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Rights and Duties in Rational Anarchy

Emile Digeon

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1882

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It is up to the people to enforce, in the name of social justice, through thick and thin, the dividing barrier of mutual rights.

From whatever side the revolutionary initiative comes, let them hold themselves ready, for the day of the great reparations, to hold each within the limits of their duties.

Let us finally learn how to do without masters.

what is, hoping that some unselfish persons will understand the impossibility of continuing their endeavors, and will finally leave the people free to organize themselves as they wish;—particular since, their revolutionary principles obliging them to immediately destroy every oppressive force, they will be absolutely powerless to impose solutions on the majority which they do no want.

Whatever the results of the experiments of the anarchists and collectivists, they would be preferable to those of the present social organization, which perpetuates the exploitation of man by man. Let no one come to speak to us of the social order!—For us, order will never consists of an artificial tranquility obtained by means of bayonets, which allows some to scandalously increase their luxuries, while others die of hunger or live in poverty.

When we sense that all these cruel uncertainties, all these frictions, and all these dangers would disappear if, *against all odds*, the holders of power, renouncing grievous traditions, put the people in effective possession of their sovereignty,—we are roused in anger against these men who hold an entirely illegitimate mandate *simply because it is not constantly revocable and it stems from usurpations*.

Why haven't they completed the work of the revolution by imitating, for what remains to be done, those who, in 1789, destroyed in a single night, all the privileges of the nobility and the clergy?—Why have they wasted their time in byzantine discussions or financial and political swindles?

But no: being able to do lots of good, they have done almost nothing, and most often then have done ill.

Come on, come on—there is nothing really effective to expect from a parliamentary system which is only, in sum, the despotism of a few in place of the despotism of one alone:—From now on, we must only count, to be done with the economic and governmental usurpations, on the energy and common sense of the people.

Rational anarchy consists of admitting *no authority* apart from the authority of the people, exercised directly in voting for the laws, and mediated by delegates who are *always revocable* in the execution of its decisions. (Rational Anarchy, by E. Digeon).

I

Certain libertarian socialists, seeking, with good reason, to react against the authoritarian tendencies of certain other socialists, have fallen into an excess of individualism which is dangerous to the liberty that they wish to defend.

Reasoning as if nature could furnish spontaneously, without human labor, everything that is necessary or agreeable to everyone, several even go so far as to maintain that everyone has the right to take anywhere, without any thought of others, everything that suits them, not only for the satisfaction of their real needs, but also for that of their whims.

That idea may stroke the selfishness of some,—but it ignores the existence of social duties imposed by nature itself.

It is important to suppress some exaggerations whose results would be fatal to the spirit of liberty in the name of which they are advocated:—*The legitimate negation of the principle of arbitrary authority* must not be confused with *the hare-brained negation of every social rule*.

To the extent that the human race has multiplied, the insufficiency of the spontaneous productions of nature has progressively made it impossible for each individual to live without laboring, and of doing without the cooperation of their fellows.

From that impossibility arises the necessity of some form of social organization.

On the other hand, as the earth does not furnish equally, everywhere, the raw materials indispensable to production, it has

been necessary to resort to exchange and to organize means of transport.—From those have arisen conventions whose execution must be guaranteed by general laws.

Whatever we say or do, the absolute necessity of living in society subjects everyone to some social duties, from which no one can escape without violating the instructions of nature herself.

But to these duties correspond some rights, and it is the equilibrium of these rights and duties which constitutes the moral life.

As a consequence, there can be, between men, no legitimate rules other than those that rest on the mutual guarantee of respective rights, in conformity with the real needs of our organism,—nor according to the caprices of egoism or folly.

That is why the rational philosophy denies all morality dictated in an authoritarian manner by any individual.

It rejects, above all, what the priests of all religions, great exploiters of credulity, present as formulated by an infinite being who, in the midst of its eternity, decided to create the world, only to fill it with unfortunates subject to its capricious and cruel will:—would it not be a capricious and cruel supreme being indeed who, having himself given us irresistible instincts, would prevent us from satisfying them, under threat of terrible punishments,—as if he took pleasure in seeing us struggles in the convulsions of Tantalus' torture?

Let us leave it to the hysterical imagination of the deists to attribute to the fantastic being that they call God the creation of the matter whose eternal existence is certainly better demonstrated than that of the alleged God:—yes, let us close our minds to superstitions; let us open it to the science whose demonstrations prove, more and more, that the forces of attraction and repulsion are inherent in matter, and that they engenders to varying degrees, in the midst of infinite transformations, some intellectual phenomena, as they produce phenomena of heat and light.

the exposition of a governmental system which differs from that of Louis Blanc, his opponent, only in the titles of the functionaries:—a question of words and individual pretensions.

We understand well that the reasonable partisans of Anarchy use it only as an instrument of revolution, not as the social system of the future:—at base, they are organizers as much as the Blanquists, with the difference that they do not accept the dictatorship *of one alone*.

The accept so much the idea of an organization—let us say the true word, of a *State* for the future,—that, in their libertarian system, they intend to guarantee the moral and material freedom of children, raising and teaching them in common, away from all pernicious education until the moment when, their reason being entirely developed, they could be left to themselves, and make good use of the instruments of labor that the society should freely put at their disposition, either in the free corporations, or for solitary labor.

In reality, the so-called absolute anarchists are separated from us only from the point of view of the revolutionary tactic where they persist in not wanting to use certain weapons under the pretext that they are those of the enemy,—as if we should not seek to strike our adversaries, even with their own weapons, except to use others if need be.

This system of abstention has, in the end, no other result than to favor the enemy.

A bizarre thing, we see these curious abstentionists refuse on the one hand to use certain existing legal means to carry confusion into the governmental trenches,—while on the other hand they fulfill the legal formalities demanded for the public or private assemblies and for the publication of journals.

Thus we have reason to say that they are, at base, much less anarchists than they want to appear in a misunderstood interest of propaganda.

Whatever the contingencies the trials of *anarchism* and *collectivism* could bring us, we prefer then the continuation of

The way that we indicate appears less perilous to us than that towards which our dear collectivist would like to push us.

But collectivism is not the most dangerous of the ordeals to which we expose the authoritarian governmental centralization.

Absolute, disorderly anarchy could also have its turn, *with as much right and by virtue of as much good faith*.—We would then see the overflowing of all forms of selfishness soon lead to the domination of brute strength, the first cause of social abuses.

Contrary to the views of the anarchists that we know, society would only change tyrants:—it will find itself faced with the same injustices, the same privileges born of selfishness, in the absence of the regulating bridle of social justice.

Just like the absolute anarchists, we desire the liberty of the individual *in everything that concerns them exclusively*;—but we think that that liberty can go so far as to let them escape from the rules of *reciprocity* in their relations with others, and from their duties with regard to some with whom they do not expect direct reciprocity.

Thus which respecting the personal liberty of the father of a family; we will not concede to him the right to oppress his children, by imposing on them in advance a religion, as the present society does not concede to him the right to poison or physically torture them.

We want liberty as much for the children as for the father.

Society has the right and duty to intervene in favor of those who cannot defend themselves: it should protect children, women, and the disabled—the weak, in short—against the abuses of strength. Fortunately, the anarchists of whom we speak are, in reality, much more reasonable than they want to appear, with their absolutely negative formulas regarding all authority, *even that of the people*.

In this they imitate Proudhon, whose formulas, intentionally composed to strike imaginations, will lead, in the end, to

Similarly, let us be on guard against the prejudices of certain lay brotherhoods which, under the guise of benevolence and anti-clericalism, want to build new temples with the ruins of the churches, and replace the old religious liturgies by rites every bit as ridiculous,—including even the ecclesiastical vestments, which they replace by a carnivalesque display of braids and little aprons.

We indicate freemasonry as especially dangerous. Based on a hierarchy of which one can generally only climb by means of the payment of gradually increasing sums, that aristocratic association is so much more fatal to the disinherited, since it constantly tends to absorb, in favor of its members, all the public functions, whatever the form and origin of the reigning power:—we also see it, while seeming to condemn governmental abuses, put at its head some accomplices of the tyranny!.... It is from among the criminals of December 2 that it took its great dignitaries during the Empire.

Don't we see it, at this moment, affect on the one hand a fierce anti-clericalism, while, on the other hand, it puts itself in tow of the opportunists who increase the budget of the cults?—Thus it establishes, with the authoritarian so-called republicans, some compromises, like those that the Catholic prelates negotiated with the monarchs whose excesses they claimed to contain.

That is why we are not afraid to affirm that every freethinker should consider freemasonry as being today as harmful, as once was the Catholicism whose procedures it imitates in order to seize a dominant role in the new official world.

Certainly, we know that among its members there are some who still believe, in good faith, in its utility;—but they do not perceive that, at base, they serve as stepladders for some leaders whose only aim is to exploit, in order to serve their personal ambition, the influence of the association.

That digression was necessary, in order to make it well understood that there are other superstitions than those from

which the priests profit, and that all are equally fatal, from the moment when they tend to establish hierarchies and privileges in violation of the collective sovereignty and the principle of equality.

One can be anti-clerical without being a freethinker or even a republican: Voltaire was imbued with monarchic and deist ideas.

Thus let us recognize, as the basis of harmony and justice between individuals, only the instructions of nature, by virtue of which society must be made, in the common interest, balancer of the rights and duties of all, for the exploitation of raw materials and for the enjoyment of the productions of human labor.

That role imposes on society the obligation seeing to it that each individual has the means of procuring satisfactions in proportion with their real needs, *as limited by the rights of others*.

From that obligation comes, for it, the right and duty to prevent, as much as possible, anyone enjoying an excess out of proportion with their real labor, when others do not have all they need, though they labor more.

That rule, scandalously violated in the present social organization, should be the criterion of everyone who sincerely wants to bring about the coming of justice towards which humanity marches constantly across painful shocks comparable to the phenomena, often disorganized, of electricity the utility of which is, however, not contestable.

Unfortunately, hesitation and doubt reign in the midst of the confused struggle of contrary interests, founded, on the one hand, on primordial rights impudently violated, and, on the other hand, on a supposed legitimacy which would come from the antiquity of the usurpations—as if right could be destroyed, in principle, by the length of the attacks to which it has been subject.

It is in the shadow of confusion, perfidiously maintained by the selfishness of the usurpers, that human society has tra-

The socialists who seem to fear individual labor as being able to maintain the abuses of exclusive possession, do not understand that that possession would no longer be dangerous from the moment that it ceases to be hereditary.

In the end, the great drawback of collectivism would be, if it could be practiced, to undermine individual liberty for this reason alone, that apart from the general collectivity, there would not be, for individuals or isolated groups, the possibility of obtaining a subsistence.

We certainly have not pretension to infallibility; but we think we have, like everyone else, the right to indicate briefly, in passing, our personal ideas.

We have asked ourselves if, instead of the *general socialization of labor*, in which individual liberty would find itself oppressed, it would not be better to instigate the creation of *free* associations, by assuring to them, *as well as to individuals*, the means to labor and live in isolation, according to their tastes and needs.

In this sense, won't the solution consist of putting credit within the reach of all, whether in tools, or in raw material?—Wouldn't a *general association of exchange* between individuals or groups of producers be more productive of results than the *regimentation of labor*, and especially, wouldn't it better guarantee that liberty to which we all cling, no matter who we are?

In an organization as we conceive it, the functionaries, of all degrees, from various social corporations would continuously correspond in order to keep their constituents posted about the needs of each region, and they would be the natural agents of exchange and transport; the respective values of the products would thus be established apart from the spirit of competition and speculation on the rarity of the merchandise.

The producers would have, naturally, entire liberty to sell their products directly to whomever they want, or to hand them over them to the general association at the established price.

It is true that the contemporary collectivists or communists imagine, in good faith, that they invented the grouping of the workers in a distinct party, in constant struggles with other parties from which, let us say in passing, it is so much more difficult to distinguish them, since nearly all the parties, contain a mass of workers in the name of whom each claims to act,—and since, moreover, the standard bearers of collectivism are themselves, more or less, what we call bourgeois.

As long as we have not said clearly where the worker ends, and where the bourgeois begins,—we believe that the economic struggle will only really exist between the exploited workers, *as much under the smock as under the coat*, and the exploiters who enrich themselves by absorbing a part of the direct product of the labor of others.

Anyway, history is full of attempt of the sort made today by the collectivists: all have inevitably collided with the absolute necessities which result from the difference of situations and the diversity irremediable of individual organisms.

The efforts of our friends the collectivists toward the grouping of the laborers in a distinct party are nothing in comparison with those made by the Spartacuses of antiquity, the Munzers of the middle ages, and the Baboeùfs of our great revolutions—without counting so many others, less well-known, who failed equally in their noble enterprises, despite deep convictions and an energy beside which all the ardors of the revolutionary propaganda of our day simply pale.

And all of that, because the various tendencies of the individual selfishness and inevitable dissipations of men always prevents, sooner or later, the permanence of a unanimous agreement in a common interest.

These tendencies and that dissipation are especially irreconcilable with the idea of the exploitation in common of social wealth, *to the exclusion of all individual, isolate labor, for an individual profit*.

versed long centuries during which some individuals have produces all the social wealth and have not always had what was strictly indispensable to them to not die of poverty,—while others have produced nothing and have absorbed the greatest part of that wealth.

But the always increasing necessities of production, have brought about the gathering of the laborers, the rapprochement of the exploited: that contact has had a profound influence on mores, which is manifested in a progressive feeling for the rights and the real strength of the worker collectivity, and by a spirit of independence incompatible, from now on, with the official morals of the governments and religions.

To the morality of servitude, or the exploitation of man by man, preached by the established orators and by the priests;—succeeds, more and more, in the heart of the proletarian masses, the higher morality of revolt against injustice and demand for usurped fundamental rights.

By listening attentively to the wind which blows across the political world we can already hear, the noise of the aroused mobs, the clamor of the exploited who will no longer be appeased by false promises, made a thousand times and always violated.

But to the extent that the murmurs of protest become accentuated, to the extent that the egalitarian and libertarian morality spreads among the disenchanted masses, the exploiters of the old superstitions and of the old principle of authority, seek to block the course of the current.

In their bemusement they do not perceive that the more they heap up obstacles, the more the flood rise behind their dikes, the more terrible the torrent will be at the inevitable moment when it overturns everything.

The fools!—Closing their eyes to evidence and their ears to reason, they persist in not wanting to recognize that the only means that remains to them to be forgiven is to spontaneously repudiate the sinful morality which cradles their selfishness.

Returning to the heart of the people they will enjoy rights which everyone will rejoice, when the rottenness of the privileges will be brushed aside;—but they persist in putting themselves at odds with the public interest, of the coming of social justice, they are inevitably crushed sooner or later!...

The salvation of each will be, only, there where are grouped the legitimate interests of all:—misfortune to those who will not rally in time under the thrice-holy standard of *Liberty*, *Equality*, and *Fraternity*.

It is only under the folds of this banner, red with the blood of our martyrs, that we will find, all equally, the much-sought happiness.

II

Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are at base only the various forms, or, to put it better, emanations of the higher idea of Justice;—regulatory idea for the exercise of the individual and collective rights of individuals with regard to each other.

The first law of social justice is that of *reciprocity*, according to the strengths and aptitudes that each have received from nature,—reciprocity of proportional efforts, in a mutual or common.

The duty of reciprocity is the indispensable check on the *selfishness* that would tend, always, high and low, to tyranny and the exploitation of man by man.

It is also appropriate to react against certain doctrines which, under the generic name of *individualism*, tends to exalt the selfishness to which we are, sadly, only too inclined.

We could not, without danger to Society, exaggerate a sentiment of which the immoderate expansion would lead naturally to leave to each the ability to appropriate, *even after the satisfaction of their needs, that which is indispensable to the lives of others*.

of the people guaranteed much better both the defense of the territory and the public liberties,—as was demonstrated by Blanqui, the great revolutionary patriot.

And the crushing and persecutory taxes which weigh or are pushed back entirely on the laborer! Wouldn't they also be abolished? Wouldn't they be replaced, if there was need, by a single and progressive tax on capital or on revenue, *beyond what is strictly necessary*?

Oh! Yes, the people would have long since been permanently rid of the capitalist and governmental oppression, if its representatives had, according to their duty, organized the direct functioning of their sovereignty, instead of arrogating to themselves the right to exercise it in their own name and most often against them:—they would not be obliged to resort again to insurrection in order to demand the free enjoyment of its enduring rights.

So long as the sovereignty of the people is not really effective, so long will it be a vain word, an illusion,—any minority would have the right to take the initiative of the claims, and it would be possible that, without any more or less justice than others, it would seize and hold power.

It is thus that we are laid open to supporting successively and alternately various dictatorships in the name of individual convictions that are equally sincere.

We could, for example, undergo the experiments of the collectivists who believe they have a right to consider themselves the *official organs* of all the laborers—for this reason alone they have imagined a new system of the collective exploitation of social wealth, and that they have triumphantly critiqued the present organization.

Only, they forget that Cabet, Fourier, Pierre Leroux, Robert Owen and many others, more or less famous, have had the same pretensions and demonstrated, as triumphantly and with no less talent, the monstrous deformities of the present economic order.

the Chamber of deputies will continue to be composed, in the great majority, of enemies of the rights of which the absolute exercise would not permit the maintenance of the abuses exploited by the government.

Certainly, no one desires ore than us to avoid the suffering which the laborers will be momentarily the first to suffer;—but convinced, more and more, that to make the persistent causes of social abuses disappear, insurrectional revolution is still the most effective means,—we dedicate all our efforts to pushing the people to the heroic demands whose time is not as passed as the pot-bellied, one-eyed lawyer of Cahors¹ would like to claim.

And yet, it will depend on the representatives of the people, to exempt us from that sad extremity!—for that, they would only have to subject themselves to constant revocability on the part of the people, to renounce the absolute with which they have illegitimately found themselves covered for several years;—that they force themselves to present to the direct acceptance of the people all the laws of general interest; that they leave the various groups of the national collectivity to administer themselves as they understand it.

What misfortunes would have been avoided, if the deputies, originating in our revolutions, had long since understood or wanted to accomplish their duty!

The somber events of June 1848, of December 2, 1851 and May 1871, would not have taken place; the exploiters of Creuzot, Ricamarie, Aubin, Roubaix, Bessèges, Grand'Combe, etc., would not have had soldiers to sustain them in their résistance to the just demands of the workers:—For, the people, put in real possession of their sovereignty, would have, long since, abolished the permanent armies which are always oppressive at home, and often ineffective for national defense; they probably would have decided a general arming

¹ Gambetta

Not only must we not advocate the selfishness, which needs no advocates; but we must foment the spirit of devotion, which is spread too little among us.

Certainly, although we admire absolute devotion, we do not pretend that one should be blindly devoted, without any thought of eventual reciprocity;—on the contrary, we consider the principle of reciprocity as the basis of every human society.

It is far from that principle that the enervating maxims of the Catholicism whose promises of reward in a future live, in exchange for absolute self-sacrifice in this one, have contributed powerfully, for several centuries, to keeping the workers in voluntary servitude, the most degrading of slaveries.

Reciprocity is such an imperious duty that, in case it cannot come directly from those to which one devotes oneself, it is incumbent on society to fulfill it,—were it only to instigate noble initiatives, as it does, indeed, already, by awarding some rewards to devotion.

No, we do not need rights without duties, any more than duties without rights: In summary *each owes to the others, in the measure of their strengths and according to their aptitudes, reciprocity of the services that the others have lent them, whether individually or collectively.*

From this arise the rights and duties from which no one can escape without earning the name of exploiter, whether under the smock of the worker or the coat of the bourgeois.

According to a rigorous interpretation of right, no one should be at the will of anyone else *with regard to their absolutely individual interests*;—but we should all be subject to the impersonal will of the majority *in that which concerns questions of general interest.*

The will of the people, manifested freely by universal vote and *constantly modifiable*, is the only legitimate authority from the point of view of the general interests;—it is the only one

which is entirely sheltered from all possibility of intentional injustice, if not of error.

In fact the people, an anonymous entity, could not, if it was really free, vote for laws which would be oppressive of its own rights.

Let no one pretend that they are often fooled:—it is their representatives who have fooled them, by offering themselves to them with programs filled with promises which they have then impudently broken.

The people will not be fooled often if, instead of voting for men whose hidden thoughts they cannot read, they were called to give their opinions directly on the questions which concern them; in the cases where they were mistaken, they would not be slow to rectify their errors.

One can be persuaded, for example, that they will soon be rid of the governmental centralization which ruins and oppresses them, by occasioning the upkeep of an innumerable quantity of unproductive functionaries and a large army placed apart from and above it.

If history mentions some so-called plebiscites by which the people have put their sovereignty in the hands of some usurpers,—they voted with bayonets at their throat and in hatred of another tyranny: these plebiscites were distorted by terror, lies, and corruption.

Such scandals would not be possible if the masses of universal suffrage voted freely, apart from all authoritarian pressure, having before them only some functionaries appointed and constantly revocable by themselves.

But it is inevitably the opposite which has taken place under the reign of any minority: those minorities tend to increase their power and to put themselves above the law—even those that they have decreed.

It is thus that after having seen Louis Bonaparte make his coup d'état with impunity, and the men of May 16 attempt their own with the same impunity,—today we see our deputies

Each free individual, in the management of their own interests, *having for limit on the obligation to respect the equal rights of others*,—such will be the individual right.

The inhabitants, of the territorial districts and all the corporations *voting for laws that are exclusively applicable to them*, and being able *to name and revoke their agents*,—such will be the right of the various collectivities.

The general interest always dominating the individual interest, *in the case of conflict*,—such will be the public right.

It is especially from this last point of view that it is dangerous to exalt selfishness by declaring it free of all social obligation.

Let us be on guard against it, let us repeat it constantly:—we are only too inclined to listen only to the voice of our selfishness; there is no need for us to make propaganda in this sense.

Let us, on the contrary, proclaim loudly that, in questions of general interest, we should sacrifice our individual interests when they are in opposition with those of the collectivity.

V

The logical conclusion of that which preceded is that the people, must, above all, seek to rid itself, *by all means*, of a governmental legislation which inevitably gives power to minorities.

For that, they should, from now on, count completely on themselves, by persuading itself well that its governors will not voluntarily abdicate authority, which permits them to perpetuate themselves in power by means of corruption and, if necessary, by violence.

With the demoralizing and oppressive action of the authoritarian economic and administrative forces at their disposal,—they will continue to distort universal suffrage, in order to obtain the successive renewal of their power

That is why, despite the efforts that we could and should make, to increase the oppositional elements that it contains,—

First, that constitution fabricated by an assembly which had no mandate for that, is not even within political right;—but had it been voted by an assembly provided with a regular mandate, it would be no less null and void in all that which undermines the sovereignty of the constituents over their representatives.

Those do not have the right to declare themselves for whatever time, determined or undetermined, apart from the incessant right of revocation that, according to the ordinary laws of all countries and according to common sense, every constituent over their representative,—while a mandate, not revocable in principle, for any duration whatsoever, constitutes a true alienation.

Our legislators have not even tried to organize the permanent functioning of the sovereignty of the people; they have preferred to keep to the errors of the past, by virtue of which they can obtain to their profit successive and periodic alienations of that sovereignty.

The usurping assembly of 1875 has not, in any case, had the right to declare the Constitution binding without submitting it to the sanction of the people.

On the other hand, the present legislature, heir of the usurpations of its precursors, is itself usurping by holding an illegitimate power.

It is thus really a minority which governs us:—it will be one as long as the people will not themselves be directly its own legislator, entrusting to delegates, always revocable, *only the task of preparing the projects of the people and execute their sovereign will.*

If, on the day after the revolution that the attitude of our governors renders inevitable, the people know how to keep for themselves, at all levels, the right to vote on or sanction the laws,—they will no longer be at risk of losing the exercise of their sovereignty, oppression will become impossible, and all individual and collective rights will be respected.

declare themselves inviolable, gather themselves outside the hours of the public sessions without making any declaration, scandalously accumulate several positions and increase, at the cost of their constituents, the pecuniary advantages, already excessive, that they enjoy.

The various governmental minorities even go so far as to mutually concede impunity, as we have seen on the part of the opportunists with regard to the criminals of December 2 and May 16:—the authoritarians always end by reconciling; they reserve their implacability for the libertarians, as in June 1848, and in May 1871:—Mr. Thiers, the pitiless slayer of the sincere communalists, protected Mr. Ranc, after having covered up the financial swindles of Gambetta and Clément Laurier.

No one would dare maintain, in principle, that the majority should be subject to the caprices of a minority: Why, then, does that which is not admissible in principle exist in fact?

When then will we finish with the presumptuous and criminal pretention of arbitrarily imposing laws on the people?

When will we no longer see so many pretenders and so many inventors of political and social systems, claim, each from their side, an infallibility which belongs to no one?

Let each freely make propaganda in favor of the idea which seem best to them, nothing better;—but that they imagine, by virtue of their birth or of a claimed superiority of judgment, to have the right to impose their authority or to banish those who do not want it, that is truly intolerable.

Let us defy the political popes as much as the religious one;—we do not want great pontiffs in Paris any more than in Rome.

Let us never leave off repeating that, in questions of public interest, that is only legitimate which is decided or previously approved by the people apart from all authoritarian pressure.

It is even necessary to rid ourselves of the prejudice which consists of conceding a superiority of judgment or of *common sense* to those who know better how to read or count.

It is obvious that, on certain technical questions, some corporations or individuals, provided with special knowledge, can often be right, against less educated minorities, with regard to these specialties;—but that is not a reason to accept that these corporations or individuals which, in the end, are not infallible, could arrogate to themselves the right to impose their solutions on the majority, especially when it is a question of morals or of the general interest, which has nothing technical or special about it.

If the superiority of instruction in a scientific or literary specialty was accepted as a title to the direction of the social interests,—it would lead logically to a tyranny of the best educated, despite all the possibilities for momentary aberration or of progressive cerebral softening to which the most learned are as subject as the most ignorant.

That tyranny, based on the relative incapacity of the people, would be perpetual since, whatever the progress of the popular masses might be, there would always be individuals better educated than the others.

We can certainly not deny that the people are today more educated than the privileged in the year 1000, for example.—So will we be more inclined to accept their right to directly manage their own affairs?—No! We continue to deprive them of the direct exercise of their rights, always on the pretext of the relative inferiority of their instruction.

As in ancient times when one called them to name their kings, we permit them to exercise for one day, every four years, a semblance of sovereignty;—but it is only to make them abdicate that sovereignty in favor of individuals who can jeer at them with impunity immediately after the vote,—which constitutes a true comedy, a delusion.

The authoritarians of all origins say *constantly that the people are ignorant, that they are stupid, and that they need to be governed.*

to the present power has always been exercised by minorities; that is why it has always been oppressive.

We have already said it, the majority logically subject to the laws *that it will decree or sanction directly, apart from all authoritarian influence*, could not be oppressive:—one does not voluntarily oppress oneself.

As to the governmental minorities, we know,—obliged to maintain themselves by force, they are inevitably condemned to make laws contrary to the liberty of the governed and favorable to the governors; they naturally feel themselves more free if their adversaries are long, and they find opportune only that which is advantageous to them:—That is, moreover, the basis of the opportunists in all times and in all countries.

From the instant that, after a revolution, oppression appears, it is because a minority had usurped the sovereignty of the people by ruse or by violence.

Thus, today, it is certainly not the majority that governs; it is the deputies who, misleading the confidence of the people, have maintained the monarchic laws contrary to the liberty of the constituents and favorable to the domination of the representatives:—at base we are oppressed by a minority composed of our deputies and some civil and military functionaries that they pay with our money.

And yet, five or six hundred deputies may well obtain, by whatever means, an open mandate,—they do not have, any more than an emperor or elected dictator, the right to impose laws on us, without those laws being directly sanctioned by the people, who are the only sovereign.

Their attitude with regard to universal suffrage is comparable to that of Mr. Grévy, with regard to the legislature which has named him president of the Republic, if he had thought of enacting laws without submitting them to parliamentary sanction.

Would we say that the Constitution gives the legislative power to the Chambers?

wills, *freely expressed and freely modifiable* by virtue of their constant perfectibility!

IV

Let no one come to say that the people could oppress minorities.

To prevent attacks against individuals or against the social collectivity, is not oppression:—oppression consists of hindering the exercise of a right.

It is not possible that the people, really free, could be mistaken about laws whose legitimacy can only be based on its own rights.

And if, by some extraordinary chance, it was necessary to choose absolutely between the possibility of oppression on the part of the majority and the real certainty or only the possibility of tyranny on the part of the minority,—wouldn't it be folly to pronounce in favor of the latter?

The people defend themselves against oppression when and as they can,—they never oppress. When in its days of anger it takes by the collar those who have persecuted them or who attempt to load them with chains,—they have the right to reduce these criminals to the definite powerlessness to harm them, and they would be wrong to leave them in a situation to renew their criminal attacks.

In a truly democratic organization, as minorities will not undermine the interests of individuals or to those of the social collectivity,—they would have nothing to fear from the majority, guardian of the rights of the collectivity whose will, essentially mobile and perfectible, will allow all the groups to become the majority in their turn, if their ideas are or become in keeping with the general interest.

We can say that the permanent functioning of the sovereignty of the people has never been organized:—up

We are outraged to see those who are lucky enough to find in their cradle, or on the road of life, enough to buy some books, treat the people as imbeciles from the height of their standardized spelling or their upstart smugness:—they may have piled books on books, or lengthened more or less their proletarian jacket, we will not grant them more *common sense*.

Haven't we all known distinguished mathematicians, eloquent lawyers, and erudite professors who had no discernment outside of their specialty ?

The truth is that each can have a particular aptitude in the exercise of which they will be more skillful than the others;—but that special aptitude, as great as it can be, is not the certain sign of a *common sense* superior to that of the individuals who have a different aptitude or profession.

History shows us celebrated scientists, and renowned philosophers who have been nearly stupid in the ordinary things of life and from the point of view of questions of general interest,—precisely, because they are lost in the midst of abstractions.

Has not Mr. Thiers, the great statesman of the bourgeoisie, denied, for a long time, the possibility of establishing railroads, as Napoleon I, fatal genius of war, denied the possibility of steam navigation?—However, it was easy to understand that the wheels of a coach would go faster on iron bands, free of obstacles, and that the steam, which blows up a tightly sealed pot, can drive a piston:—A carter or a crook would perhaps have understood better than Napoleon I and Mr. Thiers.

III

Certainly, the people are not generals, nor lawyers, nor bailiffs, nor bankers, nor publicists:—but they are masons, mechanics, tailors, bakers, cobblers, etc., etc.,—and they are as

skillful, and above all more useful, in their professions than the others are in theirs.

Instead of killing people as a trade; instead of warping their intelligence and heart to alternately maintain the pro and the con; instead of making seizures to finish ruining the unfortunate; instead of contemplating swindles and exploits in the stock market; instead of writing coldly, in verse or in prose, anathemas against capital, while spending 25, 50 or even 100 francs a day:—the people accomplish labors which are always useful, never harmful, and preserve their common sense much more than those who pretend to doubt their intelligence.

They distinguish, as well as anyone, good from evil.

Thus, they understand, quite simply, without needing to torture their brain, that individual wills do not radiate above heads, as light shines around a hearth,—they must, in order to manifest themselves, have recourse to speech, or to the vote, which is the only speech of collectivities—no offense intended to some of our friends.

Their solid good sense, a more certain guide than the spirit of quibbling, tells them that for every complex work, which demands the cooperation of several, some direction is required *chosen by the majority* of the interested parties, when all are not in agreement on the choice.

Little practiced in the art of eloquence, a sort of jugglery of speech, which they learn to mistrust more each day,—they are content to shrug their shoulders when someone tries, with the aid of more or less specious reasoning, to make them believe,—sometimes that they will always need masters to govern them,—sometimes that to construct the common house, in which we should all take shelter, there will be no need of rules and each will have the right to capriciously place his stone where he wishes.

They know in advance that in that house, there will inevitably be some places which are more or less good, and that in order to decide who will occupy the best, some rule is

necessary in order to avoid the strongest leaving the worst to the weakest, the opposite of what should take place.

In a word, the people sense that it is neither by each going their way, enveloped in a stupidly understood selfishness, nor by following blindly, by chance, the first comer,—that the human caravan will reach the social oasis.

And the people understand, know and feel all that, because they have the best of guides,—the *common sense* lacked by all those who treat them like imbeciles.

Would they wish, by chance, that they adopted all at once all of the contradictory ideas that are preached to them from left and right?

But let them know then to agree among themselves, before doubting the discernment of the people because they do not adopt their panaceas!—It is very easy to understand that if they decided to follow the advice of some, the others will nonetheless consider them incapable of conducting themselves:—Thus they do well to listen only to their sovereign reason, at the risk of being treated as simpletons by all the inventors of infallible formulas.

We know some of them who will even go so far as to claim that we should try all the systems, one after the other, and then choose the best:—first, in order to choose, we must have recourse to the vote, which some stubbornly reject; then, can you imagine in what state you would find society after having successively through all the molds, more or less eccentric, that anyone might like to present to us!—Would we ever be done with the pitiless productivity of the inventors?

Ah! Yes, the people do well to hold themselves in reserve with regard to all those who of imposing on them the practice of their theories: let them know well not only that no one has the right to oblige them to do what they do not want to do,—but also that no one, *when it is a question of the general interest*, should escape or speculate on the execution of their