

# The Modern State

## Chapter from *L'Homme et La Terre*

Elisée Reclus

1905

The world is very close to unification. All lands, including even the small islands scattered across the vast ocean, have entered into the field of attraction of one common culture, in which the European type predominates. Only in a few rare enclaves—in lands of caves where men flee the light, or in very secluded places protected by walls of rock, forests, or marshlands—have some tribes been able to remain completely isolated, living their lives outside the rhythm of the great universal life. However, as jealously as these peoples have hidden themselves, forming small, selfsufficient hereditary circles, scientific researchers have discovered them and integrated them into the whole of humanity by studying their forms, their ways of life, and their traditions, and by placing them in a social classification of which they were previously an unknown member.

The instinctive tendency of all nations to take part in the common affairs of the entire world already manifests itself in many instances in contemporary history. For example, in 1897 we witnessed the six greatest European powers (whatever their secret motives may have been) claiming to seek to maintain a balance of power in Europe, while satisfying both Turkey and Greece.<sup>1</sup> In the process, they fired on some unfortunate Cretans—their “brothers in Christ”—in the name of “public order.” Despite the disheartening spectacle of a large deployment of force against a small people who asked only that justice be rendered to them, it was nevertheless a completely new and telling political phenomenon that soldiers and sailors of various languages and nationalities could join together, grouped in allied detachments under the orders of a leader chosen by lot among the British, Austrians, Italians, French, and Russians. This was an event with an international character, unprecedented in history because of the methodical precision with which it was carried out. It was proven that Europe as a whole is now indeed a sort of republic of states, united through class solidarity. The financial caste that rules from Moscow to Liverpool causes governments and armies to act with perfect discipline.

Since then, history has offered other examples of this council of nations that forms spontaneously in all grave political situations. Since the interests of all are at stake, each wants to take part in the deliberations and profit from the settlement. In China, for example, the temporary

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<sup>1</sup> Reclus refers to Crete’s civil war of 1897 between the Greeks and Muslims. Six major European powers (Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Great Britain, and Russia), in addition to Greece and Turkey, became involved in the conflict and ultimately imposed a peace agreement in conformity with their will.

alliance that has been achieved between nations is strong enough to unite the military representatives of all the states in a common task of destruction and massacre. Elsewhere, notably in Morocco, the collective machinations are limited for the time being to diplomatic talks, but at any rate, the case is clear. States have an acute awareness of the effects of all events throughout the world on their own destiny, and they do their best to cope with changes in the balance of power. Nevertheless, it is very important to stress the difference between the solidarity of conservative states and that of peoples during periods of revolution, in which an upsurge takes place in the opposite direction. Whereas the year 1848 rocked the world with tremors of liberty, fifty years later we find that England hands itself over to representatives of the aristocracy and throws itself into a long war behind a band of crooks. France grapples with a recrudescence of a clerical and military mentality. Spain reestablishes the practices of the Inquisition. America, populated by immigrants, tries to close its ports to foreigners. And Turkey takes revenge against Greece.

A movement of convergence toward mutual understanding is occurring all over the world. We may therefore be permitted, in order to comprehend the transformations that will occur in the future, to take as our starting point the state of mind and practice exhibited by the civilized peoples of Europe in the management of their societies and the realization of their ideal. Obviously, each group of men moving toward the same goal will not slavishly follow the same road. It will take, according to the position that it occupies at any given time, the path that is determined by the sum total of all the individual wills that it contains. So what we propose is a kind of average that is related to the particular situation of each nation and each social element according to the temporal and spatial milieu. But in such a study, the researcher must carefully distance himself from any tendency toward patriotism, that vestige of the ancient delusion that one's nation is specially chosen by Divine Providence for the acquisition of wealth and the accomplishment of great things. Corresponding to this natural delusion of all peoples that they rank first in merit and genius is another, which Ludwig Gumplowicz called "acrochronism." Its effect is that one is content to suppose that contemporary civilization, as imperfect as it may be, is nevertheless the culminating state of humanity, and that by comparison, all past ages were barbaric. This is a "chronocentric" egoism, analogous to the "ethnocentric" egoism of patriotism.

The "rights of man" were proclaimed for thousands of years by isolated individuals and more than a century ago by an assembly that has drawn the attention of peoples ever since. Yet in present-day society these rights are still only recognized in principle, like a simple word whose meaning one hardly begins to fathom. The brutal fact of authority endures against rights, in the family and in society as well as in the state. It endures while at the same time accepting its opposite and intermingling with it in a thousand illogical and bizarre combinations. There are now very few fanatical defenders of the kind of absolute authority that gives to the prince the right of life and death over his subjects, and to the husband and father the same rights over his wife and children. Yet public opinion on such matters wavers indecisively, guided less by reason than by one's individual circumstances and personal sympathies, and by the nature of the stories one hears. Generally speaking, it can be said that man measures the strictness of his principles of liberty by his share of personal benefits from the outcome. He is absolutely strict when it is a question of events that occur on the other side of the world. But when it is a question of his own country or caste, he compromises slightly by mixing his mania for authority with conceptions of human rights. Finally, when he is directly affected, he is likely to let himself be blinded by passion, and he will gladly make authoritarian pronouncements.

In certain countries—France, for example—is it not an established custom, so to speak, that the husband has the right to kill his unfaithful wife? It is above all within the family, in a man's daily relationships with those close to him, that one can best judge him. If he absolutely respects the liberty of his wife, if the rights and the dignity of his sons and daughters are as precious to him as his own, then he proves himself worthy of entering the assembly of free citizens. If not, he is still a slave, since he is a tyrant.

It has often been repeated that the family unit is the primordial cell of humanity. This is only relatively true, for two men who meet and strike up a friendship, a band (even among animals) that forms to hunt or fish, a concert of voices or instruments that join in unison, an association to realize ideas through common action—all constitute original groupings in the great global society. Nevertheless, it is certain that familial associations, whether manifested in polygyny, polyandry, monogamy, or free unions, exercise a direct influence on the form of the state through the effects of their ethics. What one sees on a large scale parallels what one sees on a small scale. The authority that prevails in government corresponds to that which holds sway in families, though ordinarily in lesser proportions, for the government is incapable of pressuring widely dispersed individuals in the way that one spouse can pressure the other who lives under the same roof.



Group of non-commissioned officers from military detachments stationed in Beijing. German, French, English, Austrian, Russian, American, Japanese, Belgian, Italian, Dutch and Chinese soldiers

Just as familial practices naturally harden into “principles” for all those involved, so government takes on the form of distinct political bodies encompassing various segments of the human race that are separated from one another. The causes of this separation vary and intermingle. In one place, a difference in language has demarcated two groups. In another, economic conditions arising from a specific soil, particular products, or diverging historical paths have created the boundaries that divide them. Then, on top of all the primary causes, whether arising from nature or from stages of social evolution, is added a layer of conflicts that every authoritarian society always produces. Thus through the ceaseless interplay of interests, ambitions, and forces of attraction and repulsion, states become demarcated. Despite their constant vicissitudes, these entities claim to have a sort of collective personality and demand from those under their jurisdiction that peculiar feeling of love, devotion, and sacrifice called “patriotism.” But should a conqueror pass through and erase the existing borders, the subjects must, by order of that authority, modify their feelings and reorient themselves in relation to the new sun around which they now revolve.

Just as property is the right of use and abuse, so is authority the right to command rightly or wrongly. This is understood well by the masters and also by the governed, whether they slavishly obey or feel the spirit of rebellion awakening. Philosophers have viewed authority quite differently. Desiring to give this word a meaning closer to its original one,

which implied something like creation, they tell us that authority resides in anyone who teaches someone else something useful, and that it applies to everyone from the most celebrated scholar to the humblest mother.<sup>2</sup> Still, none of them goes so far as to consider the revolutionary who stands up to power as the true representative of authority.

Everyone has the right to speak the language that they want to speak, and to give to the words the meaning which they have personally chosen; but it is certain that, in the popular discourse, the word “authority” does have the same meaning as that given to it by Poseidon commanding to the tempests : “And thus, I order ! No reason, my will suffice !” Since, the masters never talked any other way. Is it not established that the “cannon is the reason of kings”? And isn’t the “raison d’état” distinguished precisely because it is not reason? It places itself outside of vulgar humanity, it commands the just and the unjust, the good and evil as it wishes.

In good authoritarian logic, everything belongs to the absolute monarch, the earth as well as the life of its subjects. Was it not already by the effect of a real condescension that, at the time of his accession to the throne, His Siamese Majesty deigned “to authorize all his subjects to use trees and plants, water, stones and all other substances that are in his kingdom”<sup>3</sup> ? And was it not in return, on the part of the subject, certainly daring to “lay under the soles of the sacred feet whatever was in his possession”? For it goes without saying that everything belongs to the master of masters, and the despot could have cut off the heads of the daring who dared to hold such language before him, proof that, despite the formulas of abjection, private property was beginning to exist in the country and that the master was no longer alone. But the political world is full of these contrasts between the principle of absolute authority and the demands of individual freedom. Without going so far, in despotic Asia, and even while remaining in “free England,” do we not see in a thousand texts from the past, the meaning of which is little understood in the present, that the prince’s authority was almost unlimited?

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<sup>2</sup> Saint-Yves d’Alveydra, *La mission des Juifs*, 41. [Reclus’ note]

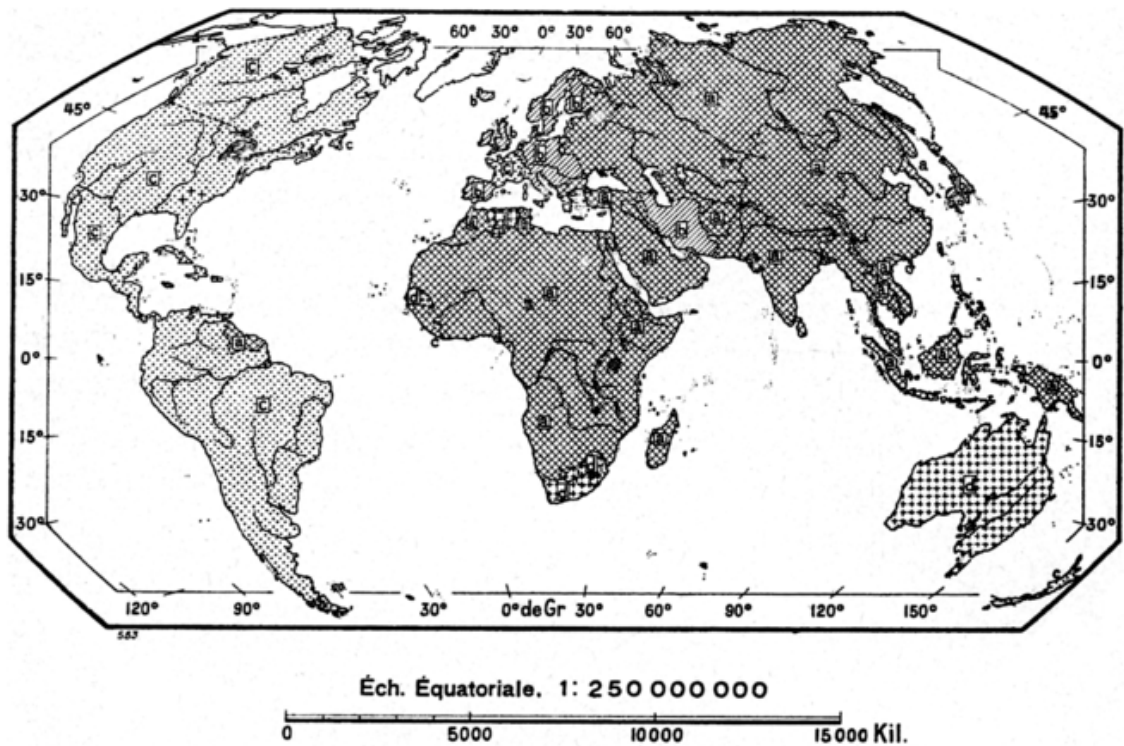
<sup>3</sup> Pallegoix, *Description du royaume de Siam*, I, p. 263, 264. [Reclus’ note]

There are hardly any limits to the degradation to which the subject agrees to lend himself in his relations with the monarch. Barely a century has passed since the Emperor Paul made all passers-by uncover their heads to see how their hair was done and did not admit anyone into his presence without the worshiper's knee falling on the floor and his kiss on the imperial hand echoing in the hall with a great noise. The word "bald" was prohibited on pain of knout because the emperor was bald, as was the term "camus" because the august nose was crushed like that of a Kalmyk. Forbidden to say that the celestial stars accomplish their "revolution," and, in all representations, forbidden to use the word "freedom," which was to be replaced by that of "permission"<sup>4</sup>. And yet this madman, who had a method in his madness, reigned five years and his people would have left him indefinitely on his throne: he succumbed under the effort of a court conspiracy, which was known of his son, the future Alexander I.

**N ° 554. Autocracy, Monarchy, Republic.**

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<sup>4</sup> Masson, *Secret memoirs of the Court of Saint-Petersbourg*, London, H. S. Nichols. [Reclus' note]



- A. Countries ruled autocratically, even if the agents of despotism on the other hand belong to a group of free citizens: Abyssinia, Congo, Russia, etc;
- B. Constitutional monarchies: Germany, Japan, Persia, etc.
- C. Republics: Argentina, France, (forgotten Liberia), etc.; Canada and New Zealand are also classified in this category of states;
- D. Countries where one race has formed a monarchy or a republic and keeps another population enslaved: Algeria, Australia, Transvaal, etc.

And if personal power shows itself in abject sides, is it not seen aswell in its ferocious aspect! The wars to which Napoleon left his name were indeed his own and if what we call his “genius” had not intervened, the mad jaunt of the Egyptian expedition would certainly not have taken place, armies would not have merged into the atrocious war in Spain to give Joseph Bonaparte the throne of viceroy; the appalling human encounter which took place in central Russia, and which ended in nameless disaster, was also the result of imperial will. Without him, whose appearance is explained by the ignorance and petty passions of his contemporaries, millions of human lives would have been spared.

Other devastators have succeeded to the one some have had the courage to call the “martyr of Saint-Hélène,” and, just as many soldiers imagine that they have the “marshal’s staff in their gibern,” thousands of warlords hoped that Napoleon’s sword would be their heritage. The conqueror is no longer here, but it is of him that one can speak of a dead man to whom the living are enslaved. It is a spectacle both very instructive and very lamentable, that of these numerous pests of society seeking a master. The flock asks for a dog who will bark at its sides, stick its fangs into its flesh. Multitudes invoke the Napoleons, but these do not respond to the call, at least one can see a cult for the boots and the whip of the deceased. We must do without reliving the ancient servitude in all its ignominy, but it is glorified in legend, it is into made a holy epoch, and the poets try to sing heroically the perfidity of their ancestors. And, since the master is no longer there in his prestigious grandeur, one can half console oneself by prostrating before the secondary masters who most resemble him, before those who put at the service of their ambition the essential qualities of the dominator: total absence of scruples, the absolute contempt of men, the ardor of pleasure always unfulfilled, intelligence refined in the service of evil, the cruel irony which gives flavor to crime.

Thus, whatever is said by the theorists who see the state as a sort of entity independent of men, history shows us most clearly that most of the government still appears in its most obvious form of primitive violence, of hoarding, of caprice, and that the representative par excellence of the State, that is to say the sovereign, necessarily gives it the direction that comes from the result of his passions and interests. Not only is the king just a man, there is even every chance that he will be a below average man, because he is surrounded by flatterers and schemers who hide the truth from him and that the vertigo of his privileged position exposes him to madness.



Mssinga, King of Uganda, his two uncles, his ministers

Lecky<sup>5</sup> notes that more than half of the wars that devastated Europe originated in quarrels between closely related rulers. It is easy to understand that this was so. The peoples had no interest in these family discussions which hovered over them, but they found themselves drawn into it like the water in the vortex of a lock: subject like an inert thing to the rivalries and hatreds of their masters, they were employed to satisfy some, to satiate others. Personal whims, family interests, this is what is hidden under the “Grace of God”, a heritage from ancient times bequeathed by the Merodach (Marduk), the Pharaohs and the Caesars. Even among the current kings bound by specific constitutions and institutions, and who, despite their desire for absolute power, feel somewhat in the position of insects stung by a pin, contemporary history can designate at least one in the center of Europe, on one of the highest thrones in the world, which never misses any opportunity to proclaim himself the chosen one of God: Most High himself, he has no other responsibility than towards the Most High.

But, as a result of historical development, it turns out that most of the defenders of the old regime have given up on the attack and are standing on the defensive; they are in the process of pleading extenuating circumstances. Just as, in a memorable period, the Republic was maintained in France because it was the state of transition which divided the least, so we keep the monarchy in several states because it allows the various parties to wait in awaiting agreement on the changes to be made. All the domestic and private virtues that the sovereign is lucky enough to possess are counted to him as particularly exceptional merits, and even all the favors of fate, good harvests and good days, are considered to be due if not to his direct power, at least to some kind of intervention. The symbol of this sovereignty of the earthly master over the elements of the sky is still seen in China, during an eclipse of the sun or the moon, when the Chinese mandarin, armed with his weapons and dressed in his full uniform, orders from below in the name of the Emperor and, to please his people, delivers the threatened star. Recently, when Queen Victoria of England died, after a very long reign of three quarters of a century, many of her enthusiastic subjects almost seemed to imagine that she had had something to do with the immense progress made around the world during her reign, the Victorian age<sup>6</sup>. This is how the legends of Rama, Cyrus, and Charlemagne were formed in the past; This is how “a look from Louis gave birth to Corneilles.”

The state of transition between the enslavement of all to a single, common form of monarchy, and the free and spontaneous grouping of men functioning in harmony, the ideal form of humanity, is marked by constitutions, charters, statutes which must necessarily change over time, not only because the nation to which they apply evolves more or less rapidly, but also because these conventions, promulgated with so much solemnity, are not original works, coming from the precise will of the people: they are mostly copies, more or less skilful, of other documents of the same kind, and, like the laws, they always represent the exclusive interests of the ruling class. No one criticized the written constitutions better than the representative of the Cherokee, speaking in a general assembly of the tribes of the Indian territory, meeting in 1872 for the discussion of a general charter: “We must — he said — take care of engraving institutions in the hearts of our fellow citizens, only thus will they be lasting institutions. Write them down on the paper, you might as well engrave them on the bark of the tree. The forest oak grows every year, changing

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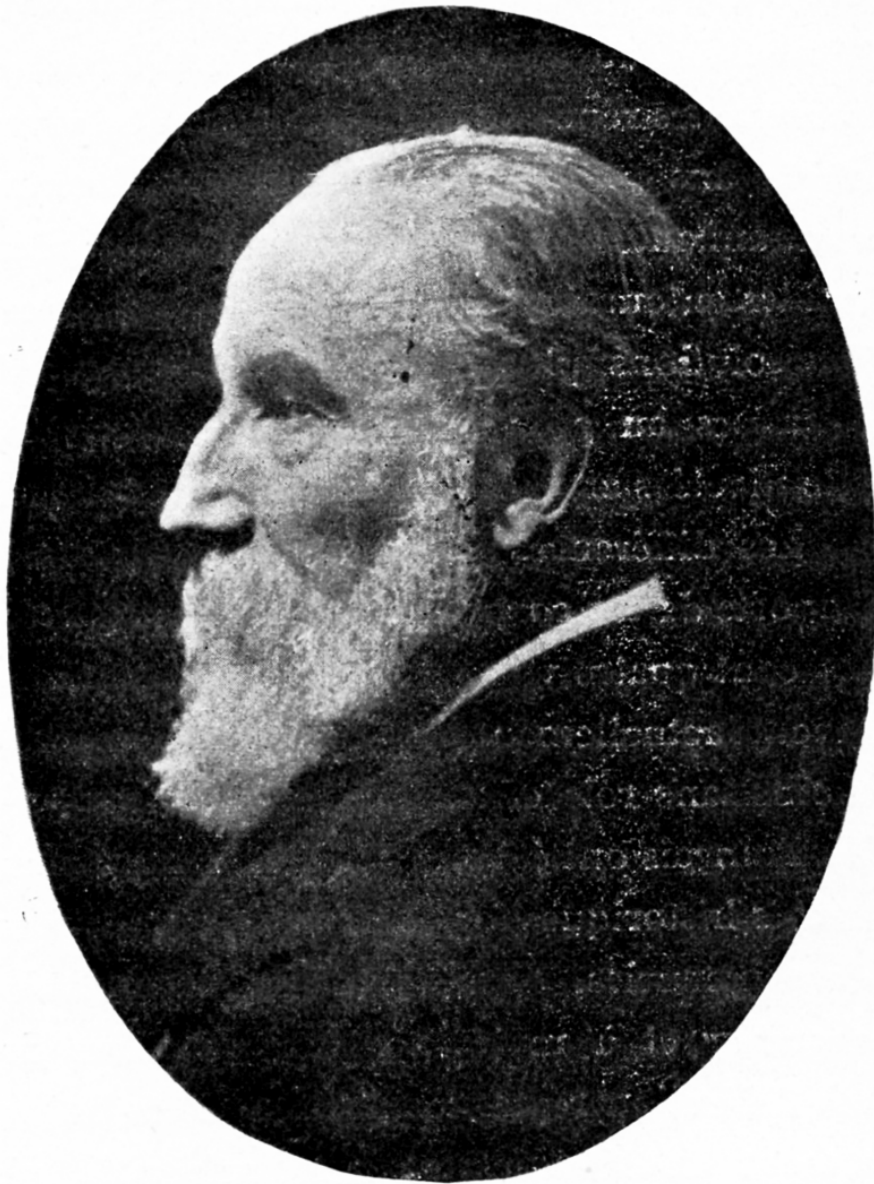
<sup>5</sup> *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. I, page 104. [Reclus’ note]

<sup>6</sup> In English in the original text

bark every time: so does the Indian nation. Two things do not pass: the will of man and the heart of the oak tree. We must hold on to the will if we are to live and last”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Le Temps*, 30 août 1872. — A. Letourneau, *Evolution de la Morale*, p. 122. [Reclus’ note]



Francisco Pi Y Margall 1824–1901  
President of the Spanish Republic in 1873

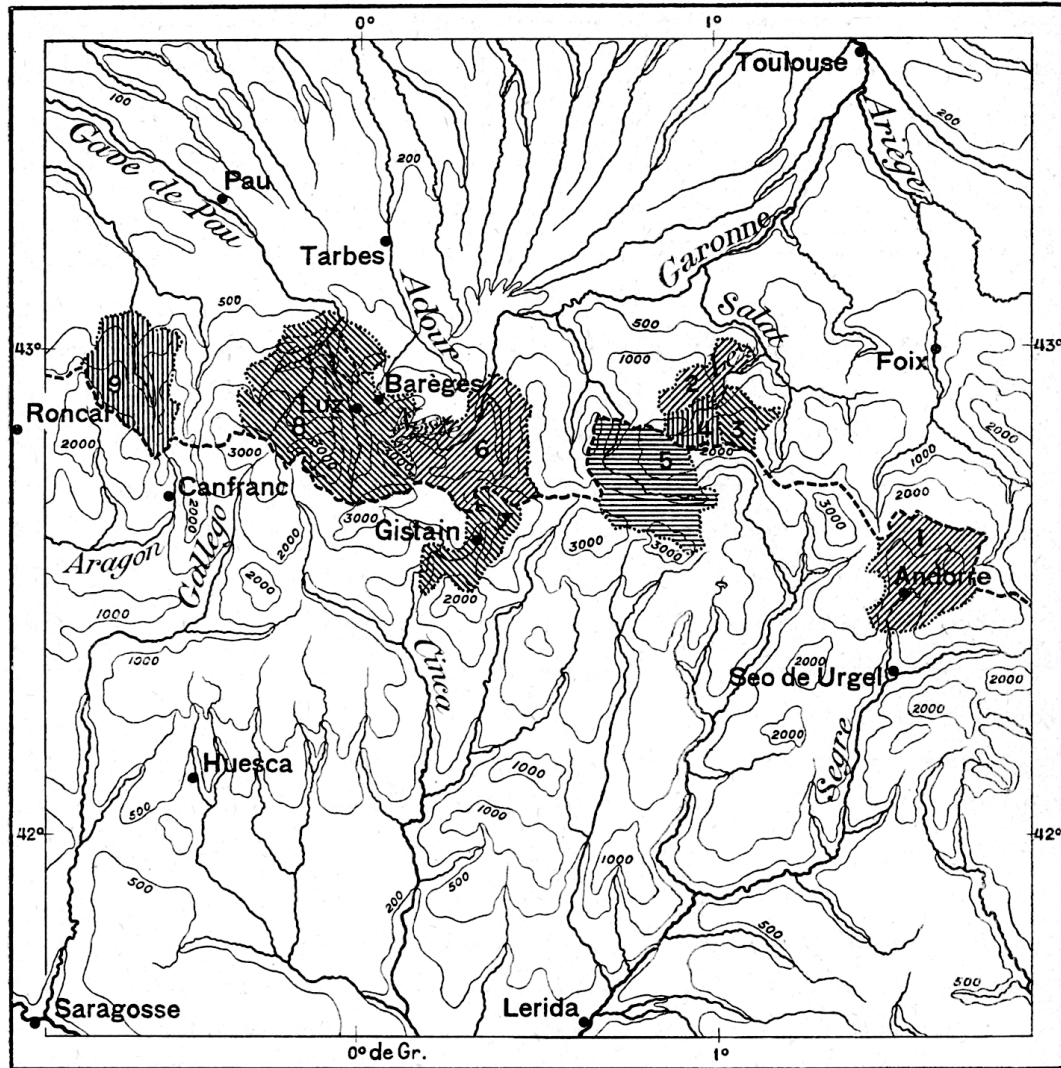
The name of Republic applied to certain States, as opposed to that of Monarchy, has been given in the course of time to very diverse organizations, but both of which tried to support a more or less restricted group of people considering themselves free in the midst of a population of slaves or barbarian neighbors. Unsolvable problem! For there can be no truly free society as long as one man remains enslaved on the terra cotta planet. And thus the citizen of Athens, the plebeian of Rome, the shepherd of the Pyrenean valleys, even the members of the tribe of Ova-Mbarandu, south of Cunene, whom the missionary Duparquet depicts as intransigent republicans, living in complete freedom, without chief, without a priest who can demand homage or tax, all these communities have succumbed, absorbed by the servile empires which surrounded them. But we can say that these organizations formulated more original solutions than the republics of the twentieth century, submitted to the government of international high finance and by it leveled to the rank of neighboring monarchies.

The differences in title are therefore not essential, but it is important to note them and determine their historical origin. Among the one hundred and eighty million or two hundred million men who currently live in a republican regime, if not without masters at least without official kings, it is evident that the Swiss, the Americans, the French have been encouraged to take the same name because of very different historical circumstances. Switzerland, which was at first a chaos of seigneuries, fiefdoms, rural communities, had only to seek and maintain its balance of forces to become a republican confederation; the United States was driven by the stubbornness of England to deprive itself of the monarchical regime to which it first wanted to remain religiously faithful; Likewise, the Hispano-American republics, which had announced themselves in history by the cry of "Vive Ferdinand VII," obviously could not come to the denial of royalty until after a long evolution of wars and internal revolutions. The Lusitano-Brazilian republic remained for a long time immersed in monarchical institutions, and the half-dozen semi-republican colonies of Greater Britain<sup>8</sup>, the Dominion or "Strength" of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the "Colony" of Cape Town, New Zealand, etc., have very ingeniously accommodated a remainder of monarchical forms to their republican constitution. Only France was led very directly, by the logic of things, to abolish royalty as an infringement of human rights and to make the Republic a symbol of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

#### **N ° 555. Former Republics of the Pyrenees.**

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<sup>8</sup> In English in the original text



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1, Republic of Andorra. 2, Bouigane or Ballongue valley. 3, Val of Bethmale or Balamet. 4, Val of Biros. 5, Val of Azran. 6, Aure Valley. 7, Val of Gistai 8, The seven "rivers" of Lavedan; bypassing these valleys from north to west to return to the east, we find the following valleys successively: Surquères or Batsouriguère; Estrem de Salles; Azun; Saint-Savin or Cauterets; Barèges, Luz or Balsan; Davantaic; Castelloubon. 9. Aspe Valley. — Roncal in the Spanish Basque Country is the center of a sort of small republic.

But it is only a symbol and a symbol almost everywhere misunderstood. The French Republic strangely becomes flexible with monarchical survivals; even in 1870, when the continuation of the republican form in France was voted in Parliament by a majority vote, it was tacitly admitted that if the word was accepted, given the difficulty of finding a king, one would remain intransigent on the background and that the old institutions — so-called good principles — would be respectfully safeguarded. This is indeed what happened. The Republic, good princess, who painfully collects money from the lower layers of the poor people for the payment of its officials, the Republic religiously continued to pay the fees of its employees, while the latter, faithful to the previous ones, to the routine and esprit de corps continued their vituperation against the new regime, thanks to which they appeared nicely to the world. Officers, magistrates, priests, even professors, took pride in betraying the government they were supposed to respect and serve, and even bragged about it in their speeches and circulars. During this affair of military treason — known as the “Dreyfus affair” — which took on an epic character in the immense whirlwind of human passions, it was an incident of the most curious and the most significant that that of the consultation of the students of Saint-Cyr, the Grande Military School of France: “Do you want a change in the form of government?” — “Yes,” was the unanimous response, increased in some of the students with violent or rude expressions. And later, when, under pressure from part of the people, scandalized to see religious congregations gradually taking over teaching in France and trying to knead the minds of children to make as many little Jesuits as possible, the government finally resolved to defend itself, did not we see all the courts unanimously justify all the rebellions, insults, assaults of priests and their friends, and uniformly condemn to punishments so light that they proved the magistrates agreed with those being prosecuted? Never has there been a more striking example of this “house divided against itself” of which the Gospel speaks. Now, “such a house cannot stand,” reason tells us. Every day shows us some stone falling off of the building.

Revolutions, in their multiple forms, are therefore inevitable since evolutions are thwarted in their normal functioning. Whether the terminal catastrophes are divided into a thousand little facts, bankruptcies and suicides, brawls, strikes or famines, industrial ruins or political declines, impoverishment and depopulation, or else a political and social hurricane suddenly passes over the country leaving behind a trail of ruins and corpses, the result is the same as a whole. The language of history is categorical on this matter. Or death, as in the past for Chaldea, Elam, Bactria, or the difficult, violent, painful transformation for all modern nations, which cannot perish because they help each other all the same, while devouring each other in vital competition! There can be no other way out as long as the state, represented by the personal power of one or more individuals, or even an entire class, retains the eminent right to consider themselves as educators of the nation, for this education will always be done in their own interest, even with the perfect illusion of “devoting themselves to the good of the country.” There is a division of labor that seems quite natural to those who desire the continuation of the old prerogatives: on the one hand the duty to govern, on the other that to obey. But those who are responsible for “driving the state’s chariot” should know everything, plan everything, organize everything; yet the subjects, who also educate themselves, note the errors made by their masters, challenge this division of labor and endeavor to abolish it.

Weren’t the July days the forced consequence of the “ordinances” and of all the oppressive regime which brought about the conflict? Wasn’t the Franco-German war, from shock to shock and vicissitude to vicissitude, the natural consequence of the two Napoleonic empires overthrow-

ing the two French republics? And, in the first years of the twentieth century, Russia would not have had to endure the shock of the Japanese armies if it had not, in violation of all promises, seized a Chinese province, laughing at the naive who could believe its word. It is therefore quite wrong that we simply see in revolutions the effect of an instinct for destruction which would agitate the popular masses and lead them to destroy. Without doubt, this instinct exists, all educators have noticed how imperious it is in children, lovers born of renewal. We must not forget that “to live is to act,” and that “destruction is the easiest form of action” (Anatole France); but there is more than instinct, it is especially necessary to take into account the collective will arising from the general conditions of society.

When it overflows, life becomes irrepressible: it is like running water, which can be dammed, but which must find a way out, either over the dam, by plunging into the accustomed bed, or, by a lateral depression, in a new stream. Thus are explained the unforeseen effects of revolutions and violent counter-revolutions. After abrupt changes obtained by force, life no longer manifests itself through the same acts, it feeds energies which were asleep until then, enters new channels like water compressed by a piston; but, whatever the transformations, the persistence of force cannot fail but to prevail. The work is accomplished in another way, but it is accomplished, bringing about a whole succession of unexpected events, which weak men subjected to their effects say, according to the circumstances, fatal or favorable, usually judging using their narrow selfishness and their view of the moment. This is how movement turns into heat and heat into electricity. Seeing the machine stop, it is easy to believe that the force itself is dispersing, but suddenly it bursts, transfigured. It is the god who vanishes and finds himself in continual avatars. Proteus, ever-changing, took on the form of a new being.

Individuals and classes with power at their disposal—whether chiefs of state or aristocratic, religious, or bourgeois masters—willingly intervene with brutal force to suppress all popular initiative. In their childish and barbaric illusion, they think themselves capable of stopping the overflowing vitality of the masses, and of immobilizing society for their personal profit. But they can only lift a faltering hand. The unchanging laws of history are beginning to be understood well enough so that even the more audacious exploiters of society do not dare to run head-on into its movement. They must proceed with science and skill in order to divert it onto side roads, like a train that is switched from the main track. Up to the present, the most frequently used means—and one that unfortunately benefits most the masters of the people—consists of transforming all the energies of a nation into a rage against the foreigner. The pretexts are easy to find, since the interests of states remain different and in conflict through the very fact of their separation into distinct artificial organisms. Beyond the pretexts, there exist the memories of actual wrongs, massacres, and crimes of all sorts committed in former wars. The call for revenge still resounds, and when a new war will have passed like the terrible flames of a fire devouring everything in its path, it will also leave the memory of hatred and serve as leaven for future conflicts. How many examples one could cite of such diversions! Those in power respond to the internal problems of the government through external wars. If the wars are triumphant and the masters take advantage of the opportunity to profit from them through the consolidation of their regime, they will have debased their people through the foolish vanity they call glory. They will have made the people into shameful accomplices by inviting them to steal, pillage, and slaughter, and this solidarity of evil will cause the people’s former demands to languish as their cups are once more filled with the red wine of hatred.



Moscow, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1905  
Procession demanding the release of political prisoners.

In addition to war, those who govern have at their disposal other powerful means of protecting themselves from any threat. These include corruption and demoralization through gambling and all forms of debauchery: betting, horse-racing, drinking, cafés, and nightclubs. “If they sing, they’ll pay!” The depraved, debased, and self-hating no longer have the dignity necessary to impel them to revolt. Imagining they have the souls of lackeys, they do themselves justice by accepting their oppression. Thus the wars of the Republic and the burgeoning vices and depravity that succeeded the first years of the Revolution, with its ideals of austerity and virtue, were well timed to prepare the way for the imperial regime and the shameful debasement of character. However, this swing in the opposite direction was largely the result of a normal reaction on the part of society as a whole. It is natural for men to shift from one extreme to the other, in the same way that their lives alternate from activity to sleep, and from rest to work. Moreover, since a nation is composed of many classes and diverse groups, each of which has a particular evolution within the general one, historical movements with opposing tendencies collide and intersect, creating a complicated web that the historian can untangle only with great difficulty.

Thus during the internal struggles of the French Revolution, the people of the Vendée certainly represented the principle of the autonomous and freely federated commune, in opposition to the central government. However, through a contradiction that they were unable to grasp due to their complete lack of education, they also became defenders of the Church, whose goal was universal authority over souls, and of the monarchy, which viewed all members of the commune as nothing but *corvée* labor to be taxed, or even as so much meat to be sliced up on the battlefield.<sup>9</sup> Through a strange naïveté that would be comic were it not so tragic, the Negroes of Haiti, struggling for their freedom against the white planters, enthusiastically declared themselves to be subjects of the King; and the rebels of the Spanish colonies of the New World greeted the Catholic King of Spain with cheers! Throughout history, those who revolted against any authority almost always did so in the name of another authority, as if the ideal required nothing more than changing masters. During the time of great ferment in public opinion and of intellectual liberation that led to the revolution of 1830, those who worked for the emancipation of language and for the free study of the history of art and literature of all periods and all cultures (and not only those of Greece, Rome, and the Age of Louis XIV), and those who traced their origins back to the Middle Ages and even found ancestry among the Germans and Slavs (in a word, the “romantics”), had for the most part remained royalists and Christians. On the other hand, those who championed political liberty always did so through the classical forms of the Schoolmen, in the traditional style that is the hallmark of the Academies. When Blanqui, blackened with powder, finally laid down his rifle after the three victorious days in July, he simply said: “Down with the Romantics!”<sup>10</sup> The revolution had disintegrated into two elements: a political one, which aimed at toppling thrones, and a literary one, which worked for the liberation of language and the extension of its domain. Each of these groups of revolutionaries was reactionary from the standpoint of the other. And each faction was quite justified in criticizing the other’s illogic, irrelevancies, absurdities, and stupidities.

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<sup>9</sup> Reclus is punning on *taillable*, which refers both to taxing and to cutting.

<sup>10</sup> Gustave Geoffroy, *L’Enfermé*, 51. [Reclus’ note]



Saint-Petersburg, Winter Palace square  
Bloodied on January 9 (22, new style), 1905.

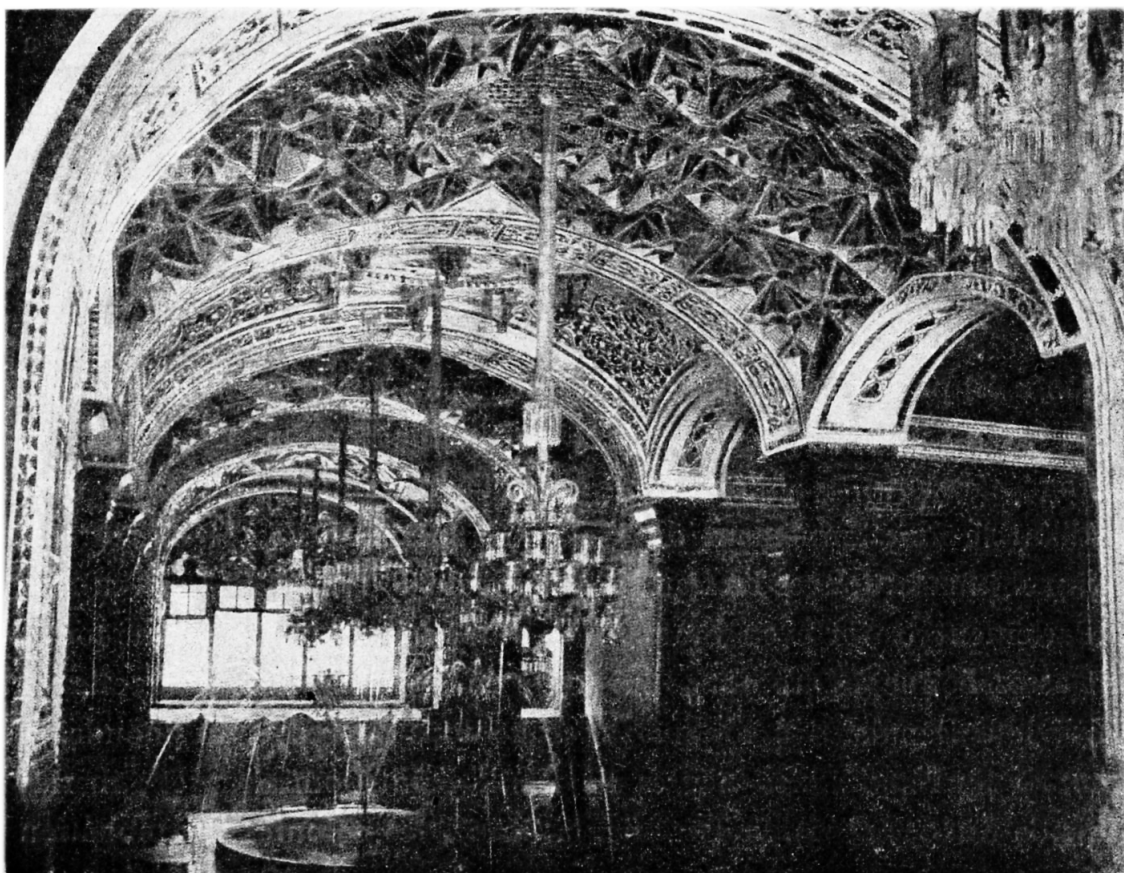
The historian who studies the vicissitudes of events and tries to extract what is essential relative to progress has the most difficult problem to resolve, that of discovering the parallelogram of forces underlying the thousand conflicting impulses that collide on all sides. It is easy for him to err, and he often despairs that he is witnessing a collapse when in reality there was progress, or rather when, in the overall assessment of losses and gains, human resources have actually greatly increased.

But how long and difficult does the work of true revolution seem to those who are devoted to the ideal! For if the external forms of institutions and laws respond to the pressure of deeper changes taking place, they cannot produce those changes: a new impetus must always come from the interior. To begin with, it certainly appears that the adoption of a constitution or of laws that give official expression to the victory of that part of the nation which is demanding its rights would ensure the progress that had been achieved. Yet it is possible that the result will be precisely the opposite. While it is true that any charter or laws that are agreed to by the insurgents may sanction the liberty that has been won, it is also true that they will limit it, and therein lies the danger. They determine the precise limit at which the victors must stop, and this inevitably becomes the point of departure for a retreat. For a situation is never absolutely stationary, and if movement does not occur in the direction of progress, it will occur on the side of repression. The immediate consequence of law is to lull those who have imposed it during their temporary triumph, to drain from zealous individuals the personal energy that animated them in their victorious efforts, and to transfer it to others, to professional legislators and to conservatives—in other words, to the very enemies of all progressive change. Moreover, the people are conservative at heart, and the game of revolution does not please them for long. They accept evolution because they are not suspicious of it; since they are unaware of it, it is unlikely to arouse their displeasure. Having become legalists, the former rebels are in part satisfied. They enter the ranks of the “friends of order,” and reaction regains the upper hand until the arrival of new groups of revolutionaries who are not tied to the system, and who, aided by the mistakes or follies of the government, smash another hole in the ancient edifice.

As soon as an institution is established, even if it should be only to combat flagrant abuses, it creates them anew through its very existence. It has to adapt to its bad environment, and in order to function, it must do so in a pathological way. Whereas the creators of the institution follow only noble ideals, the employees that they appoint must consider above all their remuneration and the continuation of their employment. Far from desiring the success of the endeavor, in the end their greatest desire is that the goal should never be achieved.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Reclus cites “Herbert Spencer, *Introduction to Social Science*, ch. V, 87.” There is, however, no such title. He is apparently referring to chapter 5 of Spencer’s *The Study of Sociology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961; reprint of the 1880 edition). There, Spencer comments that “agencies established to get remedies for crying evils, are liable to become agencies maintained and worked in a considerable degree, and sometimes chiefly, for the benefit of those who reap income from them” (75).



Tehran, Baharistan palace hall  
where the youngest of Parliaments meets.

It is no longer a question of accomplishing the task, but only of the profits that it brings and the honors that it confers. For example, a commission of engineers is in charge of investigating the complaints of landowners who were displaced by the construction of the aqueduct of the Avre. It would seem very simple first to study these complaints and then to respond in all fairness. But no—they begin by taking a few years to do a general survey of the region, a task that had already been done, and done well at that. Time passes, expenses accumulate, and the complaints get worse. How often has it happened that the funds allocated for some public work are notoriously insufficient, scarcely enough to maintain the scaffolding, yet the engineers run up fees as if useful work were being accomplished? How many years were necessary for that tireless association, the Loire Navigable, to obtain the authorization to create a channel in the riverbed at its own expense by constructing relatively inexpensive groins? The state would only consider works costing millions, and twenty years later the matter would probably still be under study, like so many other projects that are vital for the intelligent use of French land.

The Law is decreed by the Parliament, which arises from the People, in whom national sovereignty resides. The freer the country, the more venerable its elected legislative body, and the more important the free examination of all the implications of liberty. And no institution is more deserving of critique than parliamentary government.

The Parliament was undeniably an instrument of progress for the nation that gave birth to it, and one can understand the admiration that Montesquieu developed through studying the functioning of the British system, which is so simple, and therefore so logical. Later, during the National Assembly of 1789 and the Convention, the Parliament passed through its heroic period in France, and on the whole, played a rather positive role in the history of the gradual liberation of the individual. Since then, it has spread to all countries of the world, including the Negro republics of Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Liberia. Only Russia (1905), Turkey, China, the European colonies of exploitation, and a few other states remain without national representation. The institution has become diversified in different countries, demonstrating shortcomings in some cases and strengths in others, but one finds everywhere a profound divergence between the evolution of a people and that of its legislative body.

Even if one sets aside systems with poll taxes and plural voting, ignores the fact that with rare exceptions the feminine half of the population is not “represented” at all, and considers only universal suffrage that is honestly applied, one still cannot claim that the laws voted on by the majority of the elected representatives, who are themselves selected by the majority of the voters, express the opinion of the majority of electors. In fact, the opposite is often true. This defect, which is purely mathematical, might be negligible if the state contained only two factions, since the losses and gains would balance out on the whole, but it becomes so much more serious as life intensifies and opinions become more diverse. Yet the Swiss are alone in conferring on the entire electorate the final adoption or rejection of each new law.

Except in very rare cases, the spectacle presented by countries during an election would hardly delight a man of principles. Whether an electoral committee drafts the candidate, or whether he violates his own modesty, ambitions inevitably emerge, and machinations, extravagant promises, and lies have free rein. Moreover, it is certainly not the most honest candidate who has the best chance of winning. Since the legislators must be knowledgeable about all sorts of problems—local and global, financial and educational, technical and moral—no particular ability recommends the candidate to the voters. The winner may owe his success to a certain provincial popularity, his good-natured qualities, his oratorical skills, or his organizational talents, but frequently he is

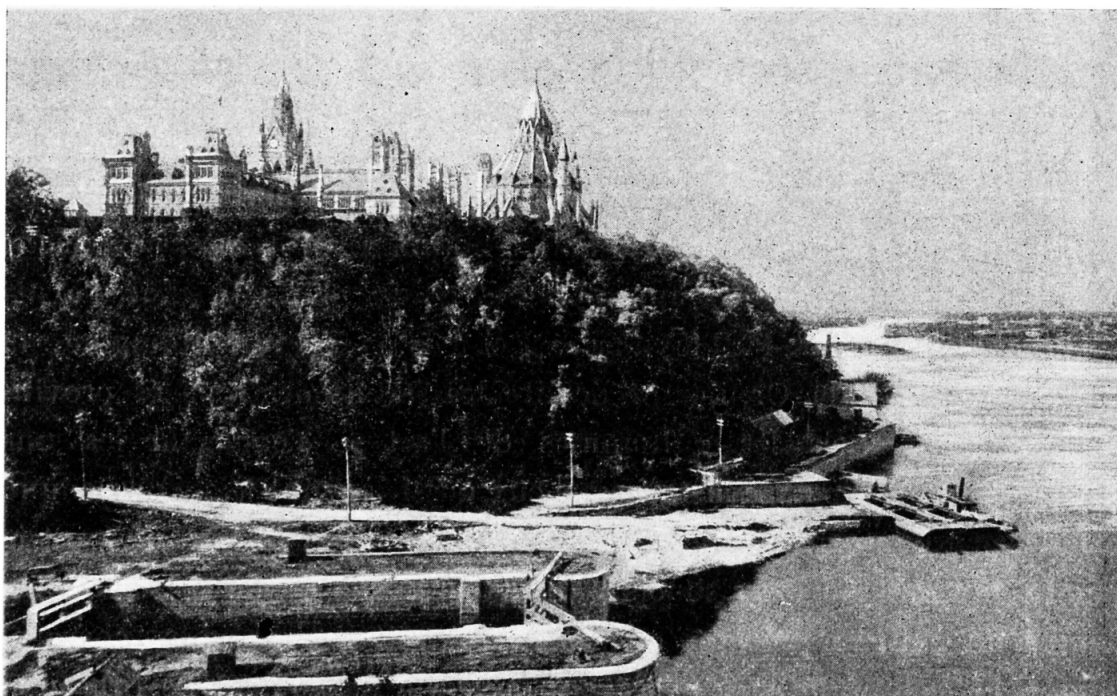
also indebted to his wealth, his family connections, or even the terror that he can inspire as a great industrialist or large property owner. Most often, he will be a man of the party; he will be asked neither to involve himself in public works, nor to facilitate human relations, but rather to fight against one faction or another. In short, the composition of the legislature does not at all reflect that of the nation. It will be generally inferior in moral qualities, since it is dominated by professional politicians.

Once elected, the representative is in fact independent of his electors. It is left up to him to decide on the thousand issues of each day according to his own conscience, and if he does not take the side of his constituents, there exists no recourse against his vote. Far from having any accountability during the four, seven, or nine years of his mandate, and well aware that he can now commit crimes with impunity, the elected official finds himself immediately exposed to all sorts of seductions on behalf of the ruling classes. The newcomer is initiated into the legislative traditions under the leadership of the veteran parliamentarians, adopts the *esprit de corps*, and is solicited by big industry, high officials, and above all, international finance. Even if the parliament happens to be composed of a majority of honest people, it develops a peculiar mentality based entirely on negotiations, compromises, recantations, dealings that must not reach the ears of the general public, and bargaining in the corridors that is covered up by brilliant jousting between skilled orators. All noble character is debased, all sincere conviction contaminated, and all honest intention destroyed.

Thus it is not surprising that so many men refuse to help sustain such an environment by means of their vote and to cooperate in the “conquest of state power.” The revolutionaries at least realize that the forms of the past will endure as long as the workers support their existence and compromise with them, even if only to modify them. They can only deplore the naïveté of those who think that they can “make the Revolution armed to the teeth with ballots.” In order to maintain this illusion, one must ignore the real weakness of this allegedly sovereign parliament, closing one’s eyes to the far more powerful institutions that gather around it, playing with it like a cat with a mouse.

It is this complexity of government that makes any radically political revolution extremely difficult. The old survivals have all been confined, concentrated in so many secondary states, true octopuses that live on the organism of the general State and at its expense: the nation is dies off because of their prosperity. A nominal revolution can have no effect if it does not also erode these corporations, which unite an absolute solidarity of particular and collective interests. As soon as one of these professions is solidly constituted as an official and sacrosanct corporation, its inevitable tendency is to say and believe itself infallible and to reserve to itself absolutely the discussions and decisions which have been declared by the king, the custom or the law as being within its purview. This is how the Church claimed not only the monopoly of the salvation of souls but also that of science: apart from priests or people of “clergy” that is to say people of knowledge, no one had the right to talk about things that were meant to be beyond their reach; the knowledge of human nature makes it possible to affirm without fear that in a number of circumstances priests brought heresy accusations much more out of professional jealousy than out of holy ardor for the faith. The same infallibility can be found in other professions, across all levels of society to the various workers’ corporations, which held to their professional privileges with patriotic fierceness, not only because of the commercial interest they had in remaining the only suppliers of certain products, but also by virtue of the pride they inspired in the exclusive possession of the secrets and practices of their industry. We know that in the past one form of

dough belonged to the baker and that another form was the property of the pastry chef. A further step in this direction, that is to say the religious and social consecration of these divisions between professions, jobs, trades, and caste was created in the West as in ancient Egypt and in present-day India.



Ottawa, the Parliament of the dominion of Canada  
North of the city, flows the Ottawa River.

And yet this esprit de corps, which is one of the scourges of modern society, had greatness in its period of evolution, when, for the conquest or defense of independence or freedom, it demanded a sense of duty, dedication, collective honor. Men who have become brothers are bound by this not to be unworthy in the eyes of one another and of those who have witnessed their pact. The bond that unites them must not be broken, even in the sight of death. How often, in the battles of primitive times, warriors were attached by chains, so as to form a single body, a gigantic individual, destined to conquer or to die as a whole! Even modern military history, which, is not even related to men fighting for a freely chosen cause, is full of accounts which testify to the close solidarity of courage between companions together by chance under a same flag, in the same body, having for tradition the contempt of death! "Make the Guard give all it has!" Such was, in various forms, the order of the general-in-chief in the supreme struggles. A statistic, carefully compiled for the British army, establishes that the figure of the mortality of troops during battles, a true measure of courage in the face of guns, increases with the traditional reputation of regiments, with the Highlanders coming at the top of the list.

This esprit de corps of the soldier who devotes himself out of pride forms the natural transition between the primitive feeling of free men, who had given themselves entirely to a beloved cause, and the current esprit de corps of companies and State administrations whose members are united for the defense, the continuation, the increase of their privileges. Let us judge by that the profession which of all of them certainly contains the highest proportion of superior men, since it requires the most in-depth studies, requires more careful experience and appeals the most to human sympathy, the medical profession. However, it suffices to read the statutes of the provincial societies, by which the "men of the art" commit themselves to one another, to see that they too have allowed themselves to be corrupted by the esprit de corps and that devotion to the suffering public is the least pressing of their concerns. The doctor is at the same time a friend, this precious adviser who knows how to read in your body and to whom affection, the sagacious practice of the life make it possible to read also in your soul. This doctor brings with him as much consolation and strength, as the hunter of the sick, the speculator in treatments and drugs, the inventor and the ingenious propagator of new defects is a dangerous accomplice. The monopoly, not to cure but to treat at random, is claimed by him with a singular tenacity, and if, sometimes, he is forced to welcome as a colleague a Pasteur or some other discoverer of new paths, of what arrogance he reject the humble rebutters, especially those who treat the sick and wounded free of charge. However, whatever may be said, the magi and the wizards, sons of ancient magicians and shamans, are not all charlatans; traditional remedies, kept in a few families for the treatment of this or that disease, are not always harmful drugs, although no first-class pharmacist has stamped them; the herbs, the plasters of the good old women and the savages can bring cures where the most modern medical solutions remain impotent. Terutak, the "doctor" of Apemama Island (Gilbert Archipelago), treats R. L. Stevenson for a cold; what licensed scientist could act more simply and more radically,<sup>12</sup> a sacred enclosure, a few magnetic passes, a deep sleep, from which the patient wakes up cured. "The diplomas are a guarantee," we are told, but are they not rather a mystification, because they falsely affirm to us the knowledge of the ignorant who knew how to recite sentences of some manual. Examiners themselves say exams are worthless formalities.

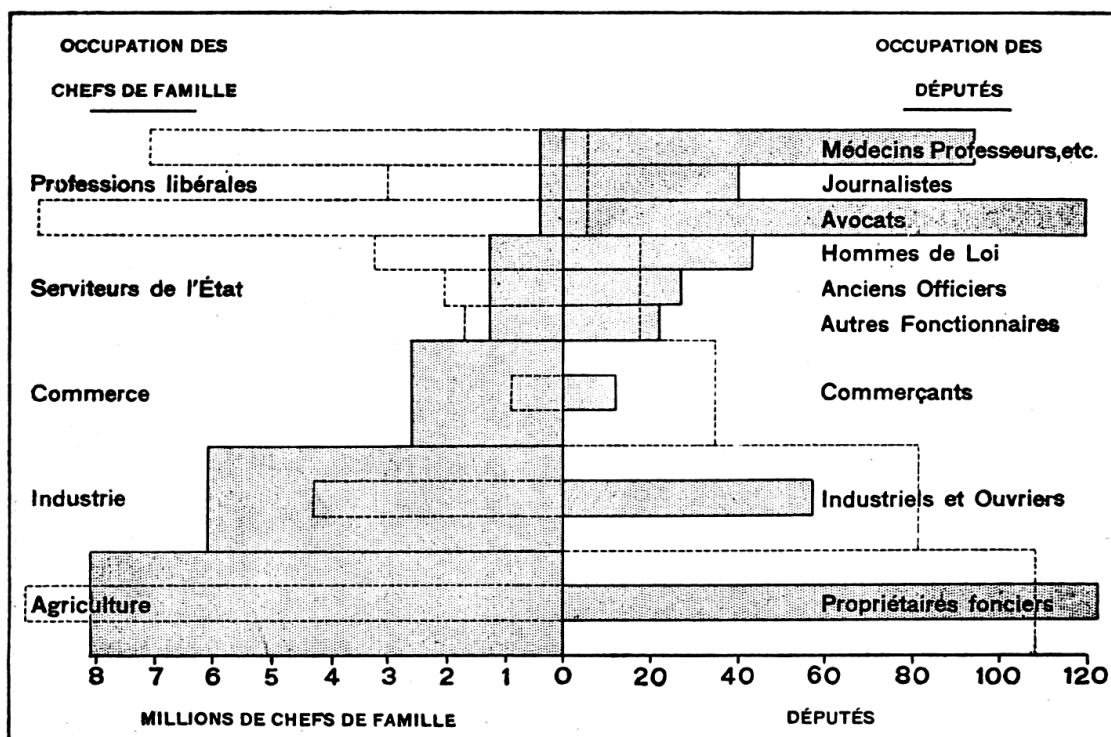
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<sup>12</sup> *In the South Seas*, vol II, p. 232–235. [Reclus' note]

Of these states within a state, the most august, of course, is the one that once wanted to be absolute master and still aims for a universal empire. It's the clergy. It has only yielded step by step in his age-old struggle, and step by step it would seek to regain all the lost ground, if science did not intervene, for it loves power dearly and has the experience of it. But, leaving it the purely spiritual character in which we want to lock it up, there is another caste that asks only to replace it. Although emanating directly from the State, the magistracy does constitute a second clergy, both through the solidarity of its members, the pride of its attitude, the supernatural character it loves to give itself. This caste does not represent God on earth, but personifies the Law, which is also a deity, and has taken as its symbol tablets of stone, on which are engraved words which are said to last forever. Nothing can erase this ancient writing traced by the lightning itself on the Sinai or any other thundering mountain; in the same way the judgments of the magistrates must appear infallible. The scales they hold in their hands weigh, without mistake, to the last speck of dust, and the edge of their sword cuts off only guilty heads. At least, that's what it was once believed and what they themselves still claim. Generations go by without the pity of the people making them reform iniquitous judgments. The majesty of justice demands that they cannot be wrong. Moreover, the state recognizes this since they are irremovable.

But this Law which they seek to represent, and which the popular indeed imagined as an institution of eternal origin older than man, this Law, who are its authors? Obviously all the privileged, considered as a whole, collaborate in the making of the legal decrees which protect their interests and their property, but, in this work, the big part of invention, arrangement and drafting goes to the magistrates, who are the only custodians of the grimoire in which these things are written.

#### **N° 556. France and its Chamber of Deputies.**



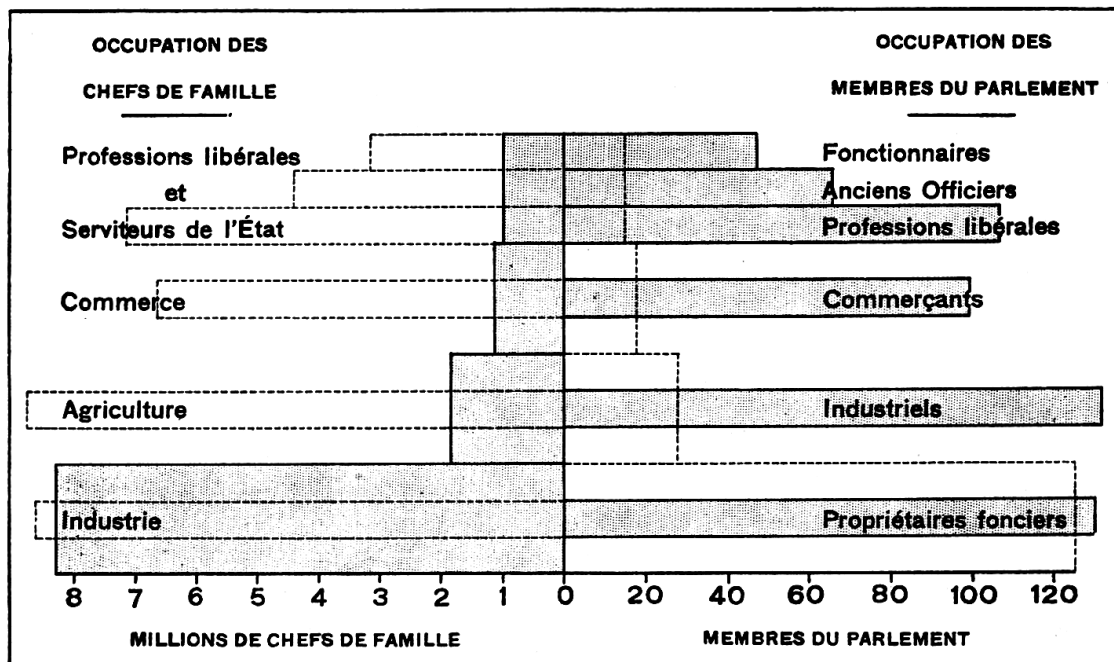
On the left, the 18 million heads of families are distributed, according to the information from the 1901 census. On the right, are the members of the Legislative Assembly elected in 1906: 120 landowners; 119 lawyers; 126 members of other liberal professions (46 doctors, 40 journalists and publicists, 26 professors, etc.); 93 former officials (26 officers, 24 magistrates, 19 notaries and attorneys, etc.); 78 traders and manufacturers (12 traders, 27 industry leaders, 18 engineers, 12 workers, etc.). Fifty deputies are missing whose occupation is not given.

They are the ones who prepare the bills that the ministers support in Parliament and who, when these texts are fought, take them back in the background with the ulterior motive of not modifying their deep meaning, while changing terms. In the discussion, they are also the ones who fix the momentary meaning of the sentences, even if it means interpreting them differently when the interests of the caste demand it. Moreover, in most parliamentary assemblies the proportion of lawyers is out of all natural relation to other classes of society. Through their former “seated” magistrates and especially by the ambitious youth of the lawyers, also initiated into the language and the tricks of the basoche<sup>13</sup>, the lawyers have the large part in the national representation.

**No. 557. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and its Parliament**

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<sup>13</sup> Old french slang for Royal Palace, from “Basilica”



This diagram is drawn up, for the population, according to the English census of 1901 for the composition of the House of Commons, according to the figures recorded by Ed. Demolins, ten years ago: 47 civil servants, 66 former officers, 107 members of the liberal professions, 100 traders, 131 industrialists, 132 landowners. The names of these last two categories are instead of each other on the right of the diagram.

A curious diagram introduced by M. Demolins in his work on the Superiority of the Anglo-Saxons (p. 222) shows how little the so-called “national” representation of France corresponds to the very constitution of society and what “conventional lie” it is actually. The deputies who did not belong to the bourgeois class from their birth are in a tiny minority, one, two dozen, three at most. The others can be broken down into five headings, four of which are roughly equivalent in number: landowners, among whom delegates owning small property are rare or non-existent; the lawyers; other members of the liberal professions (journalists, doctors and teachers); then the retired or resigned civil servants (officers of the land and sea armies, magistrates, diplomats), in whose ranks one can place notaries and attorneys; finally a fifth category, less numerous, would include financiers, manufacturers and traders.

Thanks to the alliance of smooth talkers and rich people, who still constitute the majority, regardless of the parliamentary seesaw game, the laws, the incoherent set which represents this divinity called the Law, are always guaranteed to remain in accordance with “the good principles.” Then, after the preparatory period, comes that of the application, and it is then that the judiciary can do wonders by choosing from the arsenal of legal precedents the arguments that suit it to whitewash or blacken the accused, depending on whether he is “mighty or miserable.” Terrible prerogative that of deciding evil and good, of classifying men at the minute among the good citizens or among the outcasts. It is not possible that the judge, armed with this superhuman power, is not overcome by the vertigo of his moral omnipotence. Like the clergy, to whom he resembles so much and whom he readily supports, he indulges in the illusion of his perfect superiority and, in his conflicts with the other bodies of the State, he decides with serenity in favor of his traditional interests. How much simpler is the magistracy of Apemama Island, already cited<sup>14</sup>: a single official, a first-rate shooter: King Ternbinok, both master and owner, judge and executioner; a single warning before the ultimate sentence catches the offender unawares and forces him to search his conscience, discharging a repeating rifle that makes the bullet whistle in the ear and splash the earth around!

Another caste, of recent origin, competes with priests and magistrates for alleged infallibility. This is the class of licensed engineers. If she possessed the majesty of duration, she would have every chance of achieving supreme domination. Among these characters, the esprit de corps could not be more firmly hammered, each of them ranks hierarchically, both as a soldier, as an administrator, as a scholar, each surrounded, so to speak, by a fort with three remparts. Raised as soldiers in State schools, they claim to follow the rules of discipline to demand obedience; civil servants, they speak for the government and for the law; learned, they do not admit that their personal conceptions be discussed: each of their words must be held to be the truth itself. Their decisions are therefore never limited, even when they meet before them unanimous populations, imbued with traditional experience and perfect knowledge of the place. No doubt they must often secretly admit that one or another of their “dear comrades” has committed some gross blunder, but, above all, it is important not to let the public get into the secret, to claim the wrongdoing as a masterpiece, and above all, it is necessary to prevent at all costs that a man from outside, an individual who did not go through the same schools, allows himself to correct the work failed by an elected official. Although strictly closed trades have been abolished in countries of European culture, the monopoly has nonetheless been maintained or reconstituted in all professions with degrees and hierarchy. As a result, critically important work is sometimes done in a way that is

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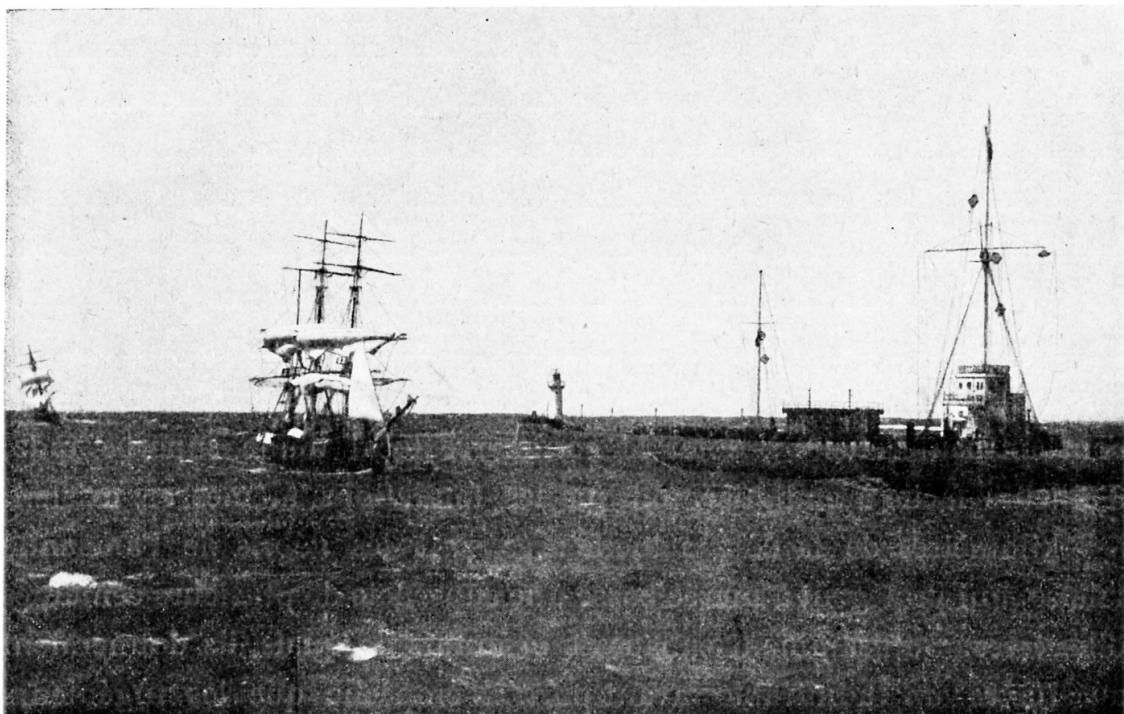
<sup>14</sup> R. L. Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, vol. II, p. 199–200. [Reclus’ note]

absolutely contrary to the public good. Thus in Le Havre, despite all the pilots, all the sailors who frequent the port, the engineers, dictating their will from Paris, have constantly refused to provide the local trade with a superb harbor, moreover, it would easy to dike, since the very foundations exist 3 kilometers from the current coast: it is the debris of the old cliff, which protects an area of several hundred hectares at low tide. Sufficiently raised and provided with quays, they would give Le Havre an admirable outer harbor. However, engineers prefer to spend four times the amount needed for diking, to dig inland new basins of secondary importance compared to the harbor.<sup>15</sup>

But priests, magistrates, licensed engineers and other officials would have to moderate their pride if the State, of which they are a part, did not rely on force, this major “reason” which dispenses it from being reasonable. In almost all European-type nations, a very considerable part of the able-bodied youth is recruited annually from the mass of the nation and methodically trained in the art of killing. Every measure is taken to ensure that the great murderous machine functions at will and always in the specific interest of the ruling classes. It is true that the armies have not kept up with the progress of industrial organization and that they represent in many ways a legacy of the time of Louis XIV, with heavy and outdated forms. We can see this lack of adaptation of the armies to modern life by comparing, for example, the military forces of France and Central Europe to those of Switzerland, where efforts have been made to organize the troops in truly defensive forces, without complete interruption of their civic and industrial life. To keep up with science, the military system would have to continuously evolve. Far from it, each day makes the lack of balance more obvious.

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<sup>15</sup> Fernand Maurice, *Le Havre et l'Endiguement de La Rade*; — E. Prat, *Enrochement de la rade du Havre* [Reclus' note]



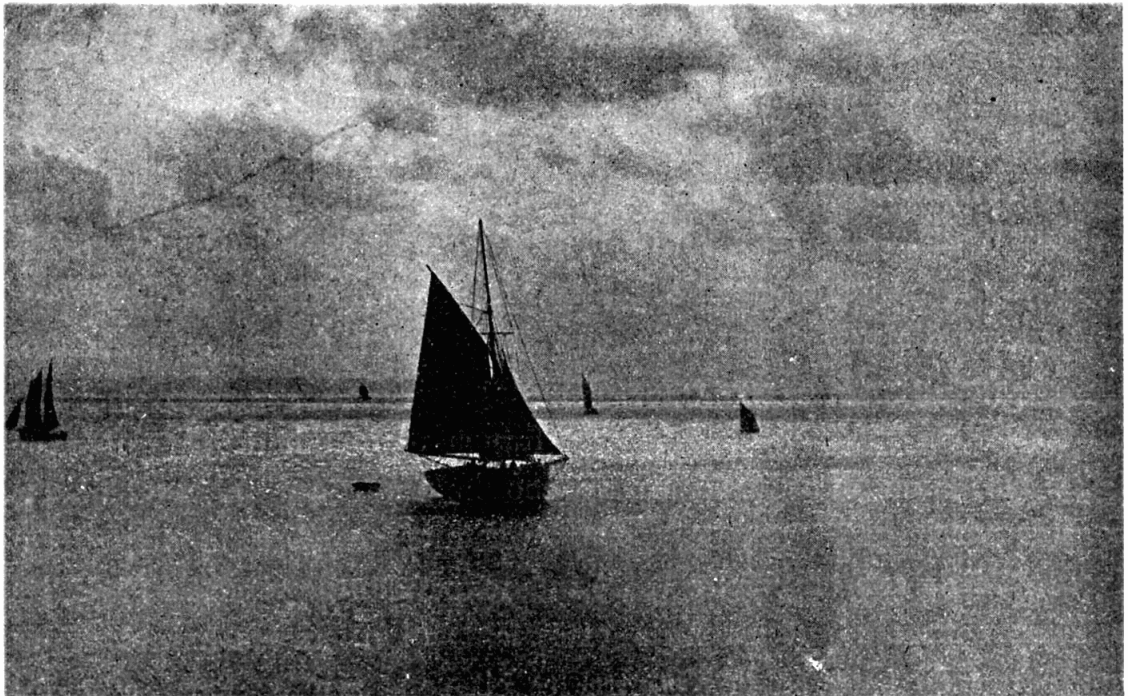
J. Kuhn, Paris.  
Le Havre, entrance of the port at high tide

Along with the terrifying power of modern weapons, so too has the relative value of individual initiative; however, how to develop this initiative without intelligence, and how to develop intelligence while maintaining passive obedience? How can we prevent each soldier from realizing, in his heart of hearts, the ridiculous flawedness of the military organization and the futility, inanity of the efforts demanded of him? How could he not feel more deeply every day the weight of the sacrifice he makes by giving up work and family for three years, or even for two years? And, as no citizen can escape personal service, how can we prevent the certainty that the standing army has had its day from spreading throughout the entire nation?

But, after all, has not the main goal of the army been achieved, to have at hand obedient bayonets in unlimited numbers, less to oppose them to the enemy than to keep at bay a people always ready to criticize, to threaten, or even to make a revolution? The traditions of the army demand that the chiefs always be decorative figures, distinguished as in the Middle Ages by the abundance of feathers and embroidery, the violence of colors. Generals in England are almost all upperclass men with a lot of money to spend on horses, tournaments and feasts.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> H. G. Wells, *Anticipations*. [Reclus' note]



J. Kuhn, Paris.  
The harbor of Le Havre in calm weather.

In Germany, Austria, Russia, they are mainly lords with ancient coats of arms; in France, most of them call themselves “sons of the Crusaders,” and how many of them, to testify that they represent reaction in its essence, pride themselves of belonging to the families of the foreigners who fought against France during the First Revolution. In Switzerland itself, the officers’ cadre, permanently retained, constitute a veritable military aristocracy. Left to their own devices, the armies never took sides for the liberty of a people against hereditary tyrants or usurpers: on every occasion they put their strength in the service of some despot. Used to passive obedience, they never understood a free society; enslaved themselves, to leaders, they helped in the enslavement of the civilian population.

Even when the army is not employed directly as a “great gendarmerie” to serve against the people, either in political agitations, or in economic crises of work and strikes, it is none the less trained to be hostile against the crowd of unarmed citizens. The sublime contempt of Napoleon’s officers for civilians or “pekings” is well known, and this contempt is still found, although to a lesser degree, in all armies, even among soldiers who readily believe in the beauty of “plume,” to the “prestige of the uniform,” if only to try to compensate in this way for the humiliations they have to suffer from their superiors. This contempt breeds hatred, and how often do we not see the army, engaged in a so-called national war, yet act in a manner completely hostile to the interests and wishes of the nation?

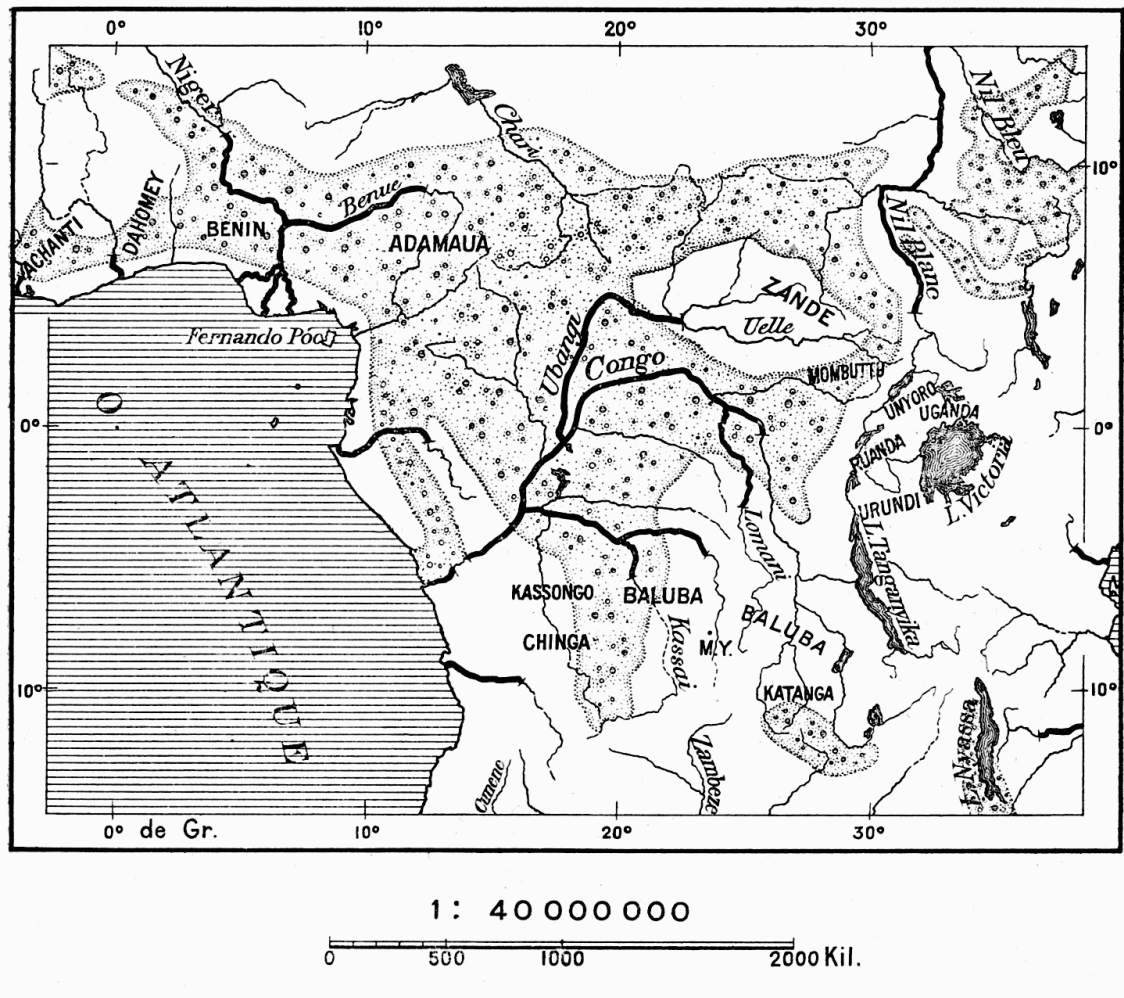
Thus, during the Franco-German War of 1870, Bazaine allowed the 170,000 men entrusted to him to be locked up in Metz because he wanted to “keep an army at the eventual disposal of his emperor.” Likewise, during the siege of Paris, the officers commanding the forts willingly excited the hatred and mockery of their soldiers against the armed citizens; the army would have felt dishonored by a victory of the National Guard<sup>17</sup>. Finally, in peacetime, the preponderant influence of the military castes causes pensioners and invalids to be assigned, to the great detriment of the public service, many functions for which the army regime has not prepared them in any way. In Algeria, in Sudan, people go so far as to sulk, to discourage, to persecute even explorers who are wrong only not to belong to the army or to the Church.

Regarding the crimes which occurred on various occasions in the colonial armies and which caused a sensation of universal horror throughout the world, it has been suggested that the influence of the tropical sun could give rise to a special disease, “sudanite,” which would manifest itself especially among the officers and would make them commit abominable acts without apparent cause. This invention of a disease peculiar to military officers, which has the great advantage of being able to have them pardoned by the court martial, and partially even by public opinion, recalls the discovery made for theft in novelty stores, when it is committed by great ladies having no need of the objects they carry:

#### **No. 558. Monarchies of Central Africa and Sudan.**

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<sup>17</sup> The National Guard, or *Garde Nationale* in French, is the armed people of Paris, the Paris Commune started from a conflict between the National Guard and the Army



According to Léo Frobenius — *Geographische Kulturkunde*, p. 9 et seq., — in Central Africa and Sudan there is a geographical arrangement of forms of government. In the center, the hunter in the equatorial forest, then the area of farmers living in the communal regime, surrounded by that of agricultural monarchies: Achanti, Dahomey, Benin, Adamaua, Zande or Niam-Niam, Mombuttu or Mangbattu, Kassongo, Chinga, Western Baluba (MY = Muata Yamvo), Bakuba, Eastern Baluba, Katanga. Still outside are the pastoral peoples who, in the east, have established empires: Uganda, Unyoro, Rwanda, Urundi, etc.

it is then a simple case of kleptomania, which arised not from the courts but from medicine. However, among the officers released in some immense colonial domain, the criminal madness is easily explained without resorting to "sudanite": the absolute power exerted on beings considered as being hardly men and without one having to fear the judgment of an equal, the disapproval of a single individual whose conscience or thought is respected, this power quickly transforms into Roman-style imperialism or sheer villainy.

Organized for evil, the army can only function for evil. During the war, it destroys everything with iron and fire, and the country which maintains it, which provides it with the elements and the weapons, spends all its present resources for it and burdens the future with as many loans as the bankers of the world will agree to. Would not Japan have profited from Mukden's victory, and would the Manchurian War not be still going (1905), if its credit had not been exhausted? It is true that conflicts between great powers have become rare events, each of them rightly fearing the formidable efforts that such struggles demand, but the proud States compensate themselves by crushing here and there a few distant enemies, too weak to resist, and, moreover, what is called peace and which is a continual preparation for war, always remains a pit of expenditure. The soldiers trained for exercise and maneuver are infinitely more expensive than if they had continued to be producers of bread or its labor equivalents. Many of them unlearn the practices of regular work and cannot return to them upon leaving the regiment; finally, whether in peace or in war, and perhaps even more so during peace, the unfortunate, placed by sexual isolation in unnatural conditions, fatally corrupt themselves and communicate their vices and their illnesses to civilians with whom they are in contact. Have we not seen, in the Indies, war operations completely suspended because the regiments, ravaged by contagious diseases, could not leave their barracks and their hospitals?

One might fear that, under the effort of military constraint, the principle of which, obedience without question, is absolutely opposed to any awakening, to any initiative of the people, one might fear that the fatal destiny of European nations was complete enslavement followed by death, if the army was strictly one in its intimate organization, as it is according to the conferences that the soldiers are obliged to undergo and in which each failure to comply with the instructions, the orders of the leaders, is punctuated, like a would be mentra, with the threat of death sentence. But the army is not one; the bottom does not hold with the top by a desired adhesion on both sides; the whole does not form a "big family," as we often repeat. On the contrary, feelings of aversion dominate between officers and "their" men. It could not be otherwise. The overwhelming majority of officers belong to the castes of the nobility and the bourgeoisie; they lived alien to the poor people; they followed a special course; With some exceptions, they were never second-class soldiers, and for a long time the most effective way to absolutely avoid cohabitation in the barracks was even to embrace the military career; we can say more: officers coming from the bottom ranks do not generally achieve equal consideration to that enjoyed by their colleagues coming from military schools. The officer dominates the low-ranking soldier so high that cordiality becomes impossible: the conditions of the soldier's life are regulated by non-commissioned officers, a hybrid class, despised by some, hated by others. Even on warships, where, it seems, space is so limited that contact becomes inevitable, even there, and there above all, the separation is complete between those in command and the crew which must obey every order; nowhere is the brutal stiffness of the caste felt more keenly: the leaders seem to feel the need to increase moral distance to compensate for the lack of material distance.

It is thanks to this absolute dividing line between officers and “men” that society has nevertheless been able to develop for the better. If war, with all its particular life of horrors and massacres, was the real occupation of the army, the latter would find its monstrous unity outside the social body, but fortunately great international conflicts are rare and the duplication occurs between the two elements of the military organization: the caste of officers is associated with the other ruling castes, while, for its part, the troop nevertheless gravitates towards the mass of the people from which it was drawn and where she will return after a few hundred days of which each soldier desirous of freedom keeps the exact count in his memory. The contrast is sharp enough that the big bosses can’t dare to try anything, and they are forced to endure this monstrous thing in their eyes, the interference of civilians in their affairs. Republican symbols, flags, songs, formulas shock them brutally, but fate forces them to put up with it. They command, but only in appearance; they too must become flexible to a new order of things. They believe they are free and the current carries them towards an unknown future.

The code which governs the army, from the general to the simple soldier, presents itself with a certain unity, but in fact, two morals, two completely different systems, apply to the elected officials of the higher body and to the crowd of non-officers. The latter are ruled by terror, and the sentences which strike them are even accompanied by traditional tortures, imposed by the pleasure of irresponsible butchers. As for the officers, they know themselves to be gentlemen, and as courteous colleagues, in good company, they regulate the breaches of their peers of military duty by punishments which nevertheless remain decorative and testify of a continuing respect for the punished officer. Frightful dramas take place, however, following crimes, betrayals, personal rivalries; but immediately afterwards the great leaders seek to repair what they call “the honor of the army” which is simply the appearance of infallibility which they must enjoy in the eyes of the ignorant crowd. Thus, in this memorable “Dreyfus affair” where the most serious sentence had fallen on a man certainly innocent, we saw most of the army chiefs unite immediately, not to seek or to proclaim the truth, but on the contrary to stifle it: at all costs, even by forgery and murder, attempts were made to safeguard the collective honor of the body, which required the sacrifice of a pure victim, “too happy, it was said, to be able to serve to the salvation of a sacred institution”. Anyway, the soul of the soldier has been revealed, and the criticism of the observer, increasingly supported by more numerous facts, finds that the body of the army, like that of all other bodies established in the State at the expense of the nation, is a real canker which tends to gain incessantly over the healthy part of the people and which can only disappear through the effect of a decisive revolution: reforms are insufficient in such case. You do not reform evil, you remove it.

But fear is a good advisor. The various castes know what they have to fear in the possibly near future and band together cautiously to ward off the danger as long as possible. In this regard, and despite the more or less lasting setback which results from it for society as a whole, it is to be welcomed that historical development has brought in so-called civilized countries a more intimate alliance between governments against peoples and, in each State, a closer complicity between the constituted bodies, clergy, magistracy, army, against the exploitable mass of the population: the situations have become clear and the events have taken a logical aspect.



Independent state of the Congo, King Zappo-Zab and the great dignitaries of his court.

More and more, the leaders and the ruling classes understand their interest in the methodical oppression of the crowd of subjects, without the abrupt upheavals of war, and their main concern is to use their entire apparatus of defense against the people, in case it shows the slightest hint of independence. The pastors of the peoples, those who we have become accustomed to designate, with Octave Mirbeau, under the name of “bad shepherds,” tend to constitute themselves in a great Council, at the service and on behalf of the anonymous society of rich shareholders who keep them in power.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, in the various States, the organs of power, once completely distinct and living on a background of their own traditions, locked themselves in their jealous *esprit de corps* and professed a morality of their own, all in the glorification of their special caste; but these various hierarchies, which were jealous of each other and willingly detested each other, felt the need to unite against the common enemy, against the free thinker who studied and despised them, against the man who Bossuet qualifies as heretic: “he who has an opinion of his own, follows his own thought and his particular feeling,” and above all against the conscious rebel, who does not abdicate his right to defend himself, and has understood the duty to act for him and for his companions of suffering: “Against the enemy the claim is eternal”<sup>19</sup> At all times, there have been rebels, but almost always they were unfortunate people, stupefied by poverty, who, unable to do otherwise, blindly rushed on the master, but the latter now sees claimants rising before him who know the reason for their misery and the means to get out of it, “heretics” who, in the fight against routine, combine their thought, their feeling, their science towards collective action, rebels who despise the vanities of power and the trivialities of wealth, and are often genuinely superior to their bosses, not only in sheer understanding of things but also in moral qualities.

Thus all classes of officials and rulers taking their share of the budget are forced to give up their proud appearance of superiority to face the danger: soldiers and priests, magistrates and parasites who live from the exploitation of laborers ally for their common benefit, all under the direction of the prelate, with a smooth word, with a subtle conscience, always ready to distinguish good from evil or to mix them skillfully.

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<sup>18</sup> In French “société anonyme” here literally translated as “anonymous society” actually also means “public limited company”

<sup>19</sup> « Adversus hostem æterna auctoritas esto. » L. Morosti, *Les Problèmes du paupérisme*. [Reclus’ note]



London, jobless workers begging with their tools

The same phenomenon occurs on both sides: the concentration of minds and wills around two opposing principles; on the one hand, authority, which has its logical form in the Catholicism taught by the Jesuits, on the other hand, freedom, which recognizes the duty of everyone to follow the law of their own conscience. Little by little, the elements come out of the crowd of slaves without an idea, and move towards one of these poles; intermediate opinions, trying to reconcile the two extremes, evaporate in the heat of controversy; they only constitute passing forms. In politics, the parties of the “left” exfoliate, the “advanced” groups gradually fall back and settle towards the “center,” those of the center towards the “right,” as the popular demands become more serious and are expressed more clearly.

All the movements for emancipation stand together, although the insurgents are often unaware of each other, and they even hold on to their atavistic enmities and resentments. From England and Germany to France and Italy, there are many workers who despise one another, though this does not prevent them from helping each another in their common struggle against capitalist oppression. Similarly, among the women who have thrown themselves impetuously into the battle for equality between the sexes, there were at first a very significant number who, with their rather patrician or high-brow tendencies, harbored a pious disdain of the worker in his worn-out or dirty clothes. Nevertheless, since the early days of “feminism,” we have witnessed the heroism of brave women who go to the prostitutes to join them in solidarity to protest the abominable treatment to which they have been subjected, and the shocking bias of the law in favor of the corrupters and against their victims. Risking insults and the most unsavory contacts, they dared to enter the brothels and form an alliance with their scorned sisters against the shameful injustice of society. Consequently, the coarse laughter and vulgar insults that greeted their first steps gave way to a profound admiration on the part of many who had mocked them. Here is a courage of a different order than that of the fierce soldier who, seized with a bestial fury, lunges with his sword or fires his rifle.

Obviously, all of the claims of women against men are just: the demands of the female worker who is not paid as much as the male worker for the same labor, the demands of the wife who is punished for “crimes” that are mere “peccadilloes” when committed by the husband, and the demands of the female citizen who is barred from all overt political action, who obeys laws that she has not helped to create, and who pays taxes to which she has not consented. She has an absolute right to recrimination, and the women who occasionally take revenge are not to be condemned, since the greatest wrongs are those committed by the privileged. But ordinarily, a woman does not avenge herself at all. To the contrary, at her conventions she naïvely petitions legislators and high officials, waiting for salvation through their deliberations and decrees; however, experience teaches women year after year that freedom does not come begging, but rather must be conquered. It teaches them, moreover, that in reality their cause merges with that of all oppressed people, whoever they may be. Women will need to occupy themselves henceforth with all people who are wronged, and not only with the unfortunate women forced by poverty to sell their bodies. Once all are united, all the voices of the weak and the downtrodden will thunder with a tremendous outcry that will indeed have to be heard.

Make no mistake about it. Those who seek justice would have neither a chance of realizing it in the future nor a single ray of hope to console them in their misery if the league of all enemy classes had no defections and remained as solid as the human wall of an infantry formation. However, countless renegades leave their ranks. Some go without hesitation to augment the camp of the rebels, while others disperse here and there, somewhere between the ranks of the innovators

and the conservatives. In any case, they are too far from their original position to be brought back at the moment of battle. It is perfectly natural that organized bodies are thus weakened by a loss of their best elements through a continual migration. The study of the interconnected facts and laws revealed by contemporary science, the rapid transformation of society, new conditions in the environment, and the need for mental balance in those who are logically attracted to the search for truth—all this creates for the young a milieu completely different from that entailed by a traditional society with its slow and painful evolution. It is true that the representatives of ancient monopolies also gain recruits, especially among those who, tired of suffering for their ideas, finally want to try out the joys and privileges of this world, to eat when they are hungry and take their turn living as parasites. But whatever the particular worth of a given individual who changes his ideals and practices, it is certain that the revolutionary offensive benefits by this exchange of men. It receives those who have conviction and determination, young people with boldness and will, whereas those whom life has defeated head for the camp of the parties of reaction and bring with them their discouragement and their faintheartedness.

The state and the various elements that constitute it have the great disadvantage of acting according to a mechanism so regular and so ponderous that it is impossible for them to modify their movements and adapt to new realities. Not only does bureaucracy not assist in the economic workings of society, but it is doubly harmful to it. First, it impedes individual initiative in every way and even prevents its emergence; second, it delays, halts, and immobilizes the works that are entrusted to it. The cogs of the administrative machine work precisely in the opposite direction from those functioning in an industrial establishment. The latter strives to reduce the number of useless articles, and to produce the greatest possible results with the simplest mechanism. By contrast, the administrative hierarchy does its utmost to multiply the number of employees and subordinates, directors, auditors, and inspectors. Work becomes so complicated as to be impossible. As soon as business arises that is outside the normal routine, the administration is as disturbed as a company of frogs would be if a stone were thrown into their swamp. Everything becomes a pretext for a delay or a reprimand. One withholds his signature because he is jealous of a rival who might benefit from it; another because he fears the displeasure of a supervisor; a third holds back his opinion in order to give the impression of importance. Then there are the indifferent and the lazy. Weather, accidents, and misunderstandings are all used as excuses for the results of ill will. Finally, files disappear under a layer of dust in the office of some malevolent or lazy manager. Useless formalities and sometimes the physical impossibility of providing all of the desired signatures halts business, which gets lost like a parcel en route between capitals.

The most urgent projects cannot be accomplished because the sheer force of inertia of the bureaucracy remains insurmountable. This is the case with the island of Ré, which is in danger of some day being split in two by a storm. On the ocean side, it has already lost a strip of land several kilometers wide in some places, and currently all that remains at the most threatened point is an isthmus of less than one hundred meters. The row of dunes that forms the backbone of the island is very weak there. Considering all the facts, it is inevitable that one day, during a strong equinoctial tide, a raging westerly wind will push the waves across the peduncle of sand and open up a large strait through the swamps and fields. Everyone agrees that it is urgent to construct a strong seawall at the weak point on the island; however, some time ago a small fort was built, a worthless construction now abandoned to the bats, without even a man garrisoned there. No matter, it is in principle under the supervision of the corps of engineers, and consequently all public works are necessarily halted in its vicinity. This part of the island will have to perish.



The coast of the island of Ré near Whale Point and the Lost Marshes

Not far from there, the waters of a gulf have intruded into the salt marshes and changed them into a shallow estuary. It would be easy to recover these “Lost Marshes,” and the surrounding residents have formulated a proposal to do so. But the invasion of the sea has made state property of the area, and the series of formalities that the recovery of the land would entail seems so interminable that the undertaking has become impossible. The lost land will remain lost unless a revolution abolishes all clumsy intervention from an ignorant and indifferent state and restores the free management of interests to the interested parties themselves.

In certain respects, minor officials exercise their power more absolutely than persons of high rank, who are by their very importance constrained by a certain propriety. They are bound to respect social decorum and to conceal their insolence, and this sometimes succeeds in soothing them and calming them down. In addition, the brutalities, crimes, or misdemeanors committed by important figures engage everyone’s attention. The public becomes enthralled with their acts and discusses them passionately. Often they even risk being removed from office through the intervention of deliberative bodies and bringing their superiors down with them. But the petty official need not have the slightest fear of being held responsible in this way so long as he is shielded by a powerful boss. In this case, all upper-level administration, including ministers and even the king, will vouch for his irreproachable conduct. The uncouth can give free rein to crass behavior, the violent lash out as they please, and the cruel enjoy torturing at their leisure. What a hellish life it is to endure the hatred of a drill sergeant, a jailer, or the warden of a chain gang! Sanctioned by law, rules, tradition, and the indulgence of his superiors, the tyrant becomes judge, jury, and executioner. Of course, while giving vent to his anger, he is always supposed to have dispensed infallible justice in all its splendor. And when cruel fate has made him the satrap of some distant colony, who will be able to oppose his caprice? He joins the ranks of kings and gods.

The arrogant, do-nothing petty bureaucrat who, protected by a metal grating, can take the liberty of being rude toward anyone; the judge who exercises his “wit” at the expense of the accused he is about to condemn; the police who brutally round up people or beat demonstrators; plus a thousand other arrogant manifestations of authority—this is what maintains the animosity between the government and the governed. And it must be noted that these daily acts do not wrap themselves in the mantle of the law but rather hide behind decrees, memos, reports, regulations, and orders from the prefect and other officials. The law can be harsh and indeed unjust, but the worker crosses its path only rarely. In certain circumstances, he can even go through life without suspecting that he is subject to it, as when he is unaware that he is paying some tax. But every time he acts, he is confronted with decisions decreed by officials whose irresponsibility differs from that of the members of parliament. The decisions of the former are without recourse and continually remind the individual of the guardianship that the state exercises over him.

The number of high and low officials will naturally grow considerably, in proportion to increases in budgetary resources and to the extent that the treasury contrives to find new means of extracting additional revenues from whatever may be taxed. But the proliferation of employees and staff members results above all from what we like to call “democracy,” that is, from the participation of the masses in the prerogatives of power. Each citizen wants his scrap, and the main preoccupation of those who already have an official post is to classify, study, and annotate the applications of others who seek a position. The budget has paid for, and possibly continues to pay for, a forest ranger on the island of Ouessant, which has a grand total of eight trees—five in the garden of the curé and three in the cemetery!

So much pressure is exerted on the government by the multitude of supplicants that the acquisition of distant colonies is due in very large part to the concern for the distribution of government positions. One can judge the so-called colonization of many countries by the fact that in Algeria in 1896 there were a little more than 260,000 French residing within the territorial boundaries, of which more than 51,000 were officials of all kinds. This constitutes roughly a fifth of the colonists,<sup>20</sup> yet one must also take into account the 50,000 soldiers stationed there. This brings to mind the inscription added on a map to the name of the “town” of Ushuaia, the southernmost urban settlement of the Americas and of the world: “Seventy-eight inhabitants, all officials”!

France is an example of such a “democratization” of the state since it is managed by approximately six hundred thousand participants in the exercise of sovereign power. But if one adds to the officials in the strict sense those who consider themselves as such, and who are indeed invested with certain local or temporary powers, as well as those distinguished from the mass of the nation through titles or distinguishing marks, such as the village policemen and the town criers, not to mention the recipients of decorations and medals, it becomes apparent that there are more officials than soldiers. Moreover, the former are, as a group, much more energetic supporters of the government that pays them. Whereas the soldier obeys orders out of fear, the official’s motivation stems not only from forced obedience but also from conviction. Being himself a part of the government, he expresses its spirit in his whole manner of thinking and in his ambitions. He represents the state in his own person. Moreover, the vast army of bureaucrats in office has a reserve force of a still greater army of all the candidates for offices, supplicants and beggars of favors, friends, and relations. Just as the rich depend on the broad masses of the poor and starving, who are similar to them in their appetites and their love of lucre, so do the masses, who are oppressed, persecuted, and abused by state employees of all sorts, support the state indirectly, since they are composed of individuals who are each preoccupied with soliciting jobs.

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<sup>20</sup> Louis Vignon, *La France en Algérie*. [Reclus’ note]



The Powers in China, by Steinlein

Naturally, this unlimited expansion of power, this minute allocation of positions, honors, and meager rewards, to the point of ridiculous salaries and the mere possibility of future remuneration, has two consequences with opposing implications. On the one hand, the ambition to govern becomes widespread, even universal, so that the natural tendency of the ordinary citizen is to participate in the management of public affairs.



The Achievers, by J. Forain

"-Yes, my children, it was by depriving myself of my coffee every day that I became a landowner"

Millions of men feel a solidarity in the maintenance of the state, which is their property, their affair. At the same time, the growing debt of the government, divided into thousands of small entitlements to income, finds as many champions as it has creditors drawing the value of their income coupons from quarter to quarter. On the other hand, this state, divided into innumerable fragments, showering privileges on one or another individual whom all know and have no particular reason to admire or fear, but whom they may even despise—this banal government, being all too well understood, no longer dominates the multitudes through the impression of terrifying majesty that once belonged to masters who were all but invisible and who only appeared before the public surrounded by judges, attendants, and executioners. Not only does the state no longer inspire mysterious and sacred fear, it even provokes laughter and contempt. It is through the satirical newspapers, and especially through the marvelous caricatures that have become one of the most remarkable forms of contemporary art, that future historians will have to study the public spirit during the period beginning with the second half of the nineteenth century. The state perishes and is neutralized through its very dissemination. Just when all possess it, it has virtually ceased to exist, and is no more than a shadow of itself.

Institutions thus disappear at the moment when they seem to triumph. The state has branched out everywhere; however, an opposing force also appears everywhere. While it was once considered inconsequential and was unaware of itself, it is constantly growing and henceforth will be conscious of the work that it has to accomplish. This force is the liberty of the human person, which, after having been spontaneously exercised by many primitive tribes, was proclaimed by the philosophers and successively demanded with varying degrees of consciousness and will by countless rebels. Presently, the number of rebels is multiplying, and their propaganda is taking on a character that is less emotional than it was previously and much more scientific. They enter the struggle more convinced, more daring, and more confident of their strength, and they find an environment that offers more opportunities to avoid the grip of the state. Here is the great revolution that is developing and even reaching partial fulfillment before our eyes. In the past, society has functioned through distinct nations, separated by borders and living under the domination of individuals and classes who claim superiority over other men. We now see another mode of general evolution that intermingles with the previous one and begins to replace it in an increasingly regular and decisive manner. This mode consists of direct action through the freely expressed will of men who join together in a clearly defined endeavor, without concern for boundaries between classes and countries. Each accomplishment that is thus realized without the intervention of official bosses and outside the state, whose cumbersome machinery and obsolete practices do not lend themselves to the normal course of life, is an example that can be used for larger undertakings. Erstwhile subjects become partners joining together in complete independence, according to their personal affinities and their relation to the climate that bathes them and the soil that supports them. They learn to escape from the leading strings that had guided them so badly, being in the hands of degenerate and foolish men. It is through the phenomena of human activity in the arenas of labor, agriculture, industry, commerce, study, education, and discovery that subjugated peoples gradually succeed in liberating themselves and in gaining complete possession of that individual initiative without which no progress can ever take place.

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