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"THOMAS PAINE … WAS NEVER ENOUGH of an optimist to let his natural anarchism run its full course."[1] His contemporary, William Godwin, said in his "Enquiry Concerning Political Justice" (1793), "With what delight must every well-informed friend of mankind look forward to the dissolution of political government, of that brute engine which has been the only perennial cause of the vices of mankind … and no otherwise to be removed than by its utter annihilation." Paine takes a more negative stance:— "Some writers have so confounded society with government as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants and government by our wickedness … Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil."[2]

Thomas Hobbes thought that without government "the life of man (would be) solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."[3] Paine took an opposing view; "Great part of that order which

[1] Anarchism—George Woodcock.
[2] Common Sense—Thomas Paine.
[3] Leviathan—Thomas Hobbes.

reigns among mankind is not the effect of Government. It has its origins in the principles of society and the natural constitution of man." In theory then Paine believed that man was essentially a responsible being who should be perfectly free, providing that his liberty did not infringe on another's freedom.

He was sceptical of the practice of subordinating the mass of men to the guidance of a few. We have seen that he clearly differentiated between society and government in "Common Sense", and he returns to this subject in "The Rights of Man", saying here "… society performs for itself almost everything ascribed to Government." He goes on to elaborate this theme, describing the state in America when there was no formal government for more than two years following the outbreak of the War of Independence. He maintains that the disappearance of government there caused the flourishing of society, "common interest producing common security."

Here then there at first appears to be a clear-cut position. Paine held that many of the activities which governments concerned themselves with were superfluous. Not only were they unnecessary and a waste of time, but often definitely harmful. Pursuing this line of argument he writes—"But how often is the natural propensity to society disturbed or destroyed by the operations of Government." And again—"… instead of consolidating society it (government) divided it, it deprived it of its natural cohesion, and engendered discontents and disorders which otherwise would not have existed."

However, even admitting that the effects of governments in general were harmful or irrelevant, Paine could produce no real alternative. In a sarcastic reference to Burke he says: "Mr. Burke has talked of old
and new whigs. If he can amuse himself with childish names and distinctions, I shall not interrupt his pleasure." But, having stated this, Paine then proceeds to distinguish between good (new) governments and bad (old) ones, even though previ-

Each separate unit should be self-controlling—the running of it being a direct reproduction of the wishes of its members. Co-ordination could be achieved on both regional, national and international scales by congresses of elected representatives. What would distinguish these delegates is that they would be merely the mouthpieces of their electors, and not individuals given the power to make decisions for, and thus rule, the population. I should like to emphasise that this would result in a society of healthy and free citizens, but not in the creation of healthy states, which would in fact cease to exist. We have had sufficient experience of politically healthy states, often displaying all the symptoms of virile power, (thousand year Reichs and the like) to realize that their flourishing existence by no means guarantees the happiness and well-being of their inhabitants.

ously he had been slating the principle of Government. This accommodation of contradictory ideas sometimes appears in the same sentence. For example:

> "Government is no farther necessary than to supply the few cases to which society and civilization are not conveniently competent; and instances are not wanting to show, that everything which Government can usefully add thereto, has been performed by the common consent of society, without Government."

What is obviously a very important aspect of this doctrine—"The few cases to which society and civilization are not conveniently competent"—is left for us to guess at.
The good and bad governmental systems are outlined as follows:

> "… the old is hereditary, either in whole or in part; and the new is entirely representative." "Government, on the old system, is an assumption of power, for the aggrandizement of itself, on the new a delegation of power for the common benefit of society."

Carried away by revolutionary fervour, Paine eulogizes the French and American patterns and sinks into idealistic myopia.

> "… the representative system diffuses such a body of knowledge throughout a Nation on the subject of Government, as to expose ignorance and preclude imposition … Those who are not in the representation know as much of the nature of business as those who are … Every man is a proprietor in Government, and considers it a necessary part of his business to understand. It concerns his

> interest because it affects his property. He examines the cost and compares it with the advantages; and above all, he does not adopt the slavish custom of following what in other governments are called LEADERS."

The two hundred years of historical experience that separates us from Paine enables us to see that he was mistaken. Instead of "exposing ignorance and precluding imposition", these still exist together with a rampant apathy. Paine considered that it was one of the sicknesses of the "old governments" that a farmer was induced, "while following the plough, to lay aside his peaceful pursuits, and go to war with the farmer of another country." From our advantageous position it is obvious to us that elected governments have been just as successful as hereditary ones in persuading their populations to wage wars.

Paine writes elsewhere that there should be "no such thing as an idea of a compact between the people on on side and the Government on the other. The compact (should be) that of people with each other to produce and constitute a government." The Oxford Eng. Dic. gives as a definition of the verb "to govern"—to rule with authority; Malatesta called it the "coercive organisation of society."[4] When any body of men becomes appointed with this function it is inevitable that the gulf between governors and governed will be established. Proudhon, born in the year of Paine's death, summed it up saying "Between governing and governed … no matter how the system of representation or delegation of the governmental function is arranged there is necessarily an alienation of part of the liberty and means of the citizen."

The fourth right of man was that of political liberty. The seventeenth was that concerning property; "The right to property being inviolable and sacred, no one ought to be

[4] Umanita Nova, September 16th, 1922.

deprived of it." Paine could not realize that the accumulation of property by one man puts him in a dominant position with regards to others, whose economic and political liberty are correspondingly restricted. With the further insight of the nineteenth century, Proudhon again was able to ask himself the question "What is property?" Instead of deciding that it is an "inviolable and sacred" right he came up with the answer "Property is theft." In agreement with this decision, theorists like Marx and Kropotkin called for the abolition of property, whereas Paine had advocated its protection.

> "Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society: all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation."[5]
>
> "All things are for all men, since all men have need of them, since all men have worked in the measure of their strength to produce them …"[6]

To wind up, Paine's main ideas are certainly of importance in the quest to establish political justice, but they by no means guarantee it. Few people would now argue with his opinions on hereditary rulers. His other suggestions, though often paid lip service to, are rarely implemented. He could hardly have expected such an anaemic doctrine as the "necessary evil" of government to be very satisfactory. He could not grasp the nature of property, and he was optimistic when estimating the degree to which representative government can reflect the interests of its citizens.

As a communist (not a bolshevik) I believe that all men must benefit when a system of co-operation replaces the present one based on exploitation. Society spontaneously arranges itself into basic nuclei—the village and the factory for example.

[5] The Communist Manifesto—Marx and Engels.

[6] The Conquest of Bread—Kropotkin.