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Letter to Bergmann

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

February 8, 1842

Besanon, February 8, 1842.

To Frédéric-Guillaume Bergmann

My dear Bergmann, I have just been judged, and have been absolved by the jury, on the four charges formulated against me. I have presented a written defense, the reading of which lasted more than an hour. As I intend to print it, you will judge its worth. It is a sort of general prospectus of my studies, by past and to come, and of their object. I win and I lose all at once, as a result of this trial. I *win* a small moment of celebrity, which does not even extend very far, for, as you know, I don't have the sympathies of the press; I win, which is more important to me, and which no one realizes, the advantage of being able to innovate, to analyze and reestablish at my leisure principles, rights, beliefs and institutions. For that judgment, acknowledging that I am a *man of meditation*, *not of revolution*, an economist, not an anarchist, and that I wish, according to the president's expression, *to convert the government and the proprietors*, it follows that I can say everything, like a teacher or a friend, and I am declared outside the ranks of the conspirators. It is up to me to preserve that magnificent position.

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But I *lose*, in the sense that, in order to defend myself, I have been forced to expose views and ideas that I only wanted to give at an appropriate time; for example, that as equality and non-property from the legislative metaphysics, from economy and history, all the same that are a necessary consequence of the Charter, and of all the institutions that accompany it; so much, as I declared elsewhere, that it is today only a question of *developing*, not of *destroying*. That is magnificent for those who are sympathetic and are in the habit of linking together their ideas; but for the multitude of sots who make and unmake reputations in an instant, it is excessively dangerous: for several of them have already concluded that I have won over power and that I have made so much noise only in order to be paid more. To begin with *equality* and *the abolition of Property*, in order to end with the acceptance and development of the Charter, that routs all our democrats, as in the audience it defeated the public minister.

Yet is it as beautiful, as fruitful, as true; you will understand it, I hope.

It remains for me to ask you for some news of a Mr. *Ferrari*, a professor of political economy at your Strasbourg Academy, who has just, I am told, been suspended by order of the minister. I would like to know who the man is, what he thinks, and what you think of him. Write to me as soon as possible.

I remain at Besançon; I believe that I have written that our mayor and his municipal council think to accommodate me in order to assure me the rest and independence necessary for study; I can do no better, I believe, than to go along with these good arrangements. I have a hard year to get through; but, I repeat, I think that it will be the last, *as to needs of the first order*. I gain friends every day; I nearly have them in the public prosecutor's office; I hope that soon the powers-that-be, without accepting me, will tolerate me. I know that they already respect and honor me.

Farewell, my friend; I have just passed a phantasmagoric day, as vain as all the others. *All is vanity*, said Salomon, *except to love God*; let us add, *and to understand him*.

Would it be an indiscretion to beg you to offer my respectful regards to your young wife? You shall do it, or not, at your pleasure.

All my best,
P.-J. Proudhon.