

Respect

Georges Palante

December 1903

The contemptible sentiment par excellence. Mosaic of crystallized fears; mixture of herd stupidity and secular religiosity.

I mean the respect of collective beings; of the maleficent and deceptive metaphors that populate our social mythologies.

Stirner gives collective entities the characteristic name of “respectful personalities.” Moral idols, political idols, society idols, they float, like the specter of religion in Lucretius’ heavens; ghostly, vain, formidable.

Stendhal had already pointed out the respectful mania, the mother of all hypocrisies, guardian of all big shots and oligarchs.

The beatific social optimism of the crowd is only a form of that respectful mania. For the crowd, whatever kind of collectivity we might be dealing with – public administration, government body, the family – are always right against the individual. It is right for the very reason that it is a collectivity. The label “collective” suffices. The dogma of infallibility is thus secularized and socialized.

Oligarchs know this. They bank on the crowd’s capacity for respect, which gives an idea of the infinite, as does its stupidity.

The citizen is a respectful and irremediably religious animal; it now inclines to civic genuflection. It adores social fetishes just as the little dog Riquet in “Monsieur Bergeret à Paris” venerated doors, the table, and the kitchen chair.

Reproductive animal, the citizen venerates the fetish “marriage.” An electoral animal, he venerates that other fetish, the modern holy ampoule, the Civic Ballot Box.

With respect to crowds we oppose irony, pensive irony, of a cold smile and a clear eye.

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