

To the Point! To Action!! An Interpretation of the Democratic Idea

Anselme Bellegarrigue

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I am told that it is for my own good that I am governed. Now, since I give my money to be governed, it follows that it is for my own good that I give that money. This is possible, but it nevertheless deserves verification.

Moreover, it is a fact that no one may be more familiar than me with the means of making myself happy. I still find it strange, incomprehensible, anti-natural, and extra-human, to devote oneself to the happiness of people that one does not know, and I declare that I have not the honor of being known by the men who govern me.

It is therefore fair to say that, from my point of view, they are really too kind, and, in the end, a little indiscreet to preoccupy themselves so much with my felicity, but, more importantly, there is no evidence that I am unable to pursue this felicity myself.

I would add that devotion involves disinterestedness, and that one does not have a right to impose caring attentions unless they cost the recipient nothing. I know better than to discuss a question of money here, and God preserve me from questioning the devotion, or, on the contrary, the disinterestedness of our men of state. But I ask permission to wait to express my gratitude until the delicate attentions with which they deign to surround me become cheaper.

Anselme Bellegarrigue, Toulouse, 1848.

I

Had I a friend, but one friend — and, to have one, I lack only a good cook or a pleasant woman — I would not have written what follows; it would have been the subject of an intimate confession. Then, relieved of the weight of my concerns, I would have been consoled for my representative labors in the fraternal arms of the one who shared my burden.

However, I have neither a cook, nor a pleasant woman; therefore, no friend, and, by extension, no confidante; so that, for lack of anyone to talk to, I address myself to everyone. This manner of keeping to myself will, I trust, be appreciated by the Republic.

While we're on the subject of the Republic, I humbly request forgiveness from the high and mighty scribblers of the Rue Lepelletier, but I must declare that this word — I said: this WORD — is beginning to weary France not a little, from the Ocean to the Alps and from the Pyrenees to the English Channel.

The word "Republic" poses rather prettily on its three rhythmic syllables; but a word is, after all, nothing but a word, as a sound is only a sound; while a thing is a fact; and the people — at least, this is what I believe — live much more on facts than on words.

Thus, if we leave the idea and pass on to the fact, I imagine that the evolution would be sufficiently to the taste of everyone; though when I say everyone, I very seriously intend to exclude from my formula that polished class of citizens that reads *Le Moniteur*, that plodding congregation that condescends to spend its time dragging the budget by the tail and without which one would never really know what to make of public liberties, nor of the ecus of the Treasury.

I would like to know — so it please God, I would not be found guilty of too much indiscretion! — I would like to know what is really meant by the word "Republic."

II

Some months ago, when it was a question of electing agents in order to proceed to the liquidation of the late government, those who had seen nations not under tutelage, major nations; those who, too proud to be ambitious, had made their democratic egoism consist of not belonging to anyone; those whose faces had never been seen in the antechambers of any regime; the true democrats, the gentlemen of humanity have been able to speak of the Republic, and its name is not soiled in passing their lips.

These said, or might have said, in speaking of the members of the provisional government:

Let us not count on the verbose theorists to establish democracy in France, to introduce liberty into the practice of the social facts.

There are great intelligences in the improvised council, but these great intelligences have preserved intact both the governmental apparatus of the monarchies and the administrative organism of the condemned constitutions; these great intelligences have not repealed any of the organic legislation, which had the condemned constitutions for its basis; these great intelligences have assumed all the powers whose usurpation had been the crime of the condemned royalties.

Further, they said, or might have said:

M. de Lamartine has written a Robespierreïde wherein is found consecrated the autocratic principle of the personification of democracy, and that doctrine can cease to be a dream of the poet only by becoming an attentat in the Russian or Chinese manner: — Case closed!

M. Ledru-Rollin was as much an exponent of exclusivism as M. Guizot: — Case closed!

M. Louis Blanc aristocratizes the workshop: — Case closed!

All the men who say that France has reconquered its liberties effectively hold in their hand, and do not wish to release, the liberties of France.

All the men who say that the people must govern themselves actually govern the people.

There are dreamers among them, and ambitious men, but no democrats.

And those who argued thus expressed a very respectable opinion, for it was the opinion of France, of that France which wanted only two very simple and legitimate things: to be free and to pay little.

In the time of which I have been speaking — an epoch I will call republican since the authority was public, since all the citizens, instead of connecting to a government which existed only in name, connected to the country, as the only immutable fact, and felt the need to shake hands fraternally — at that time, I say, which preceded the Meeting of the National Assembly, one could speak of the Republic: there were no other parties then, there was only the party of good sense, the party of public morality, established, in fact, on the democratic law of confidence in everyone, and sanctioned by the security of all.

So when one spoke of the Republic, everyone knew what was meant.

Today, as soon as I utter this word, around me one wonders what the color of the republic is to which I refer, and the mayor of my commune, who is no one except when he is being something, asks the Prefect for permission to have me arrested.

III

We speak of a red republic, of a tricolor republic, of a moderate republic; we speak of a violent republic; we also speak of an Orleanist, an imperialist and a legitimist republic.

Is it possible to explain well what all that means? In my opinion, it is very simple:

It means that the citizens one calls red are opposed to France being exploited by the tricolors; that the tricolors are opposed to her being exploited by the reds; that the Orleanists, imperialists and legitimists are opposed to her being exploited by the reds and tricolors. But it signifies as well, to be fair, that both sides would willingly accept the patriotic task of exploiting her, whether to their own ends and nominally or, in extremis, under an assumed name.

But short of giving wolves the name of sheepfolds, I do not see at all that one must call all these gentlemen republicans.

The Republic does not accept the coarse ridicule of the official denominations that I have just listed. It is just a republic of which I am, of which we are citizens — we, honest folk, who do not intrigue but pay for the irreverent national domesticity. The Republic, it is us. That is the real France, that which is exploitable and exploited; the quarry of all these frantic republics, of all these parties who have the wealth of others for dream and the laziness for idol.

The Republic is to parties what a tree is to parasites; parties are the vermin of nations, and it is important not to forget that it is because of the various claims of these political religionaries that we have to jolt along to revolutions resulting from insurrections, and of insurrections resulting from states of siege, to arrive periodically at the inhumation of the dead and at the payment of the bills of revolution, which are the premiums resulting from the imbecility of all in response to the audacity of a few.

Our forefathers saw the France of the great vassals and that of the absolute kings. Our fathers saw that of Marat, of Danton, of Robespierre, of Barras, of Bonaparte and of Napoleon. We, we have seen the France of Louis XVIII, the France of Charles X, the France of Louis-Philippe, the France of the provisional government, the France of the National Assembly; but France in person, that is to say, the France of everyone, the France of France, no one has yet seen her. No one, therefore, has seen the Republic, because the Republic is nothing other than the liberation of France from the tutelage of governments.

IV

Do not ask if a democrat is a socialist and of which faction, if he is conservative and of which faction; if he is Orleanist, imperialist, legitimist and of which faction. At the bottom of all these doctrines and social policies one could look for all one's worth for the free man and respect for private money. One will only find there paid masters and paying servants. The Democrat is not of those who rule because he is the one who does not obey at all. If there are people who, shy or timid, take shelter in Fourier, if they lodge with M. Cabet or M. Proudhon, if there are any who take refuge in Louis-Philippe, in Bonaparte, in Henri de Bourbon, I declare for my part that I do not know how to live other than within myself and I do not propose to accept the renunciation of my identity.

Hear how others call with all their voice for the accession of a sovereign authority before which one bends! I proclaim my own accession to the sovereignty of action.

I am not at all opposed to the fact that, for recognition, for devotion or for charity, some men sacrifice some of their time, their work, their intelligence, their lives to provide comfort for some needy princes or for philosophers in poor accommodation; each can do as he feels fit, provide alms from what he has to whom he likes; and when, renouncing being themselves and acting according to themselves, there are those people who determine to live, think and produce for the benefit of dreamers, soldiers and princes, so be it! The princes are poor and the dreamers even poorer than the princes; the dreamers are idle and the princes more idle than the dreamers; the soldiers are vainglorious and the dreamers and the princes more vainglorious than the soldiers. But that those who give themselves to the dreamers, to the soldiers or to the princes claim the right to give up, along with their own, my time, my work, my intelligence, my life, my liberty; that there is an obligation for me to accept and pay the master who becomes my neighbor; that, just in order for a dreamer, a soldier or a prince to be installed in the Hôtel de Ville, I, myself, am required to become the devoted servant of this dreamer, soldier or prince, that is beyond the limits of my comprehension!

If it is called a profession to govern, then I demand to see the products of that profession, and if those products are not to my liking, then I proclaim that to force me to consume them is the oddest abuse of authority that one man can exercise on another. The truth is that that abuse exercises itself by force and that it is I who maintain, with my own funds, this force of which I complain. Considering this, I withdraw within myself and recognize that at the same time as I am a victim, I am also stupid.

But my stupidity depends on my isolation, and that is why I say to my fellow citizens: Hold your heads up! We have confidence in no one but ourselves. We say: liberty now and henceforth!

V

In this France of lords, princes, philosophers and generals; in this France, whipped and castigated, like a rebelling child by who-knows-whom for who-knows-what; in this France at the heart of which the governments have inoculated an administrative cancer with so many millions of francs, every last one of them a link in the chain that binds us; in this France, finally, where everything is denied us, from the freedom to educate ourselves to the right to freely season our food, everyone, in what concerns him, must shake off his torpor and proclaim himself minister of himself, governor of his own France.

The France of each and every one is the undeniable, egoistic achievement of one's individuality with all that belongs to it: thought, production, commerce, property.

For me, as a writer, my France is my thought, over which I wish to have supreme control, the production of my thought that I wish to administer; the marketing of that product over which I have charge; the property of the acquired result that I wish to keep and to use when I like, within the limits of the respect I owe to the thought, to the products, to the market, to the property of that France comprised by others, whatever their profession or mode of life.

In the infinite number of diverse thoughts that find their social expression in various products, each producer carries, infallibly, an instinct for the public taste, for the producer seeking the consumer cannot ignore the fact that the latter will only surrender his money for a product that he likes and needs. Production could not be controlled by someone who cannot find an immediate interest in it, i.e., the producer, without it becoming bothersome and being discontinued, but if

everyone governs their own thought, as a producer, production will necessarily tend towards a single goal: the satisfaction of the consumer who is everyone. In the same way if everyone governs their thoughts, as a consumer, a sure market is prepared as a result of their labor, and production will tend, in its turn, towards a single end, the satisfaction of the producer, which is also everyone.

In this way, each individual is the beneficiary administrator of all, and all are the beneficiary administrators of each individual; that is to say, the producer does well for himself in doing well by the consumer, and the consumer comforts his existence while creating the wealth of the producer. And this without effort, without anyone having to occupy himself with anything other than his own individual interest, which is necessarily in the interest of all. This is social harmony in its democratic simplicity, in what the Americans call, as they practice it, self-government, the government of oneself.

Either I govern myself, and my instinct cannot fail me in searching for my well-being; or else someone governs me, and I am sacrificed, because the instincts of my governor which, subjected to the same law as me, also seek his well-being, not only are not and cannot be mine, but rather are and must be opposed to mine.

Either my thought is free, that I can produce, that my product can find a market, that the market will provide me with resources the exchange of which I can bring home and allow me the consummation of the products of others. Or else, on the contrary, my thought is held in check by an authority; that I am not allowed to express myself according to the infallible law of my own instinct, and I do not produce anything or produce badly; not having a product of any value, I cannot effect any exchange, from which it follows that I consume nothing; I am dependent on others and on myself; I am paralyzed at the center of a circle.

Let us make a general application of that isolated fact and we will find that swirling flurry of a social residue unknown in the United States, but with which governmental barriers have rendered France familiar; that collection of stationary existences, which pass and pass again before the administration like bodies that pursue a restricted course, returning to the obstacle, and we have nothing more than a society where we all bump and run into each other, or else a society immobile, interdicted, annihilated, cadaverized.

VI

The organization of society is the enslavement of the individual, and its dismantling leads to the liberty which deploys in the social body those providential rules of harmony, whose observance, being in the interest of everyone, finds itself being the inclination of all.

But one says that unlimited liberty is a menace.

Whom does it menace?

Who must fear the proud horse, if not he who would tame it?

Who is afraid of an avalanche, if it is not the one who wants to stop it?

Who, therefore, trembles before freedom, if it is not tyranny?

Menacing liberty! One should say the opposite. What is frightening about it is the noise of the chains. Once it has broken them, it is no longer tumultuous, it is calm and wise.

Let us not forget the order that followed the revolt of 24 February and let us recall above all the disorder that arose from the revolt in June.

The gentlemen of the Hôtel de Ville ruled; that was their fault. They were nothing but simple keepers of the seals affixed by the revolution on the governmental succession of the royals. We were the inheritors of that succession; they thought it was they: — Madness! What was their dream? That they bore well-liked names? That they were more honest than those conquered? As if, in free nations, the government was a matter of proper names! As if, in a democracy, usurpation could argue for the probity of the usurper!

That they were more capable? As if it were possible to have the intelligence of everyone, when everyone withholds his intelligence.

They should have understood something completely simple, completely elementary, which is, that since the divine right has been consigned to the depths of the priesthood, no one has received a mandate to act in the name of all and in the place of all.

But what the provisional government has not done at all, the Assembly could do; one might hope that it would democratize France; whatever might be the attitude of the vast majority of representatives, a single, truly democratic man, that is to say a man who has lived in association with the practice of democracy and liberty, would suffice to clarify the situation and free the country. Well, this man, if he exists, has not shown himself; no one has addressed parliament in the noble, disinterested, grandiose language of democracy. There are, no doubt, some generous intentions at the Palais National; but unintelligent intentions are the miscarriages of human grandeur, the stillbirths of God, and the Assembly, like the provisional government that sanctioned its taking of control, failed to recognize its mandate.

We have only seen emerge from within it men of political party, theoreticians, political casuists who have only practiced monarchy, administrative exclusivism, ruling governments; men who have only seen liberty through the jealous veil of royalism.

We can therefore say of the majority of the Assembly that which we said of the members of the provisional government: do not count on these theorists to establish democracy in France, to introduce freedom in the practice of social facts.

VII

The representatives at the National Assembly were elected, let us not forget, to create a democratic constitution, to simplify the administration to allow a reduction in tax and allow respect for the individual; they were elected to set up the country.

What have they done, however?

Instead of setting up the country, they have been busy setting themselves up in government; they have deduced consequence before having established principle; then, and without being able to escape the disastrous precedent they had just been establishing, they have only been occupied, as they could only be occupied, with the health and conservation of that government.

They acted thus and they were consistent! The country, did it not, in effect, cease to exist the day the representatives met in the legitimate Palais? Was the Assembly not declared sovereign, absolute sovereign, let us make note thereof! and so absolute that it could do more than us, because it was against us.

It could stay in place indefinitely.

It could, by decree, have us imprisoned or proscribe us individually or all together!

It could sell France bit by bit or as a whole to foreign powers!

You might object that it will not. Certainly that is where we rest our hopes, because I reply that it could; and I add that I do not understand that a free people can be regularly at the discretion of a single national representation which enjoys a modest instrument of action, made up of five hundred and fifty thousand bayonets.

The National Assembly has only the keenness of the kings: the spirit of democracy is a stranger to them.

The Assembly is a government; it should be a notary.

We elected representatives to draft a contract that determined, by specific clauses, the deciding line between where the people end and where the administration begins: it decided, without writing anything down, that the people end everywhere and that government starts everywhere.

If the Assembly was the faithful expression of national sovereignty, the laws or decrees that it makes would apply immediately to safeguard the rights of citizens rather than applying to nothing but its own security. The essence of the law is to express the will and protect the interests of everyone; the law, since everyone is supposed to obey it, well! let us examine all the decrees issued by the Assembly and we do not find one that is not designed to save administrative inviolability by paralyzing civil liberties; we do not find a single one that does not sanction the restriction of society to the benefit of officialdom.

VIII

I do not believe at all in the efficacy of armed revolution and I will state right now why I do not. But, once a revolution of that sort is accomplished, once it is accepted, without contest, by the whole entire country, I can conceive of the possibility of turning it to the benefit of the nation.

What are the conditions for this?

It is necessary that the revolutionary action intervenes in things; it is necessary that it applies itself to the institutions!

The February revolution, like that of 1830, only became of benefit to a few men, because that revolution only abolished some proper names. Then, the machinery of government kept, as it now keeps, the same gears, and I see no change other than the hand that turns the crank.

What did they mean to say when on February 24 they posted in the streets and printed in the newspapers that France had overthrown the government and regained its freedom?

Did this mean simply that the National Assembly had taken the place of the "Journal des débats"?

Has anyone realized that the consequences of this event that shook the world must have the triumph of Monsieur Marrast and his friends as its limit?

It would have been, indeed, much ado about a rather poor job! When the revolutionaries told us: The French people have regained their freedom, we took the revolutionaries at their word and we proclaimed in our hearts the abolition not only of royalty, but of royal government, government that held closely chained in its administrative talons the liberty of France.

Thus, in regaining freedom of thought, freedom of the press and freedom of voting, we have abolished, together with its budget, the government of the interior that was established to spread insecurity to the benefit of the government of king.

Thus, in regaining the freedom of education, we have abolished, with its budget, the government of public instruction, which had been set up to hone our intelligence and to direct our education to the benefit of the government of the king.

Thus, in regaining the freedom of conscience, we have abolished, with its budget, the government of religion, which was established to introduce into the church only men whose influence was gained in the interests of the government of the king.

Thus, in regaining the freedom of trade, we have abolished, with its budget, the government of commerce, which was established to hold public credit continually under the control of the government of the king.

Thus, in regaining liberty of work and industry, we have abolished, with its budget, the government of public works which was set up to provide great benefit to friends of the government.

Thus, in regaining the liberty of transactions and the liberty of the territory, we have abolished, with its budget, the government of agriculture which was set up to keep the owner of the land, that is to say the one on whom rests the overseeing of the alimentation of the people, under the immediate dependence of the government of the king.

Thus, in regaining the right to free existence, we have abolished, with its budget, the government of the barracks, which, in times of peace, have only been used to hold us in political nothingness to the benefit of the government of the king.

Thus, finally, in reclaiming all our freedoms, we have abolished, with their multiple budgets, that complex administration of the illegitimate monarchies, that exorbitant tutelage that arose in the shady days of imperial tyranny, which has lain dead, crushed by discussion, for over thirty years, and whose corrupt cadaver, because we have not known how or where to bury it, stifles our freedom.

If it is true that a revolution abolishes something, here is what we abolished on 24 February.

If it is true that the people who form a revolution do so in order to win their liberties, here are the liberties that we won on 24 February.

IX

The call to democracy of the last revolution was not heard by our representatives.

At that call, truly interpreted, France could have passed the barrier and gone home, that is to say to the commune. The nation thus rendered to its natural domicile, there would only remain in Paris an inoffensive symbol, carrying on diplomacy with the nations of the world, directing the navy, taking on or declaring war, according to events and conditions stipulated, signing peace treaties and trade pacts, keeping watch on the interior, on the implementation of the laws, — always simple and few in number among free people, — nominating, among its responsibilities a minister for foreign affairs, a justice minister, a minister for the navy and the colonies, a minister of war and a finance minister, and managing business with a budget which would reach, taking one year with another, save for the case of hostilities and debt interest, the figure of four to five hundred million.

I am not talking about the debt that remains underneath this scheme. This debt, that France can get to know rather better on returning to the commune when she is again in possession of her own wealth, will incur less interest as a result of the single fact that administrative charges absorb the clearest amount of its revenues. Here I am not liquidating the royal government. I

oblige it, by canceling seven budgets, to return annually to the nation twelve hundred million, at least, with which the debt can easily be extinguished in a few years.

But the most immediate benefit that France must gain from the canceling of these budgets is her freedom of action, which must by nature result in confidence among citizens, the cessation of the crisis and the establishment of national credit on the ruins of this feverish credit of the government, credit which rises or falls according to how the government stabilizes or totters.

Apart from the ministerial departments of the navy and war, which are annexes to that of foreign affairs, and apart from the grand judge, on whom rests judicial unity, all other ministries are incompatible with civil liberties, because they are only a dismemberment of the royal despotism that held all social elements in its grasp.

If commerce, if industry, if education, if religion, if agriculture, if, in a word, the French are free can someone tell me what we have to do with the great masters of industry, of commerce, of education, of religion, of agriculture, of home affairs? Since when has great mastery ceased to be the sanction of servitude?

X

The government of France established on the bases that I have just indicated, the parties will disappear, ambitions will become extinguished and the words Liberty, Equality, Fraternity will finally leave the domain of interpretation and controversy to go into effect.

I will explain myself and my explanation will be simple:

What is opposed to the establishment of liberty, equality, fraternity among us? Ambition, that is to say the desire to dominate, to govern the people.

Where does ambition reside? In the parties: that is to say, in those who desire to dominate and govern the people.

From where does a party derive its *raison d'être*? From the certitude that it will have power, victorious, take for itself national freedoms and taxes; that is to say in the possibility of demonstrating mastery in authority over all things and of thus imposing itself on the people and the opposition parties.

How can a party impose itself? By taking control of the administration.

So, what is the administration?

The administration is an I-know-not-what of the abstract, the indefinite, the illogical, the contradictory, the obscure, the incomprehensible, the arbitrary, the absurd, the monstrous.

Something which derives neither from the heart, since it is arid and without sentiment, nor from science, since no one there understands anything.

An instrument without form, without contour and without proportions. A myth, wicked and cowardly, whose ruinous culture occupies a million priests, all as insolent as they are fanatic.

Something blind but that sees everything, deaf but that hears everything, impotent but capable of everything, without weight but crushing everything, invisible but filling everything, impalpable but touching everywhere, impossible to seize hold of but grasping everything, inviolable but violating.

An incandescent nebulosity of lightning, thunder and asphyxia.

A magical, demoniac and infernal invention that strikes out, always strikes out at everything and in all directions in such a way that there is always a bulwark of whirlwinds and moulinets between its officers and the people.

That is the administration! — that by which one governs, the primary cause of the requirement for parties, ambition, tyranny, privileges, hatred! This is the monster in dispute! Here is the Minotaur that drinks blood and devours millions upon millions! Here is the fortress by turns besieged, conquered, resieged, reconquered, and resieged again to be reconquered anew by the parties!

Remove the administration, smother the monster, crush the Minotaur, demolish the fortress, and what is left? Doctrines, nothing more! Individual doctrines having no way to impose themselves! Isolated doctrines, timorous and abashed, that you will see running, and utterly out of breath, throwing themselves, for protection and security, into the bosom of that great human doctrine: EQUITY.

Let us slay this dragon bristling with talons that the nationals want to tame for the benefit of Monsieur Cavaignac, in order to make it bite us.

That the socialists want to tame for the benefit of Monsieur Proudhon, in order to make it bite us.

That the Orleanists want to tame for the benefit of Monsieur de Paris, in order to make it bite us.

That the imperialists want to tame for the benefit of Monsieur Bonaparte, in order to make it bite us.

That the legitimists want to tame for the benefit of Monsieur de Bourbon, in order to make it bite us.

Disperse the nails of the animal in the municipalities; keep them with care so that no one can reunite them in the body, and discord flees with its unique cause; there will be in France only free men, having, for the right of others, due respect for their own rights, and embracing in the fraternal ambition to contribute to common well-being. Mistrust loses, thus, the guarantee of its heinous impulses; capital is attracted to production, production is supported by the capital, and national and individual credit is substantiated.

XI

Having achieved this level of liberation, we will be masters at home to ourselves; no one will be above the rest; no one will be above the common law; national sovereignty will be from then on a fact, and universal suffrage will have a democratic meaning.

Instead of the silly and puerile right to choose our masters, as has just been granted us, we will select delegates who, in turn, instead of being guided by administrative law, as is the practice at the time I write, will be guided by the national law, whose definition will be specified by fact.

From this will emerge a simple administration, and, consequently, a comprehensible one; a true administration, and, consequently, a just one. The program of the accession of the French to all jobs will cease to be a crude lie, an iniquitous delusion whose turpitude is demonstrated by the inability of special studies to educate men to unravel the mechanism of a single section of the formidable administration that rules us.

And, our liberties once safe, the administration once simplified, the government once stripped of its means of aggression, put at its head a Frenchman. Whether he is called Cavaignac, Proudhon, d'Orléans, Bonaparte, Bourbon, to this I attach truly very little importance. As long as they cannot usurp my mastery, as long as they cannot fail in their duty towards me, those in office do not at all seem to me to require serious attention: the names of those who serve me are of little importance to me. If they act badly, I will punish them; if they act well, they have done nothing but their duty; I owe them nothing but that which is agreed as their salary.

What I have said about their name, I also say about their title. That the head of a democratic administration is called president, king, emperor, satrap, sultan; that he is mister, citizen or majesty, is of little importance to me! When the nation is truly sovereign, I am sure of one thing, that is, that the head of state, whatever his name may be, must not be anything other than the first servant of the nation, and that is what will suffice me; for, once he is established, de facto, as a public functionary, salaried by the people, he is nothing but a servant of the people, I know that the people will be protected from the passage of the functionary, who will show himself before the people who pay him, from whom he earns his living, to whom he owes his services, and who, therefore, are his master. This known, there is no more indecision in the city: public law is defined, the nation is queen and the civil servant is no more than a hierarchical member, remunerated by political domesticity, who owes everything to everyone, and to whom no one personally owes anything.

If democracy is the overthrow of a regime unworthy of office;

If democracy is the consecration of the dignity of the citizen;

If democracy is the nonexistence of ambition and crime, and at the same time a source of altruism and its virtues;

If democracy is the government of the people, the government by oneself for oneself;

If democracy is nothing but pure and simple rule and not a tyranny of administration;

It seems to me that I am to the point.

XII

There are only two points among the people on which no divergence of opinion can exist, two points on which converge the good sense of all parties irrespective of details.

Those two points are:

The repression of crime against the person and against property, and the defense of the territory.

Consult in this respect all the sectarians of the social schisms. Ask of the socialists, of the conservatives of this regime without name at the National Assembly, of the Orleanists, of the imperialists, of the legitimists, ask them, I tell you, if it is necessary to punish the assassin and the thief, and if it is necessary to defend the country's borders. All will respond unanimously in the affirmative; for all, regardless, the person and his belongings are sacred, and the national territory inviolable. These are the common, universal doctrines; before them the parties step aside and fade away; at these supreme points of public rendezvous, every Frenchman is in agreement and fraternally offers his hand.

So, well, why should we seek the guardian spirit of a government outside this reservoir of the common aspirations of all? Why should we permit the introduction of a dose of individual attachments to this potion prepared for the health of all?

Do you want a strong government with the consent of the public? a government whose existence is in no way threatened by the irritation and sudden attacks of minorities? Establish a serious governmental administration, a stranger to the petty squabbling and to the wretched ambitions of individuals; a national administration which includes the parties by their rational and sensible foundations, an administration whose power, though limited, extends to provide assistance in the execution of arrests decreed with a view to repress crimes and offenses against the person and against property, and to regulate the agreements and differences between our country and foreign ones.

A government whose powers are thus defined cannot excite the discontent of anyone without at the same time being condemned by everyone; since it only occupies itself precisely with issues on which everyone is in agreement, whether it acts well or whether it acts badly, it has no opposition. The sanction of its acts is in the conscience of all. To protect a government from revolutions, it must not be permitted to interfere in the real lives of its citizens, it must not be allowed to be able to touch the instincts, the tastes, the private interests of its citizens; because these instincts, these tastes, these interests are varied and changing, while the rules of an administration are uniform and fixed. A democratic government must remain forever in social abstraction.

Let me be enjoined, by a higher authority, to think in one way rather than another, to trade on such a condition rather than some other, to instruct myself in one school or with such a book rather than in another school or with another book; to exercise one profession rather than another; to like this instead of liking that — that is to tyrannize me as much as if I were ordered to eat vegetables rather than meat, and a government that has powers over such inordinate details will not fail to annoy an intelligent people that possesses a sense of human dignity.

If we rest our attention for a moment on the spirit of the institution that preoccupies me, it will be impossible for us to find a ministerial act that does not carry within its flanks the violation of a liberty. A minister (I speak of those whose administration applies to the instincts, to the tastes or to the interests), a minister could only respect the public right — I speak not of the written law — solely on the condition that he did not act; since, acting, he acts for everyone and in the place of everyone, it would be necessary for him to act well and without hurting anyone, that he has an instinct for current trends, a mind for current tastes and an awareness of the current interests of everyone. That being the case, one thing astonishes me: that there are still men sufficiently wicked or so profoundly unfit to not be able to shrink back from accepting a portfolio.

Who then would have suffered from the stripping down of the apparatus of monarchy?

Some civil servants!

Who would have benefited from it? All France!

Who then suffers from the conservation of the full apparatus of monarchy? All France!

Who benefits from it? Some civil servants!

I have said enough to make it understandable, how, by taking the revolution in February at its word, it is possible to attain both sides of the democratic equation: individual freedom and cheap government.

XIII

But there are people who remain far from accepting this reasoning. The theoreticians, our masters, find idea preferable to fact. And this doctrine that they maintain provides them with a dividend which strongly encourages them to continue maintaining it.

In their view, provided that tax payments continue and provided that the rain respects the words Republic and Liberty on the front of public buildings, we are republicans and free.

These people are very powerful!

As powerful as that well-advised character of Arab proverbs who, without touching in any way the contents of a vase, believed that in changing the label, he changed the liqueur.

As powerful as those burlesque geniuses in the farces at the fair, who believe their clothes safe from catching alight because they have on their chest boards carrying assurances against fire.

These people, I repeat, are extraordinarily powerful!

Listening attentively to the intricacies of their arguments, we hear much spoken — and loudly — of the sovereignty of the people. Do you believe it has ever been permitted to insult the sovereign? You reply: No? Ah, well! That is because you were told that the people are sovereign and that you do not have the right to insult the people? I would like better, for my part, to deny the sovereignty of the people and believe in the sovereignty of the government that I am required to respect.

I say that I would rather believe in the sovereignty of government; I am forced to believe in it, everyone is forced to believe in it like me; I do not exist, no one exists for himself; our existence is not at all our own. We do not live civilly, commercially, industrially, religiously, or intellectually except for the government.

Can we travel without a safe-conduct pass signed by it? Can we buy a property or make a transaction without it intervening? Can we profess a religion which it has not validated? Can we teach ourselves other than in the schools and with the books approved by its university? Can we publish anything other than what it permits us to publish? And to push these considerations of this regulating tyranny to the extremes of triviality: can we smoke a cigar which it has not itself sold to us? Are we lawyers, medics, teachers, merchants, artists, agents, town criers, without it giving us a license? No! We do not exist, I say to you, we are inert objects, parts belonging to a conscious and complicated machine whose crank handle is in Paris!

Well, I say that this is an irregular situation, a situation as embarrassing for the government as it is fatal for the nation.

I can understand that it was possible to for Richelieu to govern like this; the France of past centuries was completely and voluntarily under the crown of the king. But woe to those who do not take note of the difference in the times! Today, every citizen feels and deliberates for himself, and control of official acts is everywhere!

XIV

There are, however, in the healthy part of the nation, in the core of good public sense, people who fear to look clearly at the situation; people who cannot resolve themselves to understand that in desperately bleeding themselves to maintain five hundred thousand employees and as many soldiers, they hold back a million men from production and create, to the benefit of I do not know which Minotaur, an official parasitism whose formidable manner dries up in the heart

of the country the confidence and credit that is just that source on which this same parasitism comes meanwhile to quench itself.

They perpetuate the crisis and they perpetuate it because they are afraid!

They are afraid of the socialists, and they fear for their property; they are afraid for their religion, they are afraid for their family!

They are afraid of socialists? ... Of which socialists are they afraid?

There are the socialists of Fourier.

There are the socialists of Pierre Leroux.

There are the socialists of Proudhon.

There are the socialists of Considerant.

There are the socialists of Louis Blanc.

There are the socialists of Cabet.

There are, in fact, socialists that I know, and then those that I do not know and that I shall never know, because socialism fragments, subdivides, diversifies itself and separates into factions like everything that is not defined. Well, socialism is not defined.

Socialism is, in short, a very obscure philosophical system, highly complicated, extraordinarily confusing, that erudite men are obliged to study in minute detail to arrive most often at not understanding anything at all.

Socialism, according to what it is possible to grasp from all its proposals, wants to make of society a huge hive into each pigeon-hole of which will be placed a citizen, who will be enjoined to remain silent and wait patiently, while alms are made of his own money. The major dispensers of these alms, supreme tax-collectors of universal revenues, will create a general staff, reasonably well endowed, which on getting up in the morning deigns to satisfy the public appetite; and which, if it sleeps in longer than usual, will leave thirty-six million men without food.

Socialism is an attempt at geometric equilibrium whose demonstration — based on a principle of immobility — does not know to have for its foundation human societies essentially active and progressive. Socialism is an abstract speculation, just as the current administration is an abstract speculation; the people who do not understand the latter do not understand the former either. Well, the people never freely adopt what they do not at all understand.

Socialism, in short, wants to carry on the affairs of the people, and for that it has come too late, or I am much mistaken.

But the socialists are philosophers who have the same right to teach their doctrines as their adversaries have to teach theirs. Just as the people have the right to judge the latter, they have the right to appraise the former.

No one can put himself in the place of the people to pronounce condemnation or recognition of the excellence of a doctrine; since in that diversity of tastes and inclinations that mottle society, there is no doctrine that is bad for all, nor is there one that is good for all.

Tolerance, in theological order, has not resolved the problem of civil concord; the problem rests also on tolerance in social and political order.

State religions have caused, during the centuries, discords and massacres which we now find pitiable.

State doctrines have at the current time caused so much blood to flow that our children gather together to erect a monument to our shame.

We have eliminated state religions; why do we wait to crush state doctrines?

If we do not see any problem with those who wish to have churches, temples or synagogues constructed, at their expense, on land that belongs to them as their own; I do not at all see any problem with those who wish to construct convents, phalansteries or palaces, at their expense, on land that belongs to them as their own.

And if it is simple enough to let the Catholics, the protestants and the Jews have the right to maintain, at their respective expense, in the churches, the temples and the synagogues, the priests, ministers and rabbis; it is just as simple for the monks, socialists and men of court to have the right to maintain, at their expense, in the convents, in the phalansteries, in the palaces, the superiors, the patriarchs and the princes.

All these things fall within the accommodation of the taste, of the faith, of the conscience of each one of us, and it is perhaps possible that one can be a monk, a socialist, a man of court and an excellent citizen at the same time, since the religions, which must remain outside the laws of the State, do not dispense at all with obedience to the laws of the State.

But what includes at least as much buffoonery as strangeness is the determination made by a myriad of systems to attempt political campaigns, and their respective pretensions to make the whole country contribute to the costs of their establishment and the inauguration of their authority in the name of the public and the nation!

We only need to provide a circus acrobat with five hundred thousand bayonets for the act to become a social doctrine and for the wishes and caprices of Pulcinella to be made into the laws of State. We are, certainly, very near to arriving there, and it surprises me that we are not there already.

But I have digressed enough on that subject. Let us return.

XV

They have fear for their property, fear for their religion, fear for their family?

The ultimate sectarians of intolerance, those that babble among us in that language — still unintelligible, alas! — of the tyrants of humanity, repeat without ceasing their disheveled sentences on the subject of religion, of property, of family.

These ridiculous defenders of God and of society lack the intelligence to understand that the ability to save that which they ascribe to necessarily implies the ability to lose it; they do not perceive, as seriously as they take their puerile Quixotism, that the guard they mount at the temple door and at home puts, in their eyes, God and society at their discretion. It just does not enter the heads of these great children, that while saying to God and to society “we have saved you from destruction,” it is as if they were saying “it has depended on us that you continue to exist; you owe us your life.”

Do you see an articulated apparatus of organic life, claiming a right to the initiative on the existence of God and society?

Do you see here the moral and material universe under the dependence of a degenerate quadruped which could be finished off with just a fillip or a catarrh?

Shame and pity!

Enough of this wretched and discordant bragging!

Enough of this grandeur founded on the abasement of the public!

Enough of this audacity built on fear!

Religion, property, and the family have survived Geneva rationalism, the philosophy of Voltaire, forfeiture agreements, and the dissolution of social ties from antiquity; religion, property, and the family are, in fact, unassailable by individuals. To defend them is to exploit them! To protect them is to plunder them!

How well the intriguers of every hue — those who believe themselves powerful enough to threaten these institutions as much as those who claim the ability to defend them, all those, in a word, who, living by intimidation and terrorism, have an interest in perpetuating universal panic — how well do all these know that religion, property, and the family have never had a more efficacious protector than time; there has, consequently, never been a possibility of their being attacked other than by time.

Time, without anyone taking any notice, without anyone formulating a complaint, time modifies them all: religion, property, and the family. The current state of the Church with its degenerate discipline and its neutrality in secular politics would make the audacious Hildebrand die of a fit of rage.

The current state of property, with its breaking up into an infinite number of pieces and the melancholic handing over of the chateaus, would bring despair to the great tenants of the last century.

The current state of the family, with the incessant displacement of individuals, the submission to the domestic yoke, the separation resulting from cosmopolitanism, would profoundly wound the patriarchal traditions of our ancestors.

The goings-on of future generations, if we were to see them, would shock our prejudices, our customs, our way of life.

Thus, everything changes without destroying itself, and the human spirit only accepts that for which it is prepared. Every day, it opens itself to new interests, to which it can accommodate itself without shock. After a period of time, the coming together of interests gives rise to a new institution, which, having arrived en bloc beforehand, would have surprised and injured everyone, but having arrived in a providential way has not hurt anyone and has satisfied all.

Let us speak and have no fear.

Fear is nothing but the condemnation of oneself, and once one is condemned there is no shortage of executioners.

XVI

The hypothesis of spoliation has been put forward.

No one can believe in the corruptibility of the majorities, without denying at the same time human reason and the principle of its demonstration. If the majorities are incorruptible, they are equitable, since the basic law of equity is respect for acquired right.

Acquired right has been respected even among people where the means of acquisition have been denied to the majority. How can this right be violated among us, where the acquisition, as much as it is still impeded, can nonetheless be considered public.

Let one not speak to me of brigandage, when it is substantiated that it is only carried out by minorities and that its exercise requires its organization.

Let one not speak to me of brigandage, when in the place of a plan by some unacceptable organization one brings me some shouts in the street or some argument at a club.

The people are not responsible for the exceptional insanity of a few spirits. The mad are the lost children of humanity.

Brigandage is not organizable. I am wrong, one can organize it, and here is how: put in each commune an authority more jealous of individual law than public law; establish in each arrondissement, in each department hateful magistrates, intolerant and fanatical; put at the top of this hierarchy a supreme head, blinded by the pride of domination and nourished by impious dogmas; give to this man four or five thousand armed men for support, and spoliation as a rallying call and the violation of acquired rights is consummated. But one says to me that this picture is of nothing but administrative organization, founded on the constitution. I avow it, and what follows from it that a malefactor who does not embrace the administration of the State would be nothing to fear. But this also amounts to saying that this administration squashes us in some way, that we are at the complete mercy of anyone bold enough that chance can allow to happen.

Give the people spoliation as a rallying call and this rallying call will encase itself in the probity of numbers.

How this rallying call goes out from the administration, the systematic webs of which embrace all individuals and all the territory, and the supreme thought propagates like electricity to be lost in blood!

Such is the only possible organization of brigandage, and such is, finally, a usage perhaps applied by the government of representative monarchies.

Those that own, do they fear that they might be individually plundered by those who do not? I sympathize with them while being able to condemn them, because by that they tell me themselves what they would be disposed to do if they had nothing.

And, yet, they err; they are more honest people than they think. They reason from the point of view of the needs that their fortune has given them. I understand that if they were suddenly deprived of the satisfaction of these needs, which have become for them, in some way, natural, they would have to suffer, and that it is under this impression that they argue. But there is one thing that they forget, that is, that if they had never had their fortune, they would not have had their needs either.

Is it not, moreover the case, by virtue of the same principle, that he who would come to dispossess me today, could himself be dispossessed tomorrow? And if things go on like that with each dispossessing the other, what is going to become of production?

Can such an absurd state of things perhaps be understood by sensible people, where the day after a revolution where everything is at the discretion of the masses, and where perversity, in the state of emergency, finds itself drowned in public probity?

If the majority, who do not own anything, had an instinct for plunder, it would have been a long time since the minority who owned anything had anything left.

If there are criminals in our communities, let us count them; it is an easy job; and if we find a few or if we do not find any, we are not going to believe that we exercise here the monopoly of equity: people are the same everywhere.

If the domineering and insolent rage of a few men tear to shreds popular magnanimity and bring into disrepute human character, it follows that the dogma of improbity is the rationale of tyrannies, and the security of tyrants is based on the hatred and mistrust of citizens among themselves.

As for me, separated from the parties to remain human, I defend humanity with esprit de corps.

XVII

But here is what I hear said:

If socialism comes into power, it would be able to compel its recognition. That objection, I expect.

It is quite true that as philosophers, as apostles of a doctrine, as teachers, the socialists have are not at all frightening. All of their opinions might therefore be expressed without danger, seeing that these opinions do not at all aspire to government.

Well, so! Do we think that good public sense would make justice of the absurd, and we fear being governed by the absurd? Do we feel thus that one could govern us contrary to good sense? Do we feel thus that one could violate, surprise our religion as soon as one comes to govern us? But, that admitted, we are incessantly in danger of being handed over! What I say is that, being in danger, we have already been handed over; because, in matters of public security, probabilities are certainties.

At the moment when we recognize that one could do violence to us one does violence to us; it is an inevitable law, inescapable and inherent in all states of dependence.

It is therefore not the socialists that it is necessary to fear, that it is necessary to exorcise; it is necessary to fear, it is necessary to exorcise the institution of government, by virtue of the fact that it can strike us. This institution alone is bad, is dangerous, and whoever is put at the head of this institution will immediately be as dangerous as the socialists; first, because he can become the institution, and second, because he can be surprised and conquered by the socialists, and, finally, because his system can be as bad as, or worse than, theirs.

As long as there is no untrammelled freedom of opinion in France, in order for a doctrine to emerge, it will be forced to attempt the overthrow of the government, for its sole means of action will be to become official State doctrine, to govern; and as long as an official State doctrine governs, it will necessarily consider other doctrines as dangerous rivals and proscribe them.

Thus it is that we continue to see these vicious struggles to which society lends its children and its money, these battles of scheming and ambition that I would call ridiculous if they weren't so atrocious, and of which the outcome — those outcast today to be lauded tomorrow — makes criminality or heroism a mere question of the date.

XVIII

It is therefore shown that socialism is no more to be feared in itself than any other philosophical doctrine. It is established that it can become dangerous only in the condition of governing. That comes down to saying that nothing is dangerous which does not govern; from this it follows that whoever governs is already or can become dangerous — and the strict consequence is still that the nation can have no other public enemy than the government.

That having been said, it is beyond doubt that the only important thing in modern times, as well as the only one against which our representatives have not prepared themselves, consists in simplifying the administrative organism to the degree demanded by individual liberty, which has been without guarantee until this day, and by the reduction of taxation, which will be impossible to do as long as we persist on the path already beaten by the governments with its fat budgets.

The present governmental institution is the same as that of last year, and that of last year resumes all the powers of Louis XIV, with the sole exception that the unity of action of the royal trust finds itself re-divided among six or seven ministerial departments set up by a parliamentary majority. Can we be a free people, as long as our entire existence, from the civil order to the hygienic order, will be so regulated?

If we posit the guarantee of our individual liberty, if we resolve to move ourselves by our own movement, the nation will acquire again that power of which it was relieved or that has been usurped from it; that necessary power, indispensable to the balance of popular prerogatives with governmental initiative.

If the nation recovered its strength, the assembly, which comes from its own ranks, would not soon forget its real master, where true sovereignty lies, and in the contract that would be set forth between France and its stewards, there would remain no means for the latter to make themselves masters of the former.

XIX

With governmental control, such as was held by fallen administrations and such as we have preserved until the current time, one can boldly address a challenge to any who would seriously accept public functions; that would be to diminish the personnel of two formidable armies that weigh at the same time on the liberties and on the fortune of France: the army of the offices and that of the barracks. One can challenge him, consequently, not to proclaim liberty — if that happens I will laugh — but to introduce that liberty into actions and lead him to be something other than a nonentity.

Even more, one could challenge him to reduce taxes. Better still! he is forbidden to keep them at sixteen million, a monstrous figure, of which, what is more, the insufficiency could easily be shown by whoever is finance minister.

Here, in its true colors, is what governmental control accomplishes: slavery and ruin.

That control, on attributing itself the right to rule according to its fancy the movement and the thought of each citizen, has produced, in the moral order, a result not less deplorable. Truly! it has legalized everything.

Oh well! one would be strangely mistaken if one believed that legality carries within its litigious bowels the seed of human probity.

The legislation of France is not founded on the respect of individuals; it is founded on the principle of violation of public right, since lese-majesty, respect for the king, for the emperor, for the government, is consecrated at its root.

The law has never had social sanction among us: there has only been royal sanction and sanction by governmental supremacy whose character has always been to protect the minorities.

Our legislation is therefore immoral, because it is not based on the majority.

This legislation, moreover, necessarily coming after the vices that it seeks to suppress, is in reality nothing but the consecration of these vices. A code teaching me what I must avoid and what I must do; and in its spirit I practice right conveniently enough, since I abstain from wrong. Well, this could introduce a fundamental deception in public belief, since an able man, confronted with the law, finds himself with the same features as a man who is truly virtuous.

A legally honest man is one against whom no grounds for complaint have been proven; but a skilful man is not without the right to claim the benefits of the same definition! He who has carried out shadowy misdeeds, without witness and without coming to grief, skillfully avoiding the prohibitive letter of the law, and who enjoys the protection of the judge is also a man against whom no grounds for complaint have been proven. This one, too, is an honest man! and he would be in greater error to follow the law of social equity, the rule of morality, while the legal gospel is there before his eyes, while he has a clear field in unforeseen circumstances, while he is, with his ability, up to all foreseen cases, and for whom, ultimately, there is the friendship of the judge.

According to legality, therefore, equity goes according to the judgment of the court and the public conscience is taken over by the conscience of statute book.

Legality! but in pushing the social body of the people into pure and simple legality, governments have created and brought into the world a fraud, the poetry of pugilism.

The man, required to have the skill to avoid the trap set by the legislator, does not even bother to become a hypocrite. After having cleverly escaped the forethought of the law, he boasts of it as something to recommend to his contemporaries; he has sailed close to the wind with the law and the victory is his: what a superior being!

It goes without saying that our legislation, made up of scholarly compendiums, whose scrutiny and interpretation is only for the erudite, has fallen short of the morality of simple people who have always been and do not cease to be the quarry of the jurists.

Here, then, is what the much vaunted work of the legislative assemblies have provided us with: a celebrated statute book, a gravestone raised by public grief on the tomb of virtue! Each moral failing has, on passing, come to write its formula on this glossy book, and, the more numerous the formulas, the more beautiful the statute book, but also the more beautiful the statute book, the more perverted the society.

XX

Something one should never tire of repeating, is that morality can only exist among free people, and free people are those whose government, speaking very little of the national language, speak above all foreign languages; the government of democracies is principally diplomatistic.

Among us, he who speaks of government speaks of the Republic, the State, society. These words, in effect, the red Republic, the tricolor Republic, etc., which try our patience, signify nothing but the red government, the tricolor government, etc. As far as the administration is concerned, the government, that is the Republic.

Who thinks this is wrong?

The men of today, indeed quite different from those of times gone by, sense, though they understand nothing, that their being and their property are entirely separate from the administrative body. They feel it so much that, on letting, as a result to custom, a government establish itself on a model of past times, they effectively retire from it, not granting it their confidence, and not agreeing to aid it materially, without grumbling, faced with force or in fear. They feel it so much so that they take it upon themselves to control, publicly, the acts of administration. Well, a power whose acts are controlled has forfeited its rights, since its authority is undermined.

But this error, which consists of hiding the whole of society under the symbol of government, is strongly embedded in public beliefs.

The influence of tradition has made of it an article of national faith, which everyday finds itself in more direct opposition with the public will and public sentiment.

Thus, everyone knows that a popular movement puts nothing in danger but the official fortune of a few men; despite public bills and proclamations saying that the movement puts society in danger, the nation allows it without further consideration.

If I wanted to adopt the reasoning of skilled people, who use for their own interests the powers that society confers upon them, this would lead me to a curious conclusion, a disappointing commentary on the tumultuous spectacle of revolutions!

XXI

I have seen, in the few years that my memory is able to embrace, a very respectable number of popular movements.

When these movements fail at the first step, their leaders are arrested, thrown into jail, tried and convicted as criminals of the State. The proclamations posted on every wall in Paris and sent to the very smallest township tell society that it has just been saved.

Certainly, at this news, logically I would have to think that if, by some sort of misunderstanding, authority had been overwhelmed, if the army had weakened, if the movement had gone beyond the law, that would have been the end of society: France would have been pillaged, sacked, set ablaze, lost!

When, however, these movements, mastering all obstacles, overturning authority, passing the armed forces have followed their course and arrived at their goal, then their leaders are carried in triumph, hailed as heroes and raised to the highest heights of the judiciary. The proclamations posted on every wall in Paris and sent to the very smallest township tell society that it has just been saved. Thus society, incessantly in danger, is always saved!

Who saves it? Those that put it in danger.

Who puts it in danger? Those that save it.

It is to say that society is never more completely lost than when it is saved.

And that it is never better saved than when it is lost.

And I said that by adopting the reasoning of the skilled people who make use of the power with which society endows them for their own personal ends, it would lead me to a curious conclusion!

Curious, indeed, and logically explicable by the facts.

Thus, taking us back to 23 February, according to the *Journal des débats*, *Le Constitutionnel*, *Le Siècle* and all the other newspapers that defend social order, it is understood that the agitators in Paris at that time were nothing but unsanctioned troublemakers who wanted nothing less than the subversion, the overturn and the ruin of society.

These unsanctioned troublemakers triumphed the next day and, immediately, every citizen said what he liked, wrote, printed what he liked, did what he liked, went where he liked, went out and came in when he liked; enjoyed, in a word, his natural liberty in all ways socially possible, amid the most complete security, favored by the most fraternal urbanity. Society was, in short, saved by and for each of its members.

Well, this happened the day when, according to the friends of order, society was lost.

Thus, again, to the voice of the defenders of social order became added, for reasons known to itself, that of Le National: the June agitators were nothing but unsanctioned troublemakers who wanted nothing less than the subversion, the overturn and the ruin of society. These troublemakers failed and, immediately, every citizen was barracked in his own home, scrupulously examined on his own premises, disarmed, thrown in jail by a simple ill-willed denunciation, reduced to the most complete and absolute silence, placed under the unruly surveillance of the state-of-siege police and governed by the sharp, pointed and undiscerning law of the sword. Society was, therefore, lost by and for each of its members.

Well, this happened the day when, according to the friends of order, this time including Le National, society was saved.

From which I am forced to conclude, just as I have already said and proven, that society is never more completely lost than when it is saved and that it is never better saved than when it is lost.

This is, oh France, the spectacle, as delicate as it is subtle, that plays out in front of other nations and before posterity, in the country the most intelligent in the world.

What an indecorous comedy!

XXII

I do nothing more here than to state the facts; I note them and report them as they appear to me. Regarding the commentary, I simply repeat what I have said elsewhere: I do not believe at all in the efficacy of armed rebellion, and for a simple reason, which is that I do not believe at all in the efficacy of armed governments.

An armed government is a brutal entity, since its only principle is force. An armed revolution is a brutal thing, because it has no other principle than force.

When one is ruled by the arbitrariness of barbarism, it is necessary to kick like a barbarian; and, as for the arms one crosses over their chests, the parties would do well to oppose weapons.

As much as a government, in place of improving the condition of things, only improves the condition of a few people, a revolution, the inevitable end of such a government, will only be a substitution of persons instead of being a change of matters.

Armed governments are the authorities of the movement, the administration of the party.

Armed revolutions are the wars of the movement, the campaigns of the party.

The nation is as much a stranger to armed government as it is to armed revolution; but if it is the case that a revolutionary party is more immediately worried than the nation by the governing party, it will also be the case that one day the nation worried in its turn will complain about the government, and that it will be in that precise moment that it will win the moral support of the people, that the revolutionary party will wage battle.

From there, this kind of public recognition leads to bloody rabble-rousing, which under the pompous title of revolutions, hides the impertinence of a few valets rushing to become masters.

When the people have understood the position that has been reserved for them in these Saturnalias they pay for, when they have realized the ignoble and stupid role that they have been made to play, they will know that armed revolution is a heresy from the point of view of principles; they will know that violence is antipodal to right; and once resolved on the morality and the inclinations of the violent parties, whether those of government or revolutionary, there will be a

revolution among them brought about by the single force of right: the force of inertia, the denial of assistance. In the denial of assistance will be the repeal of the laws on legal assassination and the proclamation of equity.

This supreme act of national sovereignty I see happen here, not as a calculated result, but as an expression of the law of necessity, as an inevitable product of an administrative avidity, of the extinction of credit and the gloomy arrival of destitution. This revolution, which will be French and not solely Parisian, will tear France from Paris to lead it back to a municipality; then, and only then, will the national sovereignty become fact, since it will be founded on the sovereignty of the commune.

To these words of sovereignty of the commune, all the great minds, who have dragged patriotism to the bar of vocabulary to make the Republic a question of words, exclaim in admiration the name three times holy of unity.

Unity! The time is ripe speak about it. In the midst of the divisions tearing the country apart, I ask what has been made of national unity by the lame paraders who speak in its name!

Unity! I know of only one way to destroy it; that is to want to constitute it by force. If someone had the power to act on the planets, and if, under the pretext of constituting the unity of the solar system, he tried to make them adhere by force to the center, he would destroy the equilibrium and reestablish chaos.

There is someone here who supports unity more than anyone else; that someone is the French people; and if France does not understand that she must promptly leave the stomach of the administration, or else be dissolved there, that will not be my fault, nor the fault of the coarse peritoneum which elaborate the digestion.

XXIII

Let us say, moreover, that the result of an armed revolution, supposing that the revolution is generously interpreted by a kindhearted man, all-powerful over opinion, honest, disinterested and democratic like Washington, the result of an armed revolution, I have said, can turn to the profit of public law.

The tyrants overturned, before others come to take their place, there always appears, on top of the ruins of the tyranny, a man greater than the others, a man whom everyone sees, whom everyone hears, and he is the master of the debris; it is up to him to scatter it or reconstruct it.

If Monsieur de Lamartine had had the genius of action, as he had genius of matters of intelligence, 24 February would have been the date of the French Republic, instead of being nothing but invective.

France, on that day, had expected everything from that man, to whom national sympathies had spontaneously handed over the puissant steering of the destiny of the people.

He only had to say to us in the harmonious rhythm of his beautiful language: "The government of the king is abolished: France is no longer at the Hôtel de Ville!"

"Your masters have gone and they will not be replaced!"

"Their law was in force; it is in force no longer. It will not return!"

"You are returned to yourselves; the foreigner will learn from me that you are free."

"Keep a watch over yourselves; I'll keep a watch on the borders!"

Certainly, after declarations so substantial, our representatives, whoever they had been, would not have lost sight of the fact that they had to define national law, and not the frenzied law of governments.

Perhaps Monsieur de Lamartine would have perished, a victim of ambitious men left without prey. The despair of the apprentice tyrants might perhaps have been unleashed on him; but his death, like that of all great citizens, would have been fecund! And since, as he said, ideas vegetate in human blood, his would have remained at the beginning of the free era, as an eternal protestation against the tyranny of the delivered.

Unfortunately, instead of scattering the elements of despotism, he set about collecting them together again in order to reassemble them; today the building is complete except for the keystone. It is not he that lives in it, but it is inhabited; not too much worse, perhaps, but not much better either.

Ah, well! the time has come to leave words and come to action!

The time has come to know what democracy wants to say!

The time has arrived for all Frenchmen, in whose arteries still beats a little Gallic blood, who, from Diocletian to Charlemagne, protested against the tyranny of the empire, to assume their position as free citizens, and to call to account the cowardice and the inability of the men of the people, the Republican individualities, for our collapsed credit, for our vanished capital, for our paralyzed industries, for our lay-offs, for our extinguished trade, for our products without market; for our France, finally, so unproductive, so alienated, so venal, so prostituted, so debased, so inhospitable, so foreign to ourselves, so polluted by the tax authorities, and so close to contempt for its children, that they will soon not have enough love in their hearts to set their courage against attempts by their ravishers!

The time has come, for we are facing a decisive spectacle: on one side there is the government which defies the nation;

On the other side, there is the nation which defies the government.

Well, it must be, by complete necessity, that either the government devours the country or that the country absorbs the government.

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Anselme Bellegarrigue
To the Point! To Action!! An Interpretation of the Democratic Idea
1848

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Note by Shawn P. Wilbur: Translation by Collective Reason (Robert Tucker, Jesse Cohn, and Shawn P. Wilbur.) Robert did most of the hard work, and I'm responsible for the final choices.

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