Ricardo Mella
The Law of Numbers
2015

Translated by Paul Sharkey

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sive privileges or rights whatever these may be, and on three grounds: first, because a charlatan might often be mistaken for a genius; second, because, under such a system of privilege, a real sage might be turned into a charlatan; and third, because it would be tantamount to society's appointing itself a master.

But whilst we reject the absolute, universal and infallible authority of men of science, we willingly defer to the venerable, though relative, temporary and limited authority of the representatives of the special sciences, for we could do no better than refer to each in turn, placing much store by the precious reports they supply to us, provided that they willingly receive our on every occasion and in relation to every matter in which our competency may exceed their own. Broadly speaking, there is nothing better than the sight of men endowed with great knowledge, great experience, great intellects and above all, big hearts, wielding legitimate, natural influence over us to which we freely surrender and which is never imposed in the name of any authority, be it divine or human. We accept all natural authorities and all influences de facto, *but none* de jure*; any formally imposed* de jure *authority or influence turns directly into oppression and falsehood , delivering us up inevitably, as I believe I have shown, to slavery and nonsense.*

In short, we reject all legislation, all authority and all influence that is privileged, formal and legal, even should it derive from the ballot box, persuaded that it will never profit anyone other than a ruling, exploitative minority to the detriment of the interests of the vast majority subject to it.

This being the sense in which we really are anarchists."

it, aghast, and to the devil with their advice, direction and services, certain that I should have to pay the price for any such glimmers of truth, wrapped in a host of falsehoods as they might offer me, in terms of the loss of my liberty and self-respect.

If I defer to the authority of another in respect of a given matter and somehow, insofar as it strikes me that I need to, abide by his guidelines and indeed direction, this is because such authority is not foisted upon me by anybody, God or man. Otherwise I would shun it, aghast, and to the devil with their advice, direction and services, certain that I should have to pay the price for any such glimmers of truth, wrapped in a host of falsehoods as they might offer me, in terms of the loss of my liberty and self-respect.

I defer to outside authority in certain matters because they are not imposed upon me by anything other than my own reason and because I am conscious that I cannot possibly have a grasp upon much of human knowledge in its every detail and in its full extent. Even the greatest individual intelligence cannot compete with collective reason when it comes to intelligence. This being why, in science as in industry alike, the division and amalgamation of efforts are a necessity. Give and take, that is what human life is all about. Everyone leading and being led in turn. This being why there is no fixed and constant authority, but rather a continual exchange of authority and mutual subordination which is temporary and above all, voluntary.

On the very same grounds I am prevented from acknowledging any fixed, constant and universal authority, because there is no one in the world capable of embracing all the wealth of detail in every science and in every realm of the life of society, without which the application of science to life is impossible. And should someone, riding roughshod over this, seek to impose his authority upon his fellow men, such a creature would have to be banished from society because his authority would inevitably reduce his fellows to slavishness and imbecility. Not that I think that society should mistreat men of talent, as actually occurs at present; but I do not believe, either, that it should take its indulgence of them to such lengths, let alone grant them exclu-

Note from the Translator

Ricardo Mella Cea (1861–1925), one of the first writers, intellectuals and anarchist activists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Spain, was considered to be one of the deepest, most penetrating and most lucid of the Spanish anarchist thinkers. In this work he addresses the question of voting and the nature of parliamentary democracy.

I — Superstition and the fraudulence of voting

Spencer has it that the great political superstition of the divine right of kings has been replaced by the great political superstition of the divine right of parliaments. He goes on to say, "The anointing oil seems to have switched undetected from one head to many, consecrating them and their rights."

Let us take a look at the great superstition which drew such eloquent words from the premier positive philosopher.

Whether we are talking about monarchies or republics, the origin of parliament is the will of the majority, in theory at any rate. At the same time, the supremacy of the greater number rests upon its incontrovertible right to govern everyone, directly or indirectly. The claim is — and the querying of it is scarcely tolerated — that the majority is more far-sighted on every issue than the minority and that, since all men have much in common, it is only reasonable and necessary that the majority should determine how and in what manner general purposes are to be served.

From which flows a series of strictly precise consequences.

The majority among the inhabitants of a country is entitled to regulate the political, religious, economic, artistic and scientific life of society as a whole. Enjoys an all-encompassing right to decide upon all matters and deal with them as its knowledge and understanding suggest. Is entitled to affirm and deny whatsoever it pleases at any point, tearing down one day's handiwork the very next day. In politics, to lay down the law and rules from which no one is exempt. In economics, it determines and fashions changes,

the laws of Nature, so neither can we crudely dismiss the counsel of science and sage. Even when we make a real effort to emancipate ourselves through our knowledge of the former and any sway exercised by the latter. Our ultra-materialist outlook prompts us to think of man as being bound by physical laws, but we always strive against the harm they do to him, by breaking free of the very same bonds and trying always to redeem ourselves by means of rebellion and wisdom from the brutality of any force affecting him. So how likely are we to accept the authority of any man as infallible and unchallengeable? His advice is, as far as we are concerned, mere loose change, just as it is today for educated folk, folk who have abandoned all belief in infallibility of any sort.

"*When it comes to shoes*" – Bakunin said, and let us close with his quotation from him – "*I turn to the authority of the shoemaker; in everything having to do with buildings, canals or railways, I seek out that of the architect or engineer. For every specialist science I look to such-and-such a man of learning. But I do not consent to the shoemaker, the architect or the learned man forcing their authority upon me. I accept them freely and with as much respect as they deserve in terms of their intellect and their character, their knowledge, but at all times I reserve my incontrovertible right to criticise and censure. I consult not one but several authorities on a given issue; I compare their opinions and in the end I choose the ones that strike me as being most right. For that very reason and even in relation to special matters I recognise no infallible authority: no respect that I may have for the authority and honesty of this person or that can induce me to place absolute faith in him. Such faith would be fatal to my reason, my liberty and indeed to the course of my thinking; I would immediately be turned into a dull-witted slave, a mere instrument of the will and interests of others.*

If I defer to the authority of another in respect of a given matter and somehow, insofar as it strikes me that I need to, abide by his guidelines and indeed direction, this is because such authority is not foisted upon me by anybody, God or man. Otherwise I would shun

person needs the labours of the rest in order to survive, so each group also needs the labours of other groups before it can operate smoothly. No association is going to be able to survive on its own output alone; it will, rather, have need of a host of things which he other associations must supply. Ready agreement will be the only way in which the reciprocal relations and exchanges without which life is not a possibility, now or ever, can be established.

So let us cast aside a world of artificial authorities conjured up and sustained by force and upon the ruins of that world build a world of freedom with all its natural implications, including .. why not admit it? … the freely accepted influence and authority of wisdom and virtue, in that we are not out to destroy the imperishable in Nature, but only that which has been conjured up by man and which binds him hand and foot to the phoney belief that, in the absence of supremacy of force or numbers, social life was not possible. We are out to destroy, not that which is implicit in people's living in communion with one another, but the extent to which people, in their early beginnings and as part of their animal nature, waged continual and unrelenting war in order to embed the privileges of wealth and the overwhelming force of all the powers-that-be, be they religious, political, military or legal. We are not laying the foundations of a new world of new powers-that-be, because we afford the scientist no formal and unchallengeable authority; because we are not founding some brains trust, let alone a company of saints to govern us. We do embrace, whenever we feel it is right, the views of those best equipped by education or experience, just as we hope that, likewise, our own views will be accepted and we are out to bring knowledge of science to all men, excluding none, so as to render any vestige of personal servitude that much more impossible. In short, we strive for the complete emancipation of body and mind, or, as a believer might put it, for the root-and-branch emancipation of matter and spirit. But just as we cannot escape the physical laws by which we are bound, indeed, real human progress means self-emancipation from all law, even

governs production and consumption and enables or rules out cheap living, depending upon how it feels at the time. In religion, it overrules every conscience and imposes dogma on everyone on pain of severe punishment and by means of burdensome taxation. In the arts and sciences, it exercises a monopoly on education and affords the official truth privileged status.

It determines and sets the rules of hygiene and moral behaviour to be observed, which social roles behove the group and which the individual, the conditions in which work is to be done, wealth acquired, assets seized, things altered and persons related to. Finally, to cap it all, it rewards and punishes and acts as accuser, lawyer and judge, an almighty god whose reach extends everywhere, who arranges everything and above all stands guard over everything, watchful and jealous.

There is no exaggeration in these deductions once it has been accepted that the law of numbers is the supreme law.

But, since majorities cannot accomplish so many things unaided, since they cannot possibly handle such a variety of issues on a daily basis, of necessity law and parliamentary delegation pop up to complement it. And indeed, on the basis of majority, delegates or representatives are also chosen who, constituted as a body, assume all of the powers of those whom they represent, or rather of the entire nation, and this is how the omnipotent powers and divine right of parliaments come into being.

And lo and behold, inside these chambers or gatherings of the elect, the radical law of numbers is applied and, on a basis of majority, laws are decreed for the purpose of sage governance of public and private interests, such is the omniscience of the law-makers. Thus do a handful of averagely educated citizens, most often commoners, attain to the grace of supreme wisdom. Hygiene, medicine, jurisprudence, sociology, mathematics, they know it all because the holy spirit of majorities hovers constantly over their heads. That, in all its starkness, is the theory.

Querying of it is regarded as rash, denial of it madness.

Insult is the argument of the idiot.

But wisdom is the encapsulation of truth. "The sovereign people" – says the positivist – "appoints its representatives and creates the government. The government, in turn, conjures up rights and confers these separately upon each member of the sovereign people, from which it itself emanates. What a wonderful feat of political mumbo-jumbo!"

But the mumbo-jumbo does not stop there. It reaches into the very deepest recesses of political systems because, once the law of majorities has been affirmed, it turns, as we shall very soon see, into a tremendous fiction that allows a few to ensconce themselves in the cradle of power and dictate and impose their mighty will upon an entire people.

So, before we critique the law, let us try to delve deeper into this political mystery and expose to the reader's gaze the reality that it encapsulates.

VIII — Against divisive, coercive authority: the unfettered exercise of intelligence as a creative, organising influence

And still, in a last ditch effort, there will be someone who will pipe up and ask: Won't each and every one of those administrators be a boss? Won't each and every one of those technical directors be a new master? Won't each and every one of those associations not constitute a fresh authority vying with other authorities? You're tearing down one set of authorities and conjuring up a fresh set!

An administrator or a director-facilitator count for no more and no less than workers in our egalitarian organisation. Stripped of the privilege of ownership, rather than operating as chiefs, they engage in the work of cooperation, for it is the privilege of ownership that conjures up and encourages the tyranny of chieftainship, the despotism of the master. Do away with property and all authoritarian supremacy is rendered impossible. Do away with government and likewise all of the privilege of appropriation evaporates.

This applies equally to producer associations.

Bereft of exclusive ownership of things and of the authority and force required in order to impose their will, life would of necessity boil down to cooperating with other associations in the orderly and smooth pursuit of the purposes shared by them all. Just as every

We see no need for further examples. Lots of associations today live without governors and without voting. What holds true with regard to a given number of individuals holds true also for an even bigger number within a unit. What holds true for this latter example is equally true if a further unit is added on. And regardless of the numbers of persons involved. Such is mathematics.

The existence of just one group of people, surviving without votes and government arrangements, is proof that society as a whole can survive without governors and without voting, proof that our argument is no utopia, no impossible dream, since it all boils down to a general application of the practicalities of a specific experience.

II — Fictional majorities and the fallacies of parliamentary votes

Are constitutional countries really governed by majority decisions? Does the will of the majority prevail in everything or in anything? Let us see. The government of a nation – Spain, say – convenes general elections every so often. The parties gird their loins for the coming contest and the day of contention finally arrives. In every district at least two candidates will offer themselves. This is most commonly the case. Even so, in some of them even more stand and there will be plenty where there will be but one candidate.

Let us stick to the generality and assume the most perfect impartiality in election contests (which would be a real turn-up for the books). Let's do a few sums. Without quoting examples and amassing figures that anyone could find for himself without much effort, allow us to state that, broadly speaking, some 30% to 50% of electors (!) abstain from casting their votes! Regrettably, we do not have the figures for Spain. But in France and during an extraordinarily turbulent time, which is to say in 1886, seven out of ten million voters voted, or, to put that another way, nearly a third of voter numbers abstained; and the author from whom we have borrowed these figures notes that the numbers abstaining were reaching alarming proportions. So if, in abnormal circumstances and in a land where political strife is livelier than in Spain, some 38% of voters abstained, we can scarcely be accused of exaggerating if we

credit our own country with 40% abstention, which is to say, the median of the two figures quoted above. And how does the remaining 60% break down? Ordinarily, the defeated candidate is within range of the winning candidate who is virtually always the official candidate. In very rare cases, the winner takes twice the vote of the loser. So it will not be going out on a limb if we credit the defeated candidate with 20% of the voters. To recap: 40 out of every 100 voters abstains, 20 vote for the losing candidate, making 60% and the remaining 40% make up the majority which the successful candidate will be representing in parliament. That, though, is a rather rosy view of things as they affect those elected. But even if this were not the case, even if the defeated candidate took only 10% of the votes, even if we were to stack up all the favourable evidence so as to calculate in a way flattering to the winner, he would still turn out to be representative of a minority. Note, by the way, that in everything said there has been no mention made of women who account for roughly half the nation and have, as man does, rights and interests in need of defending. And we might even add that also left out of the reckoning are under-age children who, as Tarde has pointed out, enjoy full civil rights through a proxy (father or tutor) and who, similarly, should also have the right to vote in elections. In which case the upshot would be that, with three fourths of the population (France 1885 and 1886) not entitled to vote, no candidate could speak for a majority of the individuals in his constituency.

However, let us pass over these calculations and, adopting another tack, see how representative the elected candidate actually is. No matter how impartial a government may be, no matter how much it seeks to act within the law and supposing that it has the most ardent desire for justice, it cannot help tilting the electoral scales through its influence, even involuntarily. We have out-and-out lobbying, brazen violence and immoral trickery. It is only natural that such influence will exist, impersonal and thoughtless influence if you like, but all the more effective and efficacious for

tice, working life is not some metaphysical pursuit beyond mere mortals but something real in which everyone has a say. There will be different rates of pay since account may be taken in one context of individual effort, whereas in a different context that will not be the case. Where personal effort is taken into account, it would take only a straightforward pact, a contract, to iron out any issues. In short, all our business would be sorted out by means of simple agreements and it will not take much before we are applying to work that which is applied in mathematics proper. Go visit the workshops and the workers will tell you whether such agreements are feasible or not.

The same will apply where no account is taken of individual effort but where attention is paid to needs (communism). The basis of the recompense of labour or the distribution of goods will still be the compact and the mutual arrangement reached in advance.

Which still leaves the thorny issue of technical and administrative staff. No trading or industrial company has ever been known to appoint its cashier by majority vote, any more than its book-keeper or their assistants. The law of numbers is a law that does not apply outside of political societies or societies which are not political but which are out to ape them. Within each collective, every person has been allocated a function on the basis of his aptitudes and abilities. And, should there be more persons suited to a particular function than are required in any collective, some are going to have to make do with performing some other role or quit the collective. The needs of production would then, as ever, govern how work is distributed. On pain of suicide, men would agree to carry out those duties most critically important for general existence.

All of the issues that might stack up around the future evaporate like smoke in face of the chaos at present … The thousands of workers perishing in poverty are not idle because of some laughable preference for this function over some other function. Were they able to answer the call of their needs, they would gladly turn their hand to any trade in return for a livelihood.

else, each man would be free to do as he pleased, with prejudice to none and without having to defer to any

body, whether he belonged to the majority or not. Matters relating to education, insurance and assistance would have to be resolved the same way. Each collective would resort to one or more approaches and trial and error would see to the elimination of the ineffective and harmful ones. If the teaching body was not of one mind in an area, say, each person or group would strive to apply his/their particular methods, bringing forth good instead of bad. If any difference of opinion had to be resolved by the majority which, being omniscient is all-competent, then it would be worth dispensing with teachers because their expertise would count for nothing alongside the blind will of a handful of men. If the residents of some city could not see eye to eye over assistance and insurance against unforeseen accidents, whether deriving from nature or from man, there would likewise be no reason to resort to majority rule which would produce results here as bad as it does in the field of politics. Every partner would always be free, either on his own or in concert with others, to do as he saw fit. Once again, trial and error would at all times show up the effectiveness of one arrangement and the ineffectuality of a rival one.

And what of the distribution and recompense of labour? we will be asked. How will a trading or industrial concern such as the one cited at the start of this analysis go about the allocation of work? How will that work be rewarded? Why, in accordance with a contract. No more, no less. So much for life in the future. Each producer association will have all these things set out in a contract in advance. Communist, collectivist or mutualist arrangements can be properly put into practical effect. Won't the partners be entitled to do just that? Will they not have a completely free hand to proceed as they see fit? Application of rule by majority here would have damaging implications. In a hat-making factory there would be no argument over who does the metalwork and who does the ironing. Well the same would apply to other trades as well, because in prac-

that. Public servants will vote, without anyone's ordering them to, they will vote willy-nilly for the official candidate. The friends and debtors of that candidate will likewise be caught up in bringing influence to bear on those with whom they have any sort of a social relationship, albeit a moral influence expressed through their spoken words and advice. The court, church, military authorities and so on, albeit remaining entirely passive, will be seen as recommendations on the basis of which many cast their vote for the government or the political boss, without a thought for their own ideas. The fact is that the debtors, friends and relatives of the opposition candidate will do the same: but their influence and power will not match the power and influence of government personnel.

Is there anything to be queried in what we have said? Then let's not get into accounts; arithmetic will more than suffice. The elected individual will actually represent a slender minority that embraces without a quibble whatever representative is nominated by the party or actual government authorities.

And what are we to say where there are more than two candidates? Can the person elected ever represent the majority of electors? It will always be the case that the votes of the defeated plus the abstainers will add up to a figure higher than that scored by the winning candidate.

We will be told that in many instances there is no election contest because there is only one candidate. Fine. When there is only one candidate standing in a district or locality that is due either to indifference on the part of the voting public or to the certainty that nothing can be done in defiance of the government's influence. In which case, abstention is almost universal. Everybody knows it and admits it is so, although LEGALLY there is still the appearance of a large turn-out. One way or another, the person elected represents, at best, the government and its official bosses and thus is not really representative of any voter.

In most rural areas, that being where single candidates are more often to be found, polling stations do not even open up. The most

influential individuals, or the members of the town council, who are nearly always the same people, get together some day and it is they that freely decide upon the area's parliamentary representative. All votes save one (the one master-vote, as it is called) go to the previously selected candidate. A record is made and duly stamped and the election is done. Sometimes the local boss is sent blank minutes. We have witnessed this in Galicia, in Castile and in Andalusia and will not go far wrong if we assert that, in one shape or another, it goes on all over Spain.

The representatives chosen by this curious method are, in most cases, unfamiliar with their districts, nor do their districts know them and so, between one and the other there can be no empathy with needs nor, on the part of those elected, any desire to look out for interests of which they are ignorant. The voter remains indifferent in the face of all this as if knowing in advance that he need pin no hopes on the legislator and that the whole thing is a three card trick.

So how representative could a body thus composed claim to be? Representative of a microscopic minority, at most.

Let us imagine, however, that our analysis is mistaken and agree that every one of the nation's representatives enjoys that status thanks to the freely manifested will of a majority. Even then each representative is going to find himself frequently torn between the wider interests which the law commands him to look out for and the private interests that his voters insist he serve. It may be argued that, collectively, the deputies produce a harmonious outcome that satisfies both the nation's common interest and the sectional interests in each locality. But even granting such a metaphysical reconciliation of interests, do representatives *always* see eye to eye on what is good for the nation? To put that another way, do they *ever*? And if they do, do they really cater for the interests and requirements of those whom they represent?

Take, say, boosting wheat importation duty. The deputies from Castile will be all for an increase. But the deputies from Galicia,

sists in using solicitude and experience to win people over. Also, even should the peasants make their own way without any outside advice, if an agronomist's advice can be so described, it would certainly not enter their heads to put matters relating to farming and cultivation of the soil to a majority vote. Even by current standards, they have enough expertise to usefully direct their efforts in what is their constant undertaking.

When it comes to the operation of the railways and communications-transport services, it seems to us that since each producer cannot have a train at his beck and call, such services are going to have to be managed by the groups charged with them and tailored to general requirements. As ever, given their expertise in the area and in the information thrown up by statistics, technical staff will see to it that things are handled in such a way as to meet those general requirements. We will be told that there is a preference in that which confers upon that majority certain rights above and beyond the rest of society; but this is a preference which does not apply willy-nilly to every whim of that majority, but is a reasonable preference to which none may take exception in this day and age.

We still reckon that man is in actual fact never entirely free, but, as Pi y Margall has put it, is en route to becoming so. We seek complete freedom of action, and when we say complete, we mean without limits other than natural limits and none of the fictitious limits that man sets for himself at present.

That man cannot fly is a natural fact, in that he is not suitably equipped to do so, so it would be laughable to lobby for him to have the freedom to soar through the clouds. There would be a case if the time should come when he had the means to fly and if there was some artificial obstacle preventing him from doing so. Similarly, man does not yet possess the means to be able to travel as and how he pleases, so it is ridiculous raising questions about his greater or lesser freedom for he simply cannot do it. Had man such means, there would be no contest, because then, in this as in everything

These are questions we can wriggle out of answering because in actual fact we cannot be asked to determine in advance every jot and tittle of what social living will be like in the future.

Is there any real problem with answering them, though, when we have already laid down the general principle upon which the body of society must, as a matter of logic, be founded?

For one thing, let us point out that, just as matters medical, mechanical, architectural and many another are not subject to majority rule, so matters agricultural, economical and , basically, any others relating to man's existence should not be subject to such rule either; instead, such matters, just like the ones we first mentioned, should be entrusted to persons well versed in the area, to expert personnel, with the general stipulation that these be subject to criticism and analysis from those required to act upon their advice or prescriptions.

Just as we take the doctor's opinion at face value, albeit reserving our right to repudiate it and follow the opinion of someone we deem more competent, so in other matters too we can embrace the views of the experts, whilst, however, reserving our right to drop them in favour of others who might strike us as nearer the mark.

In matters agricultural, for instance, it is for the expert, the agronomist to decide what sort of cultivation is appropriate for each tract, how it should best be worked, which fertilisers are to be preferred. It follows that those to whom it falls to serve in that expert capacity must join the farming associations. Where else would they go?

Doubt may be cast upon the readiness of the peasants to accept their contribution, and our answer to that is that that would certainly be a matter of regret, but that it would have to be left to time to eradicate the concerns engendered by society's present status, concerns utterly extraneous to the society we have in mind.

Be that as it may, the task of those with expertise in farming would be to win acceptance from those currently bereft of all expertise; we already know the huge potential of the expert if he per-

Valencia, Aragon, etc., will argue for wheat's being able to enter Spain freely. If it comes to textiles, Catalonia will take an opposite stance to much of the rest of the country. In the case of wine, Andalusia and Castile for instance will not see eye to eye with Galicia and Asturias. What will happen? The deputies, primarily mindful of the government's instructions, rather than the nation's will, which in any case cannot be framed as a single expression, will resort to wheeling and dealing and accommodations out of which will emerge some contradictory or insipid law, a law that will satisfy no public or private interest, a law that will leave everybody unhappy and trigger storms of protest; a law, in short, that will suit no interests but the government's interests, a hotchpotch stupidly contrived for the law-maker's own benefit.

Collectively, parliaments represent their respective countries. A motley crew of men stakes a claim to be representative of an entire nation. Its mission is to work in conformity with the general interest rather than those of each group of voters. So the theory goes, at any rate. But how are these representatives supposed to know the broader interests and needs when they cannot even register the most short-term needs and interests of the groups that elected them? In practice, things operate differently. The country's representatives out of sheer convenience seek to accommodate themselves to the supposed needs of the *comarca* to which they belong; but as it turns out, even though Castilian deputies vote for what Castile wants, say, they will always be outvoted by the remainder of their parliamentary colleagues and so the Castilians are going to have to put up with whatever the other *comarcas* thrust upon them. And this will be the general rule, unless, just once in history, it so happens that sixteen or twenty million men agree upon the adoption of some law, some regulation. Hence there is no law that genuinely caters for the general interest and needs, but there is a certain metaphysical, vague and indeterminate entity, a shadow; but it is a shadow without substance which is what the government law-making fiction adds up to.

That aside, we can readily understand that, because of this very procedure, no law can accomplish the broad purposes attributed to it. Since the members of parliament were chosen at the ballot box, even if every single one of them had a genuine majority of the votes, lots of groups of citizens are still bereft of representation and thus withhold their consent from the laws framed. And since these laws never command the unanimous support of the legislature, the upshot is that every law has to be denied the consent of those voters defeated at the polls, the consent of those represented by deputies who take issue with the majority and, lastly, the consent of the voters who abstained; which, to cut a long story short, means that it is denied the support of the vast majority of the country.

We will still have to deal with the arguments of the federalists. They will tell us that everything we have said is strictly speaking true, but that it happens because of the centralising arrangement by which our political organisation is informed. Let us understand one another. What we have said regarding national parliaments would be equally true of *comarcal* parliaments or of municipalities. Federation replicates the problem rather than solving it. What applies today to a large nation would be applicable tomorrow to a series of federally constituted mini-nations. Autonomy simply poses the question in a smaller setting. Besides, even within a federation, a number of issues remain the preserve of the central authority; so that there would be instances in which our critique would be perfectly applicable to national assemblies and others in which it might equally apply to cantonal chambers and municipalities.

Because the problem does not derive from the more or less centralistic mind-set of a body but from the law-making and numerical tyranny which is equally embracing of federalism as a principle of political action as it is of singularity.

In fact, therefore, whatever the political arrangement turns out to be, the outcome is always that a minority governs it.

Even discounting the gross immorality of the voting body, the excesses of the political boss system (*caciquismo*) and the very pow-

The solution, as every one of the partners would immediately appreciate, would be to deploy all of the machine options presented and try them out. Why would majority rule come into it when it comes to the act of choosing? Experience, trial and error will indicate which option is to be preferred. And if it should still be the case that two or more of the machines are ranked more or less equally, there is still the solution of trying them out over a longer period of time until it becomes plain which one offers the most advantages or if they would both serve equally well. This is what the practice is these days, so why would it not continue in the future?

In short, there is no question but that in the future operational problems will arise that trial and error will not be able to resolve. And then what do we do? Well, quite simply, break up the teams so that each can operate by its own special method; and, were the matter such that there would be no merit in subdivision or if it was necessary for all the personnel to stay together as a body, they would of course all arrange to be guided either by the views of the most intelligent among them or by that of the most practical of their number and – should that fail – ultimately, by the opinion of the majority, because in that assuredly exceptional circumstance, the issue would not rank as a generally mandatory principle or law to be carried out and would carry none of the compulsion we find at present. Besides, it would be merely a transitional arrangement with no implications for the rest of the body of society as long as it did not go beyond private operations or the bailiwick of the specific collective implementing it on a regular basis.

Now let us apply the same analysis to more transcendental examples.

How are farmers going to come to agreement over the cultivation of the soil? Who is going to concentrate on the running of trains, organising communications and transport services? How is work to be shared out and who will appoint the technical and administrative staff? And how are matters of education, assistance and security to be handled?

start. Should some work the mornings and others the evenings? The nature of the work would likely require that they all work the same hours. They would have to come to some arrangement, or defer to some sort of direction.

The answer, then, is simple. The first thing to be done would be to alter the conditions within the workshop, ventilating it, preventing the entry of the sun's rays and, in short, sorting everything out so that the work might be carried out under good conditions. Everyone, surely, would be in agreement with that arrangement. That done, the matter is no longer serious. If the nature of the task allows, the immediate solution is for everybody to agree to work during the early hours of the morning and in the later evening. Because, assuming that they all have a personal interest in supporting the association in carrying out its tasks, and there is no denying that they do, there can be no question but that they would all defer to and all accept some small sacrifice.

In the end, the issue is of so little account that one way or another the requisite agreement would have to be reached. In this instance putting matters to a vote would resolve nothing. What they are compelled to do today by their boss, would they not have to do in their very own interests? It should be borne in mind that the appetite for work and sacrifice is never greater than when one's own interests are at stake. Let us take the case of a hat-makers' association. Imagine a factory,

Take a factory for example, a workshop given over to the manufacture of hats and founded, run and managed along the same lines as that foundry. Let us imagine that the partners have urgent need of a machine to simplify their operations and invite the mechanics to come up with the new apparatus they want. Let us imagine that they are offered a range of machines from which they must select one and give it preference over the rest. It is, we have been told, inevitable that they will have to defer to the wishes of the majority! Not at all.

erful governmental influence, which are not, despite what has been said, an affliction confined solely to Spain but which permeate all constitutional nations from top to bottom, the law of majorities is a redoubtable figment that allows brazenly organised stock-jobbing by those who have made politics a lucrative trade and, under its aegis, boost their wealth by means baser than those employed in the Sierra Morena or in the hills around Toledo by the classical bandit from the classic land of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza.

And arguing that widening of the suffrage and victory for democracy will make the law of numbers come true will not do, because, apart from the example we are set by republican countries, we need to remember the revolutionary period in Spain, with its deputies imposed from below at the end of a rope, if not at the point of a gun; we need to remember that, though government clientelism may be a thing of the past, local and party and committee clientelism are still with us; we need to remember that throughout that period all who became irksome on account of their impatience, or because they were Internationalists or because of a thousand other petty considerations, were harried, thrashed, jailed and deported and that such persecution was designed simply to ensure a semblance of majority, which prop was needed in order to cling to power (1873). And in the final analysis, in the face of insistence that the most perfect democratic equity would bring our critique tumbling down, let us ask further: And how are we to ensure equality of conditions and thus the voting freedom of the peasant who relies upon the wage paid him by the master, the loan made to him by the money-lender and the henchman that threatens him? How can we be sure that the priest will not cramp his personal liberty by means of anathemas and excommunication? And that the slave in his workshop can vote in defiance of his master and that the manufacturer cannot garner a few hundred votes simply by making threats, veiled or otherwise, to deny his slaves the following day's bread? How can we ensure that the vast majority of society which lives in

humiliating dependency upon the moneyed minority can vote freely?

The worker and the peasant are well aware that they do not have free disposal of their own vote and that it belongs to the boss, even though the latter may not ask for it. In thousands of cases, all it takes is fear of losing one's wage for the worker and peasant willingly to abdicate all their individual rights. The public servant and the staff of private firms think the same and effortlessly volunteer in advance for slavery and the surrender of their wills. The industrialist and small trader cannot forget their commitments to the big capitalist who holds invoices and order forms which are very often paid late and poorly. And so the freedom of which they once dreamt slips from their fingers. And no monarchy and no republic can prevent that.

It is pointless, utterly pointless, to take this matter to its logical extreme. Part and parcel of the law of majorities is the despotic rule of the lesser number, those who enjoy the privileges of a lordship which is awarded not on the basis of some willing deference to talent or virtue but is founded upon all manner of trickery and iniquity.

Superstition will carry enough weight to ensure that merely to question the virtue and wisdom of majorities and the value of their decision-making is still viewed as lunacy; but experience and consideration show the law of majorities to be false and that, inescapably, it turns into the unrestrained despotism of the few.

some of the partners insist upon exploring fresh avenues, then the company is immediately wound up. We are discounting the very rare cases in which the difference of opinion erupts into a noisy dispute because, the privileges of ownership not being at issue, such clashes of interests cannot come about and any other personal difference can always be sorted out through amicable mediators in a company in which there are no privileged rulers nor judges.

Is the example we quote authentic or not? Is it or is it not capable of serving as a model?

Plainly it is authentic and yes, it can set the pattern. So let us apply this approach to future production associations, whilst resolving, in the implementation of it, various practical examples put to us on occasion by workers with whom we have ties of friendship and comradeship. Take, say, a mechanics' association set up to cater for the requirements of such-and-such a branch of production. On joining, they will naturally prescribe the working conditions, establish how their day-to-day affairs should be handled and pay especial attention to the reciprocal dealings incumbent upon every single one of them. Unless they can see eye to eye, the association will not be formed. Just like today, each group will be made up of personnel who see eye to eye with one another. It may then be the case that, instead of one society, there are twenty of them, in which we do not see a problem, especially when, thanks to the law of necessity, those sundry associations will tend to coagulate and fuse into just one. Trial and error will teach everyone the common path, if there actually is only the one.

Let us look at a few specific instances. Take a foundry that is, as we would define it, properly organised. We do not think that there is anyone who will not think that that much is possible. Along came the summer, we were told by one old friend, and conditions within the workshop made work onerous. There was a zinc roof, inadequate ventilation and, as a result, the heat grew unbearable. What would we do? Work only during the early morning hours? Many a one would prefer anything rather than an early morning

VII — The exercise and practice of association founded upon trial and error

And then somebody will say to us: show us how social groups will be able to sort themselves out without recourse to suffrage because, between primitive societies and today's society, there is of course, a huge difference, with the latter's sphere of action being rather infinite as compared with the rest. In the former, means and ends are concrete and determined whereas in the latter they vary widely and are indeterminate. Let us assume that you set up production, exchange and consumption associations, that everyone is free to make whatever arrangements he deems best, that everybody enjoys the same rights and the same means of survival. How, in terms of practicalities, would you proceed?

Well, in precisely the same way as trade and industry proceed today. Take a trading company: the partnership agreement is drawn up and the partners never have any call to resort to voting. Each of them has a well-defined part to play. The administrator administers in accordance with the rules of accountancy. The manager in accordance with the technical instructions issued to him. It never occurs to them to put the normal operation of the business to a vote. If ever the partners try to take on new work or widen the scope of their business, this is always done with agreement across the board. If such agreement is not there, the company will carry on, restricting itself to that which had previously been agreed. This is the day-to-day practice. But if, by chance, and this would be a real exception,

III — Reason not the preserve of majorities, but intelligence built through the exercise of freedom. The law-making function is negative and centralistic; free consent boosts autonomy and vitality. The affliction lies in law per se and no amount of tinkering can alter it.

If scrutiny of the facts can show the falseness of the law of numbers, all reasoned criticism of the principles upon which it is based would seem to be redundant. But given the grip of the preoccupation that will make lots of disbelievers impatient despite our deductive reasoning, the task we are about to embark upon will not be considered pointless.

The unwholesomeness of the very principle could be ascribed to awkward reality and, despite every experience to the contrary, it might be asserted that there is a feasibility to being governed by majority decision-making. In which case it falls to us to demon-

strate the falseness of that so-called 'law' in every regard, even at the risk of repeating ourselves.

Persuaded of the radical antagonism between the freedom of the individual and the overpowering preponderance of the mass, we repudiate all established authority, whether derived from force or from strength of numbers. If the individual and the group are to coexist without destroying each other, every form of imposition upon one by the other has to be eradicated. As for those of us who base our ideals upon unbounded freedom of the individual, AUTOARCHY is the mandatory mode of social co-existence. The good of one is every bit as respectable as the good of all and so freedom can be rendered effective only if these interests match. Which is why we are libertarians and why we are socialists; because, as we see it, the root of any clash between individuals or between collectives or between both is the form assumed by what the individual claims as his own, from which our deduction is that social harmony has to be brought about by means of common ownership of wealth and complete freedom of action for individuals and groups alike.

And since freedom thus construed rules out any notion of subordination to majorities, we shall prove that the law of numbers is inherently false and that society can order its affairs without resorting to voting procedures.

It may be argued by supporters of that supposed law that majorities, or rather, supposed majorities, are not limited in their rights and practice certainly confirms that claim.

However, laws are hardly ever observed; most people skirt around them; the more outspoken repudiate them. What is behind this? The actual impossibility of devising a single law or battery of laws that can encompass an immeasurable range of interests, usages and circumstances. Every individual and every collective tends to be different and comes into being in a different manner, whereas law tries to treat them as uniform and force them to operate and behave in the same manner. Shared interests cannot be danced to a single tune because the community is never so

Atrophied brains are incapable of comprehending the genuinely positive aspects of life in society and only manage to glimpse its artificial side. Preoccupation with politics blinds them and every effort made to restore their sight proves pointless. We even question whether they are susceptible to taking their place in a new world and capable of adapting to new ways of life.

a nonsensical reversion to what they contend is the most repugnant barbarism and to the human race's original animal condition.

Even the example of what goes on at present will not persuade them. Countless matters are regulated in accordance with custom rather than legislation and, many a time, in defiance of the laws. Business makes loans without any requirement of law and a lot of its expansion occurs outside the law. The most complicated business dealings are pursued by means of arrangements and abide by time-honoured custom. The codes [of law] are late-comers to the scene and a real inconvenience. They cannot even punish bad faith since fraudulent bankruptcies circumvent all the rules.

In public and private dealings, in matters of industry and labour, in the entirety of social life, customs overrule laws. As far as folk are concerned many a law is deadweight. Laws are really an intrusion into the lives of peoples; they are the jaws of a trap that only lawyers and litigants fully understand. With their tremendous variety from one nation to the next, from *comarca* to *comarca* and from people to people, customs are, by contrast, the regulators of our every move and the very stuff of our lives. Which is why men need to live out their lives to the accompaniment of continuous rebellions and ruses of every sort. Furthermore, in order to wriggle out of the effects of the law, in order to operate in a manner consistent with one's own wishes, one is obliged to become dishonourable, unjust and selfish and place one's personal interest above any other consideration, the upshot being that the law conjured up by the majority is the cause of all our afflictions and the utter negation of personal integrity and human freedom and all for the benefit of a huge number of nincompoops or a minority of rogues.

So, if the straightforward, practical life of some peoples could be wedded to the reality of a civilised existence in defiance of the law, that just goes to show that rule by majority is not only phoney but also unnecessary and harmful. So what are we to say to the disbelievers, the fanatical supporters of numbers, the worshippers of this modern fetish?

narrow as not to have room for fragmentation and replication, divergence and opposition. For there to be effective matching of interests, fellowship has to voluntarily and spontaneously well up from below, between one individual and another and one group and another so that the more or less effective outcome is that it reaches out to include every member of society. Whereupon, through serial organisation of the component parts, every part can retain its special flavour and personality, meaning all its freedom. There being no real call for it any more, rebellion will cease, especially since that organisation would not by its very nature be unsusceptible to change, but rather be the deliberate outcome of the will of its component parts as manifested in each time and place.

But such an arrangement is the very opposite of the rule of majorities and, being the product of unrestricted personality and founded upon precisely that, it represents wholesale repudiation of the law-making rights attributed to such majorities.

Let us therefore analyse what it is that is being rejected and then demonstrate the righteousness of the rejection.

Let us narrow the focus down to some single country.

For instance, it is a matter to interest to all of us who live in Spain that we maintain trading relations with other countries. What are we to do? Shall we come down on the side of free trade? Shall we vote for protectionism? The issue is of the greatest importance and should require well nigh unanimous agreement. Nevertheless, opinion will be greatly divided; some will want cheap food and clothing without a care for domestic output's grinding to a halt; others will want to encourage that production, not caring a whit for how dear bread, meat, wine, clothing, etc., get. Are the former to have the right to foist unemployment and misery upon us? Or the latter to force us to work like mules and then also finish up jobless and hungry once the implications of this arrangement have played themselves out?

According to supporters of the law of numbers, the real solution lies in the hands of a few thousand imbeciles who, because they are the greater number, enjoy the supreme right of governing us. Actually, the majority is called upon to say what will be the straightest road to general wretchedness; rightly or wrongly, the majority will agree that the country should perish either from a glut of imported goods or from a dearth of home-grown goods; the majority will have the barbarous right to sentence us to death by starvation; the majority will be endowed with enough power to do what it pleases without a second thought or compunction.

Let us take another example.

It is in the interests of all Spaniards to live in peace with other peoples. But in, say, China, some Spaniards are RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY murdered. Passions become enflamed and, as ever, the patriots, even though they themselves may sit quietly at home, will cry out for vengeance. We level-headed folk or the minority (which amounts to the same thing) – remember that we are taking it for granted that the system is rule by majority – may reckon that the deaths of a few Spaniards at the hands of a few Chinese is not grounds enough for thoughtlessly plunging into a war of extermination two peoples who are, at worst, indifferent towards each other. And yet common sense will not prevail; it will be the blind will of some automatic majority that has the right to command us to kill and to perish.

What are we to say about how the country is organised? We should live well and the life of society hinges upon the political formulae espoused. Shall we plump for a republic? Or embrace the monarchy? Opt for centralisation? Or shall we be federalists? The majority, the all-powerful majority will decide. I, wanting no king, will have to grin and bear him. If it plumps for a president, I'll have to put up with him, no matter how much I detest him. Whilst I am equally repelled by singularity and federation, I must patiently carry the very heavy cross of their complicated mechanics. And the religious question? It works out the same whether I believe or

Among the Korarma Hottentots, "*provided that the old ways do not forbid this, anyone can assume that he is entitled to that which he himself sees as just.*" (Thomson, *Journeys Through Southern Africa*).

The Araucanians "*are guided solely by primitive customs or unspoken convention.*" (Thomson, *Geographical Dictionary* and *Historias de America*, by Alcedo).

Bajah Brooke says of the Dyaks that "*apparently custom has quite simply acquired the status of law and breaches of it are punishable by fines.*" (*Ten Years in Sarawak*).

Among the North American Indians, such as the Snake Indians, who have no government, horse ownership is respected. Among the Chippewa who have no proper government, game trapped in privately-owned snares is regarded as private property. (Schoolcraft, *Expedition to the Sources of the Mississippi*). We could quote a lot of similar facts about the customs of the Aths, the Comanche, the Eskimos and the Indians of Brazil. "*Among the various uncivilised peoples*" – Spencer goes on to say – "*the custom has grown up of respecting rights over the fruit that grows in the tilled field, but not over the soil itself.*"

Are the organised thievery and lawful thievery of the civilised peoples really an improvement upon all this? Is it not the truth that our blatant immorality, our countless depravities, our crimes without number, and the ghastly decline in our mores place us a thousand rungs below these savage peoples, these contemptible barbarians? And let us not get into the basic virtues of truthfulness, honesty, fairness and generosity. There are lot of things about the unfortunate Vehdas, Araucanians, Hottentots, Bechuanas, and all the forlornly brutish primitive peoples for us to envy.

Notwithstanding the facts cited and a lot more besides that we could add, such is the grip of the government fetishism, se deep-seated the legislative superstition, so deeply embedded the belief in blessed omniscient majorities, that there will still be those who emphatically assert the ridiculousness of an alleged lurch backwards,

an individual falls out with his associates, he would be free to seek out others with whom he sees eye to eye. Only on those conditions could the life of society be pursued harmoniously and peacefully; only at this price will order emerge as the short-term and necessary outcome of the widest possible freedom of the individual.

We might hear the argument raised against us that what we are advocating is a reversion to primitive conditions, to savagery. To which our answer will be that our brilliant civilisation has much to envy in the primitive condition spoken of so unjustly with such scorn and so dismissively.

Aside from the fact that the arrangement we advocate is a good fit for the infinite variety of life today; and aside from the fact that our obvious advances preclude any reversion to savagery, and given that, no matter what the social arrangement in which we live may be, the gains of progress and science will survive, we have plenty of grounds for arguing that the true principle underlying the life of society, albeit overshadowed or eclipsed in our day by the unrelenting warfare in which we are caught up, retains a latent presence.

"*In small, undeveloped societies*" – says Spencer – "*where complete peace has prevailed over a period of centuries, there is nothing akin to what we term government; they have no coercive organisation, only at best an honorific suzerainty. In such exceptional communities, which are not aggressive and which are, for special reasons, free of all aggression, the departures from the basic virtues of truthfulness, honesty, fairness and generosity are so rare that all that is needed to contain them is that public opinion should be expressed from time to time at gatherings of elders convened at irregular intervals.*"

Hartshone tells us: "*The Vehda Bushmen, who have no social organisation, regard it as unthinkable that anybody should be able to lay hands on that which does not belong to him, injure his comrade or utter a lie.*"

"*The Bechuanas*" – see Burchell's ***Trips into the Southern African Interior*** – "*abide by time-honoured custom.*"

do not believe, I'll be paying for a faith and a clergy and living and dying in the name of God due to the imposition of the majority's wisdom.

Why go on piling up more examples?

Since the majority is equipped to pronounce upon everything, it is going to have to impose its will upon all the sciences. But its ignorance is as huge as its prerogatives are boundless. In spite of everything, it will be able to enforce the greatest hygienic nonsense as binding upon public health. It will be able to regulate farm work by ordering seeds to be planted and harvested whenever the notion takes it. It will be able to bring its laws into the workshop, factory and home and, in the hour of death and in our death throes, its regulations will be the boon companion of our decomposition, ploughing on until our bodies lie six feet under.

We will be told that its rights are not limitless. Even so, is there any denying that the majority overrides us from birth to death? Is there any denying that hygiene, work and our entire life-time are subject to its regulation? And ultimately, if there is a limit to its rights, who sets the boundary? Philosophers, metaphysicians and theologians of the law of numbers will devise prodigious circumventions of the truth, but who is going to set that boundary but the majority itself? Voluntarily limiting and setting a boundary to its own rights! Now there's a wonderful feat of conjuring if ever there was one!

No doubt about it. The law of majorities is not the law of reason, not even the law of the likelihood of reason. Society marches to a different drummer, actually to the drum-beat of minorities, or, better yet, driven on by the rebel openly swimming against the tide. Every step forward we have taken has been taken by virtue of repeated individual defiance of what humanity has affirmed was right. True, humanity later embraced that individual's case and crowned his efforts; but the drive has never come from majorities.

Flying in the face of general opinion, a new world was discovered and the earth carries on spinning and spinning in infinite

space. Flying in the face of the majority opinion, the locomotive hurtles along the rails and messages fly from one place to another at a speed to make the head spin. Despite the views of our elders, we can sail without sails and oars and against the wind and tide. And ultimately, despite what most folk may think the winds will be ploughed and the depths of the ocean plumbed, just as, not so long from now, a better world foretold by a handful of dreamers, of which we have the honour of being one, will be built upon the ruins of today's world.

Haven't the absolute kings been toppled despite the opinion of majorities? Haven't the constitutional monarchs been deposed? Have we not done away with slavery? Did we not do the same with serfdom? Shall we not very shortly be doing the same with the proletariat, the latest form of dependent relations between men? Do we not find the same aspects and modalities in religious trends, so much so that these days the world belongs to the negation of dogma, to free-thought and to atheism, despite the religious authorities still clinging on?

The whole of history – absolutely all of it – is a rebuttal of the law of numbers, of the barbaric (yes, barbaric) law of numbers. Every step we have taken was in open defiance of everybody else. In the sciences and in the arts, as well as in politics and economics, as well as in the practicalities of life, everything has been done in spite of the wishes and decisions of majorities.

Shall we carry on singing the praises of numbers, of their ultimate wisdom and ultimate out-reasoning of the rest? Or is querying of the rights of the majority, be they limited or boundless, to be looked upon as little short of rash?

harmony of social relationships. In respect of work, production and consumption, contract is the principle underpinning every agency; the mutual compatibility of the parts is the sole guarantor of regular existence; freedom is the sole means of ironing out all differences. Likewise, when it comes to moral relations, it is customs that are the regulator of the evolution in human existence.

With every obstacle removed, all government or legislative restriction upon individual and collective evolution banished, evolving customs and evolution in the wherewithal of social coexistence, as well as in the lives of individuals and things, in short, progress, in its broadest sense, can make its way without let or hindrance.

We contend that that which is resolved by violence and broken down by violence can be resolved and broken down peacefully. Any cohesion or disintegration that is the inescapable outcome of overriding needs should be brought about, not by strife and force, but through the entirely unfettered, spontaneous and emphatic manifestation of the factors that those needs suggest. We proclaim the theory of freedom in all its purity. We want individuals and groups to stand on an equal footing and to be free to reach agreement, seek one another out, come together or stand apart. We want human association to be the result of individual initiative and spontaneity rather than imposed by some political, economic or religious agency. A federation of free producers will be the inevitable outcome of autonomy of the individual. Such an arrangement, a stranger to all legislative uniformity, will of necessity display the features of the widest variety of forms, means and ends. In keeping with life's heterogeneity, and with the fullest expansion of industry and science, the multiplicity of groupings, purposes and methods will chime harmoniously with the immeasurable variety of needs. Groups will be free to wind themselves up and amend themselves as often their members feel necessary. They will be able to disband and re-form and fragment or amalgamate as often as is necessary. Should one grouping not agree with the rest, it would be at liberty to plough its own furrow and no one would be able to stop it. If

VI — Legislated social rights lead to disintegration. Respect for man the driving, cohesive principle. Reason and free agreement rather than law and suffrage

With the practice and theory of the law of numbers exposed as false, there is no way of telling which of the various social factions competing to run public affairs has right on its side. And since we also assert the rights of the person over the supposed rights of majorities, it now falls to us to explore the principle as it relates to our negation and weigh it up in practice.

In contrast to the rights of society, expressing the despotism of cliques, and in contrast to the authoritarian, governmental principle, upon which law-making is built, we affirm the principle of free contract as the means and instrument of inter-personal relations.

The notion of contract is immediately implicit in the notion of freedom of action. Every individual, master of his own fate, should and assuredly will, at the prompting of needs of which he is sensible, enter into reciprocal relations with his peers in profession, taste and inclinations. Even today it is necessity that brings some persons into contact with others and which prompt groups to reach some accommodation with one another regarding shared purposes. For all its complicated machinery, government merely upsets the

IV — Examples and errors of the law of majorities

Let us move on now to a different sort of consideration.

Let us say that, tomorrow twenty, forty or a hundred individuals launch a society to sponsor secular education. Each of them brings to its his moral might, his standing in society and his money in order to help bring about the aims we all strive after. Will that majority be able to so arrange it that, the day after that, all of the funds and all of the efforts of the group should be poured into religious education? If not, then the law of numbers amounts to nothing, for it is limited. If our hypothesis holds water, then the law of majorities is the law of might and the law of thievery dressed up as the principle of justice.

Common sense dictates that, in any event, if the members of a society fall out over their aims, that society should be wound up. Thereby leaving everyone free to enter into association with those who share his purposes and thus have his aspirations met.

The same would apply if, even though the partners are agreed upon their ends, they differ over means. Some might want the education system to cater for folk who can meet certain specifications. Others might want it dispensed to everybody, without any differentiation. Would it be reasonable for the restricted approach to carry the day just because the majority backs it? If that were the case, it would be tantamount to building altars to privilege and its champions, placing ignorance and selfishness on a higher plane than reason and disinterest. And then, as ever, the law of numbers would amount to the rule of might and thuggery.

The disintegration of society reflects such differences of outlook, now and in the past. Each faction would be free to do as it thought best and trial and error would demonstrate to everyone which was the best way to achieve the purpose.

As to any quibbles that might be raised about the instability of associations, we can answer in advance that nothing lasting or practical is to be expected of subordinating the thinking and performance of some partners to those of others and, experience being the great touchstone in every clash of views, multiplicity of practices is always going to be preferable to restriction of already conventional practices. Then again, it is our understanding that every grouping should be specific and clear as to its purposes before it is launched and before the means to be employed are determined, care being taken at all times to ensure complete independence of the person. If this happens, there will be nothing or next to nothing left to be resolved later; and trivial matters towards which the members are generally indifferent because the doing of them is not worth falling out over, will be sorted out by common arrangement and without any pointless wrangling. Broadly speaking, in regimented societies subject to the law of numbers, it is not the majorities that decide on such petty matters, but the will of the most active members, be they few or many in number. In such private groups, where the law lacks the transcendence of a general principle, which is to say of a proper law, the same thing occurs, however, as in political society. A tiny band of individuals arranges everything, sorts everything out and carries everything out.

Anyone who has been a member of a recreational, cooperative or political society, etc., will have seen or is going to see violent struggles erupt within it over real trivialities. Despite the alleged law, under the ultra-wise tutelage of the majority one knows not a moment's peace. Over the most trivial nonsense, hackles rise, tempers fray and there is this constant competition to get one's way, rightly or wrongly and most often wrongly. This is an exact proof of arbitrariness, in that it provokes but brooks no rebellion and also

conscience on the part of the wise law-makers who, invoking society's rights, tend and watch over the welfare of humanity. Society's rights are the idea of God made political flesh. Such is the scale of the imposition upon humanity (which has been put through a Calvary of ghastly suffering) in the name of that idea that these days the imposition is made in the name of the other notion by the idiosyncratic revolutionaries of politics, forcing us to proceed under the buffeting of continual moral and material torment.

Instead of the alleged rights of society, we need to hoist very high the banner of the free individual. Rather than the despotism of the group, we need to assert independence and respect for human personality.

My rights, my freedom, my health, my welfare are every bit as valuable as the rights, welfare, freedom and health of others. I will not countenance nor consent to imposition from any quarter. Numbers hold no charm for me. Everyone is at liberty to proceed however he pleases. If we men require help, let us afford such help and if the need is on our part we should freely seek it through combining and cooperating on common purposes. But we shall do so and we want to do so, as ourselves, of our own volition, rather than as a result of imposition by anyone. Together with the law of majorities, society's rights amount to never-ending wardship for peoples, sacrificing the individual and obliterating thought, plus death for those most closely concerned. In defiance of that noxious teaching, revolutionary socialism proclaims the complete freedom of the person and freedom of action for all human beings in a world of equality, solidarity and justice.

Now since we have no grasp of everything and of nothing beyond the abstractions which day to day observation of the limited and concrete suggest to us, so we have only a crude notion of society as a whole, a notion deriving from an inevitable cast of mind.

So, if society is possessed of no actual personhood, where does the so-called right of making the rules for society spring from? Of what does that right itself consist? Nothing: nothing but metaphysics and political theology. It is religious superstition applied and encouraged in the realm of ordinary life.

So, just as thousands of selfless beings who lived for the future have been sacrificed in the name of religious superstition, and just as the truth has been condemned, excommunicated and outlawed at all times, so, in the name of the political superstition of social law-making, the human personality has been sacrificed, the rights of the person trespassed against and ridden over rough-shod, and the truth boldly asserted by the man of science or somebody selflessly trying to put paid to the misfortunes of his fellow man, or , finally, someone trying to asset his own rights against the brute force of numbers, been drowned in blood.

Under cover of society's rights, for the sake of 'public safety' as the mystical revolutionaries have it, all manner of torment and vexation is visited upon the individual. Under cover of society's rights, and as always for the sake of 'public safety', anything that causes disruption is sacrificed, and on a daily basis the very same body of society elevated to the status of a higher, all-powerful being, suffers mutilation. If it takes the decapitation of twenty thousand or a hundred thousand human beings to ensure such-and-such (always fictitious) benefits for the remainder, a hundred thousand or twenty thousand heads will roll beneath the executioner's axe. If rights and freedoms require to be curtailed, everything will be trimmed in such a way as to ensure that society is revenged in full. If it means that two or more peoples, each with no grievances against the other, must be dispatched to slaughter on the battlefield, dispatched to the slaughter they will be, without a qualm of

because, in spite of it, social affairs proceed in an utterly shambolic way when the very opposite is the aim.

Is there nothing that speaks to us of the inefficacy of this supposed law? Nothing in its negative outcomes? Nothing in its thousand-fold mayhem?

How are we to account for the general public's persistent assertion of and support for the law of numbers despite all of the data and all of the evidence that make a nonsense of it?

How are we to account for every human error? On the one hand, in terms of the concern of the beneficiaries to school us in this obsession. On the other, in terms of the very same concern bequeathed and passed on from one to another over the centuries.

In the last analysis, the most honest people agree that the case against rule by majority is a reasonable one, but they cannot fathom how things might be done differently in society. They concede that the habit of relying on baby-walkers is dire, yet they cannot conceive of being able to walk unaided.

No sooner has a law been promulgated by some alleged or real majority than masses of malcontents call for it to be revised and amended, a call that goes out to the very folk who framed it, passed it and promulgated it. Whether reform comes or not, the fact is that the majority, or its representatives, have made a faux pas and make faux pas day in and day out. Yet they are the ones to whom the call goes out for a mistake (which they do not acknowledge is a mistake) to be set right.

Such are the natural fruits of the great political superstition of parliaments, a spin-off from the superstition surrounding majorities. Earth remains fixed at the centre of their universe, despite all the demonstrations and experimental proofs to the contrary.

V— Social righteousness and free personality

Do you understand now, reader, how the preoccupation comes about and develops? Do you now have the measure of the full extent of the affliction? Have you plumbed the depths of this fetishism of numbers which is at the root of all our misfortunes? Are you aware of the slow impact of the water drip-dripping into our brains from the moment of birth up until we die and how it perpetuates superstition and inflates it until we are smothered?

Unless you are impervious to logical argument, you will also understand why we are sold as axiomatic the principle of strife between human beings, which pits some humans against other humans like wild animals at a circus; you will appreciate why we are schooled in the belief that the world cannot make progress other than across a carpet of rubble and corpses and you will also understand that, in order to justify the pre-eminence of the few, science is tainted, education corrupted and usages warped. Everybody has to be made to see the inevitability of the affliction and the eternal necessity of war, as long as it is not the lower-downs declaring it upon the higher-ups.

Teachings like these poison many a mind driven to despair and pessimism as a way of crushing its opposition or securing its indifference.

Strife between men is not some inescapable law of nature, nor is it an inescapable law of nature that all progress be bought at the price of wars of extermination because, if the rule of force, the concrete expression of the supposed supremacy of majorities, was

to be done away with, every step forward would have to be made peaceably through the swift or slow embracing of improvement by the generality of men. The sway of force is transitory because it derives from the war-like organisation of society which proclaims the righteousness of might, attributing everything wrested from Nature to cunning. Were society organised with an eye to peace and justice, were it organised with an eye to cooperation, rather than with an eye to strife, given that in the rest of Nature mutual aid between creatures is as significant as or more significant than the precept of the struggle for survival, might, bereft of any vehicle to speak for it, would be nullified, leaving the way wide open to reason and to courses set in accordance with experience or the interplay of the various applications of human activity.

But what we are really dealing with in any discussion of the law of numbers is a political mysticism that we need to banish, the political mysticism of social righteousness, in the name of which a thousand parties and schools of thought have been set up with the vain purpose of regenerating the world from positions of high authority and using the very same methods that are, in theory, rejected. Actually what is at issue is whether the collective can lay down rules for its component members, because, if it can, there is no way for that right to be exercised other than by means of the law of numbers; whereas, in the absence of such power, majority rule is without foundation.

What is society? Not so much an aggregate or a sum, but also not a definite, hard-and-fast, finished product and an aggregation of persons, a congregation if you will. Is it something different from those persons, something more powerful than them and with greater powers?

Might society perhaps be a higher elite with a personality of its own, set apart from the component members? Strictly speaking, society is an abstract construct of our minds, devised as a rough expression for an amalgam that is more ideal than actual.