market economy involving a certain degree of competition, whether, finally, it is recognised that it is impossible to establish, prematurely, a complete communism, which would only be practicable on the day when abundance reigned and the consumer would only have to "take from the pile" – on all these points, Proudhon illuminates the future with a powerful spotlight.

But, even where he hesitates, where he contradicts himself, where he corrects himself, he gives his reader a highly valuable lesson in relativism. It is exciting to see

the flowering of a creative mind always in motion, constantly searching, never fixed or dogmatic, tumultuous certainly, sometimes letting itself be carried away by witticism, improvisation, thoughtlessness, but capable of correcting itself, of revising itself, of accepting the education of events, of evolving in the light of experience.

Besides, Proudhon has excuses; the first: he explores, by laying the foundations of workers' self-management, a *terra ignota*, a domain so new and so virgin that no

one can yet serve as his guide; the second: the contradiction is less in his thought than in the actual object that it reflects. Workers' self-management, in effect, is contradictory by its very nature. It is condemned to oscillate between two poles: on the one hand, the autonomy of productive groups, necessary for each of them to feel truly free and "de-alienated"; on the other hand, the need for co-ordination in order to make the general interest prevail over selfish interests.

Who the devil could assume this coordination? Invoking Satan here is not an exaggeration, for the problem is diabolically difficult. If there is no co-ordinating body that is autonomous, that is to say, emanating from the workers, and

from them alone, it is inevitably the authoritarian State that will arrogate this role to itself. A State that, by force of circumstances, will think above all of perpetuating itself, of extending its functions ever further, of encroaching upon all autonomies, of curtailing all freedoms, of maintaining wage-labour. In libertarian Spain of 1936, co-ordination had been ensured by a long-established and powerfully organised anarcho-syndicalism. Forty years of Francoism have not clipped its wings and, to everyone's astonishment, this phoenix is rising from the ashes. But elsewhere than in the Iberian Peninsula, labour unionism is suffering from a mortal illness, recuperated by a capitalism for which it serves, vis-à-vis the proletariat, as a transmission belt, degenerated, bureaucratised, integrated, institutionalised, incapable of promoting a social revolution and co-ordinating socialist self-management. Also, the youth who turn away from it sometimes transfer their hopes to *workers' councils* and to what they call, with a term that is too vague, *workers' autonomy*. But this new concept is only embryonic and self-management has yet to discover, under penalty of failure, the means of its dispensable co-ordination.

In the final analysis, the deepest contradiction that is tearing workers' self-management apart has its source in the historical delay in the formation of the proletariat. The capitalist regime, as well as the exclusively [immediate] demand-based trade unionism which is its corollary, have not prepared workers, or have prepared them very badly, for their future self-management role.

For a whole period, they were therefore obliged to seek outside expertise, technical staff, accountants, etc. Where, as was the case in Algeria, these staff barely existed, the functioning of self-management was seriously hampered: in 1963, Algerian self-management would have needed 200,000 accountants, while the government of the country planned for annual accelerated training of only 20,000. But another danger, where these skills existed, at least partially, their intrusion from outside risks subordinating self-management. "Supervisory bodies", under the guise of providing self-managers with disinterested technical and accountant assistance, tend to replace them and become, in their place, managers.

These serious drawbacks can only be eliminated on the day when the fusion "of science with the working class" dreamt of by Ferdinand Lassalle and, after him, Rosa Luxemburg, will allow the abolition of these tutélages. As the masses become educated, the social base upon which the mentors were based will vanish. They will no longer be anything but the "executive organs", constantly controllable and revocable, of the "conscious action" of the workers.¹

Socialism is destined to remain an empty word, a demagogic and hollow option, as long as workers are not able to manage production themselves, as long as they are subjected, or allow themselves to be subjected, to a parasitic bureaucracy imitating the bosses to whose succession it aspires.

Learning self-management will be somewhat long and laborious. But, despite its slowness and its difficulties, even if it must burden society with additional costs, even if it can only be achieved at the cost of a certain number of errors, of disorders, not to say half-failures, or even, sometimes, total failures, these difficulties, these delays, these additional costs, these problems of development would perhaps, in the end, be less harmful than the false order, the false "efficiency" of state management which crushes man, kills popular initiative, paralyzes production, compromises economic efficiency, is hardly distinguishable from wage-labour, does not "de-alienate" the worker and, finally, empties the very notion of socialism of its content.

At the end of this learning, self-management is, in some way, condemned to succeed. Because, if it were not so, socialism would have failed in its historical mission. As Proudhon observed: "The entire future of the workers depends on the answer that will be given (...) if this answer is affirmative, a new world opens up to humanity. If it is negative, the proletariat can take it as settled (...): there is no hope for it in this sad world"²



Proudhon's first article for *Le Représentant du peuple*

¹ Rosa Luxemburg, « Masse et chefs » (in German "Disappointed Hopes") *Neue Zeit*, No. 2, 1903-1904, French translation in *Marxisme contre dictature*, 1940, pp. 36-37.

² *Manuel du Spéculateur...*, cit.

Proudhon, Property and Possession

Iain McKay

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“Either competition, – that is, monopoly and what follows; or exploitation by the State, – that is, dearness of labour and continuous impoverishment; or else, in short, a solution based upon equality, – in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property.”

– Proudhon, *System of Economic Contradictions*¹

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) has been subject to many interpretations, from the seminal (K. Steven Vincent²) to the malicious (Karl Marx³). This, undoubtedly, has led to many concluding that he was a contradictory thinker but not all interpretations of his ideas have merit.⁴ He was fundamentally consistent in his libertarian socialism.⁵

Derek Ryan Strong’s “Proudhon and the Labour Theory of Property”⁶ is, in general, a useful account of Proudhon’s ideas in relation to replacing wage-labour by workers’ associations. As this aspect of his ideas is often ignored or denied by commentators, it is a welcome addition to the scholarship. However, his discussion of Proudhon’s views of social ownership is flawed. While quoting many of the key passages, he does not accept them and tries to explain them away by introducing commentary which is not justified to defend an assumption in favour of private property. We need to place these quotes into their rightful context to show that the Frenchman supported socialisation of property and that the communist-anarchists extended his arguments.⁷

From “Collective Force” to “Social Property”

Proudhon’s critique of property is multi-threaded reflecting the numerous justifications for it. His

arguments for the social ownership of land and raw materials are different from those for social ownership of “capital” (instruments of labour). The former is, as Strong indicates (58-9), connected to the fact no one created them while the latter relates to Proudhon’s theory of collective force but they reach the same conclusion.⁸

While quoting the appropriate passages on social ownership of capital, Strong introduces commentary which is not justified. He is right to note that Proudhon’s conclusion that “since all capital is social property, no one has exclusive property in it”⁹ was drawn from “discussing the issue of collective appropriation” (collective force) but it is *not* the case that the “particular context” shows “the capital which he refers to is actually financial capital (i.e., money) as opposed to physical capital (i.e., capital goods).” (59) After discussing how the capitalist who hires workers exploits them by not paying for their collective force, Proudhon argues that if “the worker is proprietor of the value which he creates” then “it follows” that since “all production being necessarily collective, the worker is entitled to a share of the products and profits commensurate with his labour” and so “all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive

¹ *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Iain McKay (Editor), Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2011), 202. All quotes from Proudhon’s works are from this anthology.

² K. Steven Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

³ While *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995) is best known, Marx repeatedly commented on Proudhon throughout his life. I discuss this in my introduction to *Property is Theft!* (64-79) as well as indicating on how Marx distorts Proudhon’s *System of Economic Contradictions* within *The Poverty of Philosophy* by comparing what Marx claims Proudhon wrote with the actual text.

⁴ Most obviously, J. Salwyn Schapiro’s attempt to portray Proudhon as a fascist cannot withstand even a causal familiarity with Proudhon’s ideas nor an investigation of the material he selectively quotes from (“Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Fascism”, *The American Historical Review*, 50: 4, 714-737).

⁵ For example, his discussion of association within mutualism in “The Political Capacity of the Working Classes” (744-753) is identical to that made nearly 20 years previously within “System of Economic Contradictions” (213-215).

⁶ *Anarchist Studies* 22: 1, 52-65

⁷ I address these issues in “Introduction: General Idea of the Revolution in the 21st Century” (*Property is Theft!*, 30-1, 37-8, 47-9) and “Laying the Foundations: Proudhon’s Contribution to Anarchist Economics” (*Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics* [Anthony J. Nocella, Deric Shannon and John Asimakopoulos (Editors), Oakland/Edinburgh/Baltimore: AK Press, 2012], 64-78)

⁸ As Proudhon suggested, they are related: “Here [economist] M. Wolowski pretends to think that the opponents of property refer only to property in land, while they merely take it as a term of comparison” (“Letter to M. Blanqui on Property”, 147)

⁹ Benjamin Tucker translated this passage as “all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor.” (“What is Property?”, 118)

proprietor”.¹ Proudhon is clearly discussing the actual process of production to show where and how exploitation occurs and so is referring to “physical capital” and *not* credit.

Strong gives only part of Proudhon’s analysis when he states that the “value created within a firm results from the collective force of workers labouring together and, therefore, his conclusion is that no one person should be its exclusive proprietor.” (59) Proudhon *extends* this to conclude that, to ensure this outcome, (physical) capital must become “social property” and so it is *not* the case that Proudhon wished it to be “owned collectively by the workers in a particular firm, but not society as a whole”. (59)

This is confirmed by Proudhon’s summation that “[a]ll human labour being the result of collective force, all property becomes, by the same reason, collective and undivided” and so “every instrument of labour, an accumulated capital” is “a collective property”.² Strong is wrong to suggest that it only “appears as if” Proudhon “thought that capital goods should be common property” (59) for Proudhon takes the premise that workers own the product of their labour, combines it with an analysis of how exploitation occurs within production and concludes that the means of production (“capital”) must, like land and raw materials, be “social property” and “undivided”.

The reason is obvious: if ownership is invested in a specific workers association then what happens to new entrants? It is possible for a workers’ association to be as exclusive as a capitalist company and hire wage-workers. Only social property ensures this does not happen so that workers leaving one co-operative can become an associate in a new one.³

Property “was theft because those who legally appropriated the products of labour in capitalism were

not actually responsible for production” (53) but *also* because it allowed the few to appropriate the means of production from its rightful owners (everyone) so reducing the rest to wage-workers (*salarial*) who “have sold their arms and parted with their liberty” to an employer which has “degraded the worker by giving him a master” and ensures “the surplus of labour, essentially collective, passes entirely... to the proprietor.”⁴

If society ensures “the firm is a contractual relationship and not a property right” (57) and if property “denotes the exclusive rights assigned to an individual or specific group of people to access, use, and govern a resource, object, or set of objects in a particular way” (54) then there is *social* and not private property. Only social ownership means that there are no owners of a resource such as a workplace to stop others using them without first agreeing to oppressive or exploitative relationships.

The Synthesis of Property and Community

For Proudhon, anarchism (“*liberty*”, “association”, “universal association” or “mutualism”⁵) was the “third form of society” and a “synthesis” of property and “community”.⁶ His opposition to both community and capitalism should not blind us to his desire for a “synthesis” between the two. This means taking Proudhon at his word rather than, to quote George Woodcock, suggesting that he “did not even mean literally what he said” in *What is Property?*.⁷ Strong follows Woodcock in suggesting Proudhon’s possession is a modified form of property rather than, as Proudhon insisted, its negation.

In *What is Property?* Proudhon argued that everyone becomes “a possessor or usufructuary” which is “a function which excludes proprietorship” and “receives his usufruct from the hands of society, which alone is the permanent possessor.”⁸ He clarified this point by

¹ “What is Property?”, 117-8

² “What is Property?”, 137

³ See Proudhon’s discussion of association in “System of Economic Contradictions” (213-5) and Vincent’s excellent discussion (154-160)

⁴ “System of Economic Contradictions”, 212, 192, 253.

Labour renting capital does not end exploitation and so it is not “difficult to say whether or not Proudhon [like Ellerman] would have supported” a situation of “labour-managed firms” in which “labour hires in capital to produce goods” and so “divorces the ownership and usage of those goods while maintaining workers’ control of production”. (58) Proudhon was clear: “if labour is the sole basis of property, I cease to be proprietor of my field as soon as I receive rent for it from another... It is the same with all capital”. Rent “received by the proprietor” means “to be rewarded for the use of a tool” and so he “literally receives something for nothing.” (“What is Property?”, 119, 123)

⁵ “What is Property?”, 109, 136; “Letter to M. Blanqui on Property”, 143, 148; “System of Economic Contradictions”, 179, 255; “Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*”, 377. Other equivalent terms include “agricultural-industrial federation”

(“The Federative Principle”, 709) and “Guaranteeism” (“The Federative Principle”, 718; “The Political Capacity of the Working Classes”, 750)

⁶ “What is Property?”, 136. An added confusion is the translation of “community” as “communism” by Benjamin Tucker and others. I did not clarify the issue in *Property is Theft!* by consistently correcting Tucker’s translations by replacing “communism” by the more accurate “community.” If a second edition is produced, this error will be rectified. In addition, “community” would not be considered as communism by the likes of Kropotkin for it retained payment to members related to the amount of work done, skill expressed and money invested.

⁷ *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography* 3rd edition (Montréal: Black Rose, 1987), 45. Woodcock’s account of many of Proudhon’s ideas (such as on possession as property, small-scale production, late acceptance of workers’ associations) seem more driven by his own rejection of revolutionary anarchism (“A Personal Preface to the Third Edition”, xiii-xx) than an objective summary.

⁸ “What is Property?”, 100

stressing that “this value or wealth, *produced by the activity of all*, is by the very fact of its creation *collective* wealth, the use of which, like that of the land, may be divided, but which as property remains *undivided*. And why this undivided ownership? Because the society which creates is itself indivisible”. In short: “property in capital is indivisible, and consequently inalienable”. Proudhon, then, “opposes the exclusive appropriation of the instruments of production” and “this non-appropriation of the instruments of production” would be “a destruction of property. In fact, without the appropriation of instruments, property is nothing.”¹

In April 1848 he argued that “to organise national workshops contains an authentic idea, one that I endorse, for all my criticisms” and these “workshops are owned by the nation, even though they remain and must always remain free.” The “Exchange Bank is the organisation of labour’s greatest asset” and would allow “the new form of society to be defined and created among the workers.”² His election manifesto of the same year saw him proclaim that “under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership” to be operated by “democratically organised workers’ associations”.³ He empathetically denied in 1849 that he argued that the “*ownership of the instruments of labour must forever stay vested in the individual and remain unorganised*”, stating he had “never penned nor uttered any such thing”, had “argued the opposite a hundred times over” and he wished for “an order wherein the instruments of labour will cease to be appropriated and instead become shared”. He then sketched how “transferring ownership” would be achieved by the organisation of credit that would produce “workers’ associations” before forming “the over-arching group, comprising the nation in its entirety”.⁴

A few years later, Proudhon talks of a “double contract” between the members of the co-operative and between it and society. While its members have “an undivided share in the property of the company”, the company itself was “a creation and a dependence” of society and “holds its books and records at the disposition of Society, which... reserves the power of dissolving the

workers company, as the sanction of its right of control.” The company was to be run democratically and “may take in new members at any time” so producing an institution which “has no precedent and no model.”⁵ The change in terminology does not obscure that the company was to be run (used) by its workers – who automatically become members of the association upon entry – under the control (ownership) of society.

On his deathbed he stressed that mutualism would not be “community” but rather an association “which must embrace the whole of Society, and nevertheless preserve all the rights of individual and corporate [i.e., self-managed industry] freedom”. While both capitalist firms and communist associations show “their narrowness of spirit” and “are composed by a determinate number of people, to the exclusion of all others”, the “mutualist association... admits... everyone in the world, and tends towards universality”. Thus “the labouring masses are actually, positively and effectively sovereign” because “the economic organism – labour, capital, property and assets – belongs to them entirely”.⁶

Proudhon’s objection to community was that while the “members of a community... have no private property” the community “is proprietor, and proprietor not only of the goods, but of the persons and wills.”⁷ Workers did not control their own labour (“persons and wills”) nor its product (“goods”) – *use* was, in other words, as undivided as *ownership*. The “entire animus of [Proudhon’s] opposition to what he termed ‘community’ was to avoid the central ownership of property and the central control of economic and social decision-making”.⁸

While his critique of property as theft and despotism is well known, Proudhon also suggested the “most delightful feature of property” was “the free disposition of one’s goods”⁹ and so desired “property restored to its proper limits, that is to say, free disposition of the fruits of labour, property MINUS USURY!”¹⁰ Proudhon wished to “retain the private possession of the land, dwelling, and tools which a worker needed... a social arrangement which would allow the worker to make the decisions relevant to the conduct and operation of his

¹ “Letter to M. Blanqui on Property”, 153, 149

² “Letter to Louis Blanc”, 296-7

³ “Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*”, 377

⁴ “Letter to Pierre Leroux”, 498-500

⁵ “General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century”, 585-6. This socialisation of property included more than capital, with Proudhon indicating community ownership of housing: “all payments made as rental shall be carried over to the account of the purchase of the property... such payment shall purchase for the tenant a proportional undivided share in the house he lives in, and in all buildings erected for rental, and serving as a habitation for citizens . . . [housing] thus paid for shall pass under the control of the communal administration... in the name of all the tenants, and shall

guarantee them all a domicile, in perpetuity... For repairs, management, and upkeep of buildings, as well as for new constructions, the communes shall deal with... building workers’ associations”. This also applied to land and once “the property has been entirely paid for, it shall revert immediately to the commune, which shall take the place of the former proprietor”. (576, 578)

⁶ “The Political Capacity of the Working Classes”, 750, 746, 752, 761.

⁷ “What is Property?”, 131.

⁸ Vincent, 141

⁹ “Letter to M. Blanqui on property”, 155

¹⁰ “Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*”, 379

trade, either alone or with cooperation of his immediate associations.”¹

Anarchists are well aware that “private property in capital goods is possible without exploitation” (58) but only when it involves workers using the tools they own as in artisan and peasant production.²

Unlike artisan and peasant production, capitalism divorces ownership and use: “when the usufructuary converted his right to personally use the thing into the right to use it by his neighbour’s labour – then property

changed its nature, and its idea became complex.”³ Would ownership by co-operatives end this complexity? No, for, as indicated above, co-operatives can be as exclusive as capitalist companies. Proudhon recognised the economic transformation produced by the industrial revolution and his arguments for workers’ associations and social ownership of capital reflect this.⁴

So in capitalism ownership and use are *divided* while in community they are *undivided*. As indicated in **Table 1**:

		Use (<i>exploitative in italics</i>)	
		Divided	Undivided
Ownership	Divided	Artisan/Peasant <i>Capitalism</i>	
	Undivided	Mutualism	<i>Community</i> <i>State Socialism</i>

Table 1: Ownership and Use

Ownership and Use, a synthesis that produced liberty meant that ownership had to be undivided while use was divided. Social property ensured workers would become associates not wage-workers when they join a workplace and so receive the full product of their labour. This would allow the benefits desired by both

property and community to be achieved without their negative consequences.

Strong is wrong: Proudhon *did* argue for the social ownership of land and capital, using the word *indivise* (“joint” or “undivided”) to describe it. Such “undivided” ownership by all was the framework

within which possession (use) was exercised.⁵ As Jack Hayward notes, it was “the community which alone *owns* property, although its *use* is accorded to individual and associated producers linked by free contract” and while “the means of production should be publicly owned, production itself should be organised by workers companies.”⁶ Other commentators on Proudhon – Max Stirner⁷, Daniel Guérin⁸, Georges Gurvitch⁹ and Robert L. Hoffman¹⁰ – concur.

¹ Vincent, 141

² An artisan worker would not fear expropriation because he “exploits nobody, and nobody would have the right to interfere with his work” and so “we see no use in taking the tools... to give to another worker.” (Peter Kropotkin, “Communism and the Wage System: Expropriation,” *Act For Yourselves: Articles from FREEDOM 1886-1907* (London: Freedom Press, 1988), 104-5.

³ “Letter to M. Blanqui on property”, 155

⁴ Given that many secondary sources assert – following Marx – that Proudhon wished to return to a pre-industrial economy, it must be stressed that he explicitly rejected such a position: “M. de Sismondi, like all men of patriarchal ideas, would like the division of labour, with machinery and manufactures, to be abandoned, and each family to return to the system of primitive indivision, – that is, *to each one by himself, each one for himself*, in the most literal meaning of the words. That would be to retrograde; it is impossible.” (“System of Economic Contradictions”, 194) Compare Marx’s almost identical comments suggesting Proudhon held the opposite viewpoint (*The Poverty of Philosophy*, 73)

⁵ There is a parallel here with Proudhon’s position on democracy within unitarian and federalist regime, for example his comments on decentralisation in “General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century” (595) and elsewhere.

⁶ Jack Hayward, *After the French Revolution: Six Critics of Democracy and Nationalism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 181, 201

⁷ Proudhon “tries to get us to believe that society is the original possessor and the sole proprietor... against it the so-

called proprietors have become thieves”. (*The Ego and Its Own* [London: Rebel Press, 1993], 250)

⁸ Proudhon “distinguished between possession and ownership” and so workers “should hold their means of production in *alleu* . . . but would not be the outright owners. Property would be replaced by federal, cooperative ownership vested not in the State but in the producers as a whole, united in a vast agricultural and industrial federation.” (Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* [New York/London: Monthly Review Press, 1970], 48)

⁹ Rob Knowles quotes approvingly Georges Gurvitch’s summary that “the attribution of the means of production *all at once to the whole of economic society, to each region, to each group of labourers, and to each individual worker and peasant*. Individuals and groups could demand the redemption of their share [of the means of production], but not the division of federative property, which remains one and indivisible.” The means of production was “co-property in communal hands” and so “effectively socialised” and thereby change “not only its *subjects*, but its *nature*.” (quoted in Rob Knowles, *Political Economy From Below: Economic Thought in Communitarian Anarchism, 1840-1914* [Oxon: Routledge, 2004], 150)

¹⁰ “By labour man creates *products*; by this he has right to the products, but not to the *land* or to any other instrument of production... Everyone had a right to possession of the means of production... Proudhon would abolish property right altogether... possession... would be granted and withdrawn by society...” (*Revolutionary Justice: The Social and Political Ideas of P-J Proudhon* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972], 58-9)

Mutualism and Libertarian Communism

Proudhon rejected communism as well as community and did not extend the socialisation from the means of production to the goods created by them: workers would sell the product of their labour in markets.¹ Those who did move from the critique of wage-labour to the wage-system like Proudhon's contemporary Joseph Déjacque and later communist-anarchists based their ideas on Proudhon's and retained the same commitment to undivided ownership and divided use: the same usufructuary position is common to both.²

There is a clear link between mutualism and libertarian communism and we discover Kropotkin arguing for distribution according to need by pointing to the contradiction between usufructuary use of commonly held means of production and the private ownership of the products created by them.³ However, the use of both means and goods would remain "divided" and, as such, libertarian communism avoids the problems of "community." Indeed, Kropotkin explicitly argues that anarchist-communism would not sacrifice the individual on the "altar" of "the community" by ensuring use rights to all socialised goods.⁴

Strong is incorrect to suggest a fundamental difference in perspective between mutualism and communism. This is not to suggest that Proudhon would have embraced libertarian communism simply that his ideas on possession are at the heart of it.⁵

Conclusion

For Proudhon, then, it was *not* the case that "[e]nsuring access to capital goods need not imply common ownership of physical capital" (60), he did *not* "mean two different things" when he advocated social ownership and so did *not* argue for workplaces being "owned collectively by the workers in a particular firm, but not society as a whole." (59) Only social ownership/property meant new entrants to a workplace become associates and not wage-workers. Strong fails to grasp how Proudhon's theory of "collective force" shows how exploitation happens within production *and* why socialisation of "capital" was necessary.

Yet while land, raw materials and instruments of labour ("capital goods") must be socially owned to end exploitation their use must be divided to ensure freedom. Social property was the foundation which ensured the collective use of a workplace by its associated workforce. Strong confuses *use* (which is divided) with *ownership* (which is not). If, as he (rightly) argues, Proudhon's position on land use "is best described as usufruct, or private use of common property, rather than a type of private property" (59) then this also applies to the means of production. The notion of Proudhon advocating "mutualist private property" (63) is incorrect and it would be better to use his term: *possession*.

"Philosopher, your principles are admirable; but let us take a look at the consequences. How does this property, which, according to you, makes us free, become in its turn the principle and the occasion of servitude? How, in view of and with the knowledge of all mankind, by the admission of all jurists and economists, does property have the proletariat as its indispensable correlative? What! in the order of Providence, liberty does not shine for everyone!"

"It is there, finally, in this antagonism between the right to work and the right of property, that the cause of economic progress has been discovered, which is at the same time the cause of the proletariat and of poverty."

"Everywhere the working masses are organising themselves co-operatively; society is undermined under your feet; while you are deliberating, the social revolution is taking place quietly, all by itself. The people, organising production and exchange within themselves, have begun the blockade of capital"

– P.-J. Proudhon, "The Right to Work and the Right of Property" (1848)

¹ This explains how "some of the items Proudhon lists, such as a plough, are capital goods" (62) for he is talking of the plough as a "product of labour" and, as such, the workers should be paid for that labour. The paid for good would then be used by the worker who bought it and who would, in turn, be paid for the goods they create using it. This would be possession and not property.

² Emma Goldman, "There is No Communism in Russia", *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader* (3rd Edition, Alix Kates Shulman (ed.), New York: Humanity Books, 1998),

406; Alexander Berkman, *What is Anarchism?* (Edinburgh/London/Oakland: AK Press, 2003), 217

³ Peter Kropotkin, "The Wages System", *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Iain McKay (Editor), Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2014) 617-629

⁴ "The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution", *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 125-6

⁵ See his rejection of the idea of production according to ability and distribution according to need in "General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century" (555-7)

The Poverty of Mick Armstrong's Polemic

Daniel Rashid¹

For Alexandre Skirda

Published in the Summer 2022 edition of Socialist Alternative's *Marxist Left Review* is Mick Armstrong's incredible article "Property is sacred: How Proudhon moulded anarchism". Whilst Socialist Alternative has published fairly unconvincing attacks on anarchism before, this one is by far the most significant of them all, both in its specific charges, and in its serious, pseudo-academic tone.

I would like to begin this response with a challenge: if Mick Armstrong can prove to me that he's read a single book or pamphlet by Proudhon all the way through, I will willingly pay for a five year subscription to *Marxist Left Review*. You don't even have to send me the things, just take my cash. For the author of a 7500 word long critique of Proudhon, this should be easy! I'll take anything – some notes, a receipt for the purchase of a book, whatever.

Fortunately for me, Armstrong probably won't win. This is because he's managed to write his entire article without demonstrating any direct knowledge of Proudhon whatsoever. Neither can he demonstrate any direct knowledge of Bakunin, the secondary subject of his critique. Instead, Armstrong largely relies on secondary literature, most of which is outdated or generally deficient. One of the books he references most is a brief, ninety-six page biography of Proudhon by D.W. Brogan, which was written in 1934. Another is April Carter's *Political Theory of Anarchism*, which was published in 1971 as an introduction for political science undergraduates.

There's not really any excuse for this kind of laziness. It might have made more sense a few decades ago when very little of Proudhon's work had been in print and translated into English, but we now have hundreds of pages freely available² to any English speaker who wishes to take the time to read them.

Sins of the father: following in Hal Draper's footsteps

The only book we can really be sure Armstrong's read in detail is Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*. Armstrong follows Draper at nearly every step. For Armstrong, mimicking Draper seems to be a valid form of research; it seems obvious that at least some of the crappy secondary literature he relies on was originally found in Draper's footnotes.

Take his occasional citation of A. Mendel's *Michael Bakunin: Roots of Apocalypse*. I don't particularly believe that anyone with a brain can take this work seriously: it is genuinely one of the weirdest political biographies I've flicked through. It would be an otherwise fairly standard biography of the man, were it not interwoven with bizarre speculative attempts at psychoanalysis. One of Mendel's theses is that Bakunin was, at root, feminine. Bakunin, woman that he was, sought sexual gratification *not* through "the pleasure of imagined aggression" like a man, but through "masochistic pleasure of passive suffering that Bakunin could experience, or imagine himself experiencing, by identifying himself with the people as victim, by making and being prepared to make enormous sacrifices on its/her behalf, and by imagining the vastly greater pains still to come in the anticipated apocalyptic catastrophe" (pg. 275-276).

Mendel believes that Bakunin's lust for violence was essentially a way of sexually gratifying himself and covering up his womanly essence, which he essentially adopted to avoid "the oedipal crime". Bakunin's "persistent flight from roles identified at the time with male authority and responsibility", childhood correspondence with his sisters, one-time reference to him weeping "like a woman" – all this and more, for Mendel, "are too glaringly present in Bakunin's personality, ideas and actions to be ignored". "He... was compelled to spend a lifetime trying to repress and disguise them under mountains of aggressively heroic declarations, programs, organisational plans, and absurdly quixotic forays". Since, for Bakunin, all sexual experience was "incestual, evil, filthy, demonic", Bakunin would punish himself with imagined violence – but since he found sexual gratification in masochism, this self-punishment just triggered a spiralling loop of masochism that drove his whole life (pg. 276).

A choice paragraph:

"Did the adoption of a feminine role extend beyond this sexual-revolutionary fantasy and into his relationships in real life? Was he homosexual? The helpmate role he played in relationships with strong men, his preference for being a dependant at home rather than a protective provider, his penchant for the innocent company of young ladies during his adolescence and the stimulating atmosphere of young male virile warriors in his later years,

¹ <https://www.redblacknotes.com/2022/02/18/the-poverty-of-mick-armstrongs-polemic/>

² <https://libcom.org/library/property-theft-pierre-joseph-proudhon-anthology>

the strangely passive expressions he used in his sexual-revolutionary imagery – these and other similar hints we have seen along the way suggest, at least, the possibility. However, there is absolutely no concrete evidence whatsoever to indicate active homosexual involvements or events in his life.” (p. 483).

Amazing stuff! Why does Armstrong cite it, though? Most of the material he cites within it regarding Bakunin’s anti-Semitism and Nechaev can be found in other, saner and more recent texts, like Eckhardt’s history of the Marx-Bakunin fight in the First International. Alas, Draper relies on it; so must Armstrong.

Draper has a reputation in Marxist circles as being a fairly even-handed scholar, one focused on rebutting authoritarian interpretations of Marx and Lenin. This may well be true when it comes to his writing on Marx, but his writing on anarchism is so sectarian and polemical it is essentially worthless. This much is obvious in both his “mature” works – the relevant volume of *Marx’s Theory of Revolution* was published in 1990 – and his earlier ones, like *Two Souls of Socialism*, published in 1966.

Two Souls laid the groundwork that guided not only Draper but many other unorthodox Trotskyists like Armstrong: the fundamental divide in the history of socialism is that between *socialism from below* and *socialism from above*. Naturally, Draper sees himself as a proponent of the former – as would nearly all socialists. The problem comes when Draper is forced to acknowledge the existence of anarchism, which by most people’s understanding has a rightful claim to be the most “from below” kind of socialism there is, for better or worse.

Instead of admitting this – which would jeopardise his claims about his own Leninism being the most sincere expression of socialism from below – he makes a tortured argument that anarchism is in fact a kind of socialism from *above*! Since anarchism “rejects democracy” and instead puts forward “unlimited freedom for each uncontrolled individual”, anarchism translates to “unlimited despotism by such an individual, both in theory and practice”.¹ This is the line of thought that Armstrong follows; the rest of this

essay will show exactly how mistaken he is for following it.

The contested legacy of Stirner

The poor research continues: in the second paragraph of the article, Armstrong cites Carter as saying that Stirner’s book “had an impact on Bakunin just when the latter was being radicalized for the first time in Young Hegelian circles”. The reference for this is page 114 of volume IV of Draper’s book. Carter has nothing to do with this though; her book is not even mentioned in Draper’s bibliography. The footnote Draper gives for this passage instead references... Plekhanov. He criticises the pre-eminent historian of the labour movement, Jean Maitron, for “underestimating” the influence of Stirner, instead offering us Plekhanov’s *Anarchism and Socialism* as a correction.

The problem is, Plekhanov’s book doesn’t even make the claim that Stirner influenced Bakunin! He says nothing like that at all. In fact, Plekhanov situates Bakunin as being part of the “left wing of the Proudhonian

army” that “little by little” “left the domain of individualism to intrench itself upon ‘collectivism’”² (Plekhanov uses the word collectivism in quotation marks to distinguish it from the philosophies of French Guesdist Marxists, who at the time were calling themselves collectivists).

Draper uses the abbreviation “Cf.” to draw us to the attention of two other works on the matter: E.H. Carr’s biography of Bakunin, and Eugene Pyziur’s *Doctrine of Anarchism*. Carr does assert that Bakunin was influenced by Stirner, but provides no evidence for this being the case; he only speculates based on what is a bad misreading of Bakunin’s philosophy, that his “conception of freedom was in its ultimate analysis extreme individualism” (p. 434).

Pyziur, on the other hand, disagrees with the notion that Stirner influenced Bakunin, correctly asserting that Stirner’s “*Solipsismus*” was “substantially different from Bakunin’s ideas”, where “collective elements and factors clearly prevail over those of an individualistic nature” (p. 41). Pyziur mentions Engels believing that Bakunin was influenced by Stirner, but rebuts this by drawing our attention to a quote from *Statism and Anarchy*:

Draper has a reputation in Marxist circles as being a fairly even-handed scholar... This may well be true when it comes to his writing on Marx, but his writing on anarchism is so sectarian and polemical it is essentially worthless.

¹ From chapter four of *The Two Souls of Socialism*; it can be accessed here:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1966/twosouls/4-anarch.htm>

“...to this circle also belonged the brothers Bruno and Eduard Bauer and Max Stirner; at that time the leading circle of German nihilists in Berlin far surpassed in cynicism the most glaring nihilists of Russia.”

This is, in fact, the *only* mention of Stirner in Bakunin’s entire known written corpus. Bakunin was not shy about mentioning those who influenced him, even when he fundamentally disagreed with them: you can find pages of Bakunin praising everyone from Fichte to Marx to Mazzini, even though he was strongly critical of all of them (and, in the case of Marx, the praises went side-by-side with awful personal attacks). However, only one mention of Stirner is found: an offhanded remark calling him a cynical nihilist – which was in no sense a compliment.¹

Imperfect research

Armstrong’s assessment of anarchism depends quite considerably on *The Anarchist FAQ*, an enormous collaborative document that is intended to address common questions, criticisms and myths about our doctrine. The *FAQ* project is spearheaded by Iain McKay, who regularly updates it. It’s a fantastic document and an invaluable labour of passion by the volunteers, but it should not be taken as *the* catechism of anarchist orthodoxy – as if such a thing could ever exist. Armstrong describes it as “reflective of broad anarchist opinion”, but calling it “broad” is perhaps something of an understatement.

The *FAQ* deliberately attempts to avoid anarchist infighting by adopting a totally wide-ranging definition of anarchism, excluding only those who support the institution of private property or the retention of government. Accordingly, it includes everyone from Benjamin Tucker to Kropotkin to, yes, Stirner. The project is a kind of *synthesist* project, bringing together the disparate strands to form some kind of cohesive anarchist philosophy – albeit one delineated by different tendencies like the communist, individualist and collectivist ones.

¹ As an aside, though Armstrong does not claim Stirner influenced Proudhon, it is also worth pointing out that the Frenchman had much the same opinion as Bakunin: Proudhon mentions Stirner in his Notebooks as representing “the religion of the individual self”. I do not have a direct quote at hand, since I cannot access the Carnets – but it’s on page 6 of one of the responses to Black Flame by the French anarcho-syndicalist René Berthier, found here: http://monde-nouveau.net/IMG/pdf/concerning_black_flame-proudhon_-_part_1.pdf

² Of course, Woodcock should not be relied upon uncritically – his assertion, for instance, that “Nietzsche himself regarded Stirner as one of the unrecognised seminal minds of the nineteenth century” is baseless; there is no hard evidence that Nietzsche was influenced by Stirner at all, or had any particular regard for him. The closest thing we have to proper evidence is knowledge that Nietzsche was familiar with two

You can admire parts of it on these grounds, but you can also reject other parts for the same reasons. The author of this article in particular would reject the integration of “Stirnerist” ideas into social-anarchism; I really don’t think they are compatible with the doctrines of Bakunin or Kropotkin or even Proudhon in any real sense. McKay is influenced by the work of the older generation of Glaswegian anarchists, who were some of the only non-individualist anarchists who claimed significant influence from Stirner – in his *Anarchism*, Woodcock speaks of encountering in the 1940s “a group of anarchist working men in Glasgow for whom [*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*] was still a belated gospel” (p. 99). They, perhaps imaginatively, interpreted Stirner’s “union of egoists” concept as justifying an otherwise straightforward anarcho-syndicalist anarcho-communism.

Woodcock’s history begins to tell the actual story of Stirner’s influence upon anarchism: “Stirner’s success was as insubstantial as most of those that proceed from notoriety. His book faded quickly from the public attention, and it was only fifty years later, after the vogue for Nietzsche had prepared the readers for the cult of unlimited self-will, that a popular revival of *The Ego and His Own* took place”.²

Stirner was a totally unknown figure in the anarchist movement; for a time, it seemed like the only people intent on connecting him to anarchism were the Marxists, who made such an accusation for polemical purposes. In 1896, Wilhelm Liebknecht justified in print the exclusion of anarchists from the Second International on the grounds that including them would mean including other disciples of Stirner, like the German free-trade liberal Eugen Richter.³ In reply, the Georgian revolutionary Varlam Cherkeshvili – one of the most prominent social anarchists of his day, and a one-time comrade of Bakunin – replied in print that “Stirner and his pupil... Eugen Richter” were “strangers to our party”.⁴

The Stirner craze among anarchists only really emerged after he was rediscovered by the German individualist

books that mention Stirner: Eduard von Hartmann’s *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* and Friedrich Lange’s *History of Materialism and Critique of its Present Importance*. There is no written work where Nietzsche mentions Stirner at all; it’s difficult to see where Woodcock got the idea that he recognised Stirner “as one of the unrecognised seminal minds of the nineteenth century”.

³ “Our Recent Congress”, published in *Justice*, the newspaper of the British Social Democratic Federation, on the 15th of August 1896; accessible here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/liebkecht-w/1896/08/our-congress.htm>

⁴ “Let Us Be Just: Open Letter to Liebknecht”, published in the September-October 1896 issue of *Liberty*, accessible here: [https://libcom.org/files/Liberty%20UK%20\(Sept-Oct%201896\).pdf](https://libcom.org/files/Liberty%20UK%20(Sept-Oct%201896).pdf) (page 102)

and pederast John Henry Mackay, who found his works during a stay in London in the late 1880s. From there, he spread Stirner's thought in individualist circles like those of Benjamin Tucker, but it was relatively slow to penetrate fully – *Der Einzige* did not receive a full English translation until 1907. It was only translated into French, the main language of the anarchist movement, in 1899.

This is mentioned in Alexandre Skirda's *Facing the Enemy*, which Armstrong appears to have read, or at least skimmed; he states that "Skirda champions Stirner's individualism". This is an overstatement. Skirda does not particularly champion Stirner; in his book *Facing the Enemy*, a history of anarchist organisation, he gives a brief, roughly page-long outline of Stirner's philosophy and then contrasts it with the philosophy of Proudhon. Elsewhere in the book he makes his editorial judgement clearer: in the tenth chapter, he regards the "appearance of the first French translations of Stirner as validating and making more coherent "the old verbose, provocative and suspect individualism". The effect was that "anarchy was no longer a social teaching but rather a philosophy and the art of a 'lifestyle'". Hardly effusive praise!

You'd be hard pressed to argue that Skirda, who was one of the foremost admirers of Nestor Makhno and a die-hard organisationalist, was in any sense a representative of any kind of individualism; in *Facing the Enemy*, he approvingly mentions Bakunin's organisational aspiration to "substitute collective thinking and collective for all individual ventures... in the social revolution, there will be room only for collective thinking, resolution and action" (pg. 19).¹

Armstrong does not investigate *why* some anarchists, even some social anarchists like Iain McKay or the other Glaswegian Stirnerists, admire Stirner. Instead, he details his own second-hand understanding of Stirner's philosophy and then expects us to react with simple

¹ To be honest, it feels rather strange to even elaborate on this point; it is self-evident to anyone even marginally familiar with Skirda's works that it is an absurd claim. To call Skirda a champion of Stirnerist individualism is a bit like calling Tony Cliff a champion of Karl Kautsky.

² Available in volume 38 of the Marx and Engels *Collected Works*, available here: <http://www.hekmatist.com/Marx%20Engles/Marx%20&%20>

disgust that some nominal socialists would be influenced by such a bad, evil man.

Armstrong completely misunderstands the point made in the *FAQ*, that for anarchists, "the idea that individuals should sacrifice themselves for the 'group' or 'greater good' is nonsensical". Armstrong attempts to rebut this notion by referring to the way people sacrifice themselves in the course of a revolution, but this doesn't actually vindicate what he's saying. The point is that the class interest of a worker *is* their self-interest. They revolt collectively with other proletarians *because* they themselves have an interest in this revolt; they don't do it out of the goodness of their own heart or in the name of "the greater good".

The point is that the class interest of a worker *is* their self-interest. They revolt collectively with other proletarians *because* they themselves have an interest in this revolt; they don't do it out of the goodness of their own heart or in the name of "the greater good".

When the working-class subordinates its own goals to those of the standpoint of civil society, or "the greater good", as occurred in Egypt, then the result is nothing but tragedy. As much was clearly understood by Engels, who wrote in a letter to Marx dating from the 19th of November 1844,² that "we must first make a cause of our own, egoistic cause, before we can do anything to further it", and that "we are communists out of egoism also, and it is out of egoism that we wish to be *human beings*, not mere individuals...".

For one, the workers who die in the course of a revolution rarely go into it certain that they themselves will die; revolution isn't a suicide mission. Workers make financial sacrifices in the course of a strike because said financial sacrifices are essential to the strike's success. They refuse to scab and be a traitor to their class because scabbing kills strikes, which damages their own ability to secure their goals through strikes. This should not be taken as particular advocacy on my part for egoism: I would concur with Engels when he says in the same letter mentioned above, that "in its egoism the human heart is of itself, from the very outset, unselfish and self-sacrificing...". If Armstrong wants to criticise egoism, I am certainly not going to protest; just be serious when you do.³

Engels%20Collected%20Works%20Volume%2038_%20Karl%20-%20Karl%20Marx.pdf

³ At the very least, it should be conceded that sentimentalism doesn't aid the working-class movement; we can even see a good example of it in Armstrong's article, where he says that "in the current COVID crisis, health workers and many other groups of essential workers risk their lives on a daily basis out of a broader collective responsibility. This collective

Proudhon, crude individualist?

One of the most egregious smears made by Hal Draper, mimicked by Armstrong, is the one that claims Proudhon (and Bakunin following him) were egoistic individualists, who would see “freedom in individual terms, not in working-class collective terms as a product of mass class struggle”. This could not be more wrong. To misunderstand this point is to misunderstand both Proudhon and Bakunin in their entirety; it’s barely exaggerating to say that the philosophy of both men was centred around the social nature of humanity, not the atomised, individual form.

One of the most persistent elements of Proudhon’s social science is that of the concept of *collective force*. Collective force was what Proudhon described as the emergent property of all social relations, where individuals combine to produce a force greater than the individual sum of its parts. It was this force that was monopolised and exploited by capital; for Proudhon it was the bedrock of wage slavery. What was needed instead was a form of social organisation that properly recognised the *collective* nature of the economy.

Far from advocating simple individual ownership of the means of production – “I have never penned nor uttered any such thing: and have argued the opposite a hundred times over” (*Letter to Pierre Leroux*) – he advocated increased worker association as the path to liberty and equality. He did not want simple nationalisation of things like mines, canals, and railways; he wanted instead for these to be handed over “to democratically organised workers’ associations” which would be “models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social republic” (*Election Manifesto of Le Peuple*).

Neither was Proudhon’s moral framework fixated on the individual ego. His work *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Église* (On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church), the clearest elaboration of his viewpoint on the matter, describes this at length.¹ He thought justice was “the respect, spontaneously experienced and reciprocally guaranteed, for human dignity, in whatever person and in whatever circumstances it may be found to be compromised by, at whatever risk its defence may expose us to”.

Proudhon was concerned with establishing the basis of justice in the midst of a society decaying, riddled with religious and other bourgeois influence. In order to produce a stable society, what was needed was a

approach is central to what makes us human – not individual egoism”. This viewpoint is simply ridiculous. They risk their lives because they need the wages to survive – not out of “collective responsibility”.

¹ This work is not yet available in English in full, but summaries have been given by Jesse Cohn in *An Exchange*

“*juridical faith*” which would “[make people] happier to have respect for the rights of others than they are in their own fortune” by “elevating souls above egoistic appetites” (*De la justice*, 1.253)

Catholic doctrine projected man as being only the source of moral chaos, requiring divine intervention and guidance. Proudhon was fixated on rejecting this “transcendent” worldview in favour of “immanent” reality; in this sense, he was a proper materialist. One of his preoccupations was to push against “absolutism” in whatever form it took. He understood progress as being something inherently opposed to fixed, or absolute, ideas; his moral philosophy was predicated on a constantly shifting renegotiation of social norms, precisely because it would enhance the dynamics of human development instead of trying to fix it into place. “Justice alone, thus, can still be called progressive, since it presupposes a continuous amendment of rules, according to the experience of everyday relations...” (*De la justice* 3.181, 3.249).

This quest to “eliminate the ABSOLUTE from the consideration of things” would go so far as to entail “war even on God”, as well as on “God-Humanity”. Here, we can see a point of accord between Proudhon and Bakunin, who famously said that “if God truly existed, it would be necessary to abolish him” (*God and the State*). Religion and religion-like sentiment entailed man’s alienation from their own sense of reason and justice. Instead of finding justice in immanent humanity, man was encouraged to seek justice in transcendence – in something that would go beyond humanity. Since this was impossible, self-alienation ensued: “by an optical illusion of the intellect, man projects what is within himself outside of himself, and makes of his own Justice an idol that is no longer himself” (*De la justice* 1.489).

Proudhon was critical of moral scepticism, precisely because it entailed the raising of the individual subjective perspective above everything else. This was not destroying the absolute but simply raising a new one in its stead: “subjectivity [is] the absolute that the ego affirms and represents...” (*De la justice* 3.261). He would go so far as to say that “moral pyrrhonism... is the foundation of all theology” (*De la justice*, 3.651).

Proudhon, Nazi?

The major problem with Armstrong’s article, above all others, is that he simply does not demonstrate *how* Proudhon moulded anarchism: he doesn’t attempt to prove his own thesis. He points to some basic facts, like Kropotkin and Bakunin admiring Proudhon, or the

With Proudhon. For whatever reason this document only exists in PowerPoint format:
https://www.academia.edu/4059453/An_Exchange_With_Proudhon_extended_visual

influence of Proudhonian socialists in the Paris Commune, but then stops there. He doesn't address the substance of this influence.

Armstrong is only content to mention that there was an influence, before immediately launching into a laundry list of "reactionary ideas that anarchists today would find highly embarrassing" but were nonetheless promoted by Proudhon, like his misogyny, opposition to strikes, and the anti-Semitism professed in his private notebooks. In other words – he zeroes in on the aspects of Proudhon's thought that anarchists and other libertarian socialists have obviously *not* been influenced by.

Armstrong says that "right up to the present day the litany of Proudhon's backward positions has been covered up or apologised for or brushed aside by numerous anarchist writers". So numerous, in fact, he can't name more than one example. The only reference he provides for this statement is a single article by Hal Draper, attacking an article by George Woodcock on Proudhon's private notebooks. Once again, Armstrong reads an author by reading his critics.

Ignoring Draper's fixations and reading Woodcock's article directly, it's difficult to claim he "covered up or apologised for or brushed aside" Proudhon's anti-Semitism.¹ In a passage from what is a much larger and wide-ranging article, Woodcock describes the anti-Semitism Proudhon expressed in his notebooks as "the gravest thing [they] reveal to 20th century eyes" and that "it is impossible for us not to be troubled and angry when we read anything that suggests racial prejudice" (pg. 53).

Rather than to cover up, apologise or brush aside the anti-Semitism, Woodcock's intention is to contextualise Proudhon's statements and differentiate them from the anti-Semitism "of the Nazis and the Black Hundreds". For Woodcock, they have more in common with "the anti-Jewish feelings that were endemic in early and in mid-19th century radical movements", which was present in English radicalism and nascent German social-democracy, and would persist as an undercurrent

through American populism and Russian Bolshevism in the 20th century.

Draper agrees that anti-Semitism was common, but that "demand for their *extermination* as part of a political program was not common" – a true enough statement, but you'd be hard-pressed to argue that a delusional rant scrawled in a private diary constitutes a "political program". None of his public political statements advocate for anything close to the extermination of Jews. The same can be said in response to Draper's expose of Proudhon's alleged schemes for world domination, expressed in the same private diary.

One can disagree with Woodcock's assessment of

Proudhon's anti-Semitism; certainly, it seems an exaggeration to say that Proudhon's viewpoint is essentially assimilationist. Disagreeing here would be reasonable. What is not reasonable is concluding that anarchists are engaged in some kind of a systematic cover-up of Proudhon's sexism and racism. It speaks volumes that the closest thing Armstrong can find to proof of this is an article from 1969 attacking another text that actually makes Proudhon's misogyny and anti-Semitism clear.

The truth is that most anarchist texts dealing substantively with Proudhon (and Bakunin, for that matter) addresses his bigotry. As a

sample, we can look at the texts by anarchists that Armstrong himself references. In the *Anarchist FAQ*, Proudhon's anti-Semitism is made clear, though in the context of the author providing a defence against the idea that said anti-Semitism irreparably taints either Proudhon's philosophy specifically or anarchism generally (section H.0). In his article on Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution in the 19th Century*, Robert Graham describes the relevant passage in the *Notebooks* as "a truly horrific anti-semitic outburst [in which] he called for the expulsion of the Jews from Europe or their extermination" (footnote 23). *Black Flame* makes clear that Proudhon's views were "infused with nationalist and racial prejudices", not to mention outspoken misogyny and anti-feminism (pg. 65).

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Generally, I'd describe Armstrong's view of history as bizarrely moralistic, an iteration of "great man" history where an entire movement is expected to take some kind of collective responsibility for the misdeeds or insane beliefs of one of its long-dead adherents.

¹ The article can be read in full in the September 1969 issue of *Encounter* magazine. *Encounter* was a left-liberal magazine founded by Irving Kristol and Stephen Spender, one of a number of "anti-Stalinist left" publications clandestinely given money by the CIA. What seems to be the only online archive of it is hosted on the website of far-right

publicist Ron Unz; in order to avoid having to give him extra pageviews, I have rehosted it here:
<https://www.redblacknotes.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/The-Solitary-Revolutionary-George-Woodcock.pdf>.

where an entire movement is expected to take some kind of collective responsibility for the misdeeds or insane beliefs of one of its long-dead adherents. Let me temper myself slightly: Armstrong's view of history would be bizarrely moralistic *if he were consistent about it*. Armstrong expects anarchists to "sharply disown Proudhon" on the grounds of his bigotries and (alleged) reactionary politics; I am doubtful he would "sharply disown" Marx on account of the same sorts of bigotries – whether directed towards Jews, Slavs, or anybody else.

Proudhon, moderate?

"If I ever find myself a proprietor, may God and men, the poor especially, forgive me for it!" (Proudhon, *The Theory of Property*)

I will begin this section by requesting readers that interested in Proudhon's complicated stance on property read "Considerations on Proudhon's theory of Property", by René Berthier;¹ it is likely the best short work in English so far that begins to come to grips with Proudhon on property. I am indebted to it for the writing of this section.

Armstrong alleges that, in *The Political Capacity of the Working-Class*, Proudhon argued for workers to "form an alliance with the bourgeoisie", criticising them for having "been too busy with their own wrongs to understand the sorrows of the middle classes". Though the wording of the paragraph implies that the latter quote is something Proudhon himself said, it references Brogan's 1934 biography of Proudhon. Investigating the reference, it becomes clear Armstrong is simply quoting Brogan's assessment of Proudhon. Brogan provides no direct reference for this assessment, other than to say it's in *Political Capacity*.

Brogan himself is inaccurate when assessing Proudhon's later works, and thus his judgement should not be relied upon; he describes Proudhon as advocating "a declaration of political independence by the working-classes... a claim for working-class representation... a denial of the representative character of the bourgeois liberals" – the *Manifesto of the Sixty*. The problem? Proudhon was opposed to the *Manifesto of the Sixty*! The *Manifesto* was written by a group of politically active French workers, declaring the necessity of the proletariat to chart its own course, whilst running for elections and forming an alliance with the liberal bourgeois opposition. This would enable them to secure both the political reforms they shared in common with the liberals, and some economic reforms they could secure for themselves.

Proudhon admired the document as an "awakening of socialism", sharing with it a commitment to the representation of the working class. But he was deeply critical of it, and wrote *Political Capacity* in response to it; the preface makes as much clear. He regarded the *Manifesto*'s advocacy for electoral participation as something that would result in the proletariat signing away "its principles and its future" as well as its "democratic conscience". The balance sheet of the liberals in parliament was embarrassing: at the bottom, they had no "no other ideas, tendencies or policies to offer than the Government's policies, tendencies and ideas". If the French proletariat "sets its sights on winning yet another battle on behalf of its masters", then "its emancipation may be postponed by half a century". Electoral abstention, on the other hand, was "nothing less than a heralding of a new order of things" and "a signalling to the old world of its imminent and inevitable downfall".

Armstrong, following Draper, wishes to portray Proudhon as a utopian, who believed that society just needed the state to "simply disappear" and then freedom would reign.² Proudhon never, ever suggested anything like this; his positive political programmes all had a "transitional" character, building on the facts of the present, not the fantasies of romantic dreamers. A number of them preserved a role for the state itself in supporting the nascent socialist order.

In fact, when Proudhon argues for reformist sorts of measures that seem to reconcile with property, he is driven by purely realistic concerns; as he writes in the General Idea of the Revolution:

"The people, even the people of socialism, want, whatever they say, to be property owners; and if I may quote my own testimony here, I will say that after ten years of inflexible criticism, I have found the opinion of the masses on this point harder, more resistant than on any other question. I have done violence to convictions; I have achieved nothing on consciences. And moreover... the more the democratic principle has gained ground, the more I have seen the working classes in the cities and the countryside interpret this principle in the sense most favourable to property." (as quoted in page 6 of Berthier).

The pervasiveness of sentiments in favour of property, even among workers, led Proudhon to reckon seriously with this fact; his forceful criticisms against it failed, and he had to seek other paths. It should go without saying that one can disagree with the particular paths he chose – nearly all anarchists (and many

¹ It can be accessed here: http://monde-nouveau.net/IMG/pdf/proudhon_s_theory_of_property_19-11-2020-2.pdf

² I feel it apt to note here that Armstrong reproaches Proudhon for being both a reformist, and someone who thinks the disappearance of the state is the only thing needed for goodness to reign across the earth.

“Proudhonians”) did and currently do. It’s just that you can only properly disagree once you actually understand what he was arguing for and why.

Proudhon can hardly be accused of simply saying that if the state disappeared, then everything would naturally fall into place; he was quite insistent about what had to follow the institution of government:

“It is industrial organisation that we will put in place of government.

In place of laws, we will put contracts. – No more laws voted by a majority, nor even unanimously; each citizen, each commune or corporation, makes its own.

In place of the ancient classes of nobles, burghers, and peasants, or of bourgeoisie and proletariat, we will put the general titles and special departments of industry:

Agriculture,
Manufacture,
Commerce, etc.

In place of public force, we will put collective force.

In place of standing armies, we will put industrial associations.

In place of police, we will put identity of interests.

In place of political centralisation, we will put economic centralisation [!]” (from *General Idea*, as cited in McKay’s anthology)

Proudhon, opponent of the working-class?

Armstrong argues that Proudhon’s “abstract anti-statism” and penchant for decentralisation led him to take reactionary stands against the demands of the working-class and progressive politics generally. He gives the example of Proudhon’s opposition to the demand for the National Workshops, the make-work schemes created by the French government to employ jobless Parisians.

It’s true Proudhon opposed this demand, but it was hardly out of some callous hatred of the working-man. He regarded it as foolish for the working-class to demand that “power fulfil a promise it could not keep” (Chapter X, *Confessions of a Revolutionary*); the workshops were a temporary, ameliorative measure that was implemented by the bourgeois state to stave off the

angry unemployed, “a caricature of socialism” (*Address to the Constituent National Assembly*).

Predictably, when they “got out of hand”, the bourgeois state moved to shut them down, with brutal force – provoking the failed June revolts. For Proudhon, the only people among the revolutionaries who deserved to feel shame over the whole affair were “those who seduced [the workers] with disastrous utopias” – i.e., the state-socialists who argued that the National Workshops guaranteed the right to work.

When Proudhon later reflected on his experience as a parliamentary representative in this period, he was deeply self-critical; he regarded himself entering into a state, along with all the other representatives, of “mental perplexity and ignorance of daily reality”. In his words, he was like “the dog that does not bark in the presence of the enemy” (Chapter X, *Confessions of a Revolutionary*). Proudhon was maybe being a little too harsh on himself; he was able to fraternise with the rebellious workers and stood alongside them on the barricades. With his publications, he won their support, whilst further and



DEFENDING THE STREET BARRICADES IN 1848
From a contemporary print.

further drawing the hatred of all the bourgeois political factions.

Proudhon’s career as political representative of the workers would culminate in his introduction of a bill in the Constituent National Assembly, demanding a one-third reduction on rents and leases for the next three years; only one other member voted for it, an old mutualist friend of his from Lyon. In hindsight, it would mark the point where his political career entered a downward slide, ending in censure from the parliament and a spot in a gaol cell.

The speech Proudhon gave to a hostile audience after the failure of his resolution, in defence of the working-class, is one of the early high points of early socialism; the text of it can be found in McKay’s Proudhon anthology. In it he makes clear that the lauded “right to work”, guaranteed employment, “cannot be reconciled with the royalty of cash or the aristocracy of capital”. Proudhon responded to the laughter of the bourgeois politicians with taunting of his own, regretting that they’re laughing at what he regards to be their death sentence.

Any political revolution would be simply illusory if it did not deal with the problem at the root of it all – the social revolution. He regards himself as a simple carrier, spelling out “the import and purpose of the February

Revolution to property and to the bourgeois class” – the purpose, of course, being the abolition of private property. Proudhon holds before the representatives of the bourgeoisie the gun and the olive-branch – the repeal of “property income” may take place in a way that is “abrupt and violent”, but it might also be peaceably phased in. He cordially invites the bourgeoisie to voluntarily take part in this process, whilst stating that they will be “held answerable for the consequences of their refusal”.

Prodded to explain himself, Proudhon makes clear that “in the event of a refusal, we would ourselves proceed with the liquidation without you”. When asked by his opponents who the “we” is, and if he means the guillotine, Proudhon simply responds that “when I used those pronouns you and we, it was self-evident that at that point I was identifying myself with the proletariat and identifying you with the bourgeois class.”

What was it that Armstrong said again, about classless anti-authoritarianism? It’s one thing to criticise Proudhon on certain points; it’s another altogether to call him a “reactionary utopian” lacking class consciousness.

Armstrong gives another example of Proudhon’s alleged reactionary politics, “driven by abstract anti-statism” – opposition to universal suffrage. Here, again, Armstrong misses the point entirely. Proudhon’s opposition to universal suffrage did not arise from support of any kind for political dictatorship. He wrote against universal suffrage in the context of parliamentarianism precisely because he regarded it as illusory, something that would nominally involve “representation” but actually disenfranchised the citizenry; the way that parliamentary democracy worked was that non-voters would effectively become non-entities, regarded “as if they did not exist” (from *The Mystification of Universal Suffrage*).

Far from Proudhon being some rogue egoist, he opposed universal suffrage in this context precisely on the grounds that it meant denying the citizenry’s right to speak collectively, instead only being surveyed for their opinions as isolated individuals, “just the same way as Epicurean philosophy explains thought, will, and

intelligence away in terms of combinations of atoms” (*Mystification*).¹ Again, one can disagree with Proudhon’s assessment, but you have to understand it first. In any case, after the results of decades and decades of universal suffrage in the most advanced centres of capitalism, is it really so important to leave voting rights – a necessary component of bourgeois parliamentary democracy – as a sacred cow that must not be criticised?

Elsewhere, Proudhon argued for universal suffrage as a core component of socialism, albeit a component enhanced by the adoption of even more “democratic”

measures – in *The Election Manifesto of Le Peuple* he states that “besides universal suffrage, and as consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the imperative mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, does not appoint mandatories but rather abjures their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy...”.

In case we need one more example of Armstrong burying Proudhon’s valid points,² we can also address his alleged opposition to taxation of the rich. Proudhon, it bears repeating, was implacably opposed to gestures from the state that would only function as palliatives, raising living

conditions in meagre ways while preserving the capitalist system that was responsible for the misery in the first place. His stance on taxation was no different. In his July 31 speech to the assembly, he makes as much clear: “tax... has been a burden entirely borne by labour”, since even the taxed wealth of the rich is wealth exploited from the labour of the working-class. By what right should the bourgeois state feed itself on the wealth produced by the working-class? The aim was not to secure a fairer basis for the state, but to move to supplanting it altogether.

Proudhon, above all: relevant

Part of the reason Armstrong’s polemic is so mediocre is that its primary aim is to dismiss Proudhon, not simply to critique him. Armstrong brings up one of the famous quotes from *Poverty of Philosophy* – the book

¹ In other words – Proudhon opposed universal suffrage because it was *too* individualist!

² Iain McKay has dealt with others like his alleged support for slavery, and his actual complicated thoughts on the matter,

here: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anarcho-proudhon-neither-washington-nor-richmond>

that he childishly describes as “the classic demolition of Proudhon’s economic theories”:

“From head to foot M. Proudhon is the philosopher and economist of the petty-bourgeoisie...he is dazed by the magnificence of the big bourgeoisie and has sympathy for the sufferings of the people. He is at once both bourgeois and man of the people. Deep down in his heart he flatters himself that he is impartial and has found the right equilibrium... A petty-bourgeois of this type glorifies contradiction [in his theorising] because contradiction is the basis of his existence. He is himself nothing but social contradiction in action. He must justify in theory what he is in practice.”

The quote is interesting, because it involves Marx going back on his own previous assessments: in chapter four of *The Holy Family*, Marx writes that “not only does Proudhon write in the interest of the proletarians, he himself is a proletarian, an *ouvrier*”. He goes so far as to call *What is Property?* “a scientific manifesto of the French proletariat”, favourably contrasting it with the alleged hackwork of the Young Hegelians.

A study of Proudhon’s life brings up results that agree with Marx’s earlier assessment, not his later one. Proudhon was the child of a peasant, who later progressed to owning a pub. His childhood was marked by poverty, receiving no formal education until the age of eleven, when he secured a bursary that funded a place at a local college. He could not afford books or school shoes, and left at the age of eighteen to start an apprenticeship in the printing industry. It was in the work-process, not in the bourgeois academies, that Proudhon developed intellectually; his job required ample reading and he was exposed to a number of different authors, from unorthodox Christians to the pioneering socialist Charles Fourier. One can contrast this origin story with that of Marx or Engels.

The irony of the dispute between Marx and Proudhon was that it obscures the fact that the work of these two men is in fact very similar: in their endeavour to

establish a scientific, critical basis for socialism, away from and against the utopians who then dominated the movement, they are perhaps the most similar thinkers of the 19th century.¹ Proudhon, for his part, realised it; in his marginal notes to Marx’s *The Poverty of Philosophy*, he states that “the true meaning of the work of Marx is that he regrets that on every point I thought like him, and that I have said it before him. It is up to the reader to believe that it was Marx who, after having read me, is sorry he thinks like me...”²

The revolutionary collectivist James Guillaume, who was one of Bakunin’s closest associates, and then became a participant in the turn of the century revolutionary syndicalist movement, wrote an interesting article called “Proudhon: communiste”, where he outlines some of the theoretical points of agreement between the men.³

I’m not pretending that Proudhon was a flawless figure, far from it. I would like to simply say that above all, he is worth reading, and he should be taken seriously. He is a complicated figure who delighted in being self-contradictory; he loved being provocative, even to the point where it obscured his actual messages. In order to understand him, we have to make a conscious effort to avoid polemic.

Proudhon certainly had an influence over anarchists, particularly in the earlier years of the movement; said anarchists had no qualms whatsoever about being open about his influence, even when the movement began, in a way, by breaking from his legacy: think about Bakunin and the other Alliancists opposing the orthodox “Proudhonian” delegates like Henri Tolain at the Brussels and Basel congresses of the International, supporting instead the full collectivisation of land and industry. The Belgian collectivist César de Paepe was not alone in justifying his position on mutualist grounds, explicitly citing the work of Proudhon to argue against Proudhon’s erstwhile followers.⁴

Despite Proudhon’s opposition to strikes, he still deeply influenced the revolutionary syndicalist movement, whether that means the proto-syndicalists like Hins and

¹ To call Proudhon utopian, as most Marxists seem to do, is a major insult to him; works like *System of Economic Contradictions* make this obvious – “If I am not mistaken, the reader ought to be convinced at least of one thing, that social truth cannot be found either in utopia or in routine: that political economy is not the science of society, but contains, in itself, the materials of that science, in the same way that chaos before the creation contained the elements of the universe. The fact is that, to arrive at a definite organisation, which appears to be the destiny of the race on this planet, there is nothing left but to make a general equation of our contradictions...” (From chapter XIV of the second volume of *Economic Contradictions*).

² As cited in Berthier’s “Proudhon and German Philosophy”, available here: <http://monde->

nouveau.net/IMG/pdf/Proudhon_and_German_philosophy.pdf

³ A translation by Shawn Wilbur can be found here: <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/james-guillaume-proudhon-communist-1911/>

⁴ For more on this, read William Whitlam’s “César de Paepe and the Ideas of the First International”, published in volume 16, issue 13 of the journal *Modern Intellectual History*, and “The origins of ‘collectivism’” by Edward Castleton, in volume 2, issue 2 of *Global Intellectual History*. They can be found on sci-hub. For an example of de Paepe chastising the Proudhonians for making “the defects of Proudhon their own by sacrificing... his scientific side”, read “To the Anti-Collectivists” here: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/cesar-de-paepe-to-the-anti-collectivists>

Varlin, or the “mature” syndicalists like Fernand Pelloutier. There are of course contradictions here – but they need to be properly explored, as someone like Daniel Colson does, in his article “Proudhon et le syndicalisme révolutionnaire”.¹

Armstrong implies that Proudhon casts some kind of dark shadow over all anarchism, but the truth of the matter is that modern anarchists – at least in the Anglophone world, it’s a bit different among French and Spanish speaking anarchists – more often than not dismiss Proudhon altogether. Part of the reason I’ve written such a long response and had it published in an anarchist journal is so that it might trigger anarchists to avoid the baiting of Armstrong and other Marxists to “sharply disown” Proudhon in the manner of Schmidt and van der Walt. He should be taken seriously by *everyone!*

A black shadow

When Armstrong tries to find examples of Proudhon’s influence among contemporary anarchists, he finds himself in trouble: the claim that present-day anarchists oppose strikes or divorce would be too ridiculous, so instead he claims that Proudhon’s “reformist orientation” is “embodied” in lifestylism. Anyone who has dealt with the kinds of clowns that think digging through the rubbish is revolutionary would know that these people don’t read *anyone*, let alone Proudhon; it’s pretty nebulous to try and draw a line between the man who repeatedly agitated for working-class organisation that would destroy private property, and some young people who think “running soup kitchens” will “lay the basis for freedom”.

Armstrong claims that Proudhon’s alleged renunciation of the importance of the working-class has an echo among all branches of anarchism, not just individualist or lifestylist ones. Thus, he alleges that even people like Bakunin “viewed the Russian peasant commune as a basis for socialism” and looked to “non-proletarian social layers” like “peasants, criminal elements, students, petty-bourgeois intellectuals” to tear down bourgeois society. Firstly, anyone who has ever encountered Socialist Alternative would find it strange that one of its main theorists seems to be writing off the potential of the third category; I find it similarly strange

that someone proudly situated in the tradition of Lenin would write off the fourth.

Let’s get some facts right: Bakunin was in fact quite critical of the Russian peasant community, the mir. He believed that the mir was essentially backward, retarding the development of the peasant population by tying it to conformity, a natural hotbed of misogyny – “the commune is [the peasant’s] world... it is nothing but a natural extension of his family... the same patriarchal principle, the same vile despotism, and the same base obedience prevail within it, and therefore the same innate justice and radical denial of any personal

rights, as in the family itself... the decisions of the mir, whatever they may be, are law”. In fact, one of the reasons Bakunin values Russian outlaws is because they are some of the few who “have the courage to defy the mir”! (Appendix A of *Statism and Anarchy*)

He thought the persistence of the free commune in Russia may give a Russian revolution some advantages over revolutions in Western Europe, where such communes did not exist, but it’s not quite accurate to say he thought the commune would be *the* basis for social revolution; certainly not everywhere. There *was* a socialist who thought the commune might be “the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia”... but it was not Bakunin!²

Part of the reason I’ve written such a long response and had it published in an anarchist journal is so that it might trigger anarchists to avoid the baiting of Armstrong and other Marxists to “sharply disown” Proudhon in the manner of Schmidt and van der Walt. He should be taken seriously by everyone!

In the 1860s and 1870s, when Bakunin was at his peak in the workers’ movement, it was clear that the working-class in Western Europe was pregnant with revolutionary potential. This gave the framework to the interventions of himself and his comrades in the International. Despite the workers being in some sense the leading revolutionary force – “the workers, of whom the vast majority do not own anything, have infinitely more propensity to communism than the peasants” – he nevertheless thought it was necessary for the proletariat to form some kind of stable alliance with the rebellious peasantry, so that they would mutually reinforce each others’ aspirations in the course of a revolution. This is detailed in one of his key works, *Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis*, from where I take the above quote.

¹ Accessible here: <http://libertaire.free.fr/DColson20.html>

² <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/zasulich/reply.htm>

In the case of France, for instance, where the peasantry constituted a huge part of the population, “it is therefore not a question of blaming the peasants, nor of denigrating them [for their selfishness and ignorance], it is a question of establishing a line of revolutionary conduct that turns the difficulty that not only prevents the individualism of the peasants from driving them into the camp of the reaction, but that, on the contrary, will be used to ensure the triumph of revolution” (*Letters to a Frenchman...*).

If such an accord is not reached, and the peasantry and working-class run at loggerheads, then what will inevitably occur is “the terrorism of the cities against the countryside” – forced requisitioning, grain quotas, repression of peasant protests, and so on. Such a thing would “kill the revolution, instead of making it triumph” (*Letters to a Frenchman...*).

However, Russia was quite different to France. At the time, the proletariat in Russia was tiny, representing only a very small fraction of the population. It was under the strict domination of the brutal Russian monarchy. Opportunities to express political dissent were incredibly difficult, hence the regular resort to clandestine organisations. Strategy, in this context, was limited; was the answer to wait for the development of a more advanced capitalism before serious action could be contemplated? Could socialism only occur once the peasantry had been violently ripped up and thrown into the lower ranks of the working-classes? The history of Russia in the 20th century provides us with answers that are hardly conclusive.

In the absence of mass working-class struggle, Bakunin needed to develop other revolutionary strategies for Russia. The letter from Bakunin to Nechaev from which the quote about the “world of tramps, thieves and brigands” originates represents one of his attempts.¹ In previous revolts, like those of Stenka Razin or Pugachev, Bakunin sees “Cossacks, thieves, brigands and tramps” as playing a role in the triggering of a popular uprising. Bakunin himself admits that “he cannot tolerate either brigandage or thieving, nor any other anti-human violence”, but that if forced to choose between the brigandage of the monarchy or the brigandage of the every-day criminal, he would, “without hesitation, choose the latter”.

Still, Bakunin does not believe agitation among the brigands to mean humouring or tolerating their destructive tendencies; substantially, it means changing their character, “giving them new souls and arousing them with a new, truly popular aim”. To reiterate a similar point made elsewhere: one can disagree with such an assessment. Certainly, the plan would have likely been a disaster had it ever been put into practice.

We just have to be clear about what Bakunin was actually arguing for before we judge him.

Anarchist organisation: not a side issue

On organisation, Armstrong becomes deliberately slippery: he talks of the hostility of anarchists to the idea of “workers having their own political party”, and our “historical fudge” in being against the party whilst Bakunin formed his own “political organisation/party”. Notice the slash: organisation and party are equated, as if a political organisation and the kind of party Marxists advocate are the same thing.

You’d think Armstrong would understand that anarchists are broadly *in favour* of organisation, whether on the political or economic level; Armstrong is obviously familiar with the work of Alexandre Skirda, as well as the general politics of Schmidt and van der Walt – people who firmly advocated anarchist organisation. True, anarchists have frequently neglected organisation; as a member of an anarchist organisation, I know this all too well. But Armstrong himself is committing a major “fudge” by portraying us as opponents of *all* political organisation.

He also talks of Bakunin’s Alliance, describing it as secretive, authoritarian and conspiratorial, implying it to be worse than the “disciplined, democratic revolutionary socialist party” he advocates. The question of Bakunin’s Alliances (and there were multiple) is complicated, since much of the material relating to them is lost, and some of the Alliances do not seem to have any existence outside of Bakunin’s fantasies. Nevertheless, it’s productive to look at the details of one of Bakunin’s organisational proposals; the one put to Nechaev as an ultimatum in his June 1870 letter.

The letter was secret, so we can presume Bakunin is being more transparent than he would in a public statement or article. The organisation Bakunin advocates would simply be “an organiser of the people’s power, not its own” – “a middle-man between popular instinct and revolutionary thought”. If the organisation strives to “foist on the people [its] own thoughts... [then it] implies a wish to make [the people] subservient to a new state”. In other words, the organisation would be “a servant and a helper... never a commander of the people, never under any pretext its manager, not even under the pretext of the people’s welfare”. It would not work from the top-down, foisting “upon the people any new regulations, orders, styles of life”; it would merely “unleash its will and give wide scope to its self-determination and its economic and social organisation”.

¹ It is available to read in full here:
<https://soversiva.wordpress.com/2011/12/30/bakunin-letter-to-sergey-nechayev/>

Much ink has been spilled over Bakunin's "invisible dictatorship", but the letter to Nechaev gives Bakunin a chance to explain what he means. In the midst of "general anarchy" – i.e. the chaos of a revolution – a secret organisation acts "inspired by a common ideal and a common aim... everywhere according to a common plan"; this plan would be "sufficiently wide and human to embrace and take in all the inescapable changes which arise from differing circumstances, all varied movements arising from the variety of national life". The organisation's groups "have no officially recognised power but are strong in their ideal", which expresses nothing more than the elaboration of the desires of the people.

Through their ability to lead by example and unite the people across disparate towns and cities, the organisation would amass an influence. It would not be an official influence, since it would adopt no privileges for itself and would remain simply as a vehicle prodding along the development of a popular revolution. It would not be "placed above the people like state power", because "its whole aim... consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people".

Bakunin elaborates in detail the principles of the proposed organisation. There would be "equality among all members and their unconditional and absolute solidarity"; all members would be equal and have an equal say in the direction of the organisation. Members would keep each other accountable not through gossip or white-anting, but through calmly raising issues at general meetings, avoiding "Jesuitical" control of members. "The strength of the whole society, as well as the morality, loyalty, energy and dedication of each member", wrote Bakunin, "is based exclusively on shared truth, sincerity and trust, and on the open fraternal control over all of each one".

The organisation, by virtue of carrying out its activities in Russia, where open political opposition was impossible, necessarily had to adopt structures to help keep itself effective under clandestinity. Decisions made at general meetings would be iron-tight, subject to modification only at another general meeting. There would be an executive committee decided by the organisation at general meetings; it would have to be obeyed, "except for such cases where the orders of the committee contradict either the general programme of its principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all the brothers have participated equally in the discussion of them". In any case, if a general meeting is discontented with the committee, "it can always substitute another one for it". The organisation would have multiple tiers, encompassing the local, regional and national level.

I would like to ask Armstrong – what about such an organisational plan terrifies him? The parts which libertarians may justify as being necessary for clandestine activity, like the subordination to the elected

executive committee, appear to presage "democratic centralism" – which Leninists practice as a matter of principle, even in open political settings.

Letter to an Australian on the present crisis

Armstrong's charge that anarchism is unable to politically challenge reformism is perhaps one of his most ridiculous. Armstrong appears to malign anarchism's weakness against reformism... by moving closer to reformism himself! Because anarchists allegedly "suggest at all times and in all places it is the state which is 'the main enemy of the free individual'", they are unable to fight "immediate day-to-day struggles and to combat the influence of reformism".

In other words, anarchists are unable to fight reformists, because they're unable to coherently demand reforms themselves. To Armstrong, fighting the battle against reformism means, at times, making appeals to the bourgeois state. Anarchists, to their discredit, do not do this – at least not without being hypocrites. What are his examples? For brevity, we'll pick a representative sample.

Firstly, we are reproached for either being "opposed to" or "extremely sceptical about" state-granted worker reforms, like "the eight-hour working day, the nationalisation of core public services, a government-run health service" and so on. But what are all these things, if not the panacea of the reformists? All of these things were and are advocated by reformists of all stripes, from the ALP for decades, to more modern reformists like Jeremy Corbyn. Anarchists were, and are sceptical of all these things – justifiably! It would be abandoning socialism to *not* be sceptical of "bourgeoisies bearing gifts".

At various times, like in Depression-era America, these things were implemented precisely to stave off deeper worker revolt. In places like post-war Britain, they were part and parcel of the attempt by capital to reconstruct itself after a devastating war, the state – and the working-class, through both taxation and labour – bearing the burden of keeping alive marginally profitable but nevertheless important industries.

Secondly, we have the way "the left" (he means his own organisation, here) placed demands on governments "to provide better state health services; to roll out an effective vaccination program, to safely quarantine infected people, to use control measures to help prevent the spread of the disease, and so on". Armstrong's demands here resemble a traditional Marxist "minimum-maximum" programme – just without the maximal demands of abolishing capitalism.

Armstrong seems to be an inadequate Trotskyist too, since these aren't particularly "transitional" demands either. Their realisation doesn't imply going beyond capitalism at all: the political class in Australia has willingly deployed, at various times, all of the demands

Armstrong mentions. They did so in order to stabilise Australian capitalism, to keep the profit-making ball rolling; there was nothing inherently progressive about it.

Here, we feel it necessary to reiterate what are some fundamentals of revolutionary socialism: the bourgeois state does not implement reforms out of gratitude, or simply because workers “force” it to; it implements them in order to save itself and restructure capital for its own benefit. Rather than perpetuating or even encouraging illusions about the ability of the bourgeois state to “benefit the masses”, the task of socialists in the midst of a crisis is to figure out how best to take advantage of it, so that the working-class may come out of it stronger than it went into it.

Can one imagine if Lenin went to Zimmerwald and argued that European communists should simply demand that their state make peace? The aim of revolutionaries is not to agitate for a less harmful capitalism, but to insist on the link between workers’ misery and the present economic system, making clear in deeds and words that the only way liberation can occur is if the system is *destroyed* and a truly free one constructed in its place.

At times Armstrong, with other Trotskyists, seems to think that workers must first develop a reformism, before they can then supersede it with revolutionary politics. We don’t think that’s how it works, and we don’t think the job of socialists is to lead workers along a string, but to engage with their resistance as it develops in the here and now, generalising it and prodding it forward, outlining the connection between said resistance and a future free of capitalism.

Discounting the value of even small reforms would be silly,¹ but the more pertinent question is about *how* the reforms came about, and what can come next; the mere making of demands is rather trivial in this context. In the words of Malatesta – “we shall carry out all possible reforms in the spirit in which an army advances ever forwards by snatching the enemy-occupied territory in its path, and we shall always remain hostile to any

government – whether monarchist like today’s or republican or Bolshevik, like tomorrow’s” (*Anarchism and Reforms*).

Far from opposing the eight-hour day, anarchists took the lead in a number of union federations to push for that goal and secure it with strikes and sabotage; they weren’t critical of the eight-hour day itself – one can find even Bakunin arguing for the centrality of reduced working hours as part of worker demands – but of the social-democrats who thought such a goal was best secured through voting for it in parliament.² This is precisely the point: the goal of reduced work hours is obviously important, but the consciousness of the working-class is developed far further if the goal is fought for through their own means of struggle, rather than through electing politicians and having it implemented by a government regulator.

He bemoans our general hostility to parliamentary elections, despite its nature as a “vital arena for a mass socialist party to

engage in political agitation, recruit to its ranks, gauge the level of support it has among workers and pose an alternative to reformists”. A full response to this very non-specific critique is outside the scope of this essay, so I will stoop to Armstrong’s level and give a response as flippant as his own charge.

I recommend readers view the manifesto of Socialist Alternative’s electoral project, Victorian Socialists³: try and find anything that seems revolutionary in it, or anything that could not also be found somewhere in a program of the Greens, or in a program of the Labor Party fifty or a hundred years ago. I’ll also ask the reader to assess “the level of support it has among workers” by checking what percentage of the vote it won. In short: not much practical evidence that would persuade an anarchist to abandon our anti-electoral positions.

An opportunity we are destined to miss

A proper critical inquiry into anarchism – into any doctrine, really – requires going beyond generalisations about what most of its adherents think. Instead, it

The aim of revolutionaries is not to agitate for a less harmful capitalism, but to insist on the link between workers’ misery and the present economic system, making clear in deeds and words that the only way liberation can occur is if the system is *destroyed* and a truly free one constructed in its place.

¹ It should also go without saying here that it would be equally inane to fight indiscriminately against *everything* governments do; I am not advocating for socialists to demand the lifting of all COVID restrictions, even if they’ve been put in place for reasons that are far from humanitarian.

² Armstrong also alleges that “some anarchist unions went as far as organising strikes against the introduction of welfare measures”, but, predictably, gives no reference.

³ <https://www.victoriansocialists.org.au/manifesto>

should deal concretely with the doctrine itself. Armstrong does not do this, and instead searches for proof that the subjects of his critique are important, influential and properly representative of anarchism. His way of doing this makes the reader think he's preempting any potential defence from anarchists, who would instinctively respond by disassociating themselves with whatever he's critiquing. The mark of a good critic is a willingness to engage with the strongest arguments of the target; Armstrong instead attacks the worst, makes up the rest, then dusts off his hands and considers it a job well done.

Armstrong's approach is particularly silly, because if the same approach was applied to his own political viewpoint then it too would be treated as marginal, irrelevant to what Marxism is. Armstrong – like Draper – would describe himself as a Trotskyist in the “International Socialist tradition”. This tradition was developed by people like Tony Cliff *against* the orthodoxy of the Trotskyist movement, *against* even Trotsky's own positions – like, for instance, against the categorisation of the Soviet Union as “state capitalist” instead of a degenerated workers' state, against the defence of the Soviet invasion of Finland, and so on.¹

How would Armstrong respond if I wrote seven thousand words on how Marxism is tyrannical, and as proof cited the fact that the majority of the world's self-described Marxists are one or another variety of Stalinist? Simple: Marxism has nothing to do with this, Stalinism is in contradiction with Marx's own writings, Stalinism is a corruption of the revolutionary communist tradition, etc. In other words, the exact same sort of thing we'd say in response to a claim that anarchism is deficient because of Proudhon's misogyny or because of lifestyle lists in 2022. And, to be sure, we know of no contemporary anarchist that defends – let alone endorses – Proudhon's attitudes to women, or Bakunin's towards Jews.

In May of 1846, Marx wrote a letter to Proudhon, inviting him to collaborate and join him in a revolutionary organisation. Proudhon's response is, I believe, worth quoting at length:²

“First, although my ideas in the matter of organization and realization are at this moment more or less settled, at least as regards principles, I believe it is my duty, as it is the duty of all socialists, to maintain for some time

yet the critical or dubitative form; in short, I make profession in public of an almost absolute economic anti-dogmatism.

Let us seek together, if you wish, the laws of society, the manner in which these laws are realized, the process by which we shall succeed in discovering them; but, for God's sake, after having demolished all the a priori dogmatisms, do not let us in our turn dream of indoctrinating the people; do not let us fall into the contradiction of your compatriot Martin Luther, who, having overthrown Catholic theology, at once set about, with excommunication and anathema, the foundation of a Protestant theology. For the last three centuries Germany has been mainly occupied in undoing Luther's shoddy work; do not let us leave humanity with a similar mess to clear up as a result of our efforts. I applaud with all my heart your thought of bringing all opinions to light; let us carry on a good and loyal polemic; let us give the world an example of learned and far-sighted tolerance, but let us not, merely because we are at the head of a movement, make ourselves the leaders of a new intolerance, let us not pose as the apostles of a new religion, even if it be the religion of logic, the religion of reason. Let us gather together and encourage all protests, let us brand all exclusiveness, all mysticism; let us never regard a question as exhausted, and when we have used our last argument, let us begin again, if need be, with eloquence and irony. On that condition, I will gladly enter your association. Otherwise – no!”

I am not one of the anti-sectarians who think all differences between socialists should be minimised; I don't care one iota for “left unity”. But I do think socialists should be engaging with each other, and that the engagement shouldn't take the form of false polemics.

The world has enough bullshit; it doesn't need more. If this is the present state of the left, then any real working-class revolution will wash us away with the tide. That, I'd argue, would be a good thing.

*Thanks to Tommy Lawson, Mya Walmsley and René Berthier for editorial assistance. The author of this article is a member of **Black Flag Sydney**.³*

¹ Draper himself holds a slightly different position, descended instead from Max Schachtman; in the preface to his book on Marx, he speaks of “the Stalinist world of bureaucratic-collectivism and the decaying world of capitalism” – as if this “bureaucratic-collectivism” and “capitalism” were conceptually separate things!

² It can be accessed here: https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/proudhon/letters/46_05_17.htm

³ <https://blackflagsydney.com/>

Proudhon: “start by being right”

Iain McKay

I will start with an admission. Once, a long time ago, I wrote a letter to a Marxist paper angrily proclaiming how dare they use Proudhon to attack anarchism when he was *not* an anarchist. Suffice to say, this just showed my ignorance – not least in being unaware of the source of the article’s attacks, it being a rehash of Hal Draper rather than some original piece.

Luckily it remained unsent (not least because it got a bit long...) for I made a terrible mistake – I took the time to read Proudhon. This was driven by my work on *An Anarchist FAQ* and the need to present anarchist views on capitalism. As many have noted, unlike Marxism, there is not a huge amount of anarchist writings on economics. The exception is Proudhon, particularly in the 1840s. So I read the first two *Memoirs* on property (as translated by Tucker) and these opened my eyes. I then moved onto volume 1 of *System of Economic Contradictions* and, while hard going in certain chapters (whose relevance to analysing capitalism is hard to grasp), it was not the book I had been led to think it was by Marxist accounts. All this motivated me to work on *Property is Theft!*¹ and whilst working on other projects, I have kept an interest on Proudhon ever since.

I mention this to put the following discussions in context for it is all too easy to think that just because someone proclaims something it means they know what they are talking about, particularly if they have academic credentials. Worse, it is all too easy to assume that they are being accurate and would not just distort or make things up. Even “peer review” can mean little, if the subject is relative obscure and the peers in question know little about the subject and assume an honesty which may, with a little investigation, be proven to be lacking.

So nothing should be taken for granted when reading about Proudhon (or anarchism in general). If a claim

looks strange, it is always worthwhile investigating whether it is actually true or not. If a reference is provided, I’ve discovered it is always wise to check the source to confirm that it is as suggested (I’ve found that in far too many cases it does not). However, I appreciate – from experience! – that this can be time consuming and difficult to do as the material can be hard to access. Still, it should be done. Distortions, however, can sometimes have an element of truth about them. This



makes them plausible – as will be shown, Proudhon *did* write “All this democracy disgusts me” and he *was* anti-Semitic. However, context and accuracy *matter*. This may involve discussing unpleasant subjects but that does not mean allowing inaccuracies or exaggerations to go unchallenged. Doing so may see the accusation of “apologetics” levelled but that would be a superficial response.

Yet criticism can be valid in spite of this. Marxists, for example, never note that the valid criticisms they make of Proudhon – his racism, sexism, opposition to strikes² – are those made by later anarchists. They also rarely criticise him on any substantial aspect of his ideas, preferring to recount flaws in his personality. Rarely is any context presented, such as noting that his (measured)

support for small-scale property was reflective of his era (and that he was resolutely in favour of collective property where appropriate), nor any alternative (if Proudhon is to be denounced for opposing forced collectivisation of peasants, then that should be clearly stated). Nor do they mention the overlap in Proudhon’s disgraceful views with others of his time, including Marx and Engels.

In his marginal notes to *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Proudhon wrote “You always joke beforehand: start by being right.” This applies to the criticisms levelled at Proudhon I am about to discuss. There is plenty to criticise in his ideas and we should do so – but let us do so *accurately*. We must reject invention, caricature and exaggeration when we discuss his ideas, we must

regime their heroes ruled used troops to break strikes, declaring martial law and shooting strikers.

¹ *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011).

² There is an irony in the defenders of Lenin and Trotsky denouncing Proudhon for his opposition to strikes when the

provide the necessary context not to excuse, minimise or downplay things but to understand them and their relative importance within his ideas as a whole. If we “start by being right” then our critique will be all the more valid and our understanding of his strengths and weaknesses will be stronger.

The Housing Question

It is not only *The Poverty of Philosophy* which saw the founders of Marxism distort Proudhon’s ideas. While questionable commentary on Proudhon exists in *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value*, Engels’ *The Housing Question* is worth discussing.

Engels’ 1872 work is part of a polemic within German socialist circles and sought to defend the Marxist orthodoxy against those influenced by the French anarchist seeking “to transplant the Proudhonist school to Germany”. He also somewhat incredulously suggested that Marx had “delivered a decisive blow precisely to the Proudhonist ideas as far back as twenty-five years ago” – if so, then why was he having to do so in 1872?¹

Engels suggests that Proudhon’s aimed to solve the housing question involves a scheme in which the workers “become part-owner” of dwellings by “paying annual instalments” via their rent. So, if a worker lives in a rented property then the rent they pay goes towards buying the house. For the amusement of his readers, he paints a picture of a worker moving from rented accommodation to rented accommodation and accruing a tiny fraction of each one:

“Supposing that on the day... when the redemption of rent dwellings is proclaimed, Peter is working in an engineering works in Berlin. A year later he is owner of, if you like, the fifteenth part of his flat consisting of a little room on the fifth floor of a house somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Hamburger Tor. He then loses his job and soon afterwards finds himself in a similar flat on the third floor of a house in the Pothof in Hanover with a wonderful view of the courtyard... Subsequent removals, such as nowadays are so frequent with workers, saddle him further... And now, of what use are all these shares in flats to our Peter? Who is to give him the real value of these shares... when the redemption period has elapsed and rented flats are abolished, [and housing] belongs to perhaps three hundred part owners who are scattered all over the world?”²

In this way “the *individual worker* becomes owner of the dwelling” in Proudhon’s scheme.³

Given how obviously impractical this proposal is, the equally obvious question is: did Proudhon actually advocate such a scheme? Consulting the work and pages explicitly referenced by Engels⁴, the answer is a resounding *no*:

“all payments made as rental shall be carried over to the account of the purchase of the property, at a price estimated at twenty times the annual rental.

“Every such payment shall purchase for the tenant a proportional undivided share in the house he lives in, and in all buildings erected for rental, and serving as a habitation for citizens.

“The property thus paid for shall pass under the control of the communal administration, which shall take a first mortgage upon it, in the name of all the tenants, and shall guarantee them all a domicile, in perpetuity, at the cost price of the building...

“For repairs, management, and upkeep of buildings, as well as for new constructions, the communes shall deal with bricklayers companies or building workers associations, according to the rules and principles of the new social contract.”⁵

Note well that in Proudhon’s scheme that housing is “under the control of the communal administration” and that the tenant gains “a proportional undivided share in the house he lives in, and in all buildings erected for rental, and serving as a habitation for citizens.” In short, the aim is to achieve *social* ownership of housing and the rent paid does not accrue ownership to the individual worker but rather the commune (after all, unlike the individual worker, housing does not move). So, clearly, the worker gains access to *all* such social housing in *every* commune.

It should be noted that, Proudhon makes the same suggestion for land and once the rent paid equalled its price it “shall revert immediately to the commune, which shall take the place of the former proprietor, and shall share the fee-simple and the economic rent with the farmer.” Then “all the communes of the Republic shall come to an understanding for equalising among them the quality of tracts of land, as well as accidents of culture. The part of the rent to which they are entitled upon their respective territories shall serve for compensation and for general insurance.”⁶

Engels, in short, either cannot understand Proudhon’s argument or deliberately seeks to distort it. The answer seems to be the latter for in 1851 he accurately noted that Proudhon’s scheme meant “converting interest

¹ *Marx-Engels Collected Works (MECW)* 23: 238, 317.

² *MECW* 23: 328.

³ *MECW* 23:238, 386.

⁴ *MECW* 23: 387.

⁵ “General Idea of the Revolution”, *Property is Theft!*, 576.

⁶ “General Idea of the Revolution”, 578-9.

payments into repayments, all real wealth being concentrated in the hands of the State or the communes” and suggests that “it takes far too long” as these are “systematically protracted measures, extending over 20 or 30 years”.¹ He summarises his take on Proudhon’s ideas as follows:

“Proudhon has now also come to the conclusion that the true meaning of property rights lies in the disguised confiscation of all property by a more or less disguised State, and that what abolition of the State really means is intensified state centralisation.”²

While clearly ignoring Proudhon’s arguments for decentralisation, Engels does however recognise that his argument was for *social* rather than individual ownership. He also quotes Proudhon in the notes of an aborted review around the same time: “With every instalment of rent the tenant will acquire a proportional and joint share in the house he occupies and in the totality of all buildings let for rent and serving as dwellings for the citizens. Property thus paid for will pass by degrees into the hands of the communal administration.”³ So Engels *did* know what Proudhon had actually advocated but decided to distort his ideas.

Engels also takes the time to repeat all the standard Marxist nonsense about Proudhon, for example that he had “an aversion to the industrial revolution” and wished “to drive the whole of modern industry out of the temple”. He suggests that Proudhon’s use of the term the “productivity of capital” was “an absurdity that Proudhon takes over uncritically from the bourgeois economists” and that he “differs from the bourgeois economists in that he does not approve of this ‘productivity of capital’, but on the contrary, discovers in it a violation of ‘eternal justice’” as it “is this productivity which prevents the worker from receiving the full proceeds of his labour”. It would be abolished by “lowering the rate of interest by compulsory legislation”.⁴

It is strange to read Engels proclaim that Proudhon “aversion” to industry when earlier he had noted “Association in *big industry*. Here, then, *compagnies*

ouvrières [workers companies]... This is the solution to the *deux problèmes: celui de la force collective, et celui de la division du travail* [two problems: that of collective force, and that of the division of labour].”⁵ In terms of “the productivity of capital”, yes, Proudhon did use the term but only to proclaim that the theory is a “fiction” as “all value is born of labour” and so contrasts the “the theory of the real productivity of labour” with “that of the fictitious productivity of capital”. Engels seems to think that proclaiming something a fiction equates to “uncritically” taking it over. This, for Proudhon, *does* violate justice as this requires that “all labour must leave a surplus, all wages

be equal to product” so it appears that he is to be mocked for opposing the exploitation of labour by capital.⁶

The notion of justice has been one which has driven many socialists and working people to change society and it does Engels little favours to mock it so. Needless to say, he adds that “this justice is still called ‘eternal justice’... later on, nothing more is said about eternity, but the idea remains in essence”⁷ and so he appears unaware that Proudhon used the term just once (and ironically at that) in *System of Economic Contradictions* compared to four times by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. As it stands, developments in

biological science have indicated that a sense of justice is a product of our evolution and so it is Engels and Marx who have been judged wrong by history.

Finally, Engels claimed that Proudhon had in 1851 appropriated, without acknowledgement, Marx’s ideas as his own. In a letter to Marx, he proclaimed that he was “convinced” that the Frenchman had read *The Communist Manifesto* and Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France* as “our premises on the decisive historical initiative of material production, class struggle, etc., largely adopted” and a “number of points were indubitably lifted from them – e.g., that a *gouvernement* is nothing but the power of one class to repress the other, and will disappear with the disappearance of the contradictions between classes”.⁸

The claim is false – Proudhon had concluded that the state was an instrument of class power before the

¹ MECW 38: 421-2.

² MECW 38: 418.

³ MECW 31: 560.

⁴ MECW 23: 325, 331.

⁵ MECW 38: 414-5.

⁶ *Système des contradictions économiques* (Paris: Guillaumin et Cie, 1846) I: 16, 18, 305.

⁷ MECW 23: 378.

⁸ MECW 38: 434-5.

Manifesto was penned.¹ In 1846 he had noted that the state was “inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat. No political reform can solve this contradiction... The problem before the labouring classes, then, consists, not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly... generating from the bowels of the people... a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them.”²

Suffice to say, very little of what Marx and Engels proclaimed against Proudhon can be taken at face value and without taking the trouble of verifying whether it is accurate or not.

Engels does make a valid point when he noted “the fact that one cannot see how [in *General Idea*] the factories are to be transferred from the hands of the manufacturers to the *compagnies ouvrières*, since interest and land rent are to be abolished, but not profit (for there will still be competition).”³ Given Proudhon’s position that labour is the source of value and that wages must equal product, he did not think that lowering interest rates would do this directly but rather allow workers to get sufficient credit to create their own companies and so secure the “full proceeds” of their labour by abolishing wage-labour. Of course, once workers associations had displaced capitalist firms, all their earnings would technically be “profit” (i.e., surplus over costs) as labour would not long be bought and so no longer be a cost.

This does not mean that Proudhon’s solution to the housing question cannot be questioned. It is reformist in nature and dependent on the State being pressured into passing the appropriate legislation as well as a transformation in the nature of the local council. Kropotkin’s position of immediate expropriation of housing by the tenants (and of workplaces by their workers) is more straightforward. However, rather than critique Proudhon’s policy for being too slow, *The Housing Question* saw Engels knowingly misrepresent it. If Proudhon really was the dunce Marx and Engels liked to portray him, such shameful activities would not have to be sunk to.

Hal Draper on Proudhon: anatomy of a smear⁴

For some, the verdict of history is of little consequence. Marxists in particular seem unconcerned that every mainstream Marxist movement and revolution has become authoritarian, at its worse dictatorial, at its best bureaucratic. Rather than socialism, state-capitalism has been created time and time again. Whether it is nationalisation within the bourgeois State or turning a

whole economy over to the bureaucracy, the anarchist vision of a self-managed socialist society and economy has never happened via the Marxist route in spite of the latter’s oft-repeated claim of a common goal.

Some, however, have not let this dent their enthusiasm. Hal Draper is often pointed to as defending “real” Marxism, as Alan Johnson put it: “Democratic Marxism: The Legacy of Hal Draper”.⁵ Considered a scholar of note amongst many Marxists, libertarians are less impressed for Draper’s dislike – hatred – of anarchism is quickly seen from his writings. Indeed, it is not hard to conclude that his lifework sought what most people would consider the impossible – namely, portraying a movement with a legacy of centralised, bureaucratic and authoritarian structures as genuinely democratic while painting another with a legacy of federal, participatory and self-managed organisations as secretly aiming for tyranny.

Johnson suggests that Hal Draper “looked at” the “elitism and authoritarianism” of those Marx attacked, including “Proudhon (‘all this democracy disgusts me’).”⁶ This echoes David McNally’s pamphlet *Socialism from Below*⁷, which likewise proclaimed that Proudhon “violently opposed democracy. ‘All this democracy disgusts me’, he wrote.” Both repeat Draper himself, who in his 1966 pamphlet *The Two Souls of Socialism* included a chapter entitled “The Myth of Anarchist ‘Libertarianism’” in which we find Proudhon’s “violent opposition” to “any and every idea of the right to vote, universal suffrage, popular sovereignty, and the very idea of constitutions. (‘All this democracy disgusts me ... What would I not give to sail into this mob with my clenched fists!’).”

Draper makes many claims against Proudhon and Bakunin (Kropotkin is thankfully excluded from his tender mercies), so many it would be difficult to address them all. Some are valid, like those on Proudhon’s disgusting sexism, others are exaggerated, such as those on his anti-Semitism, and others incomplete or misrepresentative. Many, however, are simply false. Here we discuss the claims on democracy by means of the quote happily repeated by his apostles.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Draper made it difficult to confirm his claim. Under “A Few References,” he helpfully proclaims “[f]or Proudhon, see the chapter in J.S. Schapiro’s *Liberalism and the Challenge of Fascism*, and Proudhon’s *Carnets*.” The latter run into multiple volumes and hundreds of pages. Schapiro is somewhat easier as he does appear to reference his

¹ Engels does not explain where Proudhon would have come across these works, given he did not read German.

² *Système I*: 363-4.

³ *MECW* 38: 38: 419.

⁴ “Hal Draper on Proudhon: Anatomy of a Smear”, *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 77 (Fall 2019)

⁵ Mark Cowling and Paul Reynolds (eds.), *Marxism, the Millennium and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

⁶ Johnson, 202.

⁷ *Socialism from Below: The History of an Idea* (ISO, 1984).

quotes and claims in his attempt to paint the Frenchman as a proto-fascist. Thus we find on page 350:

“Proudhon’s contempt and hatred of democracy overflowed all decent bounds, and he descended to a degree of disgusting vilification, reached only by the fascists of our day. ‘All this democracy disgusts me,’ he wrote. ‘It wishes to be scratched where vermin causes itching, but it does not at all wish to be combed or to be deloused. What would I not give to sail into this mob with my clenched fists!’”

(*Correspondance* XI: 197)

Suffice to say, his account is distinctly flawed – at best, it is selective; at worse, knowingly false. Refuting Schapiro’s work could be done by presenting the multitude of pro-democracy quotes and arguments by Proudhon which he studiously ignores but it is sufficient to look at this single quote – the one repeated in part by Draper, McNally and Johnson – to see his dishonesty.

As it stands, Proudhon did not write the quote provided for Schapiro combines three separate sentences into one passage without indicating any missing text nor that they appear on different pages (197 and 198). Context is likewise removed, along with the awkward fact that Proudhon is referring to different things on the two pages.

These sentences come from a private letter written on 18 September 1861 which starts by bemoaning how others on the left were attacking him as “a false *democrat*, a false friend of progress, a false republican” due to his critical position on Polish independence. Unlike most of the rest of the French left (“the democracy,” to use the term of the period), Proudhon opposed the creation of a Polish state. His reason is summarised in his letter:

“What is worse is that M. Élias Regnault... not responding to any of the *impossibilities* of reconstitution which I indicated, none the less persists in demanding the *reestablishment of Poland*, on the pretext that nobilitarian [*nobiliaire*], Catholic, aristocratic Poland, divided into castes, has a life of its own, and that it has the right to live this life *regardless!*”

In other words, Proudhon is indicating that an independent Poland, as demanded by “the democracy” in France, would *not* be a democracy but rather a regime ruled by a nobility living on the backs of the peasantry (Schapiro notes Proudhon’s opposition to Polish independence but does not explain the reasoning

for this). He then starts the next paragraph with these much repeated words:

“All this democracy disgusts me.”

Once this context is provided, it becomes clear that Proudhon is using his justly famous talent for irony against those on the left who violate their own stated democratic principles by supporting the creation of a feudal regime – if *this* is democracy, Proudhon was saying, then it disgusts him. This becomes clear from the rest of his paragraph:

“**All this democracy disgusts me.** Reason serves no purpose with it, nor principles, nor facts. It does not matter to it that it contradicts itself with every step. It has its hobby-horses, its tics and its fancies; **it wants to be scratched where the maggots itch, but it will not hear of comb nor scrubbing;** it resembles that beggar saint who, gnawed alive by maggots, put them back into his wounds when they escaped.” (bold indicates words quoted by Schapiro)

Schapiro removes without indicating most of this paragraph, including the key words that “it [the democracy] contradicts itself with every step.” He thus completely obscures Proudhon’s point, namely that these French democrats are contradicting their own claimed principles by supporting the creation of an aristocratic and caste-divided regime.

So, by selective quoting, Proudhon’s arguments *for* democracy – in which he wishes the democrats would be consistently in favour of democracy

– are turned into their opposite.

The final sentence quoted by Schapiro appears on the next page. Rather than discussing democracy, Proudhon is referring to something else:

“Certain *patriots* have formed a small conspiracy to stop the sale of my pamphlets. On this matter, it has been said that I was a *secret agent of the Empire*; tomorrow, when they read my theory of taxation crowned by a council of State, they will say that I am a conservative, a proprietor, an Orleanist, a bourgeois!... Fortunately, all that outcry will not make me change my mind. But what can you expect from a so-called progressive democracy, which is more fanatical, upon each appearance of an ideal, than the Inquisition?

“**Sometimes I really want to fall upon this bunch of sods [*cette tourbe*] with fists flying;** what do you think? Is it not time to avenge

common sense, and to pull the republican idea from the jaws of this hydra, which terrifies writers and honest people! Come on, TWITS, YOU are a disgrace to the human mind! It is because of you that France today lags behind other nations!” (bold indicates words quoted by Schapiro)

So Schapiro’s “this mob” is *not* referring to the people exercising their democratic rights but rather a group opposed to Proudhon’s ideas. Mob may be an acceptable translation of “tourbe” but not in this context, with its hoped for connotations of democracy being dismissed as “mob rule.” Rather, here it means not “the people” but “this bunch of contemptible people” – a “hydra” from whose “jaws” Proudhon sought to “pull the republican idea from”!

Schapiro again quotes out of context to turn a paragraph in which Proudhon clearly displays his support for democracy into its opposite.

Schapiro in his preface writes an “exhaustive examination of [Proudhon’s] writings convinced the author, reluctantly to be sure, that Proudhon was a harbinger of fascism in its essential outlook and its sinister implications.” (ix)

In reality, it is his selective quoting which is exhausting.

Nowhere does he mention Proudhon’s support for workers’ associations or that he seemed to have coined the phrase “industrial democracy.” Nowhere does he note Proudhon’s critique of “democracy” is rooted in an awareness that the liberal democracy Schapiro appears to champion is *bourgeois* democracy and, as such, simply not that democratic. Nowhere does he mention Proudhon’s advocacy of election, mandates and recall, his demand that power be decentralised and decentred into the hands of the working class in what he termed a “labour democracy” in 1864:

“Thus, no longer do we have the abstraction of people’s sovereignty as in the ‘93 Constitution and the others that followed it, and in Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. Instead it becomes an effective sovereignty of the labouring masses which rule and govern... I declare here and now that the labouring masses are actually, positively and effectively sovereign: how could they not be when the economic organism — labour, capital, property and assets — belongs to them entirely”¹

There are, in short, many forms of democracy. Some are Jacobin – centralised, top-down and inherently bourgeois. Others are libertarian – federalist, bottom-up

and inherently working class. Schapiro seemed unaware of the difference. The bourgeoisie like to portray opposition to its form of democracy – which is little more than electing masters – as being anti-democratic. Marxists like Draper mimic both this portrayal and this form of centralised quasi-democracy, even if they drape it with a red flag.

Schapiro seems to have a thesis in need of bolstering, so he was far from “reluctantly” cherry-picking from Proudhon’s voluminous works – presumably secure in the knowledge that few English-language scholars would be familiar enough with the originals to protest nor have the time to track down, verify and contextualise every one of his many claims. More, the American anarchist movement was small and easily ignored, particularly in academic circles.

Schapiro’s thesis may appear plausible to those with little or no awareness of Proudhon’s ideas, particularly given that he was far from a consistent libertarian (most obviously, his defence of patriarchy and his occasional public expressions of anti-Semitism) and his (unfounded) reputation of being “contradictory.” Likewise, his ideas developed over his lifetime and how he presented aspects of his ideas changed as circumstances changed (mostly obviously, in response to the failure to the 1848 Revolution). Moreover, libertarian socialist ideas can initially appear confusing given their challenge to the dominant assumptions within society. All this aided Schapiro in his task.

Moreover, refuting Schapiro’s claims – with multiple false, cherry-picked, incomplete claims on nearly every page – is time consuming: look what is required to debunk a single quote provided by him as evidence. Other claims are just as resource intensive to debunk, if not more so.² Little wonder his work has never been fully challenged.

Given how Draper systematically addressed every perceived slight against Marx in exhausting detail (at least to his own satisfaction, if not others), his use of Schapiro’s work seems hypocritical. At best, he made no attempt to verify the account he recommended and embraced a work which chimed with his own prejudices. At worse, Draper checked and like Schapiro knowingly distorted Proudhon’s ideas.

Either way, Draper is responsible for spreading a distortion across the left – a distortion mindlessly repeated to this day. In this he follows his heroes Marx³ and Engels, whose distortions are likewise repeated as if they were the considered conclusions of disinterested seekers of the truth.

¹ “The Political Capacity of the Working Classes”, *Property is Theft!*, 760-1.

² For example, see “Proudhon on Race and the Civil War: Neither Washington nor Richmond,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 60 (Summer 2013).

³ “The Poverty of (Marx’s) Philosophy,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 70 (Summer 2017).

Proudhon, to be sure, was a flawed individual with some very repulsive views on a few subjects – like all of us, he was a child of his time (and his bigotries, whether we like it or not, were all too reflective of the French working class of the time, his class). He had his periods of pessimism, his moments of hope. At times he fell below what we would expect, at others far above. In this he is like any other thinker, Marx included.

So let him be criticised for what he actually argued rather than practice invention. While we hope Marxists will rise to this challenge, we will not hold our breath.

Finally, we anarchists are not “Proudhonians” nor “Bakuninists” nor “Kropotkinites” and so do not hero-worship our comrades past. We criticise them when they are not consistent libertarians or when they are wrong. Proudhon, for all his flaws, defined much of what anarchism is, laid its foundations if you like, yet rather than attack these core elements of his theory, the likes of Draper concentrate on those few aspects (if actually accurate) which later anarchists reject or are (more often than not) simply false to paint a radically false picture of Proudhon and by implication anarchism *as such*.

Let them critique anarchism, not a straw man of their own liking – perhaps then we can start to build a socialist movement fit for the 21st century, one which learns from the past rather than repeating it. And let us simply reply to those who reference Schapiro or Draper with the words “You are not even wrong” – and move on to more fruitful tasks.

Proudhon’s Anti-Semitism

There is no denying that Proudhon held anti-Semitic views, the question is how central they are to his ideas. For some, they are fundamental to his ideology and so, rather than an anarchist, he was in fact a Nazi. A recent attempt to suggest this was published in *Anarchist Studies*, namely Dominique F. Miething’s “Review Article: Antisemitism in the anarchist tradition”.¹ Unsurprisingly, seeing Proudhon labelled a Nazi in the leading academic journal on Anarchism did make me write a short reply but unfortunately no space could be found for it.

What to make of such claims? As Schapiro noted, a few Nazis did try to claim Proudhon as a precursor but why

the word of a Nazi should be taken seriously is hard to grasp. That they would seek to appropriate Proudhon is understandable – Marx hated him, his reputation as a socialist could be used to bolster Nazi phoney radicalism, the lack of general awareness of his *actual* ideas, his traditional views on marriage, and so on – but why we should favour their interpretation over that of, say, Peter Kropotkin, Gustav Landauer, Rudolf Rocker,

Sam Dolgoff – all of whom Miething admits “battled antisemitism”² – and Daniel Guérin is difficult to grasp.

What is the argument? Miething notes that Frédéric Krier in his 2009 book *Sozialismus für Kleinbürger : Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Wegbereiter des Dritten Reiches* shows as “one of its core claims... the pervasiveness of anti-Jewish sentiment in Proudhon’s thought”, that his “research proves that the bulk of Proudhon’s anti-Jewish statements is not found in posthumously published material,

but in books published in his lifetime”, with this “culminating in a notebook entry, which Proudhon added on December 26, 1847: ‘The Jew is the enemy of humankind. This race must be sent back to Asia or be exterminated. By steel or by fire or by expulsion the Jew must disappear.’”³

As Miething admits, that entry was unknown until the 1960s when Proudhon’s *Carnets (Notebooks)* began to be published. To say that it came as a shock is an understatement. Unsurprisingly, this horrific rant is much quoted but often in misleading contexts. This warrants a digression.

The Marxist Internet Archive includes it with the comment “Proudhon’s privately expressed thoughts were elaborated on in the same year as this entry by his follower Alphonse Toussenel in his ‘Les Juifs, Rois de l’Epoque,’ *The Jews, Kings of the Era*.”⁴ Sadly, the minimal research needed to determine that Troussenel was a follower of Fourier rather than Proudhon and that his book was published two years *before* this rant was penned was not done. It also failed to note Marx on this work:

“Paris was flooded with pamphlets — *La dynastie Rothschild, Les juifs rois de l’epoque*, etc. — in which the rule of the finance

¹ *Anarchist Studies* 26:1 (Spring 2018).

² Miething, 108.

³ Miething, 105-6

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<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/proudhon/1847/jews.htm>

aristocracy was denounced and stigmatised with greater or less wit.”¹

Also unmentioned is that a few years earlier Engels had suggested that the “success” of a crude anti-Semitic text entitled *Rothschild I. King of the Jews* “shows how much this was an attack in the right direction” and that the “hatred against Rothschild and the money lords is enormous”.² But then, neither were publicly vocal on the evils of anti-Semitism – just as they failed to challenge Proudhon’s very public sexism. As such, the following claim is simply wishful thinking:

“Many of the left intellectuals Marx and Engels most strongly criticised had antisemitic or proto-antisemitic leanings:... the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the co-operative socialist Charles Fourier, the radical philosopher Eugen Dühring, the insurrectionist socialist Louis-Auguste Blanqui, and the revolutionary anarchist and pan-Slavist, Mikhail Bakunin. Marx’s and Engels’ criticisms of these and like-minded authors were directed in part at their anti-Jewish prejudices and more especially at the political and intellectual limitations of which these prejudices were symptomatic. These critiques indicate how actively and purposefully Marx and Engels confronted anti-Judaic and antisemitic currents running through the ‘left’.”³

Surely these writers *must* know that that Marx and Engels made *no* mention of these author’s anti-Semitism when they attacked them? I am sure they sincerely wish it were true, but no evidence is presented because none exists. Indeed, Marx published anti-Semitic reports in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (NRZ) during the 1848 Revolution as well as his own and Engels’ anti-Semitic comments⁴ – and it is worth noting “the stream of vituperation [of Jewish people] that runs for decades through the private correspondence of Engels and Marx.”⁵

Other authors state that Proudhon “was one of Karl Marx’s most important critics. His publicly expressed anti-Jewish sentiments were relatively mild, but his private sentiments were violent. The following entries

from Proudhon’s notebooks, which were published in 1961, are instructive”⁶ and the *Carnets* entry is provided.

The use of “instructive” as well as “entries” (rather than entry) are significant as the impression is given that this was a common feature of Proudhon’s notebooks. Yet, as one expert on Proudhon notes, expressions of anti-Semitism “remain rare in the *Carnets*: a dozen for all eleven Notebooks” and this entry is “moreover unique”. Proudhon, he adds, “did not hesitate to say publicly what he thought of the Jews”⁷ (or on any other subject, for that matter). So if this were more than a one-off rant he would have not hesitated to let the public know. What motivated this horrific rant is unknown (although his emotional state may be guessed as his mother had died ten days before) but given that this infamous entry starts with “Write an article against this race” and this never appeared, it would suggest that it was soon forgotten.

While not stopping that entry from being abhorrent, this context is required simply to have an accurate understanding of the situation. Taking of accuracy, it should also be noted that Proudhon was *not* “one of Karl Marx’s most important critics” – he never mentioned Marx publicly and privately only a few times (twice in letters and four times in his *Carnets*).⁸ He did write a letter to Marx rejecting his call to work together⁹ but this hardly qualifies – no more than suggesting “Marx is the tapeworm of socialism” (*Carnets*, 24 September 1847).

At least the source of this rightly infamous quote is acknowledged. The same cannot be said of others. Hal Draper sought to dismiss a comparison to Marx’s numerous private anti-Semitic comments by arguing that Proudhon “advocated a pure-and-simple Hitlerite extermination of the Jews” and “a *program* of government persecution of Jews in mass pogroms as well as physical extermination.” To equate the two is “vile slander.”¹⁰ Thus, a one-off rant in a private notebook, unread by anyone for over 100 years, becomes a “*program*”. Not that his readers would know that as Draper keeps its source hidden, presumably

¹ “The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850”, *MECW* 10: 51.

² *MECW* 6: 62-3.

³ Robert Fine and Philip Spencer, *Antisemitism and the left: On the return of the Jewish question* (Manchester University Press, 2017), 33.

⁴ Roman Rosdolsky, “Engels and the ‘Nonhistoric’ Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848”, *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, No. 18/19 (1991), 191-207 (“Appendix: The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and the Jews”).

⁵ Peter Fryer, “Engels: A Man of his Time”, *The Condition of Britain: essays on Frederick Engels* (Pluto Press: London / East Haven, CT, 1996), John Lea and Geoff Pilling (eds.), 141.

⁶ Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and its legacy* (Atlanta : John Knox Press, 1987), 71.

⁷ Pierre Hauptmann, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon : sa vie et sa pensée, 1809-1849* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1982), 758-9.

⁸ Robert L. Hoffman, *Revolutionary Justice: The Social and Political Theory of P.J. Proudhon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 100.

⁹ This included in *Property is Theft!* and often quoted in other works.

¹⁰ *Socialism From Below* (Alameda CA: Center for Socialist History, 2001), 156.

because few would consider it as constituting any sort of programme if they were aware of the facts.¹

Perhaps unsurprisingly Draper does not mention that a leading socialist of the period who did call *publicly* for the extermination of whole peoples, Engels (as published by Marx). Engels looked forward to when “the Austrian Germans and the Magyars will gain their freedom and *take a bloody revenge on the Slav barbarians*. The general war which will then break out will scatter this Slav

Sonderbund, and *annihilate all these small pig-headed nations even to their very names.*” The “next world war will not only cause reactionary classes and dynasties *to disappear from the face of the earth*, but also *entire reactionary peoples*. And that too is an advance.”² This call was no one-off:

“And one day we shall *take a bloody revenge on the Slavs* for this cowardly and base betrayal of the revolution... *the Czechs, the Croats and the Russians can be certain of the hatred of the whole of Europe and the bloodiest revolutionary war of the whole West against them... hatred of the Russians* was, and still is, the first revolutionary passion of the Germans; that since the revolution a hatred of the Czechs and the Croats has been added to this... we can only secure the revolution against these Slav peoples by the most decisive acts of terrorism... We shall fight ‘an implacable life-and-death struggle’ with Slavdom, which has betrayed the revolution; a war of annihilation and ruthless terrorism, not in the interests of Germany but in the interests of the revolution!”³

For Draper these peoples were “nationalities, or Balkanized fragments of nationalities. which were then

¹ This exchange, incidentally, took place in the same year Draper talked of Proudhon’s “Hitlerite form of anti-Semitism” (with quote) in his *The Two Souls of Socialism* and he did not bother to inform his readers of the source of this repulsive view there either. (Draper, 10)

² quoted by Rosdolsky, 86.

³ quoted by Rosdolsky, 85-6. It should be of note, surely, how often the Germanic peoples represented the interests of “civilisation” or “the revolution” for Engels, allowing him to justify and excuse their imperialism and colonialisation of other races – who should presumably express “*gratitude for the pains the Germans have taken to civilize the obstinate Czechs and Slovenes*” (quoted by Rosdolsky, 100).

⁴ Draper, 155. Draper skilfully avoids these genocidal quotes in spite of reading the articles they appear in and Rosdolsky’s

acting as stooges for pro-czarist Pan-Slavism” and so presumably deserved to be wiped out.⁴ Karl Kautsky, in contrast, had the honesty to admit that Engels “proclaimed that, except for the Poles, the Slavs were all by nature counter-revolutionary, and therefore they had to be fought not merely in the present situation, which found them in the camp of the counter-revolution. No, they had to be *exterminated*. Brotherhood with them was precluded; the only thing to do was to fight against them until they were annihilated.”⁵

the anarchist critique of Marxism is not based on the personal bigotries of Marx and Engels. That this is primarily the typical Marxist one of anarchism *is* of note – and can be dismissed with a simple *people in glass houses should not throw stones.*

Ironically, almost everything Marxists denounce Proudhon for can be found in Marx and Engels – even the support for slave-holding States in wars (although it must be stressed that was *not* Proudhon’s position during the American Civil War⁶). Engels favoured America against Mexico in the 1846-8 war over Texas because it “was waged simply and solely *in the interests of civilization*”. However, this “example was even less cogent as far as the argument about ‘civilization’ was concerned. The immigrants from the United States who rose against Mexico in

1836 were *planters, owners of Negro slaves*, and their main reason for revolting was that *slavery had been abolished in Mexico in 1829*... These features of the Mexican-American conflict show now inappropriate, in fact perverse, was Engels’ illustration.” He also supported “the energetic Yankees” who had “snatched [‘magnificent California’] from the *lazy Mexicans*, who did not know what to do with it.”⁷

I could go on but there is very little point as the anarchist critique of Marxism is not based on the personal bigotries of Marx and Engels. That this is primarily the typical Marxist one of anarchism *is* of note – and can be dismissed with a simple *people in glass houses should not throw stones.*

study. The orthodox can be consoled that “Rosdolsky has produced an account which completely distorts the evidence.” (Hal Draper and E Haberkern, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution Volume 5: War and Revolution* [Delhi: Aakar Books, 2011], 190).

⁵ quoted by Rosdolsky, 90.

⁶ “Proudhon on Race and the Civil War: Neither Washington nor Richmond”, *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 60 (Summer 2013)

⁷ Rosdolsky, 159-60. Draper does not dwell on Engels’ clearly racist statement, simply suggesting it “would be a digression here to demonstrate why what Engels was getting at was not an early variant of what came to be called ‘Social Imperialism’”. (Draper and Haberkern, 71)

After this somewhat lengthy aside, I return to Miething. There is a contradiction in his suggestion that Proudhon's anti-Semitism is "omnipresent" and "the pervasiveness of anti-Jewish sentiment in Proudhon's thought" while, at the same time, acknowledging that these are "seemingly occasional hostile remarks." *Property is Theft!* has a single anti-Semitic remark out of over 700 pages. Including everything else I've read by and about him, the number increases but it is still less than 20 out of thousands of pages. If, as Kier does, you go through all of Proudhon's voluminous writings you could produce a pamphlet of quotes: but compared to – in the Lacroix edition – the 26 volumes of Proudhon's *Oeuvres Complètes*, 8 volumes of posthumously published writings and the 14 volumes of correspondence, plus the hundreds of pages of his notebooks and other writings, it would small. Yes, they would span his whole life, but they would still be "occasional" by any objective measure.

Miething states that "most all element central to antisemitism could have been detected from early on" and presents a list of works. It is useful to evaluate a few of the claims to indicate their worth.¹

In terms of "the association of Jews with money, speculation and exploitation", he references *What is Property?* in which there is *one* sentence that states "ancient and modern Jews" – amongst others – practice theft "by cheating... by swindling... by abuse of trust, and... by games and lotteries."² This sentence, perhaps needless to say, is irrelevant to his argument and his analysis of how exploitation occurs under capitalism.

The same can be said for the other work indicated, *Manuel du Spéculateur à la Bourse* (1857), which mentions Jews twice in over 500 pages, once in the way suggested. What is more important – a single anti-Semitic remark made in passing or the many pages on workers' associations that book? I think sensible readers would agree it is the latter and reflects the aim of the work. Significantly, this work did not suggest "all authority... as being under secret Jewish control"³ but rather that "[i]n a society based on the principle of inequality of conditions, government, whatever it may be, feudal, theocratic, bourgeois, imperial, is reduced, in the last analysis, to a system of insurance of the class which exploits and owns against that which is exploited and owns nothing."⁴ This repeats a similar class analysis of the Stare made in other works, including *System of*

*Economic Contradictions and General Idea of the Revolution.*⁵

As for "a belief in Jews as inventors of constitutions, as protectors of political authority", this appears to refer to Proudhon's discussion of the 1848 Constitution in *Confessions of a Revolutionary*. It is an *interesting* take on it, given what Proudhon suggests that the origins of political authority are in religious authority and uses the Biblical account of the history of ancient Israel as evidence. Is referencing the Old Testament anti-Semitic? This chapter is in *Property is Theft!* so readers can make their own judgment on the matter.⁶

In terms of "a *Völkisch*, racist and xenophobe notion of citizenship", this is hard to square with Proudhon's comment that there "will no longer be nationality, no longer fatherland, in the political sense of the words: they will mean only places of birth. Whatever a man's race or colour, he is really a native of the universe; he has citizen's rights everywhere."⁷

As is well known, the Nazis took their inspiration for their race laws from the United States. Proudhon, discussing race in America, publicly stating the need to "free the blacks and give them citizenship" for the "federative principle here appears closely linked to those of the social equality of races and the balance of fortunes. The political problem, the economic problem and the problem of races are one and the same problem, to be solved by the same theory and the same jurisprudence." He opposed calls to deport the Slaves to Africa, stating they had "acquired the right of use and of habitation on American soil". Moreover, "the principle of equality before the law must have as a corollary, 1) the principle of equality of races, 2) the principle of equality of conditions, 3) that of ever more approached, although never achieved, equality of fortunes" In short, "must not all Anglo-Saxons, those of the North and those of the South, receive them in comradeship and welcome them as fellow citizens, equals and brothers? Now the consequence of that measure will be granting to blacks hitherto kept in servitude, along with freedmen, equal political rights." In addition, economic reform was necessary and so it was "prudent and just that [the American State] also bestows upon them land and ownership."⁸ It is doubtful that any Nazi would approve of any of this or his hope that races intermingle and interbreed.

Given this sample, I would say that the notion it is "clear that the French thinker's seemingly occasional

¹ Miething, 106. It should be noted that some of his list reflect popular opinions/bigotries of the time and in this Proudhon was reflecting his rural Catholic upbringing (as with his views on marriage and women).

² *What is Property?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 199.

³ Miething, 106.

⁴ *Manuel du spéculateur a la Bourse* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1857), 138.

⁵ *Property is Theft!*, 222, 226, 566, 571.

⁶ "Confessions of a Revolutionary", *Property is Theft!*, 429-30.

⁷ "General Idea of the Revolution," 597.

⁸ "Du Principe fédératif", *Oeuvres complètes de P.-J. Proudhon* (Paris: Lacroix, 1868) 8: 228, 232, 233, 234, 231.

hostile remarks agglomerate into a fully-fledged antisemitic worldview, undergirding everything from his critique of authority to his eventual embrace of patriotism” is hard to maintain.¹ Besides, with the popular prejudices of the time, there was no reason for Proudhon to hide his views. After all, he had no qualms about exposing his sexism nor his views on subjects – like Poland – where he took an unpopular position. If, as suggested, Proudhon’s anti-Semitism was a defining feature of his views then he left his readers with only occasional and in passing remarks to work this out.

Simply put, you could read most of Proudhon’s works – especially his most famous – and not come across a single anti-Semitic (or anti-feminist, for that matter) remark (if they were removed, it would not be noticed nor impact on the arguments made). This is not to excuse them but simply to put them in context. For the actual Nazi, anti-Semitism is violent, fanatical and open. Nazis are aggressively and obsessively anti-Semitic and cannot address any topic without returning again and again to how the Jews are to blame for whatever is wrong in society. Such remarks are not passing nor limited to a sentence or two in a book of hundreds of pages, a few letters or a handful of entries in private notebooks. The two are hardly equivalent.

None of this is to suggest that Proudhon was not anti-Semitic. He was and this is shown by his occasional public and private remarks. However, these repulsive views are not fundamental to his ideas and can be ignored without impacting his argument. As such, his politics and programme cannot be considered anti-Semitic – despite his personal bigotries. The latter are in contradiction to the former, meaning that the best of Proudhon can be used to critique the worse.

Proudhon’s anti-Semitism, like his sexism, reflected the culture of his time. He used many of the words, expressions, assumptions and stereotypes then commonplace. However, whilst this is acknowledged for others it is usually not for Proudhon. So, we read of how “the reader is subjected to excerpts taken out of context which depend for their effect on Marx and Engels’ frequent resort to the kinds of racial and ethnic terminology which were common in their day *and therefore are no indication of the specific views of the writer*”, that their works “are full of the language which was typical of the period” and how Rosdolsky’s

comments were “a reaction to the language of the NRZ which meant something quite different in 1948 than it did one hundred years later.”² If only that author had applied this position consistently...

Suffice to say, Proudhon’s personal bigotries played no role in the subsequent development of anarchism (needless to say, a single, private, unrepeated and unread until the 1960s rant played *none*). Ultimately, I take the judgement of the likes of Gustav Landauer, Daniel Guérin and Rudolf Rocker over that of a few members of the Nazi party and those whose claims are less than convincing upon investigation.

The Organisation of Credit

Proudhon is often portrayed as a one-trick pony for whom credit reform was the be-all and end-all of his ideas. This is nonsense and shows a shocking ignorance of his ideas (being ignorant of Proudhon’s works – or anarchism’s – has never given anyone pause before they expound upon them). This can be seen in Meithing’s “Review Essay”:

“Neumann and Massing were among the first after Marx to point to Proudhon’s fixation on the sphere of circulation when criticising the workings of capitalism, and that he lacked an understanding that exploitation happens through the generation of surplus value in the sphere of production.”³

Yet before 1848, credit played no great role in his ideas. A chapter on it appeared in the second volume of *System of Economic Contradictions* but the focus of that work was a critique of capitalism with repeated, albeit passing, references to “the organisation of labour” as a goal. This was seen as a solution to numerous issues related to *production* – the division of labour, collective force, exploitation and wage-labour. This built upon his earlier analysis in *What is Property?* which explained how exploitation occurred because the boss appropriated the “collective force” workers produced *within production*. To suggest that Proudhon did not understand that surplus value was generated “in the sphere of production” simply shows an ignorance of his ideas.

This can be seen in Neumann’s work, whom Meithing quotes indirectly. Yes, Neumann did suggest that “[i]n singling predatory capital, National Socialism treads in the footsteps of Proudhon, who, in his *Idée générale de*

¹ Meithing, 106.

² Draper and Haberkern, 189, 204, 209.

³ Meithing, 106.

la Révolution au dix-neuvième siècle, demanded the liquidation of the Banque de France and its transformation into an institution of ‘public utility’ together with a lowering of interest to one-half or one-fourth of 1 per cent”. Yet that work argued for much more, including “Capitalist and landlord exploitation stopped everywhere, wage-labour abolished” by means of workers associations in which “all positions are elective” and where “the collective force, which is a product of the community, ceases to be a source of profit to a small number of managers and... becomes the property of all the workers” while “the division of labour can no longer be a cause of degradation for the worker.”¹

Neumann proclaimed that “National Socialist anti-capitalism has always exempted productive capital, that is, industrial capital, from its denunciations and solely concentrated on ‘predatory’ (that is, banking) capital.”² If he were better acquainted with Proudhon’s ideas he would have known that the *General Idea of the Revolution* repeated his critique of industrial capital which had begun in *What is Property?* and continued in *System of Economic Contradictions* as well as the alternative of association. That Meithing references Neumann suggests he is equally ignorant on how Proudhon’s critique of capitalism began *within* and extended *from* the workplace.

As noted, 1848 saw a change in rhetoric with the raising of the need for “the organisation of credit”. This reason for this is no great mystery – the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution meant that practice came to the fore rather than analysis. The “organisation of credit” was viewed *as the means*, the “organisation of labour” remained the end. Proudhon makes this very point in his letter to Louis Blanc in the early days of Revolution:

“Your plan to organise national workshops contains an authentic idea, one that I endorse, for all my criticisms... all the workshops are owned by the nation, even though they remain and must always remain free... By virtue of its over-arching mandate, the Exchange Bank is the organisation of labour’s greatest asset... it should then be my honour to put before you a project relating both to the course to be followed and to the new form of society to be defined and created among the workers.”³

For Proudhon, rejecting organisation of labour by the State, *labour has to organise itself*. You cannot predetermine the actual forms of a free society, they need to grow organically based on real needs and interests. All you can do is present the principles – democratic workers associations, federalism, etc. – and a means of achieving it. Rejecting revolutionary means (expropriation), there is only one way of doing so – the organisation of credit to enable workers to buy their means of production, allowing associations (co-operatives) to form, displacing capitalist firms and ending wage-labour.

So much for “the ‘missing link’... between Proudhon’s approach to economic questions and National Socialist ideology – specifically, the link between the French thinker’s highly moralising critique of ‘interest’ and the Nazi party’s antisemitic call for the ‘breaking of interest slavery’ as laid out in its twenty-five-point Program of 1920.”⁴ Yet rather than reflecting Proudhon’s anti-Semitic tendencies, as Meithing suggests, the “organisation of credit” was seen as the means to achieve the “organisation of labour” required to abolish wage-labour and exploitation, address the negative effects of the division of labour, and so on. In other words, achieve a transformation of production.

Now, you can say this was an optimistic strategy, that capitalism cannot be reformed away so easily, but it is a strategy based on an awareness that exploitation occurred in production by means of wage-labour and that it was to be abolished by association. Proudhon was very clear that under capitalism the workers have “sold their arms and parted with their liberty” for “the capitalist... has paid nothing for that immense power which results from the union of workers and the convergence and harmony of their efforts... by their formation into a workshop” and so “[u]nder the regime of property, the surplus of labour, essentially collective, passes entirely... to the proprietor.”⁵ Indeed, no one who had *read* him could claim otherwise.

In short, the premise of the claims made in this “review essay” are demonstrably false – easily so. Nazism no more trod “in the footsteps of Proudhon” in economic terms than when he called for “the free and universal commingling of races under the law of contract only.”⁶

Proudhon’s critique of capitalism began *within* and extended *from* the workplace

¹ “General Idea of the Revolution”, 596, 586.

² Franz L. Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), 320.

³ *Property is Theft!*, 296-7.

⁴ Meithing, 106. Significantly, Meithing does not mention the any of the 25 points which are completely opposed to Proudhon’s views – nor does he say whether its demands of “nationalisation” of trusts, land reform and abolition of

“unearned” (non-labour) incomes should also be considered as “antisemitic calls”, perhaps for obvious reasons as they are likewise plundered insincerely from general socialist demands to gain popular support. Needless to say, the Nazi regime *privatised* the nationalised firms it had inherited from the Weimar Republic, showing the worth of these points.

⁵ “System of Economic Contradictions”, *Property is Theft!*, 212, 253.

⁶ “General Idea of the Revolution”, 596.

1840-1847: The Critique of Property

“If, then, I demonstrate that political economy... is nothing but an organisation of privilege and misery, I shall have proved thereby that it contains by implication the promise of an organisation of labour and equality... to unfold the system of economic contradictions is to lay the foundations of universal association; to show how the products of collective labour come out of society is to explain how it will be possible to make them return to it”

– *System of Economic Contradictions*

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon played a key role in the development of anarchism as a socio-economic theory, not least its name. This he did in *What is Property?*, a work which saw him proclaim “I am an Anarchist” and present an analysis of property and exploitation which remains at the heart of all genuine socialist thought. Between this work and 1847, he laid much of the foundations of anarchist theory.

Proudhon’s first two *Memoirs on Property* (*What is Property?*, 1840; *Letter to Blanqui*, 1841) were translated by Benjamin R. Tucker in the 1870s. We publish extracts from the *Third* (*Warning to Proprietors*, 1842). While not as ground-breaking as the first two, it is still of note. The publication of his third *Memoir* saw Proudhon, as with the first, arrested and we include extracts from his defence in court.

Then we include the Conclusion of *System of Economic Contradictions* (1846), a book better known via Marx’s *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) than its own merits. This work has never been fully available in English (Tucker only translated the first of its two volumes) and it would be a useful task to produce a complete modern edition. Suffice to say, reading shows a very different work to the one Marx presented.

We then present the marginal notes Proudhon wrote in the copy of *The Philosophy of Poverty* Marx sent him. This is, we think, the first time these have been printed in full in English. These are of interest as they show how unimpressed Proudhon was by Marx’s so-called critique – indeed, many of them simply express disbelief at Marx’s claims and that, in Proudhon’s view, they simply repeat what he himself had argued. Unsurprisingly, he did not think much of Marx’s work. He wrote in his *Notebooks* that “*Economic contradictions* – All who have spoken of it so far have done so with supreme bad faith, envy or stupidity. Ch. Marx, Molinari, Vidal, *Univers religieux...*” (*Carnet*, 20 November 1847) A letter saw him, accurately, suggest it was “a libel” and “a tissue of crudities, slanders, falsifications, and plagiarism” (*Correspondance* [Paris: Lacroix, 1875] II: 267-8)

Given Proudhon’s exasperated tone, it is perhaps unsurprising that he never responded publicly Marx – he assumed that no one familiar with his book would take it seriously. Unfortunately, he did not anticipate that this obscure German communist would overtake him in socialist circles and produce followers who would never consider reading his work for Marx had uttered his verdict. Proudhon was also working *La propriété vaincue. Théorie de l’Association Universelle* which was never published. So he had better things to do than reply to a bad-faith polemic by an obscure German Communist. Then the February Revolution broke out, giving him something more important to do – turning theory into practice, and critiques into solutions.

Warning to the Proprietors

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

1842

Letter To M. Victor Considérant

Editor of LA PHALANGE

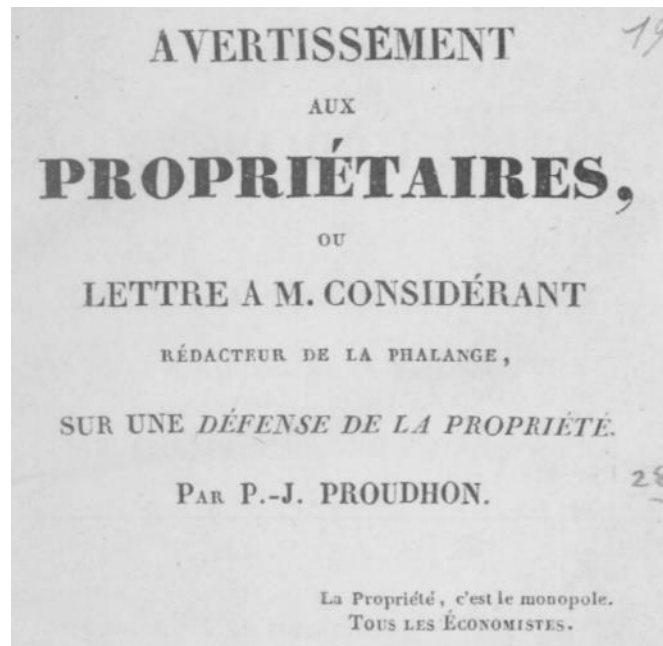
On A Defence of Property

Monsieur Editor

I have read the pamphlet entitled: *Défense du fourièrisme, Réponse à MM. Proudhon, Lamennais, Reybaud, Louis Blanc, etc.*, and I am pleased with this publication, the author, despite the aberrations of his logic and the injustice of his reproaches, showing himself almost always a friend of progress and full of zeal for science and truth.

So I say to you in all confidence, monsieur Editor, that this Fourierist is one of us; a little sooner, a little later, you will see him in the ranks of equality: there is too much fairness and intelligence in him for the God of free men not to treat him according to his mercy and let him die an unbeliever.

However, I regret that from motives of which I am ignorant, but no doubt very respectable, your defender thought it necessary to remain anonymous. Why, like those heroes of a novel who suddenly appear to avenge the honour of a beauty, does he throw himself, visor lowered, without colours or motto that would make him recognisable, into this furious melee where at this moment the destinies of France and perhaps of the world are being decided? Why did he not at least reveal himself to the one he chose as his premier adversary? I would not have betrayed his confidence, and, however much enemies he wants us to be, his secret would have died in my heart. However, in spite of this discourteous reserve for which I would have the right to punish him, I will be content to counter his attacks and will not strike him: for, who knows? perhaps my critic is one of my friends; perhaps, if I knew him, I would prefer to win him over than to sacrifice him to my cause; perhaps finally... I have not forgotten the deplorable story of Tancred and Clorinde, and how, believing he fought a



pagan, the unfortunate crusader killed his mistress. Also, by the mildness of the argument, the lack of systematisation in the ideas, a certain flux of sentiment and style, and some traits of feminine anger, I believe I have recognised a woman in my black knight...

I admit however that I hold a grudge against him on one point: he seems to believe and he says that *I hate* all those I attack, all the representatives of the ideas and principles that I combat. What do you say to that, monsieur Editor? Your

anonymous neophyte has not been planted in good Comtois soil, and does not know what it is to be a highlander of Jura. Me, hate someone, great God! because I am irritated by what I read and what I see; because I characterise, according to the degree of my feeble perception, ideas and acts, persons and things! It might as well be said that the doctor hates the patient, because he defines the illness. Certainly, I regard as very fortunate and I admire the one who, carrying the *speculum* into the depths of our ignominy, preserves his serenity and his phlegm; as for me, I declare it, I would not believe I would live and I would think little of myself if I resembled him. And I appeal to you, general of the societarian army, a man whom the imbecility of the century has driven to despair, what would you make of a soldier who marched into combat singing a priapeia, carrying the thyrsus of Bacchus as a sword, and the mantle of Epicurus as his breastplate? *A la guerre comme à la guerre*, says the old Galois proverb¹: when the enemy murders and insults you, is that the moment to say to him, with outstretched arms: Brother, friend!

But, without exaggerating anything, let us look at the facts, and judge the discourse.

¹ In time of crisis, we can act accordingly. (*Black Flag*)

If I read the journals, if I open a magazine, if I browse through some pamphlet from one of our political eagles, the first thing that strikes me is this clamour of blissful indignation against the *false doctrines*, the *dissolving doctrines*, the *execrable doctrines* that seduce the people and put society in peril. Why then are these doctrines of perversity not opposed by better instructions? Does governmental truth no longer have apostles? Would right-thinking men be badly paid? Or is the chest of secret funds empty? What! there exists a true doctrine, a salutary doctrine, a holy and immortal doctrine: a doctrine which is not that of constitutional monarchy, which we no longer want, nor that of the republic, which died on 9 thermidor; nor that of the legitimacy¹, which the people have twice condemned: and this doctrine, which everyone believes and which no one discovers, the government, far from seeking it, dreads it, the privileged curse it in advance and raise a hue and cry against those who speak of it! Indeed, the phalansterians have blasphemers and no judges; the communists, like the Christians of old, are declared enemies of the human race, probably because they are poor of heart as well as poor in goods; the egalitarians especially are abhorred, as exterminators of privilege and despisers of heroes and geniuses. Against these novelties there are anathemas and insults, but no reasons. Why then do the aged priests of fallen religions, why do the fossilised teachers of *pure morals* and *sound philosophy*, and *imperishable right*, disdain to join the fray and contest with us for the salvation of the people and the glory of God? Why do the Guizots, the Cousins, the Villemaings, and their innumerable boarders, instead of battling for portfolios and positions, refuse to set out in search of the new order and to study the true discipline of nations?

I search in the numerous categories of official persons, I traverse from high to low the hierarchical ladder of corporations and functionaries; everywhere I find men who consume and who declaim, but not one who contemplates and thinks. Who are those who work to enlighten the people and to unravel the chaos of the social and philosophical sciences? Are they our philosophers, greedy, shameless and pyrrhonian? Are

¹ Royalists who from 1830 onward supported the claims of the senior line of the house of Bourbon to be the legitimate king of France. They opposed not only republicans but also the other monarchist factions: the Orleanists (royalist adherents of the house of Bourbon-Orléans, who recognised Louis-Philippe as king of France after the July Revolution of 1830) and the Bonapartists (who favoured a restoration of the French Empire). (*Black Flag*)

² A priest as enlightened as he was pious said to me: "Why do you harass us? We are surrounded by a circle of fire: we cannot express a political thought without being immediately accused of conspiracy and intrigue; the memory of our former power renders us suspect to all opinions and confines us to our ceremonies." – "It is necessary," I said to him, "to return to the ancient traditions; we must continue the work of the first Church, and die, if necessary, a second time for charity

they our priests, occupied, as in the heyday of their past, with indulgent nonsense, having Christian charity as their only social conscience, as if the precept of charity was a law of political organisation? Are they our magistrates, these stoic continuers of all the cowardice, all the baseness, all the follies of parliaments? Are they our academics, so backward, so fawning, so silly? Are they our journalists, these little tyrants of opinion, *whose name alone is enough to arouse laughter*? Are they our deputies, these praetorians of the constitutional regime, sellers of ministers and secret funds? Is it the government, finally, the most hypocritical, the most perverse, the most all-consuming, the most anti-national that ever was?

It must be recognised; it is a profoundly abnormal thing, a scourge for society, that preaching and teaching should pass from legitimate teachers to men without a mission and without authority; that I, a poor worker, who is neither deputy, nor magistrate, nor academic, nor journalist, nor priest; that a monsieur Considérant, an artillery captain, who should be at his cannons, or running a factory, or serving a railroad; that a Boyer, who could have lived from his type-setting without worrying about organisation and labour courts; that so many others finally who do not follow their trade, and meddle in that which does not concern them, we occupy ourselves with remaking the world, and are so bold as to touch the hand of justice or the staff of command? But, once again, whose fault is that? Is it not those *shepherds of the people*, as the good Homer said, who pasture us without bread and without work; these bureaucratic administrators, buried in their papers, incapable even of organising the festivals of monopoly and storing lanterns; these judges, who seem determined only to condemn vagabonds and listen to lawyers; this clergy without acquired doctrine², these scholars who know nothing of what it is most important for us to know; all these hypnotisers of the political press, who want to bind the giant with a hundred arms under a mesh to catch butterflies? – stir yourself then, Briareos!³

And yet, see how the malevolence of our happy-medium [*juste-milieu*] bourgeois grows every day and is

and justice." – "Would to God," he replied, "that it would take only our lives to give the world order and rest! But do you not see that far from rallying minds, we would increase the fire; that instead of martyrdom, we would reap only hatred and ridicule? Proletarians, we once begot liberty to you; march now in your strength, and when you have overcome, remember your spiritual fathers."

He could have added that the high ecclesiastical dignitaries, united in outlook with the men of power, would never allow the lower clergy to follow their generous and patriotic instincts. Thus the people no longer have anyone to rely on but themselves alone...

³ In Greek mythology, Briareus was one of three Hecatoncheires, monstrous giants each with fifty heads and one hundred arms. (*Black Flag*)

encouraged; how the greed of the monopolist advances more brazenly; how power and its accomplices give an impetus to their counter-reformist projects. – “Let us not be afraid,” they say. “let us not be afraid; the phalansterians are ridiculous, the communists despised, the egalitarians impossible; the last of the Saint-Simonians have just been lost by uniting with the Great Whore. Hurrah! Death to the revolutionaries! Woe to the vanquished!”

And you, apostle of a new faith, you hoped to make a spark of the sacred fire penetrate into these rotten and worm-eaten consciences! What have you achieved in the last fifteen years, by your reverences, your kindnesses, your pious frauds, your protests of preserving everything by renewing everything?... No, no, this is not the way to conduct a revolution. Recall

the words of Danton, the day after the 10th of August, when insurgent France demanded of its citizens a counsel which would save the homeland: “*We must,*” cried Danton with an exterminating gesture, “*we must make the aristocrats fear.*” And three weeks later, the workers of Maillard responded to the voice of Danton. Danton did not warn; he struck. Well! today, if we want to escape a new September, we must speak truth to the proprietors.

I will, monsieur Editor, quickly examine, by reducing them to a small number of points, the criticisms of your anonymous. You have taken advantage of the defence, you will hear the reply: and I count on your fidelity to inform your readers, and all those in general who are interested in these debates.

Theory of Property

3. – That since property destroys itself, it is irrational, from a practical point of view, to want to defend it.

Property is bad, but property destroys itself; such is, under the hand of Providence, the universal law of human affairs: *crime and punishment, action and reaction.*

But anonymous claims to evade this law: with an affectation of positivism as contrary to good philosophy as to Fourierist opinion, he confines himself to practice, as if practice, separated from theory, were anything else than routine. He says, on page 20:

“We will readily grant that society is moving of its own accord towards the extinction of property, provided that it is admitted that the goal is still a few centuries away from us, and that this perspective will not change in any way, for many years to come, alas! the present situation of men and things.”

If the hitherto unobserved movement which is carrying us towards a state of association where property will exist only in name and where absolute equality will exist in conditions and fortunes; if, I say, this movement is real, what does the critic reproach me for? Is it for asking for the acceleration of this movement? But in this I am only conforming to the will of nature, and it is the partisans of the *status quo* who disobey Providence. Society makes an effort to free itself from the past: what keeps it in its old swaddling clothes is force. Stop defending privilege and monopoly, let work and freedom act; then, if you cannot foresee it, wait for the result. Well! what is it that angers me, if not seeing rulers and the privileged agree to ward off fate, and abuse the public power to prevent equality from blossoming?

Would I have been wrong to conclude from the imminent and inevitable abolition of property its contingent existence, its entirely relative value, and hence in its absolute impossibility? But I could not confuse the transitory fact with the immutable right, the means with the end, one of the thousand phenomena of the work of organisation, that has been operating for four thousand years, with this organisation itself. It was in the conditions of the establishment of order within societies that there was a proprietary period, but it does not follow from this that property is eternal. If there is a contradiction somewhere, it is on the side of anonymous who, seeing in property a normal institution, a principle of absolute truth and of unalterable duration, nevertheless admits that it fades and disappears. That alone can alter and perish which lacks sanction and rule.

Finally, despite the incessant degradation of the right of property, would one regard as risky this consequence of my first two memoirs, that in the natural system of social organisation, a system that I would willingly call *human families*, the principle of property cannot be admitted, and is of no scientific value? and would one want to transform here the *fact* into *right*, under the pretext that no fact exists which does not have its reason and its legitimacy? But once again this would be to attribute to the first effort of nature a character of perfection which it does not have and which it is itself only destined to produce; it would be to want to eternalise the bubblings of chaos. Yes, property was legitimate, but it was as a preparation for order, not as a definitive institution. The progress of civilisation condemns it to die; Providence and humanity are justified.

According to this, how can we conceive that anonymous accuses me of placing myself outside of nature, of building a tower in the air, of denying the traditions of peoples and of cursing the attempts of the legislators? This is how he formulates his conclusions:

“In summary, it seems to us beyond dispute that any philosopher who works for a better organisation, present and practical, must draw the materials for it from current society, and that property is the most indispensable of these materials.”

I take note of these words, which seem to be inspired, monsieur Editor, by your excellent pamphlet on *General Policy*; and I am not afraid to predict that he who wrote them, and his honourable patron, and soon all Fourierists, will be led by the consequences of their own principles to abjure their whims of property and inequality. Yes, you yourself, monsieur Editor, sooner or later you will desert the phalanstery: always defend your flag, indulge in tireless propaganda, fight for property, preach both free love and the family, found colonies, organise series of contrasting groups, before five years, if you wish to understand, you will be freed from this phalansterian limbo where your poor soul languishes, so lively in its allure, so well made for exact and rigorous science, but so miserably subjugated by the hallucinations of an ignoramus and a lunatic.

To return to what concerns me, where did anonymous see that in my research on property I rejected this same property as a means of transition and organisation? How does he know, for example, that the most disastrous rights of proprietors, tenant farming, renting, heredity in all degrees, gifts while alive and after death, inheritance in official positions, payments of annuities, etc., etc., are not, in my opinion, the natural auxiliaries which have been given to us to arrive at order, to combat property and to establish equilibrium itself? Alas! it must be said, we are still too young to do without these things! and

4. – That to reform property is to destroy it.

“Currently,” says anonymous, “property is abusive, despotic and jealous; the recent owners even outdid the old ones in this respect.” He draws from this the conclusion that property calls for a reform, but not a destruction. This is what he repeats in twenty places in his pamphlet.

This is how the instinct of self-preservation misleads the best minds and deceives them. Property is one of those things whose existence, to express myself like the

this is what best demonstrates that our whole civilisation is still impregnated with barbarism; but does it follow that we must condemn ourselves to an eternal childhood? When the organised being awakens to life, it draws its first nourishment from a special source prepared for it alone; but now the plant grows, the child grows and becomes stronger; immediately the cotyledons fall, the breast withers and dries up. Do you not see that property is exhausted, and that its vigorous sons demand stronger nourishment?

In the second edition of my first memoir, I have written the programme of egalitarian organisation in the following terms, which I submit for the appreciation of the anonymous critic:

“To find a system of absolute equality, in which all current institutions, minus property, or the sum of the abuses of property, not only can find a place, but are themselves means of equality: individual freedom, division of powers, public prosecution, jury, administrative and judicial organisation, unity and integrity in education, marriage, family, direct and indirect line inheritance, right of sale and exchange, right to make a will, and even right of the first-born; – a system which, better suited, ensures the formation of capital and maintains general emulation; which, from a superior perspective, explains, corrects and completes the theories of association proposed up to this day, from Plato and Pythagoras, to Babeuf, Saint-Simon and Fourier; – a system finally which, serving itself as a means of transition, is immediately applicable.”¹

This programme, where neither *passions*, nor *attractions*, nor *harmony* are spoken of, will no doubt seem very meagre to a Fourierist; but I defy anyone to reproach it with being outside the conditions of nature and society.

school, is not *real* or *substantial*, but *formal*; in other words, property is not an *entity*, but a *formality*. To *reform* a thing whose whole existence is in the *form* is to replace it with another, it is to destroy it.

M. Blanqui had already spoken to me of reforming property without destroying it, and I had replied:

“M. Blanqui recognises that there are a host of abuses in property: for my part, I call property exclusively the sum (or the principle) of these

¹ Heredity by itself is not a cause of social inequality; it only becomes so through the effect of monopoly and the right of property. Heredity is a *mode of transmission from the dead to the living*: now, according to existing law, fathers *arbitrarily* transmit to their children a *privilege*, while according to natural right they must *legitimately* transmit to them a

legitimate title. I will demonstrate, by the most exact calculations, that in the system of egalitarian distribution and organisation, heredity can be maintained without resulting in either an increase or a decrease in advantages for anyone, or in a fragmentation in agricultural exploitation and industrial production.

abuses. For one as for the other, property is a polygon whose angles must be knocked down: but, the operation done, M. Blanqui maintains that the figure will always be a polygon, whereas I claim that this figure will be a circle.”

Give a spherical wax mass a conical or pyramidal shape, it will still be wax: the substance is retained, but the sphericity is destroyed. Similarly, for the citizen who works, produces and consumes, uses and abuses, there are two great orders of facts which it is important not to confuse: the *goods* which he uses, and the *mode* or the *right* according to which he uses them. Whether the holder is a proprietor, a slave or a monk, the essence of the goods for him does not change; only the mode of enjoyment and exploitation varies. Here it is property, there it is renting, elsewhere community. Imagine a mode that is none of these. Will you say that this mode is *property*? With no less reason you could claim that it is *community* or *renting*.

Will you now say that I am quibbling, and should you be treated like those children terrified by masks? Let us return to the facts and we will agree later.

Whether the holder is a proprietor, a slave or a monk, the essence of the goods for him does not change; only the mode of enjoyment and exploitation varies. Here it is property, there it is renting, elsewhere community. Imagine a mode that is none of these.

“Property,” says anonymous, “is today *abusive, despotic, jealous, capricious, ignorant, immoral.*” – I say no worse.

“It must be made social, beneficial, accessible to all; discipline it and make it more fruitful.” – I ask nothing better.

“For this, fragmented work, selfish competition, arbitrary distribution must be replaced by unitary exploitation, solidarity and a better distribution of products.” – That is what I never stop saying.

“Then,” he adds, “you will no longer declaim against property.” – No doubt, I reply, because then property will no longer exist.

Let us conclude from all the forgoing that property, like everything that pertains to social institutions, is an organic and embryonic nature, so to speak; that in developing it becomes

transmuted; that, just like the human foetus, in turn worm, fish, lizard, finally man, the social order is produced through a series of transformations, the first of which contains the rudiments of the others, although it differs essentially from them, and the last presupposes the preceding ones, although it does not resemble them any more.¹

5. – Exposition of Adam Smith’s formula on equality in exchanges

For anyone who reflect upon what is happening, it thereby remains proven, it seems to me:

1. That administrative law tends to absorb civil law;
2. That individual property, always deforming itself, passes to a particular state of *possession*, of which history offers some analogues, but no examples.
3. That thanks to this double progress, an imperceptible levelling takes place in conditions and fortunes.

When the facts speak, the true philosopher accepts their decision and knows only to submit. But equality of conditions is something so marvellous, so eccentric to our prejudices, that at the sight of it most readers recoil and, without taking into account the demonstrations, whether historic or economic, fall back onto arguments of impossibility capable, before analysis, of halting the

mind for a moment, but which soon disappear in the face of criticism. “It is absurd,” exclaims anonymous, “to put Rachel at the level of the last onlooker; it is absurd to value an agate as much as a pebble; it is the whim of opinion that fixes the value of things; it is the inequality of faculties which causes the inequality of fortunes.”

With this way of reasoning, I would refute the princes of modern philosophy, Newton and Descartes. I would say to the first: Your gravitation is a contradiction in terms; for if, for example, the moon continually *falls* on the earth, how is it that it has not yet approached it by more than half a diameter? If, on the contrary, it is carried away by centrifugal force, how does it not disappear into the depths of space? Finally, if the centripetal force and the centrifugal force, equal to each other, act simultaneously on our satellite, nothing can

¹ Everything that has just been said on the transformation or transmutation of property, and on the mode of transition from this phase to the next, was indicated in my first memoir: it

was up to the alarmists to see it and understand it, before sounding the tocsin.

result from this double action but immobility. – I would say to the second: Your application of algebra to geometry is absurd; for what can there be in common between entirely metaphysical formulas and the measurement of a surface and a solid? Between these two orders of operations there is no possible relation, any more than between thought and extent.

What, I ask, would this gibberish prove? nothing but the stupidity and impertinence of the critic.

I will, as far as *labour*, *talent* and *wages* are concerned, to re-establish the question from its true point of view, contenting myself with referring for the details to the 3rd and 4th chapters of my first memoir, as well as to my next essay on organisation.

Adam Smith, and after him Germain Garnier and Ricardo, was the first to notice that the true measure of values was the labour of men. Hence these famous formulas: *Labour was the first price, the currency paid for the purchase of all things. – Labour is the only universal measure, the only exact measure of values: it is the sole standard that can serve us to compare the values of different commodities, at all times and in all places. – The constituent parts of the price of commodities are found in the costs of production, or, as I have said myself, in the sum of time and expense.*

Anonymous, who reproaches me so bitterly for my polemic against economists, did not even suspect that by criticising my formula he was putting himself in contradiction with the purest economic doctrine. When one attacks an author as affirmative as I am claimed to be, one should at least ensure that this author is unfounded in his assertions.

Adam Smith then develops his thought by comparisons and examples; he even goes so far as to investigate what would have happened if men had been faithful to this law of equality in exchanges, and what causes led to its transgression everywhere.

“In that early and rude state of society,” he says “which precedes both the accumulation of stock and the appropriation of land, the proportion between the quantities of labour necessary for acquiring different objects seems to be the only circumstance which can afford any rule for exchanging them for one another. If among a nation of hunters, for example, it usually costs twice the labour to kill a beaver which it does to kill a deer, one beaver should naturally exchange for or be worth two deer. It is natural that what is usually the produce of two days’ or two hours’ labour, should be worth double of what is usually the produce of one day’s or one hour’s labour.”

Adam Smith then remarks that in estimating the time and expense that each product costs, account must be taken of the nature of the labour, the trouble it requires, the consumption it entails, etc. For example, a farmer consuming more in food, drink, clothing, etc., than a

clerk, it follows that the salary of the farmer must be in proportion to this additional consumption. Thus the absolute law of exchange is a composite ratio of *labour* (considered in its intensity and duration) and of the *expense* necessary to the producer. The consequences of this system were developed by Ricardo in his *Principles of Political Economy*.

Adam Smith continues: “In that original state of things, which precedes both the appropriation of land and the accumulation of stock, the whole produce of labour belongs to the labourer. He has neither landlord nor master to share with him. Had this state continued, the wages of labour would have augmented with all those improvements in its productive powers, to which the division of labour gives occasion. All things would gradually have become cheaper. They would have been produced by a smaller quantity of labour; and as the commodities produced by equal quantities of labour would naturally in this state of things be exchanged for one another, they would have been purchased likewise with the produce of a smaller quantity.

“But this original state of things, in which the labourer enjoyed the whole produce of his own labour, could not last beyond the first introduction of the appropriation of land and the accumulation of stock... As soon as land becomes private property, the landlord demands a share of almost all the produce which the labourer can either raise, or collect from it. His *rent* makes the first deduction from the produce of the labour which is employed upon land.” (*An Inquiry on the Nature and the Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, volume 1.)

Here, then, is property described as theft and pillage by the father of political economy, and this in consequence of the law that *labour is the only measure and the only currency of values*.

But other economists, amongst whom J.-B. Say and M. Rossi stand out in the first rank, have argued that Adam Smith’s formula is insufficient and inaccurate: their reasons must be heard and weighed.

All objections are reduced to two:

1. Value in use is a quality inherent to the material. Labour does not create it; it only develops it, or, to put it better, puts it more within our reach. Labour, absolutely speaking, is a sterile exercise that borrows all its utility from the object to which it is applied: how could it become the measure of values?

“Two men,” says M. Rossi, “each seize a tree and they become owners, one of a wild apple tree, the other of a coconut tree laden with fruit. They used the same axe and gave the same number of blows. If there is no wealth except through the effort that man has made to obtain it, wealth is only the difficulty overcome. If this is so, when one has seized the wild apple tree with ten axe strokes and the other the coconut tree with ten axe

strokes, they possess the same wealth. (ROSSI, *Course in Political Economy*, 11th lesson.)

M. Rossi is not even to the question. Adam Smith did not claim that labour was the measure of value in use, which is inherent in matter, and can neither be sold nor bought; but of value in exchange. Utility, as M. Rossi very well says, use-value does not come essentially from labour: it does not fall under the *production* of man, but under his

appropriation. In other words, there are for natural values, there are not producers, only usufructuaries. That two savages, who do not engage in any kind of commerce with each other, should cut down, one a coconut tree, the other a wild apple tree, is a matter that is personal to each of them, a more or less advantageous fact of appropriation, an *isolated* act, therefore without any *economic* significance. For where there is no society, there is no economy.

But admit that in a horde there is a need for firewood, chairs, tables, cupboards, etc., as well as clothing and food: immediately the labour is divided, and it is then that, according to Adam Smith, the labour of the man who cuts down an apple tree is worth the labour of the one who cuts down a coconut tree. If, then, value in kind has utility for its measure, value in exchange has labour for its measure. Usurpation of the former constitutes property or monopoly; understanding of the second gradually leads to equality.

To refute M. Rossi's argument, it suffices to hear it clearly. Two peasant women spend the same number of hours, and with equal effort, one singing, the other picking vegetables: it is clear that if it is a question of dinner afterwards, the song of the first does is not worth a bean and that she runs the risk of being hungry. But transport these two women to the centre of civilisation: the singer becomes a Malibran and the housewife a gourmet chef. The conditions are reversed, but no more fair. For there to be justice, it is necessary both to cultivate talent and to ennoble domestic work. But, in our proprietary society, one function is always sacrificed to another function, one product degraded by another product.

2. One insists: "It is utility," says Say, "which causes the demand for the thing we make. On the other hand,

the sacrifices that must be made for it to be produced, in other words, the costs of production, create scarcity, limit the quantity of this thing. Its value rises all the more it is demanded and the less it is supplied, and rises all the less when it is supplied more and demanded less. This principle is fundamental in political economy..."

In short, *utility* gives rise to *supply* and *demand*, and these in their turn, varying perpetually, produce all the oscillations of value.

Say's error comes from the fact that, disdaining history, the comparison of legislations and religious traditions, he took a transitory form of society for a permanent state, an exception for an aphorism, and that, conceiving the economy only in property, he wanted to base and immobilise science on a pure anomaly.

But who does not see that these eternal variations of *supply* and *demand* result precisely from competition, from monopoly, from divergent and fragmented industry, in a word, from the lack of organisation? If we work haphazardly, if consequently our products are sometimes above, sometimes below consumption, if the various industries lack proportion and balance, is this not the effect of the right of property? Now, in the question which occupies us, the issue of property being identical to that of inequality of conditions, it follows that in order to justify property, property is assumed.

Say's error comes from the fact that, disdaining history, the comparison of legislations and religious traditions, he took a transitory form of society for a permanent state, an exception for an aphorism, and that, conceiving the economy only in property, he wanted to base and immobilise science on a pure anomaly.

Such is also the cause of my recriminations against this economist whom I accuse, on the one hand, of having recognised that property is a monopoly; on the other, of having distinguished value in kind from value in exchange; then, with the most incredible aplomb, with the most insulting contempt for philosophy and morality, which at all times have preached equality and condemned usury, to have established the inequality of exchanges on the inviolability of monopoly.

To these objections of specialised men, which I have reported in order to make the discussion as complete as it is serious, anonymous thought it necessary to add his phalansterian quibbles. I would very much like to pass over them in silence; but my adversary would triumph, and I know only too well what politeness obliges me to do. He must be satisfied soon.

6. – Demonstration of the equality of conditions by Adam Smith's formula

To summarise: The first cause of the inequality in conditions, resulting from the uncertainty of values, is annulled by Adam Smith's formula: *Each product is worth what it has cost in time and expense.*

Against this general and truly organic formula, it is objected: 1. that utility resulting from the properties of matter as much and more than from the very fact of labour, the latter cannot be taken as a comparative measure of values; 2. that supply and demand constantly varying according to fashion, whim, opinion, and other accidents of social life, value is essentially variable.

To which it is answered, on the one hand, that political economy being concerned only with value in exchange, and not at all with value in kind, to which all men have an equal right, the question remains as posed by Adam Smith; on the other, that the variations in values currently coming from the lack of organisation, and in no way from the intrinsic fact of the exchange, there is a need to deal with the formula of organisation, but no longer with the formula of distribution.

These so clear conclusions do not have the good fortunate to please anonymous, who goes so far as to discover that by this means the rights of labour and talent would be compromised. Immortal Smith! you would never have suspected that, having eliminated as elements of value monopoly, opinion, fashion and all the disastrous results of our antisocial civilisation, you would be accused of being the enemy of labour, of the labour whose scientific value and fundamentality in economics you first saw.

“By what dreadful despotism,” exclaims anonymous who preaches much more than he reasons, “will you break the instrument of labour in the hands of the strong?... Can you prevent the industrious and intelligent worker from relaxing from his material task in the study of the sciences and the arts? Now, will this second work be productive or not? and how are you to prevent it from being so in a free and intelligent society?... So it will become a new source of wealth and enjoyment unknown to the weak. What then does equality of wages mean? It does not exist, or else it is the most horrible and the most unbearable of tyrannies: *Summum jus, summa injuria.*”

In order to find objections, anonymous confuses and confounds what we have taken care to untangle just now. What do we look for in POLITICAL ECONOMY?

Notice that name! The laws of *social production* and *exchange*. From this definition alone, as from a mathematical axiom, flow these marvellous consequences, which are as many transformations of each other:

1. That individual, arbitrary, unrequested labour has value only for the individual, but not for the associate; consequently that it cannot be taken into account in the estimation of *wages*, or, what comes to the same thing, of labour purchased by society;
2. That by the principle of the division of labour, each worker becoming an employee of the same society, and his product having to be proportional to the needs of this society, it follows that for all the *guarantee* is the same, the *salary* the same, the duties and obligations the same;
3. That if, his social task completed and his duty as an employee fulfilled, the worker engages in any free exercise, the *private* product that results from it cannot determine an increase in the salary of this individual, any more than today the magistrate who occupied himself with painting obtains an increase in salary from the State;
4. That this private product, finally, entailing neither an increase nor a decrease in salary for anyone, cannot become a cause of social inequality, because, in order to produce this product, the associate had to consume time and supplies, and that, in this respect, he has deducted something, either in his pleasures, or in his expenditure; because then he cannot exchange, even privately, his product except for an equivalent, which in no way modifies the respective position of the contracting parties; because finally, with the aid of individual products or savings, it is impossible, I mean it must be forbidden within society, to monopolise the instruments of labour.

Distinguish then between *social* labour and *private* labour, between the things of daily consumption and the instruments of production, between the exchange of the former and the inalienability of the latter.

But anonymous, who claims to have understood something about the phalanstery, finds these distinctions too *subtle* and describes them as *circumlocutions*. It is above all in favour of *talent* that he tries to rehabilitate the value of opinion, the absurdity of supply and demand, the immorality of monopoly.

**it is impossible, I mean
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instruments of labour.**

Response to Accusations

[...]

[...] Workers, labourers, men of the people, whoever you are, the initiative of reform belongs to you. It is you who will accomplish this synthesis or social composition, which will be the masterpiece of creation; and you alone can accomplish it. For everything that comes from the people is profoundly synthetic; philosophers only have the talent for marquetry. You have already understood that the most salient characteristic of our reform should be labour and industry; and I felt my heart quiver with enthusiasm while listening to the song of the Parisian workers:

Forward! courage!
Let us be the first to march:
From the heart to work,
Brave workers!

March, singing, to the conquest of the new world, predestined race; labour, teach one another, brave workers! Your refrain is more beautiful than that of Rouget de Lisle.¹

And you, men in power, angry magistrates, cowardly proprietors, have you finally understood me? Your property is indefensible; but your acquired condition, but the well-being of your children and the present advantages of your families, founded on an order of things that you did not make, are inviolable and sacred. Fear nothing for yourselves or for your pleasures: your pleasures! There is not an intelligent communist, not an egalitarian worthy of the name, who wants them for his own. Thieves and looters are more odious to us than to you, proprietors enriched by our sweat: what we ask is therefore not your abasement, but the means of equalling you; it is order, work, education and bread. Your role today, know it well, is that of *emancipators of the people*; your goods are ours which have been handed over to you in guardianship; your sons are our brothers whom you endow with our legitimacy. Proprietor! your wards have grown; every day the idea of their rights shines more ardently in their enlightened eyes: tremble lest they declare themselves emancipated

¹ Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle (1760-1836) was a French army officer of the French Revolutionary Wars, best known for writing the words and music of the *Chant de guerre pour l'armée du Rhin*, which would later become *La Marseillaise*. While it had been and would become again the French

before their time, and lest a horrible vengeance makes you atone for too-long hesitations. Catastrophes are henceforth to be feared only from your selfishness and your ignorance, obstinate conservatives: the people know today that order can only be the fruit of a regular and uninterrupted development. For in the life of society, as in the life of the individual, there is no interruption: interruption is death! but there is no stopping either, because to stop, for it, is to end. Do not hope, therefore, either by concessions or by reasoning, to bring us back from what you call *fanaticism* and *chimeras*, and which is only the feeling of our just rights: the enthusiasm that possesses us, the enthusiasm for equality, is unknown to you. It is an intoxication stronger than wine, more penetrating than love, passion or divine fury, which the delirium of Leonidas, Saint Bernard and Michelangelo never equalled. Do not listen

to the sophists who reassure you: expect nothing from your courts; do not despise our helpless poverty; do not count on your gold, nor on the number of your battalions, nor on the help of your allies: for, like the torrent that thunders, like the lightning that devours, like the hail that kills, so passes the anger of the people. Above all, do not provoke the outbursts of our despair, because, when your soldiers and your gendarmes succeed in oppressing us, you will not hold out against our last resource. It is neither regicide, nor assassination, nor poisoning, nor arson, nor refusal to work, nor emigration, nor

insurrection, nor suicide: it is something more terrible than all that and more effective, something that has been seen, but which cannot be said.

I thank you, monsieur Editor, for the honourable terms in which you have expressed yourself several times on my account, and I deeply regret not being able to respond to them with a more favourable opinion of Fourier. For six whole weeks I was the captive of that bizarre genius; and every time I think of it again, it makes me laugh and terrifies me. But the habit that I have formed of never stopping at one system as long as I had others to explore soon freed me from this

national anthem, it was not so when Proudhon was writing. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *La Marseillaise* was recognized as the anthem of the international revolutionary movement. (*Black Flag*)

fascination that men with fixed ideas and strong wills exert on those who read or listen to them, and I have no doubt that the same thing would have happened to you yourself, monsieur Editor, if, instead of indulging in premature propaganda, you had pursued your studies and given your enthusiasm time to cool. Oh! what would I not give to meet with you under the same flag, fighting for the same cause! I would follow you from afar as my leader and my guide; you would encourage me with your voice and your gaze; and if the proprietors still balked, you would see what your compatriot can do.

I hope, monsieur Editor, that seeing your theory more strongly shaken every day, you will not despair of this science which you have loved so much, and to which you have made such great sacrifices. And besides, do we not live in a century where everything must be questioned, so that henceforth nothing is believed that is not demonstrated? Blind is he who is scandalised by our disputes! Men are needed for attack and men for

defence: he who would claim to do everything by himself would discover nothing. Your role, monsieur Editor, is to pose problems: that is why you are a Fourierist; mine is to make comparisons and draw conclusions: this is how I became an egalitarian.

Always defend your hypothesis until there is definitive evidence to the contrary; it is your right: he who has never believed anything hypothetically has learned nothing. But do not forget that if the hypothesis is the universal method of invention, the demonstration of truth, in our poor human sciences, is most often only the elimination of error.

I am, monsieur Editor, with all the consideration your talents and character deserve,

Your devoted servant,

P.-J. Proudhon.

Besançon, 1st January 1842

Explanations Presented to the Public Prosecutor Regarding the Right of Property

Court of Assize of the Department of Doubs

(Session of February 3, 1842)¹

Last February 3, there appeared before the jury of Besançon, the author of a brochure entitled *Warning to the Proprietors, or Letter to M. Considerant, editor of LA PHALANGE, on a defence of property*, on the charge: 1) of attacking property; 2) of provoking various classes of citizens to hatred; 3) of inciting hatred and contempt of the government and king; 4) of offense against the catholic religion.

It is not our intention to give a detailed account of this trial, which had in common with so many others of the same type only the form of the proceedings and the jurisdiction. The public prosecutor invoked the *written law*, the accused spoke in the name of a *science*, and, by the form and content of his responses, seemed less to await a verdict of acquittal than a declaration of the court's incompetence. Thus, let no one accuse us of unfaithfulness, if we limit our account to that purely explanatory part of the defence which was intended by the accused as a sort of programme of his researches on political and industrial organisation, and the constitution of equality.

The advocate general, M. Jobard, defended the charges with all the skill of a consummate jurist, but was obliged to limit himself to the text of the law. After him,

the accused read a written defence, from which we extract the following passages:²

[I will try to respond to the prosecuting attorney. I first ask for your indulgence, gentlemen of the jury, for the weakness of my words. I don't know how to speechify, and am forced to resort to a written statement to express what I think; I have never seen so many people gathered around me; I need your full attention to make myself understood to you. I hope from the prudence and kindness of the presiding judge that he will be kind enough to stop me if, in the course of my defence, anything escapes me that could harm me.

For everything else, I trust in the zeal and talent of my defender.

The public prosecutor accuses me: in fact, the jury, it took no less than an indictment to bring me before you. But, basically, the public prosecutor is not accusing me; he has experienced distrust, fears, suspicions, prejudices, he does not know who I am or what I want, and it is in order to shed light on my person and my writings that he calls me in for questioning: there are no more charges against me than there is evidence of a crime. In short, the public prosecutor is asking me for explanations; if it were otherwise, the matter before you would only be, as you will see presently, a mistake on

¹ <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Explications-Study-NP.pdf>

² The first six paragraphs of Proudhon's manuscript, bracketed in this edition, were not included in the published version. (Translator – Shawn P. Wilbur)

the part of the police, and pardon the expression, a con by the Crown Prosecutor.

I will therefore try to calm the concerns, very natural in their object, very legitimate in their motive, of the prosecution: because, gentlemen of the jury, if the public prosecutor himself did not acquit me, I would not believe myself sufficiently acquitted by your votes. I only regret that this debate could not have taken place elsewhere than in a criminal court hearing: I have the misfortune that the magistrates of my province are less exactly informed on my account than the Police Prefecture.

I will begin the discussion at once.]¹

I have only written one thing in my life, gentlemen jurors, and I will tell you that thing right away, so that there is no question: *Property is theft*. And do you know what I have concluded from that? That, in order to abolish that species of theft, it is necessary to universalise it. I am, you see, gentlemen, as conservative as you; and whoever would tell you the contrary, would prove by that alone that they have understood nothing of my books and, I would say, nothing of the things of this world.

It is up to the legislator, according to Justinian, to interpret the law; it is also up to the writer to explain his writings. Now, although I do not wish to make my defence a lesson in political economy, it is important to my justification that I explain how that *universalisation* of property should be understood: that will be the best response to the charges of the prosecuting attorney. For if I prove that in order to render properties equal, it is necessary to preserve the existing rights, it follows that the thought of expropriation would be a contradiction in my own doctrine and, consequently, that it is logically impossible that I could be guilty of the act of which I am accused, which is imputed to me only because the idea of dispossession, which I reject, has been confused with that of the abolition of the domain of property, which I proclaim.

Let us speak of labour. Labour, gentlemen, is, after God and religion, doubtless what you love and esteem most, and what you recommend every day to your children. It is through labour that you have become what you are; and whoever would try to prove to you – to you who

have laboured all your life, who have inherited legitimately from your fathers, who feel that you have clean hands and pure consciences – whoever would try, I say, to prove to you that your possession could be, without your knowledge, vicious and founded on an illegitimate title, would not be heard. You would dismiss him as a sophist.

Thus, let us leave the metaphysics of right; it is not within the competence of the court of assize.

For you, gentlemen jurors, nothing is more justly acquired than that which you have gained by the sweat of your brow; nothing is more formally condemned by the catechism than holding back the wages of workers.

Religion has made that crime one of the four sins that cry to the heavens for vengeance. That posited, I asked myself one day how many ways one can retain the wages of the worker; and that examination showed me some very curious things – things that you, gentlemen, do not suspect.

If a worker made three francs worth of products in a day, he is right to ask three francs for it. All deduction is a crime that cries for vengeance, and do not forget it. Now, the world is full of people from whose daily wage a quarter, a third, or a half is retained every day, and that without the Code Napoleon, which certain people admire as the equal of the Decalogue, even anticipating the case.

A pair of shoes is worth, I suppose, five francs. Estimating at two francs and fifty centimes the supplies that enter into the fabrication of a pair of shoes, the rest makes up the wage of the worker, the price of his day of labour. And allowing that the worker is free, that he receives his wage entirely, and that every day he makes a pair of shoes, we would say of him that he gains two francs and fifty centimes per day. But it frequently occurs that a worker is not known in the business, or else that he lacks the means to form an establishment; besides, it is with a clientele as with a piece of land; it is attached to individuals, transmitted from father to son, and not obtained by just anyone. The public has its habits. It gives itself to a boutique, to a sign; nothing is more capricious than its favour. In this case, the worker who is without work offers his services to another worker who is established, and who is called *bourgeois*.

Like the other worker, the bourgeois sells his shoes for five francs. There is competition on one side, which

¹ The published version of the statement begins with the following paragraph. (Translator – Shawn P. Wilbur)

prevents the indefinite increase of the price of merchandise; on the other, the value of supplies and the necessity to live, which prevents the lowering of prices below a certain level. If then, the bourgeois has work, it is probable that he will make his fellow labour, but on the condition that that fellow renounces a part of his wage, for it is necessary that the *master gain from the worker*. And so the worker will not receive all that is coming to him, every day he will see with his own eyes his product selling at a price higher than he has received, and all this without any right to reclaim the deduction.

Soon, gentlemen jurors, I will show that this *bourgeois*, on whom you perhaps believe that I call all the fury of the populace, is in general a very honest man, who cannot do otherwise, and who is often more to be pitied than the one that he despoils.

But let us see what results from the deduction made from the daily labour of the workers.

When you buy a pair of shoes, you buy the day of a shoemaker. When a cobbler buy shoes, he buys back his own day. Thus if his day is worth fifty sous on the market, and he gains only forty at the workshop, how do you want him to pay for his own goods? In that case, you say, he must make his shoes himself. He will have them at cost price, and escape the deduction.

The observation is fair, but we are not finished. The shoemaker cannot procure by himself all the things that he needs, since he has only one profession; it is necessary, in order to survive, that he buy, by turns, the day of a tailor, the day of a baker, the day of a vintner, etc. And as he can buy all these days only by offering his own in return; as on the other hand, assuming equal pay for all the trades, and also an equal deduction, the price of all these days surpasses what the purchaser can offer for them. It follows that a worker who needs to buy three hundred sixty-five days of others' labour, at three francs, in order to live, and who receives only two francs and fifty centimes per day, finds himself at the end of the year damaged a sum of one hundred eighty-two francs and fifty centimes according to Barrême.

You will perhaps say that wages not being everywhere the same the worker at two francs fifty centimes makes up for the worker at two francs and below. But, gentlemen jurors, it is precisely that which makes the inequality of conditions; it because of this that there are *poor states*, as one says, although the ancient wisdom had declared that there were no *foolish trades*, but only *foolish people*. Society is like a pyramid: the lower courses support the upper, and sink under the weight. In addition, it suffices for a rule of proportion in order to find the mean of the deductions, and consequently the arithmetic reason for the impoverishment of certain classes of labourers. That is calculated exactly like the tables of mortality.

And that is what explains to us the hopeless profundity of the popular proverb: *The cobblers are always the most poorly shod*; that is also why the masons find themselves the most poorly housed, why the vintners often drink only water, and rarely of the best sort; why the bakers cry famine in the very heart of abundance. It is because there are some bourgeois, some masters, placed over the workers, who make a deduction from their wages, because they are themselves robbed by others, until finally we come to a privileged few who, raised above all the others, profit from all the deductions, but do not suffer any, for the excellent reason that they work for no one.

Now, gentlemen jurors, political economy, a science of recent date, but which already promises marvels, gives the means of escaping that impasse, without harming anyone's lifestyle, without detracting from any interest, without taking anything from the rich, without asking anything of them but the permission to labour more and better than one has done up to this day.

Like geometry, political economy has its axioms, its definitions, its laws and its formulas; like geometry it proceeds methodically from the known to the unknown, and starting from the most trivial truths, it raises itself to the intelligence of divine and human laws.

What say the geometers?

The straight line is the shortest route between one point and another.

All the radii of the circle are equal.

Every straight line which falls on another straight line, forms with it two adjacent angles, which are equivalent to two right angles.

It is with this that the geometers measure the circumference of the globe and the height of mountains, calculate the course of the celestial bodies, predict eclipses, weigh the moon and planets, and find the distance and diameter of the sun.

The economists, in another order of ideas, proceed in absolutely the same way. Here are the principles that they rely on.

Man produces nothing except by labour.

Wages must be equal to product.

The productive force of labour is in direct relation to its division.

With the aide of these simple principles, and of some others that follow from them, the economists propose to abolish robbery and property without dispossessing anyone. To organise labour, to explain the causes and the accidents of revolutions. To plumb the secrets of God and to calculate the future. And they will come to the end of it, do not doubt it, gentlemen of the jury, for every question that the human mind can address, it can also resolve.

According to this new species of levellers, of which I count myself a member, who hardly resemble those who terrified France fifty years ago, according to these reformists who are so slandered and so little understood, it is absurd to give six thousand francs to a rector and fifteen hundred francs to a judge, and we know why; according to them, property is a monopoly the temporary existence of which entered into the views of Providence, and we explain what those views have been. But also, according to them, it is necessary to always increase the income of the proprietors, in order to make possible the equality of conditions. I will, gentlemen of the jury, give you an idea of their theories in this regard, theories that the government, which will soon be as egalitarian as I am, has already begun to put into practice.

Let us speak of finance.

We call a *rentier* every capitalist who loans to the State, in perpetuity, a sum of money, at 3, 4, or 5 percent interest. Now, the smallest sum the State accepts in loan being, I believe, 100 francs, and the share of the loan limiting to a small number of persons the advantage of the rent, it follows that the constitution of that rent, always much sought after, creates a true privilege. That creation dates from the National Convention.

But all the French, according to the Charter, are equal before the law; as a consequence, the government, not being able to abolish the privilege of the rent, has occupied itself in recent years with making all the French privileged on the same basis, but how much better it is to interest them in order and public peace. Hence the savings banks, where one receives from 1 franc up to 200, and where interest is paid from 2 up to 4 percent.

Now, gentlemen of the jury, let the worker who does not receive from his bourgeois all the wages from his labour, come in the end, by dint of economies, to create a little income, and you will understand, on the one hand, that this income will form the supplement of the wages that he was expecting to gain, and that he had not received completely; on the other hand, that this rent paid by the State to the thrifty workers being taken from the revenues of the State, and these revenues being deducted in the form of a tax on the proprietors, the State would have to make a part of the revenues pass from the latter into the pockets of the former, an operation which, in the long run and with a bit of consistency, would lead to the equality of all the revenues.

the worker... does not receive from his bourgeois all the wages from his labour... Thus, profit, interest, the right of increase, property or suzerainty, is a usurpation, a theft, as Diderot said, more than a century ago

Thus the whole secret consists in making the deduction take place in a circular manner from the one to the others and come back to its point of departure, that is to say that the citizens all work for one another, and, by turns robbed and reimbursed, receive a profit equal to the loss they suffer. At first glance, it seems much simpler that each wage be equal to each individual product; but things could not happen in this way at first, and the organic reason for *this rotation of profit*, if I dare put it that way, is perhaps the most admirable secret of political economy.

Thus, profit, interest, the right of increase, property or suzerainty, is a usurpation, a theft, as Diderot said, more than a century ago, and yet society could live only with the aid of that theft, which will no longer be one, as soon as by the irresistible force of institutions it will become general, and which will cease completely when an integral education has rendered all the citizens equal in merit and in dignity.

In order not to prolong this hearing, I will spare you, gentlemen of the jury, some detailed means and processes by the aid of which the egalitarian economists propose to accelerate the realisation of that future.

Nothing is more curious than to see them transform houses, land, furniture and even tools into circulating money; to constantly increase everyone's income, by decreasing the fatigues of labour, and gradually enriching the workers, by making greater and greater deductions from their wages.

Those are some trade secrets that I do not have to teach you.

You see, gentlemen, why the true egalitarian is necessarily a conservative; it remains for me to show you how the adversaries of property are necessarily friends of order and government.

The Code Civil, article 556, states:

“The deposits and increases which form successively and imperceptibly on the banks of a river or a stream are called *alluvium*. Alluvium profits the riparian proprietors.

Art. 557. “It is the same with the relays formed by the current, which insensibly remove material from one of its banks and carry it to the other: the proprietor of the increasing bank profits from the alluvium, without the resident on the opposite side being able to come to demand the land that he has lost.

Art. 559. “If a river or a stream, navigable or not, carries away by sudden violence a considerable and

identifiable part of a field on its banks, and bears it to a lower field, or on its opposite bank, the owner of the part carried away may reclaim his property, etc.”

It is useless to add that on this point there exist as many customs as countries, as many opinions as doctors; this much jurisprudence has known how to work in matters of economy!

Such is the spirit of the Code: if the water takes from me a chunk of the field that I possess, I can reclaim it, provided that I make my demand within a year; if it takes it from me grain of sand after grain of sand, then I lose my property. Too bad for me if my field is found too close to the stream: the legislator will do nothing for me. We see that the spirit of conquest has passed this way.

The economist, on the contrary, maintains that the property must be restored; he demonstrates, by a mathematics of his own, that all the riparian proprietors are connected with one another; that none of them can ever be dispossessed; that all are responsible for the property of each, and each interested in the property of all; that it falls to the municipal authorities ensure the maintenance of the possessions, and to their perfect development. Now which of these two appears the better friend of order and society, gentlemen of the jury, the conquering legislator or the egalitarian economist?

The economist also proves, by analogous principles, that the worker without clientele is like the proprietor dispossessed by a flood; that the homeless proletarian falls under the charge of those housed; that it is among the duties of the administrative authorities to see to it that the labourers are housed according to their nature and the demands of their position in life; that a mayor, a

prefect, can and should in some cases require, in return for rent, the rich citizen to house the poor one; to order the restoration of a property, at the expense of the selfish proprietor who has let it degrade and become ugly, as well as the demolition of a shack that disrupts the alignment of a road; to ensure finally that each uses his goods as prescribed and for the greatest advantage of industry, architecture, commerce, morals and hygiene.

That is what the egalitarian economists call *disciplining possession*, or, in other words, *abolishing property*. What is so frightening about that abolition?

But they add, these economists, that to succeed in that enterprise, it is necessary above all to abstain from dividing goods and establishing an agrarian law; it is necessary to teach, with the national spirit, the spirit of family, and instead of changing the systems of institutions, to develop all the institutions.

The economists, gentlemen, may be wrong, and I doubt that you will give the least bit of faith to the things that I announce. But in the end, their errors are at least very innocent, since instead of tending to destroy, they tend to preserve.

[...]

The president, Mr. Béchet summarised the debates, and discharged this difficult task with a concision and an impartiality that everyone admired.

After an hour of deliberation, the jury pronounced a verdict of “not guilty.”

[...]

System of Economic Contradictions

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

1846

Chapter XIV: Summary and Conclusion

It has been said of Newton, to express the immensity of his discoveries, that *he has revealed the abyss of human ignorance*.

There is no Newton here, and no one can claim in economics a part equal to that which posterity assigns to this great man in the science of the universe. But I dare to say that there is here more than Newton has ever guessed. The depth of the heavens does not equal the depth of our intelligence, within which wonderful systems move. It looks like a new, unknown region that exists outside space and time, like the heavenly realms

and infernal abodes, and on which our eyes plunge, with silent admiration, as in a bottomless abyss.

Non secus ac si quâ penitus vi terra dehiscens
Infernas reseret sedes et regna recludat
Pallida, Dis invisa, superque immane barathrum
Cernatur, trepidentque immisso lumine Manes.
Virgil. Aeneid. lib. viii.¹

Here the throng, collision, swing of eternal forces; there the mysteries of Providence are revealed, and the secrets of fate appear uncovered. It is the invisible

¹ “even as though some force tearing earth apart should unlock the infernal house, and disclose the pallid realms abhorred of heaven, and deep down the monstrous gulf be descried where the ghosts flutter in the streaming daylight.”

(Virgil, *The Aeneid of Virgil* [MacMillan and Co. Ltd: London, 1920], Translated by J. W. Mackail, Eighth Book, 178). (*Black Flag*)

making itself visible, the intangible rendered material, the idea becoming reality, and reality a thousand times more wonderful, more grandiose than the most fantastic utopias. So far we do not see, in its simple formula, the unity of that vast machine: the synthesis of these gigantic gears, in which the well-being and misery of generations are ground, and which are shaping a new creation, still evades us. But we already know that nothing that happens in social economy has a copy in nature; we are forced to constantly invent special names, to create a new language, for facts without analogues. It is a transcendent world, whose principles are superior to geometry and algebra, whose powers derive neither from attraction nor from any physical force, but which use geometry and algebra as subordinate instruments, and takes as material the very powers of nature; a world finally freed from the categories of time, space, generation, life and death, where everything seems both eternal and phenomenal, simultaneous and successive, limited and unlimited, ponderable and imponderable... What more can I say? It is even creation, caught, so to speak, in the act!

And this world, which appears to us as a fable, which inverts our judicial habits, and never ceases to deny our reason; this world which envelops us, penetrates us, agitates us, without us even seeing it in any other way than the mind's eye, touching it only by signs, this strange world is society, it is us!

Who has seen monopoly and competition, except by their effects, that is, by their signs? Who has felt credit and property? What is collective force, division of labour and value? And yet, what is stronger, more certain, more intelligible, more real than all that? Look in the distance at this carriage drawn by eight horses on a beaten field, and driven by a man dressed in a old smock: it is only a mass of matter, moved on four wheels by an animal form. You discover there, in appearance, only a phenomenon of mechanics, determined by a phenomenon of physiology, beyond which you perceive nothing more. Penetrate further: ask this man what he does, where he goes; by what thought, what title, he drives this vehicle. And presently he will show you a *letter*, his authority, his providence, as he himself is the providence of his equipment. You will read in this letter that he is a carter, that it is in this capacity that he carries out the *transportation* of a certain quantity of *merchandise*, so much according upon the *weight* and *distance*; that he must carry out his journey by such a *route* and within such a *time*, barely covering the *cost* of his *service*; that this service implies on the part of the carter the *responsibility* for the *losses* and *damages* that result from other causes than *force majeure* and an *inherent defect* of the objects; that the price of the vehicle includes or not includes *insurance*

¹ In Kantian philosophy, a thing as it is in itself, as distinct from a thing as it is knowable by the senses through phenomenal attributes. (*Black Flag*)

against unforeseen accidents, and a thousand other details which are the hazard of the law and the torment of jurists. This man, I say, in a piece of paper as big as the hand, will reveal to you an infinite order, an inconceivable mixture of empiricism and pure reason, and that all the genius of man, assisted by the experience of the universe, would have been powerless to discover, if man has not left individual existence to enter collective life.

Indeed, these ideas of work, value, exchange, traffic, responsibility, property, solidarity, association, etc., where are the archetypes? who provided the exemplars? what is this world half material, half intelligible; half necessity, half fiction? What is this force, called work, which carries us along with ever greater certainty that we believe we are more free? Which of our joys and torments does this collective life, which burns us with an inextinguishable flame, cause? As long as we live, we are, without our being aware of it, and according to the extent of our faculties and the speciality of our industry, the thinking springs, thinking wheels, thinking gears, thinking weights, etc., of an immense machine that thinks and goes by itself. Science, we said, is based on the accord of reason and experience; but it creates neither one nor the other. And here, on the contrary, a science appears to us, in which nothing is given to us, *a priori*, neither by experience nor by reason; a science in which humanity draws everything from itself, noumenon¹ and phenomena, universals and categories, facts and ideas; a science, finally, which instead of simply consisting, like any other science, of a reasoned description of reality, is the very creation of reality and reason!

Thus the author of economic reason is man; the creator of economic matter is man; the architect of the economic system is again man. After having produced reason and social experience, humanity proceeds to the construction of social science in the same way as for the construction of the natural sciences; it brings together in agreement the reason and the experience it has given itself, and by the most inconceivable marvel, when everything in it takes after utopia, principles and actions, it only comes to know itself by excluding utopia.

Socialism is right in protesting against political economy and saying to it: You are nothing but a routine that does not understand itself. And political economy is right to say to socialism: you are only a utopia without reality or possible application. But both denying in turn, socialism the experience of humanity, political economy the reason of humanity, both lack the essential conditions of human truth.

Social science is the agreement of reason and social practice. Now, this science, of which our masters have only seen rare sparks, will be given to our century to contemplate it in its sublime splendour and harmony!

But what am I doing? Alas! It is a question, at this moment when quackery and prejudice share the world, of raising our hopes. It is not incredulity that we have to fight, it is presumption. Let us start by noting that social science is not finished, that it is still in a state of vague premonition.

“Malthus,” says his excellent biographer, M. Charles Comte, “had the profound conviction that there exists in political economy principles which are true only insofar as they are contained within certain limits; he saw the main difficulties of the science in the frequent combination of complicated causes, in the action and reaction of effects and causes with each other, and in the necessity of setting limits or making exception for many important proposals.”

This is what Malthus thought of political economy, and the work we have published at this moment is only a demonstration of his idea. To this testimony we add another just as worthy of belief. In one of the final sessions of the Academy of Moral Sciences, M. Dunoyer, as a truly superior man, who does not allow himself to be dazzled either by the interest of a clique, nor by the disdain that inspires ignorant opponents, made the same confession with as much candour and nobility as Malthus.

“Political economy, which has a number of certain principles, which rests on a considerable mass of exact facts and well deduced observations, nevertheless seems far from being a set science. There is no complete agreement on the extent of the field in which its research should be extended, nor on the fundamental object which it must suggest. It is not suitable for all the work it embraces, nor the means to which the power of its work is linked, nor the precise meaning to be attached to most of the words that form its vocabulary. The science, rich in truths of detail, leaves a great deal to be desired as a whole, and as a science it still seems far from being constituted.”

M. Rossi goes further than M. Dunoyer: he formulated his judgement in the form of a reprimand addressed to the modern representatives of the science.

“Every thought of method now seemed abandoned in economics,” he cries, “and yet there is no science without method.” (*Compte-rendu par M. Rossi du cours de M. Whateley [Report by M. Rossi of M. Whateley’s course]*)

Messrs. Blanqui, Wolowski, Chevalier, everyone who has glanced every so briefly on the economy of societies speaks the same. And the writer who best appreciates the value of modern utopias, Pierre Leroux, writes on every page of the *Revue sociale [Social Review]*: “let us seek the solution of the problem of the proletariat; let us keep looking for it until we find it. It

is the entire work of our epoch!...” Now, the problem of the proletariat is the constitution of social science. There are only short-sighted economists and fanatical socialists, for whom the science is summed up entirely in a formula, *Laissez faire, laissez passer*, or else, *To each according to his needs as far as social resources allow*, who boast of possessing economic science.

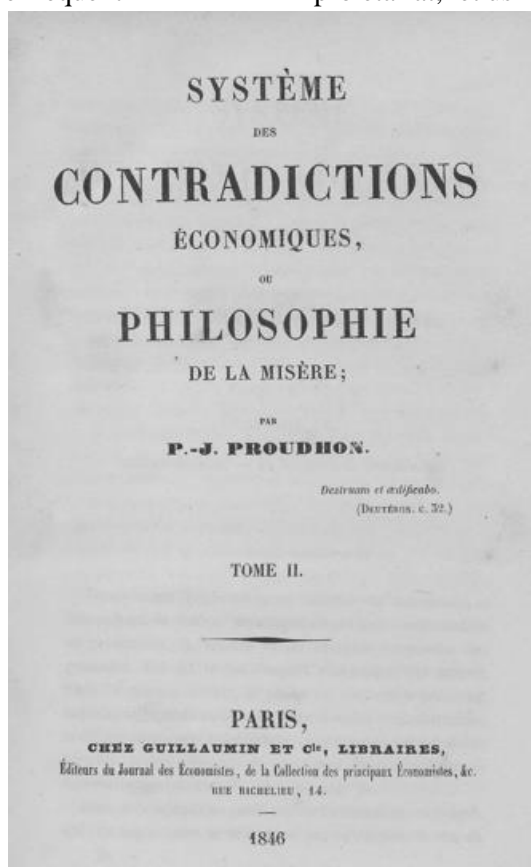
What then keeps this delay of social truth, which alone maintains the disappointment of the economist and gives credit to the operations of the alleged reformers? The cause, in our opinion, is the separation, already very old, of philosophy and political economy.

Philosophy, that is to say metaphysics, or if it is preferred, logic, is the algebra of society; political economy is the realisation

of this algebra. This was not noticed by J.B. Say, nor Bentham, no anyone else who, under the names of *economists* and *utilitarians*, created a split in morals and rose against almost at the same time politics and philosophy. And yet, what more secure control can philosophy, the theory of reason, wish for than work, that is, the practice of reason? And conversely, what more certain control could economic science wish than the formulas of philosophy? It is my dearest hope, that the time is not far when the masters in the moral and political sciences will be in the workshops and [behind] counters, as today our most skilful builders are all men formed by a long and arduous apprenticeship...

But on what condition can there be a science?

On the condition of recognising its field of observation and its limits, to determine its object, to organise its



method. On this point the economist expresses himself as the philosopher: the words of M. Dunoyer, recounted earlier, seem literally taken from the preface of Jouffroy to the translation of Reid.

The field of observation of philosophy is the self [le moi]; the field of observation of economics is society, that is to say again the self. Do you want to know man, study society; do you want to know society, study man. Man and society reciprocally serve each other as subjects and objects; the parallelism, the synonymy of the two sciences is complete.

But what is this collective and individual self? What is this field of observation, where strange phenomena are going on? To find out, let us see the analogues.

All the things we think seem to exist, to succeed one another or to be in three transcendent CAPABILITIES, outside of which we can only imagine and conceive absolutely nothing: these are *space, time* and *intelligence*.

Just as every material object is conceived by us necessarily in space; just as phenomena, connected with each other by a relationship of causality, seem to follow each other in time; thus our purely abstract representations are recorded by us to a particular receptacle, which we call intellect or intelligence.

Intelligence is in its species an infinite capacity, like space and eternity. There are restless worlds, of numberless organisms with complicated laws, with varied and unexpected effects; equal, for magnificence and harmony, to the worlds sown by the creator through space, to the organisms that shine and die out over time. Politics and political economy, jurisprudence, philosophy, theology, poetry, languages, customs, literature, fine arts: the field of observation of the self is more vast, more fecund, more rich in itself than the double field of observation of nature, space and time.

The self, as well as time and space, is infinite. Man, and what is the product of man, together with the beings thrown through space and the phenomena that follow one another in time, constitutes the triple manifestation of God. These three infinities, indefinite expressions of infinity, penetrate each other and support one another, inseparable and irreducible: space or scale not being conceived without movement, which implies the idea of force, this is to say a spontaneity, a self.

The ideas of things which are presented to us in space form for our imagination *tableaus*; the ideas which we place objects in time unfold in *histories*; finally, ideas or relations which do not fall under the category of time or space, and which belong to the intellect, are co-ordinated in *systems*.

Tableau, history, system, are thus three analogous expressions, or rather equivalents, by which we make known that a certain number of ideas appear to our mind as a symmetrical and perfect whole. That is why

these expressions may, in certain cases, be taken for each other, as we have pursued from the beginning of this work, when we presented it as a history of political economy, no longer according to the date of the discoveries, but according to the order of the theories.

We conceive then, and we cannot not conceive of a capacity for things of pure thought, or, as Kant says, for *noumena*, in the same way that we conceive two others for sense things, for *phenomena*.

But space and time are nothing real; they are two forms imprinted on the self by external perception. Similarly intelligence is also nothing real: it is a form that the self imposes on itself, by analogy, in the context of the ideas that experience suggests to it.

As for the order of acquisition of ideas, intuitions or images, it seems to us that we start with those whose types or realities are included in space; that we continue by stopping, so to speak, the flight of ideas that time carries, and that we finally discover, with the help of sense perceptions, the ideas or concepts, without external model, which appear to us in this ghost capacity we call our intelligence. Such is the progress of our knowledge: we start from the sense to rise to the abstract; the ladder of our reason has its foot on the earth, crosses the sky and is lost in the depths of the mind.

Let us now reverse this series, and we envision creation as a descent of ideas from the higher sphere of intelligence into the lower spheres of time and space, a fall during which the ideas, originally pure, have taken a body of *substratum* that realises them and expresses them. From this point of view all created things, the phenomena of nature and the manifestations of humanity, will appear to us as a projection of the mind, immaterial and immutable, on a plane sometimes fixed and straight, space, sometimes inclined and moving, time.

It follows from this that ideas, equal to each other, contemporaneous and co-ordinated in the mind, seem thrown haphazardly, scattered, localised, subordinate and consecutive in humanity and in nature, forming *tableaus* and *histories* without resemblance to the original design [*dessin primitif*]; and all human science consists in finding this conception the abstract system of eternal thought. It is by a restoration of this kind that naturalists have found systems of organised and unorganised beings; it is by the same process that we have tried to re-establish the series of phases of social economy, which society makes us see isolated, incoherent, anarchic. The subject we have undertaken is really the natural history of work, according to the fragments collected by the economists; and the system which has resulted from our analysis is true in the same way as the systems of plants discovered by Linné and Jussieu, and the system of animals by Cuvier.

The human self manifested by work is thus the field for the exploration of political economy, a concrete form of philosophy. The identity of these two sciences, or rather these two scepticisms, has been revealed to us throughout the course of this book. Thus the formation of ideas appeared to us in the division of labour as a division of elementary categories; then, we have seen freedom being born from the action of man upon nature, and, following freedom, arise all the relations of man with society and with himself. As a result, economics has been for us at the same time an ontology, a logic, a psychology, a theology, a politics, an aesthetics, a symbolism and a morality...

The field of science recognised, and its operation delimited, we had to recognise its *method*. Now, the method of economic science is still the same as that of philosophy: the organisation of work, we believe, is nothing but the organisation of common sense...

Among the laws that make up this organisation we have noticed the antinomy.

All true thought, as we have observed, arises in one time and two moments. Each of these moments being the negation of the other, and both of which must disappear only within a superior idea, it follows that antinomy is the very law of life and progress, the principle of perpetual motion. Indeed, if a thing, by virtue of the power of evolution which is in it, is repaired precisely of all that it loses, it follows that this thing is indestructible, and that movement supports it forever. In social economy, what competition is constantly occupied making, monopoly is constantly occupied unmaking; what labour produces, consumption devours; what property appropriates to itself, society gets a hold of: and from this results continuous movement, the unwavering life of humanity. If one of the two antagonistic forces is hindered, [so] that individual activity, for example, succumbs to social authority, organisation degenerates into communism and ends in nothingness. If, on the contrary, individual initiative lacks a counterweight, the collective organism is corrupted, and civilisation crawls under a regime of castes, iniquity and misery.

Antinomy is the principle of attraction and of movement, the reason for equilibrium: it is that which produces passion, and which breaks down all harmony and all accord...

Then comes the law of progression and series, the melody of beings, law of the beautiful and the sublime.

Remove the antinomy, the progress of beings is inexplicable: for where is the force that would produce this progress? Remove the series, the world is no more than a melee of sterile oppositions, a universal turmoil, without purpose and without an idea...

Even if these speculations, for us pure truth, appear doubtful, the application we have made of them would still be of immense utility. Let us think about it: there is not a single moment in life where the same man does not affirm and deny the same principles and theories at

the same time, with more or less good faith, no doubt, but also always with plausible reasons, which, without soothing the conscience, suffice to make passion triumph and spread doubt in the mind. Let us leave, if you want, logic: but is it nothing to have illuminated the double face of things, to have learned to be wary of reasoning, of knowing how, the more a man has fairness in ideas and righteousness in the heart, the more he runs the risk of being a dupe and absurd? All our political, religious, economic, etc. misunderstandings come from the inherent contradiction of things; and this is even the source from which flow the corruption of principles, the

All our political, religious, economic, etc. misunderstandings come from the inherent contradiction of things; and this is even the source from which flow the corruption of principles, the venality of consciences, the charlatanism of professions of faith, the hypocrisy of opinions...

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What is, at present, the *object* of economics?

The method itself tells us. Antinomy is the principle of attraction and balance in nature; antinomy is therefore the principle of progress and equilibrium in humanity, and the object of economic science is JUSTICE.

Considered in its purely objective relations, the only ones which social economy deals with, justice is expressed in *value*. Now, what is value? It is the labour performed.

“The real price of everything,” says Mr Smith, “what everything really costs to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it... What is bought with money or with goods is purchased by labour as much as what we acquire by the toil of our own body. That money or those goods indeed save us this toil. They contain the value of a certain quantity of labour which we exchange for what is supposed at the time to contain the value of an equal quantity. Labour was the first price, the original purchase-money that was paid for all things. It was not by gold or by silver, but by labour, that all the wealth of the world was originally purchased; and its value, to those who

possess it, and who want to exchange it for some new productions, is precisely equal to the quantity of labour which it can enable them to purchase or command.”¹

But if value is the embodiment of labour, it is at the same time the principle of the comparison of products with one another: hence the theory of proportionality which dominates all economic science, and to which A. Smith would have raised, if it had been in the spirit of his time to pursue, with the aid of logic, a system of experiments.

But how is justice manifested in society, in other words, how is proportionality of values established? Say said it: by an oscillatory movement between value in *utility* and value in *exchange*.

Here appears in political economy, with regard to work, its master and all too often its executioner, the *arbitral* principle.

At the outset of the science, work, devoid of method, without understanding of value, barely stammering its first attempts, appeals to free will to build wealth and set the price of things. From this moment two powers enter into struggle, and the great work of social organisation is inaugurated. For work and free will is what we will later call labour and capital, wage-labour and privilege, competition and monopoly, community and property, plebe and nobility, state and citizen, association and individualism. For anyone who has obtained the first notions of logic, it is obvious that all these oppositions, eternally reborn, must be eternally resolved: now, that is what the economists do not want to hear, to whom the arbitral principle inherent in value seems resistant to all determination; and it is, with the horror of philosophy, what causes the retardation, so fatal to society, of economic science.

“It would be as absurd,” says [John Ramsay] McCulloch, “to speak of absolute height and depth as of absolute value.”

Economists all say the same thing, and we can judge by this example how far they are from each other, and on the nature of value, and on the meaning of the words they use. The *absolute* expression carries with it the idea of wholeness, perfection, or plenitude, on the basis of precision and accuracy. An absolute majority is a true majority (half plus one), it is not an indefinite majority. In the same way absolute value is the precise value, deduced from the exact comparison of products together: there is nothing in the world so simple. But the consequence of this critical effect is that since values measure one another, they must not oscillate at random: such is the supreme wish of society, such is the significance of political economy itself, which is nothing else, in its totality, but the picture of the

contradictions whose synthesis infallibly produces true value.

Thus society is gradually established by a sort of swinging between necessity and arbitrariness, and justice is constituted by theft. Equality does not occur within society as an inflexible standard; it is, like all the great laws of nature, an abstract point, which oscillates continually above and below, through arcs more or less large, more or less regular. Equality is the supreme law of society; but it is not a fixed form, it is the average of an infinity of equations. That is how equality appeared to us from the first epoch of economic evolution, the division of labour; and such has been constantly manifested from the legislation of Providence.

Adam Smith, who had a kind of intuition on almost all the great problems of social economy, after having recognised labour as the principle of value and described the magical effects of the law of division, observes that, notwithstanding the increase of the produce resulting from this division, the wages of the worker do not increase; that often, on the contrary, they diminish, the gains of collective force not going to the worker, but to the master.

“The profits of stock, it may perhaps be thought are only a different name for the wages of a particular sort of labour, the labour of inspection and direction. They are, however, altogether different, are regulated by quite different principles, and bear no proportion to the quantity, the hardship, or the ingenuity of this supposed labour of inspection and direction. They are regulated altogether by the value of the stock employed, and are greater or smaller in proportion to the extent of this stock... In this state of things, the whole produce of labour does not always belong to the labourer. He must in most cases share it with the owner.”²

That, A. Smith tells us coldly, is how things happen: everything for the master, nothing for the worker. Whether we call it injustice, plunder, theft, the economist is not moved. The despoiler proprietor seems to him in all this as an automaton as the worker is robbed. And the proof that they deserve neither envy nor pity is that the workers only demand when they are dying of hunger; it is that no capitalist, entrepreneur or proprietor, neither during life nor at the moment of death, has felt the slightest remorse. They accuse ignorant and distorted public consciousness; they may be right, they may be wrong. A. Smith limits himself to reporting the facts, which is much better for us than declamations.

So by designating amongst workers a select [*privilégié*], *nazaræum inter fratres tuos*, social reason personified collective force. Society proceeds by myths and

¹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Volume 1, Book I, Chapter 5, 34-5. The original text is used where appropriate,

although Proudhon quotes a French translation which differs somewhat from the original. (*Black Flag*)

² Smith, Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter VI, 54-5. (*Black Flag*)

allegories. The history of civilisation is a vast symbolism. Homer summarises heroic Greece; Jesus Christ is suffering humanity, striving with effort, in a long and painful agony, to freedom, to justice, to virtue. Charlemagne is the feudal type; Roland, chivalry; Peter the Hermit, the crusades; Gregory VII, the papacy; Napoleon, the French Revolution. In the same way the industrial entrepreneur, who exploits a capital by a group of workers, is the personification of the collective force whose profit he absorbs, as the flywheel of a machine stores force. This is really the heroic man, the king of work. Political economy is a whole symbolism, property is a religion.

Let it follow A. Smith, whose luminous ideas, scattered in an obscure clutter, seem a repetition [*deutérose*] of primitive revelation.

“As soon as the land of any country has all become private property, the landlords, like all other men, love to reap where they never sowed, and demand a rent even for its natural produce. The wood of the forest, the grass of the field, and all the natural fruits of the earth, which, when land was in common, cost the labourer only the trouble of gathering them, come, even to him, to have an additional price fixed upon them. He must then pay for the licence to gather them; and must give up to the landlord a portion of what his labour either collects or produces [*without him*].”¹

Here is monopoly, here is interest on capital, here is [economic] rent! A. Smith, like all the enlightened, sees and does not understand; he recounts and has not the intelligence. He speaks under the inspiration of God without surprise and without pity; and the meaning of his words remain for him a closed letter. With what calm he recounts proprietor usurpation! As long as the land seems good for nothing, as long as labour has not loosened, fertilised, *utilised*, created VALUE [*mise en VALEUR*], property gives it no thought. The hornet does not alight on the flowers, it falls upon the hives. What

the worker produces is immediately taken; the worker is like a hunting god in the master’s hand.

A slave, exhausted from work, invents the plough. With a hardened wooden hook dragged by a horse, he opens the ground, enabling him capable of making ten times, a hundred time more. The master, at a glance, grasps the importance of the discovery: he seizes the land, he appropriates the revenue, he attributes the idea to himself, and makes himself adored by the mortals for this magnificent gift. He walks the equal of the gods: his wife is a nymph, Ceres; and he is Triptolemus.

Misery invents, and property reaps. For genius must remain poor: abundance would smother it. The greatest service that property has rendered to the world is this perpetual affliction of labour and genius.

But what to do with these heaps of grain? What a poor wealth [is] that which the boss shares with his horses, his oxen and his slaves! It is well worth being rich, if all the advantage consists of being able to gnaw a few more handfuls of rice and barley!...

An old woman, having pounded grain for her toothless mouth, realises that the dough soured, fermented, and cooked under the ashes, gives a food incomparably better than raw or grilled wheat.

Miracle! The daily bread is

discovered. – Another, having pressing into a jar a mass of dropped grapes, intends to boil the mash on the flame; the liquor spews out its impurities; it gleams, ruddy, bountiful, immortal. *Evoe!* it is the young Bacchus, the darling son of the proprietor, a child beloved of the gods, who has found it. What the master could not have devoured in a few weeks, a year will suffice for him to drink. The vine, like the harvest, like the earth, is appropriated.

What is to be done with these countless fleeces that each year provides such a large tribute? When the proprietor would raise his bed to be worthy of his pavilion, when he would duplicate thirty times his sumptuous tent, this useless luxury would do nothing but attest his impotence. He abounds in goods and he cannot enjoy; what a mockery!

A shepherdess, left naked by the avarice of the master, collects from the bushes some wool fibres. She twisted

travail”: “He must pay to have permission to collect them; that is to say, he pays the landlord a portion of what he collects or produces, *without him*, by his labour.” (*Black Flag*)

¹ Smith, Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter 6, 56. As before, Proudhon is quoting from a French translation and this ends with the words “Il faut qu’il paie pour avoir la permission. de les recueillir; c’est-à-dire qu’il paie au propriétaire une portion de ce qu’il recueille ou de ce qu’il produit, *sans lui*, par son

this wool, stretching it into equal and fine threads, gathering them on a spear, crisscrossing them, and making herself a soft and light dress, a thousand times more elegant than the patched skins that cover his scornful mistress. It is Arachne, the weaver, who created this marvel! Immediately the master begins to shear the hair of his sheep, his camels and his goats; he gives his wife a troop of slaves, who spin and weave under his orders. It is no longer Arachne, the humble servant; it is Pallas, the daughter of the proprietor, whom the gods have inspired, and whose jealousy avenges itself on Arachne by causing her to die of hunger.

What a sight this incessant struggle of labour and privilege, the first created everything out of nothing; the other always arriving to devour what it has not produced! – It is because the destiny of man is a continuous march. *He must work*, create, multiply, always and always perfecting. Let the worker enjoy his discovery; he falls asleep on his idea: his intelligence no longer advances. This is the secret of this iniquity which struck A. Smith, and against which, however, the unemotional historian did not find a word of reprobation. He felt, although he could not realise it, that the touch of God was there; that until the day when labour fills the earth, civilisation is driven by unproductive consumption, and that it is by rapine that fraternity is gradually established between men.

Man must work! That is why at the advice of Providence, theft was instituted, organised, sanctified! If the proprietor had tired of taking it, the proletariat would have soon be tired of producing, and savagery, hideous misery, was at the door. The Polynesian, amongst whom property has been aborted, and who enjoys in an entire community of property and love, why would he work? The earth and beauty are for everyone, children to anyone: what do you say to him about morals, dignity, personality, philosophy, progress? And without going so far, the Corsican, who is found for six months living and residing under his chestnut tree, why do you want him to work? What does he care for your conscription, your railways, your tribune, your press? What else does he need but to sleep when he has eaten his chestnuts? A prefect of Corsica said that to civilise this island it was necessary to chop down the chestnut trees. A more certain way is to appropriate them.

But already the proprietor is no longer strong enough to devour the substance of the worker: he calls his favourites, his jesters, his lieutenants, his accomplices. It is again Smith who reveals this wonderful conspiracy.

¹ A combination and slight re-organising of selections from *The Wealth of Nations*. The first sentence is from Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter 6 (57) while the rest is from Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter 9, with the second sentence originally appearing at the end of the rest of the passage. (110, 109-10). (*Black Flag*)

“In the progress of the manufacture, not only the number of profits increase, but every subsequent profit is greater than the foregoing; because the capital from which it is derived must always be greater. In raising the price of commodities the rise of wages operates in the same manner as simple interest does in the accumulation of debt. The rise of profit operates like compound interest. If in the linen manufacture, for example, the wages of the different working people, the flax-dressers, the spinners, the weavers, etc., should, all of them, be advanced two-pence a day; it would be necessary to heighten the price of a piece of linen only by a number of two-pences equal to the number of people that had been employed about it, multiplied by the number of days during which they had been so employed. That part of the price of the commodity which resolved itself into wages would, through all the different stages of the manufacture, rise only in arithmetical proportion to this rise of wages. But if the profits of all the different employers of those working people should be raised five per cent, that part of the price of the commodity which resolved itself into profit would, through all the different stages of the manufacture, rise in geometrical proportion to this rise of profit. The employer of the flaxdressers would in selling his flax require an additional five per cent upon the whole value of the materials and wages which he advanced to his workmen. The employer of the spinners would require an additional five per cent both upon the advanced price of the flax and upon the wages of the spinners. And the employer of the weavers would require a like five per cent both upon the advanced price of the linen yarn and upon the wages of the weavers.”¹

This vivid description of the economic hierarchy, starting with the Jupiter-proprietor, and ending with the slave. From labour, its division, the distinction of the master and the wage-worker, the monopoly of capital, arises a caste of landlords, financiers, entrepreneurs, bourgeois, masters and supervisors, labouring to consume rents, to collect usury, to squeeze the worker, and above all to exercise policing [*d'exercer la police*]², the most terrible form of exploitation and misery. The invention of politics and laws is exclusively due to property: Numa and Egeria, Tarquin and Tanaquil, as well as Napoleon and Charlemagne, were noble. *Regum tirmendorum in proprios greges, regel in ipsos irnperium est lavis*, says Horace. One would say a

² In chapter VII, Proudhon writes of “great family of preventive, coercive, repressive, and vindictive institutions which A. Smith designated by the generic term police.” In other words, State power. (*Black Flag*)

legion of infernal spirits, rushing from every corner of hell to torment a poor soul. Pull him by his chain, take away his sleep and food; strike, burn, pincers, without rest, without pity! For if the worker were spared, if we did him justice, nothing would remain for us, and we would perish.

O God! what crime has this unfortunate man committed, that you abandon him to the guards who distribute blows to him with such a liberal hand, and subsistence with a hand so miserly? ... And you, proprietors, chosen rulers of Providence, do not go beyond the prescribed measure, because rage is rising in the heart of your servant, and his eyes are red with blood.

A revolt of the workers wrings a concession from the pitiless masters. Happy day, deep joy! Work is free. But what freedom, for heaven's sake! Freedom for the proletarian is the ability to work, that is, of being robbed again; or not to work, that is to say to die to hunger! Freedom only benefits strength: by competition, capital crushes labour everywhere and converts industry into a vast coalition of monopolies. For the second time, the plebeian worker is on her knees before the aristocracy; she has neither the possibility, nor even the right to discuss her salary.

"Masters," says the oracle, "are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform league, not to raise wages above their existing rate. To violate this rule is an act of a false-friend. And by abhorrent legislation, this league is tolerated, while the coalitions of workers are severely punished."¹

And why this new iniquity, which the unalterable serenity of Smith could not help declaring *abhorrent*? Would such a crying injustice have been even necessary and that, without this favouritism [*acceptation de personnes*], fate would have been in error and Providence thwarted? Will we find means of justifying, with monopoly, this partial policing of the human race?

¹ A paraphrase of Adam Smith: "the law, besides, authorises, or at least does not prohibit their combinations, while it prohibits those of the workmen [...] Masters are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise the wages of labour above their actual rate. To violate this combination is everywhere a most unpopular action, and a sort of reproach to a master among

Why not, if we want to rise above societal sentimentalism, and consider higher facts, the force of things, the intimate law of civilisation?

What is labour? What is privilege?

Labour, analogous to creative activity, without awareness of itself, indeterminate, barren, as long as the idea, the law does not penetrate, labour is the crucible where value is elaborated the great matrix of civilisation, the passive or female principle of society. – Privilege, emanating from free will, is the electric spark that determines individualisation, the freedom which realises, the authority that commands, the mind that deliberates, the self that governs.

The relation of labour and privilege is thus a relation of the female to the male, of the wife to the husband. Amongst all peoples, the adultery of the woman has always seemed more reprehensible than that of the man; it was consequently subjected to more rigorous penalties. Those who, stopping at the atrocity of forms, forget the principle and see only the barbarism exercised towards the sex, are politicisers of romances worthy of appearing in the stories of the author of *Lélia*.

Any indiscipline of workers is comparable to adultery committed by woman. Is it not obvious then that, if the same favour on the part of the courts were to accept the complaint of the worker and that of the master, the hierarchical link, outside which humanity cannot live, would be broken, and the entire economy of society ruined?

Judge moreover by the facts. Compare the physiognomy of a workers' strike with the march of a coalition of entrepreneurs. There, distrust of the proper law, agitation, turbulence, outside screaming and trembling, inside terror, spirit of submission and desire for peace. Here, on the contrary, calculated resolution, feeling of strength, certainty of success, calmness in execution. Where, in your opinion, is power? where is the organic principle? where is life? Without doubt society owes to all assistance and protection: I do not plead here the cause of the oppressors of humanity; may the vengeance of heaven crush them! But the education of the

his neighbours and equals [...] The masters upon these occasions are just as clamorous upon the other side, and never cease to call aloud for the assistance of the civil magistrate, and the rigorous execution of those laws which have been enacted with so much severity against the combinations of servants, labourers, and journeymen." (Volume 1, Part 1, Chapter 8, 74-6). (*Black Flag*)

proletarian must be accomplished. The proletarian is Hercules arriving at immortality through work and virtue: but what would Hercules do without the persecution of Eurystheus?

Who are you? asked Pope Saint Leo at Attila, when this ravager of nations came to set his camp before Rome.

“I am the scourge of God,” replied the barbarian. “We receive with gratitude,” continued the pope, “all that comes from God: but you, take care not to do anything that is not commanded you!”

Proprietors, who are you?...

Weirdest thing, property, attacked on all sides in the name of charity, of justice, of social economy, has never known how to respond for its justification other than these words: *I am because I am*. I am the negation of society, the plundering of the worker, the right of the unproductive, the right of the strongest [*la raison du plus fort*], and none can live if I do not devour him.

This appalling enigma has made the most sagacious intelligences despair.

“In that original state of things, which precedes both the appropriation of land and the accumulation of stock, the whole produce of labour belongs to the labourer. He has neither landlord nor master to share with him. Had this state continued, the wages of labour would have augmented with all those improvements in its productive powers, to which the division of labour gives occasion. [...] They would have been produced by a smaller quantity of labour [...] they would have been purchased likewise with the produce of a smaller quantity.”¹

So says A. Smith. And adds his commentator:

“I can well understand how the right of appropriating, under the name of *interest*, *profit* or *rent*, the product of other individuals becomes nourishment for greed; but I cannot imagine that by diminishing the reward of the worker to add to the opulence of the idle man, we can increase industry or accelerate the progress of society in wealth.”²

The reason for this deduction, which neither Smith nor his commentator has seen, we will repeat, so that the inexorable law that governs human society is again and for the last time brought to light.

To divide labour is to make only a production of pieces: for there to be value, a composition is needed. Before the institution of property, each is a master to take from the ocean the water from which he draws salt for his food, to gather the olive from which he will extract his

oil, to collect the ore which contains iron and gold. Each is free to exchange some of what he has collected against an equivalent quantity of provisions made by another: so far, we do not go beyond the sacred right of work and the community of the earth. Now, if I have the right to use, either by my personal labour or by exchange, all the products of nature; and if the possession thus obtained is entirely legitimate, I have the same right to compose myself, from the various elements which I obtain by labour and exchange, a new product, which is my property, and which I have the right to enjoy exclusively of any other. I can, for example, by means of the salt from which I extract soda, and the oil I draw from the olive and sesame, to make a specific composition to clean linen, and which will be for me, from the point of view of cleanliness and hygiene, a precious utility. I can even reserve for myself the secret of this composition, and consequently take, by means of exchange, a legitimate profit.

Now, what is the difference, under relation of right, between the manufacture of an ounce of soap and that of a million kilograms? Does the greater or lesser quantity change anything of the morality of the operation? So property, as well as commerce, as well as labour, is a natural right, of whose exercise nothing in the world can steal from me.

But, by the very fact that I compose a product which is my exclusive property, as well as the materials that constitute it, it follows that a workshop, an exploitation of men is organised by me; that profits accumulate in my hands to the detriment of all who enter into business relations with me; and that if you wish to substitute yourself for me in my enterprise, quite naturally I will stipulate for myself a rent. You will possess my secret, you will manufacture in my place, you will turn my mill, you will reap my field, you will pick my vine, but at a quarter, a third, or half share.

All this is a necessary and indissoluble chain; there is no serpent or devil here; it is the very law of the thing, the *dictum* of common sense. In commerce, plundering is identical to exchange; and what is really surprising is that a regime like this one does not excuse itself only by the good faith of the parties, it is commanded by justice.

A man buys from his neighbour the collier a sack of coal, from the grocer a quantity of sulphur from Etna. He makes a mixture to which he adds a portion of saltpetre, sold by the druggist. From all this results an explosive powder, of which a hundred pounds would suffice to wreck a citadel. Now, I ask, the woodcutter who charred the wood, the Sicilian shepherd who picked up the sulphur, the sailor who transported it, the commission agent from Marseilles who reshipped it, the merchant who sold it, are they complicit in the disaster?

¹ Smith, Volume 1, Book I, Chapter VIII, 72. Indicators of missing sentences have been added. (*Black Flag*)

² Hodgskins, Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter X, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations* (Paris: Chez Guillaumin Libraire, 1843), 132. (*Black Flag*)

Is there any interdependence between them, I'm not saying in its use, but in the manufacture of this powder?

Now, if it is impossible to discover the least connection of action between the various individuals who, each without his knowledge, have co-operated in the production of the powder, it is clear, for the same reason, that there is no more connection and interdependence between them as to the profits of the sale, and that the gain which may result from its use also belongs exclusively to the inventor, that the punishment, to which he might become liable for as a result of crime or imprudence, is personal to him. Property is identical to responsibility: we cannot affirm the one, without granting at the same time the other.

But admire the unreason of reason! The same property, legitimate, irrefragable in its origin, constitutes in its use a flagrant iniquity; and this, without adding any element which modifies it, but by the mere development of the principle.

Let us take as a whole the products that industry and agriculture bring to the market. These products, such as powder and soap, are all, to some degree, the result of a combination of materials which were drawn from the general store. The price of these products invariably consists, firstly of the wages paid to the different categories of workers, secondly, of the profits demanded by the entrepreneurs and capitalists. So that society is divided into two classes of people: 1) entrepreneurs, capitalists and proprietors, who have the monopoly of all objects of consumption; 2) employees or workers, who can offer only half of what these are worth, which makes their consumption, circulation and reproduction impossible.

Adam Smith tells us in vain:

“It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, clothe, and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed, and lodged.”¹

How could this done, except with the dispossession of the monopolists? And how can monopoly be prevented if it is a necessary effect of the free exercise of the industrial faculty? The justice that Adam Smith wants to establish is impractical in the regime of property. Now, if justice is impractical, if it becomes actual injustice, and if this contradiction is internal to the nature of things [*intime à la nature des choses*], what is the use of even speaking of equity and humanity? Does Providence know equity, or whether fate is philanthropic? It is not to destroy monopoly, any more than labour, which we must reach; it is, by a synthesis which the contradiction of monopoly renders inevitable, to make it produce in the interests of all the goods which it [currently] reserves for some. Outwith of this

solution Providence remains insensitive to our tears; fate inflexibly follows its path; and while we, gravely seated, argue on the just and the unjust, God who has made us contradictory like himself in our thoughts, contradictory in our actions, answers us with a burst of laughter.

It is this essential contradiction of our ideas that, being realised by labour and expressing itself in society with a gigantic power, makes everything happen in the inverse direction of what it must be, and gives society the appearance of a tapestry seen in reverse or an inverted animal. Man, by the division of labour and by machinery, was to gradually rise to science and to liberty; and by division, by the machine he stupefies himself and becomes a slave. Tax, says the theory, must be as a result of wealth; and quite the contrary tax is because of poverty. The unproductive must obey, and by a bitter mockery the unproductive command. Credit, according to the etymology of its name, and according to its theoretical definition, is the provider of labour; in practice, it squeezes and kills it. Property, in the spirit of its most beautiful prerogative, is the extension of land; and in the exercise of this same prerogative, property is the prohibition of land. In all its categories political economy reproduces the contradiction and the religious idea. The life of man, affirms philosophy, is a perpetual emancipation from animality and nature, a struggle against God. In religious practice, life is the struggle of man against himself, the absolute submission of society to a superior Being. *Love God with all your heart*, the Gospel tells us, and *hate your spirit [âme] for eternal life*: precisely the opposite of what reason commands...

I will not push this summary further. Having reached the end of my journey, my ideas are pressing in such a multitude and vehemence, that already I would need a new book to recount what I have discovered, and that, in spite of the oratorical expedience, I see no other means of finishing than to stop abruptly.

If I am not mistaken, the reader must to be convinced of at least of one thing: that social truth cannot be found either in utopia, nor in routine; that political economy is not the science of society, but that it contains the materials of this science, in the same way that the chaos before creation contained the elements of the universe; it is that, to arrive at the definite organisation which appears to be the destiny of the species on the globe, it remains only to make a general equation of our contradictions.

But what will be the formula of this equation?

We already have a glimpse of it: it must be a *law of exchange*, a theory of MUTUALITY, a system of guaranties which solves the old forms of our civil and commercial societies, and satisfies all the conditions of efficiency, progress and justice that was indicated by

¹ Smith, Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter 8, 88. (*Black Flag*)

criticism; a society no longer merely conventional but real; which changes the fragmented [*parcellaire*] division into an instrument of science; which abolishes the servitude of machines, and prevents the appearance of crises; that makes competition a benefit, and monopoly a pledge of security for all; which, by the power of its principle, instead of asking credit from capital and protection from the State, subjugates capital and State to labour; which, by the sincerity of exchange, creates a true solidarity between peoples; which, without forbidding individual initiative, without prohibiting domestic savings, continuously restores to society the wealth which appropriation diverts; which, by this movement of *exit* and *return* of capital, assures the political and industrial equality of citizens, and by a vast system of public education, brings the equality of functions and the equivalence of aptitudes, by continuously raising their level; which, by justice, well being and virtue, renews the human conscience, assures the harmony and the equilibrium of generations; a society, in a word, which, being at the same time organisation and transition, escapes the provisional, guarantees everything and imposes nothing...

The theory of *mutuality*, or of *mutuum*, that is to say, of exchange in kind, whose most simple form is loan for consumption, is, from the point of view of collective existence, the synthesis of the two ideas of property and of community [*communauté*], a synthesis as old as the elements that constitute it, since it is nothing other than the return of society to its primitive practice through a maze of inventions and systems, the result of a meditation of six thousand years on the fundamental proposition, A equals A.

Everything today is being prepared for this solemn restoration; everything announces that the reign of fiction has passed, and that society will return to the sincerity of its nature. Monopoly has swelled to equal the world; yet, a monopoly which embraces the world cannot remain exclusive; it must be republicanised or else it must be destroyed. Hypocrisy, venality, prostitution, theft, form the foundation of the public conscience: now, unless humanity learns to live on what kills it, we must believe that justice and atonement approach....

Already socialism, sensing its utopias fail, attaches itself to realities and to facts, it laughs at itself in Paris, it discusses in Berlin, in Cologne, in Leipzig, in Breslau; it trembles in England; it thunders on the other side of the ocean; it gets killed in Poland, it tries its hand at government in Berne and in Lausanne. Socialism, by penetrating the masses, has become very different: the people care little for the honour of schools; it asks for work, science, well-being, equality. The system matters little, as long as the thing is there. Yet, when the people want something, and it is no longer a question of knowing how they can obtain it, the

discovery is not long in arriving: get ready to see the grand masquerade descend.

Let the priest finally put in mind that sin is misery, and that true virtue, that renders us worthy of eternal life, is to fight against religion and against God; – that the philosopher, lowering his pride, *supercilium philosophicum*, learns on his part that reason is society, and that to philosophise is to work with his hands; – that the artist may remember that he once descended from Olympus into Christ's stable, and that from this stable, he rose suddenly to unknown splendours; that as well as Christianity, labour must regenerate it; – that the capitalist muses that silver and gold are not true values; that by the sincerity of exchange all products amount to the same dignity, each producer will have in his house a mint [*un hôtel des monnaies*], and, as the fiction of the productivity of capital has plundered the worker, so organised labour will absorb capital; – that the proprietor knows that he is only the collector of society's [economic] rents, and that if he could once, in favour of war, put a prohibition on the soil, the proletarian can in his turn, by association, put a prohibition on harvests, and make property expire in the void; – that the prince and his proud cortege, his soldiers, his judges, his councillors, his peers, and all the army of the unproductive, hasten to cry *Thanks!* to the agricultural and industrial worker, because the organisation of labour is synonymous with the subordination of power, that it depends on the worker abandoning the unproductive to his indigence, and to destroy power in shame and hunger.

All these things will happen, not as unforeseen, unhoped novelties, a sudden effect of the passions of the people, or of the skill of a few men, but by the spontaneous return of society to an immemorial practice, momentarily abandoned, and rightly so...

Humanity, in its oscillatory march, turns incessantly upon itself: its progress is only the rejuvenation of its traditions; its systems, so opposite in appearance, always exhibit the same basis [*fond*], seen from different sides. Truth, in the movement of civilisation, always remains the same, always old and always new: religion, philosophy, science merely translate. And this is precisely what constitutes Providence and the infallibility of human reason; which ensures, in the very heart of progress, the immutability of our being; which renders society at once unalterable in its essence and irresistible in its revolutions; and which, continually extending perspective, always showing from afar the latest solution, establishes the authority of our mysterious premonitions.

Reflecting on these battles of humanity, I involuntarily recall that, in Christian symbolism, the militant Church must succeed on the final day a triumphant Church, and the system of social contradictions appears to me like a magic bridge, thrown over the river of oblivion.

Marginal notes to Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

1847

The Poverty of Philosophy

Chapter One: A Scientific Discovery

§ 2. Constituted Value or Synthetic Value

Marx (quoting from John Francis Bray's *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy*): "As an end, the political equality is there a failure, as a means, also, it is there a failure."

Proudhon: Yes

Chapter Two: The Metaphysics of Political Economy

§ 1. The Method

First Observation

Marx: "But the moment we cease to pursue the historical movement of production relations, of which the categories are but the theoretical expression, the moment we want to see in these categories no more than ideas, spontaneous thoughts, independent of real relations, we are forced to attribute the origin of these thoughts to the movement of pure reason."

Proudhon: It is quite necessary, since, in society, everything is, no matter what one says, contemporary; just as, in nature, all the atoms are eternal.

For credit can and must be *based only on realities, not on expectations*; credit is *real*, not *personal*, as the lawyers say. In order for this rule to be overthrown and reversed, it is necessary that by the reaction of labour against capital all appropriated wealth has become collective wealth again, that capital taken out of society has returned to society; it is necessary, in a word, that the antinomy be resolved. But then credit will be no more than a secondary organ of progress; it will have disappeared in the universal association

– "Chapter X: Seventh Epoch - Credit"
System of Economic Contradictions

Now, we have enumerated and critiqued these forms or categories of labour. They are: the division of labour, machines, competition, monopoly, the state or centralisation, free trade, credit, property, and community. Our analysis has shown that if labour possesses within itself the means of creating wealth, these means, through the antagonism that is specific to them, are likely to become so many new causes of poverty; and as political economy is nothing other than the affirmation of this antagonism, it is thereby proven that political economy is the affirmation and organisation of pauperism. The question is therefore no longer how labour will drive out primitive poverty, which has long since disappeared; but how we will eliminate the pauperism that results from the inherent defect of labour, or, to put it better, from the false organisation of labour, from political economy.

– "Chapter XIII: Tenth Epoch – Population"
System of Economic Contradictions

Marx: "It is of this absolute method that Hegel speaks in these terms:"

Proudhon: Very well: is that so stupid?

Marx: "He thinks he is constructing the world by the movement of thought, whereas he is merely reconstructing systematically and classifying by the absolute method of thoughts which are in the minds of all."

Proudhon: I do not pretend to do anything else!; and I believe that it is something. Your observation observes nothing.

Second Observation

Marx: "M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen, or silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces."

Proudhon: Lie: that is precisely what I say. Society produces the laws and materials from its experience.

Marx: “Thus the ideas, these categories, are as little eternal as the relations they express.”

Proudhon: Yes, eternal like humanity, no more no less and all contemporary. Your second observation goes nowhere.

Third Observation

Marx: “The only drawback to this method is that when he comes to examine a single one of these phases, M. Proudhon cannot explain it without having recourse to all the other relations of society; which relations, however, he has not yet made his dialectic movement engender.”

Proudhon: I say precisely all this. So tell me, how will you set about speaking in turn about the objects of Pol[itical] Econ[omy]?

Marx: “In constructing the edifice of an ideological system by means of the categories of political economy, the limbs of the social system are dislocated.”

Proudhon: Who tells you about all this? Your third observation is nothing but slander.

The error of Malthus, or rather of political economy, does not consist in saying that a man who has nothing to eat must die; or in maintaining that, under the system of individual appropriation, there is no course for him who has neither labour nor income but to withdraw from life by suicide, unless he prefers to be driven from it by starvation: such is, on the one hand, the law of our existence; such is, on the other, the consequence of property.. The error of Malthus, the radical vice of political economy, consists, in general terms, in affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition, namely the division of society into patricians and proletarians; – particularly, in saying that in an organised, and consequently interdependent, society, there may be some who possess, labour, and consume, while others have neither possession, nor labour, nor bread.

– “Chapter I: On Economic Science”
System of Economic Contradictions

The remedy for competition, in your opinion [economist], is to make competition universal. But, in order that competition may be universal, it is necessary to procure for all the means of competing; it is necessary to destroy or modify the predominance of capital over labour, to change the relations between employer and worker, to solve, in a word, the antinomy of division and that of machinery; it is necessary to ORGANISE LABOUR: can you give this solution?

– “Chapter V: Third Epoch – Competition”
System of Economic Contradictions

Fourth Observation

Marx: “For him, M. Proudhon, every economic category has two sides – one good, the other bad. He looks upon these categories as the petty bourgeois looks upon the great men of history: *Napoleon* was a great man; he did a lot of good; he also did a lot of harm.”

Proudhon: I myself criticised of this way of reasoning. For some, Napoleon is a demigod, for others a scourge. Are these or those closer to the truth than this petit bourgeois?

Marx: “The problem to be solved: to keep the good side, while eliminating the bad.”

Proudhon: Shameless slander.

Marx: “*Slavery* is an economic category like any other... What would M. Proudhon do to save slavery? He would

formulate the problem thus: preserve the good side of this economic category, eliminate the bad.”

Proudhon: This is just a deceitful, but reasonable, point. Slavery, the extreme [version] of the proletariat, that is to say of relative inferiority, has its reason for being, which will always make it exist, not as slavery but as an apprenticeship or something similar. It is forever like the customs-house.

Marx: “Hegel has no problems to formulate. He has only dialectics. M. Proudhon has nothing of Hegel’s dialectics but the language. For him the dialectic movement is the dogmatic distinction between good and bad.”

Proudhon: Nonsense.

Marx: “The very setting of the problem of eliminating the bad side cuts short the dialectic movement.”

Proudhon: Who has ever spoken to you of elimination?

Marx: “By taking the economic categories thus successively, one by one, and making one the antidote to the other, M. Proudhon manages to make with this mixture of contradictions and antidotes to contradictions, two volumes of contradictions, which he rightly entitles: *The System of Economic Contradictions*.”

Proudhon: Your fourth observation is nothing but a lie, a [illegible word] slander.

So by the very fact that society, forced by credit, has recognised the monopolist’s right to borrow on the mortgage of his monopoly without rendering an account to his fellow workers, it has made him the owner. Property is the postulate of credit, as credit had been the postulate of commerce, and monopoly the postulate of competition. In practice, all these things are inseparable and simultaneous; but in theory they are distinct and consecutive; and property is no more monopoly than machinery is the division of labour, although monopoly is almost always and almost necessarily accompanied by property, as division almost always and almost necessarily presupposes the use of machinery.

– “Chapter XI: Eight Epoch – Property”
System of Economic Contradictions

Fifth Observation

it is labour that must be paid for and exchanged, not the gratuitous utility of the land... In such conditions, the most absolute freedom of exchange is always advantageous, and can never become harmful. But monopolies, but the privileges of industry, but the prelibation of the capitalist, but the seigniorial rights of property, have you abolished them? do you even have a means of abolishing them? do you even believe in the possibility, in the necessity of their abolition?... As long as the privilege of national territory and individual property are implied by you, the law of exchange in your mouth will be a lie; as long as there is no association and solidarity agreed between the producers of all countries, that is to say, a community of the gifts of nature and an exchange only of the products of labour, foreign trade will only reproduce between races the phenomenon of enslavement and dependence that the division of labour, wage labour, competition and all economic agents produce between individuals; your free trade will be a deception, if you do not prefer that I say a theft exercised by force.

– “Chapter IX: Sixth Epoch – Balance of Trade”
System of Economic Contradictions

Marx: “When M. Proudhon spoke of the *serial relation in understanding*, of the *logical sequence of categories*, he declared positively that he did not want to give *history according to the order in time*, that is, in M. Proudhon’s view, the historical sequence in which the categories have manifested themselves.”

Proudhon: There is none.

Marx: “and now we have M. Proudhon reduced to saying that the order in which he gives the economic categories is no longer the order in which they engender one another.”

Proudhon: False. To appreciate the true value of logic is not to deny logic.

Marx: “In logical sequence, it was the century that belonged to the principle, and not the principle which belonged to the century.”

Proudhon: Who speaks to you of that? When I categorically say the opposite?

Marx: “But the moment you present men as the actors and authors of their own history, you arrive – by detour – at the real starting point, because you have abandoned those eternal principles of which you spoke at the outset.”

Proudhon: So I have the misfortune to still think like you! Have I ever claimed that principles are anything other than the intellectual representation, not the generating cause, of facts? Your fifth observation is a slanderous imputation. The real meaning of Marx’s work is that he regrets that throughout I thought like him, and that I said it before him. It is up to the reader to believe that it was Marx who, after having read me, regrets thinking like me! What a man!

Sixth Observation

Marx: “We shall concede that economic relations, viewed as *immutable laws, eternal principles, ideal categories*, existed before active and energetic men did”

Proudhon: I have no need of your supposition.

Marx: “So great is the productive force of the contradictions which *function* and which made M. Proudhon function, that, in trying to explain history, he is forced to deny it”

Proudhon: Appearing and existing are two different things, the first of which is true only for us.

In other words, in an organised society, *production increases as the square of the number of workers*. It is political economy itself that teaches us this: all its books are full of it; and if Malthus, preoccupied with a fixed idea, that of the doubling of the population, had forgotten it, why did his colleagues not remember it? For it is obvious that the ratio of increase determined by Malthus between the population and subsistence can only be understood in an inorganic society, where industry, that is to say division, machinery, competition, exchange, etc., are absolutely null; where collective force does not exist: in no way in an interlocking society, founded on the separation of industries and on exchange, and where each man, producing for millions of consumers, is served in turn by millions of producers.

– “Chapter XIII: Tenth Epoch – Population”
System of Economic Contradictions

English commerce, requested by its immense clientele, calls for workers from all directions, and encourages marriage; as long as work is abundant, marriage is an excellent thing, the effects of which often cited in the interest of machinery; but, as the clientele fluctuates, as soon as work and wages are lacking, they denounce the abuse of marriage, they accuse workers of improvidence. Political economy, that is to say, proprietary despotism, can never be wrong: it must be the proletariat.

– “Chapter IV: Second Epoch – Machines”
System of Economic Contradictions

Marx: “in trying to explain the successive appearance of social relations, he denies that anything can appear: in trying to explain production, with all its phases, he questions whether *anything can be produced*.”

Proudhon: Yes, production is appearance.

Marx: “To this end he has invented a new reason”

Proudhon: You always joke beforehand: start by being right.

Marx: “Just as the *antithesis* was before turned into an *antidote*, so now the *thesis* becomes a *hypothesis*. This change of terms, coming from M. Proudhon, has no longer anything surprising for us!”

Proudhon: Prattle.

Marx: “Providence, providential aim, this is the great word used today to explain the movement of history. In fact, this word explains nothing. It is at most a rhetorical form, one of the various ways of paraphrasing facts.”

Proudhon: Here I am again guilty of worshipping Providence!

Marx: “Thus, by successive transformations, landed property in Scotland has resulted in the driving out of men by sheep. Now say that the providential aim of the institution of landed property in Scotland was to have men driven out by sheep, and you will have made providential history.”

Proudhon: Libel! [Pasquinade!]

Unfortunately, the antagonism of economic institutions does not allow them to produce their effect without friction: hence the mishaps of labour, hence the upsets of misery. Thus, competition, by its positive and social side, has indeed as its aim to reduce indefinitely the price of things, consequently to increase unceasingly the sum of values and to put production in advance of the population; but, by its negative and selfish side, competition turns from wealth to poverty, since the reduction in price that it brings about, on the one hand only benefits the victors, on the other leaves the vanquished without work and without resources.

Competition, says the theory, must enrich everyone. But, by the imperfection of the social organism, practice proves that where competition has become general, there are just as many unfortunates as enriched: this is what it is impossible to doubt, after the criticism that we have made.

– “Chapter XIII: Tenth Epoch – Population”
System of Economic Contradictions

This is the war you have to support: a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority; a war of the producer against the non-productive; a war of equality against privilege... Now, to combat and reduce power, to put it in its proper place in society, it is useless to change the holders of power, nor to introduce some variation into its workings: it is necessary to find an agricultural and industrial combination by means of which power, today dominating society, becomes its slave.

– “Chapter VII: Fifth Epoch – The Police or Taxation”
System of Economic Contradictions

Marx: “To say now that all former centuries, with entirely different needs, means of production, etc., worked providentially for the realization of equality is, firstly, to substitute the means and the men of our century for the men and the means of earlier centuries and to misunderstand the historical movement by which the successive generations transformed the results acquired by the generations that preceded them.”

Proudhon: What is this chicanery? Generations transform! – I say myself that the same principle unites, governs, all events; – I do not know what transformation is. The France of 89 transformed its absolute monarch into a constitutional monarch. So be it. That is your style. I say, for my part, that the State, in 89, regularised the division of political powers that existed before 89. The reader will judge. The sixth observation falls on Hegel and does not relate to anything.

Marx: “But since M. Proudhon takes such a tender interest in Providence, we refer him to the *Histoire de l'économie politique* of M. de Villeneuve-Bargemont, who likewise goes in pursuit of a providential aim. This aim, however, is not equality, but Catholicism.”

Proudhon: What stupidity after what I wrote! Truly, Marx is jealous.

Seventh and Last Observation

Marx: “Thus, feudal production, to be judged properly, must be considered as a mode of production founded on antagonism.”

Proudhon: Does Marx have the pretension to present all this as his own, in opposition to something to the contrary that I said?

Marx: “From day to day it thus becomes clearer that the production relations in which the bourgeoisie moves have not a simple, uniform character, but a dual character... there is a development of the productive forces, there is also a force producing repression; that these relations produce *bourgeois wealth* – i.e., the wealth of the bourgeois class – only by continually annihilating the wealth of the individual members of this class and by producing an ever-growing proletariat.

Proudhon: But all this is me!

It is important, then, that we should resume the study of economic facts and practices, discover their meaning, and formulate their philosophy. Until this is done, no knowledge of social progress can be acquired, no reform attempted. The error of socialism has consisted hitherto in perpetuating religious reverie by launching forward into a fantastic future instead of seizing the reality which is crushing it; as the wrong of the economists has been in regarding every accomplished fact as an injunction against any proposal of reform.

For my own part, such is not my conception of economic science, the true social science. Instead of offering *a priori* arguments as solutions of the formidable problems of the organisation of labour and the distribution of wealth, I shall interrogate political economy as the depositary of the secret thoughts of humanity.

– “Chapter II – On Value”
System of Economic Contradictions

and when we...., taking up the difficult task, abandoned by you, of A. Smith, Ricardo, J. B. Say, even Malthus, we reveal to your eyes the despoiling principle; when we demonstrate to you that humanity is always struck before it fails in bread and land; when we develop in your presence the mechanism of proprietary usurpation, of capitalist fiction and of mercantile theft, you close your eyes so as not to see, your ears so as not to hear, your heart so as not to yield to conviction! The iniquity of the century is more precious to you than the rights of the poor, and the interests of your clique come before those of science!

Well! as long as you cry out against imprudence and against population, we will cry out on our side against hypocrisy and brigandage; We will point you out to the distrust of the workers, and it is you, you alone that we will hold responsible for the exploitation that is killing us and the infamy that is defiling us. We will repeat everywhere, with a clap of thunder: Political economy is the organisation of misery; and the apostles of theft, the purveyors of death, are the economists.

– “Chapter XIII: Tenth Epoch – Population”
System of Economic Contradictions

Marx: “We have the *fatalist* economists, who in their theory are as indifferent to what they call the drawbacks of bourgeois production as the bourgeois themselves are in practice to the sufferings of the proletarians who help them to acquire wealth... The proletariat that takes part in this struggle and is absorbed in this feverish labour experiences only passing, accidental sufferings, and itself regards them as such.”

Proudhon: I said all that. Marx does as Vidal did.¹

Marx: “these theoreticians are merely utopians who, to meet the wants of the oppressed classes, improvise systems and go in search of a regenerating science.”

Proudhon: Plagiarism of my 1st chapter.

Marx: “Let us return to M. Proudhon.”

Proudhon: What! return! But the preceding pages are a copy of me.

§ 2. Division of Labour and Machinery

Marx: “Certainly, things would be made much too easy if they were reduced to M. Proudhon’s categories.”

Proudhon: What does that prove? That humanity is progressing slowly.

Marx: “Adam Smith goes further than M. Proudhon thinks.”

Proudhon: Fine

Marx: “All this does not prevent M. Proudhon from saying elsewhere that Adam Smith has not the slightest idea of the drawbacks produced by the division of labour.”

Proudhon: Fine. But has Smith clarified the matter? – No.

Marx: “17 years before Adam Smith, who was a pupil of A. Ferguson, the last-named gave a clear exposition of the subject in a chapter which deals specifically with the division of labour [and quotes Ferguson’s *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1783)]”

Proudhon: The problem is not clarified.

Marx: “Besides, why stress this part of M. Proudhon’s work, since a little later we shall see him formally retract all these alleged

Whatever the pace of mechanical progress, if we were to invent machines a hundred times more marvellous than the mule-jenny... very far from freeing humanity, securing its leisure, and making the production of everything gratuitous, they would never do anything but multiply work, increase the population, make the chains of serfdom heavier, render life more and more expensive, and deepen the abyss which separates the class that commands and enjoys from the class that obeys and suffers.

– “Chapter IV: Second Epoch – Machines”
System of Economic Contradictions

Let us remember that in the current period of social antinomies that we call credit, and from which we are led to expect such pompous wonders, nothing is yet organised: labour is delivered to fragmented division; the workshop, to master and wage labour; the market, to competition and monopoly; society, to fiscal and parliamentary hypocrisy... We must therefore return to the general observation that we first made: for credit to become a true means of equilibrium, equilibrium must first be established in the workshop, on the market, in the State; in a word, labour must be organised. But this organisation does not exist...

– “Chapter X: Seventh Epoch – Credit”
System of Economic Contradictions

developments? ‘The first effect of fractional labour,’ continues M. Proudhon... M. Proudhon says, to relieve his conscience, that the universal conscience wills it thus...”

Proudhon: Come, dear Marx, you act in bad faith, and at the same time you know nothing.

Marx: “Machinery is no more an economic category than the bullock that drags the plough. Machinery is merely a productive force.”

Proudhon: It is a philosopher who says this.

¹ François Vidal (1812-1872) was a French utopian socialist associated first with the Saint-Simonians and then the Fourierists. He published an article in *Presse* on the 9th of December 1846 which analysed capitalism in terms of its contradictions. In his notebooks Proudhon accused Vidal of plundering his ideas (Pierre Haubtmann, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: sa vie et sa pensée, 1809-1849* [Paris : Beauchesne, 1982], 711). (*Black Flag*)

An English manufacturer: “The insubordination of our workers has made us think of dispensing with them. We have made and provoked every imaginable effort of the mind to replace the service of men by more docile tools, and we have achieved our object. Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labour. Wherever we still employ a man, we do so only provisionally, pending the invention for us of some means of accomplishing his work without him.”

What a system is that which leads a businessman to think with delight that society will soon be able to dispense with men! *Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labour!* That is exactly as if the ministry were undertaking to deliver the budget from the oppression of the taxpayers. Fool! if the worker cost you, they are your customers: what will you do with your products, when, driven out by you, they will no longer consume them? Thus machinery, after crushing the workers, does not take long in dealing the masters a counter-blow; for, if production excludes consumption, it itself is soon obliged to stop.
– “Chapter IV: Second Epoch - Machines”
System of Economic Contradictions

Marx: “For M. Proudhon, who sees things upside down, if he sees them at all, the division of labour, in Adam Smith’s sense, precedes the workshop, which is a condition of its existence.”

Proudhon: Not division in the sense of A. Smith, but the great natural division of trades.

Marx: “Nothing is more absurd than to see in machinery the *antithesis* of the division of labour, the *synthesis* restoring unity to divided labour.”

Proudhon: I maintain that.

Marx: “The machine is a unification of the instruments of labour, and by no means a combination of different operations for the worker himself. ‘When, by the division of labour, each particular operation has been simplified to the use of a single instrument, the linking up of all these instruments, set in motion by a single engine, constitutes – a machine.’ (Babbage, *Traité sur l’économie des machines*, p. 230, Paris, 1833)”

Proudhon: So the machine comes after division.

Marx: “Simple tools; accumulation tools; composite tools; setting in motion of a composite tool by a single hand engine, by man; setting in motion of these instruments by natural forces, machines; system of machines having one motor; system of machines having one automatic motor – this is the progress of machinery.”

Proudhon: So the workshop that groups the parts of work also comes after division.

Marx: “The concentration of the instruments of production and the division of labour are as inseparable one from the other as are, in the political sphere, the concentration of public authority and the division of private interests.”

Proudhon: Without doubt, it is only a logical succession.

Marx: “For M. Proudhon the concentration of the instruments of labour is the negation of the division of labour. “

Proudhon: Yes.

Marx: “In reality, we find again the reverse. As the concentration of instruments develops, the division develops also, and vice versa.”

Proudhon: Yes too, all of this is true at the same time.

Marx: “This is why every big mechanical invention is followed by a greater division of labour, and each increase in the division of labour gives rise in turn to new mechanical inventions.”

Proudhon: Very good, this is explained in my theory perfectly, as the parallel development of wealth and poverty.

Virgin country! Certainly, it is not from the burning of these eternal forests that the English, Swiss, German pioneer lived and multiplied; it is from work, work, I say, at first suitably divided, then gradually accompanied by capital and machines, increasing in value through circulation, and not yet made sterile by parasitism and monopoly. A proof of this is that political economy, imported from Europe, having begun to function a little too early in this country where, land and space being lacking to no one, work paid for itself without passing through the servitude of capital, the mediation of the banker and the surveillance of the police, the people had to let political economy run its course, and turn its gears alone.

– “Chapter XIII: Tenth Epoch – Population”
System of Economic Contradictions

Whoever appeals to power and capital to organise labour has lied,

Because the organisation of labour must be the downfall of capital and power.

– “Chapter XII: Ninth Epoch – Community”
System of Economic Contradictions

Marx: “The automatic workshop opened its career with acts which were anything but philanthropic.”

Proudhon: Absurd, like the opinion that believes the balance of trade is dishonoured by the vexations of the customs-house.

Marx: “Indeed, what a difference between the division of labour as it existed in Adam Smith’s day and as we see it in the automatic workshop!”

Proudhon: Division for me goes back further than A. Smith; it is also taken in a broader sense.

Marx (quoting from Dr. Ure’s *The Philosophy of Manufactures*): “The principle of the factory system then

is, to substitute mechanical science for hand skill, and the partition of a process into its essential constituents, for the division or gradation of labour among artisans... on the automatic plan, skilled labour gets progressively superseded, and will, eventually, be replaced by mere overlookers of machines.”]

Proudhon: One is only the consequence of the other and everything that is said about the first is applicable to the second.

Marx (quoting from Dr. Ure’s *The Philosophy of Manufactures*): “Such translations are utterly at variance with the old practice of the division of labour, which fixed one man to shaping the head of a pin, and another to sharpening its point, with the most irksome and spirit-wasting uniformity, for a whole life...”

Proudhon: Very good: I have carefully noted this opposition – the degradation of the worker is more advanced in what you call the automatic system than in what A. Smith calls division: – as for me, I have termed those two degrees as *Division* and as *machines*. I have said the Division of Labour fragments, mutilates, dissipates man; – machines enslave him: it is exactly the same as Dr Ure.

Marx: “But the moment every special development stops, the need for universality, the tendency towards an integral development of the individual begins to be felt.”

Proudhon: Good! And how do you understand this integral development?

Marx: “M. Proudhon, not having understood even this one revolutionary side of the automatic workshop, takes a step backward and proposes to the worker that he make not only the 12th part of a pin, but successively all 12 parts of it.”

Proudhon: Yes, insofar as it would only be a matter of resolving the antinomy of division; but I did not say that

It seems, then, that machines are going to repair the deficit caused by division, and triumph over misery. This is not the case. With machines begins the distinction between masters and wage-earners, between capitalists and workers. The worker, whom machinery was supposed to pull out of the stupefaction to which fragmented work had reduced him, sinks deeper and deeper into it: he loses his human character, his freedom, and falls into the condition of a tool. Well-being increases for the bosses, evil for the subordinates; the distinction of castes begins, and a monstrous tendency is declared, that which consists, by multiplying men, in wanting to do without men. Thus universal embarrassment worsens: already announced by fragmented division, poverty officially enters the world; from this moment it becomes the soul and nerve of society.

– “Chapter XIII: Tenth Epoch – Population”
System of Economic Contradictions

Thus power, the instrument of collective power, created in society to serve as a mediator between labour and privilege, finds itself fatally chained to capital and directed against the proletariat. No political reform can resolve this contradiction, since, by the admission of the politicians themselves, such a reform would only result in increasing the energy and extent of power, and unless hierarchy is overthrown and society is dissolved, power cannot touch the prerogatives of monopoly. The problem therefore consists, for the working classes, not in conquering, but in vanquishing both power and monopoly, which means bringing forth from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more powerful fact which envelops capital and the State, and which subjugates them. Any proposal for reform that does not meet this condition is only one more scourge, a sentinel rod, *virgam vigilantem*, as a prophet said, which threatens the proletariat.

– “Chapter VII: Fifth Epoch – The Police or Taxation”
System of Economic Contradictions

was all there was. The worker, always synthesising old and modern skill, must know how to work both with his hands and with machines. For it is absurd [to suggest] that he who has been replaced by the machine can do without the machine. Synthetism, having reached to its highest degree, requires of the worker both a greater ability and a lesser development of ability.

§ 3. Competition and Monopoly

Marx: “If the immediate *object* of the lover is the woman, the immediate object of industrial emulation is the product and not the profit.”

Proudhon: Synonym here.

Marx: “Competition is not industrial emulation, it is commercial emulation.”

Proudhon: Another synonym.

We cannot now enter upon a more fundamental criticism of the civil and commercial societies... We will reserve this subject [that is, “the organisation of labour”] for the time when, the theory of economic contradictions being finished, we shall have found in their general equation the programme of association, which we shall then publish in contrast with the practice and conceptions of our predecessors.

– “Chapter VI: Fourth Epoch – Monopoly”, *System of Economic Contradictions*

1848-1851: The February Revolution

“we are forced to conclude again that property... which owes its existence entirely to servitude, is an impossibility in a Republic; and that only one of two things can happen: either property will overrule the Republic or the Republic will overrule property.”

– Speech to the Constituent National Assembly, 31st July 1848

Proudhon, whilst referring to himself as a revolutionary, was a reformist at heart. However, he played an important role during the 1848 Revolution, primarily as a journalist but also (for a time) as an elected politician – although he also turned his trade of printer to good use by setting the type for the first republican proclamation.

He sought to influence the revolution towards mutualist goals. Here he was hindered by his reformism and the lack of a well-organised workers’ movement. Both saw him to appeal to various bodies to aid his reforms, such as the National Assembly in 1848 and even – with the obvious defeat of his previous hopes – the bourgeoisie in 1851 (in *General Idea of the Revolution*). Perhaps unsurprisingly, neither felt inclined to agree that it was in their own interests to help end their power and position. Yet he also pointed to the need for workers to free themselves, to organise their own alternatives and groups to undermine bourgeois political and economic power – which is the only consistently libertarian strategy.

From the many writings from the period, we include two which summarise his ideas well – “Toast to the Revolution” and “Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*”. The latter is of particular note for how many of its demands were put into practice within the Paris Commune of 1871.

We then include articles from his polemics with two other leading French socialists, Pierre Leroux and Louis Blanc. Proudhon’s critiques show (some of) the differences between libertarian and statist socialism. For Kropotkin Proudhon had “cheered up the readers of *Voice of the People* with his sarcastic remarks towards this new democratic label of the State” advanced by Blanc and that “[m]any admirable pages can be found there on the State and Anarchy which it would be very useful to reproduce for a wide audience”, words “which we could say were written yesterday”. (*Modern Science and Anarchy* [2018], 205, 227)

The 1848 Revolution has not been analysed much by anarchists, despite both Proudhon and Bakunin being active participants. Proudhon’s own analysis, *Confessions of a Revolutionary* (1849/1851), has only been partially translated (one of the four works he completed in prison, sentenced after correctly predicting President Louis-Napoleon was aiming for tyranny. This period is important for many reasons, not least because the backlash of the peasantry saw him temper his rhetoric on association somewhat, stressing its need only when objectively required, as well as rehabilitating the word “property” to describe possession.

A few of these texts have appeared before, in *Property is Theft!*, alongside the middle part of “Resistance to the Revolution” which was translated by leading American individualist anarchist Benjamin R. Tucker as “The State: Its Nature, Object, and Destiny” (*Liberty* [Boston], 28 January and 11 February 1888). We have reprinted them due to their importance in clarifying Proudhon’s ideas in a relatively concise way.

Toast to the Revolution

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

Le Peuple, 17 October 1848¹

Citizens,

When our friends of the democratic republic, apprehensive about our ideas and inclinations, cry out against the qualification of *socialist* which we add to that of democrat, for what do they reproach us? – They reproach us for not being revolutionaries.

Let us see then if they or we belong in the tradition, whether they or we have the true revolutionary practice.

And when our adversaries in the middle class, concerned for their privileges, pour calumny and insult upon us, what is the pretext for their charges? It is that we want to totally destroy property, the family, and civilisation.

Again, let us see whether we or our adversaries better deserve the title of conservatives.

Revolutions are the successive manifestation of justice in human history. – It is for this reason that all revolutions have their origins in a previous revolution.

Whoever talks about revolution necessarily talks about *progress*, but just as necessarily about *conservation*. From this it follows that the revolution is always at work in history and that, strictly speaking, there are not several revolutions, but only one permanent revolution.

The revolution, eighteen centuries ago, called itself the gospel, the *Good News*. Its fundamental dogma was the *Unity of God*; its motto, the *equality of all men before God*. Ancient slavery rested on the antagonism and inequality of gods, which represented the relative inferiority of races in the state of war. Christianity created the rights of peoples, the brotherhood of nations; at the same time, it abolished idolatry and slavery.

Certainly no one denies today that the Christians, revolutionaries who fought by testimony and by martyrdom, were men of progress. They were also conservatives.

The polytheist initiation, after civilising the first humans, after converting these men of the woods – *sylvestres homine*, as the poet says – into men of the towns, became itself, through sensualism and privilege, a principle of corruption and enslavement. Humanity was lost, when it was saved by the Christ, who received from that glorious mission the double title of *Savior* and

Redeemer, or, as we put it in our political language, conservative and revolutionary.

That was the character of the first and greatest of revolutions. It renewed the world, and by renewing it conserved it.

But, supernatural and spiritual as it was, that revolution only expressed the more material side of justice, the enfranchisement of bodies and the abolition of slavery. Established on faith, it left thought enslaved; it was not sufficient for the emancipation of man, who is body and spirit, matter and intelligence. It called for another revolution. A thousand years after the coming of Christ, a new upheaval began within the religion the first revolution founded, a prelude to new progress. Scholasticism carried within it, along with the authority of the Church and the scripture, the authority of reason! In about the 16th century, the revolution burst forth.

The revolution, in that epoch, without abandoning its first given, took another name, which was already celebrated. It called itself philosophy. Its dogma was the *liberty of reason*, and its motto, which follows from that, was the *equality of all before reason*.

Here then is man, declared inviolable and free in his double essence, as soul and as body. Was this progress? Who but a tyrant could deny it? Was it an act of conservation? The question does not even merit a response.

The destiny of man, a wise man once said, is to contemplate the works of God. Having known God in his heart, by faith, the time had come for man to know him with his reason. The Gospel had been for man like a primary education; now grown to adulthood, he needed a higher teaching, lest he stagnate in idiocy and the servitude that follows it.

In this way, the likes of Galileo, Arnaud de Bresce, Giordano Bruno, Descartes, Luther – that whole elite of thinkers, wise men and artists, who shone in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries as great revolutionaries – were at the same time the conservatives of society, the heralds of civilisation. They continued, in opposition to the representatives of Christ, the movement started by Christ, and they suffered no lack of persecution and martyrdom for it!

¹ <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/translations/proudhons-toast-to-the-revolution-revised-translation/> (a previous version appeared in *Property is Theft!*)

This was the second great revolution, the second great manifestation of justice. It too renewed the world – and saved it.

But philosophy, adding its conquests to those of the Gospel, did not fulfil the program of that eternal justice. Liberty, called forth from the heart of God by Christ, was still only individual: it had to be established in the tribunal. Conscience was needed to make it pass into law.

About the middle of the last century a new development began, and, as the first revolution had been religious and the second philosophical, the third revolution was political. It called itself the social contract.

It took for its dogma the *sovereignty of the people*. It was the counterpart of the Christian dogma of the *unity of god*.

Its motto was *equality before the law*, the corollary of those that it had previously inscribed on its flag: equality before God and equality before reason.

Thus, with each revolution, liberty appeared to us always as the instrument of justice, with equality as its criterion. The third term – the aim of justice, the goal it always pursues, and the end it approaches – is brotherhood.

Let us never lose sight of this order of revolutionary development. History testifies that brotherhood, the supreme end of revolutions, does not impose itself. Its conditions are, first, liberty, and then equality. It is as if justice said to us all: Men, be free; citizens, become equal; brothers, embrace one another.

Who dares deny that the revolution undertaken sixty years ago by our fathers, the heroic memory of which makes our hearts beat with such force that we almost forget our own sense of duty – who denies, I ask, that this revolution was a progress? Nobody. Very well, then. But was it not both progressive and conservative? Could society have survived with its time-worn despotism, its degraded nobility, and its corrupt clergy, with its egotistical and undisciplined parliament, so given to intrigue, with a people in rags, a race which can be exploited at will?

Is it necessary to blot out the sun, in order to make the case? The revolution of '89 was the salvation of humanity; it is for that reason that it deserves the title of revolution.

But, citizens, if our fathers have done much for liberty and fraternity, and have even more profoundly opened up the road of brotherhood, they have left it to us to do even more.

Justice did not speak its last word in '89, and who knows when it will speak it.

Are we not witnesses, our generation of 1848, to a corruption worse than that of the worst days of history,

to a misery comparable to that of feudal times, to an oppression of spirit and of conscience, and a degradation of all human faculties, which exceeds all that was seen in the epochs of most dreadful cruelty? Of what use are the conquests of the past, of religion and philosophy, and the constitutions and codes, when by virtue of the same rights that are guaranteed to us by those constitutions and codes, we find ourselves dispossessed of nature, excommunicated from the human species? What is politics, when we lack bread,

when even the work which might give bread is taken from us? What to us is the freedom to go or to become, the liberty to think or not to think, the guarantees of the law, and the spectacles of the marvels of civilisation? What is the meagre education which is given to us, when by the withdrawal of all those objects on which we might practice human activity, we are ourselves plunged into an absolute void; when to the appeal of our senses, our hearts, and our reason, the universe and civilisation reply: *Néant!* Nothing!

Citizens, I swear it by Christ and by our fathers! Justice has sounded its fourth hour, and misfortune to those who have not heard the call!

– Revolution of 1848, what do you call yourself?

– I am the *right to work!*

– What is your flag?

– *Association!*

– And your motto?

– *Equality before fortune!*

– Where are you taking us?

– *To Brotherhood!*

– Salute to you, Revolution! I will serve you as I have served God, as I have served Philosophy and Liberty, with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my intelligence and my courage, and I will have no other sovereign and ruler than you!

– Revolution of 1848, what do you call yourself?

– I am the *right to work!*

– What is your flag?

– *Association!*

– And your motto?

– *Equality before fortune!*

– Where are you taking us?

– *To Brotherhood!*

Thus the revolution, having been by turns religious, philosophical and political, has become economic. And like all its predecessors, it brings us nothing less than a contradiction of the past, a sort of reversal of the established order! Without this complete reversal of principles and beliefs, there is no revolution; there is only mystification. Let us continue to interrogate history, citizens.

Within the empire of polytheism, slavery had established and perpetuated itself – in the name of what principle? In the name of religion. – Christ appeared, and slavery was abolished, precisely in the name of religion.

Christianity, in its turn, made reason subject to faith; philosophy reversed that order, and subordinated faith to reason.

Feudalism, in the name of politics, controlled everything, subjecting the labourer to the bourgeois, the bourgeois to the noble, the noble to the king, the king to the priest, and the priest to a dead letter. – In the name of politics again, '89 subjected everyone to the law, and recognised among men only citizens.

Today labour is at the discretion of capital. Well, then! The revolution tells you to change that order. It is time for capital to recognise the predominance of labour, for the tool to put itself at the disposition of the worker.

Such is this revolution, which has suffered sarcasm, calumny and persecution, just like any other. But, like the others, the Revolution of 1848 becomes more fertile from the blood of its martyrs. *Sanguis martyrurum, semen christianorum!* exclaimed one of the greatest revolutionaries of times past, the indomitable Tertullien. Blood of republicans, seed of republicans.

Whoever does not dare to acknowledge this faith, sealed with the blood of our brothers, is not a revolutionary. The failure is an infidelity. He who dissembles regarding it is a renegade. To separate the Republic from socialism is to wilfully confuse the freedom of mind and spirit with the slavery of the senses, the exercise of political rights with the deprivation of civil rights. It is contradictory, absurd.

Here, citizens, is the genealogy of social ideas: are we, or are we not, in the revolutionary tradition? It is a question of knowing if we are at present also engaged in revolutionary practice, if, like our fathers, we will be at once men of conservation and of progress, since it is only by this double title that we will be men of revolution.

We have the revolutionary principle, the revolutionary dogma, and the revolutionary motto. What do we lack in order to accomplish the work entrusted to our hands by Providence? One thing only: revolutionary practice!

But what is the practice which distinguishes the epochs of revolution from ordinary times?

What constitutes revolutionary practice is that it no longer proceeds by details and distinctions, or by imperceptible transitions, but by simplifications and enjambments. It passes over, by broad equations, the middle terms proposed by the spirit of routine, which would normally have been applied in the past, but which the selfishness of the privileged or the inertia of the governments has dismissed.

These great equitations of principles, these enormous shifts in mores, also have their laws, and they are not at all arbitrary. They are no more a matter of chance than the practice of revolutions.

But what, in the end, is that practice?

Suppose that the statesmen we have seen in power since February 24, these short-sighted politicians of small means, of narrow and meticulous routines, had been in the place of the apostles. I ask you, citizens, what would they have done?

They would have fallen into agreement with the innovators of the various conferences, concluding, in secret consultations, that the plurality of gods was an absurdity. They would have said, like Cicero, that it is inconceivable that two augurs could look at one another without laughter. They would have condemned slavery very philosophically, and in a deep voice.

But they would also have cried out against the bold propaganda which, denying the gods and all that society has sanctified, raised superstition and all the interests against it; they would have trusted in good policy, rather than attacking the old beliefs, instead of interpreting them. Instead of abolishing the worship, they would have purified it. They would have knelt before Mercury the thief, before impudent Venus and incestuous Jupiter. They would have spoken with respect and esteem for the Floralia and the Bacchanalia. They would have made a philosophy of polytheism, retold the history of the gods, renewed the personnel of the temples, published the payments for sacrifices and public ceremonies, granting, as far as it was in them, reason and morality to the impure traditions of their fathers. By dint of attention, kindness and human respect, instead of saving the world, they would have caused it to perish.

There was, in the first centuries of the Christian era, a sect, a party powerful in genius and eloquence, which, in the face of the Christian revolution, undertook to continue the idolatry in the form of a moderate and progressive republic; they were the Neo-Platonists, to whom Apollonius of Tyana and the Emperor Julian attached themselves. It is in this fashion that we have seen with our own eyes certain preachers attempt the renovation of Catholicism, by interpreting its symbols from the point of view of modern ideas.

A vain attempt! Christian preaching, which is to say revolutionary practice, swept away all the gods and their hypocritical admirers; and Julian, the greatest

politician and most beautiful spirit of his time, bears in the histories the name of *apostate*, for having been madly opposed to evangelical justice.

Let us cite one more example.

Let us suppose that in '89, the prudent counsellors of despotism, the well-advised spirits of the nobility, the tolerant clergy, the wise men of the middle class, the most patient of the people – let us suppose, I say, that this elite of citizens, with the most upright vision and the most philanthropic views, but convinced of the dangers of abrupt innovations, had agreed to manage, according to the rules of politics, the transition from despotism to liberty. What would they have done?

They would have passed the promised charter, after long discussion and mature deliberation, letting at least ten years elapse between each article. They would have negotiated with the pope, and with all manner of submissiveness, the civil constitution of the clergy. They would have negotiated with the convents, by amicable agreement, the repurchase of their goods. They would have opened an investigation into the value of feudal rights, and the compensation to be accorded to the lords. They would have sought compensation to the privileged for the rights accorded to the people. They would have made the work of a thousand years what revolutionary practice might accomplish overnight.

All of this is not just empty talk: there was no lack of men in '89 willing to connect themselves to this false wisdom of revolution. The first of all was Louis XVI, who was as revolutionary at heart and in theory as anyone, but who did not understand that the revolution must also be practiced. Louis XVI set himself to haggle and quibble over everything, so much and so well, that the revolution, growing impatient, swept him away!

Here then is what I mean, today, by revolutionary practice.

The revolution of February proclaimed the *right to work*, the predominance of labour over capital.

On the basis of that principle, I say that before overriding all reforms, we have to occupy ourselves with a generalising institution, which expresses, on all the points of social economy, the subordination of capital to labour; which, in lieu of making, as has been the case, the capitalist the sponsor of the labourer, makes the labourer the arbiter and commander of the capitalist; an institution which changes the relation between the two great economic powers, labour and property, and from which follows, consequently, all other reforms.

You who possess nether reserve nor property, who hold no public offices and whose labour is useless to us, TAKE YOURSELVES AWAY! You have really no business on the earth; beneath the sunshine of the Republic there is not room for all.

Who will tell me that the right to labour and to live is not the whole of the Revolution?

Who will tell me that the principle of Malthus is not the whole of the Counter-Revolution?

– “The Malthusians”, *Le Représentant du Peuple*, 10 August 1848

Will it then be revolutionary to propose here an agricultural bank serving, as always, the monopolisers of money; and to create there a certified loan office, a monument to stagnation and unemployment; and elsewhere, to found an asylum, a pawn-shop, a hospital, a nursery, a penitentiary, or a prison, to increase pauperism by multiplying its sources?

Will it be a work of Revolution to sponsor a few million workers, sometimes a company of tailors, and sometimes of masons; to reduce the tax on drink and increase it on properties; to convert obligations into losses; to vote seeds and pick-axes for twelve thousand colonists leaving for Algeria, or to subsidise a *trial phalanstery*?

Will it be the speech or act of a revolutionary to argue for four months whether the people will work or will not, if capital hides or if it flees the country, if it awaits confidence or if it is confidence that awaits it, if the powers will be divided or only the functions, if the president will be the superior, the subordinate or the equal of the national assembly, if the first who will fill this role will be the nephew of the emperor or the son of the king, or if it would not be better, for that good purpose, to have a soldier or a poet, if the new sovereign will be named by the people or by the representatives, if the ministry of *reaction* which goes out merits more confidence than the ministry of *conciliation* which comes, if the Republic will be blue, white, red, or tricolour?

Will it be revolutionary, when it is a question of returning to labour the fictive production of capital, to declare the net revenue inviolable, rather than to seize it by a progressive tax; when it is necessary to organise equality in the acquisition of goods, to lay the blame on the mode of transmission; when 25,000 tradesmen implore a legal settlement, to answer them by bankruptcy; when property no longer receives rent or farm rent, to refuse it further credit; when the country demands the centralisation of the banks, to deliver that credit to a financial oligarchy which only knows how to make a void in circulation and to maintain the crisis,

while waiting for the discouragement of the people to bring back confidence?

Citizens, I accuse no one.

I know that to all except for us social democrats, who have envisioned and prepared for it, the Revolution of February has been a surprise; and if it is difficult for the old constitutionals to pass in so short a time from the monarchical faith to a republican conviction, it is still more so for the politicians of the old century to comprehend anything of the practice of the new Revolution. Other times have other ideas. The great manoeuvres of '93, good for their time, do not suit us now any more than the parliamentary tactics of the last thirty years; and if we want to abort the revolution, we have no surer means than to take up again these errors.

Citizens, you are still only a minority in this country. But already the revolutionary flood grows with the speed of the idea, with the majesty of the ocean. Exercise again some of that patience that made your success, and the triumph of the Revolution is assured. You have proven, since June, by your discipline, that you are politicians. From now on you will prove, by your acts, that you are organisers. The government will be enough, I hope, with the National Assembly, to maintain the republican form: such at least is my conviction. But the revolutionary power, the power of conservation and of progress, is no longer today in the hands of the government; it is not in the National Assembly: it is in you. The people alone, acting upon themselves without intermediary, can achieve the economic Revolution begun in February. The people alone can save civilisation and advance humanity!

Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*

Le Peuple, 8 November 1848¹

The central electoral committee, comprising delegates from the fourteen Seine *arrondissements* and designed to make preparation for the election of the president of the Republic, has just concluded its operations.

Citizen Raspail, the people's representative, has been selected unanimously as the candidate of the democratic and social republican party.²

The central committee is to publish its circular to electors without delay.

As for ourselves, who have associated ourselves intellectually and emotionally with that candidature, who, in that context, have seen fit, in defence of the dignity of our views, to stand apart from other, less advanced factions of the democracy, we consider it our duty here to recall what our principles are: that being the best way of justifying our conduct.

Our *principles*!

Throughout history, men who have sought popular endorsement in order to succeed to power have abused the masses with alleged declarations of principle which, in essence, have never been anything other than declarations of PROMISES!

Throughout history, the ambitious and scheming have, in more or less pompous language, promised the people:

Liberty, equality, fraternity;

Work, family, property and progress;

Credit, education, association, order and peace;

Participation in government, equitable distribution of taxes, honest and inexpensive administration, fair courts, movement towards equality of income, liberation of the proletariat and eradication of poverty!

So much have they promised that, coming after them, it has to be confessed, there is nothing left to be promised.

But then again, what have they delivered? It is for the people to answer: Nothing! . . .

The true friends of the people must henceforth adopt a different tack. What the people expects of its candidates, what it asks of them, is not promises now, but PRACTICALITIES.

It is upon these practicalities that they suggest men should be judged: and it is upon such that we ask that we be judged.

As socialist-democrats, we belong, in truth, to no sect, no school. Or, rather, if we were obliged to come up with a description of ourselves, we should say that we are of the *critical* school. For us, socialism is not a system: it is, quite simply, a protest. We believe, though, that from socialist works is dedicated a series of principles and ideas at odds with economic convention, and which have been absorbed into popular belief: which is why we call ourselves socialists. Professing socialism while embracing nothing of socialism, as the more artful do, would be tantamount to mocking the people and abusing its credulousness... Being a republican is not the last word: it is not the last word to acknowledge that the Republic ought to be surrounded by social institutions: it is not enough to inscribe upon

¹ First appeared in *Property is Theft!*, translation by Paul Sharkey (*Black Flag*)

² François-Vincent Raspail (1794-1878) was a French chemist, naturalist, physiologist, and socialist politician. Stood as the Socialist candidate in the Presidential elections of 10th December 1848 but came fourth (with 0.49% of the vote). (*Black Flag*)

one's banner, *Democratic and social Republic*: one must plainly point up the difference between the old society and the new: one has to spell out the positive product of socialism: and wherein and why the February Revolution, which is the expression thereof, is a social revolution.

For a start, let us recall socialism's underlying dogma, its pure dogma.

The objective of socialism is liberation of the proletariat and eradication of poverty, which is to say, effective equality of circumstances between men. In the absence of equality, there will always be poverty, always be a proletariat.

Socialism, which is egalitarian above all else, is thus the democratic formula par excellence. Should less honest politicians be mealy-mouthed about admitting it, we respect their reservations: but they ought to know that, in our view, they are no democrats.

Now, what can be the origin of this inequality?

As we see it, that origin has been brought to light by a whole series of socialist criticisms, particularly since Jean-Jacques [Rousseau]: that origin is the realisation within society of this triple abstraction: *capital, labour, talent*.

It is because society has divided itself into three categories of citizen corresponding to the three terms in that formula – that is, because of the formation of a class of capitalists or proprietors, another class of workers, and a third of talents – that caste distinctions have always been arrived at, and one half of the human race enslaved to the other.

Wheresoever an attempt has been made to separate these three things – capital, labour and talent – effectively and organically, the worker has wound up enslaved: he has been described, in turn as slave, serf, pariah, plebeian and proletarian: and the capitalist has proved the exploiter: he may go variously by the name of patrician or noble, proprietor or bourgeois: the man of talent has been a parasite, an agent of corruption and servitude: at first he was the priest, then he was the cleric, and today the public functionary, all manner of competence and monopoly.

The underlying dogma of socialism thus consists of reducing the aristocratic formula of *capital-labour-talent* into the simpler formula of LABOUR!... in order to make every citizen simultaneously, equally and to the same extent capitalist, worker, and expert or artist.

In reality as in economic science, *producer* and *consumer* are always one and the same person, merely considered from two different viewpoints. Why should the same not be true of capitalist and worker? of worker and artist? Separate these qualities in the organisation of society and inexorably you create castes, inequality and misery: amalgamate them, on the other hand, and in every individual you have equality, you have the Republic. And that is how in the political order, all these distinctions between governors and governed, administrators and administered, public functionaries and tax-payers, etc., must some day be erased. Each

citizen must, through the spread of the social idea, become all: for, if he be not all, he is not free: he suffers oppression and exploitation somewhere.

So, by what MEANS is this great amalgamation to be brought to pass?

The means is indicated by the affliction itself. And, first of all, let us try to define that affliction better, if possible.

Since the organic *origin* of the proletariat and of poverty is located in the division of society into two classes: one that works and does not own; the other that owns but does not work; and, consequently, consumes without producing; it follows that the affliction by which society is

beset consists of this singular fiction according to which capital is, of itself, productive: whereas labour, of itself, is not. In fact, for all things to be equal in this hypothesis of the separation of labour and capital, then, because the capitalist profits by his capital without working, so the worker should profit from his labour, in the absence of capital. Now, that is not the case. So, in the current system, equality, liberty and fraternity are impossible: and thus, poverty and proletariat are the inevitable consequence of property as presently constituted.

Anyone knowing this but not confessing it is lying equally to bourgeoisie and to proletariat. Anyone courting the people's votes but keeping this from it is neither a socialist nor a democrat.

We say again:

The productivity of capital, which Christianity has condemned under the name of USURY, is the true cause of poverty, the true origin of the proletariat, the eternal obstacle to establishment of the Republic. No equivocation, no mumbo-jumbo, no sleight of hand! Let those who profess to be socialist democrats join us in signing this profession of faith: let them join our

company: then, and then only, will we acknowledge them as brothers, as true friends of the people, and will we associate ourselves with their every act.

And now, what is the means whereby this affliction can be eradicated, this usury terminated? Is it to be an attack upon *net* product, seizure of revenue? Is it to be, while professing utmost regard for property, the ravishing of property by means of taxation, as it is acquired through work and enshrined by law?

It is on this count above all that the true friends of the people stand apart from those whose only wish is to command the people: it is on this count that true socialists part company with their treacherous imitators.

The means of destroying usury, is not, let us repeat, the confiscation of usury: it is by countering principle with principle, in short, by *organising credit*.

As far as socialism is concerned, the organisation of credit does not mean lending at interest, since that would still be an acknowledgement of capital's suzerainty: it is, rather, organising the workers' mutual solidarity, introducing their mutual guarantees, in accordance with that common economic principle that *anything that has an exchange value is susceptible to becoming an article of exchange* and can, in consequence, furnish the basis for credit.

Just as the banker lends money to the businessman who pays him interest upon the loan:

Or the estate-owner lends his land to the peasant who pays him a rent for it:

Or the house-owner lets his tenant have lodgings in return for payment of rent:

Or the merchant lets his goods go to the customer who pays on the instalment plan:

So the worker lends his labour to the employer who pays him by the week or by the month. Every one of us vouchsafes something on credit: do we not speak of *selling on credit, working on credit, drinking, eating on credit*?

Thus labour can make an advance of itself, and can be as much the creditor as capital can.

Furthermore, two or more workers can advance one another their respective products, and, if they were to come to an arrangement regarding permanent transactions of this sort, they would have organised credit among themselves.

This is what those labour associations are to be admired for having grasped which have spontaneously, without prompting and without capital been formed in Paris and in Lyon, and which, merely by liaising with one another and making loans to one another, have organised labour as we said. So that, organisation of credit and organisation of labour amount to one and the same. It is no school and no theoretician that is saying this: the

proof of it, rather, lies in current practice, revolutionary practice. Thus application of one principle leads the people towards discovery of another, and one solution arrived at always opens doors to another.

If it were to come about that the workers were to come to some arrangement throughout the Republic and organise themselves along similar lines, it is obvious that, as masters of labour, constantly generating fresh capital through work, they would soon have wrested alienated capital back again, through their organisation and competition: they would attract to their side, to start with, small property, small traders and small industries: then large-scale property and large industries: then the very biggest ventures, mines, canals and railways: they would become the masters of it all, through the successive affiliation of producers and the liquidation of property without the proprietors' being despoiled or indemnified.

Organising labour and credit along these lines would build an alliance between agriculture and industry which, at the present time, are instantly at loggerheads with each other. For who is there but industry to extend loans to the farmer? And what market is agriculture going to have but industry?

Such is the undertaking upon which the people has spontaneously embarked before our very eyes, an undertaking that it prosecutes with admirable vigour, weathering all difficulties and the most frightful privations. And we ought not to weary of saying that this movement was initiated, not by the leaders of schools, and that the primary instigation came not from the State but from the people. We are merely its spokesmen here. Our creed, the democratic and social creed, is not a utopia any more: it is a fact. This is not our doctrine that we are preaching: these are the people's ideas that we have taken up as themes for our explorations. Those who sneer at them, who prattle to us of association and Republic and yet do not dare to acknowledge the true socialists, the true republicans as their brothers are not of our ilk.

Committed to this idea these ten years past, we have not waited for the people to triumph before lining up on its side; it didn't take Christ's resurrection to persuade us of the divinity of his mission.

Should the government, the National Assembly, the bourgeoisie itself sponsor and assist us in the accomplishment of our undertaking, we will be grateful for that. But let none try to distract us from what we regard as the people's true interests: let none try to deceive us with the empty sham of reforms. We are too clear-sighted to fall for that again, and we know more of the workings of the world than the politicians who regale us with their admonitions.

We should be delighted if the State were to contribute through its budgetary provisions to the emancipation of the workers: We would look only with mistrust upon

what is termed State organisation of credit, which is, as we see it, merely the latest form of man's exploitation of his fellow-man. We repudiate State credit, because the State, in debt to the tune of eight billions, does not possess a centime that it could advance by way of a loan: because its finances rest solely upon fiat money [*papier à cours forcé*¹]: because fiat money necessarily entails depreciation, and depreciation always hits the worker rather than the proprietor: because as associated workers or workers in the process of association, we need neither the State nor fiat money to organise our exchanges: because, in the end, credit from the State is always credit from capital, not credit from labour, and still monarchy rather than democracy.

Under the arrangement suggested to us and which we reject with all of the vigour of our convictions, the State, in the awarding of credit, first has to secure capital. For such capital, it must look to property, by way of taxation. So we still have this reversion to principle when the point is to destroy it: we have displacement of wealth, when we ought to have its creation: we have withdrawal of property, after it has been declared by the constitution to be inviolable. Let others of less advanced and less suspect ideas, meticulous in their morals, support such ideas, and we will not question their tactics. But we, who wage war, not upon the rich but upon principles: we, whom the counter-revolution never wearies of vilifying, we have to be more demanding. We are socialists, not despoilers.

We do not want progressive taxation, because progressive taxation is the validation of *net* product and we wish to do away with *net* product, through association: because, if progressive taxation fails to divest the rich man of all his wealth, it is merely a concession made to the proletariat, a sort of ransom for the right of usury, in short, a trick: and if it seizes all income, it amounts to confiscation of property, to expropriation without prior indemnification and is of no public use.

So let those who claim to be primarily politicians invoke progressive taxation by way of a reprisal against

¹ The term *cours forcé* (forced rate/price) refers to inconvertible money, which is legal tender by government declaration and not backed by, nor convertible into, gold or silver. (*Black Flag*)

property, a punishment for bourgeois selfishness: we respect their intentions and if it should ever happen that they get the chance to implement their principles, we will bow to the justice of God.² As far as we representatives of those who have lost everything to the rule of capital are concerned, progressive taxation, precisely because it is an enforced restitution, is off-limits to us: we will never propose it to the people. We are socialists, men of reconciliation and progress: we seek neither reaction nor agrarian law.

We do not want levies upon State revenues, because such a levy is, like progressive taxation in the case of *rentiers*, mere confiscation, and in the case of the people, mere sleight of hand, trickery. We believe that the State is entitled to repay its debts, and thus to borrow at the lowest rates of interest: we do not think that it is licit for it, under cover of taxation, to default upon its commitments. We are socialists, not bankrupters.

We do not want taxes upon inheritance, because such a tax is likewise merely a retreat from property, and, property being a constitutional right acknowledged universally, the wishes of the majority must be respected with regard to it: because that would be a trespass against the family: because, in order to emancipate the proletariat, we need not indulge in such fresh hypocrisy. Under the law of association, transmission of wealth does not apply to the instruments of labour, so cannot become a cause of inequality. So, let the assets of the deceased proprietor pass to his most distant and often his

most impoverished relative. We are socialists, not stealers of inheritances.

We do not seek taxes upon luxury items, because that would be to strike a blow against the luxury industries: because luxury items are the very badge of progress: because, with labour in the ascendant and capital subordinated, luxury must extend to each and every citizen. Why, having encouraged property, would we

² As in "The voice of the people is the voice of God" ("Vox populi, vox dei"). (*Black Flag*)

retaliate against proprietors for their pleasures? We are socialists, not begrudgers.

Taxation represents the contribution made by each worker towards the costs of the community: the natural basis for taxation, therefore, is the *product*. A few centimes in every hundred added to the purchase price of everything that circulates or is consumed. As to the land and capital, these can only be taxed to the extent that they are appropriated: direct taxation being nothing but the price of the tolerance shown to the proprietor.

Then again, since, under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership, it follows that direct taxation must be little by little done away with, like the veneration of privilege, the badge of feudalism and usury. This is the very opposite of what the neophytes of social democracy propose to us.

At the moment, the costs of tax collection stand at over 50 millions. – Under association, as conceived of and implemented by the People, such costs can and must be whittled down to virtually nothing. What have the new socialists, those official but rather dull-witted champions of property, to say to that?

Customs tariffs, which is to say, protection for the nation's labours, sets the country back twenty six millions. People would enjoy both free exchange and equal exchange. Labour would be protected by the simple fact that it could be exchanged only against labour: such protection would not cost a thing. It is not a mere *overhaul* of customs tariffs that socialism asks for, as do its young friends: it is their utter abolition.

We do not want expropriation by the State of the mines, canals and railways: it is still monarchical, still wage-labour. We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations operating under State supervision, in conditions laid down by the State, and under their own responsibility. We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic.

We do not want the government of man by man any more than the exploitation of man by man: have those who are so quick to seize upon the socialist formula given it any thought?

We want savings in State expenditure, just as we want the worker to enjoy the full range of the rights of man and the citizen, the attributes of capital and of talent. For which reason we ask for certain things that socialism suggests, and which men who purport to be particularly political fail to understand.

Politics tends to lead to specialisation and indefinite proliferation of jobs: socialism tends to amalgamate them all.

It is not enough to say that one is opposed to the presidency unless one also does away with ministries, the eternal focus of political ambition. It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power through its joint deliberations and votes

Thus we believe that virtually the totality of public works can and should be carried out by the army: that such participation in public works is the primary duty that the republican youth owes to its homeland: that, as a result, the army budget and the public works budget duplicate each other. That represents a saving of more than 100 millions: politics overlooks that.

There is talk of trades education. We believe that agricultural training comes in the form of agriculture: the school for arts, crafts and manufacture is the workshop: the school for commerce is the counting-house: the mining school is the mine: the navigation school the navy: the administration school the civil service, etc.

The apprentice is as necessary to the job as the journeyman: why put him to one side in a school? We want the same education for everybody: what good are schools which the people sees as only schools for aristocrats and which represent a double drain upon our finances? Organise association, and by the same token, every workshop becoming a school, every worker becomes a master, every student an apprentice. Elite figures are turned out as well and better by the workshop as by the study hall.

Likewise in government.

It is not enough to say that one is opposed to the presidency unless one also does away with ministries, the eternal focus of political ambition. It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power through its joint deliberations and votes. Ministers, under-secretaries of State, departmental heads, etc., duplicate the work of the representatives, whose idle, dissipated life, given over to scheming and ambition, is a continual source of troubles for the administration, of bad laws for society and of needless expense for the State.

Let our young recruits get this straight in their heads: socialism is the contrary of governmentalism. For us, that is a precept as old as the adage: *There can be no familiarity between master and servant.*

Besides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the imperative mandate [*mandat impératif*]. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty!... That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.

We seek unbounded freedom for man and the citizen, along as he respects the liberty of others:

Freedom of association;

Freedom of assembly;

Freedom of religion;

Freedom of the press;

Freedom of thought and of speech;

Freedom of labour, trade and industry;

Freedom of education;

In short, absolute freedom.

Now, among these freedoms, there is still one that the old politics will not countenance, which makes a nonsense of all the rest! Will they tell us once and for all if they want freedom on condition or unconditional freedom?

We want the family: where is there anyone who respects it more than we do?... But we do not mistake the family for the model of society. Defenders of monarchy have taught us that monarchies were made in the image of the family. The family is the *patriarchal* or dynastic element, the rudiment of royalty: the model of civil society is the fraternal association.

We want property, but property restored to its proper limits, that is to say, free disposition of the fruits of labour, property MINUS USURY!... Of that we need say no more. Those who know us get our meaning.

Such, in substance, is our profession of faith. The *Declaration* by the deputies of the Mountain leaves us duty-bound to reproduce it so that a judgement may be made as to whether, by not welcoming the honourable Mr Ledru-Rollin's candidacy on the say-so of friends, we are letting down the democratic and social cause, or

whether it is the authors of that *Declaration* who are lagging behind in socialism.

We acknowledge the inclinations of the young Mountain, we applaud its efforts and take note of its onward march. Today, it is the Mountain that comes to the prophet: politics is evolving into socialism; just a few steps more and all the shades of republicanism will be indistinguishable.

But even though it may say the opposite, and doubtless believes it, the Mountain is only socialist in intention. The people has read its *Declaration* and will read our own *Manifesto*. Let it compare and judge. Let it say if, in the light of this document, as lightweight in ideas as it is compromising of us in terms of its politics, we should cover our tracks and fold up our tents.

The Mountain, which is, for all its ambition, only slightly or not at all socialist, is still only slightly or not at all revolutionary, for all its fervour. Its political deeds and ideas alike are the proof of that.

Was it revolutionary in September, in the elections?

Was it revolutionary in June?

Was it revolutionary in April?

Was it revolutionary during the proceedings in the Luxembourg?

We were every bit as much as it was, and more than it was, in February.

The Mountain bemoans the fact that we are not *politicians*!

To which our retort is that the Mountain is sorely mistaken if it imagines that politics amounts to anything in the absence of socialism. Socialism is politics defined in its aims and in its means. Prior to this, politics has been mere deftness. In short, socialism is the thing, politics the man. From which it follows that socialism can manage very well without politics, whereas politics cannot dispense with socialism. We see the evidence of that in the profound mediocrity of the political deeds that have come to pass, not just over the last nine months, we should say, but over the past eighteen years! ...

And now to this miserable question of the Presidency.

Assuredly, it is a serious business knowing on the one hand whether the people should vote or abstain: and, on the other, under what colours, under what profession of

Besides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the imperative mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty!... That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.

faith the election would proceed. And as far as the candidate goes, ours was the first.

Democratic and social opinion had to be directly consulted: the Mountain has acted alone.

It publishes its *Declaration* the way Louis XVIII did the charter he granted, without consulting anyone.

It puts up a candidate in Paris and in the departments without a word of warning.

Then, once the election committee has been formed, it walks up and tells it: Things are too far advanced, and to withdraw would be impossible! No divisiveness! The Mountain simultaneously rams the vote, the programme and the candidate down our throats. As if to say to us: You have come thus far, but you will go no further. To borrow an expression that has become parliamentary language, it has leapfrogged socialism to its own advantage!

We shall not dwell upon the personality issue. It is a matter of regret for us that a politician (and we are using that term here without the least irony) such as the honourable Mr Ledru-Rollin should have played into the hands of clumsy friends. He already had our personal sympathies and preferences. The bullying approach and hurtful mistrust of his entourage, however, have pushed us into the opposition ...

Besides, it is our belief that this division, far from decreasing the strength of the democratic and social camp, will increase it. As things presently stand, no candidate could attract all the votes: between the old-style socialist democracy and tomorrow's the disagreements still run too deep.

The central electoral committee has decided unanimously to support citizen RASPAIL in his candidacy for the presidency.

Raspail, returned by 66,000 Parisian and 35,000 Lyonnais votes;

Raspail, the socialist democrat;

Raspail, the implacable exposé of political mythologies;

Raspail, whose work in the field of healing has elevated him to the ranks of the benefactors of mankind.

In lending our backing to this candidature, we do not, as the honourable Monsieur Ledru-Rollin had written somewhere, intend to endow the Republic with a possible CHIEF: far from it. We accept Raspail as a living protest against the very idea of the Presidency! We offer him to the people's suffrage, not because he is or believes himself possible, but because he is impossible: because with him, presidency, the mirror-image of royalty, would be impossible.

Nor do we mean, in calling for votes for Raspail, to issue a challenge to the bourgeoisie which fears this great citizen. Our primary intention is reconciliation and peace. We are socialists, not muddleheads.

We back Raspail's candidacy, so as to focus the eyes of the country all the more strongly upon this idea, that henceforth, under the banner of the Republic, there are but two parties in France, the party of labour and the party of capital.

It will not be through any fault of ours if the last remaining vestige of this ancient division is not soon erased.

Resistance to the Revolution: Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

La Voix du Peuple, 3 December, 1849

Revolutions do not recognise initiators: they come when destiny's signal calls them; they stop when the mysterious force that makes them hatch is exhausted. They allow themselves to be pushed: they do not allow themselves to be dragged. This is what is demonstrated to us today, in a striking manner, by the example of all those who, eager for power and popular favour, have harnessed themselves to the chariot of revolutions, imagining that they would stop it when they ceased pulling it. But the indomitable machine rolls on, sweeping away pell-mell both those who want to hinder its course and its powerless drivers. Wise man, do you want to avoid being crushed under the wheels? Get

behind the vehicle, and then, when you see it rushing forward, get on the running board.

Pius IX, one day, wanted to test whether the papacy and freedom could live together. He soon learns, at his cost, that freedom recognises neither mistress nor rival, and that it breaks, when it pleases, the institutions it has given itself, Monarchy and Catholicism, State and property. Then the pope, the first helmsman of the Revolution, steps back and wants to hold back the revolutionary chariot which passed over his body – Roll, Revolution.

After the Pope, it is the dynastic opposition. The example of Pius IX seizes and inflames it: Courage! Holy Father, it cries to him through the mouth of M. Thiers, taking one of the shafts; courage! Shame on this cowardly government which ignores the spirit of the century and the need for progress! – Courage! dynastics, shout the republicans in turn, attaching their trinkets to the former. –

Courage, everyone! take up the socialists; let us not remain halfway: forward!... and the thundering chariot, chasing before it papacy, dynasty and bourgeoisie, hurls them one upon the other into the democratic and social Republic. – Roll, Revolution!

Halt! said then President of the Luxembourg, Louis Blanc: I am Minister of State for progress; no progress is made without my permission. Down with the anarchists, the individualists, the egalitarians! Men of the people, respect the State: the State is you!

Halt! cries the revealer of the Triad, the restorer of metempsychosis, the apocryphal author of the *universal hearth*, Pierre Leroux: I am the apostle of the neo-christians, the last of the seers. Down with the voltairians, the liberals and the atheists! Respect for my religion and my God! Worker, stop, in the name of brotherhood, charity, solidarity, humanity, unity!...

And the two heralds of Religion and State, out of breath, put themselves in the way of the chariot, which is carried along by its acquired speed and mass, and which is pushed by a mysterious, irresistible force. – Roll, roll, Revolution!

We have read, with a real pleasure, as this reading filled us with hope, the latest pamphlet of Louis Blanc, and the pious disquisitions of Pierre Leroux.

The former statesman of the provisional government, the beloved writer of classical republicans, romantic democrats, communitarians and fraternitarian socialists, shines in this diatribe with all the qualities of his style and all the poverties of his logic. Passion, a true passion this time, raises him above himself: he explodes, he is indignant, he insults, he slanders; he has superb insults and magnificent disdain. He calls the people as witnesses; he attests to the workers, his brothers, who awarded him the title of the premier worker of the

Republic, and who now, in the midst of convalescence from the governmental epidemic, speak of doing without statesmen, as well as capitalists and priests. He even appeals to the proprietors, to whom he promises a fair, but not in advance, compensation, if they will allow him to seize their properties, intact to use them to organise work without a cataclysm, peacefully.

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We feel that the famous utopian fights for his hearths and his gods: because the State, power is the patrimony, the life and blood of Louis Blanc. Extinguish the State, Louis Blanc is a dead man. The February Revolution was made for him, to achieve his plan for the organisation of work by the State. Also never has his wit been more lively and more frank. No more groomed tirades, idle epithets, affected sentimentalities, antitheses with effect: it is almost revolutionary language. *Quousque tandem...*¹

Pierre Leroux joins Louis Blanc, Pierre Leroux who also is interested in the debate; the holy man aspires to replace the Pope in his duties as vicar of God; some even go so far as to say that he remembers having been Jesus Christ. – No more government,

he says, no more religion; all is lost! Where are you going, you wretch! Return to religion; without religion, no society. We are religion; UNITY! We are the Way, the Truth, the Life: TRINITY IN UNITY!... Sensation-feeling, knowledge: He who denies our *Doctrine*, and who disregards the *Triad*, that one is no republican!...

But let us leave the demagogue and the mystagogue together, and approach this great problem of the State, even more obscure than that of labour ever was: but which, we firmly hope, will soon become as clear, as positive.

The Revolution of February raised two critical questions: one economic, the question of labour and property; the other political, the question of government or the State.

On the first of these questions the socialist democracy is more or less in agreement. It is recognised that it is not a question of seizing and dividing property, not even of its buyback; of subjecting the wealthy and the proprietor to additional taxes in bad faith, which, while giving the lie to the principle of property, recognised in the Constitution, would only have the effect of upsetting the

¹ *Quousque tandem* is a Latin phrase that means “for how much longer?” or “how long will you abuse our patience?”. It

is a line from Cicero’s first speech to the Roman Senate. (*Black Flag*)

general economy, and of aggravating the situation of the proletariat. Economic reform consists, on the one hand, in creating competition for usurious credit, and, thereby causing capital to lose its income, in other words, in identifying, in every citizen and to the same degree, the quality of worker and that of capitalist; – on the other, in abolishing the entire system of current taxes, which only impact the worker and the poor man, and in replacing them all by a single tax on capital, as an insurance premium.

By these two great reforms the social economy is renewed from top to bottom, commercial and industrial relations are inverted, and the profits, today assured to the capitalist, are returned to the worker. Competition, currently anarchic and subversive, becomes emulative and fruitful; markets no longer being wanting, the worker and entrepreneur, united together, no longer have to fear either stagnation or unemployment. A new order is established upon the old institutions abolished or regenerated.

On this point the revolutionary route is charted; the meaning of the movement is known. Whatever variety is brought to the application, the reform will be carried out according to these principles and on these bases; the Revolution has no other outcome. The economic problem can therefore be considered as solved.

It is not the same, far from it, with the political problem, that is to say, with the judgment to be made, for the future, on government and the State. On this point the question is not even posed; there is nothing in the public conscience and the intelligence of the masses. The economic Revolution accomplished, as we have just said, can, should government, the State, still exist? This is what no one, neither within the democracy nor outwith the democracy, dares to question; and yet this is the question which, on pain of new catastrophes, must be addressed.

We therefore affirm, and as yet we are alone in affirming it, that with the economic revolution, no longer disputed, the State must entirely disappear; that this disappearance of the State is the necessary consequence of the organisation of credit and the reform of taxation; that, by the effect of this double innovation, government becomes successively useless and impossible; that it is with this, in this respect, as with feudal property, with lending at interest, with absolute or constitutional monarchy, with judicial institutions, etc., which have all served in the education of liberty, but which fall and vanish when liberty has reached its fullness.

Others, on the contrary, amongst whom Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux stand out in the front ranks, maintain that after the economic revolution, the State must continue, an organisation of the State must be retained, on which they have hitherto provided neither principle nor plan. For them, the political question,

instead of being annihilated by identification with the economic question, still remains: they retain, enlarging it still further, the State, power, authority, government. What they do is to change the names; to say, for example, instead of *master-State*, *servant-State*, as if it sufficed to change words to transform things! Above this system of government, utterly unknown, hovers a system of religion whose dogma is equally unknown, whose ritual is unknown, whose object, on earth and in heaven, is unknown.

This, then, is the question which at present divides the socialist democracy, at this time in accord, or nearly so, on the rest: Must the State continue to exist once the question of labour and capital has been resolved? In other words, will we always have, as we have had hitherto, a political Constitution apart from the social Constitution?

We reply in the negative. We maintain that, capital and labour once identified, society exists by itself, and no longer needs government. We are, consequently, as we have more than once proclaimed, *anarchists*. *Anarchy* is the condition of existence of mature societies, as *hierarchy* is the condition of primitive societies: there is an incessant progress in human society from hierarchy to anarchy.

Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux affirm the contrary: in addition to their capacity as *socialists* they retain that of *politicians*; they are men of government and authority, statesmen.

To settle the dispute, we must therefore consider the State, no longer from the point of view of the old society, which naturally and necessarily produced it, and which approaches its end; – but from the point of view of the new society, as it is made or must be made by the two fundamental and correlative reforms of credit and taxation.

Now, if we prove that from this last point of view, the State, considered in its nature, rests on a completely false hypothesis; that, secondly, considered in its object, the State finds no reason for its existence save in a second hypothesis, equally false; that, finally, considered in the reasons for its further extension, the State again can only invoke a hypothesis as false as the first two: these three points clarified, the question will be settled, the State will be regarded as a superfluous, consequently a harmful, an impossible, thing; government will be a contradiction.

Let us proceed at once with the analysis:

I. On the Nature of the State

“What is the State?” asks Louis Blanc.

And he replies:

“The State in a monarchic regime is the power of one man, the tyranny of one.

“The State in an oligarchic regime is the power of a small number of men, the tyranny of a few.

“The State in an aristocratic regime is the power of one class, the tyranny of several.

“The State in an anarchic regime is the power of the first comer who happens to be the most intelligent and the most strong; it is the tyranny of chaos.

“The State in a democratic regime is the power of all the people, served by their elected representatives, it is the reign of freedom.”

Of the twenty-five or thirty thousand readers of Louis Blanc, perhaps there are not ten to whom this definition of the State did not seem conclusive, and who do not repeat, after the master: The State is the power of one, of a few, of several, of all, or of the first comer, according as the word State is prefaced by one of these adjectives: *monarchic, oligarchic, aristocratic, democratic, or anarchic*. The delegates of the Luxembourg [Commission] – who believe themselves robbed, it seems, when anyone allows himself to hold an opinion other than theirs on the meaning and tendencies of the February Revolution – in a letter made public, have done me the honour of informing me that they found Louis Blanc’s response quite triumphant, and that I had nothing to answer it. It seems that none amongst the citizen-delegates has learned Greek. Otherwise, they would have seen that their master and friend Louis Blanc, instead of saying what the State is, did nothing other than translate into French the Greek words *monos*, one; *aligoi*, a few; *aristoi*, the great; *demos*, the people; and a privative *a*, which means: no. It is with the help of these qualifiers that Aristotle differentiated the various forms of the State, which is expressed by *archê*, authority, government, State. We ask pardon of our readers, but it is not our fault if the political science of the President of the Luxembourg [Commission] does not go further than etymology.

And see the artifice! It was enough for Louis Blanc, in his translation, to use the word tyranny four times, *tyranny of one, tyranny of several*, etc., and to remove it once, *power of the people, served by their elected representatives*, to immediately draw applause. Every State other than the democratic, as Louis Blanc understands it, is *tyranny*. Anarchy above all is treated

in a peculiar way; *it is the power of the first comer, who happens to be the most intelligent and the most strong; it is the tyranny of chaos*. What a monster is this *first comer*, who, although he is the first comer, nevertheless happens to be *the most intelligent and the most strong*, and who exercises his *tyranny in chaos!* Who, after that, could prefer *anarchy* to this amiable government of all the people, served so well, as we know, by their elected

representatives? How overwhelming that is! At the first blow, we are on the ground. Ah! rhetorician. thank God for having created for your express benefit, in the nineteenth century, such stupidity as that of your so-called delegates of the working classes, otherwise you would have perished under boos the first time you touched a pen.

What is the State? This question requires an answer: the list that Louis Blanc, after Aristotle, has produced of the different forms of the State has taught us nothing. As for Pierre Leroux, there is no point in questioning him: he would tell us that the question is indiscreet; that the State has always existed; that it always will exist: this is the supreme reason of conservatives and old wives.

The State is the EXTERNAL constitution of the social power.

By this external constitution of its power and sovereignty, the people does not govern itself; it is sometimes one individual, sometimes several, who, by election or hereditary title, are charged with governing it, with managing its affairs, with negotiating and compromising in its name; in a word, with performing all the acts of a father of a family, a guardian, a manager, or a proxy, furnished with a general, absolute, and irrevocable power of attorney.

This external constitution of the collective power, to which the Greeks gave the name *archê*, principality, authority, government, rests then on this hypothesis, that a people, that the collective being which we call society, cannot govern itself, think, act, express itself, by itself, in a manner analogous to that of beings endowed with individual personality; that it needs, for that, to be represented by one or more individuals, who, in whatever capacity, are supposed to be the custodians of the will of the people, and its agents. According to this hypothesis, it is impossible for the collective power, which belongs essentially to the mass, to express itself and act directly, without the intermediary of expressly

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established organs, and, so to speak, staffed *ad hoc*. It seems, we say – and this is what explains the constitution of the State in all its varieties and species – that the collective being, that society, existing only as a being of reason, cannot make itself felt otherwise by way of monarchical incarnation, aristocratic usurpation, or democratic mandate; consequently, that all specific and personal manifestation is forbidden it.

Now, it is precisely this notion of the collective being, of its life, of its action, of its unity, of its individuality, of its personality; – for society is a person, do you hear? as all humanity is a person; – it is this notion of the collective human being that we deny today; and it is for this reason that we also deny the State, that we deny government, that we reject from the economically revolutionised society every constitution of the popular power, outside and above the mass, by hereditary royalty, feudal institution, or democratic delegation.

We affirm, on the contrary, that the people, that society, that the mass, can and must govern itself by itself; to think, act, rise, and halt, like a man, manifest itself, finally, in its physical, intellectual, and moral individuality, without the aid of all these intermediaries, who formerly were despots, who now are aristocrats, who from time to time have been so-called delegates, panders or servants of the crowd, and whom we call merely and simply popular agitators, *demagogues*.

In short:

We deny government and the State, because we affirm what the founders of States have never believed in, the personality and autonomy of the masses.

We affirm further that every constitution of the State has no other object than to lead society to this condition of autonomy; that the different forms of the State, from absolute monarchy to representative *democracy*, are all only middle terms, illogical and unstable positions, serving in turn as transitions or stages to freedom, and forming the steps of the political ladder by the aid of which societies raise themselves to self-consciousness and self-possession.

We affirm, finally, that this *anarchy*, which expresses, as we now see, the highest degree of freedom and order that humanity can attain, is the true formula of the Republic, the goal to which the February Revolution

impels us; so that between Republic and government, between universal suffrage and State, there is a contradiction.

We establish these systematic affirmations in two ways: first, by the historical and negative method, by demonstrating that all establishment of authority, all organisation of the collective force by exteriorisation,

has become impossible for us. – This is what we began in the *Confessions of a Revolutionary*, by recounting the fall of all the governments that have succeeded one another in France for sixty years, by identifying the cause of their abolition, and finally noting the exhaustion and death of power in the corrupt reign of Louis Philippe, in the inert dictatorship of the provisional government, and in the insignificant presidency of General Cavignac and Louis Bonaparte.

Secondly, we prove our thesis by explaining how, through economic reform, through industrial solidarity and the organisation of universal suffrage, the people passes from spontaneity to reflection and consciousness; act, no longer by coaching and fanaticism, but with design; maintains itself without masters and servants, without delegates as without

aristocrats, absolutely as would an individual. Thus, the notion of person, the idea of the *self*, finds itself extended and generalised: there is an individual person or *self*, as there is a collective person or *self*; in both cases, the will, the act, the soul, the spirit, the life, unknown in their principle, elusive in their essence, result from the animating and vital fact, the organisation. The psychology of nations and of humanity becomes, like the psychology of man, a possible science. It was to this positive demonstration that we have indicated, both in the publications we have produced on circulation and credit as well as in the section XIV of the manifesto of *La Voix du Peuple* relating to the constitution.

So, when Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux pose as defenders of the State, which means of an *external* constitution of the public power, they do nothing other than reproduce, under a variant that is their own and which they have not yet made known, that old fiction of representative government, whose integral formula, the most complete expression, is still the constitutional

monarchy. Did we, then, make the February Revolution to achieve this retrogressive contradiction?

It seems to us, what do you say, readers?, that the question is beginning to be posed in a somewhat clearer manner; that the poor in spirit will be able, after what we have just said, to form an idea of the State, that they will understand how republicans can ask themselves if it is indispensable, after an economic revolution that changes all the relations of society, to maintain, for the vanity of so-called statesmen, and at a cost of two billion per year, this parasitic organ called government? And the honourable delegates of the Luxembourg, who, having sat in the armchairs of the peerage¹, believe themselves politicians, and so bravely attribute to themselves the exclusive understanding of the Revolution, will, without doubt, no longer fear that we, in our capacity as the *most intelligent* and the *most strong*, after having abolished government, as useless and too expensive, we will establish the tyranny of chaos. We deny the State and government; we affirm the autonomy of the People at the same time as its maturity. How could we be upholders of tyranny, aspirants to the ministry, competitors of Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux?

In truth, we do not understand the logic of our adversaries. They accept a principle without concerning themselves about the consequences; they adhere, for example, to the equality of taxation that the tax on capital realises; they adopt popular, mutual, and free credit, for all these terms are synonymous; they cheer at the deposing of capital and the emancipation of labour; then, when it comes to drawing the anti-governmental conclusions of these premises, they protest, they continue to talk of politics and government, without asking themselves whether government is compatible with industrial liberty and equality; whether there is a possibility of a political science, when there is a necessity for an economic science! Property they attack without scruple, in spite of its venerable antiquity; but they bow before power like churchwardens before the Holy Sacrament. Government is for them the necessary

¹ The Luxembourg Commission was initially met at the palais du Luxembourg in Paris, the former seat of the upper house of the French parliament during the July Monarchy. Members of the Chamber of Peers (Chambre des pairs) included most

and immutable *a priori*, the principle of principles, the eternal archæon.

Certainly, we do not offer our affirmations as proofs, we know, as well as anyone, under what conditions a proposition is demonstrated. We will only say that, before proceeding to a new constitution of the State, we must ask ourselves whether, in view of the economic reforms the Revolution imposes upon us, the State itself should not be abolished; if this end of political institutions does not result from the meaning and scope of economic reform? We ask if, in fact, after the explosion of February, after the establishment of universal suffrage, the declaration of the omnipotence of the masses, and the henceforth inevitable subordination of power to the popular will, any government whatever is still possible; if this government would not find itself placed in the perpetual alternative, either to follow docilely the blind and contradictory injunctions of the multitude, or to knowingly deceive it, as the Provisional Government did, as the demagogues in all ages have done? We ask, at the very least, which amongst the various remits of the State should be retained and enlarged, which

abolished? For, if it happened, something which can still be foreseen, that, of all the current remits of the State, not one were to survive the economic reform, it would be necessary to admit, on the strength of this negative demonstration, that, in the new condition of society, the State is nothing, can be nothing; in short, that the only way to organise democratic government is to abolish government.

Instead of this positive, practical, realistic analysis of the revolutionary movement, what course do our so-called initiators take? They go to consult Lycurgus, Plato, Orpheus, and all the mythological wisdom; they interrogate the ancient legends; they appeal to remotest antiquity for the solutions to exclusively modern problems, and then give us as an answer the dizzying illuminations of their brain.

Is this, once again, that science of society and of the Revolution which was to, at first sight, resolve all problems, an essentially practical and immediately

surviving pre-Revolutionary ecclesiastical (Reims, Langres, and Châlons) and lay peerages, with new members appointed by the French king. (*Black Flag*)

applicable science; a science eminently traditional, no doubt, but above all a progressive science, and in which progress is accomplished by the systematic negation of tradition itself?...

II. On the End or Object of the State

We have just seen that the notion of the State, considered in its nature, rests entirely on a hypothesis which is at least doubtful, that of the impersonality and the physical, intellectual, and moral inertia of the masses. We will prove that this same notion of the State, considered in its object, rests on another hypothesis, still more improbable than the first, that of the permanence of antagonism in humanity, a hypothesis which itself is a consequence of the primitive dogma of the fall or of original sin.

We continue to quote *Le Nouveau Monde*:

“What would happen,” asks Louis Blanc, “if we should let the most intelligent or the most strong to obstruct the development of the faculties of those who are less strong or less intelligent? – Freedom would be destroyed.

“How can we prevent this crime? – By interposing between oppressor and oppressed the whole power of the people.

“If Jack oppresses Peter, will the thirty-four million men who compose French society all rush at once to protect Peter, to safeguard freedom? To claim so would be buffoonery.

“How then shall society intervene?

“*Through those whom it has chosen to REPRESENT it for this purpose.*

“But these REPRESENTATIVES of society, these servants of the people, who are they? – The State.

“So the State is nothing other than society itself, acting as society, to prevent... what? oppression; to maintain... what? freedom.”

That is clear. The State is a REPRESENTATION of society, externally organised to protect the weak against the strong; in other words, to bring peace between combatants and to create order! Louis Blanc did not go far, as we see, to find the purpose of the State. It can be traced from Grotius, Justinian, Cicero, etc., in all the authors who ever have written on public right. It is the Orphic tradition related by Horace:

*Sylvestres homines sacer interpresque deorum,
Cædibus et victu fædo deterruit Orpheus,
Dictus ob hoc lenire tigres rabidosque leones,
Dictus et Amphion, Thebanæ conditor arcis,
Saxa movere sono testudinis, et prece blanda*

Ducere quo vellet...

“The divine Orpheus, the interpreter of the gods, called men from the depths of the forests and filled them with a horror of murder and of human flesh. Consequently it was said of him that he tamed lions and tigers, as later it was said of Amphion, founder of Thebes, that he moved the stones by the sound of his lyre, and led them whither he wished by the charm of his prayer.”

Socialism, as we know, does not require with certain people great efforts of the imagination. They imitate, quite flatly, the old mythologies; they copy Catholicism, while declaiming against it; they ape power, which they covet; then they shout with all their might: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! and the trick is done. They pass for a revealer, a reformer, a democratic and social restorer; they are named as a candidate for the ministry of progress, or even for the dictatorship of the Republic!

Thus, by the confession of Louis Blanc, power is born of barbarism; its organisation attests, amongst early man, to a state of ferocity and violence, an effect of the utter absence of commerce and industry. To this savagery that the State had to put an end, by opposing to the force of each individual a superior force, capable, for want of any other argument, of constraining his will. The constitution of the State therefore supposes, as we said earlier, a profound social antagonism, *homo homini lupus*.¹ Louis Blanc himself says this when, after having divided men into the strong and the weak, quarrelling like wild beasts over their food, he interposes between them, as a mediator, the State.

So the State would be useless; the State would lack both an object and a motive; the State would have to abrogate itself, if there came a time when, for whatever cause, there were no longer in society either strong or weak, that is to say, when the inequality of physical and intellectual forces could not be a cause of theft and oppression, independently of the protection, more fictitious than real, of the State.

Now, this is precisely the thesis that we maintain today.

That which smooths morals, that gradually makes right reign in place of force, that which establishes security, which progressively creates freedom and equality, is, much more than religion and the State, labour; firstly, commerce and industry; then science, which spiritualises it; in the last analysis, art, its immortal flower. Religion, by its promises and its terrors, the State, by its tribunals and its armies, have only given to the sentiment of right, too weak amongst early man, a sanction, the only one intelligible to savage minds. For us, whom industry, science, literature, art, have corrupted, as Jean-Jacques [Rousseau] said, this sanction lies elsewhere; it is in the division of properties, in the cogs of industry, in the growth of luxury, in the pressing need for well-being, a need

¹ Man is wolf to man. (*Black Flag*)

which makes labour a necessity of everyone. After the harshness of the early ages, after the pride of castes and the feudal constitution of the first societies, a last element of servitude still remained: capital. Capital having lost its dominance, the labourer, that is to say, the merchant, the worker, the farmer, the scholar, the artist, no longer needs protection; his protection is his talent, his knowledge, his industry. After the deposing of capital, the preservation of the State, far from protecting freedom, can only compromise freedom.

It is to form a sorry idea of the human species, of its essence, of its perfectibility, of its destiny, to conceive it as an agglomeration of individuals necessarily exposed, by the inequality of physical and intellectual forces, to the constant danger of reciprocal spoliation or the tyranny of a few. Such an idea attests to the most retrograde philosophy; it belongs to those times of barbarism when the absence of the true elements of social order left the genius of the legislator no other means of action than force; when the supremacy of a pacifying and avenging power appeared to all as the just consequence of a previous degradation and an original stain. To express our whole thought, we regard political and judicial institutions as the esoteric and concrete formula of the myth of the fall, of the mystery of redemption, and of the sacrament of penitence. It is curious to see so-called socialists, enemies or rivals of Church and State, copying all that they blaspheme: the representative system in politics, the dogma of the fall in religion.

Since they talk so much of doctrine, we frankly declare that this is not ours.

For us, the moral state of society is changes and improves with its economic state. The morality of a savage people, ignorant, and without industry, is one thing; that of an industrious and artistic people another: the social guarantees consequently, in the first differ to those amongst the second. In a society transformed, almost unconsciously, by the development of its

economy, there are no longer *strong* or *weak*; there are only workers, whose faculties and means incessantly tend, through industrial solidarity and the guarantee of circulation, to equalise. In vain, to ensure the right and the duty of each, the imagination refers to this idea of authority and government which attests the profound despair of souls long frightened by the police and the priesthood: the simplest examination of the remits of the State suffices to demonstrate that, if inequality of fortunes, oppression, theft, and misery are not the eternal prerogative of our nature, the first leprosy we have to reform, the first plague to cure, after capitalist exploitation, is the State.

Let us see, in fact, budget in hand, what the State is.

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The State is the army. – Reformer, do you need an army to defend you? In that case, you understand public security like Cæsar and Napoléon... You are not a republican, you are a despot.

The State is the police; urban police, rural police, police of the waters and forests. – Reformer, do you need police? Then you understand order like Fouché, Gisquet, Carussidière, and M. Carrier.¹ You are not a democrat, you are an informer.

The State is the entire judicial system: justices of the peace, tribunals of first instance, courts of appeal, court of cassation, high court, industrial tribunals, commercial tribunals, councils of prefects, councils of State, councils of war. – Reformer, do you need all these judges? Then you understand justice like MM. Baroche, Dupin, and Perrin Dandin.² You are not a socialist, you are a mercenary [*routier*³].

The State is the treasury, the budget. – Reformer, you do not want the abolition of taxation? Then you understand public wealth like M. Thiers, for whom the biggest budgets are the best. You are not an organiser of labour, you are an exciseman [*rat de cave*⁴].

The State is the custom-house. – Reformer, do you need, to protect national labour, differential duties and toll-houses? Then you understand commerce and

¹ Joseph Fouché (1759-1820), Minister of Police for the Emperor Napoléon, and several Prefects of Police: Henri Gisquet (1792-1866), Marc Caussidière (1808-61), and Pierre Carrier (1794-1858). (*Black Flag*)

² Pierre Jules Baroche (1802-70), Republican turned right-wing statesman after 1848, later Minister of Justice; André Dupin (1783-1865), politician and procureur-général; Perrin Dandin, a character from Rabelais notable for passing arbitrary judgements. (*Black Flag*)

³ In the Middle Ages, these were irregular soldiers belonging to organised bands who, in times of war, hired their services to one or other of the parties involved, and, in times of peace, engaged in pillage and brigandage on their own account. (*Black Flag*)

⁴ “Cellar rats” was the term used under the Ancien Régime for the dreaded agents of the *Contributions Indirectes* (Indirect Contributions), responsible for the control of wines and alcohols. (*Black Flag*)

circulation like M. Fould and M. Rothschild. You are not an apostle of fraternity, you are a Jew.¹

The State is the public debt, the mint, the amortisation, the savings-banks, etc. – Reformer, is that your prime science? Then you understand social economy like MM. Humann, Lacave-Laplagne, Garnier-Pagès, Passy, Duclerc, and *l'Homme au quarante écus*. You are a Turcaret.²

The State... but we must stop. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, in the State, from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom, that is not an abuse to be reformed, a parasitism to be suppressed, an instrument of tyranny to be destroyed. And you talk to us of preserving the State, of augmenting the responsibilities of the State, of rendering the power of the State stronger and stronger! Come on, you are not a revolutionary; for the true revolutionary is essentially a simplifier and a liberal. You are a mystifier, a trickster; you are a muddlehead.

III. On a Future Destiny of the State

Here arises, in favour of the State, a final hypothesis. Because the State, say the pseudo-democrats, has hitherto performed only a role of parasitism and tyranny, this is no reason to deny it a more noble and more humane destiny. The State is destined to become the principal organ of production, consumption, and circulation; the initiator of freedom and equality.

For freedom and equality are the State.

Credit is the State.

Commerce, agriculture, and manufactures are the State.

Canals, railroads, mines, insurance companies, as well as tobacco-shops and post-offices, are the State.

Public education is the State.

The State at last, abandoning its negative responsibilities to clothe itself with positive ones, from the oppressive, unproductive and regressive that it always was, must become an organiser, producer and servant. This is feudalism regenerated, the hierarchy of workers' associations, organised and positioned according to a potent formula, the secret of which Pierre Leroux reserves the right to reveal to us.

Thus, the organisers of the State suppose, for in all this they only go from supposition to supposition, that the State can change its nature, turn itself, so to speak, from

Satan to become an archangel; and, after having lived for centuries by blood and slaughter like a wild beast, graze upon the laburnum with the deer, and suckle the lambs. This is what Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux teach us; this is, as we said long ago, the whole secret of socialism.

“We love the tutelary, generous, devoted power, taking as its motto these profound words of the Gospel: *Let the first amongst you be the servant of all the others*, and we hate the depraved, corrupting, oppressive power, making the people its prey. We admire it representing the generous and living part of humanity; we abhor it when it represents the cadaverous part. We revolt against what is insolent, usurpation, brigandage in this notion: the MASTER-STATE, and we applaud what is touching, fruitful, and noble in this notion: the SERVANT-STATE. Let us put it better: there is a belief to which we hold a thousand times more than life, it is our belief in the coming and definitive TRANSFORMATION of power. *That is the triumphant passage from the old world to the new world*. All the governments of Europe rest today on the notion of the MASTER-STATE; but they are dancing, distraught, the dance of the dead.” (*Le Nouveau Monde*, 15 November 1849)

Pierre Leroux is entirely in favour of these ideas. What he wants, what he teaches and what he calls for is a regeneration of the State – he has not said yet by whom and by what this regeneration must be effected – as he wants and calls for a regeneration of Christianity, without having been able, as yet, to present his dogma and bestow his *Credo*.

We believe, contrary to Pierre Leroux and Louis Blanc, that the theory of the tutelary, generous, devoted, productive, initiating, organising, liberal and progressive State is a utopia, a pure illusion of their intellectual vision. Pierre Leroux and Louis Blanc resemble, we believe, a man who, standing at a mirror and seeing his image reversed, would pretend that this image must become a reality and one day replace, if we may use the expression, his *natural person*.

This is what separates us from these two men, whose talents and services, whatever they may say, we have never dreamt of denying, but whose stubborn hallucination we deplore. We do not believe in the

¹ Achille Fould (1800-67) and Jakob Mayer Rothschild (1792-1868), both Jewish citizens of France, were financiers. (*Black Flag*)

² Georges Humann (1780-1842), a financier, was also Minister of Finance; Jean Lacave-Laplagne (1795-1849) was a politician and financial minister; Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès (1803-78) was made Minister of Finance in 1848; Hippolyte Philibert Passy (1793-1880) was an economist and politician active on financial matters; Charles Duclerc (1812-88) succeeded Garnier-Pagès as Minister of Finance; *The*

Man With Forty Crowns (*L'Homme aux quarante écus*) is a fable by Voltaire, published anonymously in 1768, which aimed to oppose the economic and fiscal conceptions of physiocrats, who considered that only agriculture created wealth (unlike industry and commerce, considered as sterile activities) and that only the products of the earth should be taxed.; Turcaret, a greedy money-man, is the protagonist of Alain-René Lesage's satirical play, *Le Financier* (1709). (*Black Flag*)

SERVANT-STATE: for us it is quite simply a contradiction.

Servant and *master*, when applied to the State, are synonymous terms; just as *more* and *less*, when applied to equality, are identical terms. The proprietor, by interest on capital, demands *more* than equality; communism, by the formula, *to each according to his needs*, grants *less* than equality: it is always inequality; and this is why we are neither a communist nor a proprietor.

Likewise, whoever says *master-State* says usurpation of the public power; whoever says *servant-State* says delegation of the public power: it is always an alienation of this power, always a power, always an external, arbitrary authority, in place of the immanent, inalienable, untransferable authority of citizens: always *more* or *less* than freedom. It is for this reason that we do not want the State.

Moreover, to emerge from metaphysics and return to the domain of experience, here is what we have to say to Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux.

You claim and affirm that the State, that the government can and must be completely transformed in its principle, in its essence, in its action, in its relations with the citizens, as in its results; that thereby the State, a bankrupt and a counterfeiter, must be the source of all credit; that, for so many centuries an enemy of knowledge, and at this moment still hostile to primary education and the freedom of the press, it is for it to provide, *ex officio*, for the education of citizens; that after having left commerce, industry, agriculture, and all the instruments of wealth to develop without its aid, often even despite its resistance, it is for it to take the initiative in all work as in all ideas; that finally, an eternal enemy of freedom, it must again, not leave freedom to itself, but create, direct freedom. It is in this marvellous transformation of the State that, according to you, the present Revolution comprises.

You have therefore to, at the same time, firstly establish the truth of your hypothesis, by deducing its traditional legitimacy, its historical titles, and outlining its philosophy; secondly, by applying it.

Now, it appears already that both theory and practice, in your hypothesis, is in formal contradiction, and with the

idea itself, and with the historical facts, and with the most authentic tendencies of humanity.

Your theory, we say, implies a contradiction in its terms, since it claims to make freedom a creation of the State, while it is the State, on the contrary, which must be a creation of freedom. Indeed, if the State imposes itself upon my will, the State is master; I am not free; the theory is undermined.

whoever says *master-State* says usurpation of the public power; whoever says *servant-State* says delegation of the public power: it is always an alienation of this power, always a power, always an external, arbitrary authority, in place of the immanent, inalienable, untransferable authority of citizens

It is in contradiction with the historical facts, since it is certain, and as recognised by you, that everything positive, good, and beautiful that has been produced within the sphere of human activity has been the exclusive product of freedom, acting independently of the State, and almost always in opposition to the State; which leads directly to this proposition, which ruins your system, that freedom is sufficient unto itself and has no need of the State.

Finally, the manifest tendencies of civilisation contradicts your theory; since, instead of continually adding to individual freedom and dignity by making every human soul, following Kant's precept, an exemplar of all humanity, an aspect of the collective soul, you subordinate the private person to the public person, you subject the individual to the group, you absorb the citizen in the State.

It is for you to remove all these contradictions by a principle superior to freedom and to the State. We, who plainly and simply deny the State; who, resolutely following the line of freedom, remain faithful to revolutionary practice, we do not have to demonstrate to you the falsity of your hypothesis, we await your proofs. The *master-State* is lost; you agree with us. As for the *servant-State*, we do not know what it can be; we distrust it as a supreme hypocrisy. The *servant-State* seems to us to be exactly the same thing as a servant-mistress; we do not want it; we prefer, until further notice, to espouse Freedom in legitimate marriage. Explain, then, if you can, why, after having demolished the State through love of this adored freedom, we must now, by virtue of the same love, return to the State. Until you have solved this problem, we will continue to protest against all government, all authority, all power; we shall maintain, in spite of everything, the liberal prerogative. We will say to you: Freedom is, for us, a thing gained; now, you know the

rule of law: *Melior est conditio possidentis*¹. Produce your titles to the reorganisation of government; otherwise, no government!

To summarise:

The State is the *external* constitution of the social power.

This constitution supposes, in principle, that society is a rational being devoid of spontaneity, providence, unity and which needs, to act, to be fictitiously represented by one or more elected or hereditary proxies: a hypothesis whose falsity the economic development of societies and the organisation of universal suffrage also contribute in demonstrating.

The constitution of the State supposes further, as to its object, that antagonism or a state of war is the essential and indelible condition of humanity, a condition which necessitates, between the *weak* and the *strong*, the intervention of a coercive force which puts an end to the conflicts by a general oppression. We maintain that, in this respect, the mission of the State is ended; that, by the division of labour, industrial solidarity, the taste for well-being, the equal distribution of capital and taxation, freedom and justice obtain surer guarantees than all those formerly afforded to them by religion and the State.

As for an utilitarian transformation of the State, we consider it as a utopia that contradicts both the governmental tradition, and the revolutionary tendency, and the spirit of the now accepted economic reforms. In any case, we say that it would be up to liberty alone to reorganise power, which today is equivalent to the complete exclusion of power.

As a result, either no social revolution, or no more government; such is our solution of the political problem.

Now, a few words of explanation from the writer to citizens Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux.

To Louis Blanc:

You complain that for a long time you have been the target of a systematic attack on my part; you say that you have always been reluctant to respond to it, because you did not want to give the counter-revolution the spectacle of our disagreements. You will permit me to acknowledge that I am not very grateful to you for this deigned moderation, which is only a surreptitious way of indicating me to the criticism of the democrats. The questions must be studied. (The Revolution does not accept these mutual complacencies). If you have supposed for a single moment that I would keep quiet or conceal anything in your books that seems to me false

and dangerous, you have not done me justice; you have been mistaken.

I have never slandered your intentions; I have often asserted the honour, very rare in the world, that you have of being the first to put the social question in a formal manner. It is a glory that cannot be taken from you; for my part, no one thinks less of it. I have, moreover, called attention to your theory, which I know, be sure, better than you; not because I approve of it, of course, but because it expresses one of the sides of humanitarian development, the communist and governmental side, which is the one I combat.

Also, without any regard for your person, I have always considered you as the least disguised expression of absolutism and, as such, as one of the most dangerous men for the Revolution. I believed, in criticising your ideas, to fulfil a duty: I regret that you have not been able to understand it. I am, in your eyes, the *theoretician of tyranny by chaos*, to borrow your style: whatever! I have just told you what I mean by *anarchy* and abolition of the State; I had already made it sufficiently clear in various tracts, and, quite recently, in the manifesto of the *Voix du Peuple*. You need only open your eyes to see that there is a long way from these ideas to those of *tyranny* and *chaos*. It has pleased you, for the sake of your popularity and the satisfaction of your self-esteem, to distort and conceal my sentiments. You owe it to me to set the record straight on this point and retract your words: I demand it.

You insinuate, always for the sake of your popularity and in order to draw upon me the hatred of the democracy, you attribute to me intentions for the guillotine with regard to you and all those who, with you, remain Jacobins. You are a man of letters: you must know better than anyone that, despite the vehemence of the discourse, violence is what is most foreign to the soul of the man of letters. Here again, you owe me reparation; and in order that it may cost less to your pride, I will give you the example of frankness.

It is true that I appreciate Robespierre's role and work differently than you do; I think, with many others, that Robespierre was, before Bonaparte, the fatal man who, after having served it energetically, lost the Republic. M. Royer-Collard said one day to M. Odilon Barrot: "I know you, you are Pétion." Well, I recognise you too, citizen Louis Blanc, you are Robespierre. You have the same love of speaking, the same backward-looking thoughts, the same reactionary ways, and, if I must tell you everything, the same nullity of ideas, the same political incapacity. And, admire the astonishing analogy of the times: you still have, in Pierre Leroux, your Dom Gerle, and I am sure that Catherine Théo will not miss you. Does it follow, because I draw your horoscope thus, that I myself am a Girondin? You alone

¹ Latin for *the condition of the party in possession is the better one*; a maxim stating that the onus of making out a

claim to title in law falls upon the shoulders of the party who makes the claim against the existing possessor. (*Black Flag*)

could claim it. Far from it, I accuse Robespierre precisely of having lost the Republic by precipitating, through the disgust for his petty person and the intolerance of his fanaticism, the fall of the Mountain and the defeat of the Jacobins.

France, bourgeois by its habits and its institutions, is Montagnard by temperament: it prefers, in revolution, coups de mains to methodical transitions; it is after having shown its strength that it consents to return to ideas. That is why our aspirations to freedom have always been disappointed: 1799, 1814, 1830 and 1848 are there to attest to that. At each of these times, the country made an effort to free itself from a corrupting and tyrannical power; but, the ideas not being up to the circumstances, the country again fell back into oppression.

According to this disposition of our dear and unfortunate homeland, and given the speed of events, my predictions, very impartial as you will judge, are that the democratic and social republic will be established under the influence of the ideas of which you are the most prominent mouthpiece; and that one day, soon perhaps, you will occupy that eminent post that you covet in the State. The demagogic carnival, predicted by me, must come to fruition. Events moving faster than ideas, your theory of the State, all imagination, being more easily grasped than the scientific theory of freedom, it seems to me almost inevitable that we will escape the experience of the Luxembourg's theories. But I predict to you in advance: you will not govern as you imagine, neither you nor anyone else. The worker, whatever favour he may show to your ideas, will not leave the initiative to you this time; he intends to govern himself; you will be the instrument of a disorganised multitude, and you will have compromised, for the second time, the February Revolution, by constantly stirring up revolutionary passion instead of the idea.

This is why I, a republican, against whom you sow distrust and hatred, try today to ward off the danger by casting out into the world some positive ideas that may one day join the democracy and serve as ballast for your deplorable glibness. For, despite the unpopularity to which I expose myself by combating your sad influence, I know full well that my ideas are not wasted. Did not one of your people say to me one day: *We will create free credit without you, in spite of you and against you?* And is that not what you yourself are already doing, when you stitch the theory of free credit onto your theory of the State!

You still dare to say that after having condemned power in [the hands of] Robespierre, I exalt it in Louis-

Philippe; that after having spat upon the Jacobin's scaffold, I kneel before the dunghill into which the monarch sank.

If I had the slightest sensitivity left for calumnies of this kind, I would not go far to seek my answer. I would apply to you Pascal's *mentiris impudentissime*, and leave you there. But I want to treat with more respect the president of those poor delegates of the Luxembourg, who receive your speeches so preciously and admire you so naively. Oblige me, therefore, to tell them, since they take your word for it and do not read me, that what you are doing to me is pure mockery, with the sole aim of pointing me out to patriotic vengeance, in case triumphant neo-Jacobinism creates a batch of *reactionaries* and *aristos*. Is he not a reactionary, in fact, who dares to laugh at your so-called *Organisation of Labour*? Is he not an aristocrat who allows himself an opinion outside the common profession of faith!

To Pierre Leroux:

My dear theosophist,

Your three articles essentially state that I am a conceited person, an eclectic, a liberal, a sophist, a Voltairean, a Fourierist, a Malthusian, an egoist, an atheist, an Erostratus¹, a bourgeois, a proprietor, which does not prevent you from calling me your friend and saying to me: *My dear Proudhon*; – that I have plundered, without saying a word, Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Fourier and yourself; but that if I have taken some of your ideas, it has been with bad intentions, and solely to overturn your *doctrine*; that after having criticised Louis Blanc, Considérant, Cabet and others, about whom you care *in petto* as much as I do, I had the audacity to attack you, the victor over M. Cousin and eclecticism, whom I have called a *théologastre*, while you are well and duly the theologian of socialism; in short, I am not a republican.

You spent fifteen columns of the *République* reeling off this rosary to me. I ask you: what does all this prove? What an argument for your readers is this myriad of insulting epithets, for the use of the hypocrites of social democracy! And what does it matter to you, great theomacer, great theomime, not to say theomane, of whom I had said nothing, that Louis Blanc and the others, who worked so well after February, were confessed by me *ex-officio*, since they refuse to speak!

The question you had to answer was very simple, and I had posed it in precise terms.

What is God? I asked myself. And I answered following Kant, following all philosophers, following yourself: *We do not know.*

¹ Erostratus syndrome is the desire to become famous at any cost, an unbridled search for notoriety and public recognition which often leads people to commit extreme or controversial acts in order to achieve fame. It is named after Erostratus,

who lived in ancient Greece and burned the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus with the sole purpose of going down in history as the person who destroyed one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. (Translator)

What is government? – We do not know.

And I added, by way of commentary: It seems to me that by occupying ourselves with these questions, we seem like astrologers seeking the future in the stars.

You had only one thing to do: it was to show me, empirically or by dialectical formula, what God is, what government is. You had a great opportunity to present your theory! Instead, you are inflamed, you declaim; you treat me as sacrilegious, as a Malthusian, as *not a republican!* Finally, you threaten to treat me as you did eclecticism, that grand open door of modern philosophy, which you had the glory of breaking down all by yourself. What is the matter with you? What horsefly is biting you? What hypochondria are you prey to? I suspect, if you are not mad, some excitation of the people, some trick of Carlier, as M. de Lareochejacquelein elegantly says. Be careful: we are surrounded by informers, who only think of making us say, when they do not make us do, stupid things.

Do you want me to tell you what I think?

At bottom, you have no other ideas about God, religion, property, government, association than those which I am trying to clarify, whereas you confuse them with the triad, the *circulus*, the metempsychosis and all sorts of metaphysical and erotic enlightenments. That is why you declare yourself my adversary: it annoys you to see me sow your ideas, like sand, in the public square.

God, you say it yourself, cannot be proven, cannot be explained. – And what else do I say?

Religion, again according to you, is social democracy. – I accept, subject to verification, this definition. I abandoned the word with the thing; you, by abandoning the thing, you deny the word. Nothing is easier than for us to understand each other.

Property, it is always you whom I quote, *is the right that every man has to develop himself in the triple physical, moral and intellectual respects.* – Thus defined, who would be foolish enough to deny property! I agree with you: I had only believed that property was something else.

After having thus explained yourself about God, religion and property, you declare yourself a supporter of FREE CREDIT, of which you even claim the original idea. Only, you claim that the *Bank of the People* is nothing but an absurdity, exclusively my invention. This at least proves that, in agreement on the principle

and the theory, we differ only on the application. But what would the public say if it learned that the cause of the rebuke you disgorge upon the Bank of the People comes solely from the fact that I had banished from it, in spite of you, any kind of triad? You wanted initially, in the Bank of the People, THREE divisions: Production, Consumption and Circulation. Then you distinguished THREE types of credit: then you established THREE funds. Everything was in *threes*, multiples and sub-multiples of *three*. I told you that you knew nothing about book-keeping, and the lectures ended there. How I regret not having published them! Will you tell us one day, metaphysician of the Trimurti, why a pot cannot have three legs, while a cart has four wheels?

**But who could have
put into your mind
that double formula:
*Abolition of the
exploitation of man
by man and Abolition
of the government of
man by man; that we
affirm, you and I...?***

In perfect community of ideas on capital and interest on capital, we are also on government. You deny, as I do, the government of man by man. You were the first to say that, in the Republic, each citizen should be *his priest and his emperor*. You go so far as to reproach me for having stolen the idea from you. Sorry! I did not even know that it was yours; and even if I had known, I would not have believed that it lost anything by passing through my mouth: I have a better reputation than you for knowing what I am talking about.

But who could have put into your mind that double formula:

*Abolition of the exploitation of man by man and Abolition of the government of man by man; that we affirm, you and I, [but] was on my part a treacherous antinomy, while with you it is simply a deduction? That if I affirmed these two propositions at the same time, it was in order to ruin one by the other, and to perpetuate in this way both the exploitation of man by man, and the government of man by man? How could you have attributed to me this antinomic wickedness, when I never cease to repeat, from one end of my *Confessions* to the other, that the two phrases are identical and correct, that they derive from the same principle, and serve each other as a corollary. And that is what you are basing your cry from the rooftops that I am not a republican! Once again, is this madness, or slander?*

Yes, yes, yes – must I drum it into your ears! – I deny all at once, collectively, identically and synthetically, both the exploitation of man by man, and the government of man by man, and, what you are very wrong to forget, dear Theopompus, the worship of man by man. In denying it, I swear to you, I am making neither antinomy nor antithesis, I do not in the least

intend to demolish your *Doctrine*; I do not even know if you have a doctrine.

The conformity of our sentiments in matters of religion, government, credit and property, thus ascertained, and by your words, and by this harsh claim of ideas, of which, it seems, you would be the father, while I would only be the midwife; is it not a shame for you to come suddenly with brilliance, with scandal, to take up the defence of religion, which rejects you; of government, which repudiates you; of property, which abhors you! What is this crusade of which you are now Peter the Wanderer in favour of religion, of government, of property? What are you attacking? What are you defending? Who, what do you care about? What does this torrent of pedantic ramblings mean, where all that one discovers most clearly is that the idea of the century, the immortal idea, under whose invocation I have very humbly placed my booklet, this idea is yours? Could you not say to your readers, simply, and without

calling me Malthusian, Erostratus, proprietor, etc.: Citizens, He who solved the problem of the proletariat, He who alone has the right to raise his hand to heaven and say: *My idea is immortal*, that man is not Proudhon, it is PIERRE LEROUX! It is ME!

Listen to me, dear Theoglosse. I will spare you, for today, all the follies and absurdities that you have poured out in your three diatribes; I would make you suffer too much by bringing them up again. But, I warn you, I do not like this Jesuit way of slitting a man's throat whilst kissing him. I prefer a thousand times the avowed, cordial hatred of Louis Blanc to your false good nature. You can accuse my ideas, it is your right; but I forbid you to accuse my intentions: otherwise, I will accuse your good-self; I will mark you so deeply and so ardently that it will be remembered in future generations. It will be, for you, a means of achieving posterity, more surely than the Triad, the *Circulus* and the Doctrine.

To Pierre Leroux

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

[First letter/article]

La Voix du Peuple, 7 December 1849

My dear Pierre Leroux

Would you like us to suspend our polemic for a moment, to have a friendly chat? Put aside your sensitivity and your suspicions: it is a new pact that I propose to you, in which you will not have to put anything of your own.

I am determined to endure everything from you, the most mortifying criticism, the most severe corrections, except that you say of me that I am not a republication, a democrat and a socialist; that I am a *villain* and an *atheist*.

Such imputations, addressed not to ideas but to the person, you have no right to express, for the reason that no man in the world has the right to inquire into the intentions of his neighbour. Inquiring into intentions, great God! Do you know, Pierre Leroux, who knows so many things, what that is? It is the inquisition, it is organised denunciation, systematic slander, condemnation without trial, without grounds,



Pierre Leroux (1797-1871)

without evidence, without *corpus delicti*.¹ It is the abolition of all fraternity between men, the negation of the Gospel, the apotheosis of Torquemada, of Fouquier-Tinville, of Marat, the glorification of the revolutionary tribunal.

Is it then, Pierre Leroux, that you want to repeat Marat? Are you an incarnation of Fouquier-Tinville? Would your soul have once animated the atrocious figure of Torquemada? What! you cry out so loudly against slander, which I have never used against you, as far as I know; you who compare slander to the assassins dagger, you profess to erect it into a system, under the pretext of

inquiring into intentions! Do you therefore already possess canonical infallibility, to arrogate to yourself the right to accuse the intentions of a living man! Do you forget that the slightest error of judgement, while you speak of intentions, becomes slander!

sufficient evidence that the crime actually occurred. (*Black Flag*)

¹ *Corpus delicti* is a common law Latin phrase that translates to "body of the crime." The phrase generally refers to the principle that no one should be convicted of a crime without

Say as much as you please: Such a proposition, such an idea, does not seem republican to me, all the better! Say that I am mistaken in the way I understand democracy and socialism; prove it in your own way: I have no reason to disagree. I even undertake, as a response, to prove that, apart from your antediluvian fantasies, your opinions on government, property, association, credit, are none other than mine. The public will appreciate it.

But do not go and conclude from what appears to you to be my ideas what you might then take to be my intentions: you have no right to do so. You could not do so without a slanderous intention, without first being yourself guilty of the crime you seek in others.

I am a republican: as I have proven for twelve years. It was necessary to be Pierre Leroux, to have made the Triad, the *Circulus* and Metempsychosis the criterion of republicanism to discover, after twelve years of fighting for the holy cause of the Republic, that I am not a republican.

I am a democrat: my explanations, endless repeated, of what I mean by *an-archy* are proof of this. Are there no democrats in France except those who swear with you by the Triad, who believe in the *Circulus* and Metempsychosis? I greatly fear that on this account there does not exist, there has never existed a republican other than you alone, in all past, present and future republics.

Finally, I am a socialist: I have said a hundred times that socialism, insofar as it limits itself to the criticism of current political economy, and offers its hypotheses for criticism, is a protest; that insofar as it formulates practical and positive ideas, it is the same thing as social science. I protest against current society and I seek science; on both counts, I am a socialist. You have no right to take this status away from me, because I recognise neither the Triad, nor Metempsychosis, nor the *Circulus*. On this account, Fourier, Owen, Saint-Simon, Cabet, Louis Blanc, would be no more a socialist than me: you alone would be Socialism, as you alone are Democracy and the Republic.

I reject the definition of atheist, not out of hypocrisy, you should know, nor out of any religious terror; but because this word, taken in the vulgar sense, implies an odious insinuation. The atheist is the abject materialist,

without respect for justice and humanity, who makes a law of his egoism, a god of his belly, a cult of the satisfaction of his passions. It is not so, as you know, that Spinoza was an atheist; it is not for such causes that Kant, Fichte, Hegel later deserved the name. The so-called atheism of these great men was nothing other than idealism raised to its highest power, the culmination of metaphysical and religious speculation.

I am a republican: as I have proven for twelve years...

I am a democrat: my explanations, endless repeated, of what I mean by *an-archy* are proof of this...

Finally, I am a socialist... socialism, insofar as it limits itself to the criticism of current political economy, and offers its hypotheses for criticism, is a protest... I protest against current society...

I will not mention the other epithet of *enfant terrible* that you bestow upon me, after having translated it, lest the public may mistake it for *villain*. You, who speaks so much of intentions, you naively reveal your own. What! I am an *enfant terrible*, that is to say, in the language of Pierre Leroux, a *villain*, because I believe neither in the Triad, nor in the *Circulus*, nor in Pantheism, nor in Metamorphosis, nor in Metempsychosis! I am a renegade of the Republic, and of Socialism, of all that the People venerate, because I had the scandalous audacity to laugh at your would-be dogmas! You told yourself: "orthodoxy is my doxy"; and thereupon you go around shouting that I am an atheist, a villain, the scourge of the Democratic and Social Republic.

You abuse the consideration with which the people honour you, the opinion they have of your sincerity, your probity, to make me suspect in their eyes. You avenge, by this immolation of my person, a few jokes more cheery than offensive, all this for the greater glory of the *Circulus* and the Doctrine. Do you know what this means, Pierre Leroux? It is that you prefer your doctrine to the Truth, to Charity, to the Republic.

No, I do not believe in the Triad, nor in the *Circulus*, nor in Metempsychosis, any more than I believe in the resurrection of the dead and in constitutional monarchy; I am neither theist, nor pantheist, nor atheist. I have no faith, love or hope except in Liberty and Homeland. That is why I systematically oppose everything that seems to me hostile to Liberty, foreign to this sacred land of Gaul. I want my country returned to its original nature, freed once and for all from foreign beliefs, from all alien institutions. For a long time the Greek, the Roman, the Barbarian, the Jew, the English have influenced our race: one gave it its religion, the other its law; this one its feudalism, that one its government.

And as if this long invasion of foreign ideas were not enough, you come to offer us, renewed from Hindustani fables, the Triad, the *Circulus*, Metempsychosis and castes. You do not want this poor people, the premier of the earth, to regain, with its initiative, its lost *automathie*. You forbid them to live their own life, to speak to the world of the abundance of their heart and their genius; for their legitimate inspiration you substitute metempsychosis and the triad.

Ah! you who reproach me for not being a republican, you are not of your land. You have not heard, like me, since childhood, the oak trees of our druidic forests weep for the ancient homeland: you do not feel your bones, moulded from the pure limestone of the Jura, thrill at the memory of our Celtic heroes, Vercingetorix dragged in triumph by Caesar, Orgetorix, Ariovistus, and that old Calgacus defeated by Agricola; you did not

see, on the banks of our Alpine torrents, liberty appear to you in the guise of Velleda the Gaul.

You are not a child of Brennus: you understand nothing of this restoration of our nationality, which, beyond economic reform and the transformation of a debased society, appears as the highest aim of the February Revolution. You are on the side of the foreigner; this is why Freedom, which was everything for our ancestors, is odious to you; this is why you understand nothing of the work to which I am dedicated, and why you slander my *intentions*; this is why you bring us the Triad, the *Circulus* and the Doctrine.

Speak then, Pierre Leroux, since you have knowledge; but do not touch Freedom, and above all do not slander: that is all I have to say. You will not find me lacking in good manners.

[Second letter/article]

La Voix du Peuple, 13 December 1849¹

My dear Pierre Leroux,

I really must forgive you your incessant accusations, for you do not know me and do not engage in debate.

For a start, you haven't read me, so you have a cheek attacking me; next, I think you need telling and everything that you have written over the past month is there to prove it: you have absolutely no method. As a result of rehashing your empty formulae, wallowing in your sterile imaginings and focusing your thoughts upon some world beyond the senses, you have rendered yourself incapable of grasping other people's thinking; the upshot being that, all unbeknownst to yourself, your criticisms amount, I am sorry to say, to unrelenting demonisation.

On the basis of a few snatches of text quarried from my books and utterly misconstrued, you have cast me as an adversary of your own devising – anti-democratic, anti-socialist, counter-revolutionary, Malthusian and atheistic. This is the imaginary creature to which you address your arguments, without in the least bothering if the man you depict thus to proletarians fits the description. Sometimes you credit me with saying things that I never said, or you credit me with conclusions diametrically opposed to my actual ones; at other times, you take the trouble to lecture me on what no one living in this century could honestly be ignorant of; all in order to banish me benignly from the democratic and social community.

Meanwhile, the well-intentioned readers who follow you, and the malicious ones – and of the latter sort there is no shortage – pick up on your accusations, passing

comment on them, inflating them and exploiting them. So much so that, ultimately and thanks to you, today I find myself the Satan of socialism, just as, a year ago, I was the Satan of property. Socialism's main business at this point in time is to demolish Proudhon, or so one of your disciples, Madame Pauline Roland,² is telling all who are prepared to listen. How much more clear-sighted socialism will be, won't it?, once this renegade Proudhon has been cast down; whereupon Pierre Leroux's tittle-tattle merchants, eaten up by hypochondria, will take their seats among the denizens of the Assembly of representatives of the People!

So, my dear Pierre Leroux, would you care to see this controversy brought to an end? The crucial thing is that the debate be kept on track, that, in each particular, we deal first with one issue and then with the next, rather than rant about them all, and then some, as you do in every one of your articles; without this, our exchanges will inevitably become a laughing-stock for the Malthusians and scandalise the proletarians. As for myself, I will freely confess to you that I find it impossible to keep up such a polemic, squandering my time and my paper on relentlessly clarifying facts, reconstructing texts, clearing up your misunderstandings, rebutting your whimsy and translating your high-falutin' style into common parlance.

Thus you take me to task for having made a distinction between the labour question and the question of the State, two questions which are, at bottom, identical and susceptible to one and the same solution.

¹ First appeared in *Property is Theft!*, translation by Paul Sharkey (*Black Flag*)

² Pauline Roland (1805-1852), a Saint-Simonian socialist, feminist, and associate of Leroux, also wrote a column for

Proudhon's *Le Représentant du peuple*, but was later to write a critique of Proudhon's antifeminism, *La femme a-t-elle le droit à la liberté?* (*Does Woman Have the Right to Liberty?*, 1851). (*Black Flag*)

If you were as eager to acknowledge the common ground between your thoughts and mine as you are to highlight where they differ, you wouldn't have had any difficulty persuading yourself that, when it comes to the questions of labour and the State, as well as on a host of other matters, our two outlooks have no reason to feel jealous of each other. When I state, say, that the capitalist principle and the monarchist or governmental principle are one and the same principle; that the abolition of the exploitation of man by man and the abolition of the government of man by man are one and the same formula; when, taking up arms against communism and absolutism alike, those two kindred faces of the authority principle, I point out that, if the family was the building block of feudal society, the workshop is the building block of the new society; it must be as plain as day that I, like you, look upon the political question and the economic question as one and the same. What you upbraid me for not knowing on this score is your own sheer ignorance of my own thinking and, what is worse, it is a waste of time.

But does it follow from the fact that the labour question and the State question resolve each other and are, fundamentally, one and the same issue, that no distinction should be made between them and that each does not deserve its own resolution?

Does it follow from these two questions being, in principle, identical, that we must arrive at a particular mode of organising the State rather than the State being subsumed by labour? Neither of those conclusions holds water. Social questions are like problems of geometry; they may be resolved in different ways, depending on how they are approached. It is even useful and vital that these differing solutions be devised so that, in adding further dimensions to theory, they may add to the sum of science.

And as to the State, since, despite this multi-faceted character, the ultimate conclusion is that the question of its organisation is bound up with that of the organisation of labour, we may, we must, further conclude that a time will come when, labour having organised itself, in accordance with its own law, and having no further need of law-maker or sovereign, the workshop will banish government. As I argue and into which we shall look into, my dear philosopher, whenever, paying rather more heed to the other fellow's ideas and being a little

less sensitive about your own, you may deign to enter into a serious debate about one or other of these two things, about which you are forever prattling without actually saying anything: Association and the State.

The government question and the labour question being identical, you rightly remark that such identity is articulated in the following terms: *The Question of the organisation of Society*.

But does it follow from the fact that the labour question and the State question resolve each other and are, fundamentally, one and the same issue, that no distinction should be made between them and that each does not deserve its own resolution?... labour having organised itself, in accordance with its own law, and having no further need of law-maker or sovereign, the workshop will banish government.

Now, read through chapter one of *Economic Contradictions* and you will find it formally spelled out that it is incorrect to say that labour is organised or that it is not; that it is *forever* self-organising; that society is an ongoing striving for organisation; that such organisation is at one and the same time the principle, the life and the purpose of society. So, my dear Pierre Leroux, be so kind as to think me somewhat less of an ignoramus and above all less of a sophist than I may seem to your frightened imagination: it will lay to rest three quarters of our quarrel.

There can be nothing easier than justifying the orthodoxy of this proposition as penned by me and upon which you seize so contemptuously and irrationally: "The February Revolution has posed two crucial questions: one economic, namely, the question of labour and property; and the other political, to wit, the question of government and the State." I merely needed to issue a

reminder of the message implicit in all my words, that politics and political economy are one and the same science, the former being the more personal, arbitrary or subjective; the latter more substantial and positive. However, that interpretation of the February Revolution strikes you as *dry* and *narrow*: it lacks that certain something beyond the government and economics of societies, without which any idea looks satanic to you and every proposition fit for the pyre. That certain something is the sense of the divine, the theological and religious sense. Topped off with a quotation from some homily by Monsieur de Lamartine, and one of your usual commentaries on God, religion, the head of Christ, the Convention and the Republic.

At a time of your choosing, my dear Pierre Leroux, I shall give you such a sermon on God, his Spirit and his Word, as will draw tears from socialism's blue-stockings and their concierges; I can play that

instrument every bit as deftly as you and Monsieur de Lamartine. But permit me not to throw theology into the pot with Political Economy, or, as the proverb has it, serve up *God with plums*. Such abuse of religiosity is one of the mystifications of our age and one that it behoves socialism to purge from its literature and press. Talking religion to men when the task in hand is to lay the foundations of social, mathematical and objective science amounts to a muddying of minds; and to perpetrating against the People the very same crime as the notorious Mazarin¹ was accused of having committed against the person of the young Louis XIV.

What is your God?

What is your religion, your ritual, your dogma?

What is the meaning of this constant invocation of Christ and Church?

You do not know the first thing about these things; you cannot see a single drop of them in your own thinking and all this other-worldly lyricism is nothing but a cover for the wretchedness of your alleged faith and the nullity of your means. You only prattle so much about God, of whom you, the anti-Christian, know nothing, to spare yourself the need to talk about matters here below, *non ut aliquid dicatur sed ne taciturn*.²

Yes, I tell you, the February Revolution (and I am sticking to my formula precisely on account of its concrete simplicity and its very materiality), the February Revolution has posed two questions; one political and the other economic. The first is the question of government and freedom; the second that of labour and capital. I defy you to express bigger issues in fewer words. So leave the Supreme Being to heaven and religion to conscience, to the household, a matter for the mother of the family and her offspring.

¹ Jules Mazarin (1602-61) was an Italian cardinal who served as the chief minister of France from 1642 until his death first under King Louis XIII and then Louis XIV. As the later was only five years old when he became King, Mazarin functioned essentially as the co-ruler of France alongside the queen. (*Black Flag*)

² A slight misquotation of St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*: "Dictum est tamen tres personae, non ut aliquid diceretur, sed

Let me add – and there is nothing in me to validate your entertaining doubts, the way you do, about my feelings on this score – that once those two major issues have been resolved, the republican catch-cry, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, is a reality. If this is what you refer to as *God's kingdom on earth*, let me say to you, indeed, that I have no quarrel with that. It is a real comfort to me to find out at last that the kingdom of God is the kingdom of liberty, equality and fraternity. But could you not express yourself in everyday language?

You have me saying, and I really do not know where you could have found this, that *ownership of the instruments of labour must forever stay vested in the individual and remain unorganised*. These words are set in italics, as if you had lifted them from somewhere in my books. And then, on the back of this alleged quotation, you set about answering me that society, or the State that stands for it, has the right to *buy back* all property assets, that it has a duty to pursue such *buy backs* and that it will do so.³

But it does not follow at all from my speaking on the basis of socialism in order to reject the buy back of such assets as nonsensical, illegitimate and poisonous that I want to see individual ownership and non-organisation of the instruments of labour endure for all eternity. I have never penned nor uttered any such thing; and have argued the opposite a hundred times

over. I make no distinction, as you do, between real ownership and phoney ownership: from the lofty heights of righteousness and human destiny, I deny all kinds of proprietary domain. I deny it, precisely because I believe in an order wherein the instruments of labour will cease to be appropriated and instead become shared; where the whole earth will be depersonalised; where, all functions having become interdependent [*solidaires*], the unity and personhood of society will be

ne taceretur" ("We shall speak of [God as having] three persons, not in order to say anything, but in order not to be silent"). (*Black Flag*)

³ The French word translated here as *buy back* and *buyback*, "rachat," can also have a theological dimension, as in the English words *redeem* and *redemption*: the phrase "redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ," in French, is "rachat par le sang de Jésus-Christ." (*Black Flag*)

**You have me saying...
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articulated alongside the personality of the individual. True, were I not familiar with the candour of your soul, I should think, dear Pierre Leroux, that such misrepresentation of my meaning and my words were done on purpose.

But how is such solidarity of possession and labour to be achieved? How are we to make a reality of such personhood of society, which must result from the disappropriation, or de-personalising of things?

That plainly is the issue, the big question of the revolution.

Together with Louis Blanc, you make noises about *association* and *buy back*: but association, such as it must emerge from fresh reforms, is as much a mystery as religion, and all the attempts at association made by the workers before our very eyes and more or less modelling themselves on the forms of companies defined by our civil and commercial codes, can only be deemed transitory. In short, we know nothing about association. But, besides its requiring the acquiescence of all property-owners, by all the citizenry – which is an impossibility – buying back assets is a notion of mathematical nonsensicality. What is the State supposed to use to pay for assets? Why, assets. An across-the-board buyback amounts to universal expropriation without public utility and WITHOUT COMPENSATION. Yet your sense of caution, Pierre Leroux, has no misgivings about being compromised by fostering such claptrap!

There is a more straightforward, more effective and infinitely less onerous and less risky way of transferring ownership, of achieving Liberty, Equality and Fraternity: that way is, as I have indicated many times, to put an end to the productivity of capital by the

democratic organisation of credit and a simplification of taxation.

Capital having been divested of its power of usury, economic solidarity is gradually created, and with it, an equality of wealth.

Next comes the spontaneous, popular formation of groups, workshops or workers' associations;

Finally, the last to be conjured and formed is the overarching group, comprising the nation in its entirety, what you term the State because you invest it in a representative body outside of society, but which, to me, is no longer the State.

That, dear philosopher, is how I see the Revolution going; this is how we should shift from Liberty to Equality and thence to Fraternity. Which is why I so forcefully insist upon the importance of economic reform, a reform that I have given this makeshift designation: *Free credit*.

And that too we might have scrutinised methodically, and have thrashed out item by item, had you but once managed to stand back from your amorous ecstasies and turn your attention to the sordid practice of loans and discounts. But you deemed it more purposeful, more urgent to have it out and repeat everywhere that I am a foe of Socialism, a foe of Democracy, a foe of Revolution, a hidden disciple of Malthus, determined to preserve *bourgeoisism* and *proprietaryism*.

Hang on, Pierre Leroux: do I need to tell you what I think of your role and mine in this mammoth drama of the nineteenth century? I am the thresher of the February Revolution: the proletarians who are listening to us will be the millers and the bakers and you, with your triad,¹ and the rest with their tub-thumping claptrap, all of you are merely pastry cooks.

Finally, a critic came who, proceeding with the aid of a new argument, said:

Property, in fact and in right, is essentially contradictory and it is for this very reason that it is anything at all. In fact,

Property is the right of occupancy; and at the same time the right of exclusion.

Property is the reward of labour; and the negation of labour.

Property is the spontaneous product of society; and the dissolution of society.

Property is an institution of justice; and property IS THEFT.

From all this it follows that one day property transformed will be a positive idea, complete, social and true; a property that will abolish the former property, and will become equally effective and beneficent for everyone. And what proves this is once again that property is a contradiction.

– “Chapter XI: Eighth Epoch – Property”, *System of Economic Contradictions*

¹ In Leroux's philosophy the fundamental principle was that of what he called the “triad” – a triplicity which he finds to pervade all things, which in God is “power, intelligence and love,” in man “sensation, sentiment and knowledge.” In

society, he pointed to the division of the human race into three great classes, philosophers, artists and industrial chiefs, to be paid according to their capacity, labour, and capital. (*Black Flag*)

Regarding Louis Blanc: On the Present Utility and Future Possibility of the State

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

[First Article]

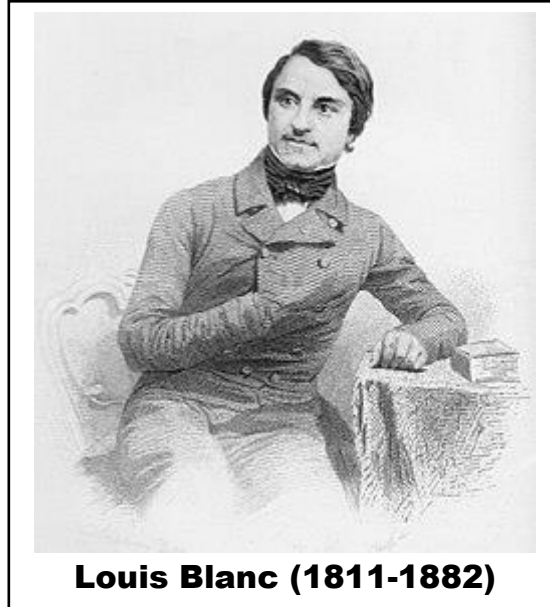
La Voix du Peuple, 26-27 December 1849

I said to myself: What will we do with Louis Blanc? A polemicist or an insulter? – his choice. Either one suits *La Voix du Peuple*. It is up to him to prove, by the way he responds to our inquiries, that he has even more wit than eloquence. Otherwise, a booed author, he must disappear from the revolutionary stage. Whatever he does, and whatever he says, stupidity or stroke of genius, we will draw our conclusions. Science will gain, the Revolution will benefit, and the people will take notice. *Quidquid dixerit, argumentabor.*¹

On that, I wrote a book, Manifesto of *La Voix du Peuple*, in which, acknowledging Louis Blanc, I told him in substance:

You claim to be a revolutionary! But all your economic science is only a clumsy application to society of the domestic economy, an absurd generalisation of mercantile and proprietary routine; but your system of government is only a bloating of the policy of Ferdinand Flocon, who competed for it with M. Armand Marrast, who held it in a direct line from M. Thiers, who was a crony of M. Guizot, who had studied under M. Royer-Collard, who himself, under the name of doctrine, introduced this variety of Absolutism amongst us. You are, in short, a pseudo-socialist and a pseudo-democrat. This is why in March you responded to Blanqui; how in April, believing him dead, you aspired to dictatorship; how, by your ultra-governmentalism, you have made the social revolution odious to the peasant and to the bourgeois, and contributed, more than anyone else, to the defeats of the democracy. It is time for the people to get out of the rut you have created for them, which can only lead to a total dissolution. What do you have to say?

At the same time, to give Louis Blanc every facility for justification, and to make the discussion between him and us more instructive, I propose that he insert his explanations in *Voix du Peuple*, while, for his part, he



Louis Blanc (1811-1882)

will publish my observations in *Nouveau Monde*. Could I have said it better?

Certainly, if the ex-president of the Luxembourg had had the slightest glimmer of faith in what he so complacently calls his *System*, he would have had a fine opportunity to perform. He had only to restate this well-known theme: that the family is the element of society; that consequently the domestic economy is the model for the social economy; that therefore a nation must be like a big household, where the government, in turn monarchic, aristocratic or democratic, takes

the place of the father, and the workers of the children; where finally liberty, equality, property, work, all rights and all duties, flow from the authority of the law, expressed by the representatives of the people, and as sanction the force of the State. The country listened: the opposition that had suddenly burst forth within the democracy assured Louis Blanc a passionate audience. What a moment to make his eloquence shine! Had he succumbed in the struggle, the theoretician of the organisation of labour by the State would have fallen with honour, and, victor or vanquished, the recognition of patriots was his. The error would have been excused in favour of the intention.

When, fifty or sixty years ago, Catholic and monarchical absolutism was on the eve of descending into the grave, it made a supreme effort. It was then that it produced its most illustrious apologists, de Maistre, de Bonald, Chateaubriand and Lamennais, whose marvellous destiny was to show the world, in the single lifetime of a thinker, the philosophical progress of eighteen centuries. Now, in the person of Louis Blanc, an idea more general, more profound, more ancient than the old absolutism, the very idea of government, adequate to the idea of God, was called into question. What a thesis for an orator of some genius! What a case to defend for a publicist, for a historian, for a statesman! It was a tradition to justify, an universal belief to

¹ Whatever he says, I will argue. (*Black Flag*)

avenge, a popular prejudice, so dear to demagogues, to enflame, a glorious prize to conquer. I expected a magnanimous struggle, from which I hoped to reap only the honour, certainly very modest, of having been the first, with a profound awareness and a certain dose of reason, to pose the problem, the inevitable problem of the State.

Well, what did Louis Blanc say in response?

In his first diatribe, through strong personal attacks, digressions, protests of respect towards the sovereignty of the people, he throws in my face what is called in rhetoric an *antithesis of words*. To the MASTER STATE, he opposes the SERVANT STATE; and here is his demonstration.

The State, says Louis Blanc, has been until now the master and the tyrant of the citizens; henceforth it must be their servant. The relation is changed; therein lies the whole revolution. – As if, at all times, the apologists of the monarchy had not also claimed that royalty was the *servant* of the people – that *kings were made for the people, not the people for kings*, and other parables of which the experience of the people has rightly judged. We know today what this servitude of the State, this devotion of the government is worth. Did not Bonaparte, a compatriot of Louis Blanc, call himself the servant of the Revolution? What services he rendered it!...

Thus, the *servant* State, that is Louis Blanc's answer to my first question. As for the question of how the State can really and effectively become a *servant*; how, being a *servant*, it can still be the State, Louis Blanc does not explain; he keeps a prudent silence. He is content to protest that, if he, the premier worker of the Republic, ever became a statesman and minister of progress again, he will be the very humble servant of the people; that he will govern with the people: which will not prevent him, on occasion, from resisting the whims and drives of the people!... In truth, this man has nothing in his breadbin. He is only a nibbler of political crusts. I blame myself for having taken so long to believe it, and especially to say it. Judge for yourself.

¹ Latin for “do everything”, having many diverse activities or responsibilities. (*Black Flag*)

² The women of the people who, during the French Revolution, attended sessions of the National Convention,

Asked on what he based the necessity, under an egalitarian regime, in which credit, work and outlets are guaranteed to all, for an external representation of society: – he replied, covering his ears: *I do not understand*.

Asked repeatedly: How do you reconcile the theory of free credit, which you claim, simultaneously with Pierre Leroux, to be the father of, since the idea became popular, with your initiative of power, with your communist tendencies, with your love of dictatorship, with your system of the *factotum*¹ State, with your hotch-potch economy?

Said: that I was a *professional gladiator, a destroyer of popular renown, a panegyrist of tyrants, manipulator, spreader of birdlime, sower of doubts, whisperer of discord, extinguisher of enlightenment, slanderer of the people, offspring of Thrasymachus, offspring of Lysander, offspring of Tallien* (it is just as well he believes himself to be Robespierre), *sophist, partisan of Louis-Phillippe, and what is worse, Hellenist, Galimafron, monster, conceited, vain, coarse, brutal, self-idolater, Satan, schoolboy, Erostratus, madman*; – that I was a *free student* at the Besançon college; that I belong to *Pitt and Cobourg*; that I *forbid audacity* to the republicans; that after having defended him, Louis Blanc, in an article in the *Peuple*, I am today making the reaction laugh at his

expense, etc., etc., etc.

What say you about this appendix by Pierre Leroux to the litany composed in my honour: *Malthusian, eclectic, liberal, individualist, atheist and proprietor*? Choir of seraphim! When the first says: *Kill!* the other answers: *Destroy!* These people do not even know that an insult, to be in good taste and to be tolerated by honest people, must be the just expression of the fact and the idea, and never reveal the secret and vile passion of the one who resorts to it.

All this interspersed with warm handshakes to the twelve or fifteen so-called delegates who once made up the sycophants of the Luxembourg, and a few commonplaces about government and the State, incubated since 9 Thermidor in the bedwarmers of the knitters.²

popular clubs and the revolutionary tribunal while knitting, noted for their vehement calls for the Terror. (*Black Flag*)

Certainly, we have had many mystifications after February; but, I must admit, I would never have expected this one. What! It is to give birth to the *servant-State* that the Revolution, this woman of the Apocalypse, clothed with the sun like a mantle and crowned by the stars, has been in labour for forty centuries! It is for the *servant-State* that Christianity has brought about the fusion of cults and founded the centralisation of the human race! It is for the *servant-State* that we have attacked royalty, on August 19, on July 29, on February 24! It is for the *servant-State*, and the *ministry of progress* no doubt, that suffered death and passion in June 48, and that the young Mountain protested in June 49!

What! here is a man who, taking metaphors for ideas, comes to tell us that the State is the head of society; that in the State resides the soul of the people, as, according to Descartes, the soul of man has its seat in the pineal gland; that the *collective Being* needs, in order to make itself manifest, this cranioscopic REALISATION; that it thinks, acts, exists only insofar as it is this representatively REALISED: as if every being were not essentially a collection, a group; as if there existed something else, in nature, than collections or groups; as if all the difference between realities or collections did not consist solely in the fact that some form organisms, others simple aggregates; as if finally life and thought did not necessarily appear everywhere there is organisation in the collection, whatever, moreover, the formula of this organisation!

And this man, the Américo Vespucci of Socialism, has produced, with his meagre crass ignorance, a book that everyone has read, on the *Organisation of Labour*! Without knowing a word about organisation, he was counted, by force of palaver, amongst the organisers! On 22 February, the people, attracted by the label, chose him first to be part of the provisional government. A member of this government, he dared to solicit, through six thousand petitioners and under the name of Ministry of Progress, dictatorship. It is still, for a crowd of people whom the clattering of words strikes more than the evidence of reason, the purest, most advanced expression of the Revolution! It is in the presence of the hangings of Haynau, the beatings of Radetski, the amnesties of the Pope, the fiscal, police, scholarly reaction of Louis Bonaparte; it is when the revealed secret of the most unbridled squandering, when the most all-consuming stagnation, the most dreadful misery, testify every day to the radical impotence, not only of the men in power, but of the very principle of power; it is at this moment that Louis Blanc, that stunted shadow of Robespierre, dares to plead the cause of Power, of strong, and ever stronger, Power! What are we destined for, great God! If, after M. Molé, M. Guizot, M. Thiers; after the provisional government and the executive commission, after M. Sénart, M. Dufaure, M. Barrot, M. Faucher, M. de Falloux, M. d'Hautpoul, we must still hear Louis Blanc sing us the same tune,

the tune of *strong power*, the music of the organising, initiating, industrious State!... Oh! we should despair of our race, if we had to judge its genius on such examples. But let us not be discouraged, let us not cease to knock at these empty skulls: it is the best way to give the people an awareness of their own laws, and to teach them to judge their masters. Do we therefore want the democratic and social edifice to be founded sometime? Let us begin by draining the soil; let us set fire to the undergrowth: we still have more than one wild boar to get rid of.

So, Louis Blanc does not accept the struggle in the closed arena that we courteously proposed to him in the *Nouveau Monde* and the *Voix du peuple*. A prudent shepherd, he is careful not to expose his flock to the contagion of severe critique, which, by teaching them to reason, tighten their hearts. Instead of the sainfoin of controversy, he prefers to make them graze on the straw of his monthly flattery. Here we are, thanks to him, free from learned demonstrations, from those long historical, philosophical, economic dissertations, which tired the poor workers, and broke the heads of the people. From now on, we with reason prosaically, as true physicians and following the Socratic method, fortunately substituted for the German dialectic. What good is it, indeed, of raising our minds to discuss the *servant-State* and the *realisation of the collective Being*, and the society that gives itself a head and a brain by the election of its representatives?

Let us talk about the State, simply, plainly, without metaphysics or scholarship, as if it were a question of the society of tailors or cooks.

Unhappy State! After having plummeted, for twenty years, from Charles X to Louis-Phillippe, from Louis-Phillippe to the provisional government, from the provisional government to the executive commission, from the executive commission to Cavaignac, and from Cavaignac to Louis Bonaparte, it was still in its destiny to have as an apologist the most vain, the most empty, the most impudent, the most nauseating rhetorician that, in the most verbose of centuries, the most cowardly of literature has produced! – Let us also speak of association: it seems that it is Louis Blanc's strong point; and we shall have, on this interesting subject, curious revelations to make to the people. No one knows, no one has yet said what association can, must be in the future. Then we will explain to the workers the Triad, the *Circulus* and the Metempsychosis. We will make them aware of these great discoveries of modern enlightenment. And since our *conduct* is constantly being discussed, we agree to render our accounts; but beware! we summon our adversaries to render theirs as well.

In the meantime, let the workers continue to associate, we do not put the slightest obstacle in their way. Association is a right of man and of the citizen, which the Constitution guarantees, which universal practice

proclaims, and against which we have no reason to object. Let the workers form themselves into groups and squads; let them centralise their forces; let them organise their circulation and their exchanges, and not be discouraged by a few setbacks. Faith in charlatans has led them down a false path; their experience, more than our advice, will draw them out of it. Association can no longer be what they imagine: we will demonstrate it to them, and they will soon agree. But it is good, it is essential that they experiment for themselves with the ideas of their dreamers: They will always have something left. Enlightened by daily practice, they will grasp its principles better, as they are

[Second Article]

La Voix du Peuple, 28 December 1849¹

There is something odd about the fate of the writer of these lines. No matter how little he may be tempted to take pride in an all but unprecedented situation, he would be compelled to believe that, just at the moment, everybody, excepting only himself, has taken leave of their senses; or that he himself, through some inexplicable freak, has gone mad, albeit a madness of the most erudite, considered, thought out, conscientious, philosophical sort and (in terms of its principle, its purpose, its deductions) the sort that conforms most closely to pure science and common sense.

But God forbid that we should mentally entertain this presumptuous alternative: and would do better to investigate whether the contradiction currently existing between public belief and the views we hold might not be the effect of some sort of misunderstanding. Every idea delivered into this world for the very first time, even though it may be derived from the universal consciousness, is a deduction from previous tradition and, at the moment it first appears, is nonetheless regarded, by the one who articulates it, as his own personal creation and for that reason he assumes sole responsibility for it. At which point the notion appears to sit outside of the general belief and is dubbed a *paradox*. But in next to no time that paradox is acknowledged; little by little common sense overtakes it. The idea is absorbed into the public mind which then grants it credibility and leave to circulate. There is not one of us who has not witnessed such a shift in public consciousness at least once in our

brought to their meditations; then it will be easy for them to recognise who are the manipulators, those who spare them no truth, no relief, or those who, not having an idea to which they can pay homage, know only how to stroke, in the interest of a desperate ambition, their passions and their prejudices. It will not be long.

A little more patience, proletarians; and if you are not enlightened this time; if, being enlightened, you do not know how to be free, blame only yourselves; blame only your intelligence and your heart for your misfortune.

**freedom and authority
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citizen: otherwise, there
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lives. So might we not, today, be witnessing just such a shift?

What have we been saying since February? What has *La Voix du Peuple*, founded to carry on the work of its older siblings, *Le Peuple* and *Le Représentant du Peuple*, been saying for the last three months?²

That the Revolution in the nineteenth century has a dual purpose:

1. In economic terms, it seeks the utter subordination of capital to labour, the assimilation of worker and capitalist, through democratisation of credit, the abolition of interest, and the reduction of all dealings relating to the instruments of labour and products to equal and honest exchange. In this sense, we were the first to point out and remark that henceforth there are but two parties in France: the party of labour and the party of capital.

2. In political terms, the object of the Revolution is to absorb the State into society, which is to say, to put paid to all authority and do away with the entire machinery of government through the abolition of taxes, simplification of administration, and the separate centralisation of each and every class of function, or, to put this another way, the organisation of universal suffrage. In which regard we say that now there are but two parties in France: the party of freedom and the party of government.

There, summed up in two articles, you have our declaration of social and political faith.

Yes, the future requires that the worker aspect and the capitalist or proprietor aspect of every producer be

¹ Translation by Paul Sharkey, included in *Property is Theft!* (*Black Flag*)

² All three of these papers were suppressed by the state, as was its next incarnation *Le Peuple de 1850* (*Black Flag*)

made equal and distinct.¹ Just as in a bygone age the serf was bound to the land, so today, by an inversion of relationships, capital should be bound to the worker. There you have the most positive pledge and most authentic tendency of the Revolution. Socialism and democracy are of like mind with us on this count.

Yes, freedom and authority must be equal in every citizen: otherwise, there would be no equality and equality would be compromised; and the sovereignty of the people, vested in a small number of representatives, would be a fiction. Here again we have the pledge as well as the irrepressible and irresistible tendency of the Revolution, even though opinion has yet to wake up entirely to the way in which this parity between freedom and authority is to be established. In this respect, let the bourgeoisie look to tradition: let it cast its mind back to its own long exertions against despotism, its deep-seated hatred of government; let those who were the first on February 22nd to bellow *Long live Reform!* and who, even before Ledru-Rollin himself, laid the first foundation stone of universal suffrage, let them answer for us: let them say whether we have truth on our side!

Now, this double pledge, this trend, detected and acknowledged, is what we are still affirming! What is the loftier and definitive conclusion we afford the Revolution?

That between labour and liberty, like capital and government, there is a kinship and identification: so that instead of four parties such as we had in the land but recently, placing us in turn in the economic point of view and in the political point of view, there are really only two: the party of labour or liberty and the party of capital or government. And these two propositions – *abolition of man's exploitation of his fellow-man and abolition of man's government of his fellow-man* – amount to one and the same proposition; that finally the revolutionary IDEA, despite the dualism in its formula, is one and indivisible, as is the Republic itself: universal suffrage implying negation of capital's preponderance and equality of wealth, just as equality of wealth and the abolition of interest are implicit in negation of government.

We need not spell out the identity of these ideas for any logical mind to acknowledge and embrace it; it represents the point of transition between the capitalist, governmental age which is nearing its end and the era of freedom and equality which is just beginning. And, so to speak, history's apogee and the humanitarian equator.

Our entire opposition, our polemic, our revolutionary science flows from this fact: just as, further along, all philosophical advancement, every manifestation of

religion – should society still need to manifest itself in this manner – will flow from it. With all of our might we are striving for, on the one hand, the abolition of interest and for lending to be free and, on the other, the obliteration of government. *La Voix du Peuple* has no other reason for its existence.

Now, this is what has befallen us.

As a result of one of those contradictions so frequent during times of great intellectual endeavour, it turns out that at present the labouring class, that which resists capital, and for whose benefit the Revolution is primarily made, is unwittingly sliding, due to a communism in its thinking and thanks above all to the ineptitude of its leaders, into the preservation of authority: the old monarchist instinct is still around, in the form of Dictatorship, Convention or whatever, to delude the people; whereas the middle class, or bourgeoisie, eternally hostile to authority, having baptised itself the liberal party, is tilting, as a consequence of its economic routine and the servility of its interests, towards perpetuation of capitalist and proprietary exploitation.

So that we who, in the name of the Revolution and of the principle invoked by every single one of the parties who stand for it, are also and simultaneously striving for the abolition of capital and of the State, at a time when we should be rallying every opinion, find ourselves at odds with each of them and upbraided and opposed by all of the very people whose cause we serve! Politics! If you want to get surely to power then refrain from being in the right against everybody.

And so the Revolution that the middle class and the proletariat, by virtue of their shared ideas and needs, seemed to be competing to accomplish, has been stopped in its tracks by the short-sighted, illogical parting of the ways between their views and their interests. Since 26th February, when it looked as if everyone was agreed upon giving it a formidable forward thrust, the Revolution has been faced with the entire nation split into two antagonistic camps – those who, with Messieurs Dunoyer, Frédéric Bastiat, etc., following in the footsteps of J.-B. Say, were ready to surrender the State, were championing capital; and the rest, who, together with the provisional government, Louis Blanc, Pierre Leroux and the entire democratic and utopian tradition, were bent on turning the State into the creator of freedom and order.

For, and we can say this without fear of misquotation and calumny, it was in all seriousness that Pierre Leroux who rejects man's governance of his fellow man, or so he assures us, nevertheless craves, in the name of the Triad and the consent of *each one*, to establish over *all*

¹ A reference to the Trinity of Christian faith, the notion that there is one God existing in three divine persons (the father, the son and the holy spirit). In short, Proudhon means that the

future producer would embody the roles of worker and capitalist. (*Black Flag*)

the sovereignty of *THE FEW*. The draft for a Triadic Constitution published by Pierre Leroux, which we will some day make time to examine, reeks of its author's governmental tendencies. And it was also with the utmost seriousness that Louis Blanc, for all his celebrated dictum about going "from the *master-State* to the *servant-State*", wants an authority formed, as all authorities are, through delegation by the citizenry; a State that is the organ and representative of society: in short, a government that may be to the people as the head is to the body, which is to say, master and sovereign.

This is the contradiction which we are striving with all the vigour of our consciousness and all the might of our reason to banish. Whilst the political thinking by which the middle class is prompted and the economic rationale pursued by the people should, through mutual complementation, resolve into one and the same notion that would thus encapsulate the Revolution's past and its future and reconcile those two classes, these two ideas are at war with each other and by virtue of their clash, stopping movement and jeopardising public safety.

And this also lies at the root of the recriminations that our polemic has sparked every time that, contrary to one of the half-baked ideas competing for influence, it falls to us to expand upon one of the great principles of February. On our right we find the old liberalism, inimical to the authorities, but protective of interest and exclusive property; on our left, the governmentalist democrats, inimical, like us, to man's exploitation of his fellow man, but full to the brim with faith in dictatorship and the omnipotence of the State; and in the centre ground stands absolutism, its banners emblazoned with the two faces of the counter-revolution; and, bringing up the rear, the moderates whose phoney wisdom is always ready to compromise with all shades of opinion.

Each party ascribing its own contradictions to us, we are simultaneously accused by the democratic socialists of treason; by the liberal economists, of frivolity; by the moderates, of exaggeration. The first take us to task for preaching individualism after having opposed property. They tell us: you see only one term in the republican equation of *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*; this AN-ARCHY of yours is Monsieur Dupin's *every man for himself, each to his own*; what you attack under the name of government is the core idea of the age, association.

The economists, in turn, ask us how it is that, rejecting State initiative, we could nonetheless look to the initiative of the people; they contend that putting society in the place of government through the organisation of

the free interplay of wills and interests, still amounts to going around in the same circles and to opposing freedom.

The moderates acknowledge the correctness of our reasoning: they give their blessing to our principles; but they refuse to follow us all the way to our conclusions. Following a principle through to its every consequence is, they say, tantamount to sacrificing truth on the altar of logic and venturing beyond the target one wishes to reach and going astray through exaggeration.

As for the absolutists, they are, of all our adversaries, the ones who best understand us. They level no charges against us and do not slander us; they take the line that we are playing into their hands by making our *reductio ad absurdum* of all of the notions shared by public opinion, democracy, constitutional monarchy, economism, socialism and philosophism; and, bedazzled by their illusions, they gravely wait for us to be converted and repent our errors. However, the situation must become clear and this already too long-lived error must come to its end.

Who, then, is contradicting himself, us, or the governmental socialists whose noxious tendencies we have been denouncing these past twenty months and whose every defeat we have foretold? Us, or the liberal economists whose errors we have been refuting these past ten years? Us, or the pig-headed doctrinaires whom we are forever telling that their alleged moderation is nothing but impotence and arbitrariness? Who is it that needs to win his adversary over – we who have kept to the broad thoroughfares of progress all the way, or the supporters of absolutism, as rigid as milestones, at the furthest extremity of the horizon?

All doubts will be dispelled and the public spared many a discussion if, just the same way as we agree in acknowledging, on the one hand, the bourgeoisie's liberal inclinations and, on the other, the proletariat's egalitarian tendencies, we might yet agree that they are one and the same.

Is it true that socialism, an expression of the proletariat, is at war for all eternity against capital, indeed, against property? – Yes.

Is it a fact that liberalism, an expression of the middle class, has, since time immemorial, been resisting the factiousness of government, the ventures of the authorities, the prerogatives of the State? – Again, yes.

Those two points made, what say we?

That what, in politics, goes under the name of *Authority* is analogous to and synonymous with what is termed, in

**Is it true that socialism,
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political economy, *Property*; that these two notions overlap one with the other and are identical.

That an attack upon one is an attack upon the other.

That the one is incomprehensible without the other, and *vice versa*.

That if you do away with the former, you still have to do away with the latter, and *vice versa*.

That where capital is stripped of all interest, government is rendered useless and impossible; and, on the other hand, capital, in the absence of a government to support it, cloak it with its prerogatives and guarantee it the exercise of its privileges must, of necessity, remain unproductive and all usury unfeasible.

Finally, that Socialism and Liberalism are the two halves of the wholesale opposition that Liberty has, ever since the world began, mounted against the principle of AUTHORITY as articulated through property and through the State.

Are we wrong now, are we being frivolous, disloyal to our cause and treacherous to our principles when we champion this grand, magnificent conclusion? Is it our fault if the proletariat and the middle class, divided right now by the selfishness of their respective tendencies, are, in essence, of one mind on principles as well as on aims and on means?

And just because self-styled revolutionaries, capitalising upon hatred, service this factious antagonism for the benefit of their own despicable ambitions are we supposed to stay silent about our ideas, the same ideas as February? Should we cravenly shy away from the risk of calumny and unpopularity?

But, they tell us, you are forever mistaking civilisation's *trends* for its *laws* and this is where you go astray: that is the origins of the contradictions, inconsistencies and exaggerations of which the entire people accuses you.

Thus one socialist says, it is correct, and we were delighted to welcome this truth, that capital and products should circulate free of charge and that use of the instruments of labour should be guaranteed for all at no cost other than what covers the costs of depreciation. This, indeed, is one of the laws of society: and you yourself have demonstrated it mathematically. But, by the same token, it is not true that society can and should dispense with government. In the absence of government, in the absence of the State, who would

then extend loans to the worker, organise commerce and ensure that everyone gets education and work?

But, responds an economist from the liberal school, that is the very opposite of what is true. The abolition of governments is what societies dream about; and the elicitation of order by means of the boundless spread of freedom is their law. As for reducing interest, the phenomenon of social economics should be seen as a mere tendency rather than as a principle of

amelioration. Rent on capital dwindles as capital proliferates; this is a fact. But it is nonsensical to claim that interest ever falls to zero; in that case who would be willing to make loans? Who would save? Who would work? Discard your political and egalitarian mirages, therefore, socialist, and follow freedom's banner: the banner of 1789 and 1830!

THE SOCIALIST: You do not want a social Revolution! You support usury! You actually advocate man's exploitation of his fellow man! There is enough

intelligence, initiative and patriotism within the people for it to be able to complete the Revolution on its own. It will be able to do without a suspect alliance: it will never tag along behind the bourgeoisie.

THE ECONOMIST: Liberty is indebted to the bourgeois for all its gains; it is to it that the labouring class is beholden for the welfare and the rights that it enjoys, Thus far, it is this valiant and disciplined bourgeoisie that has, all unaided, shouldered the burden of Revolution: it will never allow itself to be overtaken, nor dragged along. It will never be carried along in the wake of the proletariat.

Now, now, citizens. If you cannot see eye to eye with one another, then at least try to see eye to eye with common sense. How can you fail to see that every *tendency* points to a law? That tendency is law itself, not in the form of a latency, but in the form of action? Aristotle used to teach that the first cause of motion is the intelligible heavens, by which he meant pure Idea, Reason, Law. Thus what we describe in bodies as *attraction*, or in man as *love* or *passion*, is in society, *tendency* or *progress*; in organised creatures, *life*; in the universe, *destiny*. All of which is nothing more than a manifestation of the Idea, the Law, the Intelligible Heavens, commanding the creature, nurturing it, shaping it and magnetically commanding obedience...

But let us put psychology, ontology and metaphysics to one side. Let us turn to facts and evidence. For as long as the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, in their mutual suspicion, hold each other in check, the Revolution,

**That what, in politics,
goes under the name of
Authority is analogous to
and synonymous with
what is termed, in
political economy,
Property; that these two
notions overlap one with
the other and are
identical.**

instead of growing peaceably, will do so in fits and starts; and at every step society will be in danger of a general dislocation. Let us show them both, therefore, that their principle is one and the same, their tendency one and the same and their pride one and the same: that whatever the one might do in the pursuit of its own interests would amount to a realisation of the wishes of

the other, just as the victory of the one over the other would spell the suicide of them both.

Odd, is it not, that, in order to break through universal ostracism, we should now need to effect a universal reconciliation?

[Third article]

La Voix du Peuple, 29 December 1849

*Destruam et ædificabo*¹

What! you claim that socialism, which was to regenerate commerce, agriculture, industry, property, the family, religion, art, the State; which was to revolutionise humanity and the world, is entirely within the abolition of interest, in the *Bank of the People!* – Yes, as the oak is in the acorn.

What! you do not want a Constitution! You want to abolish government! What will maintain order in society? What do you put in place of the State? in place of the police? in place of the great political powers? – Nothing. Society is perpetual motion. It does not need to be wound nor have its tempo set. It carries within itself its own spring, always taut, and its own pendulum.

But who will enforce the laws? Would you not like laws too? – No. An organised society has no more need of laws than of legislators. Laws in a society are like spiders in the hive: they only serve to catch the bees.

How can you talk of organisation, you who do not want laws? What organisation is yours, where there is neither legislative power, nor executive power, nor armed force, nor courts, nor police officers! That organisation is anarchy. – Exactly: society will be organised when there is no longer anyone to make laws for it, to guard it and to judge it. And it is because society has never been organised, but only in the process of being organised, that it has needed until now legislators, statesmen, heroes and police commissioners. When the tree is young, it is given a guide: one does not tie a sixty-foot oak to a stake.

You mean, no doubt, that, all men being brothers, all antagonistic interests having disappeared in the community of work and goods, association will take the place of government and laws? – Association thus understood is in the opposite sense to freedom and progress. It is still government; it is the suppression of all guarantees, the destruction of solidarity, the cessation of life; it is social disorganisation.

So, no more interest, no more government, no more Constitution, no more association, no more laws! ANARCHY in capital, in labour, and in the State; anarchy everywhere and always, that is what you call organisation, solidarity, guarantee, progress! You

suppress institutions; and you call that institution society! *Destroying*, for you, is synonymous with *building!* This is how you claim to realise the republican motto: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! What a paradox! what irony!

– What do you want? Ancient and modern languages do not provide me with another term to render my thought, to express, in its simplicity and its grandeur, the revolutionary idea. Yes: *Anarchy!* that is to say, for immature nations, chaos and nothingness; for mature ones, life and light. Complete, absolute anarchy: once again, I cannot formulate otherwise the identity of the two tendencies that we have noted in the working class and bourgeois class. This is, moreover, what I hope to make you see with your eyes, touch with your fingers, consider with your mind, as if you had before you the Pantheon or the Bastille column. I will hardly need your attention.

The task I have set for myself would be beyond my strength, if I had to deal with it doctrinally, by science, history, philosophy, law. No human force could sustain such a labour.

But the mind is fertile in resources. When facts encumber it, when experience embarrasses it, when the diversity of observation perplexes it, it generalises, establishes classifications, and thus founds science: an analysis and summary of nature. When science obsesses it in turn, and the thread escapes it, then it simplifies its knowledge by reducing it all to a primal fact, and starting science anew on a higher experience.

This is the procedure I will use, in a question which would have required, to be developed scientifically, the accumulation, in a single head, of almost the entirety of human knowledge. I will not *demonstrate*; such a demonstration would be impossible for me. I will *SHOW*: that is to say, instead of explaining the thing, I will try to make it visible; in such a way that the objections that may be made to me, and to which I will have to respond, do not accuse my account of a lack of intelligibility, but only a lack of transparency. The reader must not be able to tell me, like Louis Blanc, *I do not understand*; but only, *I do not see*. Then it will be up

¹ Latin for “I will destroy and I will build” (Deuteronomy).
(*Black Flag*)

to me to shed more light on the object in perspective, or to apply, if necessary, eyewash to the spectator's eyes.

But, first, what is the fact that we have to bring to light? It is a matter of defining it well.

It is, in the first place, that by the combined tendency, of the proletariat which calls for a reform in property, and of the bourgeoisie which demands another in the State, government annihilates itself and disappears;

It is then that, as this abolition of government progresses and by the very fact of this abolition, liberty, equality, solidarity, security, order, all the rights enshrined in the Constitution, all the promises of the Republic, all the wishes of society, are realised.

This is what we have to recognise, is it not? what was announced two years ago by this epigraph at the head of a book of demolition: *Destruam et aedificabo!* Which means that a negative necessarily corresponds, in the mind and in society, to an affirmative series; so that, if the negation is complete and irreproachable, the affirmation exists; all that remains is to free it. If the honourable critics who have spoken of *System of [Economic] Contradictions* had understood this elementary truth, they would have spared themselves the trouble of accusing is of presumption and pride; they would have taken care not to reproach us for having excelled at demolition, but not knowing how to build anything. To demolish is to build! Will criticism ever be anything but the beast of burden of literature?...

Here then is what is understood: we have to see how, by the double movement of the revolution which carries away both the bourgeoisie and the people, government perishes in society; then how, by the extinction of government, order, that is to say liberty, equality and fraternity, is established.

Now, by what means, by what torch are we going to see all these things? – For it is obvious, being neither a painter, nor a physicist, nor a machinist, nor a government, but a simple worker of the press, I cannot show the public the future of the Revolution on a canvas, a magic lantern, or a model phalanstery. My field of exposition is the *Voix du peuple*; my instrument is writing. But writing only represents things to the understanding and in a successive manner: how then

can we grasp the whole? What guarantee will we have of the fidelity of our understanding? What will be our compass, our criterion?

I will indicate this criterion. It could not be simpler, everyone can verify its accuracy. It is this axiom of geometry: *The sum of the parts is equal to the whole*. Do you believe, reader, in geometry? In this case, you can abandon yourself to our guidance: we will show you the most interesting novelties, and you will run no risk of getting lost.

Well! it is by means of this axiom: *The sum of the parts is equal to the whole*, that I hope to show you this true, unprecedented phenomenon, that government, through the progress of reforms, necessarily perishes in society, and that as it perishes order is born in its place, as perfect as it is possible, in the current state of our knowledge, to conceive.

And, indeed, if I show, on the one hand, that by the organisation of free credit, by the abolition or the conversion of taxation and the extension of universal suffrage, triple and inevitable consequence of the February Revolution, the governmental system is struck, in all its parts, by such a simplification, that each of the functions by which public authority manifests itself becomes useless, and that the action of power finds itself totally annihilated: it is clear that, the whole not being able to survive after the elimination of the parts, the government becomes a pure entity: created by a fiction of general thought, it enters into fiction.

And if, on the other hand, I show that wherever the action of power has ceased, there spontaneously manifests an action of freedom at once individual and co-operative [*corporative*], communal and nation; co-operative, because individual; national, because communal; action which is the very agreement of interests, for this simple reason that they depend only on liberty, not on property; which is the expression of all wills, because where nothing is abandoned to chance, to favour, to birth, to privilege, wills can have no other object than freedom; action which simultaneously satisfies general and particular needs, henceforth identical; if, I say, I show this progressive creation of harmony by freedom, following everywhere the decline of order by power: it will be evident again that, the whole being homogeneous in each of its parts and equal

This is what we have to recognise, is it not? what was announced two years ago by this epigraph at the head of a book of demolition: *Destruam et aedificabo!* Which means that a negative necessarily corresponds, in the mind and in society, to an affirmative series; so that, if the negation is complete and irreproachable, the affirmation exists; all that remains is to free it

to their sum, the highest degree of order in society is expressed by the highest degree of individual freedom, in a word by ANARCHY.

Thus no philosophy, no metaphysics, no jurisprudence; no dissertation, no controversy: we would never have

finished. Nothing but an empirical exposition: instead of arguments, a series of facts. And, the facts noted and admitted, it is enough that the people, author of the government, making the government for the last time, convert them into decrees, so that, in the opinion of all, the Revolution would be over in twenty-four hours.

[Sixth article]

La Voix du Peuple, 11 January 1850

The following objection is made to me:

Your theory is only a sophism. This supposedly anarchic organisation of credit and banking is also only a delegation by the people renewed by the State, a small State alongside the State. Where then, if you please, is the difference between the two systems? What is the reason why the present State, all organised, should not add circulation and credit to its present responsibilities, and does not administer the national Bank according to the principle of gratuity [of credit], as well and better than independent officials, appointed, supervised and directed by the chambers of commerce? It was, in truth, not worth speaking so loudly about the abolition of the State, only to then give us this pale imitation of the State. Why do you not want the State?

That observation could not fail to be addressed by me: I do not weaken it nor conceal it.

I admit, if one judges my theory by a first and unique example, that the difference between the governmental system and that which I call anarchic is inappreciable. The people, in their collectivity, acts with arms, as it thinks with the head of each citizen; and, since the functions are divided, it is true to say furthermore that in each function there are one or more individuals who think and act for all. In this regard, I agree with the governmentals: the people is represented by each citizen, society by each worker, as humanity is represented by each man.

But there is not one single public function, one single industry in society; and the question is precisely to know if public thought or action can and must be exercised *ex aequo*, in equal measure and title, by all citizens individually and independently of one another: this is the democratic and anarchic system; – or whether this collective thought, [collective] action must become the exclusive attribute of an elite of functionaries, appointed for this purpose by the people and in relation to whom the others are then, no longer COLLEAGUES, but obedient and passive subjects, instruments. It is this latter system which, for reasons that it is useless to

recall, has until the present been in force in society, and which has been called in turn, according the scarcely varied modes of its application, *hierarchical* or *theocratical*, monarchical, oligarchical, etc., all designations that, at bottom, always indicate the same thing, namely the State, sometimes of priests, sometimes of a dynasty, here of patricians or nobles, elsewhere of tribunes or demagogues.

The spirit of this system was perfectly expressed in the Charter of 1830, of which the Constitution of 1848 is, in this respect, only a degeneration.

the question is precisely to know if public thought or action can and must be exercised *ex aequo*, in equal measure and title, by all citizens individually and independently of one another: this is the democratic and anarchic system

“Legislative power,” said this Charter, article 14, “is exercised collectively by the king, the Chamber of Peers and the Chamber of Deputies.”

So much for thought, so much for counsel. The people do not think for themselves, that is to say, through the totality of their members; they think, they legislate through their representatives. And the popular thought, expressed by the legislative delegation, without any other criterion or guarantee of certainty than the good pleasure of the delegates, acquires the force of *law*; there is

nothing left but to obey.

Now for action.

“The king is the head of the State. He commands the forces of land and sea, declares war, makes treaties of peace, alliance, and commerce, appoints all public administration positions, and makes the regulations and ordinances necessary for the execution of the laws.”

I do not speak of the innumerable restrictions subsequently placed on the initiative of the people, on their action, on their spontaneity, all of which are the consequence of the principle of authority. Bossuet deduced this in his *Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte*. I limit myself to these citations. The State is the constitutional silencing of the people, the legal alienation of its thought and of its initiative into the hands of *one man, monarch, or a few men, oligarchs*; and the two powers, legislative and executive,

established, the people have only to keep quiet and obey.

We others, anarchists, say on the contrary:

A social science exists: political economy has posited it, it develops its principles every day.

These principles, rid of every characteristic of personality and arbitrariness, pure ideas of individual reason, are the necessary and immutable axioms which steer societies, at first unknowingly, and later with reflection and which, once promulgated by the people, exclude all political convention, all human legislation. The rule of the law is succeeded by the reign of the IDEA.

We also say:

Universal suffrage exists: it is the imprescriptible and inalienable right of the people, the form of its expressions. Contrary to article 13 of the Charter of 1830, which assigns to the executive power, delegated by the people, the nomination of all positions, and consequently the full exercise of the public power, universal suffrage implies the nomination by the people of all the functionaries without exception, their permanent revocability, and consequently the government of the people by the people.

Thus the people appoint, at one or two degrees at most of election, according to the importance of the positions, all its officials; and as, by the natural division of labour and the separation of industries, the ensemble of the functions is nothing other than the social organism itself; as the totality of the officials embraces the totality of the citizens, it follows that the whole people enters into the administration and into the State; that each citizen fulfils a function, not servile or subordinate, but independent and responsible; that all, in short, are elected by one another, and exercise their specific share of public authority.

Centralisation, from being unique and hierarchical as it was before, becomes multiple and democratic. What we call the State and whose existence supposes, on the one

hand, a very small number of citizens, supposedly delegated or mandated, who make the law and command; on the other, a countless multitude, reputed to be sovereign and who merely obey; the *State*, I say, no longer exists, it is SOCIETY; the *law* is repealed, it is the IDEA.

That is what we will express in a still more concrete, more intelligible and more practical manner, by saying: *The people bestow no general mandate; it only gives specific delegations.* The general mandate is hierarchy, royalty, despotism; the specific delegation is, on the contrary, liberty, equality and fraternity: it is anarchy.



A caricature of Proudhon from a hostile newspaper during the 1848 Revolution

The State, an organism of convention, essentially parasitical, distinct from the people, outside and above the people, receiving from the people a mandate at once general and specific, the State, having by itself neither science nor ideas, supplants them by the law. – Anarchy, on the contrary, is the living society, the people having consciousness of its ideas, governing itself as it works, by division of industries, specific delegation of jobs, in short by the egalitarian distribution of forces.

Now, it is easy to understand why we do not want the State, either in the organisation of the national Bank, or in the exercise of any function and of any industry.

We do not want the State in the Bank: on what grounds could we want it? Has the Bank not been established by the people? Have the administrators, directors, managers not received their investiture from the sovereign? Are they not placed under the immediate supervision of the chambers of commerce, which are the popular committees for everything concerning credit, circulation and finances! What good is a hierarchical director or supervisor, highly paid, when the people itself directs and supervises without a salary?

We do not want the State, because the State, so-called agent or servant of the people, by a general and unlimited proxy of the voters, no sooner exists than it creates for itself an interest of its own, often contrary to

the interests of the people; because, acting then in that interest, it makes public officials its own creatures, from which results nepotism, corruption, and little by little the formation of an official tribe, an enemy of labour as well as of liberty.

We do not want the State, because the State, in order to increase its extra-popular power, tends to multiply its employees indefinitely; then, to attach them ever more, to constantly increase their pay. Since 1830, without any known utility, the sum of the salaries for functionaries employed by the State in the service of the people has been increased by 65 million, and the budget for expenditures increased from one billion 1,800 million.

We do not want the State, because, when the taxes are no longer sufficient for its squanderings, for the payment of its favours and sinecures, the State resorts to loans and embezzlements, and after having taken someone else's money, it still finds a way to have its plunder applauded. This is how the floating debt, under the reign of Louis-Philippe, reached 800 million, and the State, after having robbed the savings banks, the municipal funds, the securities of privileged functionaries, and devoured the money of the holders of treasury bonds, was forced, in order to escape bankruptcy, to consolidate all its thefts, which means to *constitute* them as perpetual annuities, the interest on which the people pay today.

Democrats, do you want to perpetuate, to generalise it forever theft and exploitation amongst yourselves? Preserve this regime of the State; maintain that alienation of the public power for the profit of a few ambitious men, who will reward you for your credulity with shame and misery; and then hand over to these so-called delegates of the people, to these servants of the people, hand over to them the national Bank.

Soon you will see them dipping into the cash register with both hands. When there are no coins, they will take notes. Now, you know that Bank notes, given without cover, in exchange for nothing, notes which, as a

consequence, represent nothing, that circulate without security or mortgage, are *assignats*; and the *assignat*, citizens, is theft.¹

You will see them, in order to increase their takings, and pay their henchmen, under the pretext that interest collected by the State benefits the community and is not usury, successively raise the discount rate to 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 per 100. After February, did you not hear them, these theorists of government, claim for the State, the net profit of the railways, mines, insurance companies, and finally the banks? The net profit, do you understand? that is to say the agio, the interest, the usury, everything, finally, that is not the fruit of labour. Did they think then of free credit? Did they want to seize power to establish that gratuity? And you, when you asked the provisional government to abolish the exploitation of man by man, did you suspect that the joining of the banks to the State was only a new form of exploitation?

We do not want the State, because we would like to purge society of all that is called bankruptees, usurers, *loups-cerviers*², speculators, robbers, swindlers, *stellionataires*³, bribe-takers, forgers, counterfeiters, manipulators, parasites, hypocrites and Statesmen; because in our eyes all Statesmen are alike, and they are all, to varying degrees, enemies of justice and freedom, eaters, as Cato said, of human flesh.

And in this regard, judge, by what is happening today, what may still happen to you under this dreadful and devouring tutelage of the State. The *Constitutionnel* quoted yesterday, with a malicious satisfaction, a passage from the *Voix du peuple*, in which we highlighted the dangers that a revolution whose object has not been determined, and whose course was mapped beforehand from opinion, would inevitably have for the country. See, it said to its readers, what the democratic and social Republic promises you!⁴

Instead of reporting our words, why did it not cite the acts, the specific acts of the current government, the acts and deeds of M. Louis Bonaparte?

We do not want the State, because the State, so-called agent or servant of the people, by a general and unlimited proxy of the voters, no sooner exists than it creates for itself an interest of its own, often contrary to the interests of the people

¹ Assignats were paper money (fiat currency) authorised by the Constituent Assembly from 1789 to 1796, during the French Revolution to address imminent bankruptcy. They were originally meant to be backed by the value of land seized by the State from the Crown, aristocracy and the church. (*Black Flag*)

² A rapacious, unscrupulous financier, a stock market wolf. (*Black Flag*)

³ Someone who sells a good which they are not the owner or selling the same good to several people. (*Black Flag*)

⁴ *Le Constitutionnel* was a French political daily newspaper, based in Paris. Liberal in politics, it played a key role in the election of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte and became one of the main government newspapers of the Second Empire. (*Black Flag*)

There, it is General Gémeau who, in the name of the State, for reasons of State, in the exclusive interest of the State, suspends, in the sixth military division, the freedom of the press, closes the cafés and public establishments, prohibits commerce: all this, because the democratic newspapers displease the State; because the gatherings, even by chance, of citizens in certain places of consumption are suspect to the State; because true and egalitarian commerce threatens to supplant the commerce of monopoly, protected by the State.

Certainly, it is indubitable that, if Louis Blanc were president of the Republic, and the delegates of the Luxembourg were prefects and generals under his orders, not only the *Constitutionnel* and the *Univers*¹ would be suspended, but the *Voix du peuple* itself and all the anarchist newspapers suppressed. It is certain that, with the dictatorship of Louis Blanc, the workers' associations that were not established according to the model outlined by the master would not be tolerated by the State. Every citizen designated as a first-rate worker would see themselves, in the name of fraternity, seized by the State: for fear that he would exploit his brothers through free industry, they would make him exploit them through official industry; he would be made a parasite of the State. Could a dictator, a servant of the people, responsible for the order and security of all, do less for good order and good morals? That is what we would see, without a doubt, with the governmentalism of M. Louis Blanc. But by what right does the *Constitutionnel* accuse the copyist of its own patron, the one whom the patriots have nicknamed the Thiers of the republican party?

Here, it is the minister of public education, Mr. de Parieu, who, assisted by a Jesuitical majority, suppresses, by a stroke of parliamentary authority, one might as well say a *coup d'État*, the freedom of education. Doubtless there is no lack of democrats, or so-called democrats, as little interested in the freedom of education as they are in any other freedom, who, on occasion, would not fail to follow the example of the current majority [in the Assembly]; and I am quite sure that, if Louis Blanc were in the place of M. de Parieu, he would do as he has done. Could a statesman, a friend of the people, charged with the future of the younger generations, abandon the education of the young to paternal care?... But with what audacity does the *Constitutionnel* dare to denounce the schismatics of the democracy to the hatred of its readers? How is it this the sacred name of freedom not choke it in the throat, not burn its tongue?

Ah! if there still existed friends of freedom, men seeking justice and peace, true revolutionaries finally, on the rumbling volcano, whose crater is called government, they would form a league against this concentration of powers that is killing us, that will make us perish, when the inevitable reaction of opinion will have made it return, from the hands of a stupid absolutism, to those of a drunken demagoguery. But why do I speak of freedom to men whom the zeal for pleasures holds enslaved; who have never known how to do anything but cut their throats for the choice of their princes and their Statesmen? Freedom! they have stifled it in the arms of their mistresses. Pass then, Bonaparte; come, come, Louis Blanc, come, in your turn, to avenge, by dint of despotism, Freedom!

I should dislike to have M. Blanc, whose social tendencies are well known, accuse me of making impolitic war upon him in refuting him. I do justice to M. Blanc's generous intentions... now, putting personality entirely aside, what can there be in common between socialism, that universal protest, and the hotch-potch of old prejudices which make up M. Blanc's republic? M. Blanc is never tired of appealing to authority, and socialism loudly declares itself anarchistic; M. Blanc places power above society, and socialism tends to subordinate it to society; M. Blanc makes social life descend from above, and socialism maintains that it springs up and grows from below; M. Blanc runs after politics, and socialism is in quest of science. – “Chapter V: Third Epoch – Competition”, *System of Economic Contradictions*

¹ *L'Univers* was a French daily newspaper with a Catholic orientation. (*Black Flag*)

1852-1865: Federalism

“All my economic ideas, elaborated for twenty-five years, can be summarised in these three words: *Agricultural-Industrial Federation*,

“All my political views are reduced to a similar formula: *Political Federation or Decentralisation*”

– *The Federative Principle*

With the defeat of the February Revolution with the *Coup d'État* of Louis-Napoleon, Proudhon turned to writing again – when allowed by the censors of the Second Empire. Indeed, persecution after the publication of *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* (1858) saw him leave for exile in Belgium for a number of years.

We start with the conclusion of *The Social Revolution Demonstrated by the Coup d'État of December 2*, a work which seems to be reviewed purely on its title. Rather than the peon to autocratic rule or the Second Empire his detractors present it, it is Proudhon's attempt to explain events. Better entitled *The Social Revolution Despite the Coup d'État of December 2*, Proudhon argued that December 2 “demonstrated” the Social Revolution only in the sense that its progress was being blocked by Conservative National Assembly and something had to give: that something was a coup conducted in the name of universal suffrage.

Only in that sense was December 2 an expression of the Revolution: what it would do next was the subject of the book. Would the new regime foster the Revolution (by reforms which would weaken its power) or not (by reforms which would strengthen it). Its conclusion that France faced “Anarchy or Caesarism” was resolved in favour of the latter with the creation of the Second Empire, perhaps unsurprisingly given that Louis-Napoleon had organised a coup to enhance his power and privilege.

Then we publish extracts from his book *Manuel du Spéculateur à la Bourse* (1857). Initially published anonymously, Proudhon wrote it to make money but used the opportunity to expound on themes he had raised earlier, including workers' associations. What follows is an evaluation of the practice of self-management during the 1848 Revolution, indicating its strengths and weaknesses. As it reflects practice, certain queries (such as the use of “Auxiliaries” – workers hired by the associates – within a mutualist economy) are not discussed.

A few extracts from *Federation and Unity in Italy* follow which indicate how centralisation reflects and ensures bourgeois rule as well as the limitations of any national movement which ignores the need for federalism and economic reforms. Then comes three chapters of *The Federative Principle*, indicating his view that federalism was essential for genuine freedom, democracy and socialism. We include his discussion of slavery in the American Civil War, with its clear defence of racial equality and civil rights for all.

We end with Proudhon's 1864 letter calling workers to recognise their class interests and abstain in elections. This is part of a general move to recognise, at long last, that the working classes (proletarians, artisans and peasants) could only rely upon their own strength and organisation. This perspective was always there within his writings, but this had been combined with a hope that the bourgeoisie and government would embrace, indeed aid, their own demise.

The Social Revolution Demonstrated by the Coup d'État Of December 2

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

1852¹

X. Anarchy or Caesarism – Conclusion

If there is one fact that attests to the reality and force of the revolution, it is indisputably the events of December 2. Let France listen to them, and let Europe be taught by them: after the days of February and June 1848, those of December 1851 must count as the third eruption of the volcano.

Let us give an account of this shock that, more than any other, has marked a decisive step in the revolution.

France, throughout its whole history, from the Romans and the Franks, through Charlemagne and the Capetians, marches, in a continuous advance, to 89; by way of 89, it reaches 1848.

In 1848, as in 1789, everything, in the realm of things, called for a revolution. But, unlike in 1789, there was in 1848, *in the realm of ideas*, nothing, or next to nothing, to cause it. The situation was ripe, but opinion lagged behind. From this discord between things and ideas spring all the incidents that have followed...

First, the socialist teaching.

The revolution imposing itself as a necessity, and public opinion resisting it because it did not understand it, the first labour had to be to reveal the social revolution to the country. So while the Provisional Government, the Executive Commission and General Cavaignac occupied themselves with maintaining order, socialism, with all the energy that circumstances demanded, organised its propaganda. It has been reproached for having *caused fear*, and it is still accused today of having, through its extravagances, compromised, doomed the republic! Yes, socialism has been frightening, and it boasts of it! One dies of fear as from any other malady and the old society will not recover from it. Socialism has been frightening! Was it necessary then, because others did nothing, could do nothing, that we silence ourselves! Must we, muting our

drums, drop the idea along with the action?... Socialism has been frightening! What powerful minds, frightened by socialism, but who have not trembled before universal suffrage!...

Now, as socialism, frightening at first glance (and every idea is frightening when it first appears), could not pass without giving rise to a violent contradiction; just so,

however, it was in the data of history and institutions that, on the one hand, socialism will grow under a general reaction and that, on the other, it will lay bare the foolishness of all its adversaries, from the Montagnards to the dynastics, and by that revelation of their lack of logic, cast them one after the other from the position of power they have used against it.

There is not a fact that does not attest to the progress of socialism and does not show at the same time the successive, inevitable rout of its adversaries.

**But why have the
republicans, worshipers
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Because they realised
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social revolution is the
negation of all hierarchy,
political and economic**

Why, from February to December 1848, have the republicans of every shade successively toppled? Because they have held themselves apart from socialism, which is the revolution; because apart from the social revolution the republic makes no sense; because it seems a compromise, a *doctrine*, an arbitrary act.

But why have the republicans, worshipers of 93, held themselves apart from the movement in 1848? Because they realised from the first that the social revolution is the negation of all hierarchy, political and economic; because this void can't bear their organisational prejudices, their habits of government; and because their minds, stopping at the surface of things, not discovering beneath the nakedness of the form the intelligible link of the new social order, recoil at that aspect, as before an abyss.

¹ https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Social_Revolution-Study-NP.pdf

Thus, even as negation, as *tabula rasa* or rather as void, the revolution already exerts a power over the surrounding milieu; it is an attractive force, a destination, an aim, since by denying it the republicans seem to turn their backs on themselves and lose their way!

On December 10, Louis Bonaparte obtained the preference over General Cavaignac, who had however *been well worthy of the homeland*, whose civic-mindedness, selflessness and modesty will be noted by impartial history. Why that injustice in the election? Because General Cavaignac (destiny!) had to combat, in the name of law and order, the revolution in socialism; because then he was presented, in the name of revolution, as an adversary of the dynastic parties and as frankly republican; because, finally, in the face of that rigidity, at once constitutional and republican, the name of Bonaparte was raised: for the masses, as the hope of the swiftest revolution; for the partisans of the altar and throne, who steered them, as a hope of counter-revolution. Revolution, counter-revolution, the *yes* and the *no*, what does it matter! It is always the same passion that stirs, the same idea that directs.

Against whom was the war of Rome later undertaken? Against Mazzini? Go on then! Those who decreed the war on Rome were all as democratic as Mazzini. Like Mazzini, like Rossi, they had written on their flag: *Separation of the spiritual and the temporal! Government, secular and free!* The Revolution of Rome was waged against the social revolution.

Against what was the law of May 31 passed? – Against the revolution.¹

How, in 1849 and 1850, did the candidate selected by five and a half million votes manage to lose popularity? Through his alliance with the reactionaries. How then did he recover his popularity? By affirming universal suffrage, the voice, one supposes, of the revolution. The people, in 1851, have received a remorseful Louis Bonaparte; like the father of the prodigal child, without listening to the observations of the wise son, they pardoned the repentant son.²

Here we are, faced with the elections of 1852: on the left, the proposal for a recall of the Elysee, on the right the obstinacy of the law of May 31, and behind us the insurrection. The situation can not be more revolutionary. What will come of it?

Here, we can no longer judge the events from the point of view of legality and morals, of the regular exercise of power, of respect for the constitution, of the religion of

the oath. History will pronounce on the morality of the acts: what is left to us it to note their inevitable side. Constitution, oath, laws, all have succumbed in the midst of fierce competition: the bad conscience of one has absolved that of the other, and when royalty proclaims itself at the tribune, why should not the empire rise in the public square? Constitutional faith trampled underfoot by the majority, all that remains is the gross, *immoral* action of ambitions and parties, a blind instrument of destiny.

Such is then, in November 1851, the situation of the antagonistic forces: the revolution is represented by the republican left, and incidentally by the Élysée, which joins with it for the repeal of the law of May 31; – the counter-revolution has for an organ the majority, and incidentally also the Élysée, which unites with it for all the rest, against the republican party.

The Elysée, the ambiguous element, without significance by itself, is at this moment fought by both parties, which tend, with an equal ardour, to eliminate it. It is in fact a question of knowing if France will be for the revolution or the counter-revolution. What is M. Bonaparte, that he has come to say: Neither one nor the other; France will be for me?...

However, at the sight of this enclosed field where its destinies will play out, what does the populace think? The populace is loathe to regress, but it dreads the revolutionaries. It is not only socialism that makes it afraid: it is a Montagnard reaction; it is the reprisals of the democracy!... This disposition of minds, which equally rejects, on the one hand, *the principle of the reaction* and, on the other *the men of the revolution*, assures the fortunes of the Élysée. The same reason that could grind it between the two armies gives it triumph over both: it affirms the revolution, and it protects the conservatives! It is a bilateral, contradictory solution, but still a logical one, given the state of opinion, which circumstances render almost inevitable.

The meaning of December 2, the idea that it represents is thus, quite genuinely, revolution. The remainder is a matter of *persons*, of party intrigues, deals between coteries, private vengeance, autocratic manifestations, measures of public safety and reasons of State. This is the allowance left to the good pleasure of the government by the law of revolutions.

But that ambiguity cannot last: every principle must produce its consequences, every power must develop its idea. We have reached that point: what will Louis-Napoléon do?

¹ 31st May 1850: When the complementary elections to the National Assembly in March and April 1850 resulted in an unexpected victory for the left, the alarmed conservative majority passed an electoral law to restrict universal male suffrage. To register to vote, proof of three years' domicile from the record of direct taxes for the canton or commune

had to be provided. This disenfranchised around three million working class men (for example, 62% of the electorate in Paris and 51% in the Nord). (*Black Flag*)

² A reference to Louis-Napoleon's plebiscite held on December 20th, 1851, which overwhelmingly ratified the *coup d'état* of December 2nd. (*Black Flag*)

I have reported the principal acts of December 2; I have highlighted their inspiration, half real, half personal, and the constant uncertainty. And we have been able to note that up until this moment the new power, arrested by the void of public opinion, abandoned to its own inspirations, directed, in the heart of the universal contradiction, more by the prudence of man than by the reason of things, instead of abandoning the double face that had given it victory, tended instead, by virtue of its understanding of the delegation and according to its family traditions, to continue its seesawing game and to transform, probably without knowing it, the existing institutions into a capricious feudalism.

I have shown then, through the example of the Emperor, the vanity of every political conception apart from the social synthesis, from the reason of history, from the indications of economics and from the revolutionary data. And, authorised by the analogy of eras, I have reminded Louis Bonaparte of his true mission, defined by himself, at the time of his first advent, *the end of the parties*: a definition that translates into this other, *the end of Machiavellian or personal politics*, which is to say *the end of authority itself*.

The negation of authority, and thus the disappearance of every governmental organism, could still appear, in 1849, as an obscure idea;¹ after December 2, not the least cloud remains. December 2 has highlighted the contradiction between governmentalism and the economy, between the State and society, in present-day France; what, four year ago, we could only have surmised through the rules of logic, has been made palpable today by the facts, infallible interpreters: the paradox has become a truth.

Let us summarise these facts, and prove by their analysis the truth of that triple proposition, which represents the whole movement of the last 64 years:

Individual or despotic government is impossible;
 Representative government is impossible; Government is impossible.

The principles upon which French society – let us say all free society – has rested since 89, principles prior and superior to the very notion of government, are:

December 2 has highlighted the contradiction between governmentalism and the economy, between the State and society, in present-day France

1. *Free property*, what was called *quiritary* in Rome, and *allodial* among the barbarian invaders. That is absolute property, at least to the extent that we can find anything absolute among men; property that is directly and exclusively under the control of the owner, who administers, rents, sells, gives or hires it, at his pleasure, without giving any account to anyone.

Property must be transformed, undoubtedly, by the economic revolution, but not in the extent to which it is free: it must, on the contrary, ceaselessly gain in liberty and guarantees. The transformation of property centres on its *equilibrium*: it is something analogous to the principle that was introduced into the right of nations by the treaties of Westphalia and 1815.

2. *Free labour*, with all of its accessory notions – free profession, free trade, free credit, free science, free thought and free religion – which means the absolute right, *a priori*, without restriction or oversight, for every citizen to labour, manufacture, cultivate, extract, produce, transport, exchange, sell, buy, lend, borrow, negotiate, invent, learn, think, discuss, popularise, believe or not believe, etc., within the scope of their means, without any condition other than that of honouring their commitments, and also not disturbing anyone else in the

exercise of the same rights.

Labor must also be revolutionised, like property, but with regard to its *guarantees*, not its initiative. To take the corporative organisation for labour's guarantee would be to recommence the work of the middle ages, the eradication of slavery by feudalism.²

3. The *natural distinction, egalitarian and free*, of industrial, mercantile, scientific, (etc.) specialties, according to the principle of the division of labour and apart from all spirit of caste.

Such are the *principles of 1789*, subject of the celebrated *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, recognised by the last constitution; and such, since that time, are the bases of our society.

Now, as the government must be the expression of society, as M. de Bonald puts it, we ask what the government can be in a society established on such bases?

varied from work to work, rejecting its use in, for example, *System of Economic Contradictions* (1846) but embracing it in *The General Idea of the Revolution* (1851). Regardless of the term used he supported workers' self-management to replace wage-labour. (*Black Flag*)

¹ See Confessions of a Revolutionary, § xvi, 3rd edition.

² A Corporation were the French equivalent of a guild and should not be confused with capitalist joint-stock companies (modern corporations). Proudhon's attitude to using the term "corporation" to describe his ideas on workers' associations

It could not be a territorial feudalism, since property is free; nor an industrial, mercantile or financial feudalism, since labour is free, commerce free and credit free, or at least obviously in the process of becoming free; nor a regime of castes, since the professional specialties, according to their economic principle, are free; nor a theocracy, since conscience is also free. Will it be an absolute monarchy? No. Since the faculties of the man and citizen, labour, exchange, property, etc., converted into *rights*, are free, and their exercise is free, there no longer remains anything that could serve as motive or object of any sort of authority, and because the sovereign, formerly the visible, personal incarnation of divine right, has become an abstraction, a fiction, namely the people.

So if a government forms in the society thus constituted, this government could only result from a delegation, convention or federation, in short from the free and spontaneous consent of all the individuals who make up the People, each of them stipulating and contributing in order to guarantee their interests. So that the government, if there is a government, instead of being the authority, as in the past, will *represent the relation* of all the interests engendered by free property, free labour, free commerce, free credit and free science, and will consequently itself have only a representative value, like the paper money that only has value because of the crowns it represents. At base, the representative government has for a symbol and can be defined as an *assignat*.

Thus the democratic and representative nature of the government flows from the essentially free nature of the interests whose relations it indicates: these interests given, every appeal to any sort of authority becomes nonsense. In order for the government to cease to be democratic, in a society formed in this way, and for authority to reappear, it would be necessary that the faculties that have been declared free cease to be so; that property was no longer property, but fief; commerce no longer commerce, but excise; credit no longer credit, but servitude, corvée, tithe and mortmain – all of which is contrary to the hypothesis.

Need I repeat what everyone knows, that the thought of 89, and that of all the constitutions that have been inspired by it, has been to organise the movement in such a way that it was the representation of the free interests on which society rests, and that this is still the pretension of December 2! The government of December 2, like all the powers that have preceded it since 89, flatters itself that it represents *par excellence* the relation of the interests recognised as free, both by nature and *a priori*. Neither it nor any of its predecessors have ever suspected what role there is for a government – which, incidentally, aims for authority – but to be a *representation*, the representation of a *relation*, of a relation of *interests*, and of interests that are *free!!!*

So the government exists today only because it *represents*. It does not enjoy, as one says in school, *aseity*; it does not establish itself; it is a product of the good pleasure of the liberties, of the inclination of the interests. Is such a government possible? Is there not a contradiction between all these terms: *Government, representation, interests, liberties, relation?*... Instead of giving ourselves up at this point to a discussion of categories, keeping the reader immersed in metaphysics, let us engage in history.

Let us suppose that, in the order of political understanding, as in every other order of knowledge, abstract ideas gradually take the place of concrete ideas. The government, instead of being considered as the *representation* or personification of the social relations, which is only a materialist and idolatrous conception, should be conceived as being that relation itself, something less poetic perhaps, less favourable to the imagination, but more in conformity with the habits of logic. The government, no longer distinguishing itself from the interests and liberties to the extent that both are put in relation, ceases to exist. For a relation, a law, can be written, as one writes an algebraic formula, but *does not represent*, in the governmental and theatrical sense of the word, does not embody and cannot become a whole army of performers, appointed to act out before the people the *relation of the interests!* A relation is a pure idea, which is recorded in a few figures, characters, symbols or terms, in a book, in an agreement, in a contract, but which has no reality except that of the very objects that are in relation.

Well! The most positive, the only positive result of all the governments that have passed through France since 89 has been to bring to light this simple truth as a definition, obvious as an axiom: *Government is the relation of liberties and interests.*

And that first proposition given, the consequences follow swiftly: that from now on politics and economics are merged; that in order for there to be a relation of interests, the interests themselves must be present, responding, stipulating, committing themselves and acting; that in this way the social reason and its living emblem are one and the same thing; that, in the last analysis, everyone being the government, there is no longer any government. So the negation of government arises from its definition: Whoever says representative government, says relation of interests; whoever says relation of interests, says absence of government.

And indeed, the history of the last sixty years proves that the interests are no more free or in relation with the representative government than with the despotic; that in order for them to maintain themselves in the conditions of their declaration, which are those of their existence, they must negotiate directly among themselves, according to the law of their solidarity and without intermediary. Apart from that, property once again becomes fief, labour servitude, commerce toil; the

corporations reform, philosophy is at the discretion of the Church, science, in the hands of the Cuviers and Flourens, says only what pleases theology and the pope: there are no longer either liberties or interests!

The interests, in their famous declaration, had said that conscience would be free. – The representative of those interests declares, in 1814, that the Catholic religion is the religion of the State; in 1830, that it is the religion of the majority, which, in terms of practice and finances, amounts to exactly the same thing. In fact, in 1852, the Catholics, under the pretext that they are the majority, exclude the dissidents from public education, remove academic chairs, and close the schools to the Protestants and the Jews. So that every citizen, whether or not they have an interest in any belief, pays first for all the religions; and if they have the misfortune to be Jew or Protestant, they are excommunicated by the Catholics, not as Jew or a Protestant, but as part of the religious minority. Where is the liberty and where is the relation?

In the same declaration, the interests express their wish that thought be free. – The representative of the interests, of the relation of interests, maintains, on his side, that he cannot fulfil his mandate in the presence of that liberty; that he needs the interests to say nothing, write nothing and read nothing, since, if they look too closely at things, if they gave an opinion, their security and that of the State would find itself compromised. The Emperor suppresses the newspapers, the Restoration creates the censorship, the July Monarchy makes the September laws, the republic *septemberises*¹ the papers, December 2 gives them *warnings*. Where is the liberty of the interests? Where is their relation? And what a strange manner of representing the interests, which reduces them to silence!...

In the expectations of the interests, war should be the last argument to which the nation would have recourse in order to preserve the peace. Apart from the case of war, the maintenance of a permanent army seemed to them an anomaly that the institution of the national

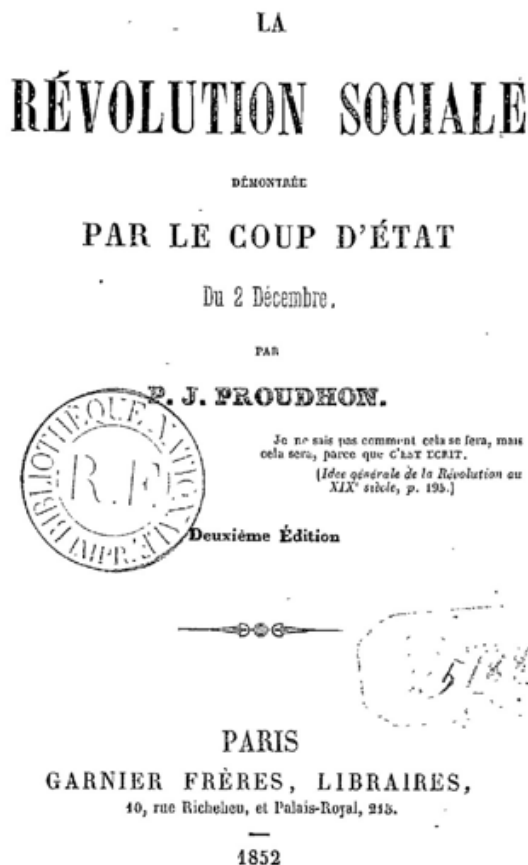
guards had especially aimed to end. – But the representative of the interests, *leader of the armies of land and sea*, always finds some reason to assert his title; and when he does not make war, he still keeps his armies complete, under the pretext that without them he cannot address domestic order, maintain the peace between the interests! So the interests are not in relation or, to put it better, that relation is not represented, since the representative can only keep the peace by force.

The interests demand government at the lowest price, the moderation of taxes, their equitable division, economy in expenditures, the payment of debts! – To this the representative of the interests responds that in order to be governed well, one must pay well; that a large budget is a mark of wealth and strength, an enormous debt a condition of stability. And the budget, along with the debt, doubles in fifteen years! Isn't this the mystification of the interests?

Vineyards are one of the principal sources of wealth for the country. It would be necessary, in order to encourage cultivation, to ensure the wines and brandies the outlets they need, by eliminating at least three quarters of the duties on beverages, which would at the same time give great pleasure to the people, who go without wine. – What does the representative of the interests

say regarding this? That the duties on beverages are the most important category of his revenue, the finest jewel in his crown; that to replace them is impossible; that to eliminate them would be to drive him to bankruptcy. To complete the contradiction, he closes the cabarets! So that, if the wine-growing interest is not repressed, crushed, sacrificed, the other interests cannot be represented! Where is the liberty for the vineyard? Where is its relation with the other crops, with industry and commerce?...

But, excuse me! It is not the wine-growers alone who complain: agriculture demands salt; the worker demands meat, sugar, tobacco, coal, leather, canvas and wool. The worker is naked and dies of hunger. – The representative of the suffering interests – and these interests are all the interests! – says through his



¹ Presumably a reference to the September Massacres, a series of killings and summary executions of prisoners in Paris that

occurred in 1792, from Sunday, 2 September until Thursday, 6 September, during the French Revolution. (*Black Flag*)

newspapers and his orators that it is not true that salt is indispensable to agriculture and livestock, as if he would know better than the farmers! As if it were up to him, their representative, to decide the matter!... That, moreover, he would be happy to achieve for the people the wish of Henri IV, *the chicken in the pot*, but that the interest of the French breeders, that of the manufacturers of native sugar, etc., etc., does not allow the introduction into the country, *franc de port*, of the livestock, sugar, coal, etc. that the people need for their consumption. So much so that the interests are sacrificed, by their own representative, to the relation of the interests, and that by virtue of that relation, according to the testimony of the representative, the nation could not become rich without at the same instant being ruined! So what use is the government? Isn't it clear that the representation of the relation only represents one thing, which is that the relation does not exist?

For twenty years the interests have demanded, without the power to obtain them, some institutions of credit. Finally, a decree of December 2 organises the *crédit foncier*: that is all that it can do. But as it has no funds, the institution is only a coffer that will remain empty until it pleases the interests to fill it. It is clear – despite what has been said by the famous Law¹, cited by M. Thiers – that the State does not give credit, but on the contrary receives it: which means that the representative of the interest finds himself, in the matter of credit, absolutely incapable of action, if he is not himself represented by the interests that he represents!

The relation of the interests demonstrates that the canals must be delivered to the inland shipping trade *gratis*. The representative of the interests establishes a tariff on the canals and leases them. Why? Because that helps out his friends and provides him with an income. So the representative of the interests has other interests than the interests!

The relation of interests demands that the posts, the railways and all the instruments of public utility be operated at the lowest price, and without interest to capital. The representative of the interests makes the people pay for the transport of letters, persons and goods, at the highest price; individuals do not even have the security of their correspondence.

Thus far we have believed that it was up to the principals to testify their confidence in the agent: not at all, it is the agent who says they do not have confidence in their principals!

The interest of families, a universal and absolute interest, which no one can gainsay, demands that

instruction be given to the child by men who have the confidence of the father, according to principles that are agreeable to him. The representative of the family interest, the highest expression of paternal power, hands education over to the ignorant and the Jesuits; and that, under the pretence that he not only represents the fathers, but also represents the children!... What do you say, fathers, regarding this conscientious representation? ...

On every point, the representative of the liberties and interests is in contradiction with liberty, in revolt against the interests: the only relation that it expresses is their common servitude!

So what will it be necessary to say to you, race of sheep, to prove to you that a relation, an idea is not *represented*, as you are inclined to understand it; that liberty, even more so, is not represented either; that to represent it is to destroy it; and that from the day when our fathers made, before God and men, the *declaration of their rights*, positing in principle the free exercise of the faculties of the man and citizen – from that day, authority was denied in heaven and on earth, and government, even by means of delegation, became impossible?

Return, if you wish, to feudal customs, to theocratic faith, or to the piety of Caesar; regress ten, twenty or forty centuries, but speak no more of liberties represented, of rights and interests represented, because the liberties and interests, taken collectively and in their relations, are not represented, and because the representative of a nation, just like the representative of a family, of a property or of an industry, can only be its leader and master. The representation of the interests is the reconstitution of authority!

Anarchy or caesarism then, M. Romieu has told us; the Jesuits say it to you, and for the hundredth time I repeat it. Seek no more red herrings, no more middle ground. For sixty years that has all been exhausted and the experience has made you see that this middle ground is only, like Dante's purgatory, a sphere of transition where souls, in an agony of conscience and thought, are prepared for a higher existence.

Anarchy, I tell you, or caesarism: you will no longer escape from that choice. You didn't want the honest, moderate, conservative, progressive, parliamentary and free republic; you are caught between the *Emperor* and the *Social Revolution*! Decide, now, which you want more: for, in truth, Louis-Napoléon, if he falls, will only fall, like his uncle, by revolution, and for the revolution; and the proletarian, whatever happens, will tire less than

became a publicly chartered company, the *Banque Royale*. It collapsed in 1720 after speculating on swamp land in Louisiana, bringing the French economy down with it. (*Black Flag*)

¹ John Law (1671-1729) was a Scottish economist who believed that money was only a means of exchange that did not constitute wealth in itself and that national wealth depended on trade. While in exile in France, he was provided with a royal edict in 1716 to establish a bank in France; this

you. Is it not for him that the revolution will be made, and until the revolution, isn't he the friend of Caesar?...

But Caesarism! Has the merry councillor of the Elysee thought about it? Caesarism became possible among the Romans when the conquest of the world was added to the victory of plebes over the patricians, as a guarantee of subsistence. Then Caesar could pay his veterans with land taken from the foreigners, pay his praetorians with foreign tributes and feed his plebes with products from abroad. Sicily and Egypt furnished grains; Greece its artists; Asia its gold, perfumes and courtesans; Africa its monsters; the Barbarians their gladiators. The pillage of nations organised for the consumption of the Roman plebes – the lazy, ferocious, monstrous masses – and for the security of the Emperor: that is Caesarism. That lasted, as best it could, three centuries, until the coalition of the foreign masses, under the name of Christianity, had filled the empire and conquered Caesar.

It is a question today of something very different. We have lost our conquests, those of the Emperor and those of the republic. We do not draw a penny from abroad with which we can pay alms to the last of the Decembrists, and Algeria costs us, in good years or bad, 100 million. In order to triumph over the bourgeoisie, the capitalists and proprietors, and to contain the middle class, [which is] industrious and liberal, and reigning through the plebes, it is no longer a question of maintaining the masses with the remains of the vanquished nations; it is a question of making them live on their own product, of making them work. How will Caesar do it? That is the question. Now, however it is done, he addresses himself to Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Cabet, Louis-Napoléon, etc., we are in full socialism, and the last word of socialism is, along with *noninterest, non-government!* . . .

Do you believe, I am asked at this moment, by an indiscreet, perhaps malicious curiosity, that December 2 accepts the revolutionary role in which you confine it, as in the circle of Popilius? Would you have faith in its liberal inclinations? And based on this inevitability, so well demonstrated by you, of the mandate of Louis-Napoléon, would you rally to his government, as to the best or least worst of transitions? That is what we want to know and what we await from you!...

– I will respond to that question, which is a bit suggestive, with another:

Do I have a right to suppose, when the ideas that I have defended for four years have obtained so little success, that the head of the new government will adopt them straightaway and make them his own! Have they taken on, in the eyes of opinion, that character of impersonality, reality, and universality, which would impose them on the State? And if these ideas, all still young, are still hardly anything but the ideas of one man, from whence would come the hope that December 2, who is also a man, will prefer them to his own ideas!...

That is why I hold myself apart from government, more inclined to pity it that to make war against it, devoted solely to the homeland, and I join myself body and soul with that elite of workers, head of the proletariat and middle class, the party of labour and progress, of liberty and the idea

I write so that others will reflect in their turn and, if there is cause, so that they will contradict me. I write so that, truth being manifested and elaborated by opinion, the revolution – of the government, with the government or even against government – can be accomplished. As for men, I readily believe in their good intentions, but even more in the misfortune of their judgment. It is said in the book of Psalms: *Put not your trust in princes, or in the children of Adam*, – that is to say in those whose thought is subjective, – *because salvation is*

not in them! So I believe, and unfortunately for us all, that the revolutionary idea, ill-defined in the minds of the masses, poorly served by its popularisers, still leaves to the government the full choice of its politics; I believe that the power is surrounded with impossibilities that it does not see, contradictions that it does not know, traps that universal ignorance conceals from it. I believe that any government can endure, if it wishes, by affirming its historical reasons and placing itself under the direction of the interests that it is called to serve, but I also believe that men change little and that if Louis XVI, after having launched the revolution, had wanted to revoke it, if the Emperor, or if Charles X and Louis-Philippe had preferred to doom it than to continue it, it is improbable that those who succeeded them would have straightaway and spontaneously made themselves its promoters.

That is why I hold myself apart from government, more inclined to pity it that to make war against it, devoted solely to the homeland, and I join myself body and soul with that elite of workers, head of the proletariat and middle class, the party of labour and progress, of liberty and the idea, which, understanding that authority is nothing, that popular spontaneity is of no use; that

liberty that does not act is lost, and that the interests that need to put themselves in relation with an intermediary which represents them are interests sacrificed, accepts for its goal and motto *the Education of the People*.

O homeland, French homeland, homeland of the bards of the eternal revolution! Homeland of liberty, for, despite all your servitude, in no place on the earth, neither in Europe, nor in America, is the mind, which is all of man, so free as it is with you! Homeland that I love with that accumulated love that the growing son bears for his mother, that the father feels grow along with his children! Will I see you suffer for a long time yet, suffer not for yourself alone, but for the world that rewards you with its envy and its insults; to suffer, innocent, only because you do not know yourself?... It

seems to me at every instant that you are at your last ordeal! Awaken, mother. Neither your princes, your barons nor your counts can do anything for your salvation, nor can your bishops know how to comfort you with their benedictions. Guard, if you wish, the memory of those who have done well and go sometimes to pray at their monuments, but do not seek their successors. They are finished! Commence your new life, O first of immortals; show yourself in your beauty, Venus Urania; spread your perfumes, flower of humanity!

And humanity will be rejuvenated, and its unity will be created by you: for the unity of the human race is the unity of my homeland, as the spirit of the human race is nothing but the spirit of my homeland.

Stock Exchange Speculator's Manual

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

1857 (4th Edition)

Preface to the Third Edition

The first two editions of this *Manual* appeared anonymously. I believe that it is my duty to say why I am adding my signature to the third.

When in 1853-54, Messrs Garnier brothers, wanting for their bookshop a kind *Vade mecum* of the Stock Exchange, asked me to take on this work, I did not at first believe that such a compilation needed a public respondent. A few notions of political economy, serving to determine the role of speculation, either as a productive force or as a stock exchange operation; some critical assessments, of simple common sense, whose correctness has since been confirmed by time, did not seem to me to constitute what the laws on literary property pompously call a work of genius. The entrepreneur of industry or trade has his trademark; the worker who works on behalf of this entrepreneur does not have his own: he cannot have it. In this case, I was only a worker.

So I provided the *article*, as they say in countertop style: repugnant and painful work; it is the fate of plebeians of literature. I did not put my name on it: what did it matter to the reader to know that in my career as a publicist, I sometimes worked to order?

Today, my position has changed.

Under the pressure of events, and while following my initial thought, I was led to discuss *matters* more thoroughly, to qualify the *acts*, to identify the causes, to define situations, to calculate trends, based on considerations of economy and right that go beyond the responsibility of the bookseller.

This is what obliges me to appear, and on what I ask to explain.

Two major considerations dominate all the judgments expressed in this volume: public morality and the economic movement.

Public morality

The agricultural and industrial order, this primary and profound foundation upon which the social edifice rests, is in full revolution.

Is it a nation that is deteriorating, a society that is disappearing, or a superior civilisation that is beginning? The reader will decide. What is certain at least is that a transformation, which I do not examine, for freedom or for servitude, for the supremacy of work or the prepotency of privilege, is everywhere on the agenda. This is the general, decisive fact which emerges first and foremost from our industrial inventory.

Now, whatever the goal towards which they trend, Revolutions, and amongst all those whose object is the distribution and exploitation of public wealth, are occasions of triumph for dishonesty. We have seen it in all eras, but perhaps never as much as in ours, and especially never with such an accompaniment of indifference.

Thus people pretended to see in the scandals of the era only speculation. The *Moniteur* has been vocal about it; the judiciary, following the example given from above, fulminated its mercurials. Comedy in its turn pretended to shake its bells. What, however, do the official organ, and justice, and the theatre accuse? The game, nothing but the game. But, gentlemen,

The GAME does not produce such powerful efforts.

We would not be so ill if we had only this peccadillo to reproach ourselves with. Let us tell the truth.

At the spectacle of a few sudden fortunes, unassailable perhaps from the point of view of an incomplete legitimacy, but perfectly illegitimate before the conscience, and judged as such, the multitude of weak souls was shaken, in whom the thirst for well-being had progressed faster than moral sense.

A conviction has been formed in the universal silence, a sort of tacit profession of faith, which has replaced for the masses the old political and social programmes:

“That of all the sources of wealth, work is the most precarious and the poorest;

“That above work, there is, first of all, the bundle of productive forces, a common fund of national exploitation, of which the government is the supreme dispenser;

“That then comes *Speculation*, meaning by this word the whole of the means, not provided for by law or unattainable to justice, of ambushing the property of others.

“That moreover, the economy of societies is, according to the definitions of the writers on credit, only a state of industrial anarchy and social war, where the instruments of production serve as weapons of combat; where each property, privilege, monopoly, takes the place of a stronghold; where right and duty are indeterminate by their nature, justice exceptional, good and evil confused, truth relative, all guarantees illusory; where the licences of practice, the contradictions of theory, the vagueness of legislation, the arbitrariness of authority, constantly come to disconcert reason and distort morality; where each, finally, fighting against all, subject to the chances of war, is only required to respect the law of war.”

So, while established Wisdom accuses the game, while the Stage chastises it, while the Stock Exchange itself, delighted to see itself so well chaperoned, denounces it: improbity reigns in morals, piracy in business. Under the guise of regular and free transactions, of voluntary achievements, of legitimate exercise of property, charlatanism, corruption, infidelity, blackmail, fraud, extortion, theft, are, without any hindrance, rampant.

Ask anyone: he will tell you that no gain, obtained through State concessions, combinations of limited partnerships, stock market negotiations, trading companies, the lease of livestock or rent, is free from corruption, violence or fraud; that today no fortune is made without reproach, and that out of a hundred rich

individuals, taken at random, there are not four who are fundamentally honest.

It is to this universal, reciprocal disesteem, which seems to be replacing the ancient faith in our country, that we must attribute the brigandage which each day strikes Companies unexpectedly, and no longer leaves the slightest security to their shareholders.

Logic, alas!, always goes faster in dissolution than in virtue.

MANUEL
DU
SPÉCULATEUR
A LA BOURSE

PAR P.-J. PROUDHON

QUATRIÈME ÉDITION

PARIS

LIBRAIRIE DE GARNIER FRÈRES

6, RUE DES SAINTS-PÈRES ET PALAIS-ROYAL, 215

1857

Subordinates, witnesses to the grand moves of their bosses, say to themselves that by plundering the coffers entrusted to them, they are, after all, neither more nor less prevaricators than their honourable employers: and what is sad, while these wretches absolve themselves in their conscience, the public is not far from applying to them the benefit of extenuating circumstances!

The *Économie* Insurance Company: embezzlement of more than a million, cash, by the director;

The Northern Railway Company: theft of five to six million shares, by the clerk;

A bank branch in *Besançon*: 400,000 francs embezzled by the clerk;

Sous-Comptoir des Denrées coloniales in Paris: pillage of the cash register by the manager;

The Crédit mobilier Company: theft of 147,000 francs by a broker of the Company... I will stop: the whole list would fit on a page.

Not a department, not a county town, that does not have its scandal. And how many are ignored! How many are concealed, out of respect for the families, and to protect the dignity of the Companies! Amongst our allies across the Channel, *losses* have multiplied to the point that it has been proposed to create an insurance against theft. Contradicted by so many striking facts, they no longer trust the morality that the sacred character of the law assumes.

What! you award concessions, you create monopolies which, from evening to morning, on hundreds of thousands of shares, create hundreds of francs in premium; – forty million are distributed to the holders of dividend shares [*d'actions de jouissance*], in compensation for *possible* profits which the State had not guaranteed, that the canals would never have been able to produce; – 661 million in subsidies are granted

to the railway companies, plus a guarantee of interest for their shares: and you accuse the game [of speculation]!

The supplies for the State and Companies generate millions for the happy contractors; the bribe has become the privilege of every remit; and this world of employees, clerks, workers, little people, you speak to them of disinterestedness, integrity, morality!

The loan on deferral gives up to 250 per cent interest; the privilege of stock brokers produces for the corporation, in a single year, 80 million: and you declare infamous, you strike with confiscation the village usurer who lends on a mortgage at 8 per cent! Try, therefore, yourself, with your mortgage lending company [*Société de Crédit foncier*] to compete with that usury.

The shopkeeper and the proletarian see their rent increased in one day by half, by three-quarters, for no other reason than the good pleasure of the landlord [*maître de maison*]: and you pursue the strike by the worker as a crime against the State, a strike whose primary cause is the rent; you signal to the vengeance of the multitude the grocer, the butcher, the baker, the wine merchant, [for being] a adulterator, a monopoliser!...

Ah! know this: the actions and gestures of the Stock Exchange have made a clean sweep of commercial honesty; the arbitrary, insulting exaggeration of rents, the mobility of tariffs, the mergers of Companies, the confiscations, expulsions, for reasons of public utility, have destroyed respect for property, and, what is worse, the love of work in hearts. We no longer exist except by the police, by force.

Economic movement

We have one hope.

After having noted the revolutionary state in which society is fatally engaged; after having, secondly, recognised the theoretical, so to speak, character of the immorality that accompanies it, we are led to this reassuring conclusion, that if evil is deep, incalculable, if it needs burial chambers [*chambres ardentes*] rather than comedies and rants, at least it is not without remedy: it is due to ideas rather than to men.

Yes, ideas: it is they which, by their logic and our obliviousness, produce the desolation of morals. Follow this progression.

Not more than fifteen years ago, men who carefully observed the economic movement pointed out, in the midst of peace, the incoherence of the social elements; they showed their antagonism and innumerable contradictions. It was *industrial anarchy*, the ideal of

Anglican economism, adopted by French practitioners, and which the critique of the innovators denied as irrational and unstable. Such a situation, they said, is eminently critical, and cannot be sustained; it must inevitably, through the play of its principles, result, under the preponderant action of capitals, to a corporatist formation, to an INDUSTRIAL FEUDALISM.

Industrial anarchy, INDUSTRIAL FEUDALISM: such was, according to them, the inevitable progression.

The forecasters were mocked: they were socialists, utopians, humanitarians, what more? Enemies of the family and of property. – “Our fathers,” it was said, “in the simplicity of their hearts, had lived under the dominion of the ideas that were reproached today; they had fought for them, for them they had made the Revolution. Since the Revolution, the sons had grown up with these same ideas; France had become rich, it owned to them the clearest and most purest of its power.” – Faith was therefore whole; good faith, consequently, honesty, inviolate.

Now the prediction is fulfilled. Industrial anarchy has produced its legitimate consequences; at the same time faith in the old ideas has been shaken, and public honesty has disappeared. I defy anyone to say that he believes in something. INDUSTRIAL FEUDALISM therefore exists, uniting all the vices of anarchy and subordination, all the corruptions of hypocrisy and scepticism:

A system of anarchic competition and legal coalition;

A system government concessions and State monopolies;

A system of guilds, masters and jurandes¹, in limited partnerships and public limited companies;

A system of national debts and popular loans;

A system of exploitation of labour by capital;

A system of commercial seesawing and stock market brigandage;

A system of sublimation of securities and mobilisation of property;

A system of consumption in the future by an increasingly impoverished present.

Then, what the prophets of the social transformation had not themselves foreseen, behold INDUSTRIAL FEUDALISM is no more solid than industrial anarchy had been; it is still only a crisis, which must pass like the first:

Sic erat instabilis tellus, innabilis unda.²

¹ The *jurande* was a guild body made up of its *juré*, members of the guild elected (usually for one year) to represent it and defend its interests. (*Black Flag*)

² From Ovid's description of primordial chaos in *Metamorphoses* (Book I): “thus the earth was unstable, the water unswimmable” (*Black Flag*)

Anarchy or feudalism, in fact, as history demonstrates, is always [due to] a lack of balance, antagonism, social war, for which, in the present state of mind, no remedy can be imagined except by means of a more powerful concentration, of a third serial term, that we will name, without any malignant purpose, the INDUSTRIAL EMPIRE.

Everything impels us to it: the monarchical tradition, the analogies of history, the popular instinct, the prejudices of democracy.

Here at least we will have accord, unity, so dear to the Jacobins, silence and peace. But will we have freedom? will we have equality? will we have right?

The INDUSTRIAL EMPIRE is nothing other than the anarchic principle itself, the famous *laissez faire, laissez passer*, pushed to its extreme consequence; a reduction to the absurd of classical and official political economy, in a word a contradiction.

But, a contradiction is not right, much less freedom and equality.

And without freedom, without equality, without right, the crisis does not end; it is only in its third phase.

This is why the government of Napoleon III, we must give its moderation the justice it deserves, resists as much as it can this logic of ideas, this implacable fatality of things, which pushes it, in spite of itself, to make this industrial empire a political empire; why finally it strives to retain a remnant of that anarchy which had made the glory of the preceding realm.

What would the government of Napoleon III not give today to anyone who could find a way to reconcile these three fateful terms: *industrial anarchy*, INDUSTRIAL FEUDALISM, INDUSTRIAL EMPIRE; a mixture of autocracy, aristocracy, democracy, something like the government of the Saint-Ouen Charter!¹

¹ The Declaration of Saint-Ouen is a statement made by the future King Louis XVIII of France on 2 May 1814. It preserved various gains from the French Revolution and the Empire, whilst restoring the dynasty of the Bourbons and retaining the Napoleonic Code of Law. It notably stated that the lands of the aristocrats who fled, which the Republic had sold at auction, were not to be confiscated, and that no restitution was to be given. It was eventually adopted in the Charter of 1814. (*Black Flag*)

² Followers of Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), a French political, economic and utopian socialist theorist and businessman. He called for the creation of a society led by people within what he defined as the industrial class, which

Vain hope! Constitutionalism, unstable in politics, is absurd in economics. Social right cannot be the product of three formulas of non-right, any more than unity can come from an addition of zeros.

Let the partisans of the *Napoleonic Idea*, recognising here the inadequacy of their principle, therefore deign to take in a large part a forced conclusion. They will find there more resources for their country and their own glory, than in the tradition of the Caesars and all the rubrics of Machiavelli.

The imperial formula is inapplicable to the economic order.

Let us leave aside the Saint-Simonians, initiators of the new feudalism and promoters of an impossible empire²; let us leave with them the Ultramontains,³ the Anglo-Saxons and the Slavs, all feudalists of the old type.

And let us end, against all odds, the Revolution begun in 1789, by founding economic and social balance, that is to say, right, freedom, equality, honour, peace, progress, internal joy, all civil and domestic virtues – I am not speaking of government, I am not

making politics here – upon the **INDUSTRIAL REPUBLIC**.

Let no one be afraid of the word. It is not up to me to designate otherwise the fourth term of this economic series, whose evolution strikes all eyes: *Industrial Anarchy, Industrial Feudalism, Industrial Empire, Industrial Republic*.

Of these four terms, the first is nearing its end; the second is at its peak, the third is hatching, the fourth is in the foetal state.

Moreover, the principles of republican economics, very different from those of the *Social Contract*, could only be outlined in this *Manual*, as they had already been in

included all people engaged in productive work that contributed to society, emphasising scientists and industrialists, but including engineers, businesspeople, managers, bankers, manual workers, and others. The State was to ensure that productive activity in the economy was unhindered and encouraged. His followers were influential in the Second Empire. (*Black Flag*)

³ Ultramontanism is a clerical political conception within the Catholic Church that places strong emphasis on the prerogatives and powers of the Pope. It contrasts with the belief that the State's authority over the Church is comparable to that of the Pope. (*Black Flag*)

other publications. I reserve the right to give an original and complete exposition of them in a future work.

The history of societies does not show greater things to the philosopher's meditations: how is it that we barely deign to notice them?

What are the revolutions of Thermidor, Brumaire, 1814 and 1815, 1830, 1848 and 1851, which have been the subject of so many narrators and have shaken the country only on the surface, beside these profound changes, accomplished in less than a quarter of a century, and which are laid bare, without wasting words, by a simple statistic, a brutal stocktaking?

We have talked about the crimes of the Terror, the dishonours of the Directory, the arbitrariness of the Empire, the corruptions of the Legitimacy¹ and of the Bourgeois Monarchy. Compare then these miseries with the dissolution of an epoch which took the Stock Exchange and its works for its Decalogue, the Stock Exchange for philosophy, the Stock Exchange for politics, the Stock Exchange for morality, the Stock Exchange for homeland and Church!

Greater freedom is demanded for the press. It would be desirable for newspapers to be allowed to discuss at

ease the Naples issue and the Swiss issue, the ballot papers, the oath [to the Emperor], etc. The French public cannot get used to this muzzling of speech and pen, says M. Véron. And certainly, I am not the last to complain: who would have more to gain than me from freedom of the press?

But, with all the freedom, with all the license imaginable, what could I say to intelligent men, more than what this authentic exposition of the Stock Exchange and its mysteries reveals of them!... Alas! intelligent men are sparse, and I have no other readers to rely on.

In claiming responsibility for this collection, the oldest of its kind, and still the only one to address questions of economic right and stock market morality, I must declare here, to be entirely fair, that I owe to M. G. DUCHENE, the former editor of *Le Peuple*, who was kind enough to take on for me the bulk of the work, a number of pages of excellent writing, with touches of lively irony that I did not think it necessary to remove, of analyses and judgements of a firm and clear intellect.

Paris, 15 December 1856

P.-J. Proudhon

Final Considerations

§ 3. Industrial democracy: financing of labour by labour, or universal mutuality; end of the crisis

The strength of the Empire is that, with the exception of the outlaws of the Mountain, whose temperament, hardened by exile, could no longer be surprised by anything, there is no dynasty, fusion,² Church or Republic, which dares undertake this succession [required to implement the needed reforms].

The first thing that the successor would have to do would be to declare all payments suspended; then to convene, in lieu of parliament, an assembly of creditors; finally to obtain a concordat. Such a task could not go to a Bourbon, an Orléans or even a Lamartine or a General Cavaignac. Who amongst them would want to return at that price? It would be worse than to return, like Louis XVIII who could not do otherwise, in foreign wagons. Nothing but a Syndicate of *Public Safety* would be able to undertake this ventilation: where are the Carnots, the Cambons, the Prieurs and the Barrères who would comprise it?...³

For us, who would not be satisfied with a solution of this kind, because it guarantees nothing; who moreover do not believe ourselves to be genius enough to resolve problems posed in contradictory terms, we will confine ourselves, after having indicated the course of the new revolution, to presenting its definitive formula, according to the most significant symptoms of the present time.

I. Workers' Associations

The thought that first inspired them was naïve, illusory unfortunately. By freeing labour from the employers, they wanted to make the workers, associated with each other and who had become masters, enjoy the supposedly enormous profits and prerogatives until then reserved for the heads of the establishments. It was not known that in most, if not almost all, industries employing groups of workers, especially in those where spontaneous association could appear immediately practical, the profits, when they exist, may be

¹ A reference to the Bourbon Restoration of 1814 to 1830. Its supporters were called the Legitimists and they rejected the claims of the July Monarch of 183-1848. (*Black Flag*)

² A reference to an alliance between the rival Orléanist and Legitimist political factions. (*Black Flag*)

³ Lazare Carnot (1753-1823), Pierre Joseph Cambon (1756-1820), Pierre-Louis Prieur (1756-1827), and Bertrand Barère (1755-1841), members of the Committee of Public Safety that oversaw the Reign of Terror after the French Revolution (1793-1795). (*Black Flag*)

satisfactory for one person but are no longer so when divided amongst multitudes. In a large factory, the profits of the master, distributed to the wage-earners he employs, would not increase by 10% wages varying from 50 centimes to 1 franc 50 centimes, would be only a small relief to the workers' poverty. It is so with all professions, considered as a whole: the *net product* of the entrepreneur, a product which must be considered most of the time as the fruit of his particular calculations and compensation for his risks, is not what causes the workers' misery; it is not therefore the demand for this *net product* that can cure it. Of the 4 billion that Labour must pay each year to maintain the feudal regime, the net product, received in the form of dividends in addition to interest, does not reach 100 million: the cause of pauperism, which they wanted to strike, is not there.

Workers' associations, founded on hatred of the employers, on a notion of substitution, were soon able to convince themselves of this. Other miscalculations, the fruit of inexperience and prejudice, the practice of ideas of centralisation, community [*communauté*], hierarchy, supremacy, political parleying, were not long in giving rise to division and discouragement. All the abuses of general partnerships, limited and joint stock, were even exaggerated in these so-called fraternal companies. They had dreamt of monopolising all industry, of rendering free enterprise void and dead, of replacing, in everything and for everything the bourgeoisie with the proletariat. The better to emancipate the people, they intended to exclude from the circle of working communities those who had until then been the representatives of freedom!... The error soon bore fruit. Of the several hundred workers' associations that existed in Paris in 1850 and 1851, there remain barely twenty, which owed their salvation solely to the abandonment of the utopian ideas of 1848 and the recognition of the true principles of social economy. In this regard, these associations merit studying, all the more since the phenomenon of their existence reveals a positive element for financial and industrial speculation.

Can the ownership of enterprises and their management, instead of remaining, as they generally always been, individual, progressively become collective, to the point of providing, on the one hand, to the working classes, a decisive guarantee of emancipation...?

The challenge facing workers' associations, outside of which they inevitably fall back into the limbo of religious brotherhoods, of philanthropic impotence, is divided into two related questions:

1. Is there in the concurrence of forces and in their combination a productive potentiality such that it gives rise to financially appreciable results; that consequently the worker can use it for the formation of the capital which he lacks, and the conversion of his status as a wage-warner into that of a participant?

In other words, can labour, like capital, finance businesses by itself?

2. Can the ownership of enterprises and their management, instead of remaining, as they generally always been, individual, progressively become collective, to the point of providing, on the one hand, to the working classes, a decisive guarantee of emancipation; on the other hand, to civilised nations, a revolution in the relationship between labour and capital, hence the definitive substitution, in the political order, of justice for reasons of State?

The workers' entire future depends on the answer to these questions. If this answer is affirmative, a new world opens up to humanity; if it is negative, the proletariat can take it as settled. Let it commend itself to God and to the Church; there is no hope for it in this sad world: *Lasciate ogni speranza!*¹

First, we understand that the problem cannot be solved from a fiery multitude, obeying its instincts alone, in whom a long oppression has killed intelligence. Here we need, for immediate initiators from the working masses, men who, emerging from their midst, have received from the civilisation whose burden they bear an amount of knowledge, and who have learned in the school of the exploiters to do without them. Such initiators, having one foot in civilisation and the other in barbarism, are found in only small numbers, even in the most industrially advanced nations, such as France and England. And what is worse, these elite workers, precisely because of their ambiguous nature, are generally, in relation to their less-educated brethren, the most unwelcome, if not the most ill-disposed of all people. Barbarism on one side, pride on the other, it

¹ From the words marking the entrance to Hell in Dante's *Inferno*: "Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate" ("Abandon hope, all ye who enter here"). (*Black Flag*)

seems that the working class is conspiring, in all its categories, against its own freedoms.

“When,” says an English economist, “the uneducated English workmen are released from the bonds of iron discipline in which they have been restrained by their employers in England, and are treated with the urbanity and friendly feeling which the more educated workmen on the Continent expect and receive from their employers, they, the English workmen, completely lose their balance: they do not understand their position, and after a certain time become totally unmanageable and useless. This result of observation is borne out by experience in England itself. As soon as any idea of equality enters the mind of an uneducated English workingman, his head is turned by it. When he ceases to be servile, he becomes insolent.” (J. STUART MILL, *Principes d'Économie politique*, t. I, p. 128)¹

This vice of the heart, which is not rare amongst the French workers either, and which is further aggravated here by an excessive mobility of character, constitutes in the present state of society, in which the proletariat has nothing to expect but from itself, the greatest obstacle to its liberation.

It is a question then, and the whole difficulty lies there, of forming a grouping of workers endowed with a certain dose of morality and intelligence, capable of conceiving the laws of social economy, having the firm will to follow them, without mixing in anything of the fantasies and hallucinations of the epoch: it is a matter, in short, for the question we have just posed, of forming, not a mass of capital [*un masse de capitaux*] but a resource of men [*un fonds d'hommes*].

Once the initiators have been found, it remains to group around each of them a number of workers, or to put it better collaborators, destined to become, in each category of work, a model society, a veritable palingenetic embryo.

It is of this group that we ask if it possesses in itself a particular force of production.

Labour, as we said in our INTRODUCTION, is a productive force, the first and the most powerful; *Capital* is another; *Commerce* another; *Speculation* yet another. To this list may be added *Property*, *Credit*, *Competition*, etc. Everything that is an action or a principle of action in an Economy is a productive force. That said, is the *Grouping* of workers, apart from the labour of each of them, and from the Capital which exploits them and which they serve, also, like the

Division of Labour, a force? Can this force replace capital and dispense with its protection?

The facts, more eloquent in their spontaneity than theories, will answer.

We have visited Workers' Societies. We have obtained a record of their situation from their origin until 31 December 1853, then from 1853 until 1856; we have studied their internal discipline and principles, more or less clearly expressed in their articles, which regulate all. We believe we will please the public by publishing the details you are about to read about the movement of transformation that is being prepared in the industrial economy, beyond the formulas of the [legal] Code and predictions of jurisprudence.

The basis on which all these Associations are established is as follows:

1. Unlimited ability to continually admit new associates or members; consequently, the perpetuity and infinite multiplication of companies and the universalist character of their constitution.
 2. Progressive formation of capital by labour; in other words, *financing labour by labour*, either by the workers themselves producing for each other, according to their specialities, the tools and furnishings which they respectively need, or by means of levies on the price of sales and services, or monthly deductions from wages.
 3. Participation of all associates in the management of the enterprise and in its profits, within the limits and proportions determined by the articles of association [*l'acte social*].
 4. Piecework, and proportional wages.
 5. Constant recruitment by the Society from among the workers it employs as auxiliaries.
 6. Retirement and relief fund, formed by a deduction from wages and profits.
- To these fundamental conditions, which can be seen as the common law of the Associations, it will soon be appropriate to add the following, which, as we have remarked a number of times, are the necessary complement to the system.
7. Progressive education of apprentices.
 8. *Mutual guarantee* of work, that is to say, of supply and consumption, as well as of a low-cost between the various Associations.
 9. Publication of the [association's] books.

¹ John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*, (Fairfield: August M. Kelly, 1976), 110 (Book I, Chapter 7, §5). (*Black Flag*)

Such is, in its essence, the *Fundamentals [Organique]* of the Workers' Societies: we leave aside the details of practices specific to each of them. Of course, moreover, the principles we have just explained are not written in the duly authenticated articles of the Associations. Neither perpetuity, nor universality, nor the declaration of the absence of capital, nor the participation of the financing workers in administration and profits, nor the mutualism of the Associations, would be tolerated by our commercial legislation and by the courts responsible for interpreting it. The new associates have had to conform to the received legal practice; but what they are not allowed to say, they imply and act accordingly. Let us see what these men, without advice and without resources, have learnt from this, and what they can still learn from it.

It is impossible for us to go into the details here of the operations and inventories of each Society, as we did in the second edition of this *Manual*.

It suffices for us to recall and state that the social funds in all of these Companies began, like that of civilisation; with zero; that in a few years, these funds have risen, according to the importance of the industry and the number of associates to 20,000, 30,000, 50,000 and 80,000 francs; that, since 1853, this progress has been sustained; that the Companies today add to the social fund a reserve and relief fund, formed by a levy on profits; that any idea of communism is now abandoned, and the equality of well-being is subject to the equality or equivalence of services, having as its fulcrum the equality of guarantees.

Moreover, the workers are persuaded that the fortune of the Associations is not so much in their extension as in their mutuality: experience has taught them that the association, however liberal it may be, however free of all personal subjection, of all domestic interdependence, of all administrative exploitation it may be supposed to be, still requires a certain education of the subjects. *We are not born an associate, one of them told us; we become one.* Is this not the translation of the famous expression: *Homo homini aut lupus, aut deus?*¹

Société des Bijoutiers en doré, rue Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth, 8. – Founded in 1834, with a capital of less than 200 fr. – 8 associates, 12 auxiliaries; turnover in 1856: 200,000 fr., net product: 41,000 fr.

Société des Menuisiers en fauteuils, rue de Charonne, 5. – Staff of the Society in 1852: 90 associates and as many auxiliaries. – Capital: 81,123 fr. 12 c.

Since 1853, the sales and profits have been constantly increasing. We are assured that at this time its net assets are no less than 200,000 fr. It is rich enough to offer a manager it no longer wants a payment of 1,500 fr. as compensation. This is more than the State gives to a captain after 30 years of service.

Société des Maçons, rue Saint-Victor, 155. – Staff on 1 November 1856: 87 worker associates, 8 capitalist associates (these are master carriers, suppliers of plaster and bricks, a doctor and an engineer: we see here the principle of industrial mutuality appear); 250 to 300 auxiliaries.

The contribution of each associate was increased to 2,000 fr., that is 174,000 fr. of a social fund. The material of the Society is sufficient to carry out one and a half million constructions. The dividend of 1855 produced 12 fr. 33 c. per hundred. The dividend of 1856 will be higher.

According to the *Indicateur du bâtiment*, the Company of masons is, of all the Workers' Associations, the one with the most work and orders.

Société des Ouvriers en limes, rue Phelipeaux, 20, passage de la Marmite. – Staff, 19 members, 21 auxiliaries. – Capital as of June 20, 1856: 29,086 fr. 35 c. – Turnover during the year 1855: 69,054 fr. 35 c.

When the Society was formed in 1848, the State had advanced the founders a sum of 10,000 fr. This loan was fully repaid on September 4.

Société des Ouvriers en chaises, rue Amelot, 70. – Reduced to 4 associates, currently employing 25 assistants. – Capital as of December 31, 1855: 6,826 fr. 15 c. – Turnover during the year: 72,915 fr. 15 c.

Of course, moreover, the principles we have just explained are not written in the duly authenticated articles of the Associations... The new associates have had to conform to the received legal practice; but what they are not allowed to say, they imply and act accordingly.

¹ Erasmus: "Man is to man either a god or a wolf" (*Black Flag*)

Société des Menuisiers en voitures, faubourg Saint-Honoré, 233. – 16 associates, 24 auxiliaries. – Capital as of 31 December 1855: 7,400 fr. – Turnover 75,000 fr. – Profits: 23,230 fr.

Société des Lanterniers pour voitures, rue de la Pépinière. – 14 members, 30 auxiliaries. – Capital as of 30 June 1856: 28,000 fr. – Turnover in 1855: 60,000 fr. The profits allow the amount for each associate to be increased from 2 to 3,000 fr.

Société des Tourneurs en chaises, rue Popincourt, 32. – This Society is noted for its large turnover of staff. Since 1848, 147 workers have joined, 102 have left, each taking their share of the social fund. Currently the staff consists of 45 members, 70 to 80 auxiliaries. – Capital as of 31 December: 64,932 fr. 53 c. – Turnover: 153,159 fr. 80 c.

Société des Formiers, rue du Cadran, 12. – Staff, 26. – Paid-in capital: 8,000 fr.

Société des Lunettiers, rue Saint-Martin, 250. – 25 members, 75 auxiliaries. – Capital as of 31 December 1855: 28,000 fr. – Turnover: 92,000 fr.

Société des Peintres en laque, rue Albouy, 9. – 11 members, 16 auxiliaries. – Capital as of 31 December 1855: 2,500 fr. – Turnover: 46,600 fr.

Société des Graveurs, rue des Vieux-Augustins, 58. – 2 associates, 20 auxiliaries. – Assets, cash and tools, 800 fr.; currency and merchandise, 30,000 fr. – Turnover in 1855: 40,000 fr. This small Society is noted for its spirit of fraternity towards its auxiliaries.

Société des Facteurs de pianos, rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis, 162. – 24 members, 13 auxiliaries. – assets, equipment and merchandise: 91,000 fr.

Société des Facteurs de pianos, rue Saint-Martin, 122. – 10 associates, 15 auxiliaries. – Capital: 20,238 fr. 96 c. – Turnover in 1855: 60,621 fr. 70 c.; on 25 November 1856: 59,442 fr. This Society received an honourable mention.

Société des Ébénistes en meubles, rue Saint-Pierre-Amelot, formerly rue de Charonne, 5. – 18 associates, 65 auxiliaries. – Capital on 31 December 1855: 132,963 fr. 88 c., on which there are 75,000 fr. loaned by the State to be repaid. The turnover in 1855 was 200,000 fr.

Société des Brossiers, rue du Petit-Hurlleur – The associated are 4 in number, compared to 23 in 1849. –

The capital or new assets are today 5,600 fr. – Turnover in 1855: 28,000 fr.

Société des Ferblantiers, rue de Bondy, 70. – The staff of this Company has experienced, since its foundation in 1848, great and sudden oscillations. In turn, 216, then 57, later 326, the number of members is today 37, employing 6 to 8 auxiliaries. – Capital on 31 December 1855: 74,000 fr. – Amount of sales, 213,000 fr.¹

There were once other Workers' Associations, pavers, bakers, spoon-makers, hatters, etc. We do not know what became of them.

All of them, moreover, have been riddled with adversity, lack of work and misery, struggled with political bickering, discord, rivalries, defections, betrayals; all have paid the price for inexperience, charlatanism, infatuation, bad faith. It takes time for the human mind to define its principles; and as long as they are not defined, the conscience is left to trouble and iniquity. Some Associations have seen their managers, once they were initiated in business, withdraw to establish themselves as bosses and bourgeoisie; elsewhere, it was the associates who, from the first inventory, have demanded the sharing of the products, and left with their rightful share. As it is true that long-term reflections are as repugnant to the modern proletariat as to the ancient slave, and that the most difficult task of Associations is not to establish themselves and survive, but to civilise the associates. Similar details, interesting above all from the psychological perspective, for the history of Workers' Associations, could not find a place in this *Manual*, where it can only be a question, at most, of noting, according to the financial results, the economic power of those Societies.

Let us now summarise and conclude.

Workers' Associations are the centres of production, a new principle, a new model, which must replace the current public limited companies, where it is not known who is more shamefully exploited, the worker or the shareholder.

The principle which prevailed there, in place of that of wage-labour and master, and after a passing attempt at communism, is participation, that is, the MUTUALITY of services complementing the force of division and the force of collectivity.

There is mutuality, in fact, when, in an industry, all the workers, instead of working for an entrepreneur who

¹ We owe the details just read to the kindness of M. Ch. Beslay, former representative of the people, whose daily relations with the Associations allow him to know perfectly their staff and financial situation, and who guarantees us their

accuracy. Moreover, and we have experienced it ourselves, the associated workers have no difficulty in giving the people who visit them all the desired information.

pays them and keeps their product, are expected to work for each other, and thereby contribute to a common product from which they share the profit.

Now, extend to the Workers' Associations taken as units, the principle of mutuality which unites the workers of each group, and you will have created a form of civilisation that, from all points of view, political, economic, aesthetic, will differ completely from previous civilisations; which can no longer become feudal or imperial; which, with all possible guarantees of freedom, with honest publicity, with an impenetrable system of insurance against theft, fraud, corruption, parasitism, nepotism, monopolisation, speculation, the artificial increase in rent, subsistence, transportation, credit; against overproduction, stagnation, gluts, unemployment, disease, poverty, with no need for *charity*, will offer you everywhere and always RIGHT.

Then, no more anticipated achievements, bounty hunting, subsidies to be shared among ministers, middlemen, lawyers, founders, administrators; no more bribes paid by suppliers to disloyal managers; no more stock market killings, accumulations, *latifundia*. The inequality of conditions and fortunes has disappeared, returned to its elementary expression, which consists of the differences blind nature creates between worker and worker, a difference which education, the division of labour, etc., must continually reduce.

Probity, honour, morals have fled the bourgeois world, just as they had fled the feudal world before the Revolution. They will only find themselves there.

Without doubt there is a long way from the grouping in Societies of a few hundred workers to the economic reconstitution of a nation of 36 million souls. So we do not expect such a reform from the expansion of those Societies alone. What matters is that the idea works, that it has been demonstrated by experience; that the law arises in practice as in theory.

We already know that the example given amongst us is bearing fruit abroad: the workers' unions¹ in England

have decided that in the future, instead of spending their funds on useless strikes, they will use them to create Companies like the Parisian Societies. The final shock will come, this inevitable liquidation predicted for more than eight years: it will be easier to organise work across the entire country than it has been since 1848 to form the first twenty workers' groups in Paris.

II. Associations for Consumption

These societies, such as the *Ménagère*, have as their aim to resolve the special problem of relations of industry to industry, consequently of Association to Association.

They are mainly due to bourgeois initiative. Their existence proves that if, in 1848 as always, popular instinct has grasped the ideas in their synthesis, the average intellect, more exercised, attached itself first of all, and with remarkable nimbleness of intelligence, to the crux of the question.

Besides the fact that the internal administration of these purely commercial Societies did not present the same difficulties as those of the Workers' Associations, they had the valuable merit, in an epoch of revolutionary agitation, of appearing as a conciliation of interests. It was a step toward that fusion of employers and employees, denounced by the

utopians as a betrayal of the people, and for an instant ostracised from the democracy by the radicals.

The combination in question was less, in fact, a Society than a coalition, by which a certain number of consumers, guaranteeing a trading house a secure clientele and constant outlet, demanded in return a discount on the current price of products. The profits of trade, greater than those of industry properly speaking because of random chance, allowed a significant reduction [of prices] and a corresponding improvement in the position of consumers. The more or less immediate consequence of such establishments has been to gradually guarantee to each buyer, and by the act of his consumption, the labour he needed, in the same manner as he himself guaranteed the market for the merchants. All consumption presupposes production: those two terms are correlative and appropriate.

¹ Proudhon uses the French word for "guilds" (corporations) but it seems clear that he is referring to trade unions rather than co-operatives. (*Black Flag*)

There was, therefore, in our opinion, material for lucky speculation: unfortunately, they exceed the ordinary reach of workers, whose intractability is so difficult to overcome, and who do not provide the bourgeoisie with immediate enough advantages for them to resign themselves to the efforts, advances, and possible sacrifices that they initially require. However, Societies for consumption have begun to multiply in the departmental capitals thanks to the sponsorship of a few bourgeois, who thereby gave their fellow citizens co-operative [*sociétaires*] bakeries, butcher shops, grocers. Several were closed by the police, following December 2nd: we cannot say where this movement stands today.

III. Workers' Cities, Cheap Rent

We read in a brochure published by M. Victor Calland, author of the *Palais de familles* project:

“The same economic reform, said M. Émile de Girardin, which by way of association was accomplished in the means of communication and transportation, must be carried out in human habitation... This reform is inevitable: it contains a whole revolution.”

If we were to abide by this announcement, it would not be very reassuring in our eyes. The reform carried out by the Railway Companies has only resulted in a monopoly. It is a confiscation of the transport industry for the benefit of a handful of capitalists, and which calls, before long, for a revolution in the direction of democracy and mutuality. Until a liquidation of this monstrous monopoly has freed both the wage-earners who serve it, and the public who pays its dividends, the railway, far from contributing to the general well-being, will have only accelerated the plundering, aggravated the servitude.

From this observation, it will be understood that what we expect for housing is something quite different from what M. de Girardin has planned. Here, as there, *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*; in other words, a service for a service, a price for a price. We ask, in short, that in a city *as large as Paris*, housing be removed from the arbitrariness of the proprietors, and rent fixed at the *cost price*.

The cost price, in terms of housing, is made up of these three elements: *tax, maintenance costs, depreciation*. In the last two is the profit of the entrepreneur.

The idea of reducing rents to the cost of housing is at the bottom of all the projects for *Workers' Cities*, funded and subsidised by the government.¹ But no animal can renege on its nature, The government, which

believed it was practicing philanthropy, has only succeeded in giving rise to speculation: The *Workers' Cities* can be cited as an example of the Industrial Empire.

By decree of 22 January and 20 March 1852, the government allocated a sum of 10 million francs to the improvement of workers' housing in large manufacturing towns. Created in 1850, the *Cité Napoléon* consequently received a subsidy of 200,000 francs. It contains 194 dwellings, and is currently inhabited by 500 people. Its net income is 26,447 francs.

Freed from philanthropic claims, and reduced to its technical meaning, cheap housing for tenants, dividends for shareholders, the Workers' City seems never to lack inhabitants, any more than entrepreneurs. Counting on a loyal population, it could therefore, while reserving a sufficient income for the founders, offer at reduced prices housing, wash houses, baths, retirement homes. It is a way of industrialising built property, which fits wonderfully with new credit institutions, and increasingly tends to reduce the social economy to a single principle, exchange.

The workers, rightly or wrongly, perhaps precisely because the initiative came from above, have not shown themselves to be eager supporters of this system. The idea of corralling them into separate areas reveals a mindset of distrust and caste, which allows schism to persist, and clashes with the instincts of liberty and equality. Add to that a gate that closes at a fixed time, like in a jail, and gives the institution a certain police stamp!... and one will understand the little favour with which the Workers' City has been received.

If there was a real desire to provide workers with low-cost housing, instead of Workers' Cities, why not base speculation, the institution if you like, on the purchase of particular houses, scattered in all the neighbourhoods of the capital, and which, properly fitted out, restored, would have brought about and maintained a drop in rents, by competing with landlords everywhere? Why, if they were so keen to protect the building industry, not entrust the construction of the Cities to Companies of masons and plasterers, which would have helped the workers both in their habitation and in their work, and would have killed two birds with one stone? Why not admit manufacturers, shopkeepers, the renters themselves and the owners, who almost never live in their houses, as well as the common people, to the benefits of combination? Do not the grocer, the milliner, the wine merchant, the cloth trader, have at least as

¹ A policy of the Imperial government for the building housing estates, funded by the State. (*Black Flag*)

much need as the worker for cheap lodgings, workshops and shops?... Any reform must be general and not exclude anyone: it is to perpetuate servitude and consecrate privilege to create retirement homes, nurseries, hospitals, schools, which are only for the poor.

In any case, the idea, entirely charitable, of improving the housing of workers, and the promise of a government subsidy, have given rise in Paris and in some other cities to a certain number of Companies whose operations it is useful to know. We find them summarised in a report from the Minister of the Interior of 5 April 1854, and an article in the *Moniteur* of the 27th of the same month.

Compagnie Pereire frères. Construction of Workers' Cities at La Chapelle, Batignolles, up to a maximum of 4,550,000 fr., one third of which is provided by the government. Average price of housing, 225 fr. per 30 square metres.

Compagnie Heckeren et Kennard. Construction of housing, up to the amount of 4,140,000 fr., one third of which is subsidised by the government. Same price conditions as in the previous Company.

Compagnie Puteaux frères. Construction of houses in Mazas, Batignolles and Grenell. Government subsidy. Average price of housing, 200 to 225 fr.

Compagnie Martin et Muller. Construction of 110 houses between the streets of Reuilly and Picpus, with government subsidy. Average price, 365 fr. By adding 50 cents per day, or 182 fr. 50 c. per year, the worker will become the owner after 18 years.

Compagnie Carabin. Construction of 182 houses, between the avenues of Ségur and Lowendal. These houses are intended to become the property of the tenants, in turn for a payment of 10 annuities, from 470 to 550 fr. – Government subsidy.

All these Companies – an employee of the Prefecture, responsible for distributing aid to poor families evicted by their landlords, admitted to us himself – are reduced, under a philanthropic appearance, to more or less usurious speculations, as is easy to see through discussion of the projects.

Compagnie Dollfus, in Mulhouse. Construction of more than 300 houses. Average rent, 120 fr. – Government subsidy.

Compagnie Montricher, in Marseille. Construction of a City, comprising 145 furnished houses, with garden, baths, washhouse, restaurant, school, etc. Government subsidy.

Compagnie Scrive frères, in Lille. Construction of 234 houses on the territory of Marcq-en-Barœul, with government subsidy. Rented at 4%,

Of the 10 million in credit granted by the State, approximately 4 and a half million had been distributed in grants by April 1854. Since that time, we have not been able to follow the movement of the institution. But it is clear that this is pure philanthropy in vain, and that 10 million, distributed by the government to speculators to build a thousand and a half small houses, which they then rent at 7 fr. 50 per

square metre of housing, or resell at a profit, will do no more to improve the lot of the workers than the distribution of soup and meat at 5 centimes a portion. Also the costliness of rents since 1854 has nonetheless been constantly increasing, evictions more and more frequent, the deals between the police and ruthless landlords, at the expense of poor families, are becoming more and more onerous: this does not prevent the project makers from going their own way. The anomaly of the situation is such that, in the face of this foreclosure of the working classes, it has been proposed to build a Workers' Paris on the plain of Issy, with the old Paris remaining reserved for the bourgeoisie, foreigners, the Stock Exchange and barracks.

Fate impels the Empire, which hesitates, and seems to cry out to its plebeians, its true backers: *Dare I? – Dare.*

IV. Exchange Societies

These have taken the matter from a higher level; and if not yet in excitement, at least as to the idea, they have, in our opinion, hit the mark. The services which a vast system of credit, circulation and discount is called upon to render consist less in the reduction of commission costs than in the creation of the outlet itself and the destruction of the parasitic organs which obstruct it.

In the final analysis, whether trade is done with specie or with paper, work is paid for with work. Any individual with an inventory is therefore solvent. However, tailors have no shoes, nor shoemakers

Any reform must be general and not exclude anyone: it is to perpetuate servitude and consecrate privilege to create retirement homes, nurseries, hospitals, schools, which are only for the poor.

clothes: where does this come from? Obviously, it is not for the lack of knowing how to produce, nor of the desire to acquire: the evil does not exist either in the organisation of work or in the organisation of consumption. It is entirely in the difficulty of exchange.

Under the pressure of need and the inspiration of such a simple idea, countless reform projects have been born, all of which have as their aim to organise direct exchange between producers, without distinction of quality or fortune, that is to say, either to suppress the use of money in trade, or at least to make up for the insufficiency of its function. Our hands are full of prospectuses. We will limit ourselves to reporting the title:

Réforme monétaire, by M. Mazel, operating by means of exchange vouchers;

Comptoir d'échange et de commission, which must combine normal banking operations with advances on goods, overdrafts on security, and the issue of demand vouchers on producers who agree to receive them in exchange for their products;

Société générale de crédit privé, which proposes to issue long-term bonds;

Monnaie auxiliaire (of Esclée and Co.);

Banque de compensation, which proposes to trade using current accounts;

Banque d'échange de Paris (M. Lachâtre);

Banque communale d'Arbanatz, by the same;

Comptoir général d'escompte (Chartron and Co.), in Lyon;

Monétisation universelle, Lerouge and Co., rue des Fossés-du-Temple, 34.

All these concepts are highly comprehensive¹; they have nothing of that particularism, of that fanciful and exclusive spirit which dishonoured the popular inspirations of 1848. They are universal, synthetic and fertile, like their principle, exchange. Before exchange, no classes, no favouritism, all are equal: equality is the essence of exchange. With it, parasitism becomes impossible. To destroy privilege, it suffices to ask the privileged: What do you bring to the exchange? Where is the product, the service, the value, in return for which you demand a payment, a sinecure?...

We cannot say how any of these institutions work: in matters of credit, exchange, discount, there are only two bases of operation, outside of which there is no business: *money*, or the *concurrence of wills*, two things which are equally difficult to bring together.

But it is clear that what everyone has conceived, and that no one in particular can execute, everyone can do, just as everyone made the Bank of France, the Crédit mobilier, the Railway. It is only a simple manifestation of opinion. Let the government take the initiative, and the country will applaud. It is a case of repeating the refrain of the ballad: *Dare I? – Dare.*

“In a word, *industrial feudalism* must be succeeded, according to the law of historical antinomies, by an INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY: this results from the opposition of terms, as day follows night.”

“From whatever aspect we consider things, from the political side or from the economic side, from the point of view of mechanics as from that of funding, it appears more and more that we are moving, through a semblance of feudal restoration, towards an Industrial Democracy.”

“There is only one way for a society, for a government, to put an end to the abuses of stock market speculation: it is, for public funds, and generally for all capital investments, to organise the amortisation of debts, which implies another organisation of credit; secondly, to make this amortisation easy by the indefinite reduction of interest; finally, to make amortisation, as formerly of interest, the sine qua non condition of all borrowing, both private and public; – for railways, canals, mines, insurance, the Bank, etc., to liquidate existing companies, and to replace the funding of capitalists by the mutuality of industries and the association of workers.”

“In a society based on the principle of inequality of conditions, government, whatever it may be, feudal, theocratic, bourgeois, imperial, is reduced, in the last analysis, to a system of insurance of the class which exploits and owns against that which is exploited and owns nothing.”

“Certainly, we believe in a radical transformation of society, in the sense of Liberty, Equality of persons, Confederation of peoples: but we do not want it to be violent or despoiling. It is therefore a question of finding ways and means: this is how we will end this *Manual*.”

“...the power of production that can result from the progressive formation of workers' societies, of workers' companies...”

– *Stock Exchange Speculator's Manual*

¹ On these companies, see *De la Réforme des Banques*, by M. Alfred Darimon. Paris, Guillaumin, 14, rue Richelieu.

Federation and Unity in Italy

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

1862

[...]

The first effect of centralisation, and here it is nothing else, is to eliminate, in the various localities of a country, every kind of indigenous character; while we imagine by this means to exalt political life in the mass, we destroy it in its constituent parts and even in its elements. A State of 26 million souls, such as Italy would be, is a State in which all provincial and municipal freedoms are confiscated for the benefit of a superior power, which is the government. There, every locality must be kept quiet, the *parochial spirit* must be silent: except on the day of elections, in which the citizen expresses his sovereignty by a proper name written on a ballot paper, the collectivity is absorbed into the central power; everything concerning administration, justice, army, education, public works, police, religions, etc., ends up in the ministry; everything concerning legislation, in parliament. Fusion, in a word, that is to say, the annihilation of specific nationalities, in which citizens live and are distinguished, into an abstract nationality in which we no longer breathe or know each other: this is unity.

Mazzini is a nationalist; in his manifesto he speaks of, and intends to assert, only *national right*. Now, if the principle of nationalism is true, it is true for the smallest nationalities as well as for the largest; it implies the independence and autonomy of the smallest groups as well as of the largest agglomerations, all the more so since in the last analysis it is impossible, outside of the territorial divisions sometimes given by nature, sometimes by politics, to clearly delimit a nationality.

But the principle of nationality is only a lure in the mouths of the unitarians, and I would not like Mazzini to believe that I take his words more seriously than he himself does. These gentlemen care about nationalities as they do about spiritual power: we can judge this from the way in which the agents of the Piedmontese government treat the annexed who make demands.

To govern twenty-six million men from whom self-possession has been taken away, to operate this

immense machine, a prodigious bureaucracy is needed, legions of functionaries; to defend it from within and without, to make it respected by its subjects and its adversaries, a standing army is necessary. Officials, soldiers, tributaries, this is what will henceforth replace the nation. In France, fifteen years ago, the number of functionaries was estimated at six hundred thousand. This number has certainly not decreased since the coup d'État. The figure for the army and navy is in keeping

with this. All this is essential to unity: these are the general expenses of the State, expenses which increase in direct proportion to centralisation and inversely to the freedom of the provinces.

This grandiose unity, finally, requires glory, prestige, luxury: hence an imposing civil list, magnificent salaries, encouragement of literature and the arts, assignments, allowances, sinecures. The ambitious, the schemers, the declassed, the *bohemians*, all partisans of unity, swarm around the government. Naturally, one cannot give everything to some and nothing to others. Under a regime of unity, everyone holds out his hand; cities like individuals solicit. An intelligent power

attaches commune, parishes, brotherhoods, by gifts, subsidies, orders [for products or services]; work of beautification or public utility is undertaken; construction and demolition are carried out; railways and strategic routes are multiplied; monuments are erected to local glories; commerce, agriculture, industry are encouraged by awards, exhibitions, tax rebates and provision of capital. Mines, canals, railways, colonies, exchange agencies, ministerial offices, tenders, concessions of all sorts, supplies, are the currency with which governments pay their majorities, keep the public on tenterhooks, and make everyone hope for wealth. Everything is taken from the masses: it is about who will get the biggest piece. Whoever says a unitary nation, says a nation corrupted by its government, *urbem venalem*. A town is bought for a church, a village for a tobacco shop. I have seen a head of a canton punished by the recall of an infantry company that had been sent to garrison there; I have seen another

And who benefits from the regime of unity? The people? No, the upper classes.... Unity, today and since 1815, is simply a form of bourgeois exploitation under the protection of bayonets. Yes, political unity, in the great States, is bourgeois

renounce his opposition for a position as police commissioner.

And who benefits from the regime of unity? The people? No, the upper classes.

Under the Caesars, unity was praetorian autocracy, the pillage of the provinces, the gratuitous maintenance of the plebs of Rome. God forbid that I should compare the empire of Napoleon III to that of Nero, Commodus or Caracalla! Unity, today and since 1815, is simply a form of bourgeois exploitation under the protection of bayonets. Yes, political unity, in the great States, is bourgeois: the positions it creates, the intrigues it provokes, the influences it caresses, all this is bourgeois and goes to the bourgeois. There are in the French army twenty-five thousand officer positions of all ranks and as many non-commissioned officers: is it to be believed, if the subjects who fill these positions were as uninterested in their employment as the soldiers are in their service, that the army would remain only twenty-four hours without disbanding, and that the government could count on it? Of the two billion sixty million that make up the budget of the Empire, two-thirds go to the bourgeois class: since Brumaire, this has been its way of participating in the government. There is nothing to be gleaned for the bourgeois, banker, speculator, large landowner, clerk, artist or man of letters, in a small State. Complicated functions, little or no pay, thankless cares, free services, obscure devotions: this is not enough to tempt a noble ambition, to sustain a powerful individuality.

Mazzini is a republican, he boasts of it. Does he know what he has done for Italy with its unity? He has infected it with despotism. Mazzini is a democrat; the cause he defends is that of the plebs. Does he know what he has done for the Italian plebs, by making them fanatics of unity? He has established bourgeois rule over them, a reign that was doomed, judged, condemned in France in 1847; a reign that was the error of the first Constituent Assembly, of the Jacobins, of the Consulate, of the Restoration of the July Monarchy, and which is the fatality of Napoleon III.

What France no longer wanted in 1848, Mazzini, more than anyone, if his unitary programme is realised, will have contributed to giving to Italy. For, after all, what else is it, this constitutional monarchy of which Victor Emmanuel is the principal beneficiary, a governmental thing substituted for provincial and municipal autonomy for the benefit of that class which wears a suit against that which wears a smock? In Italy, as everywhere, the bourgeois loves paid positions, of which the common man does not dream. Mazzini was present at the scramble for spoils: what have his friends, the men of the people, grabbed? In Italy there is a mass of ecclesiastical property whose sale the bourgeois are loudly demanding. How much of this sacred land will accrue to the proletarian without savings, to the peasant

who believes himself doomed to hell if he took, by paying, his share of the *patrimony of poor*?

[...]

Let us not forget, in this sad episode undertaken in the name of the principle of *nationalities*, to note the brutality with which party selfishness, let us be blunt, national selfishness, occurs. They conspire, they arm themselves, in the name of freedom and the fraternity of nations; but each intends to exploit the alliance for its own profit. The Greeks, the Montenegrins and the Serbs begin the dance; but Garibaldi, who thinks only of Rome, is not ready. Each to his own, each for himself. Then he enters the scene in his turn and calls Hungary; but Hungary declares that it is too late, and that Garibaldi must provide for his own salvation, *Italia fara da se*. This reminds me that Mazzini, when approached one day by the Poles, refused to join his cause to theirs, saying that the Polish aristocracy had nothing in common with the Italian democracy. Very good, if it is only a question of economic reforms and the emancipation of the proletariat. But we have just seen that in Italy the question was entirely unitary and nationalist: why then rebuff the Poles?

[...]

A few more words on the harm done to the democracy by the boost given over the last ten years to Jacobin and Mazzinian politics, and my subject is exhausted.

In 1848, the different socialist schools, although not agreeing amongst themselves, had posed the question on its true terrain, not only for France but for the whole of Europe: economic and social reforms, guarantee of work, discipline of interests, better distribution of wealth, popular education, communal organisation, in other words, administrative decentralisation, regeneration of morals.

The problems being new, no solution could immediately be produced: but at least the socialist democracy had compelled widespread attention; the old politics were relegated to the background: and that in itself was an immense progress. It was proven, in our opinion, and what has been accomplished in the last ten years has only made this truth more striking, that the political boost of 89 was exhausted; that French society, on pain of collapsing upon itself and entering a period of decay, had to get out of the rut it had hitherto followed; that all agitation, outside the line indicated by socialism, was sterile and retrograde; that henceforth questions of dynasty, of government form, of nationality, of preponderance, were secondary; that diplomacy and militarism had had their day, and that religion itself, succumbing under the burden, called for, if not the substitution of a new principle, at least a total transformation.

These were our thoughts in 1848: we know how they were received. [...]

The Federative Principle

and the need to reconstitute the party of the revolution

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

1863

Second Part – Unitary Politics

Chapter III: Democratic Monogram, Unity

The democracy is liberal, republican, socialist even, *in the good and true sense of the word*, of course, as M. de Lamartine said.

The democracy imposes this on itself. It never understood that revolutionary triad, *Liberty-Equality-Fraternity*, that in 1848, as in 1793, it always had in its mouth, and of which it has made such beautiful emblems. Its motto, definitively adopted, is a single term, UNITY.

It takes an entire philosophy, an entire jurisprudence, an entire science of man and things, of society and its economy, indeed, to understand *Liberty*, especially *Equality*, to feel *Fraternity* as a free man. How many resign themselves to such studies?... Whereas with UNITY, a physical, mathematical thing, which can be seen, touched and counted, we know everything in an instant. We are even exempted, in difficult cases, from reason. With UNITY, politics is reduced to a mere mechanism, wherein the only thing left to do is to turn the steering wheel. Too bad for anyone who gets caught up in the gears: he was not really a politician; he was an interloper, justly punished for his ambitious vanity.

Whoever says *liberty*, in the language of public right, says guarantee: guarantee of the inviolability of the person and of the home; guarantee of municipal, trade [*corporatives*¹] and industrial freedoms; guarantee of due progress, presumption of innocence [*protectrices de l'innocence*] and free defence. How can all this be reconciled with governmental majesty, so so dear to the democracy, with Unity? It was the democracy, it was its

leaders and its organs which, in 1848, instituted war councils, organised house searches, decreed the state of siege, enforced the deportation without trial of white workers,² as Mr. Lincoln decrees today the deportation without trial of black workers.³ The democracy has little regard for individual freedom and respect for laws, incapable of governing on other terms than that of Unity, which is nothing but despotism.

Whoever says *republic* or *equality* of political rights, says administrative independence of the political groups which compose the State, says above all separation of powers. However, the democracy is above all centralising and unitary; it abhors federalism; under Louis-Philippe, it hunted at all cost *parochialism* [*l'esprit de clocher*]; it regards the indivision of power as the government's mainspring, its anchor of mercy: its ideal would be a dictatorship coupled with an inquisition. In 1848, when the uprising roared in the street, it quickly hastened to gather all powers in the hands of General Cavaignac. Why, it thought, change the governmental mechanism? What absolute monarchy did against us, let us do against it and its partisans: for that we do not have to change the cannons; it is enough to turn its own guns against the enemy. The Revolution is nothing else.

Whoever says *socialism*, in the good and true sense of the word, naturally says freedom of commerce and of industry, the mutuality of insurance, the reciprocity of credit, the equalisation of taxes, the balancing and security of wealth, the participation of the worker in the firm's fortunes, the inviolability of the family in

¹ It should be noted that *corporatives* was the medieval French equivalent for guilds and that, when Proudhon was writing, a common term within working class circles for the self-managed trade associations which would replace wage-labour within capitalist firms. (*Black Flag*)

² A reference to the crushing of the working class revolt – “the June Days” – in response to plans to close the National Workshops, created by the Second Republic in order to provide work for the unemployed. Between 23 to 26 June 1848, troops led by General Louis Eugène Cavaignac killed around three thousand and wounded many thousand more. Afterwards, four thousand insurgents were deported to Algeria. This marked the end of the hopes of a “Democratic

and Social Republic” (*République démocratique et sociale*) and the victory of the liberals over the left. (*Black Flag*)

³ A reference to President Lincoln's long-standing support for the removal of freed slaves from the United States. At his urging, the Confiscation Act of 1862 included a clause “for the transportation, colonization, and settlement, in some tropical country beyond the limits of the United States, of such persons of the African race, made free by the provisions of this act, as may be willing to emigrate.” The Bureau of Emigration was subsequently created to direct his colonisation projects. See Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011). (*Black Flag*)

inheritance. However, the democracy strongly inclines towards communism, the economic formula of unity: it is only through communism that it understands equality. What it needs are maximums [in prices], forced loans, progressive and extravagant taxes, accompanied by philanthropic institutions, hospices, asylums, nurseries, tontines, national workshops, savings and relief funds, all the paraphernalia of pauperism, all the livery of misery. It does not like piece work; it treats free credit as madness; it would tremble before a people [composed] of learned workers, knowing equally how to think, write, handle a pickaxe and a plane, and whose wives know how to do without servants in their households. It welcomes the inheritance tax, which, demolishing the family, tends to place property in the hands of the State.¹

In short, whoever says freedom says federation, or says nothing;

Whoever says republic, says federation, or says nothing;

Whoever says socialism, says federation, or yet again says nothing.

But the democracy, as it has demonstrated for four years, is nothing, neither capable of nor wanting anything Federation produces, which Contract requires, which Right and Liberty require. The Democracy has as a principle unity; its goal is unity; its means, unity; its law, always unity. Unity is its *alpha* and *omega*, its

Chapter XI: Hypothesis of a Solution by the Federative Principle

The defeat of Garibaldi neither solved the problem nor improved the situation. The unification of Italy is, it is true, postponed indefinitely; M. Rattazzi, considered too centralising, had to withdraw in the face of municipalist demands; at the same time, the question of the Papacy was somewhat overshadowed by the garibaldian eclipse. But the antithesis of the two powers, Italian and French, remains ominous, irreconcilable; Italy is writhing in civil war and chaos, France is plagued by the fear of an immense threat.

Already there is talk of a return to the *status quo*, that is to say a division of Italy into four or five independent States, as before the war of 1859. If this solution is adopted, it will be the work of diplomacy; it will probably result in the restoration of fallen princes; the

¹ In terms of inheritance, Proudhon's views should be seen in terms of his wider economic reforms: "I see what shocks you in heredity: heredity, according to you, is only good for maintaining inequality. But inequality does not come from heredity; it results from economic conflicts. Heredity takes

supreme formula, its final reason. It is all unity and nothing but unity, as its speeches and actions demonstrate; that is to say, it does not leave the absolute, the indefinite, the void.

This is why the Democracy, which senses its emptiness and is afraid of its weakness, which took a revolutionary accident for the very idea of the Revolution, and made a dogma of a transient form of dictatorship, this old

democracy of 1830 renewed from 93, is above all for strong power, hostile to all autonomy, envious of the Empire which it accuses of having stolen its policy, but it promises to sing the aria again, as M. Thiers said of M. Guizot, with variations and without false notes.

No principles, no organisation, no guarantees; only unity and arbitrariness, all decorated with the names *Revolution* and *Public Safety*: here is the profession of faith of the democracy today. Since 1848 I have asked it several times to produce its programme, and did not obtain a word. A

programme! It is compromising, not sure. From which front will this democracy, empty of ideas, which the day after the stroke of luck which would bring it to power would be, like all its predecessor governments, conservative, from which front, I say, would it today decline the responsibility of activities with which I recognise it was not involved but that it would have performed in the same fashion and that it has covered with its approval?

constitutional forms, the promised guarantees will be preserved: but the Democracy was denied, and indirectly through it the Revolution. The cause of the people, I mean by this the common working people of the towns and countryside, who must now be the focus of attention for true revolutionaries, has been sacrificed by the so-called party of action to personal speculations as ambitious as they are chimerical, and the real issue postponed for a long time.

The *chauvinists*, whom the prospect of a diminished France agitates to the point of terror, would like us to put an end to it with a thunder-clap, and that the Emperor of the French, boldly resuming the policy of his uncle, trusting in the sympathy of the masses and playing double or quits, declared the French Empire

things as it finds them: create equality, and heredity will render equality to you." (*Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère* [Paris: Guillaumin, 1846] II: 258)

restored within the limits of 1804, and by a single act incorporated into France north Belgium and all the Rhine, south Lombardy and Piedmont. Victor Emmanuel would be offered the throne of Constantinople. Apart from that, they say, everything else will only ever be a palliative. France remains annulled; it is no longer the centre of gravity of politics. The most moderate recommend maintaining the agitation in Italy until, weary of war, tired of brigandage, the nation makes a new appeal to the liberator of 1859 and throws itself back into his arms.

These councils of despair very loudly accuse those who, by the most detestable calculations, have pushed the Italian people to this fantasy of unity. While in our country the old Democracy, out of palaver, aspires to remake itself in a general melee, and, without provocation, without motives, solicits new annexations; while there it redoubles its Machiavellianism and pushes the masses to revolt, England, which coldly observes the crisis, gains ground everywhere and challenges us; Germany, Austria, Prussia, Belgium, Russia stand ready. With the empire blocked, everyone expects an explosion. We can take for certain that we will succumb to a new Waterloo, if Victory, as usual, remains faithful to the big battalions, and, as a body politic, as a centre of civilisation from which philosophy, science, right and freedom have radiated over the world, we will be ended. The France of Henri IV, Richelieu and Louis XIV, the France of 89, 93, 1802, 1814, 1830, 1848, as well as that of 1852, will have said its last word; it will be over.

How this desolate situation would have seemed simple, easy and advantageous to all parties if it had been considered in 1859 from the point of view of principles, from the point of view of federation!

First consider that which makes Italy, as a maritime and industrial power, so formidable a rival to France disappears entirely in the federative system, without any loss for the Italian people. It is not, in fact, advantages of location and territory; it is not superiority of industry and capital that makes a people dangerous to its neighbours; it is their concentration. Distributed wealth is harmless and does not excite envy; only wealth agglomerated in the hands of a strongly based feudalism, and by this placed at the disposal of an enterprising power, can become a force of destruction in the economic and political order. The oppressive, dissolving influence of a financial, industrial and territorial aristocracy on the people it exploits and on the State is not in doubt: this truth, thanks to 1848, can pass today as a commonplace. Well! what the agglomeration of economics forces within is for the

working class, it becomes outside for neighbouring nations; and conversely, what the equal distribution of the instruments of labour and the sources of wealth is for the welfare of a nation and for the freedom of the citizens, it also becomes for the community of peoples. The cause of the proletariat and that of European equilibrium are interlinked; both protest with equal energy against unity and in favour of the federative system. Need I say that the same reasoning applies to the government and the army, and that the bravest confederation, with the same number of soldiers, will never weigh on its neighbours as much as it would if it were transformed into a unified monarchy?

That the Italians make the most of their geographical position, that they develop their navy, that they exploit their railways, that they become industrious and rich: it is their right, and we, the French, do not have to worry about it. To each nation its heritage; we have ours that it is up to us to claim. After all, we cannot claim to the exploitation any more than the conquest of the world: we must leave these ideas of industrial, commercial and maritime monopoly to the English. Let us not build our wealth on supplying the

foreigner: the English, our rivals, could tell us that if, at times, the privilege of exporting produces enormous profits, it is compensated for by appalling miseries. In the general economy, the principal market of each nation is within itself; the external market is an accessory: it is only by exception that it can take precedence over the other. The economic development that is being remarked at this moment by all Europe is a demonstration of this law, of which the Italian federation would give a decisive application. Thus aristocratic England pushes with all her might the unity of Italy: the pre-eminence over the Mediterranean eluding her in any event, it understands that is important for it to oppose to French bankocracy and centralisation an equal centralisation and bankocracy.

I nevertheless admit that while industrial federation in Italy, organised by the very fact of political federation, does not create for unified France a legitimate cause for concern; if confederated Italy, having nothing in common with the French Empire either by its constitution or by its aspirations, not posing as a rival, cannot be accused of causing us any harm, its industrial and commercial progress will nevertheless be for us a cause of less income, a loss of earnings. But what conclusion can we draw from that? Only one: it is that the French people, if it wishes to maintain its leadership and sustain dignified competition, will have to follow the example of the Italian people: accepting that it will retain its political centralisation, it will at least wisely



prepare its economic federation.¹ Such an outcome would be one of the most positive effects of federation, not only for Italy, but for France itself and for all Europe.

But it is also what the French partisans of Italian unity, speculators in general, business leaders, chasers after industrial stocks and bribes, who are loyal to the bankocracy, do not care about. These, to consolidate monopoly in France and at the same time guard against the competition of Italian monopoly, will not fail to organise, if it has not already done so, a monster association, in which will be merged and interlocked the capitalist bourgeoisie and all shareholders on both sides of the Alps. Let us not forget that the constitutional, bourgeois and unitary monarchy, tends, with regard to international politics, to guarantee from State to State the exploiting classes against the exploited classes, consequently to form the coalition of capital against wage-workers, of whatever language and nationality they all are. That is why *Journal des Débats* concurs with *Siècle*, *Opinion nationale*, *Pays*, *Patrie* and *Presse* on the Italian question. Here the political colour fades before the conspiracy of interests.²

Let us conclude this second part. Against the renewed project of the ancient Caesars for an unified Italy, there were:

The Peninsula's geographical formation;

Municipal traditions;

The judicial, republican, principle of federation;

The favourable opportunity: Austria defeated, France offering its guarantee;

The Roman question to be resolved, which meant the Papacy to be secularised, the Church to be revolutionised;

The plebs to be emancipated;

The political and commercial susceptibilities of France, the self-esteem of the Emperor to be spared;

The progress of nations to be served and the European equilibrium to be reformed, through the development of federations.

¹ Proudhon sketches his ideas on economic federation – “an agricultural-industrial federation” in an earlier chapter (Part 1, Chapter XI) entitled “Sanction économique : Fédération agricole-industrielle” (“Economic Ratification: Agricultural-Industrial Federation”). This is included in *Property is Theft! (Black Flag)*

² The capitalist coalition between France and Italy is three-quarters complete: you only have to glance at the editorial page [*quatrième page*] of the newspapers to be sure. What are the so-called Italian, Piedmontese, Roman loans; the borrowing from the city of Milan, the Cavour canal, the Lombard, Venetian, Roman railways, etc., if not French assets as much and even more than Italian ones? The Parliament of Turin has decided that the shares of the Naples

If what we call opportunity, in politics, is not an empty word, I dare say that it was there.

The neo-Jacobin Democracy has admitted none of these considerations. Geography has been ignored by it; – history distained; – principles trampled underfoot; – the cause of the proletariat betrayed; – the opportunity rejected; the French guarantee scorned; – the Roman question confused; – France threatened, compromised; – the Emperor wounded; – European progress sacrificed, under the pretext of *nationality*, to a conspiracy of adventurers and intriguers. We know the rest.

It was up to Garibaldi, at a certain moment in his career, to give Italy, along with freedom and wealth, all the unity that a system of mutual guarantees between independent cities entails, but which will never be found in a system of absorption. It was up to him, by creating the federations of Europe in place of these forever extinct nationalities, to make the Republic preponderant everywhere, and to inaugurate with irresistible power the economic and social Revolution. Shall I say that he shrank from the task? God forbid: it would have been enough for him to see it for him to want to execute it. Garibaldi understood nothing of his era, consequently nothing of his own mission. His blindness is the crime of this retrograde democracy to which he listened too much, of these entrepreneurs of revolutions, restorers of nationalities, tacticians of adventure, statesmen *in partibus*, for whom he had too much deference. May he, now that his error has broken him, never understand in all its depth the truth that he has not recognised! The loss of his illusions, he would bear it as a philosopher, as a hero; his regrets would be too bitter for him.

I have said what my principles were, what I would have wanted to do if I had been in the place of Garibaldi and Mazzini; what I would have advised if I had had a say in the matter; what I believed I had sufficiently expressed in my last publication. Could the unitary democrats tell me in turn what they wanted and what they want? Could they explain what they mean by *Liberty, Sovereignty of the people, Social Contract*, and give a definition of the REPUBLIC?

track will be reserved for Italian capital: *Italia fara da se* [Italy will take care of itself]. But we know that behind these native names there will be, as always, French financiers. A new Italian loan, with a capital of 500 million, is being prepared: by whom will it be underwritten? By the house of Rothschild, a person quite familiar with this sort of thing assured me recently. Sooner or later there will be created in Italy a mortgage credit company [*Crédit foncier*] and a personal credit company [*Crédit mobilier*]: who will be the founders? The same people, or their peers, who created *Crédit mobilier* in France and Spain. Combining the capital of all countries in a vast anonymous bond is what is called an agreement of interests, a fusion of nationalities. What do the neo-Jacobins think?

Third Part – The Unitary Press

Chapter IX: Slavery and the Proletariat

What is happening on the other side of the Atlantic, three thousand leagues from the regions where the Mazzinian idea hovers, is clear proof of this truth that, outside of federalism, politics, regardless of the virtue and kindness of the heads of State, tends to degenerate into tyranny, plunder and extermination.

For half a century, the republic of the United States was regarded as the model for societies and the standard for governments. Indeed, an incomparable freedom unfolded there, surrounded by an unprecedented prosperity. But this republic, with its federalist forms, was infected with profound flaws. The fever of exploitation, imported from Europe with religion and laws, the pride of blood and wealth, had developed the principle of inequality and class distinctions to a frightening degree, and made the return to unitary government inevitable.

Three categories of subjects make up American society: *black workers*, slaves; *white workers*, increasingly driven into the proletariat; and the landed, capitalist, industrialist aristocracy. As slavery and the proletariat were incompatible with republican values, the southern states, although they call themselves DEMOCRATS par excellence, first conceived the idea of centralising the

United States and dominating the Confederation. At the same time, they wished to develop over the entire surface of the republic their *particular institution*, namely black servitude. Rejected by those in the North, the vast majority, and who preferred to cover themselves with the title of REPUBLICANS; struck in their local interests by this majority, which intended to use the power in its turn and speak in the name of the entire Union, they broke the federal pact and constituted a slaveholder democracy, presumably unitary.

Two things would have been necessary, by common accord and energetic will, to save the Union: 1) free the blacks and give them citizenship, which the states in the North only half granted and which those of the South did not want at all; 2) energetically fight the growth of the proletariat, which did not enter the views of anyone. Threatened in the South and the North by black servitude and by the white proletariat, the Confederation was in peril: the obstinacy of both parties rendered the evil almost incurable. What if, in fact, things had been

left alone, if the owning class of the North and the aristocracy of the South had remained united, only occupied with developing their respective exploitations, without doing anything for the waged or enslaved workers, and without worrying about the time when the two populations would meet, we could foresee the day when, the two floods colliding, the democratic multitude of the South would permeate the republican mass of the North, at the same time as the latter would overflow into the former. Then white workers and black workers mingling and soon understanding each other, the class of exploiters would have to change its confederation into a unitary State with a police force and gendarmes, a large standing army, centralised

administration, etc., to protect itself from the slave and proletarian insurrection, if it did not wish to be subjected to seeing slaves and proletarians marching against it, it would have to name, like the examples of Haiti and Mexico, an emperor. If, on the contrary, the difference of the exploited races, if the divergence of the customs developed by the exploiters and the contradiction of their interests made separation inevitable, and which no force could prevent, the fortune of the North would be seriously compromised from the triple political, economic and strategic

point of view, and we could still foresee that the time would come when the republican majority would demand on its own terms an alliance with the slaveholding minority. In any event, the confederation was going to perish.

In this situation, the South took the initiative by proclaiming its independence: what has been the conduct of the North? Jealous to preserve its supremacy and considering that the territory of the United States comprised, according to it, a single nation, it began by treating the separatists as *rebels*; then, to remove any pretext for secession, it decided to transport, with compensation to the owners, all the slaves out of the republic, except those who requested permission to remain, but in an inferior condition, reminiscent of the Hindu pariahs. Thus, while they declare the confederates of the South *rebels* who, to save their particular exploitation, ask to leave a confederation that has become impossible, they decree by authority, they legalise, they render irrevocable the political and social

Two things would have been necessary... to save the Union: 1) free the blacks and give them citizenship, which the states in the North only half granted and which those of the South did not want at all; 2) energetically fight the growth of the proletariat

separation of men by colour: a new way of applying the principle of nationality! Such is Lincoln's plan. If this plan comes to pass, it is clear that black servitude will only change its form; that a good number of blacks, indispensable for cultivation in hot regions, will be retained in the states where they live; that American society will not be more homogenous; that, furthermore, the desire to prevent any future attempt at separation by the southern States will have been a further step toward centralisation, so that, the geographic constitution here assisting the social constitution,¹ the federative republic of the United States will have only moved more quickly toward the unitary system by the Lincoln solution.

Now, the same Democracy which amongst us supports Italian unity also supports, under the pretext of the abolition of slavery, American unity; but, as though to better demonstrate that those two unities are in its eyes only two bourgeois, quasi-monarchical manifestations, having the purpose of consolidating human exploitation, it applauds the conversion of the slavery of the Blacks into the proletariat that Mr. Lincoln proposed. Compare that to the proscription which it has struck socialism since 1848, and you will have the secret of this democratic philanthropy, which does not support slavery, of course!... but accommodates itself wonderfully to the most brazen exploitation; you will have the secret of all these unities, the purpose of which is to break, by administrative centralisation, every force for resistance in the masses; you will have acquired the proof that what governs the politics of the so-called republicans and democrats in the United States, as well as in Italy and France is not justice, it is not the spirit of freedom and equality, it is not even an ideal, it is pure egotism, the most cynical of reasons of state.

If in its discussions on the American affair the democratic press had contributed as much judgment as zeal; if, instead of urging the North against the South and shouting *Kill! Kill!*, it had sought means of conciliation, it could have provided the warring parties wise counsel and noble examples. It would have told them:

¹ If ever a confederation was placed in disadvantageous geographic conditions, it is surely that of the United States. We can say that fate is fundamentally hostile and that freedom has much to do. A vast continent, six hundred by one thousand leagues wide, squarish in shape, bathed on three sides by ocean, but whose coasts are so far apart that the sea can be said to be inaccessible to three-quarters of the inhabitants; in the middle of this continent, an immense corridor, or rather moat (Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio), which, if not neutralised or declared common property, will only form, for nineteen out of twenty residents, a route with no exit: here, in short, is the general configuration of the American Union. Thus the danger of secession was immediately understood, and it is undeniable that in this regard that the North fights for its existence as much as for Unity. Everything there at present is in contradiction: Whites and Blacks, the North and the South, the East and the West

“In a federal republic, the proletariat and slavery appear equally unacceptable; the tendency must be to abolish them.

“In 1848, the Swiss Confederation, after including in its new constitution the principle of equality before the law and abolishing all the old bourgeois and familial privileges, did not hesitate, by virtue of this new principle, to bestow citizenship and its rights on the *heimathlosen* (people without a country). – Can the American confederation, without forsaking its principle and without going backwards, refuse already emancipated men of colour who abound on its territory the same benefits that Switzerland granted to its *heimathlosen*? Instead of rejecting these men and afflicting them with indignities, must not all Anglo-Saxons, those of the North and those of the South, receive them in comradeship and welcome them as fellow citizens, equals and brothers? Now the consequence of that measure will be granting to blacks hitherto kept in servitude, along with freedmen, equal political rights.²

“In 1860, Tsar Alexander II of Russia, after freeing the peasants of his States, numbering more than twenty-five million souls, and bestowing upon them the enjoyment of such civil and political rights as the government of his empire provides, gave them all ownership of the land of which previously they were only serfs, reserving for himself the power to compensate the dispossessed nobles. – Will the American confederation do less for its emancipated blacks than Tsar Alexander, an autocrat, did for his peasants? Is it not prudent and just that it also bestows upon them land and ownership, so that they do not fall into a worse servitude than whence they came?

“The American confederation is called upon by the sequence of ideas which govern it and by

(Protestants and Mormons), the national character (Germanic and federalist) expressed by pact, and territory, interests and morals. At first glance, North America seems destined to form a great unitary Empire, comparable, even superior, to that of the Romans, the Mongols or the Chinese. But is it not also a marvellous thing that this continent has just fallen into the hands of the most federalist race due to its temperament, its genius and its aspirations, the Anglo-Saxon race? Let Mr. Lincoln teach his compatriots to overcome their revulsion; let him grant the blacks citizenship and at the same time declare war on [what creates] the proletariat, and the Union is saved. ² This echoes Proudhon's comments in *General Idea of the Revolution* (1851): “There will no longer be nationality, no longer fatherland, in the political sense of the words: they will mean only places of birth. Whatever a man's race or colour, he is really a native of the universe; he has citizen's rights everywhere.” (*Property is Theft!*, 597). (*Black Flag*)

the inevitability of its situation, to do even more: it must, upon pain of recrimination on the part of the Southern States, attack at its sources [what creates] the white proletariat, by providing possessions for the wage-workers [*possessionnant les salariés*] and organising, alongside political guarantees, a system of economic guarantees. It is up to the North to take the initiative on this reform, and lead the South by the force of example rather than by that of arms.

“Outside of that, the North’s hypocritical and unholy attack against the South can only lead to the ruin of all the States and the destruction of the Republic.”

At least Mr. Lincoln, obliged to take into account the aristocratic spirit and moral revulsions of the Anglo-Saxon race, is excusable to a certain extent, and the sincerity of his intentions must pardon his strange philanthropy. But the French, men trained in the school of Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Revolution, in whom the egalitarian sentiment must be innate, how did they not sense that the demand of the North entailed all these consequences? How can they be content with Mr. Lincoln’s semblance of emancipation? How do they have the courage to applaud the recent appeal for slaves to revolt, an appeal which is obviously made by a North desperate for a means of destruction, and which repudiates both the laws of war and the rights of peoples?... Where is the excuse of these so-called liberals? Do they not see that the feeling that drives them is not love of humanity, but the cold calculation of a hypocrite economist, who says to himself after comparing its costs: Certainly, it is more advantageous for the capitalist, for the head of industry, for property and the State whose interests here are united, to use *free* workers, who support themselves with their wages, than enslaved workers who give more trouble than wage-workers and produce proportionally less profit regardless of [the costs of] their subsistence?

These facts, these analogies and these considerations posed, here are the questions that I address to Fr. Morin.¹

The federative principle here appears closely linked to those of the social equality of races and the balance of

fortunes. The political problem, the economic problem and the problem of races are one and the same problem, to be solved by the same theory and the same jurisprudence.

Notice, with regard to *black workers*, that physiologists and ethnographers recognise them as being of the same species as whites; – that religion declares them, along with whites, children of God and of the Church, redeemed by the blood of the same Christ and consequently their spiritual brethren; – that psychology sees no difference between the constitution of the negro conscience and that of the white, no more than between

the comprehension of one and the other; – finally, [and] this is proven by daily experience, that with education and, if needed, interbreeding, that the black race can yield offspring as remarkable in talent, morality and industry as the white one can and that more than once already it has been an invaluable help in reinforcing and rejuvenating it.

I therefore ask M. Fr. Morin:

If the Americans, after forcibly removing the blacks from their African countries to enslave them on American soil, have the right today to expel those that they no longer want;

If this *deportation*, which only renews in an inverse direction the odious fact of the first

removal, does not constitute, amongst the so-called abolitionists, a crime equal to that of the slavers;

If, by a century of servitude, the Negroes have not acquired the right of use and of habitation on American soil;

If it is sufficient for the French proprietors to say to their proletarian compatriots, to all those who possess neither capital nor resources and who exist by the hiring of their arms, “The soil is ours; you do not own an inch of land, and we no longer need your services: go”; – for the proletarians to skedaddle;

If the Black, as free as the White by nature and by his human dignity, can, by recovering the possession of their momentarily lost person, be excluded from citizenship;

If this right is not acquired by the double fact of his recent emancipation and his prior residence;

¹ Frédéric Morin (1823-74) was a French republican and journalist who opposed the coup d’état of Louis-Napoleon

and stood as an opposition candidate in 1857 and 1863. (*Black Flag*)

If the condition of pariah, to which the Lincoln plan dooms the Black, would be no worse for this minority race than slavery;

If that derisory emancipation is not shameful for the North and does not morally defeat the claim of the South;

If *Federals* and *Confederates*, fighting only over the type of servitude, must not be declared equally blasphemers and renegades of the federative principle, and shunned by [other] nations;

If the European press, which by its incitements, by its unitarism and its anti-egalitarian tendencies, has become their accomplice in all this, does itself not deserve the stigma of public opinion?

And generalising my thought, I ask M. Fr. Morin:

If he believes that the inequality of faculties between people is such that it can legitimise inequality of prerogatives;

If inequality of fortunes, for which the inequality of faculties serves as a pretext and which creates in society such dreadful antagonisms, is not far more the work of privilege, cunning and chance, than that of Nature;

If the first duty of States is not therefore to repair, by institutions of mutuality and a

vast system of education, the insults of birth and the accidents of social life;

If it does not seem to him, therefore, that the principle of equality before the law must have as a corollary, 1) the principle of equality of races, 2) the principle of equality of conditions, 3) that of ever more approached, although never achieved, equality of fortunes;

If, according to what is happening before our eyes, it appears to him that those principles, the negation of every political, economic and social privilege, of every meaning of people and races, of every preference of fate, of every class superiority, can be seriously applied and pursued under a government other than a federative government;

If, finally, as far as logic, history and contemporary facts allow us to judge, is there no true incompatibility between Right and the destiny of mankind and the practices and aspirations of the unitary system?

As for me, immorality and servitude are what I have discovered at the bottom of this policy of unity, which is that of Mazzini and the Jacobins; which tomorrow will be that of President Lincoln, if a better inspiration does not come to

extract him and his compatriots from their fatal and ruthless prejudices.¹

the principle of equality before the law must have as a corollary, 1) the principle of equality of races, 2) the principle of equality of conditions, 3) that of ever more approached, although never achieved, equality of fortunes

“There will no longer be nationality, no longer fatherland, in the political sense of the words: they will mean only places of birth. Whatever a man’s race or colour, he is really a native of the universe; he has citizen’s rights everywhere.”

– General Idea of the Revolution

¹ It must be noted that, as Proudhon feared, the failure after the war to provide a solid economic footing for the freed slaves – most became wage-workers – is now considered a cause of the failure of Reconstruction. W. E. B. DuBois captured that failure well in 1935 when he wrote: “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery”. (*Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* [New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013], 26) Incidentally, this perspective was shared by many Negroes at

the time who “understood that their status after the war, whatever their situation legally, would depend on whether they owned the land they worked on or would be forced to be semislaves for others.” Nor should it be ignored as the Southern states “enacted ‘black codes’ which made the freed slaves like serfs” after the end of the Civil War. (Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-Present* [New York: HarperCollins Books, 2003], 196, 199). See, Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday Books, 2008). (*Black Flag*)

To workers

Passy, 8 March 1864¹

To workers,

You ask, citizens, what I think of the Manifesto of the Sixty workers which has appeared in the press? Above all, you are eager to know if, after having come out in May against candidatures of every sort, you should abide by that line or, on grounds of circumstance, support the election of a comrade deserving of your sympathies.

I had not been expecting, I confess, to be consulted by anyone on such a matter. I had thought the election campaign spent, and in retirement, my thoughts focused only upon mitigating its dismal effects insofar as I was able. But since, on grounds that strike me as quite personal, your confidence in my opinion has felt obliged to, so to speak, put me on the spot, I will not hesitate to answer your question, the more so as my thinking could scarcely be anything other than an interpretation of your own.

To be sure, I was delighted at the awakening of the socialist idea: in the whole of France just then, who more than myself was entitled to rejoice in it? To be sure, I hold, along with you and with the Sixty, that the working class is not represented and is entitled to representation: how could I believe otherwise? Does not workers' representation, today as in 1848, signal socialism's arrival in legislative, political and governmental terms?

We are told that since '89, there have been no more classes: that the notion of worker candidates tends to resurrect them: that, if a working man is acceptable as a candidate, just the way one would accept a sailor, an engineer, a scholar, a journalist, a lawyer, this is because that working man will, like his colleagues, represent society and not a specific class: that, otherwise, the fielding of this working man would be a step backwards, an illiberal, even a dangerous move, by virtue of the misgivings, the alarm, the hostility that it would inspire in the *bourgeois class*.

Such is the logic of the adversaries of the Manifesto, who do not even realise that they contradict themselves.

But, as I see it, it is precisely on account of its specific character, and as the manifestation of one class or caste – for I do not recoil from the word – that worker candidature has value: stripped of that, it would be meaningless.

What! Is it not a fact that, in spite of the Revolution, French society is profoundly split into two classes: one, which lives exclusively by its labours, and whose wages are generally less than 1,250 francs annually, for a

family of four, a sum that I take to be the rough average of the national product: another, which lives off something other than its labours, assuming that it does work, and lives off the income from its properties, capital, endowments, pensions, subsidies, shares, salaries, honours and stipends? Is it not a fact that, in terms of the division of wealth and produce, there are still, as once there were, two categories of citizen among us, commonly described as *bourgeoisie and plebs, capitalism and wage labour*? But the whole of our political organisation, political economy, industrial organisation, history, literature and society repose upon that distinction which only

bad faith and a foolish hypocrisy seem to deny.

The division of society into two classes – one class of waged workers, another of proprietors-capitalists-entrepreneurs – therefore enjoying indisputable *de facto* status, the implications of that ought not to come as a surprise to anyone: it is that there has always been some question as to whether that distinction did not also have a *de jure* existence: whether it fell within the province of nature, compatible with justice: whether it might not be possible to bring it to an end, which means contriving some amalgamation of the classes: in short, whether, by means of improved implementation of the laws of justice and economics, one might not successfully do away with a dismal distinction which every man would wish at heart to see eradicated?

Is it not a fact that, in terms of the division of wealth and produce, there are still, as once there were, two categories of citizen among us, commonly described as *bourgeoisie and plebs, capitalism and wage labour*?

¹ Translation by Paul Sharkey, included in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (AK Press, 2006). We have slightly revised the text and added a paragraph excluded originally (*Black Flag*)

That question, scarcely a new one, is what has been described in our day as the *social* question: it is the whole and all of SOCIALISM.

Well, now! What say the *Sixty*? They, for their part, are convinced that the social question can be resolved in an affirmative sense: with moderation and firmness, they note that for quite some time, it has been stricken from the agenda, that the time has come to re-table it: to that end, and as a signal or earnest of that resurrection, they propose that one of them stand as a candidate: that, by virtue of his being a working man and precisely because he is a working man, they reckon that he can represent the working class better than anyone else.

And these men are accused of designs upon the re-establishment of castes? Some would have them barred as reactionaries, professing dangerous opinions, from representation of the nation, and their Manifesto has even been denounced as inciting some citizens to hate their fellow-citizens! The press thunders, the supposedly democratic opposition shrieks its displeasure, and there are cries of importunity and recklessness and what not. There are dark hints about the police! With a show of consummate disdain, the question is posed whether the *Sixty* would claim to know more about their interests and their rights, and about defending them, than Messrs J. Favre, E. Ollivier, Pelletan, J. Simon, etc?¹ Contemptible...

Thus far at any rate, I am quite in agreement with you, citizens, and with the *Sixty*, and it is gratifying that not for a single moment did you imagine that I could feel differently than yourselves. Yes, class distinction enjoys a de facto existence in our democratic France, and it has yet to be proved entirely that this phenomenon is rooted in entitlement, albeit that there are no grounds for imputing it to anyone. Yes, except for 1848, national representation has been the prerogative of one of those classes: and, unless the representatives drawn from said class make a prompt commitment to effect the fusion sought, justice, common sense and universal suffrage require that the second of those classes be represented like the other, in proportion with its population numbers. In making that claim, the *Sixty* are not in any sense insulting the bourgeoisie, are not threatening it, but are standing up to it as youth would towards their elders, they are saying to it:

“For some forty years, the anomaly of which we complain has developed in the most disturbing way within the bourgeoisie itself; there too a division has occurred, perhaps more difficult to determine, but no less real. The bourgeoisie is no longer homogeneous; there is what is called the high bourgeoisie or financial, mercantile and industrial feudalism, and petit bourgeois,

or the middle class tipping more and more towards wage-labour [*salarariat*]. It is especially to the latter, to you, the middle class, with whom you are in closer contact, that we address ourselves. Your interests are the same as ours, your cause is our cause, your middle condition makes you intermediaries, natural arbiters between the two extreme categories of the nation. Accept our hands in alliance, and vote with us. What we demand is the fusion of classes, it is an economic reform that will allow us all to achieve, through work and intelligence, property, and that will keep us there...”

Such language, as candid as it is modest, ought to reassure the faintest of hearts: and the bourgeoisie, the middle class especially, would be ill-advised to be alarmed by it. Whether it knows it or not, its true ally, its saviour, is the people. So let it with good grace concede the workers’ entitlement to national representation and, I say again, not merely as citizens and *although workers*, but BECAUSE [they are] workers and members of the proletariat.

That said, let me move on to the second point. Whether, in the present circumstances, exercise of the eligibility right is indeed, as far as the working class is concerned, the best way of bringing about the reforms for which it sues, whether such a conclusion on the part of the Manifesto does not conflict with the aim its authors have set themselves, whether it is not at odds with their principles: in short, can socialism, under the current regime, do what it managed to do in 1848 without injury to its dignity and faith? Men of some import in the democracy, whom no one ever suspected of compromise with the enemy, who themselves refrained from voting, nevertheless reckoned it their duty, out of sympathy with the working class and by way of testimony to their distancing themselves from an opposition which was misunderstood, not to oppose the workers’ decision and to wish their candidature well. While acknowledging sentiments in which I share, I regret that I can make no such concession, and on this count I take issue with the *Sixty*.

Consider this: the imperial government, established by coup d’état, identifies as the prime cause of its success its defeat of red socialist democracy, that to this day that is still its *raison d’être*, which it has never overlooked that in its policy, and that there is at present nothing to indicate that it has any inclination nor indeed capacity to change. Under that government, the financial and industrial fiefdom, long incubated over the thirty-three years of the Restoration and the July monarchy, has completed its organisation and climbed into the saddle. It has supported the Empire, which has rewarded it for its sponsorship. The big companies have formed their

¹ Jules Favre (1809-1880), one of the leaders of the liberal opposition under the Second Empire. Emile Ollivier (1825-1913), ditto, and was later head of government of the so-called liberal Empire between 1867 and 1870. Pierre Marie

(1795-1870) former member of the provisional government of 1848 and organiser of the National Workshops. Jules Simon (1844-1896), philosopher and liberal politician. (*Black Flag*)

coalition: the middle class, the authentic expression of French genius, has found itself being ground down more and more in the direction of the proletariat.

The Republic, through the introduction of universal suffrage, provided Democracy with a moment of effervescence: but the conservative aristocracy soon recaptured the upper hand, and, come the coup d'état, it might be said that power was a foregone conclusion for the side that had best used the reaction against the socialist tendencies. On which basis we may say that, under the regime that has ruled over us since 1852, our ideas, if not our persons, have been, so to speak, placed outside of politics, outside of government, outside of the law. To none but us has access to the periodical press, the preserve of the *old parties*, been denied. Whereas sometimes a proposition inspired by our principles was put to the authorities, it quickly foundered – I know of what I speak – when rebuffed by contradictory interests. Confronted with a state of affairs where our destruction is the salvation of society and property, what can we do but accept our reprobation in silence, and, since the government has ventured to impose this draconian condition, separate ourselves radically from it? Entry into its precincts, where we may be sure to find all our enemies, old and new, defectors to the Empire and non-defectors, ministry folk and opposition folk, embracing the prescribed conditions, seeking representation in the legislative body – that would be an absurdity, an act of cowardice! All that we are permitted to do under the existing law is register a protest in great elections, through the negative-content of our bulletins. Bear this in mind – that in the system of compression by which democracy is oppressed, it is not such and such a financial measure, such and such an undertaking, such and such an expenditure, such and such an alliance, such and such a treaty, policy or law that we must debate: they have no need of us for that: our opinion is ruled null and void in advance. Such debates are the preserve of the *constitutional* opposition, friend or foe. For there is room for every view but ours in the Constitution: can you doubt it, after the brouhaha that erupted everywhere after publication of the Manifesto? Now, in order to exercise our separatism, we need neither representatives nor candidates: in legal terms, all we require is a single word, *veto*, the most vigorous message that universal suffrage can deliver.

Let us clarify our thought with a few examples:

**Now, in order to
exercise our
separatism, we need
neither representatives
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can deliver.**

May we, by word of mouth, in writing, or through the actions of men authentically ours, pledge fidelity to the 1852 Constitution, to which we see all our enemies, Legitimists, Orleanists, ex-Republicans, clericals agog to pledge themselves? No, we cannot, for that oath, injurious to our dignity, incompatible with our principles, would imply apostasy on our part, even should we remain, as so many others have after their oath, the personal enemies of the Emperor, an apostasy. The Constitution of '93, by enshrining the sovereignty of the people, swept away the civic oath required under the '91 Constitution to these three terms: *Nation, Law, King*. Let Napoleon follow that example and then we shall see. Meanwhile, no representatives and no candidates!

There are some who say that the pledge imposed upon deputies is meaningless: that it is not binding upon the maker, provided that, in the act of making it, he understands that his pledge is being made, albeit under the name of the Emperor, to the nation: that, furthermore, the pledge does not imply any support for imperial policy. Finally, that it is not for electors to overcome this scruple, which is a matter of concern to the candidates only. In bygone times, the Jesuits alone possessed the secret of salving consciences: Has that secret now been passed down

to the Ecole Normale? Such moralists, now matter how high their reputation for virtue may stand, ought to be deemed the most infamous human creatures by the socialist democracy. So, no representatives and no candidates!

Just now, I referred to the periodical press monopoly introduced and especially directed against us. From the outcome of the May elections, we know what it cost us to have had a week's dalliance with it. Do you think that abolishing ministerial authorisation would be enough to do away with that monopoly? Then you are well wide of the mark!... We want neither hide nor hair of a regime that has been depraving our political morals, misrepresenting ideas and misleading opinion for twelve years now. Authorising such corruption of the public mind – be it for six months, for a day, or through the election of a socialist deputy – would amount to declaring ourselves accomplices of that corruption and unworthy ever to be heard. So, no representatives, no candidates!

We want no conditions upon the exercise of universal suffrage, and why? Not just because natural population clusters have been subverted by arbitrary constituency

boundaries: we leave it to the Imperial government's competitors to bleat while they await their chance to imitate it. Nor is it because of administrative interference either. In meetings summoned to decide the government's fate, those who rail loudest against such interference are careful to say that, in the minister's shoes, they would not refrain from it. Chiefly because, with a monopoly over a tame press, with centralistic prejudices in the ascendant, with the rarity and inadequacy of summons, with double, triple, quintuple and decuple candidatures and with that absurd principle – of which electioneers are so enamoured – that a true representative of France should not be known to his electors: with the mishmash of categories, opinions and interests, things are so combined as to smother the democratic spirit in its corporative and local manifestations, as well as in its national manifestations, with the masses denied a voice and reduced to bleating flocks, never having learned to make their presence felt and to have their say.

To call for the emancipation of the plebs and then to consent, in the plebs' name, to a method of election which is tantamount to rendering it seditious or dumb. What a paradox! So, no representatives and no candidates!

Note, citizens, that in all of this I am sticking to politics alone and deliberately steering clear of economic and social considerations. How many further arguments I could adduce against this candidatures fantasy, which would assuredly not have possessed the people, had we been able in time to explain this proposition, the truth of which you are doubtless starting to discern: that an opposition vote is one thing, a protest vote another and a duly recorded constitutional vote, bearing the stamp of the returning officer another, and a democratic and social vote quite another. In May 1863, the people thought it was voting for itself and as sovereign: it voted only for its bosses and as client. As for the rest, I know that by now you have no illusions left: the worker candidates, if my sources are accurate, say as much themselves. So, what good are representatives! What use are candidates?

Everything that has been done since November 24, 1860, in government and in opposition, indicates a reversion to the regime of 1830, with the sole modification that the title of emperor is to replace that of king, and the Bonaparte dynasty replace that of the Bourbons. Leaving to one side the dynastic issue, with which we need not concern ourselves, can we democrats lend a hand with this about-turn? It would be a betrayal of our past to worship that which we have put to the torch, or put to the torch that which we have worshipped. Now, that is necessarily what must happen if we let ourselves be represented in a legislative body, among an opposition three fourths of which have come around to the idea of a constitutional, bourgeois monarchy. So, no representatives and no candidates!

Many among the workers fail to appreciate clearly these deep-seated incompatibilities between the present or forthcoming political regime, into which they are invited to step, and their democratic social aspirations. This will help them get to grips with the thing:

It is axiomatic that in a country racked by revolutions such as ours is, succeeding governments, although their slogans may change, still close ranks against a third party, and take turns at the duties imposed upon them by this redoubtable inheritance. Now, that is a condition which, should the opportunity arise, we are prohibited from accepting. We – the outlaws of 1848, 1849 and 1852 – cannot agree to the undertakings, deals and all the acts of power devised with an eye to our extermination. That would amount to a betrayal of ourselves, and the world should know that. At present, the public debt, consolidated and outstanding, with growth rates at three percent, stands at 14 thousand 600 millions.

So much for the financial expression of charges accrued since 1789 and bequeathed to one after another of our various governments. It is the plainest and most clear-cut product of our political systems, the most splendid bequest to posterity of seventy five years of conservative, bourgeois rule. If need be, we would assume responsibility for that debt up until 24 June 1848: but we are within our rights to repudiate it after that. And since it is unacceptable that the nation should be declared bankrupt, it would be up to the bourgeoisie to pay off the residue. We await its decision. So, citizens, no representatives and no candidates!

In the Manifesto of the *Sixty* there is an unfortunate choice of terms. In *politics*, they profess to be in agreement with the opposition: this is an unduly large concession, inspired by the generous intention of bridging, in part at least, the gulf separating democracy from its representatives, and it must be put down to a slip of the pen. In all sincerity, we can no more be happy with the opposition's politics than with its economic and social ideas: if the latter be mistaken, how could the former be above reproach? The opposition's politics is not the criticisms which parties fling at each other regarding their actions, such as the Mexican expedition, the state of Algeria, the swelling budget, etc.: nor is it the banal demonstrations in favour of freedom, the philanthropic jeremiads, the sighs heaved over Poland, or the more or less explicit support for the trade agreement. On all such matters of pure detail, we should have our reservations about the opposition's criticisms, not just as socialists and communists, but as politicians and democrats.

The opposition's politics is above all its declared anti-socialism, which necessarily places it in the reactionary camp against us. Messrs. Marie and Jules Favre have said as much, in the opening debate, and in a tone never to be forgotten: *We are no socialists!* At which words the entire Assembly erupted into applause: not a single

voice was heard to object. So we are within our rights to say that, on the very principle of their politics, members of the so-called democratic opposition are in agreement with the government: they outdo the government itself in their anti-socialism: how could they fail to become ministers some day?

The opposition's politics is its love for parliamentarism, which will draw it willy-nilly into a bloc with the imperialist majority, under the 1830 arrangement: it is its enthusiasm for centralisation and unification that shines through all its speeches, in spite of all its declaiming about municipal freedoms and sycophancy towards Parisians. Remember, a high degree of centralisation alone can satisfy high ambitions and you will notice that, should France ever have the misfortune to find opposition personnel summoned to take their turn at overseeing this much-cherished centralisation.

The opposition's politics is its constitutional dynastic oath: it is the solidarity with the actions of the government to which it consents, if only by drawing its deputy's stipend: it is the compliments, the praises, the thanksgiving which it mixes with its criticisms, the share it claims of its successes and glories.

The opposition's politics is its conduct in the May 1863 elections. When we saw it, once it had usurped the oversight of the count, trampling suffrage underfoot, fielding everywhere candidates utterly irreconcilable with the spirit of the Revolution, showing itself to be more scheming, more tyrannical, more corruptive than the administration, against which it then strove to focus the public revulsion, so as to whiten its own record. Ah, the elections of May and June 1863, fought by an opposition that posed as puritanical: these elections overturned the result of 1851: have you considered that, citizens?

That is what the opposition's politics is about. And you would send your colleagues to join it? No, no! No representatives and no candidates!

To those who would now take us to task for halting the popular upsurge, and who might still have the courage to flaunt the title of men of action which they awarded themselves nine months ago, let me answer that the *inactive*, the *inert*, the *slumberers* are themselves, whose splendid discipline has served the views of the reaction, and at a single stroke, cost democracy thirty years of civic virtue, sacrifices and propaganda. What, then, has this rigorous action produced?

1. A thunderous declaration from Messrs. Marie and Jules Favre: *We are no socialists!* Yes! Your representatives have disowned, reneged upon you, as they did in 1848: they declare war on you and you congratulate yourselves upon your *actions!* Are you waiting until they spit in your face?

2. The lamentable result of the oath. The democracy, led by its new tribunes, fondly imagined that the oath of

obedience to Napoleon III, and of fidelity to the 1851 Constitution, could not but be a sublime perjury on the lips of its representatives. It was intoxicated with this notion, and it has sadly deceived itself. Our sworn deputies will no more have the courage to breach their oath than to keep it. Can you see them beating about the bush, sustaining heavy losses, swimming between the waters of treachery and fidelity? Traitors to democracy when in cahoots with the Empire, traitors to the Empire when closeted with democracy. Privy councillors and table companions of His Majesty, are still more honest and less hypocritical. Thanks however to this policy, the Restoration of the Orleanist system, with M. Thiers at the helm, is visibly underway. M. Thiers and his cronies, posing monarchy as in principle essential for the organisation of power, and declaring themselves to be, by virtue of the very same principle, indifferent as to the dynasty chosen, that being a simple question of personalities according to them, are perfectly at home here. Nothing prevents them from taking the oath, and the more that Napoleon affords them cause to keep it, the more content they are. Also, since the taking of all these oaths, a matter of such high significance and import for the Orleanists, but which the country can watch democrats do only with disgust, the party of constitutional, parliamentary monarchy has bounced back completely: supported by the weightiest and most enlightened faction of the Bonapartists, it believes that its victory is assured: it has secured over the Republican party the only advantage it has retained since 1852, the advantage of logic and political honesty.

3. The conclusion to this deplorable intrigue?

Democracy, the preponderance of which should have been established once and for all by the 1864 poll, momentarily hailed as sovereign following the election of the new incumbents, now no longer matters, pending the advent of new order, except as the instrument of a political re-plastering job, against which our every effort must henceforth be deployed in defending ourselves.

As for ourselves, whom some have dared to label *idlers*, *puritans*, *stick-in-the-muds*, *eunuchs*, sure in the knowledge that we could not reply, this is what we have done and what we have achieved. Our success has been splendid enough for us not to lose heart:

At first we told ourselves:

“In our own right and ante-dating the 1852 constitution, we have the right to vote. We have the right to vote or not to vote.

“If we vote, we are free to choose between the administration's candidate and the opposition's candidate, just as we are to protest against each by selecting a candidate of a hue opposed to them both (which is what the authors of the Manifesto propose).

“Finally, we have the right to protest against election of any sort, either by depositing blank votes or by voting

for some citizen who would not meet all of the criteria for eligibility, who, say, might not have taken the oath, if in our judgment electoral law, as practiced, does not offer sufficient guarantees for universal suffrage, or on any other grounds.”

The point, therefore, was to find out what would be the most useful way for us to vote. Those who have argued that the vote must necessarily designate a candidate, that universal suffrage by itself was bereft of meaning, and that it derived all of its value from the choosing of a man – those people have overwhelmed the public, and they have lied.

We have opted then for the protest vote, by means of blank vote or equivalent, and this was the outcome:

Out of 64 departments we have been able to monitor, there were 63,000 protest votes – 4,556 of them in Paris: proportionally speaking, that makes around 90,000 for the whole of France.

We would have numbered 100,000 in Paris and a million across the 89 departments, had we been allowed to make our voice heard and explain our thinking.

Those scattered votes were enough to sink several candidates from the so-called democratic opposition. They might have sunk them all, and the government might have been left all alone with its elected deputies, facing a protesting democracy, had the monopoly press not smothered our voice.

Do you believe that those 90,000 voters who, in spite of their enforced silence, in spite of calumny, in spite of regimentation of the people, without having managed to communicate or reach agreement, managed to stand firm and, by their protest, preserve the inviolability of democracy, are a minority without virtue? Do you think that this party, seemingly weak in numerical terms, lacks energy? There were *twenty* of us and our call has been heard over the opposition’s racket by 90,000 men. Suppose that the 153,000 in the capital, who cast their votes for the *newcomers*, had registered a protest as we did, do you think that that protest would have had less of an impact than the harangues with which the opposition has regaled us? What have you to say about that now, citizens? Faced by a *veto* from 160,000 voters, augmented by some of the 86,000 who purely and simply *abstained*, would the administration’s candidates with their 82,000 votes have been bragging about representing the capital? Would we be less informed as to our financial situation, the European situation and electoral strengths and so many other matters about which the government and its friends are so wont to prattle, simply because we might not have heeded the pleas of a half dozen lawyers? Would it not be a thousand times better for democracy’s honour and its future prospects, had we left the government to debate with its own representatives and to wash its dirty linen at home, as Napoleon I used to say, than to have

besmirched our consciences, hitherto unblemished by oath?

Democrats, your line of conduct has been determined for you. Over the past 15 years, a blind reaction has busied itself casting you out of the law, out of the government, out of politics. The situation in which you have been placed is not of your making: it is the handiwork of a conspiracy by the *old parties*. They are prompted by a single thought, and that thought is incompatible with achievement of that political, economic and social justice, for which you yearn with all your might. A single oath unites them, the symbol of their confederacy, a snare set for the vanity and zeal of democrats. It is scarcely your fault if, hemmed in by their concert, you are condemned to resort to reprisals against them. Which is why I tell you with all of the vigour and all of the sadness my soul can muster: separate yourselves from him who was the first to stand apart, even as the Roman people [in another age] stood apart from its aristocrats. *Separamini popule meus*. It is through separation that you will win: no representatives, and no candidates!

What! Having declared yourselves the equals of the bourgeoisie, the repositories of the new thinking, the hope of generations unborn: having displayed the grandeur of your destiny to the world, can you not devise anything better than to pick up, sub-contracted, those aged bourgeois institutions, the futility and corruption of which have been pointed out to you a hundred times over by the government itself? Your dreams would be of *doctrine*, the balance of representation and cant! Given the chance to be original, you would act as blatant imitators. That, take it from me, is merely the logical conclusion to the Manifesto of the *Sixty*: the labour democracy declaring by its vote that it is abandoning opposition and that, until better times arrive, is renouncing, not the vote, but having itself represented. Through this manifesto, the labour democracy has struck a patrician pose: by electing a representative, you would fall back into the ranks of the liberated. Is there an outstanding man among you? Vote him a civic crown, do not make a prostitute, do not make a candidate of him.

For my own part, I do not think that I need tell you that I abide by my resolutions.

Had I no other grounds for perseverance than remembrance of events in which I have been implicated, things in which I have participated, hopes that I helped arouse, out of respect and in remembrance of so many citizens who have suffered and perished since 1848, so that the people’s liberties may succeed, and whom I have encountered inside prison and in exile, I would repudiate all compromise and I would say: no representatives, no candidates!

Fraternal greetings to you, citizens.

P.J. Proudhon

Reviews

The Views of Proudhon

Sylvia Pankhurst

Workers' Dreadnought, 5 and 12 April 1924

[I]

The Freedom Press is to be congratulated upon the republication of P. J. Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*¹, originally published in 1851.

Proudhon's exposition of capitalist society as he saw it at that time is remarkably true and vivid, and we cannot fail to read it with interest and appreciation, though we must differ from him strongly in a great part of his conclusions. We differ emphatically from his desire to retain private ownership and petty trading banks, etc., on a basis of petty capitalism. On the other hand, his denunciation of the tyranny of majority rule and of the centralised bureaucracy advocated by the State Socialists is unanswerable, and the industrial Communism of the future must avoid the evils he justly condemns if it is to provide a satisfactory social basis. Proudhon's ironical advice to the reactionaries, if they desire to retain their power, is interesting. He says to them:

“It will be necessary, if you expect your work to stand:

- (1) To declare the state of siege general, absolute, and for an unlimited time;
- (2) To decree the deportation beyond the seas of a hundred thousand individuals;
- (3) To double the effective strength of the army, and to keep it constantly on a war footing;
- (4) To increase the garrisons and the police, to arm all the fortresses, to build in each district a strong castle, to interest the military in the reaction by making the army an endowed and ennobled caste, which can partly recruit itself;
- (5) To rearrange the people in corporations of arts and crafts, no one accessible to any other; to suppress free competition; to create in commerce, industry, agriculture, property, finance, a privileged class which will Join hands with the aristocracy of the army and the Church.

(6) To expurgate or burn nine-tenths of the books in the libraries, books of science, philosophy, and history, and to do away with every vestige of the intellectual movement for four centuries; to commit the direction of studies and the archives of civilisation to the Jesuits exclusively;

(7) To increase the taxes two hundred million dollars, and issue new loans in order to cover these expenses; and to erect a special and inalienable privilege for the support of the new nobility, as well as of the churches, seminaries, and convents.”

In his seventh point Proudhon shows that he understood the importance to reaction of creating a strong state, and the reaction in all Europe has certainly done what he suggested in this respect.

Proudhon's fifth point is still more striking. The privileged trading class, which would join hands with the aristocracy of the army and the church, has long been an immense factor in our midst. The Stock Exchange and the big business enterprises are now as much the profession of the aristocrat as the Church and the army, though it was not so in Proudhon's day.

Remarkable, too, is his advice to the reaction “to arrange the people in corporations of arts and crafts, no one accessible to any other.”

The craft unions which display so conspicuous a lack of solidarity the one with the other and break up the unity of the working class, are here visualised for us.

Analysing the Revolution of 1789, Proudhon justly says:

“The feudal order having been abolished on the night of the 4th of August, and the principles of liberty and civil equality pro-claimed, the consequence was that in future society must be organised, not for politics and war, but for work. What in fact was the feudal organisation?” It was one entirely military. What is work? The negation of fighting. To

¹ “General Idea of the Revolution” – *Freedom Press* [1923].

abolish feudalism, then, meant to commit ourselves to a perpetual peace, not only foreign but domestic. By this single act all the old politics between State and State, all the systems of European equilibrium, were abrogated; the same equality, the same independence, which the Revolution promised to bring about among individuals must exist between nation and nation, province and province, city and city...

“It was evident that the problem of the Revolution lay in erecting everywhere the reign of equality and industry.”

Proudhon points out that after the French Revolution there was a considerable impetus in agriculture and industry which in all countries, and especially in our own, was on the eve of new developments. He argues that it was in the field of political economy that the efforts of the Revolution should have been exerted, but this was not understood by those who secured the leadership:

“All their ideas were of politics only. The counter-revolutionary forces aiding, the revolutionary party, forced for the moment to place itself on the defensive and to organise itself for war, the nation was again delivered into the hands of warriors and lawyers.”

All this emphasises for us the need that in the coming social changes that the industrial workers shall be organised at the point of production; able to take charge of the essential services so that they may not fall into the hands of parasitic exploiters.

Proudhon continues:

“One might say that nobility, clergy, and monarchy had disappeared only to make way for another governing set of Anglomaniac constitutionaries, classic republicans, militaristic democrats, all infatuated with the Romans and Spartans, and, above all, very much so with themselves. On the other hand, caring but very little for the real needs of the country; which, understanding nothing of what was going on, permitted itself to be half destroyed at their leisure, and finally attached itself to the fortune of a soldier. . . . The revolutionaries failed in their mission after the fall of the Bastille, as they have failed since the abdication, of Louis Philippe, and for the same

reasons: the total lack of economic ideas, their prejudice in favour of government, and the distrust of the lower classes which they harboured . . .

“ . . . it necessarily followed that the new society, scarcely conceived, should remain in embryo; that, instead of developing according to economic lairs, it should languish in constitutionalism; that its life should be a perpetual contradiction, that, in place of the ordinary condition, which is characteristic of it, it should exhibit everywhere systematic corruption and legal inefficiency; finally, that the power which is the expression of this society, reproducing with the most scrupulous

fidelity the antimony of its principles, should find itself continually in the position of fighting with the people, and the people in continual need of attacking power.”

Analysing the “chaos of economic forces“ that grew up after the Revolution, Proudhon says:

“I call certain principles of action *economic forces*, such as the division of labour, competition, collective force, exchange, Credit, property, etc., which are to labour and to wealth what the destruction of classes, the representative system,

monarchical heredity, administrative centralisation, the judicial hierarchy, etc., are to the State.”

The characterisation is acute, but as we shall presently observe, Proudhon did not see that see what was required to produce an equalitarian society was to sweep away all of these save the division of labour on a basis not of profit making, but of mutual service to secure abundance for all and congenial life and occupation for every individual.

A scathing account of capitalist production in his time is given by Proudhon in words which are still brilliantly apt, though the justification for them has been intensified.

On the division of labour he says:

“Without division of labour the use of machines would not have gone beyond the most ancient and most common utensils. . . . The French Revolution itself, lacking an out-let, would have been but a sterile revolt; it would have accomplished nothing. But, on the other hand, by division of labour, the product of labour

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mounts to tenfold, a hundredfold, political economy rises to the height of philosophy, the intellectual level of nations is continually raised. . . .

“. . . This economic force was left to all the overturns caused by chance and by interest. The division of labour, becoming always more minute, and remaining without counterpoise, the workman has been given over to a more and more degrading subjection to machinery. That is the effect of the division of labour when it is applied as practised in our days, not only to make industry incomparably more productive, but at the same time to deprive the worker in mind and body of all the wealth which he creates for the capitalist and the speculator.”

Proudhon writes as one who sees the factory system growing up, and is able to compare it with the home craftsmanship it is displacing. He quotes also M. de Tocqueville:

“In proportion to the more complete application of the principle of the division of labour, the workman becomes weaker, more limited, and more dependent.”

J. B. Say is also quoted:

“It may be said that the division of labour is a skilful mode of employing the power of man; that it adds prodigiously to the products of society; but that it subtracts something from the capacity of each man taken individually.”

The coming of machines, like, for instance, the linotype, which might require as much or more skill in the operator than the hand process, was not visualised by these writers, nor the solidarity of the factory workers. The terrible hardship which the coming of the machines meant to the workers of the time is indicated in the following passages:

“The more the value of the worker falls, and the demand for labour diminishes, the lower are wages and the greater is poverty. And it is not a few hundreds of men, but millions, who are the victims of this economic perturbation.

“In England, through the division of labour and the power of machinery, the number of workmen has been observed to diminish by a third, by a half, by three-quarters, by five-sixths; and the wages decreasing in like proportion fall from 30 pence a day to fivepence and threepence. Throughout entire provinces the proprietors have driven out useless mouths. Everywhere first women, then children have taken the place of men in manufacture. Consumption being unable to keep pace with production among an impoverished people, the latter is obliged to

wait; and regular out-of-work periods are the result – of six weeks, three months, and six months of each year. Statistics of these periods of idleness of Parisian workmen have recently been published by one of them, Pierre Vincard; the details are heartrending. The smallness of the wages being in proportion to the time of idleness, the conclusion is reached that certain workmen who earn 20 cents a day must live on to, because they are idle for six months.”

Philanthropic conservatives, says Proudhon, charge the industrial system with being at fault, and desire to go back to the feudal farming period, but he declares that it is not industry which should be blamed but economic chaos.

COMPETITION.

Proudhon, lacking in certain respects the power to visualise the ultimate tendencies of economic forces which have possessed, regards competition as both right and necessary. Production for use as opposed to production for sale did not appeal to him as the ultimate solution of the evils which distressed him. He says:

“*Competition* . . . is one of the most powerful factors of industry . . . one of the most valuable guarantees. Partly for the sake of it the first Revolution was brought about. The workmen’s unions, established at Paris some years since, have recently given it a new sanction by establishing among themselves piecework and abandoning, after their experience of it, the absurd idea of the equality of wages. Competition is, moreover, the law of the market, the spice of trade, the salt of labour. To suppress competition is to suppress liberty itself.”

Proudhon is called an anarchist; yet whilst his desire to preserve individual enterprise and to avoid collective interference was so strong that he advocated the retention of production for sale. Yet he desired such legal regulation of competition, and of other features of production for sale, as would have been impossible of application and enforcement save by a strong government machinery. He says:

“Competition, lacking legal forms and superior regulating intelligence, has been perverted in turn like the division of labour.”

Proudhon recognises that in practice competition has

“ended in building up a mercantile and land aristocracy, a thousand times more rapacious than the old aristocracy of the nobility. Through competition all the profits of production go to capital; the consumer, without suspecting the frauds of commerce, is fleeced by the speculator, and the condition of the workers is made more and more precarious.”

CREDIT.

Proudhon, desirous of retaining production for sale, therefore of necessity desires to retain money and credit. Indeed he says:

“Of all economic forces the most vital, in a society reconstructed for industry by revolution, is credit.”

THE FINANCIAL POWER.

He complains that the legislature has not regulated credit, and wisely observes:

“The FINANCIAL power, far greater than the executive, legislative, and judicial, has never had the honour of mention in our various charters. Handed over by a decree of the Empire on 23rd of April, 1803, to a company of revenue farmers, it has remained until now in the condition of a hidden power; hardly anything can be found relating to it except a law of 1807, fixing the rate of interest at 5 per cent. . . . The Government, while sacrificing the country, did not spare itself; it treated itself as it treated others... .

“What has been the result of this in-credible negligence?”

“In the first place, forestalling and usury being practised upon coin by preference, coin being at the same time the tool of industrial transactions and the rarest of merchandise, and consequently the safest and most profitable, dealing in money was rapidly concentrated in the hands of a few monopolists, whose fortress is the Bank.

“Thereupon the country and the State were made the vassals of a coalition of capitalists.

“Thanks to the tax imposed by this bankocracy upon all industrial and agricultural industry, property has already been mortgaged for two billion dollars, and the State for more than one billion.

“The interest paid by the nation for this double indebtedness, with costs, renewals, commissions, and discounts on loans included, amounts to at least 240 million dollars.

“This enormous sum of 240 millions does not yet express all that the producers have to pay to the financial exploitation. We should add from 140 to 160 millions for discounts, advances, delays in payments, dividends, obligations under private seal, court expenses, etc.

“Property fleeced by the Bank has been obliged to follow the same course in its relations with industry, to become a usurer in turn towards labour; thus farm rent and house rent have reached a prohibitive rate, which drives the

cultivator from the field and the workman from his home.

“So much that to-day they whose labour has created everything cannot buy their own products, nor obtain furniture, nor own a habitation, nor even say : This house, this garden, this vine; this field are mine.

“On the contrary, it is an economic necessity in the present system of credit, and with the growing disorganisation of industrial forces, that the poor man, working harder and harder, should be always poorer, and the rich man, without working, always richer.”

That exposition of the capitalism of that time is true in the main essentials to-day. The evils of the bankocracy were perhaps more easily realised in those days of its rapid emergence and rise to power than at the present time, when all men are thoroughly accustomed to it.

PARASITISM.

Proudhon continues:

“If we may believe the estimate of a skilled economist, M. Chev , out of the two billions of value produced every year, one and one-fifth billions are taken away by parasites; that is to say by finance, by predacious property, and by the budget and its satellites. The balance, perhaps four-fifths of a billion, remains for its producers. Another able economist, M. Chevalier, dividing the estimated product of the country by its 36 million inhabitants, has found that the income per head per day was an average of 13 cents; and as from this figure must be deducted enough to pay interest, rent, taxes, and the expenses which they involve. M. de Morogues, yet another learned economist, has concluded that for a large part of the population daily consumption was less than 5 cents. But since rents, the same as taxes, continually increase, while through economic organisation work and wages diminish, it follows that, according to the aforesaid economists, the material comfort of the working classes follows a decreasing progression, which may be represented by this series of numbers : 65, 60, 55, 50, 45, 40, 35, 30, 25, 20, 15, 10, 5, 0, – 5, 10, – 15, etc.”

The fact that the worker’s standard cannot be permanently depressed beneath his subsistence level and some other factors have, of course, modified this estimate of Proudhon. Nevertheless, the estimate he quotes of M. Chev , giving 6-10ths of parasitism, would have to be increased to-day.

The solution offered by Proudhon is a great reduction of the price of credit; a solution, remember, which could only be maintained by a perpetual struggle with the

capitalist waged by a strong and vigilant government, not subject to capitalist influences. The solution is actually impracticable.

CAPITALIST GOVERNMENT.

In attacking the capitalist, Proudhon points out that the public debt of France rose from 12,661,532 dollars in 1814 to 54,200,000 dollars in 1851, and that the budget rose from 117,000,000 dollars in 1802 to 33,436,222 dollars in 1848. Between 1830 and 1848 the naval and military expenses cost 1,501,000,000 dollars, while those of public instruction were only 46,560,400.

Regarding taxation Proudhon justly observes:

“The capitalist pays nothing. . . . What one of the workers would not esteem himself lucky if he were granted 400 dollars income upon the sole condition that he should give up a quarter of it in redemption?”

In a previous article we discussed some aspects of Proudhon’s views relative to the rising Capitalist system as he surveyed it in 1851. The solutions he proposed for the evils of the system he suggested should be brought about by Parliamentary measures. His programme was as follows:

1. The Bank of France was to be decreed not the property of the State, but an institution of public utility, and the company was to be dissolved.

Henceforth the capital of the bank was to be furnished by its customers and it should only serve the interests of its customers. Proudhon proposed that the interest should be $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. only.

The National Debt was to be wiped out, if possible, by decreeing that, though interest on it would be paid as before, this would not really be interest, but would come off the principal, which would be reduced by every payment.

Private debts, loans, mortgages, etc., were to be repaid by annual payments of 5 per cent. if under a certain amount, and 10 per cent. if above that amount.

The rent of buildings was to be converted into purchase money; that is to say, whoever paid rent for twenty years was to own the building. Land was to be bought in the same manner.

The buildings were finally to pass under the control of the town, which should guarantee all citizens a domicile at cost price. The land should pass to the community and charge the owner who works it an economic rent according to its extent and value. Proudhon would have it arranged that the conditions of land cultivation should be equal to all, but in spite of his desire his system does not appear to insure that.

And again:

“In fact, whenever the latter (the capitalist) is put down on the books of the assessor for any amount whatever, or pays the duties established by the fiscal authorities on objects of consumption, it is clear that, as his income is composed solely of the interest upon his capital, and not by the exchange of his products, his income remains free from taxation, inasmuch as it is only the producer pays.”

Having laid down the dictum that only the producer pays, Proudhon is illogical in his contention that a single tax on property draw the tax from capital without affect labour.

[With Proudhon’s views on the social contract *versus* majority rule, and on associated labour, we shall deal next week.]

[II]

Proudhon visualises a society mainly composed of small agriculturalists. Two-thirds of the French population, he says, are interested in land owning, and “even this proportion must increase.” He regards agricultural labour as the most noble of occupations.

To him agriculture is essentially small agriculture; he declares that agricultural labour rejects the society form, and asserts: “Never have peasants been seen to form a society for the cultivation of their fields.” Large scale agriculture is indeed outside his purview, but he recognises the necessity of large scale industry, and in respect of it finds himself obliged to modify his individualism, saying:

“The degree of associative tendency among workers must be in relation to the economic relations which unite them, so that where these relations are appreciable or insignificant, no account need be taken of them; where they predominate and control, they must be regarded.”

We can all agree to that, but we shall find in examining the proposition that not only has division of labour enormously increased since Proudhon’s day, but that even in Proudhon’s time the economic relations of the various sections of the community were much more closely interlocked than in some passages of his book he seems disposed to imply.

Though he recognises no reason for co-operation of land workers in the carrying out of their work, Proudhon advocates the paying of economic rent to the community for services to be rendered by it, agricultural banks and the maintenance of a rural police force under the control of the County Councils – a necessary accompaniment of the private property system from which he refuses wholly to break away.

On the land Proudhon probably visualised no hired workers, but each farm worked by a single family of parents and children. The hard narrow life of unremitting toil imposed upon two adults who have everything to do for a house and farm and family of young children was apparently so normal in Proudhon's eyes that he does not even refer to it. Whether the family may remain together as its children become adults and extends into a clan for associated labour is a question not mentioned by Proudhon, or whether if it does so a patriarchal tyranny or a mutual co-operation is to regulate the toil.

Recognising the co-operation of many workers as a growing necessity of industry, Proudhon discusses how this co-operation is to be achieved. He realises that either the worker must be a mere employee or he must become an associate having a voice in the Council. So far so good, but Proudhon desires the council of workmen to co-operate for the sale of their product. That is where, of course, we must differ from him. We sympathise with his desire for the autonomy of the workers, for their freedom to organise and originate in producing the product, but we regret his tenacious clinging to the production for profit principle. He says:

“A railway, a mine, a factory, a ship, are to the workers who use them what a hive is to the bees, at once their tool and their home, their country, their territory, their property.”

Yet the bees are producing for their community; they are by no means making a profit from each other.

The relationship he desires to establish between the industry and the community Proudhon sets forth as follows:

1. “Large scale industry may be likened to a new land, discovered, or suddenly created out of the air, by the social genius; to which society sends a colony to take possession of it to work it, for the advantage of all.
2. “This colony will be ruled by a double contract, that which gives it title, establishes its property, and fixes its rights and obligations towards the mother country, and the contract which unites the different members among themselves, and determines their rights and duties.

He realises that either the worker must be a mere employee or he must become an associate having a voice in the Council. So far so good, but Proudhon desires the council of workmen to co-operate for the sale of their product. That is where, of course, we must differ from him.

3. “Towards Society, of which it is a creation and a dependence, this working company premises to furnish always the products and services which are asked of it. at a price as nearly as possible that of cost, and to give the public the advantage of all desirable betterments and improvements.

4. “To this end the working company adjures all combinations, submits itself to the law of competition, and holds its books and records at the disposition of Society, which, upon its part, reserves the power of dissolving the working company as the sanction of its right of control. •

5. “Toward the individuals and families whose labour is the subject of the association, the company makes the following rules:

“That every individual employed in the Association, whether man, woman, child, old man, head of department, assistant, head workman or apprentice, has an undivided share in the property of the company

6. “That he has a right to fill any position of any grade in the company, according to suitability or sex, age, skill, and length of employment.

7. “That his education, instruction and apprenticeship should therefore be so directed that, while permitting him to do his share of unpleasant and disagreeable tasks, they may also give variety of work and knowledge, and may assure him, from the period of maturity, an encyclopaedic aptitude and a sufficient income.

8. “That all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members.

9. “That pay is to be proportioned to the nature of the position, the importance of the talents and the extent of the responsibility.

10. “That each member shall participate in the gains and losses of the company in proportion to his services.

11. “That each member is free to leave the company on settling his account and paying what he may owe; and reciprocally, the company may take in new members at any time.”

That is a much more complete, logical and workmanlike plan for organising industry on a community basis than most of the Reformists who pose as intellectual Socialists are capable of today. It is, however, vitiated its adherence to the wage system and production for sale and profit.

Let us regard the scheme again and alter some of its clauses. Let us delete from Clause 2 the words “that which establishes its-property.”

From Clause 3 delete from the words “at a price as nearly as possible that of cost” down to the end of the clause.

Clause 4 is by no means satisfactory, but let us delete the first part of it stating that the company “abjures all combinations and submits itself to the law of competition.”

From Clause 5 delete the words “share in the property of the company” and substitute “in organising the workshop and its products.”

From Clause 7 delete “and a sufficient income.”

Delete Clauses 9 and 10 in their entirety.

Delete Clause 11 and substitute that that worker may leave the workshop at will.

Transformed thus, the workshop plan is more in accordance with the Communist idea. Since, however, Communism aims at providing plenty for all, in drafting any industrial scheme it must include provision for harmonising the production of the various workshops in order that the total product may be in accordance with social needs. Many of us will feel that the power reserved to Society by Clause 4 to dissolve the working company is unnecessary and likely to cause trouble. We shall also probably dislike the notion of a fixed contract as proposed by Clause 2. We shall say that all that is required is a general contract to cooperate in supplying social needs.

Whilst advocating competition Proudhon felt the need for the State organisation of low prices, but apparently that was a transition measure.

Surveying the Greater Capitalism, we can see the impossibility of Proudhon’s dream of enchaining production for profit so that all might take part in it on a small and equal scale and neither great nor small fortunes result from it. Yet we can also see the truth of his condemnation of Parliamentary Government; of the sanction of Governments to rule by virtue of the majority vote, of legislation of State judgment and punishment and of State Church.

The ugliness and tyranny of the so-called democratic government which arose from the ashes of feudalism is apparent to all candid observers of the Capitalist system.

Proudhon’s proposal of the Social Contract is based on the theory of the self-respecting intelligent independence of every individual in the community. In the days when it was formulated the trend of opinion was streaming in the direction of State worship. The democratic State based on the majority vote seemed all that was required to ensure the freedom and well-being of all. Now that that fallacy has been exposed we can return with interest to Proudhon’s Social Contract. What is it?

It is simply that each individual shall freely and personally enter into each social obligation or association which he or she elects to undertake, whether it be the association of a community for the upkeep of the roads, or the association of a group of workers for the planting of a forest, the building of a town, the running of a factory, the working of a mine.

To that principle we can assent; it will be part of the basis of the autonomous workshop councils through which production will be carried on in the industrial society of the future.

Proudhon sums up his views in the follow-mg passage:

“1. The indefinite perfectibility of the individual and of the race; 2, The honourableness of work; 3, The equality of fortunes; 4, The identity of interests; 5, The end of antagonisms; 6, The universality of comfort; 7, The sovereignty of reason; 8, The absolute liberty of the man and the subject.”

Again he says:

“It is industrial organisation that we will put in place of contracts. No more laws voted by a majority, not even unanimously; each citizen, each town, each industrial union, makes its own laws.

“In place of political powers we will put economic forces.

“In place of the ancient classes of nobles, burghers and peasants, or of business men and working men, we will put the general titles and special departments of industry: Agriculture, manufacture, commerce, etc.

“In place of public force we will put collective force.

“In place of police we will put identity of interest.

“In place of political centralisation we will put economic centralisation.

“Do you see now how there can be order without functionaries, a profound and wholly intellectual unity?”

The Poverty of (Marx's) Philosophy

Iain McKay

“The Poverty of (Marx's) Philosophy”, *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 70 (Summer 2017)

This year (2017) marks the 170th anniversary of the publication of Karl Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*, written in “reply” to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's *System of Economic Contradictions* published the year before. The book's title is a play on the subtitle of Proudhon's two volumes (“or, the Philosophy of Poverty”) and for Trotskyist Ernest Mandel “the prototype of that sort of implacable polemical writing which has often inspired the pens of Marx's followers”.¹

Given its age and stature, some may wonder why bother to review it? There are two reasons why this is no esoteric act.

First, it has played a key role in how the French anarchist is viewed. So, from an anarchist perspective, it is useful to see whether the criticism is valid or not – particularly given that much of the “conventional wisdom” about Proudhon can be traced to it.

Second, it allows radicals today to re-evaluate Proudhon's ideas and their relevance. As Kropotkin suggested, it is a “work which, of course, lost none of its considerable merit on account of Marx's malignant pamphlet”.²

The Method of Marx's Poverty

This is a work which is very difficult to review. Not only do you need to have also read Proudhon's work, Marx's usually fails to reference his quotes which makes comparing what he suggests Proudhon argued to what he wrote difficult. It would take a book in itself to address all of Marx's claims and so we will concentrate on a few of the most important and indicative ones but before addressing these, a few general points.

First, Marx wilfully ignores Proudhon's use of irony. For example, he makes much play of Proudhon's use of the expression “eternal justice.” Yet Proudhon uses it twice in his two volumes and both times in an ironic fashion. Marx uses it four times – once in a quote which he attributes to Proudhon (“cries M. Proudhon”) but which he simply made-up. Interestingly, the editors of the *Marx-Engels Collected Works* removed the quotation marks which existed in the 1847 original. Why? Seeking to make the definitive edition, they sought to reference all Marx's quotes and as this was an invention on his part they had little option. This

illustrates two aspects of Marx's method – selective quoting and pure invention.

Second, Marx repeatedly invokes authority in lieu of genuine debate. Indeed, he does it so often it seems more about proving how many books he has read rather than contributing to the argument. Often the authors are quoted without indicating whether Marx agreed with them or, indeed, whether their opinions actually matter – quoting someone who is wrong does not do your case any good. Similarly, his book is full of quotes from other authors but whose actual relevance is often null as Proudhon did not argue the point Marx is refuting by them. Still, this does allow Marx to give himself the appearance of a learned critique. For example, after noting how Proudhon “personifies society” he then states that “Proudhon reproaches the economists with not having understood the personality of this collective being” before having the “pleasure in confronting him with [...] an American economist, who accuses the economists of just the opposite.” Marx does not bother to indicate whether this work of Thomas Cooper (today he is better known, if known at all, as a successionist politician than an economist) is worth accepting or not. Does it rank, for example, with Cooper's defence of the use of slaves in certain areas of the Americas “which incapacitates a white from labouring”?³ Whether it is or not is ultimately an irrelevance for Proudhon did not in fact suggest what Marx attributes to him: “To the true economist, society is a living being...”.⁴

Third, Marx's reply is often self-contradictory. This is to be expected with Marx's mud-flinging approach – while some of it will stick, it can hardly be expected to be consistent. The most obvious example is on Proudhon's position on competition: in the first chapter his attacks on Proudhon's “Constituted Value” are premised on the (false) assertion that “there is no more competition” while in chapter two he attacks Proudhon for “defending the eternal necessity of competition”.

Fourth, Marx is keen to portray Proudhon as yet another utopian seeking to create a perfect system. Yet the “system” of Proudhon's title is *capitalism* and Proudhon spends the bulk of the book critiquing it. Discussion of what should replace capitalism is fleeting and based on looking at the tendencies within capitalism which point beyond it. This explains his opposition to the *actual*

¹ *The formation of the economic thought of Karl Marx* (London: N.L.B., 1971), 53.

² *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2014), 214.

³ *Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy* (Columbia: Doyle E. Sweeney, 1826), 95-6.

⁴ *Système des contradictions économiques* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1846) I: 74.

utopian socialists who simply denounce capitalism while inventing ideal systems to replace it. It “is important, then, that we should resume the study of economic facts and practices, discover their meaning, and formulate their philosophy” for the “error of socialism has consisted hitherto in perpetuating religious reverie by launching forward into a fantastic future instead of seizing the reality which is crushing it.” He rejects “offering *a priori* arguments as solutions of the formidable problems of the organisation of labour and the distribution of wealth” in favour of “interrogat[ing] political economy as the depository of the secret thoughts of humanity” for “to unfold the system of economical contradictions is to lay the foundations of universal association; to show how the products of collective labour *come out* of society is to explain how it will be possible to make them *return* to it; to exhibit the genesis of the problems of production and distribution is to prepare the way for their solution.”¹

Fifth, while for Proudhon civilisation “aims to constitute the value of products and organise labour”, Marx distorts the former and ignores the latter. Thus the reader of his “reply” would be unaware of Proudhon’s discussion of the associations which would replace wage-labour (and so end labour as a commodity). In these members “straightway enjoy the rights and prerogatives of associates and even managers”, “have a deliberative voice in the council” and so are “a solution based upon equality – in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property.” Hence “the socialisation of capital and property” for “it is necessary that [...] all appropriated wealth again become collective wealth, that the capital taken from society returns to society” for “there is supremacy and dependence” between the worker and the capitalist and “capital introduces into society an inevitable feudalism”.² Unlike the utopian socialists, he rejected the idea of organising labour and instead argued that labour would organise itself

Still, ignoring this allows Marx to suggest in all seriousness that Proudhon “[t]o save his system, he consents to sacrifice its basis” for “he forgets that his whole system rests on labour as a commodity”! Perhaps this lack of discussion of a key aspect of Proudhon’s

ideas may be less surprising when we realise that, as one Marxist summarises, “Marx’s picture of life and organisation in the first stage of communism is very incomplete. There is no discussion of such obviously important developments as workers’ control. We can only guess how much power workers enjoy in their enterprises”.³ History suggests that we do not have to guess.

More could be written about the overall nature of Marx’s “reply” but it becomes obvious when we address specific subjects. To avoid repeating ourselves, we turn to a few illustrative examples.

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Constituted Value

The “conventional wisdom” is that Proudhon advocated labour-notes, the pricing of commodities by the time (hours and minutes) taken to produce them. This notion has its source in Marx’s “reply” and he spends some time mocking it and showing its flaws. Yet he does not present any evidence that Proudhon advocates such an idea – and ignores much which clearly shows he did not.

Marx states that “[v]alue (marketable value) is the cornerstone of the economic structure. ‘Constituted’ value is the cornerstone of the system of economic contradictions.” Yet the “system

of economic contradictions” is capitalism and, for Proudhon, the market (value) is not identical to it. Marx begins with a false dichotomy.

He then describes Proudhon’s “own invention” which he “has discovered in political economy”, namely that the “constituted value of a product is purely and simply the value which is constituted by the labour time incorporated in it.” Marx contrasts Ricardo who “takes his starting point from present-day society to demonstrate to us how it constitutes value” to Proudhon whom, he claims, “takes constituted value as his starting point to construct a new social world with the aid of this value”. The former is “the scientific interpretation of actual economic life” while the latter is “the utopian interpretation of Ricardo’s theory”. It is utopian because Proudhon thinks that “marketable value [should be] determined *a priori* by labour time” resulting in “the sale of a given product at the price of its cost of production”:

“Suppose for a moment that there is no more competition and consequently no longer any means to ascertain the minimum of labour

¹ *Système I*: 89, 92.

² *Système II*: 204; I: 272-8, 217, 88; II: 168

³ Bertell Ollman, *Social and Sexual Revolution* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1978), 65-6.

necessary for the production of a commodity; what will happen? It will suffice to spend six hours' work on the production of an object, in order to have the right, according to M. Proudhon, to demand in exchange six times as much as the one who has taken only one hour to produce the same object.”

Marx then – with copious quotes from Ricardo – shows that the price (market value) must differ from the value (labour-time) in order for a commodity's supply and demand to finally approximate by means of competition:

“If M. Proudhon admits that the value of products is determined by labour time, he should equally admit that it is the fluctuating movement alone that in society

founded on individual exchanges make labour the measure of value. There is no ready-made constituted ‘proportional relation,’ but only a constituting movement.”

This applies to labour: “Is your hour's labour worth mine? That is a question which is decided by competition.” Proudhon, however, “inverts the order of things” and goes from “measuring the relative value of a product by the quantity of labour embodied in it” in order that “supply and demand will infallibly balance one another” and also “takes for granted the equivalence of the working days of different workers” in order to “arrive at equal payment for the workers”.

What is striking about this critique – beyond its admittedly amusing use of withering scorn – is the complete lack of supporting evidence. The reason is simple as Proudhon's “Constituted Value” is *precisely* the “constituting movement” Marx describes. To show this we need simply do what Marx failed to do – quote Proudhon.

Rather than Ricardo's “exchange value” being the market value of a good, Proudhon suggests that there are three elements to value – useful value (*valeur utile*), exchangeable value (*valeur échangeable*) and constituted value (*valeur constituée*). The first is what the buyer prices the good (rooted in utility), the second

is what the seller prices the good (rooted in costs) and the third is the price agreed between the two.¹ It is competition which drives the latter towards the labour cost of the commodity:

“Competition is necessary to the constitution of value, that is, to the very principle of distribution, and consequently to the advent of equality. As long as a product is supplied only by a single manufacturer, its real value remains a mystery, either through the producer's misrepresentation or through his neglect or inability to reduce the cost of production to its utmost limit. [...] an exact knowledge of value [...] can be discovered only by competition, not at all by communistic institutions or by popular decree.”²

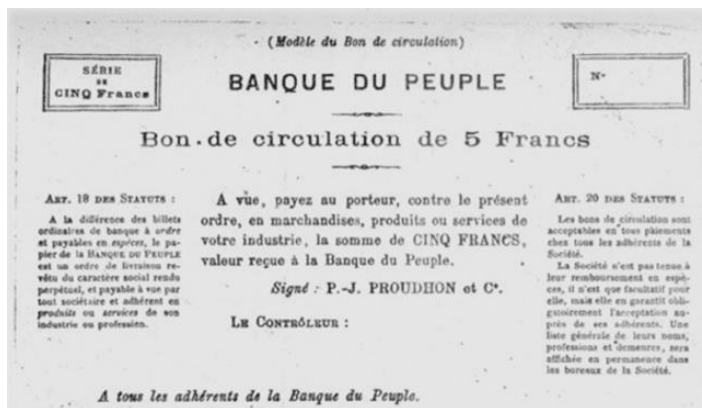
Rather than proclaim that goods must be priced at their labour-time cost, his constituted value explains how market price is

regulated by cost (ultimately labour) and this was “the centre around which useful and exchangeable value oscillate”, the “absolute, unchangeable law which regulates economic disturbances” for “whoever says *oscillation* necessarily supposes a mean direction toward which value's centre of gravity continually tends”.³ This was inherently dynamic:

“The idea of value socially constituted [...] serves to explain [...] how, by a series of oscillations between supply and demand, the value of every product constantly seeks a level with cost and with the needs of consumption, and consequently tends to establish itself in a fixed and positive manner”⁴

So rather than there being “no more competition” as Marx asserts, Proudhon was very clear that work “differs in quantity and quality with the producer” and that “competition between workers” was “a necessity” and every utopia “ever imagined [...] cannot escape this law”.⁵ He explicitly opposed the idea of pronouncing *a priori* prices (and pricing by labour-time cannot be anything else):

“Suppose for a moment that all producers should sell at a fixed price: there would be some who, producing at less cost and in better quality, would get much, while others would



A Note Issued by *The Bank of the People* during the February Revolution

¹ *Système I*: 48.

² *Système I*: 188-9.

³ *Système I*: 62, 23.

⁴ *Système I*: 87.

⁵ *Système I*: 55, 189.

get nothing. [...] Do you wish [...] to limit production strictly to the necessary amount? That would be a violation of liberty: for, in depriving me of the power of choice, you condemn me to pay the highest price; you destroy competition, the sole guarantee of cheapness”¹

What of Marx’s other claims? Proudhon never argued that workers should exchanging according to *time* rather “*[p]roducts are bought only with products*” and notes that “[i]n economic science, we have said after Adam Smith, the point of view from which all values are compared is labour; as for the unit of measure, that adopted in France is the FRANC.” A worker’s income would reflect the price achieved on the market for “all wages [will] be equal to product”.² There would be social equality (no classes, only workers) but not equality of income for that depended on labour and competition:

“Ensure that for each of us well-being results exclusively from labour, so that the measure of work becomes the exact measure of well-being, and that the product of labour is like a second and incorruptible conscience, whose testimony punishes or rewards each man’s actions, according to merit or demerit.”³

Is Proudhon’s term “*valeur constituée*” and related discussion, as Marx suggest, less clear than Ricardo’s? Perhaps – but then Ricardo is not critiquing the workings of capitalism by exposing its contradictions. But disliking flowery language is hardly a firm basis for a critique – but it would be more accurate than the one Marx provides:

“Proudhon’s idea has often been contrasted with Robert Owen’s labour notes, and with the scheme prepared by Mr Bray [...] Proudhon’s circulating notes have nothing in common with the labour notes described by these writers. The circulating notes represent commercial goods produced for the purpose of private exchange. Prices are

freely fixed by buyer and seller, and they bear no relation to the labour time, as is the case with the labour notes. The final result, doubtless, was expected to be the same. Proudhon hoped that in this way the price of goods [...] would equal cost of production. This result was to be obtained indirectly.”⁴

Finally, we must note that Marx’s attempts to suggest that Proudhon had plagiarised Ricardo (for suggesting, correctly, that – in context, *French* – economists had opposed the labour theory of value for “the last 40 years”) while, simultaneously, “he talks about him, he talks at length about him, he keeps coming back to him, and concludes by calling his system ‘trash.’” Yet

Proudhon is extremely complementary about Ricardo and lists him amongst the few economists whose works have “most to be commended”.⁵ He does dismiss⁶ Ricardo’s ideas on banking and money with the word “nonsense” (*absurdité* rather than *fatras* as Marx invents) but then Marx later also dismisses Ricardo’s “erroneous theory of money”.⁷

Proudhon, rightly and like Ricardo, notes “the honour of first mention belong[s] to Adam Smith, *Remuneration is in proportion not to USE VALUES which the producer brings to the market but TO THE WORK INCORPORATED in these use*

values” His theory of value “is not a revelation that we pretend to offer to the world, or a novelty that we bring into science” for it “is, as we might prove easily by innumerable quotations, a common idea running through the works on political economy” and rejected “pretensions to originality”. This applies to how value is constituted and rather than “labour-notes” it “is determined in society by a series of oscillations between supply and demand”.⁸ Ironically, Marxists later appropriated Proudhon’s term – “the law of value”⁹ – to summarise how the market price of goods oscillates around their prices of production (labour cost).

So rather than attack Proudhon for not going beyond the market (for the products of labour), Marx invents the notion of an “utopian interpretation of Ricardo’s

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¹ *Système I*: 40-1.

² *Système I*: 246, 67-8, 305.

³ *Système II*: 383.

⁴ Charles Gide and Charles Rist, *A History of Economic Doctrines* [London: Harrap, 1948], 322-3.

⁵ *Système I*: 146.

⁶ *Système II*: 138.

⁷ *Theories of Surplus Value* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969) II: 164.

⁸ *Système II*: 84; I: 52; II: 209.

⁹ *Système I*: 60.

theory” and so both misses a fruitful line of critique and wastes his reader’s time with *absurdité*.

Money

Marx’s attack on Proudhon’s “Constituted Value” extends into a discussion of his views on money. This is significant for it shows how wrong Marx’s assertions about “labour notes” were and the shoddiness of his method for here Marx inflicts an invention onto his readers, namely the tampering of quotations. He asserts that “Proudhon has not yet exhausted all the so-called economic reasons” for the use of gold as money for there “is one of sovereign, irresistible force” and quotes him as follows:

“Money is born of sovereign consecration: the sovereigns take possession of gold and silver and affix their seal to them.” (« C’est de la consécration souveraine naît la monnaie : les souverains s’en emparent et y apposent leur sceau. »)

From these damning words Marx proclaims “the whim of sovereigns is for M. Proudhon the highest reason in political economy.” This shows his poverty for “one must be destitute of all historical knowledge not to know that it is the sovereigns who in all ages have been subject to economic conditions, but they have never dictated laws to them. Legislation, whether political or civil, never does more than proclaim, express in words, the will of economic relations.” Marx fails to provide a page reference for Proudhon’s words, presumably because of what Proudhon *actually* wrote:

“Little by little the sovereigns took possession of them and affixed their seal to them: and of this sovereign consecration was born money (« Peu à peu les souverains s’en emparent et y apposent leur sceau : et de cette consécration souveraine naît la monnaie »).¹

We can see why Marx changes Proudhon’s words, for Proudhon’s sketch of how money developed is the same as his: “In the patriarchal period, gold and silver were still bartered and exchanged in ingots but even then they showed a visible tendency to become dominant and received a marked degree of preference. Little by little the sovereigns took possession of them and affixed their seal to them: and of this sovereign consecration was born money, that is, the commodity par excellence”.² Nor must we forget that come 1867 the “business of coining, like the establishing of a standard measure of prices, is an attribute proper to the State.”³

Proudhon’s discussion of money is also noteworthy due to what it says about his views on “Constituted Value.” Proudhon started by stating that gold and silver “were

the first commodities to have their value constituted.”⁴ Marx quotes this passage yet he made no attempt to reconcile it with his earlier proclamation that Proudhon’s “constituted value” was labour-notes. He does not because he could not – for to do so would be to suggest that Proudhon thought gold and silver were *currently* priced in terms of hours worked to produce them, an obvious nonsense.

So rather than a system of labour-time pricing, Proudhon’s “constitution of value” is simply the recognition that because all goods are “a representative of labour” this meant that they “can be exchanged for some other” and can become exchangeable like money for “the monetisation of gold and silver” was “the consecration of the law of proportionality, the first act in the constitution of values”. The aim was to ensure that “all products of labour must be submitted to a proportional measure which makes all of them equally exchangeable” for up to now “this attribute of absolute exchangeability” was given just “to a special product [i.e., gold and silver], which shall become the type and model of all others.”⁵

If the too short discussion of money in chapter two Proudhon’s work was not enough, he also raises it in the chapter on credit⁶ and concludes that “the price stipulated and accepted for sold goods can become currency in the form of a bill of exchange.” Likewise in the chapter on international trade, which argued for “all values” to be “determined and constituted like money” and for “each good” to be “immediately and without loss, accepted in exchange for another”. This was because “[m]oney, as we said in chapter II, is a variable value, but CONSTITUTED” and so “these goods remain the only one acceptable in payment, the suzerain of all the others, one whose value, by a temporary but real privilege [...], is socially and regularly determined in its oscillations [...] Until, by a radical reform in the industrial organisation, all produced values have been constituted and determined like currency [...] money preserves its royalty, and it is of it alone which one can say that to accumulate wealth is to accumulate power.” In short: “ensure that all goods are equivalent to money.”⁷

This did not stop Marx ignoring that this was obviously the case by asserting “for M. Proudhon [gold and silver are] the example *par excellence* of the application of value constituted... by labour time.” Needless to say, he does not quote Proudhon stating that gold and silver were currently priced... in the hours and minutes they had taken to produce.

Marx ends by proclaiming that gold and silver “are always proportional because, alone of all commodities,

¹ *Systeme* I: 69.

² *Systeme* I: 69.

³ Marx, *Capital* (London, Penguin Books, 1976) I: 221-2.

⁴ *Systeme* I: 69.

⁵ *Systeme* I: 68-73.

⁶ *Systeme* II: 109-111.

⁷ *Systeme* II: 141, 27, 32, 50-1.

they serve as money, the universal agent of exchange, whatever their quantity in relation to the sum total of wealth.” Which was Proudhon’s whole point. This is so obvious that Marx cannot help but contradict what came before by noting that this idea of all goods “attain[ing] the status of money is not new” and can be found “in the writings of Boisguillebert, one of the oldest of French economists” and so we apparently see “that the first illusions of the bourgeoisie are also their last.”

Sadly, Proudhon never claimed to be saying anything original and asserting ideas to be “illusions” is not the same as proving it.

Surplus of Labour

Marx’s discussion of Proudhon’s “surplus of labour” both hits the target and misses the point. The hit is minor, namely a mathematical error which – presumably because it is an actual point rather than an invention – Marx milks for far more than its worth. He misses the point because he ignores Proudhon’s actual theory of how exploitation *occurs in production* as a result of wage-labour in favour of asserting exploitation is rooted in exchange *as such*.

Proudhon’s mathematical error was made in relation to showing that “labour must leave a surplus for each producer”. It is made in the context of Proudhon invoking “Prometheus,” the personification of society, an admittedly over-egged and unclear analogy to show, as he put it elsewhere, “in society the profits of speculation are equal to the losses”. Regardless of Marx’s mockery, Proudhon does so not to deny the reality of class society but rather to expose it for he discusses how this surplus does not enrich the worker for while in theory “by the progress of collective industry, each individual day’s labour yields a greater and greater product, and while, by necessary consequence, the worker, receiving the same salary, must grow ever richer, there exist in society classes which *thrive* and classes which *perish*”.¹ However, he does not explain in that discussion how this happens. Instead, his theory must be constructed from his analysis of the contradictions of specific elements of capitalism (machinery, monopoly, property, etc.).

First, labour did not have a value but what it created did and so labour produces value only as *active* labour engaged in the production process:

¹ *Système* II: 87; I: 50, 80.

² *Système* I: 61.

“Labour is said to have value, not as merchandise itself, but in view of the values supposed to be contained in it potentially. The value of labour is a figurative expression, an anticipation of effect from cause [...] it becomes a reality through its product. When, therefore, we say: This man’s labour is worth five francs per day, it is as if we should say: The daily product of this man’s labour is worth five francs”²

Second, capitalism is marked by private property in the means of production and this creates an institutional inequality between the working class and the owning class (landlords and capitalists). Any equality between the two “was bound to disappear through the advantageous position of the master and the dependence of the wage-workers. In vain does the law assure to each the right of enterprise, as well as the faculty to labour alone and sell one’s products directly” for “the object of the workshop [is] to annihilate isolated labour. [...] When an establishment has had the time to grow, enlarge its foundations, ballast itself with capital, and

assure itself customers, what can the worker who has only his arms do against a power so superior?” Those without property, “within whose reach competition never comes, are hirelings of the competitors” as “competition cannot by itself become the common condition” because “[b]y the formation of the company [...] competition is an exceptional matter, a privilege”.³

Third, this inequality of conditions means that workers have no access to the means of production and so they “have sold their arms and parted with their liberty” to those who own them.⁴ Capitalism’s

defining feature was not markets or exchange (which predate it) but rather labour as a commodity:

“The period through which we are now passing – that of machinery – is distinguished by a special characteristic: WAGE-LABOUR.

“Wage-labour stems from the use of machinery – that is, [...] from the economic fiction by which capital becomes an agent of production. [...] The first, the simplest, the most powerful of machines is the *workshop*. [...] The machine, or the workshop, after having degraded the worker by giving him a master, completes his degeneracy by reducing him from the rank of artisan to that of common labourer. [...]

³ *Système* I: 163-4, 213.

⁴ *Système* I: 267.

Machinery plays the leading role in industry, man is secondary: all the genius displayed by labour tends to the degradation of the proletariat. [...]

“With machinery and the workshop, divine right – that is, the principle of authority – makes its entrance into political economy. Capital, Mastership [...] such are, in economic language, the various names of [...] Power, Authority, Sovereignty [...] the workshop with its hierarchical organisation, and machinery [...] serv[es] exclusively the interests of the least numerous, the least industrious, and the wealthiest class”¹

Fourth, the workers labour under the control of their bosses and so “they have executed with their hands what the thought of the employers had conceived”.² Property produces despotism in production:

“Thus, property, which should make us free, makes us prisoners. What am I saying? It degrades us, by making us servants and tyrants to one another.

“Do you know what it is to be a wage-worker? To work under a master, watchful of his prejudices even more than of his orders [...] Not to have any thought of your own, to study without ceasing the thought of others, to know no stimulus except your daily bread, and the fear of losing your job!

“The wage-worker is a man to whom the proprietor who hires his services gives this speech: What you have to do does not concern you at all: you do not control it, you do not answer for it. Every observation is forbidden to you; there is no profit for you to hope for except from your wage, no risk to run, no blame to fear.”³

Fifth, the employer keeps the product of the workers’ labour:

“Here, then, is the proposition which the speculator makes to those who he wishes to collaborate with: I guarantee to you [the worker] in perpetuity the distribution [placement] of your products, if you will accept me as purchaser or intermediary [...] the entrepreneur will have more opportunity for selling, since, producing cheaply, he can lower his price; finally his profits will be larger because of the mass of the investments.”⁴

Sixth, this allows capitalists to appropriate the difference between what workers create and what they receive in wages. The “co-operation of numerous workers” produces “an effect of collective power” and so “the question is to ascertain whether the amount of individual wages paid by the entrepreneur is equivalent to th[is] collective effect”. The answer is no: it goes to the boss “gratuitously” for he “has paid nothing for that immense power which results from the union of workers” but rather “has paid as many times one day’s wage as he has employed workers – which is not at all the same thing.” He “allots to himself the benefit of the collective power” which “is usurpation on his part” and so the axiom “[e]very product is worth what it costs” is “violated”.⁵

Exploitation occurred in production as the employer appropriated the collective force and surplus of labour of the wage-workers embodied within the products they create for them:

“I have proven, in dealing with value, that every labour must leave a surplus; so that in supposing the consumption of the labourer to be always the same, his labour should create, on top of his subsistence, a capital always greater. Under the regime of property, the surplus of labour, essentially collective, passes entirely [...] to the proprietor: now, between that disguised appropriation and the fraudulent usurpation of a communal good, where is the difference?

“The consequence of that usurpation is that the worker, whose share of the collective product is constantly confiscated by the entrepreneur, is always on his uppers, while the capitalist is always in profit [...] political economy, that upholds and advocates that regime, is the theory of theft.”⁶

So in “this system of interlocked monopolies” the worker “is no longer anything more than a serf” to whom “the holder of the instruments of production seems to say [...]: You will work as long as your labour leaves me a surplus”. This explains “the reason why wealth and poverty are correlative, inseparable, not only in idea, but in fact; this is the reason why they exist concurrently [...] the wage-worker [...] finds that, though promised [...] hundred, he has really been given but seventy-five.” This results in a system that ensures that “the subordinated worker should lose, together with his legitimate salary [i.e., his product], even the exercise of the industry which supported him”.⁷

In short: “PROPERTY IS THEFT”⁸

¹ *Système I*: 161-6.

² *Système I*: 267.

³ *Système II*: 295

⁴ *Système I*: 162.

⁵ *Système I*: 266.

⁶ *Système II*: 315.

⁷ *Système II*: 54; I: 258-9, 366.

⁸ *Système II*: 234.

Marx ignores all this and instead invokes the authority of Ricardo to dispute Proudhon's basis as well as suggesting that it is exchange – *not wage labour* – that is the problem: “relative value, measured by labour time, is inevitably the formula of the present enslavement of the worker”.

He starts by arguing that the egalitarian consequences Proudhon “deduces from Ricardo's doctrine are based on a fundamental error. He confounds the value of commodities measured by the quantity of labour embodied in them with the value of commodities measured by ‘the value of labour.’” Ricardo “exposes this error” in Smith's work while Proudhon “goes one better than Adam Smith in error by identifying the two things which the latter had merely put in juxtaposition.”

To see the flaw in Marx's argument, we need simply quote an authority Marx should recognise, his later self:

“It is Adam Smith's great merit that [...] where he passes from simple commodity exchange and its law of value to exchange between materialised and living labour, to exchange between capital and wage-labour [...] he feels some flaw has emerged. He senses that somehow [...] in the actual result the law is suspended: more labour is exchanged for less labour (from the labourer's standpoint)”¹

Thus “fundamental error” becomes “great merit”! If, for later-Marx, “Ricardo simply answers that this is how matters are in capitalist production. Not only does he fail to solve the problem; he does not even realise its existence in Adam Smith's work”² then the same can be said of younger-Marx.

In short, when “all workers are producers of commodities” the “value of labour is therefore equal to the value of the product of labour.” Thus is because “as owners of commodities” the “quantity of social labour which they command is therefore equal to the quantity of labour contained in the commodity with which they themselves make the purchase.” It only changes in “the exchange between materialised labour and living

labour, between capitalist and worker”.³ In other words, wage-labour.

So rather than Proudhon “confus[ing] the two measures, measure by the labour time needed for the production of a commodity and measure by the value of the labour” and thinking “a certain quantity of labour embodied in a product is equivalent to the worker's payment,” the opposite is the case under capitalism. This can be seen from the passage Marx selectively quotes as evidence for his claim: “‘Any man's labour,’ he says, ‘can buy the value it contains.’” In fact, Proudhon is taunting the bourgeois economists:

“Why do not the economists, if they believe, as they appear to, that the labour of each should leave a surplus, use all their influence in spreading this truth, so simple and so luminous: Each man's labour can buy only the value which it contains, and this value is proportional to the services of all other workers?”⁴

One of the aims of Proudhon's book was to show why *under capitalism this was not the case*. He showed how wage-labour allowed the exploitation of labour. Marx in 1847 had no theory of exploitation *within production*. “Neither *The Poverty of Philosophy* nor the *Communist Manifesto*, nor *Wage Labour and Capital*”, Mandel admits, “contain the idea of surplus-value.”⁵ Marx limits himself to

appealing to the authority of Ricardo and suggesting that working class slavery is the result of commodity production rather than wage-labour. Both positions he later came to recognise were wrong. Worse, Marx in 1847 mocks the theory of exploitation he published twenty years later:

“Marx made some disparaging remarks about this passage [that Labour ‘is a thing vague and indeterminate by nature, but defined qualitatively by its object, that is to say, it becomes a reality by the product’] even though Proudhon here anticipated an idea that Marx was to develop as one of the key elements in the concept of *labour power*, viz. that *as a commodity*, labour produces nothing and it exists independently of and prior to the exercise of its potential to produce value as *active labour* [namely, ‘Human labour power in its fluid state,

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¹ *Theories of Surplus Value* I: 87.

² *Theories of Surplus Value* II: 396-7.

³ *Theories of Surplus Value* I: 71-2, 77.

⁴ *Système* I: 81.

⁵ Mandel, 81.

or human labour, creates value but is not in itself value. It becomes value in its coagulated state, in objective form.’ (*Capital I*: 142)]”¹

Marx seems unaware of the specific class foundations of capitalism and rather than root exploitation in wage-labour he places it in exchange which produces exploitation of one class by another – *even if no classes exist*. For “[i]ndividual exchange corresponds also to a definite mode of production which itself corresponds to class antagonism. There is thus no individual exchange without the antagonism of classes” and “social relations based on class antagonism” are “not relations between individual and individual, but between worker and capitalist, between farmer and landlord, etc.” Yet in Proudhon’s alternative, there are no capitalists or landlords, just workers and as Marx later suggested: “if one eliminates the capitalists, the means of production cease to be *capital*.”²

So Marx is like the bourgeois economist who “confounds the most disparate things, association and wage-labour, usury and partnership”.³ It takes him until 1867 to recognise that the “historical conditions of [capital’s] existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available on the market, as the seller of his own labour-power.”⁴ But by then he had come to the same analysis as Proudhon had when he tried to belittle him twenty years previously.

The Poverty of Marx’s Method

We have addressed a few of Marx’s attacks on Proudhon from the first chapter of his book and shown their fundamentally dishonest and often self-contradictory nature. Proudhon rarely argued what Marx proclaimed he did and so the bulk of his book is simply irrelevant to a critique of Proudhon. This applies to the Marx’s discussion of Proudhon’s methodology in the second chapter which he proclaimed as pure idealism:

“But the moment we cease to pursue the historical movement of production relations, of which the categories are but the theoretical expression, the moment we want to see in these categories no more than ideas, spontaneous thoughts, independent of real relations, we are forced to attribute the origin of these thoughts to the movement of pure reason.”

Proudhon sought a model of capitalism. Using the categories of political economy, he builds an analysis of capitalism by discussing these categories, exploring

their contradictions (both internal and comparing their theory with reality) and adding them one to the other to build a more realistic model.

Marx takes umbrage at this, arguing that “only drawback to this method is that when he comes to examine a single one of these phases, M. Proudhon cannot explain it without having recourse to all the other relations of society; which relations, however, he has not yet made his dialectic movement engender. When, after that, M. Proudhon, by means of pure reason, proceeds to give birth to these other phases, he treats them as if they were new-born babes. He forgets that they are of the same age as the first.” So, for Marx in 1847, we must discuss every aspect of capitalism and their histories all at the same time. That this is a near to impossible task Marx inflicts on Proudhon should be obvious but not to him. The burden that this method imposes on the writer is immense and so perhaps it is unsurprising that while Marx had been trying to write a book on capitalism since the mid-1840s he would not – until he embraced Proudhon’s method of using categories to organise it. He summarised his new perspective in “The Method of Political Economy” subsequently published in the *Grundrisse*.⁵ As one Marxist academic notes:

“To avoid limiting the cognitive process to a mere repetition of the stages of what had happened in history, it was necessary to use a process of abstraction, and therefore categories that allowed for the interpretation of society in all its complexity. [...] For Marx [in 1857], it was not necessary to reconstruct the historical genesis of every economic relationship in order to understand society and then give an adequate description of it.”⁶

Yet in 1847 he lambasts Proudhon as an idealist for doing precisely that. Marx argues – seriously! – that “in the final abstraction” when we create “a logical category” and “we abstract thus from every subject all the alleged accidents” then “the only substance left is the logical category”. For this reason Proudhon is an idealist who – like Hegel – thinks ideas create reality. Yet Proudhon continually links the need to base any model on empirical reality. He does reject pure empiricism because he is aware that a “fact” needs to be *interpreted* and so “facts are not matter [...] but visible manifestations of invisible ideas” and “the value of facts is measured by the idea which they represent.” While rejecting pure empiricism, “it is impossible to accuse us of spiritualism, idealism or mysticism” for the idea “does not exist, as long as it is not reflected” in facts. So ideas as based on facts – as Proudhon noted as regards

¹ Alan Oakley, *Marx’s Critique of Political Economy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 1: 118.

² *Theories of Surplus Value III*: 296.

³ *Système II*: 46.

⁴ *Capital I*: 264.

⁵ *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 100-8.

⁶ Marcello Musto, *Foundations of the critique of political economy 150 years later* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 21-2.

Hegel “we have glimpsed quite quickly that even its author had only been able to construct that logic by constantly mixing in experience and taking from it his materials. All his formulas followed observation, but never preceded it”.¹ But generalising from empirical reality – “we abstract thus from every subject all the alleged accidents” – does not mean idealism as later-Marx acknowledges:

“If prices actually differ from value, we must first reduce the former to the latter, i.e. disregard this situation as an accidental one in order to observe the phenomenon [...] and to prevent our observations from being interfered with by disturbing incidental circumstances which are irrelevant to the actual course of the process.”²

Let us step back and consider what Marx is claiming in 1847, namely that Proudhon thinks that economic relations are immutable – unchanging ideas – and existed as long as people have (“we shall concede further that these laws, principles and categories had, since the beginning of time, slumbered ‘in the impersonal reason of humanity.’”). In other words, that value, division of labour, machines, competition all existed as categories – in their present form, moreover – long before humans actually laboured, exchanged, built machines, etc.

Ignoring the question of why Marx thought his readers would believe this nonsense about Proudhon, it is useful to consider how did Marx arrive at such an obviously stupid assertion. Let us follow his chain of reasoning.

First, Proudhon analyses the capitalist economy and builds a series of categories. Second, a category is a generalisation, an abstraction – and so an idea. Third, Proudhon is quoted as “not giving a history according to the order in time, but according to the sequence of ideas. Economic phases or categories are in their manifestation sometimes contemporary, sometimes inverted”. (*Système I*: 145) Fourth, Marx concludes that when Proudhon writes of categories manifesting themselves he means that the ideas manifest themselves.

It is easy to see how Marx is misled – or seeks to mislead his reader – for when Proudhon writes that the categories “are in their manifestation sometimes contemporary, sometimes inverted” he is not talking about the abstractions used to build his model but rather the actual facts upon which his abstractions are based. Marx feigns to believe that Proudhon thinks the ideas produce the facts when, in reality, Proudhon is at pains to stress that his model and its abstractions are rooted in observation, the analysis of experience. As his marginal note on his copy of *The Poverty of Philosophy* states:

“Have I ever said that PRINCIPLES are anything other than the intellectual representation, not the generative cause, of facts?”

Marx confuses a means of presentation with idealism. Proudhon creates an abstract model of capitalism by taking specific aspects (categories) of that system in isolation in order to draw out their contradictions. He builds up his model by adding more categories and applying the same analysis. In this way he makes his model more reflective of reality but, it is important to stress, he never forgets *that it is a model*, an abstraction – “we attain knowledge only by a *sort of scaffolding* of our ideas. But truth in itself is independent of these dialectical symbols and freed from the combinations of our minds.” Nor does he forget while “in the

theory they [the categories] are distinct and consecutive” in reality “all these things are inseparable and simultaneous”.³ Yet Marx quotes Proudhon on his “scaffolding” and proclaims he is “reduced to saying that the order in which he gives the economic categories is no longer the order in which they engender one another”! Talk about (wilfully?) missing the point.

We cannot address everything Marx proclaims against Proudhon. Suffice to say, this chapter draws the bulk of Proudhon’s ire in his marginal notes – a combination of outrage (“lie”, “slander”, “Prattle”) and incredulity (“Does Marx have the pretentiousness to claim all of this as his own, in opposition to something contrary which I am supposed to have said?”, “But all that it is me!”, “Plagiarism of my first chapter”, “What! *Come on now!* But the preceding pages are copies of my own”). It is easy to see why when the works are compared. However, we will address three aspects of Marx’s critique before turning to two illustrative examples.

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¹ *Système I*: 134; II: 220-1.

² *Capital I*: 269.

³ *Système II*: 97, 250-1.

First, Marx proclaims that by using the categories of capitalism to analyse capitalism means to fail to recognise that “the ideas, these categories, are as little eternal as the relations they express” and are in fact “*historical and transitory products*”. As if Proudhon were not aware that “the radical vice of political economy, consists, in general terms, in affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition – namely, the division of society into patricians and proletarians” and that “in its present form, the organisation [of labour] is inadequate and transitory”¹ So much for Proudhon “borrows from the economists the necessity of eternal relations”!

Second, Marx proclaims that “Providence is the locomotive which makes the whole of M. Proudhon’s economic baggage move better than his pure and volatized reason” to which he has “devoted [...] a whole chapter” but as George Sorel noted, it is “obvious that Marx must have read this chapter very superficially (if at all), for Proudhon rejected [it] as clearly as possible”.² A Catholic scholar also shows more comprehension skills than Marx and summarised Proudhon’s actual position (“Against the ‘Myth of Providence’”), namely as a critique of those economists who invoked it for “it was Property in particular which called upon Providence to consolidate its interests.”³ Did Marx really fail to see sarcasm and irony when it is literally in front of his face?

Third, in 1847 Proudhon is attacked for producing an abstract analysis of capitalism rather than writing a history book yet in *Capital* Marx fails to produce the work he demanded of Proudhon twenty years previously. Instead he produces an abstract analysis of capitalism based on exploring the contradictions of the various categories of capitalism, as Proudhon was denounced for doing in 1847. Then abstraction by definition meant idealism, now it was the case that “[i]n the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace them both”.⁴

Still, we must acknowledge that Marx realised what he had demanded in 1847 – the simultaneous discussion of every category of capitalism and their histories – was near impossible. We need not bother too much with Marx’s attempt to portray Proudhon as an idealist like Hegel for he later rejected his opposition to this methodology:

“Marx here tackles differently the thorny question of the order to be assigned to the economic categories. He had already addressed it in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, where, in opposition to Proudhon’s wish to follow not

‘history in accordance with the order of events, but in accordance with the succession of ideas’, he had criticized the idea of ‘constructing the world by the movement of thought’. Thus in 1847, in his polemic with the logical-dialectical method employed by Proudhon and Hegel, Marx had preferred a rigorously historical sequence. But ten years later, in the ‘Introduction’ [in the *Grundrisse*], his position changed: he rejected the criterion of chronological succession for the scientific categories, in favour of a logical method with historical-empirical checks [...] setting out the categories in a precise logical order and the working of real history do not coincide with each other [...]

“Marx, then, arrived at his own synthesis by diverging from the empiricism of the early economists, which yielded a dissolution of concrete elements into abstract definitions; from the method of the classical economists, which reduced thought about reality to reality itself; from philosophical idealism [...] which he accused of giving thought the capacity to produce the concrete [...] and, finally, from his own conviction in *The Poverty of Philosophy* that he was essentially following ‘the march of history’”⁵

So any claim that Marx’s book is still of use – if we can ignore the distortions – because of its method fails as this was soon rejected. We now know the answer Proudhon’s marginal note: “So tell me, how will you set about speaking in turn on matters of Pol[itical] Econ[omy]?”

The Division of Labour and Machinery

Marx seeks to apply his methodology by first berating Proudhon for abstracting and generalising on the division of labour and so “hav[ing] no need to study the numerous influences which give the division of labour a definitive character in every epoch.” However, not providing a detailed historical account for every society and its corresponding division of labour is hardly a valid criticism given both its impossibility and its irrelevance to developing a critique of capitalism. Suffice to say, come 1867 and the publication of *Capital*, such a study urged twenty-years before is nowhere to be found.

Marx then states that for Proudhon “J. B. Say was the *first* to recognise ‘that in the division of labour the same cause that produces the good engenders the bad.’” Marx

¹ *Système I*: 26, 14.

² *The Illusions of Progress* (California: University of California, 1973), 141.

³ Henri du Lubac, *The Un-Marxian Socialist* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), 185.

⁴ *Capital I*: 90.

⁵ Musto, 20-1.

provides no page number so making it harder to discover what Proudhon actually wrote:

“Say goes so far as to recognise that in the division of labour the same cause which produces the good engenders the evil”.¹

As for Marx’s reference to Lemontey to refute something Proudhon did not write, it comes as no surprise to discover Proudhon writing how “[m]ore than thirty years ago, Lemontey, developing a remark of Smith, exposed the demoralising and homicidal influence of the division of labour. What has been the reply; what investigations have been made; what remedies proposed; has the question even been understood?” And as for mentioning Sismondi to refute Proudhon’s comment that “all economists have insisted far more on the advantages than on the drawbacks of the division of labour,” well he was hardly a typical economist and is the exception that proves the rule.²

After a weak start, Marx’s critique gets worse. He denounces Proudhon for not showing “the drawbacks of the division of labour in general, of the division of labour as a category” and instead criticising the harmful effects of it under capitalism. No, rather than understand the dynamics of capitalism – where “it is necessary that the poor should perish to secure the proprietor his fortune”³ – Marx thinks we need to study all of history! Yet this example shows the limitations of his demand. He proclaims “it is slapping history in the face to want to begin by the division of labour in general, in order to get subsequently to a specific instrument of production, machinery” for he later does precisely that by arguing that the “workshop, the product of division of labour in manufacture, produced in its turn – machines”⁴ as well as repeating Proudhon’s schema of division of labour leading to machinery in chapters 14 (“The Division of Labour and Manufacture”) and 15 (“Machinery and Large-Scale Industry”) not to mention elsewhere: “machinery, by and large, arose [...] through the division of labour”.⁵

Marx berates Proudhon for not understanding that the “machine is a unification of the instruments of labour, and by no means a combination of different operations for the worker himself” yet for Proudhon “the machine is the division of labour” and “division almost always and almost necessarily supposes the use of machines.” He thinks that Proudhon is providing a history when he is showing the economists how under capitalism “machines promised us an increase of wealth” while “at the same time endowing us with an increase of poverty” and they “promised us liberty” but “have brought us slavery.”⁶ Ironically, Marx in *Capital* also eschews the actual history he denounced Proudhon for ignoring:

“Why this free worker confronts him in the sphere of circulation is a question which does not interest the owner of money [...] And for the present it interests us just as little. We confine ourselves to the fact theoretically, as he does practically.”⁷

Marx’s irrelevant lecturing about history in 1847 does show the dangers of replacing economic analysis with historical commentary as new research can overturn previous conclusions. So twenty years after denouncing Proudhon for not recognising that history itself showed that there was “not one single example” of it being sufficient “to assemble” all “the different branches of one and the same craft” to form a workshop, Marx admitted that manufacturing originated “[b]y the assembling together in one workshop, under the control of a single capitalist, of workers belonging to various independent handicrafts”.⁸

And talking of history, it must be noted that Marx wasted his reader’s time attacking Proudhon for ignoring how the “automatic workshop opened its career with acts which were anything but philanthropic” by being used by employers against their workers – for Proudhon did not.⁹ Similarly, after suggesting Proudhon eulogises machinery and its uses, Marx ends by proclaiming he “has not gone further than the petty-bourgeois ideal” and seeks “to take us back to the journeyman or, at most, to the master craftsman of the Middle Ages” based on a discussion of something – “synthetic labour” – which Proudhon does *not* specify but *explicitly rejects*¹⁰ what Marx claims he meant,

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¹ *Système I*: 96.

² *Système I*: 121, 95.

³ *Système I*: 97.

⁴ *Capital I*: 490-1.

⁵ *The Grundrisse*, 704.

⁶ *Système II*: 250-1; *I*: 160.

⁷ *Capital I*: 273.

⁸ *Capital I*: 455.

⁹ *Système I*: 150-2.

¹⁰ *Système I*: 127-8.

namely the worker “successfully [making] all 12 parts” of a product. Nor did Proudhon reject the use and necessity of modern machinery:

“Sismondi, like all men of patriarchal ideas, would like the division of labour, with machinery and manufactures, to be abandoned, and each family to return to the system of primitive indivision – that is, to *each one by himself, each one for himself*, in the most literal meaning of the words. That would be to retrograde; it is impossible.”¹

In short, Marx attacks Proudhon for both being completely uncritical about modern machinery and its uses *and* wishing to get rid of it to return to the Middle Ages. The facts are otherwise for it is important to remember that while he did suggest that machinery “is the *antithesis* of the division of labour, the *synthesis* restoring unity to divided labour.” but is this only *potentially*. If groups of workers controlled their workplaces then, surely, they would introduce machinery which improves their working life? It is this potential for machinery which Proudhon eulogises in the first section of the chapter on Machinery while the second section shows how this is turned into its opposite under capitalism and so “far from freeing humanity, securing its leisure” mechanical progress has “no other effect than to multiply labour”, “make the chains of serfdom heavier” and “deepen the abyss which separates the class that commands and enjoys from the class that obeys and suffers.”²

The State and Taxation

Our last example starts with Marx presenting a heavily edited – with no indication of this editing – unreferenced quote as support for how Proudhon achieved “the dialectical transition to the taxes which come after monopoly” and “talks to us about the social genius which” creates and uses taxation with “no other object in view than that of destroying the bourgeois by taxes, whereas taxes are the very means of giving the bourgeois the wherewithal to preserve themselves as the ruling class”. He then summarises:

“Merely to give a glimpse of the manner in which M. Proudhon treats economic details, it suffices to say that, according to him, the *tax on consumption* was established with a view to equality, and to relieve the proletariat.”

Marx does not inform his reader of what Proudhon immediately states after the passage he almost quotes:

“We have to prove that society could neither think better nor act worse [...] Every measure of general police, every administrative and

commercial regulation, like every law of taxation, is at bottom but one of the innumerable articles of this ancient bargain, ever violated and ever renewed, between the patriciate and the proletariat.”³

Marx, then, quasi-quotes Proudhon completely out of context to attribute ideas which are the complete opposite of his actual position. The rest of Proudhon’s chapter explains how “analysis and the facts demonstrate [...] the tax upon monopoly, instead of being paid by those who possess, is paid almost entirely by those who do not possess” and “the tax on provisions agitates and tortures the poor proletarian in a thousand ways”. To “conduct this offensive and defensive war against the proletariat a public force was indispensable: the executive power grew out of the necessities of civil legislation, administration, and justice.”⁴

The comments Marx quasi-quotes is Proudhon *recounting how taxation is presented* not what he believes it actually is. They reflect how Adam Smith recounts various expenses of the State and how they are “for the general benefit of the whole society.”⁵ Likewise, John Locke suggested that the liberal social contract was advantageous to even the servant class. Proudhon, in contrast, is very clear on the class nature of the State:

“Such is the war that you have to sustain: a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority; a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege. [...] Now, to combat and reduce power, to put it in its proper place in society, it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave. [...] Thus power, the instrument of collective might, created in society to serve as a mediator between labour and privilege, finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat. No political reform can solve this contradiction [...] The problem before the labouring classes, then, consists, not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly – that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them.”⁶

Significantly, Proudhon argues that the State cannot be captured by the working class and used as an instrument

¹ *Système I*: 167.

² *Système I*: 170.

³ *Système I*: 285.

⁴ *Système I*: 296, 317, 356.

⁵ *The Wealth of Nations*, [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976] Volume II, 339.

⁶ *Système I*: 362-4.

for emancipation. Marx, in contrast, continued to have illusions that universal suffrage gave the working class political power and so the State could be used to transform society. History has shown that Proudhon was correct.

Marx ends his comments by proclaiming that “[t]his brief summary will suffice to give the reader a true idea of M. Proudhon’s lucubrations on the police or on taxes, the balance of trade, credit, communism, and population. We defy the most indulgent criticism to treat these chapters seriously.” Given how Marx distorts Proudhon’s ideas by selectively quoting a few ironic comments and completely ignoring the rest of the chapter on the State, in reality this “brief summary” simply gives the reader “a true idea” of Marx’s so-called “reply.” We defy the most sycophantic Marxist to compare what Proudhon actually wrote to what Marx claimed he did and take Marx’s so-called critique seriously.

Marx’s Alternative

Given the pains he takes to mock Proudhon, we must quickly discuss Marx’s alternative to both capitalism and the (brief outlines of) market socialism Proudhon presents, central planning:

“One hour of Peter’s labour exchanges for one hour of Paul’s labour. That is Mr. Bray’s fundamental axiom. [...] Thus, if all the members of society are supposed to be actual workers, the exchange of equal quantities of hours of labour is possible only on condition that the number of hours to be spent on material production is agreed on before hand. But such an agreement negates individual exchange. [...] What is today the result of capital and the competition of workers among themselves will be tomorrow [...] an actual agreement based upon the relation between the sum of productive forces and the sum of existing needs.”

Marx generalises from the example of two men producing two commodities to the whole of society within an actual economy. This is undoubtedly because such an “agreement” is easier to visualise for the former than the latter:

“a simple problem involving 2 objectives and 2 variants will have 4 solutions. With 5 objectives

and 3 variations we already have 243 solutions. With 500 objectives and 10 variants (still a very simple economic planning problem) the number of solutions is 10^{500} (i.e., a ‘1’ followed by 500 zeros). This is much more than the number of atoms in the entire universe”.¹

So “an actual agreement” may take some time to create and perhaps unsurprisingly how it can be reached in any real economy of millions of people and millions of products is not discussed by Marx here – *or anywhere else*. As one Marxist (apparently without the slightest trace of embarrassment) admits:

“In deciding how much of any given article to produce, the planners have to strike a balance between social need, available labour-time and the existing means of production. Although Marx recognises that demand is elastic he never doubts that his

proletarian planners – whose actual planning mechanisms are never discussed – will make the right equations.”²

The alert reader may wonder why Marx refers to a “Mr. Bray” rather than Proudhon in all this. This is because Marx, without evidence, accuses Proudhon of plagiarising the ideas of the British Ricardian Socialists, specifically John Bray in whom “we think that we have discovered [...] the key to the past, present and future works of M. Proudhon”. Yet Bray was an advocate of central planning, *not* market socialism, as shown by a passage Marx himself quotes:

“By means of general and local boards of trade, and the directors attached to each individual company, the quantities of the various commodities required for consumption – the relative value of each in regard to each other – the number of hands required in various trades and descriptions of labour – and all other matters connected with production and distribution, could in a short time be as easily determined for a nation as for an individual company under the present arrangements”³

An individual company does *not* allocate labour and products within it by means of the market but rather conscious allocation – planning. Marx himself admitted as much:

“If one took as a model the division of labour in a modern workshop, in order to apply it to a

¹ Geoff Hodgson, *The Democratic Economy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1984), 170-1.

² Ollman, 63.

³ J.F. Bray, *Labour’s Wrongs and Labour’s Remedy* [Leeds: David Green, 1839], 162.

whole society, the society best organised for the production of wealth would undoubtedly be that which had a single chief employer, distributing tasks to different members of the community according to a previously fixed rule [...] inside the modern workshop the division of labour is meticulously regulated by the authority of the employer”

That Bray advocated central planning is confirmed by other passages that Marx failed to quote. So “[o]n the surface Bray’s solution,” notes Noel W. Thompson, “would seem to have laid the basis for some kind of market socialism. However, a closer reading of *Labour’s Wrongs* shows that his intention was to abolish the market and replace the motive force of competition by the conscious, rational, economic planning and decision-making of central and local authorities.”¹ Bray was clear: “Competition could have no existence in a change like this”.²

So Proudhon is denounced by Marx for defending the necessity of competition *and* also equated to someone who aims for its elimination.

This is hardly the only contradiction for Marx’s “reply in a few words” to Bray’s scheme simply repeats Bray’s own words against him (luckily for Marx Bray was “still little known” in Germany as in France). Worse, Marx’s system is even sketchier than Bray’s:

“Bray was aware of the need to acquire systematically the information on which to base decisions of those who managed the means of production, though [...] Bray suffered from an inability to see and a failure to confront the magnitude of the task. Thus, for example, the problem of managing a socialist economy was likened to that of overseeing an ‘individual enterprise’; a naïve suggestion which could only have been born out of an ignorance of the complex functions which the market performed and which would therefore have to be fulfilled by the central and local boards which Bray proposed.

“However, leaving aside the problem of acquiring the information upon which informed economic decisions could be based, there remained the problem of how that information, once gathered, could best be used. On what basis and by reference to what criteria would calculation proceed. [...] Bray spirited away the problems he has set himself.”³

The same can be said as regard Marx and his few lines of alternative to Proudhon’s market socialism. Similarly, Marx singularly failed to appreciate that turning the world into a single workplace under a single economic authority would produce not the freedom of socialism but the tyranny of state-capitalism. Proudhon, in contrast, would not have been surprised by the Soviet Union and its new class system based on the bureaucracy.

Conclusion

Comparing Marx’s “reply” to what Proudhon actually wrote, it is hard to take the former seriously. Once the various distortions and inventions are corrected, little remains. Proudhon was right to suggest Marx’s work was “a tissue of crudities, slanders, falsifications, and plagiarism.”⁴ Worse, Marx himself twenty years later embraces in *Capital* most of the positions he attacks Proudhon for holding in 1847.

More – much more – could be written but to do justice to all the distortions Marx inflicts on his readers would take a book in itself. We hope we have shown that rather than a masterpiece of polemical writing, Marx’s “reply” to Proudhon is a shoddy piece of work. For nothing is below Marx in his attempt to belittle and destroy Proudhon – up to, and including, inventing and tampering with quotes, selective quoting, false attribution and repeating Proudhon’s own ideas as if they were his own.

The dishonesty of *The Poverty of Philosophy* has distorted our view of Proudhon’s ideas and the time is long overdue for a revaluation of Proudhon and his contributions to anarchism and the wider socialist movement. This does not mean that Marx does not, occasionally, presents a valid point – most obviously, Proudhon’s opposition to strikes was wrong as subsequent anarchists recognised – it is just that these are frustratingly few in the midst of so much distortion. So, yes, Proudhon’s mutualism – a form of market socialism based on worker-run co-operatives – does need to be critiqued but Marx’s book is simply not that work.

Further Reading

My article “Proudhon’s constituted value and the myth of labour notes” (*Anarchist Studies* 25: 1) discusses many of the issues raised in this review in more detail. I discuss Proudhon and Marx in an appendix to my introduction for *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2011) In addition, its extracts from Proudhon’s *System of Economic Contradictions* have numerous footnotes contrasting what he argued to what Marx claimed he wrote.

Finally, I must mention by debt to René Berthier’s excellent *Proudhon and German philosophy* (http://monde-nouveau.net/IMG/pdf/Proudhon_and_German_philosophy.pdf)

¹ *The Market and Its Critics* (London: Routledge, 1988), 110.

² Bray, 158.

³ Thompson, 111.

⁴ *Correspondance* (Paris: Lacroix, 1875) II: 267-8.

Letter to M. Bitzon

Ixelles, 18 September 1861

Dear M. Bitzon,

Am I really not worthy of *pity* and *compassion*?

Now that all the cry-babies of nationalities have come down on me regarding Poland, of which not one has read the scandalous tale, nor knows what goes on behind the scenes! At the moment I am an usurping troublemaker, a scribe in the pay of the Holy Alliance!

In vain I show that by following the current course we *bury* the Polish people; that by the one which I indicate we lead it to *liberty, equality* and all that must follow. Nothing works; they began lamenting over Poland thirty years ago, they want to lament, and woe to those who do not lament! He is, they say of me, a false *democrat*, a false friend of progress, a false republican! Certainly, we are the Athenians of the nineteenth century, and of all the nations the one with the most spirit; but, when we meddle, we must admit that we are ten times more stupid than the others!

I sent a reply yesterday to M. Élias Regitault, which I recommend.

Élias Regitault, [who is] incidentally well educated, has just proven that on the two most important questions of diplomacy, the treaty of Westphalia and the treaties of 1814-15, he was in complete error. – On that, I do not think I have anything left to say.

What is worse is that M. Élias Regnault, placing himself on the same ground as M. de Montalembert, supports his cause by the same arguments, and, after having abandoned the *principle of nationality*, as futile; after having admitted the *principle of European equilibrium* (the supreme law of forces, by the way), not responding to any of the *impossibilities* of reconstitution which I indicated, none the less persists in demanding the *reestablishment of Poland*, on the pretext that nobilitarian [*nobiliaire*], Catholic, aristocratic Poland, divided into castes, has a life of its own, and that it has the right to live this life *regardless*!

All this democracy disgusts me. Reason serves no purpose with it, nor principles, nor facts. It does not matter to it that it contradicts itself with every step. It has its hobby-horses, its tics and its fancies; it wants to be scratched where the maggots itch, but it will not hear of comb nor scrubbing; it resembles that beggar saint who, gnawed alive by maggots, put them back into his wounds when they escaped.

Attacking a prejudice of the democracy is counter-revolution! What brutes!



It is much worse when I talk to them about the *right of force*, which is nothing else than the affirmation of a law of force, as there is a law of *movement*, a law of life, etc., and, consequently, the obligation of every moral being to abide by this *law*. I have an enormous correspondence, scores of newspapers and journals, where they show me that I am a man of paradoxes, that I do not know what I am saying, and that I abuse the patience of my readers!

Certain *patriots* have formed a small conspiracy to stop the sale of my pamphlets. On this matter, it has been said that I was a *secret agent of the Empire*; tomorrow, when they read my theory of taxation crowned by a council of State, they will say that I am a conservative, a proprietor, an Orleanist, a bourgeois!.... Fortunately, all that outcry will not make me change my mind. But what can you expect from a so-called progressive democracy, which is more fanatical, upon each appearance of an ideal, than the Inquisition?

Sometimes I really want to fall upon this bunch of sods [*cette tourbe*] with fists flying; what do you think? Is it not time to avenge common sense, and to pull the republican idea from the jaws of this hydra, which terrifies writers and honest people! Come on, TWITS, YOU are a disgrace to the human mind! It is because of you that France today lags behind other nations!

If you have the patience to wait a few days, I will send you, as well as M. Ballande, a copy of my book on *Taxation*, which should have appeared yesterday in Paris, [published] by Dentu; I do not have the official news yet.

I hope that this volume will bring back M. Lavertujon to me, in the expectation that I convince him of the truth of the *principle of mutuality* in matters of credit.

I am tardy with my letter to you, dear sir. Unfortunately, I cannot find your second-last one, so please consider this in response to both. I devour your letters, they amuse me, refresh me, encourage me, and then they get lost in the clutter of correspondence. So write to me, dear sir, when you wish to kill time; only do for me as the professor of philosophy did for his pupil M. Jourdain, proceed, I ask, as if I did not know English.

Also much obliged for your spiritualist communication; I will send him a little weekly newspaper of my acquaintance.

Sincerely yours

P.-J. Proudhon