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“Questions eliminated by this organization” and “Revolutionary Practice”

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

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“Revolutionary Practice”
1850–55

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Introduction and working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur

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[In margin: The true religion is the always greater liberty of the man and citizen, in conformity with social and popular law.]

Revolutionary Practice.

The basic thought of this work can be reduced to three points:

1. The formation of a *patrimony* for the people, *non-transferable* and *inalienable*.
2. The People, in effective possession of Power, as they are of Labor, Property and Wealth.
3. The *Representative* of the Country is neither a man, nor an assembly, nor even a city; it is each commune of France, in the territory it occupies and each citizen in the sphere of their prerogatives.

From which it results that if on a given spot the Homeland and Liberty are in danger, the duty and right to fix it belongs *ipso facto* to the city in question, which can take any measure and call for its neighbors.

From which results, finally, the political prerogative resulting from the revolutionary initiative of the People of Paris.

Those who do not want this and demand liberty, equality and fraternity, want an impossible thing.

[There is a 44th point, which follows the section on “Revolutionary Practice,” but Proudhon’s notes there are very fragmentary, and it will take some time to reconstruct the argument.]

Translator’s Introduction: I’ve been working through the texts in Ms. 2867, part of *Economie*, looking for material to include in the forthcoming edition of *The Philosophy of Progress*, and I’ve been finding all sorts of interesting things. The following section comes immediately after the “New Propositions Demonstrated in the Practice Of Revolutions,” so we should perhaps understand by “this organization” the program laid out at the end of that section: “To set aside the notion of *substance* and *Cause*, and move onto the terrain of *Phenomena* and *Law*, or of the Group.” While the translation here has a fair number of gaps in it (which can hopefully be filled by some more work with the manuscript-images), I think the gist of Proudhon’s argument is clear: a large number, and perhaps the vast majority, of our present concerns are, he seems to suggest, products of our failure to adequately understand the world and to set our relations on a foundation based in that understanding. That did not, of course, prevent Proudhon from dedicating another 10–15 years to the pursuit of almost all of these questions, since we remain far off from that prerequisite.

Questions eliminated by this organization.

1. Government or Anarchy.—Words.
2. Monarchy or Republic.—Words.
3. Unitary Democracy or Federalism.—Words.
4. Direct or Indirect Government.—Words.
5. Dictatorship or Constitution.—Words.
6. Separation or Confusion of Powers.—Both are impossible.

7. Revolution from above or from below.—Both at once.
8. Universal or limited suffrage.—Nonsense.
9. [] of two, or several degrees.—Nonsense.
10. Supremacy of the legislative or executive.—Nonsense.
11. One, two or three [legislative] chambers.—Senseless [question.]
12. Centralization or Decentralization.—Words.
13. Radical and moderate Republicans.—Absurd.
14. Formalists or [effectifs].—[M..]
15. Montagnards and Girondins.—Absurdity.
16. Revolutionary Power and Regular Power.—They are identical.
17. Transitory or perpetual.—It is progress, [].
18. Capacity or incapacity of the people.—One is always capable of possessing.
19. Socialism or Politics.—Words.
20. Association and individualism.—*Ad libitum*.
21. Community and Property.—*Ad libitum*.
22. Interest or Gratuity.—*Ad libitum*.
23. Liberty and Order.—They are identical.
24. Absolute or limited liberty.—There is reciprocity everywhere.
25. Progressive or proportional taxation.—The first is
26. Incompatibilities.—No more []!
27. Organization [] by the citizen or by the State.—The citizen is the State.
28. Agrarian or non-agrarian law.—It is the [].
29. Inheritance and wills.—No more abuse.
30. Competition.—No more abuse.
31. Unemployment, drudgery, hours of labor.—Senseless.
32. Conservation and resistance.—Senseless.
33. Paleo-Christian or Neo-Christian.—[].
34. Gallican or Ultramontane.—Senseless.
35. Removability or immutability.—[]
36. Conservation or revolution.—They are the same thing.
37. Movement and resistance.—Unintelligible.
38. [], absolute dictatorial, oligarchic, [], parliamentary or constitutional power.—[left blank by Proudhon]
39. Status quo, happy medium, etc.—Words.
40. Equality or inequality of conditions.—The condition of each is equal to their product, and they produce as much as they can and wish to.
41. The Prince and the Sovereign.—They are the same thing: the People.
42. The Nation, the law, the king.—Absurd.
43. The Country and the State?—Absurd.