Study 4
The Principle of Authority
1851
People :
Author : Pierre-Joseph Proudhon
Text :

General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century (1851)
• by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon


Fourth Study. The Principle of Authority.

I beg that the reader will pardon me, if in the course of this study an expression should escape me which might betray any feeling of self-esteem. I have the double-regret, in this great question of authority, of being, on the one hand, as yet
alone in asserting the Revolution categorically; on the other, in having perverse ideas attributed to me, which I, more than anybody, abhor. It is not my fault if, in supporting so lofty a thesis, I seem to plead my own personal cause. at least I shall do so, even if I may not defend myself with some vivacity, that the intelligence of the reader may lose nothing. Moreover our mind is so constructed that it sees the light never better than when it springs from the clash of opposing ideas. Man, says, Hobbes, is a fighting animal. It was God himself who, when placing us in this world, gave us this precept: *Increase, multiply, labor and fight.*

Some twelve years ago, well I may recall it, while busying myself with researches into the foundations of society, having in view not at all political eventualities, impossible then to have forseen, but solely for the greater glory of philosophy, I was the first to cast into the world a denial which has since obtained great renown, the denial of Government and of Property. Others before myself, to seem original, humorous, or seeking a paradox, had denied those two principles; not one had made this denial the subject of a serious, earnest criticism. One of our most good-natured journalists, M. Pelletan, undertaking my defense one day, motu proprio, made this singular statement to his readers, that, in attacking sometimes property, sometimes power, sometimes something else, I was firing a gun into the air, to attract toward myself the attention of empty-heads. M. Pelletan was too good indeed, and I cannot be too much obliged to him for his kindness: he must have taken me for a literary person.

It is time that the public should know that, in philosophy, in politics, in theology, in history, negation is the preliminary requirement to affirmation. All progress begins by abolishing something; every reform rests upon denunciation of some abuse; each new idea is based upon the proved insufficiency of the old idea. Thus Christianity, in denying the plurality of the gods, in becoming atheistic, from the pagan point of view, asserted the unity of God, and from this unity deduced its whole theology. Thus Luther, in denying the authority of the Church, asserted the authority of reason, and laid the first stone of modern philosophy. Thus our fathers, the revolutionaries of ’89, in denying the sufficiency of feudal rule, asserted, without understanding it, the necessity of some different system, which it is the mission of our age to explain. Thus, finally, I myself, having demonstrated afresh, under the eyes of my readers, the illegitimacy and powerlessness of government as
a principle of order, will cause to arise from this negation a productive, affirmative idea, which must lead to a new form of civilization.

The better to explain my position in this examination, I will make another comparison.

It is with ideas as with machines. No one knows the inventor of the first tools, the hoe, the rake, the ax, the wagon, the plow. These are found among all the nations of the globe from the earliest antiquity. But this spontaneity is not found with perfected instruments, the locomotive, the daguerreotype, the art of ballooning, the electric telegraph. The finger of God, if I may venture to say so, is no longer there: the names of the inventors, the dates of their first experiments, are known: the aid of science, together with prolonged practical skill, has been required.

Thus are born and thus develop the ideas which serve to guide the human race. The earliest are furnished by spontaneous, immediate intuition, in which priority cannot be claimed by anybody. But the day comes when these gifts of common sense no longer suffice for collective life: it is then that reason, which alone can show this insufficiency, can alone supply that which is lacking. All nations have produced and organized by themselves, without the aid of teachers, the ideas of authority, of property, of government, of justice, of worship. Now that these ideas are growing weaker, that a methodical analysis, an official inquiry, if I may say so, has established their insufficiency, at the bar of reason and of society, the question is for us to discover, through science, what substitute we can find for ideas which, according to the verdict of science, are condemned as false and injurious.

 Whoever then openly, in the face of the people, by a sort of extra-judicial act, has been the first to propound a view directed against government and established property, is bound to explain further his ideas for a new social organization. I will attempt the solution, as I attempted before the criticism of it: I mean that after having given to my contemporaries consciousness of their own deficiencies, I will try to explain to them the secret of their own aspirations. God forbid that I should set myself up as prophet, or that I should pretend to have ever invented an idea!

I see, I observe, I write. I may say, with the Psalmist: I have believed because I have spoken.

Why is it that with the simplest question some ambiguity must mingle? Priority in philosophical conceptions is not less an object of emulation than priority
in industrial inventions, with lofty minds which know their value and seek the glory
of their discovery, although they can be neither sold nor patented. In the domain of
pure thought, as well as in that of mechanical improvement applied to the arts,
there are rivalries, imitations, I had almost said counterfeits, were it not that I fear,
by the use of so strong a term, to asperse an honorable ambition, which attests the
superiority of the present generation. The idea of Anarchy had this fortune. The
denial of government having been renewed since the revolution of February with
new ardor and some success, certain men of note in the democratic and socialistic
party, whom the idea of Anarchy filled with disquietude, thought that they might
appropriate the arguments directed against government, nad upon these
arguments, which were essentially negative, might restore the very principle which
was at stake, under a new name, and with a few modifications. Without intending it,
without suspecting it, these honorable citizens took the position of
counter-revolutionaries, since a counterfeit, for after all this word expresses my
idea better than any other, a counterfeit, in political and social affairs, is really
counter-revolution. I shall prove it immediately. That is what these restorations of
authority really are, that have been undertaken recently in competition with
anarchy, and that have occupied public attention under the names of Direct
Legislation, Direct Government, of which the authors or editors are, in the first
place, Messrs. Rittinghausen and Considerant, and afterwards, M. Ledru Rollin.

According to Messrs. Considerant and Rittinghausen, the first idea of direct
government came from Germany; as for M. Ledru-Rollin, he only claims it, and with
reservations, for our first revolution; this idea being found at length in the
Constitution of ’93, and in the Social Contract.

It must be understood, that if I intervene in my turn in the discussion, it is not to
claim a priority which I reject with all my power in the terms in which the question
has been put. Direct Government and Direct Legislation seem to me the two
biggest blunders in the annals of politics and of philosophy. How is it that M.
Rittinghausen, who understands German philosophy to the bottom; how is it that M.
Considerant, who ten or fifteen years ago wrote a pamphlet, under the title,
Breaking-up of Politics in France; how is it that M. Ledru-Rollin, who, when he
subscribed to the Constitution of ’93, made such generous and futile efforts to
make direct government practicable, and to reduce it within the bounds of common
sense; how is it, I ask, that these gentlemen have not understood that the very arguments which they use against indirect government, have no force that does not apply equally against direct government; that their criticism is admissible only when made absolute; and that, in stopping half-way, they have fallen into the most pitiful inconsequence? Above all, how is it that they have not seen that their pretended direct government is nothing but the reduction to absurdity of the governmental idea; to the extent that, if through the progress of ideas and the complexity of interests, society is forced to abjure every kind of government, it will be just because direct government, the only form of government that seems to be rational, liberal, equal, is nevertheless impossible?

Meanwhile comes along M. de Girardin, aspiring, no doubt, to have a share in the invention, or at least, in the completion, who proposed this formula: Abolition of Authority through the Simplification of Government. What was M. de Girardin doing with this foolish business? Such a mind, so resourceful, can never be restrained! You are too quick, M. de Girardin, to accomplish anything. Authority is to Government what the thought is to the word, the idea to the fact, the soul to the body. Authority is government in principle, as government is authority in practice. To abolish either, if it is a real abolition, is to abolish both. By the same token, to preserve one or the other, if the preservation is effective, is to keep both.

Moreover, M. de Girardin’s simplification has long been known to the public. It is a combination of personages borrowed from what merchants call their Journal. There are three clerks: the first named Debts, the second named Assets, the third named Balance. Nothing is lacking but the Chief, who orders them about and directs them. Among the thousands of ideas which M. de Girardin’s brain throws off every day, without any of them taking root, no doubt he will not fail to find one to fulfill this indispensable function of his government.

Justice must be done to the public. What the public has seen most clearly is that among all these fine governmental inventions, Direct Government, Simplified Government, Direct Legislation, Constitution of ’93, the Government, whatever it may be, is very sick, and tending more and more toward Anarchy. My readers may give this word any meaning they choose. Let Messrs. Considerant and Rittenhausen pursue their researches; let M. Ledru-Rollin dig deeper into the Constitution of ’93; let M. de Girardin have more confidence in his inspirations, and
we shall arrive forthwith at pure negation. That accomplished, it will only remain,
by opposing the negation to itself, as the Germans say, to discover the affirmation.
Onward, innovators! less haste and more boldness! Follow the light which has
appeared to you from afar; you are at the boundary between the old world and the
new.

In March and April, 1850, the Revolution put the following question to the vote:
Monarchy or Republic? The voters declared themselves for the Republic: the
Revolution won the victory.

I take upon myself today to show that the dilemma of 1850 had no other meaning
than this: Government or No-government? If you can refute this dilemma,
reactionaries, then you will have struck the heart of the Revolution.

As for Direct Legislation, Direct Government, and Simplified Government, I
think that their authors will do well to hand in their resignations, as soon as
possible, if they have the slightest regard for their standing as revolutionaries, or
for the esteem of liberal thinkers.

I shall be brief. I know that volumes would be needed to explain so grave a
question, with due form and including all useful implications. But the mind of the
people is quick in our time: they understand everything, guess everything, know
everything. Their daily experience, their intuitive spontaneity, take the place of
dialectic and erudition: they can grasp in a few pages, what, not more than four
years ago, would have demanded a folio from the professional publicists.

I. Traditional Denial of Government.
Emergence of the Idea which Succeeds it.

The form under which men first conceived of Order in Society is the patriarchal or
hierarchical; that is to say, in principle, Authority; in action, Government. Justice,
which afterwards was divided into distributive and commutative justice, appeared
at first under the former heading only: a Superior granting to Inferiors what is
coming to each one.

The governmental idea sprang from family customs and domestic experience: no
protest arose then: Government seemed as natural to Society as the subordination
of children to their father. That is why M. de Bonald was able to say, and rightly,
that the family is the embryo of the State, of which it reproduces the essential classes: the king in the father, the minister in the mother, the subject in the child. That is also the reason that all the fraternity socialists, who take the family as the rudiments of Society, arrive at a dictatorship, which is the most exaggerated form of government. The administration of M. Cabet in his estate of Nauvoo is a good example. How much longer will it take us to understand this connection of ideas?

The primitive conception of order through Government is found among all peoples; and if, from the very beginning, the efforts that were made to organize, modify and limit the action of Power, to devote it to general needs and to special circumstances, show that the denial of government was implied in its affirmation, it is certain that no rival hypothesis arose; the spirit always remained the same. As the nations emerged from a state of savagery and barbarism, they are observed to have immediately entered upon the governmental path, and to traverse a circle of institutions which are always the same, and which historians and publicists arrange in classes succeeding one another, Monarchy, Aristocracy, Democracy.

But there is something more serious.

The prejudice in favor of government having sunk into our deepest consciousness, stamping even reason in its mold, every other conception has been for a long time rendered impossible, and the boldest thinkers could but say that Government was no doubt a scourge, a chastisement for humanity; but that it was a necessary evil! That is why, up to our own days, the most emancipating revolutions and all the eruptions of liberty have always ended in a reiteration of faith in and submission to power; why all revolutions have served only to reestablish tyranny: I make no exception of the Constitution of '93, any more than that of 1848, the two most advanced expressions nevertheless of French democracy.

What has maintained this mental predisposition and made its fascination invincible for so long a time, is that, through the supposed analogy between Society and the family, the Government has always presented itself to the mind as the natural organ of justice, the protector of the weak, the preserver of the peace. By the attribution to it of provident care and of full guaranty, the Government took root in the hearts, as well as in the minds of men; it formed a part of the universal soul, it was the faith, the intimate, invincible superstition of the citizens! If this confidence weakened, they said of Government, as they said of Religion and Property, it is not
the institution which is bad, but the abuse of it; it is not the king who is wicked but his ministers; Ah, if the king knew!

Thus to the hierarchical and absolutist view of a governing authority, is added an ideal which appeals to the soul, and conspires incessantly against the desire for equality and independence. The people at each revolution think to reform the faults of their government according to the inspiration of their hearts; but they are deceived by their own ideas. While they think that they will secure Power in their own interest, they really have it always against them: in place of a protector, they give themselves a tyrant.

Experience, in fact, shows that everywhere and always the Government, however much it may have been for the people at its origin, has placed itself on the side of the richest and most educated class against the more numerous and poorer class; it has little by little become narrow and exclusive; and, instead of maintaining liberty and equality among all, it works persistently to destroy them, by virtue of its natural inclination towards privilege.

We have shown in a previous study how since 1789, the revolution having founded nothing, society, as M. Collard expressed it, having been reduced to dust, the distribution of wealth left to chance, the Government, whose task it is to protect property as well as person, found itself in fact established for the rich against the poor. who does not see now that this anomaly, which then it was thought proper to embody in the political constitution of our country, is common to all governments? At no epoch is property found to depend on labor exclusively; at no epoch has work been guaranteed by the equilibrium of economic forces: in this matter, the civilization of the nineteenth century is not any more advanced than that of the Middle Ages. Authority, in defending rights, however established, has always been for riches against misfortune: the history of governments is the martyrology of the proletariat.

Most of all in a democracy, which is the last phase of governmental evolution, it is necessary to study this inevitable desertion by Power of the cause of the people.

What do the people do when they proclaim their own sovereignty, that is, the authority of their own votes, after they are tired of their aristocrats, and indignant at the corruption of the princes?

They say to themselves:
Before everything else, order is necessary to society. The guardian of this order, which should mean liberty and equality for us, is the Government.

Therefore let us take the Government into our own hands. Let the Constitution and the laws become the expression of our own will; let the office holders and magistrates, who are our servants elected by us, and always subject to recall, never be permitted to do anything but what the good pleasure of the people has determined upon. Then we shall be sure, if our watchfulness never relaxes, that the Government will be devoted to our interests, that it will no longer be the tool of the rich, nor the prey of the ambitious politicians; that affairs will be conducted as we wish and to our advantage.

Thus reasons the multitude, at each epoch of oppression. Simple reasoning, logic that cannot be more straightforward, and which never fails in its effect. Even if the multitude went so far as to say, with Messrs. Considerant and Rittinghausen: Our deputies are our enemies; let us govern ourselves and we shall be free;—there would be no change in the argument. The principle, that is to say, Government, remaining the same, there would still be the same conclusion.

For several thousand years this theory has diverted the oppressed classes and the orators who defend them. Direct government dates neither from Frankfort, nor from the Convention, nor from Rousseau; it is as old as indirect: it dates from the foundation of societies.

No more hereditary royalty,
No more presidency,
No more representation,
No more delegation,
No more alienation of power,
Direct government,

The People! in the permanent exercise of their sovereignty.

What is there at the end of this refrain which can be taken as a new and revolutionary proposition, and which has not been known and practiced long before our time by Athenians, Boeotians, Lacedemonians, Romans, &c.? Is it not always the same vicious circle, always the same drop to absurdity, which, after having
sucked dry and eliminated successively absolute monarchies, aristocratic or representative monarchies, and democracies, comes to the turning point of direct government, only to begin again with a dictatorship for life and hereditary royalty? Direct government, among all nations, has been an epoch of renewed life for destroyed aristocracies and broken-down thrones: it could not maintain itself among peoples which, like Athens and Sparta, had the advantage of a very small population and the service of slaves. It would be for us the prelude to Caesarism, despite our post office, our railroads, our telegraphs, despite the simplification of laws, the recall of officials, the imperative mandate. It would hurl us so much the more quickly toward imperial tyranny, in that our lower classes are no longer willing to be wage-workers, our proprietors would not suffer themselves to be expropriated, and the partizans of direct government, doing everything through politics, seem to have no notion of economic organization. One step more on this road, and the era of Caesars will have dawned: to an unworkable democracy will succeed, without any step of transition, the empire, with or without Napoleon.

We must get out of this vicious circle. The political idea, the ancient notion of distributive justice, must be contradicted through and through; and that of commutative justice must be reached, which, in the logic of history as well as of law, succeeds it. Blind men by choice, seeking in the clouds for what is under your nose, read again your authors, look about you, analyze your own formulas, and you will find the solution, which has dragged from immemorial time through the centuries, and which neither you nor any one of your satellites have deigned to notice.

All ideas are co-eternal in the mind: they seem to be successive only in history, in which they come in their turn to assume direction of affairs and to occupy the first rank. The operation by which one idea is driven from power is called in logic, negation; that by which another is established is called affirmation.

Every revolutionary negation therefore implies a subsequent affirmation: this principle, which the practice in revolutions proves, is about to receive a wonderful confirmation.

The first authentic negation of the idea of authority which has been made is that of Luther. This negation, nevertheless, did not go beyond the sphere of religion: Luther, like Leibnitz, Kant, Hegel, was a thoroughly governmental mind. This
negation was called free criticism.
What does free criticism deny? The authority of the Church.
What is reason? An agreement between intuition and experience.
The authority of reason; that is the eternal, positive idea, substituted by the
Reformation for the authority of faith. As philosophy formerly sprang from
revelation, revelation hereafter will be subordinated to philosophy. Their parts are
changed: the government of society is not what [it] was: morality is changed:
destiny itself seems to be modified. We can already in our time catch a glimpse of
all that this renewal of reign contained, in which the words of man took the place of
the voice of God.
A like movement is about to take place in the sphere of political ideas.
Following Luther, the principle of free criticism was carried, notably by Jurieu, from
the spiritual to the temporal. To the sovereignty of divine right, the adversary of
Bossuet opposed the sovereignty of the people, which he expressed with infinitely
more precision, force and profundness by the words Social Contract or Pact, of
which the contradiction is manifest to such words as power, authority, government,
imperium, αρχη.
What really is the Social Contract? An agreement of the citizen with the
government? No, that would mean but the continuation of the same idea. The
social contract is an agreement of man with man; an agreement from which must
result what we call society. In this, the notion of commutative justice, first
brought forward by the primitive fact of exchange, and defined by the Roman law,
is substituted for that of distributive justice, dismissed without appeal by
republican criticism. Translate these words, contract, commutative justice,
which are the language of the law, into the language of business, and you have
Commerce, that is to say, in its highest significance, the act by which man and
man declare themselves essentially producers, and abdicate all pretension to
govern each other.
Commutative justice, the reign of contract, the industrial or economic
system, such are the different synonyms for the idea which by its accession must
do away with the old systems of distributive justice, the reign of law, or in more
concrete terms, feudal, governmental, or military rule. The future hope of
humanity lies in this substitution.
But before this revolution of doctrine can be formulated, before it can be comprehended, before it can take possession of the peoples who alone can put it into practice, what fruitless debates! what weary inactivity of ideas! what a time for agitators and sophists! From the controversy of Jurieu with Bossuet, to the publication of Rousseau’s Social Contract almost a century elapsed; and when the latter appeared, it was not to assert the idea, but to stifle it.

Rousseau, whose authority has ruled us for almost a century, understood nothing of the social contract. To him, most of all, must be ascribed the great relapse of ’93, expiated already by fifty-seven years of fruitless disorder, and which certain minds more ardent than wise wish us still to regard as a sacred tradition.

The idea of contract excludes that of government: M. Ledru-Rollin, who is a lawyer, and whose attention I call to this point, ought to know it. What characterizes the contract is agreement for equal exchange; and it is by virtue of this agreement that liberty and well being increase; while by the establishment of authority, both of these necessarily diminish. This will be evident if we reflect that contract is the act whereby two or several individuals agree to organize among themselves, for a definite purpose and time, that industrial power which we have called exchange; and in consequence have obligated themselves to each other, and reciprocally guaranteed a certain amount of services, products, advantages, duties, &c., which they are in a position to obtain and give to each other; recognizing that they are otherwise perfectly independent, whether for consumption or production.

Between contracting parties there is necessarily for each one a real personal interest; it implies that a man bargains with the aim of securing his liberty and his revenue at the same time, without any possible loss. Between governing and governed, on the contrary, no matter how the system of representation or of delegation of the governmental function is arranged, there is necessarily alienation of a part of the liberty and of the means of the citizen; in return for what advantage we have explained above.

The contract therefore is essentially reciprocal: it imposes no obligation upon the parties, except that which results from their personal promise of reciprocal delivery: it is not subject to any external authority: it alone forms the law between the parties: it awaits their initiative for its execution.

But if such is the contract in its most general acceptation, and in daily practice;
what will be the Social Contract, which is relied upon to bind together all the members of a nation into one and the same interest?

The Social Contract is the supreme act by which each citizen pledges to the association his love, his intelligence, his work, his services, his goods, in return for the affection, ideas, labor, products, services and goods of his fellows; the measure of the right of each being determined by the importance of his contributions, and the recovery that can be demanded in proportion to his deliveries.

Thus the social contract should include all citizens, with their interests and relations. — If a single man were excluded from the contract, if a single one of the interests upon which the members of the nation, intelligent, industrious, and sensible beings, are called upon to bargain, were omitted, the contract would be more or less relative or special, it would not be social.

The social contract should increase the well-being and liberty of every citizen. — If any one-sided conditions should slip in; if one part of the citizens should find themselves, by the contract, subordinated and exploited by the others, it would no longer be a contract; it would be a fraud, against which annulment might at any time be invoked justly.

The social contract should be freely discussed, individually accepted, signed with their own hands, by all the participants. If the discussion of it were forbidden, cut short or juggled, if consent were obtained by fraud; if signature were made in blank, by proxy, or without reading the document and the preliminary explanation; or even if, like the military oath, consent were a matter of course and compulsory; the social contract would then be no more than a conspiracy against the liberty and well-being of the most ignorant, the weakest and the most numerous, a systematic spoilation, against which every means of resistance, and even of reprisal, would be a right and a duty.

We may add that the social contract of which we are now speaking has nothing in common with the contract of association by which, as we have shown in a previous study, the contracting party gives up a portion of his liberty, and submits to an annoying, often dangerous, obligation, in the more or less well-founded hope of a benefit. The social contract is of the nature of a contract of exchange: not only does it leave the party free, it adds to his liberty; not only does it leave him all his goods, it adds to his property; it prescribes no labor; it bears only upon exchange: all these
being points which are not found in the contract of association, which is even antagonistic to it.

Such should be the social contract, according to the definitions of the law and universal practice. Is it necessary now to say that, out of the multitude of relations which the social pact is called upon to define and regulate, Rousseau saw only the political relations; that is to say, he suppressed the fundamental points of the contract, and dwelt only upon those that are secondary? Is it necessary to say that Rousseau understood and respected not one of these essential, indispensable conditions,—the absolute liberty of the party, his personal, direct part, his signature given with full understanding, and the share of liberty and prosperity which he should experience?

For him, the social contract is neither an act of reciprocity, nor an act of association. Rousseau takes care not to enter into such considerations. It is an act of appointment of arbiters, chosen by the citizens, without any preliminary agreement, for all cases of contest, quarrel, fraud or violence, which can happen in the relations which they may subsequently form among themselves, the said arbiters being clothed with sufficient force to put their decisions into execution, and to collect their salaries.

Of a real, true contract, on whatsoever subject, there is no vestige in Rousseau’s book. To give an exact idea of his theory, I cannot do better than compare it with a commercial agreement, in which the names of the parties, the nature and value of the goods, products and services involved, the conditions of quality, delivery, price, reimbursement, everything in fact which constitutes the material of contracts, is omitted, and nothing is mentioned but penalties and jurisdictions.

Indeed, Citizen of Geneva, you talk well. But before holding forth about the sovereign and the prince, about the policeman and the judge, tell me first what is my share of the bargain? What? You expect me to sign an agreement in virtue of which I may be prosecuted for a thousand transgressions, by municipal, rural, river and forest police, handed over to tribunals, judged, condemned for damage, cheating, swindling, theft, bankruptcy, robbery, disobedience to the laws of the State, offense to public morals, vagabondage,—and in this agreement I find not a word of either my rights or my obligations, I find only penalties!

But every penalty no doubt presupposes a duty, and every duty corresponds to a
right. Where then in your agreement are my rights and duties? What have I promised to my fellow citizens? What have they promised to me? Show it to me, for without that, your penalties are but excesses of power, your law-controlled State a flagrant usurpation, your police, your judgment and your executions so many abuses. You who have so well denied property, who have impeached so eloquently the inequality of conditions among men, what dignity, what heritage, have you for me in your republic, that you should claim the right to judge me, to imprison me, to take my life and honor? Perfidious declaimer, have you inveighed so loudly against exploiters and tyrants, only to deliver me to them without defense?

Rousseau defined the social contract thus:

To find a form of association which defends and protects, with the whole power of the community, the person and goods of each associate; and by which each one, uniting himself to all, obeys only himself and remains as free as before.

Yes, these are indeed the conditions of the social pact, as far as concerns the protection and defense of goods and persons. But as for the mode of acquisition and transmission, as to labor, exchange, value and price of products, as to education, as to the multitude of relations which, whether he wishes it or not, places man in perpetual association with his fellows, Rousseau says not a word; his theory is perfectly meaningless. Who does not see that without some definition of rights and duties, the sanction which follows is absolutely null; who does not see that where there are no stipulations, there can be no infractions, nor, in consequence, any criminals; and, to conclude with philosophical rigor, that a society which after having provoked revolt, punishes and kills by virtue of such authority, itself commits assassination with premeditation and by treachery.

Rousseau is so far from desiring that any mention should be made in the social contract of the principles and laws which rule the fortunes of nations and of individuals, that, in his demagogue’s program, as well as in his Treatise on Education, he starts with the false, thievish, murderous supposition that only the individual is good, that society depraves him, that man therefore should refrain as much as possible from all relations with his fellows; and that all we have to do in this world below, while remaining in complete isolation, is to form among ourselves
a mutual insurance society, is to form among ourselves a mutual insurance society, for the protection of our persons and property; that all the rest, that is to say, economic matters, really the only matters of importance, should be left to the chance of birth or speculation, and submitted, in case of litigation, to the arbitration of elected officers, who should determine according to rules laid down by themselves, or by the light of natural equity. In a word, the social contract, according to Rousseau, is nothing but the offensive and defensive alliance of those who possess, against those who do not possess; and the only part played by the citizen is to pay the police, for which he is assessed in proportion to his fortune, and the risk to which he is exposed from general pauperism.

It is this contract of hatred, this monument of incurable misanthropy, this coalition of the barons of property, commerce and industry against the disinherited lower class, this oath of social war indeed, which Rousseau calls *Social Contract*, with a presumption which I should call that of a scoundrel, if I believed in the genius of the man.

But if the *virtuous and sensitive* Jean-Jacques had taken for his aim the perpetuation of the discord among men, could he have done better than to offer them, as their contract of union, this charter of their eternal antagonism? Watch him at work: you will find in his theory of government the same spirit that inspired his theory of education. As the tutor, so the statesman. The pedagogue preaches isolation, the publicist sows dissension.

After having laid down as a principle that the people are the only sovereign, that they can be represented only by themselves, that the law should be the expression of the will of all, and other magnificent commonplaces, after the way of demagogues, Rousseau quietly abandons and discards this principle. In the first place, he substitutes the will of the majority for the general, collective, indivisible will; then, under the pretext that it is not possible for a whole nation to be occupied from morning till night with public affairs, he gets back, by the way of elections, to the nomination of representatives or proxies, who shall do the law-making in the name of the people, and whose decrees shall have the force of laws. Instead of a direct, personal transaction where his interests are involved, the citizen has nothing left but the power of choosing his rulers by a plurality vote. That done, Rousseau rests easy. Tyranny, claiming divine right, had become odious; he reorganizes it
and makes it respectable, by making it proceed from the people, so he says. Instead of a universal, complete agreement, which would assure the rights of all, provide for the needs of all, and guard against all difficulties, which all must understand, consent to and sign, he gives us, what? That which today we call direct government, a recipe by which, even in the absence of all royalty, aristocracy, priesthood, the abstract collectivity of the people can still be used for maintaining the parasitism of the minority and the oppression of the greater number. It is, in a word, the legalization of social chaos by a clever fraud, the consecration of poverty, based on the sovereignty of the people. Moreover there is not a word about labor, nor property, nor industrial forces, nor the industrial forces; all of which it is the very object of a Social Contract to organize. Rousseau does not know what economics means. His program speaks of political rights only; it does not mention economic rights.

It is Rousseau who teaches us that the people, a collective being, has no unitary existence; that it is an abstract personality, a moral individuality, incapable by itself of thinking, acting, or moving; which means that general reason is not superior to individual reason, and, in consequence, that he who has the most developed individual reason best represents general reason. A false proposition, which leads directly to despotism.

It is Rousseau who teaches us by aphorisms the whole of this liberty-destroying theory, making his deductions from this first error.

That popular or direct government results essentially from the yielding up of liberty that each one must make for the advantage of all. That the separation of powers is the first condition of government. That in a well-ordered Republic no association or special meeting of citizens can be permitted, because it would be a State within a State, a government within a government.

That a sovereign is one thing, a prince is another. That the first by no means excludes the second; so that the most direct government may well exist with a hereditary monarchy, as was seen under Louis Philippe, and as some people would like to see again.

That as the sovereign, that is to say, the People, is a fictitious being, an ideal person, a mere conception of the mind, it has, as its natural and visible
representative, the prince, who is the more valuable because he is one.

That the Government is not within a society, but outside of it.

That according to all these considerations, which are linked together in Rousseau like the theorems of geometry, a real democracy has never existed, and never will exist, seeing that in a democracy it is the greater number that should lay down the law and exercise the power, while it is contrary to the order of nature that the greater number should govern and the less be governed.

That direct government is impracticable, above all in a country like France, because, before everything else, it would be necessary to equalize fortunes, and equality of fortunes is impossible.

That besides, on account of the impossibility of maintaining equal conditions, direct government is of all the most unstable, the most perilous, the most fruitful of catastrophes and civil wars.

That as the ancient democracies could not maintain themselves, despite the powerful aid of slavery, it would be vain to attempt to establish this form of government among ourselves.

That democracy is made for gods, not for men.

After having trifled with his readers thus for a long time, after having drawn up the Code of Capitalist and Mercantile Tyranny, under the deceptive title of Social Contract, the Genevese charlatan deduces the necessity of a lower class, of the subordination of labor, of a dictatorship and of the Inquisition.

It appears to be the advantage of literary people that style should take the place of reason and morality.

Never man united to such an extent intellectual pride, aridity of soul, lowness of tastes, depravity of habits, ingratitude of heart; never did the warmth of eloquence, the pretense of sensitiveness, the effrontery of paradox, arouse to such infatuation.

Since the time of Rousseau, and following his example, there has been founded among us a sentimental and philanthropic school, I should say, industry, which is able to gather in the honor due to charity and devotion, while really practicing the most complete selfishness. Distrust this philosophy, this politics, this socialism of Rousseau. His philosophy is all phrases and covers only emptiness, his politics is full of domination; as for his ideas about society, they scarcely conceal their profound hypocrisy. They who read Rousseau and admire him, are simply dupes, and I
pardon them: as for those who follow and copy him, I warn them to look to their own reputation. The time is not far away when a quotation from Rousseau will suffice to cast suspicion upon a writer.

Let me say, in conclusion, that, to the shame of the eighteenth century and of our own, the Social Contract of Rousseau, a masterpiece of oratorical jugglery, has been admired, praised to the skies, regarded as the record of public liberties; that Constituents, Girdonins, Jacobins, Cordeliers, have all taken it for an oracle; that it served for the text of the Constitution of '93, which was declared absurd by its own authors; and that it is still by this book that the most zealous reformers of political and social science are inspired. The corpse of the author, which the people will drag to Montfaucon, on the day when they shall have learned the meaning of these words: Liberty, Justice, Morality, Reason, lies glorious and venerated in the catacombs of the Pantheon, where never one will enter of these honest laborers who nourish with their blood their poor families; while the profound geniuses set up for their adoration send, in lubricious frenzy, their bastards to the almshouse.

Each aberration of the public conscience carries its punishment with it. The vogue of Rousseau has cost France more gold, more blood, more shame, than the hateful reign of the three famous courtesans, Cotillon I, Cotillon II, Cotillon III, (Chateauroux, Pompadour, Dubarry) ever caused her to sacrifice. Our country, which never suffers but from the influence of foreigners, owes to Rousseau the bloody struggles and failures of '93.

Thus, while the revolutionary tradition of the sixteenth century gave us the idea of the Social Contract as an antithesis to that of Government, an idea which the Gallic genius, so judicial in its character, had not failed to penetrate; the tricks of a rhetorician sufficed to divert us from the true road, and to cause delay in the interpretation of it. The negation of government, which is at the foundation of the Utopia of Morelly, which casts a gleam, soon extinguished, over the sinister manifestations of the Enragés and Hébertists, and which would have emerged from the doctrines of Baboeuf, if Baboeuf had known how to reason and deduce his own principles:—this great and decisive negation remained not understood, all through the eighteenth century.

But an idea cannot perish. It is born again, always from its contradictory. Let Rousseau triumph: his glory of a moment will be but the more detested. While
waiting for the theoretical and practical deduction of the Contractual Idea, complete trial of the principle of authority will serve for the education of Humanity. From the fullness of this political evolution, we finally arise the opposite hypothesis: Government, exhausting itself, will give birth to Socialism as its historic sequel.

It was Saint Simon who first took up the thread again, in timid language, and with a still dim consciousness. The human race, he wrote in the year 1818, has been called upon to live at first under governmental and feudal rule. It is destined to pass from the governmental or military rule to administrative or industrial rule, after it has made sufficient progress in the physical sciences and industry.

Finally, it has been subjected through its organization to endure a long and violent crisis in its passage from a military to a pacific system.

The present period is one of transition. The transitional crisis began by the preaching of Luther; since that time the tendency of thought has been fundamentally critical and revolutionary.

Saint Simon then cites in support of his ideas, as having had a more or less vague apprehension of this great metamorphosis, among statesmen, Sully, Colbert, Turgot, Necker, even Villèle; among philosophers, Bacon, Montesquieu, Condorcet, A. Comte, B. Constant, Cousin, A. de Laborde, Fièvée, Dunoyer, &c. All Saint Simon is in these few lines, written in the style of the prophets; but too hard of assimilation for the age when they were written, and too condensed in meaning for the youthful spirits who first attached themselves to the noble innovator. Note well, that therein is found neither community of goods nor of women, nor purification of the flesh, nor androgyne, nor a Supreme Father, nor Circulus, nor Triad. Nothing of all that has been disseminated by his disciples really belongs to the master; on the contrary, the disciples have quite misunderstood the meaning of Saint Simon.

What did Saint Simon mean? From the moment when, on the one hand, philosophy succeeds to faith, and replaces the ancient conception of government by that of contract; or, on the other,
when after a Revolution which has abolished feudalism, society requires the
development and harmonization of its economic powers; from this moment it
becomes inevitable that government, already denied in theory, should fall to pieces
in practice. And when Saint Simon, to designate this new order of things, conforms
to the old style and uses the word government, joined with the epithet
administrative or industrial, it is evident that this word, from his pen, acquires a
metaphorical, or rather analogical, meaning, which could not but mislead the
uninitiated. How is it possible to misunderstand the thought of Saint Simon, in
reading the still more explicit passage which I here cite:

If we observe the course which is followed in the education of
individuals, we notice that in the primary schools government has the
most importance; and in schools of a higher grade, the government of
the children continually diminishes in intensity, while instruction plays
a more important part. It has been the same in the education of
society. Military activity, that is to say, feudal or governmental, had
to be strongest at the origin of society; it always had to diminish,
while administrative activity had to acquire greater importance; and
the administrative power must end by entirely overshadowing military
power.

To these extracts from Saint Simon must be added his famous Parable, which in
1819 fell like an ax upon the official world; and for which the author was tried in the
Court of Assizes, on the 20th of February, 1820, and acquitted. The length of this
work, which is moreover well known, forbids us from quoting it here.

Saint Simon’s negation of government, as is easily seen, is not deduced from the
idea of contract, which for eighty years Rousseau and his votaries had corrupted
and dishonored. It flows out of a different kind of insight, entirely experimental and
a posteriori, such as is suited to an observer of facts. The end of governments,
which the providentially inspired theory of contract had, since the time of Jurieu,
foreshadowed in the future of society, Saint Simon establishes from the law of the
evolution of humanity, appearing at his strongest in the heat of discussion. Thus
the theory of the Law and the philosophy of history, like two surveyor’s poles
planted on in front of the other, direct the mind toward and unknown revolution;
one step more and we shall reach the issue.
All roads lead to Rome, says the proverb. All investigations also conduct to the truth.
I think that I have over-abundantly established that the eighteenth century would have reached the negation of government by the development of the idea of contract, that is to say, by the judicial road, if it had not been turned from the path by the classic, retrospective and declamatory republicanism of Rousseau.
This negation of government Saint Simon deduced from observation of history, and of the progress of humanity.
In my turn I have completed the analysis of economic functions, and of the theory of credit and exchange, if I may speak of myself at this time, when I alone represent the revolutionary point of view. To establish this discovery, I have no need, I fancy, to mention the different works and articles in which it is recorded: they have obtained enough notoriety in the past three years.
Thus the idea, the incorruptible seed, passes along the ages, illuminating from time to time a man of willing mind, to the day when an intellect that nothing can intimidate receives it, broods upon it, then hurls it like a meteor among the astonished crowds.
The idea of contract, in opposition to that of government, which was the outcome of the Reformation, passed through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, without being noticed by a single publicist, nor observed by a single revolutionary. On the other hand, all that was most illustrious in the Church, in philosophy, in politics, conspired to oppose it. Rousseau, Siéyès, Robespierre, M. Guizot, all that school of parliamentarians, bore the banner of the opposition. At last one man, perceiving the disregard of the leading principle, brought again to the light the new and fruitful idea: unfortunately the practical side of his doctrines deceived his own disciples: they could not see that the producer is the negation of the ruler, that organization is incompatible with authority; and thus for thirty years the principle was lost to sight. Finally, it took hold of public opinion, through the loudness of protest; but then, O vanas hominum mentes, o pectora coeca! opposition brings about revolution! The idea of Anarchy had hardly been implanted in the mind of the people when it found so-called gardeners who watered it with their calumnies, fertilized it with their misrepresentations, warmed it in the hothouse of their hatred,
supported it by their stupid opposition. Today, thanks to them, it has borne the anti-governmental idea, the idea of Labor, the idea of Contract, which is growing, mounting, seizing with its tendrils the workingmen’s societies, and soon, like the grain of mustard seed of the Gospel, it will form a great tree, with branches which cover the earth.

The sovereignty of Reason having been substituted for that of Revelation, The notion of Contract succeeding that of Government, Historic evolution leading Humanity inevitably to a new system, Economic criticism having shown that political institutions must be lost in industrial organization,

We may conclude without fear that the revolutionary formula cannot be Direct Legislation, nor Direct Government, nor Simplified Government, that it is No Government. Neither monarchy, nor aristocracy, nor even democracy itself, in so far as it may imply any government at all, even though acting in the name of the people, and calling itself the people. No authority, no government, not even popular, that is the Revolution.

Direct legislation, direct government, simplified government, are ancient lies, which they try in vain to rejuvenate. Direct or indirect, simple or complex, governing the people will always be swindling the people. It is always man giving orders to man, the fiction which makes an end to liberty; brute force which cuts questions short, in the place of justice, which alone can answer them; obstinate ambition, which makes a stepping stone of devotion and credulity.

No, the old serpent shall not prevail: it has strangled itself by involving itself in this question of direct government. Now that we grasp, as a clear antithesis, the political idea and the economic idea, Production and Government; now that we can deduce them reciprocally one from the other, test them and compare them, the opposition of Neo-Jacobinism is no longer to be feared.

They who are still fascinated by the schism of Robespierre will tomorrow be the orthodox of the Revolution.

Translator’s note 16. I have taken the liberty to change two words in this passage, as a literal rendering would make nonsense of it. There must be some error in the
II. General Criticism of the Idea of Authority.

I have demonstrated two things in the first part of this study:

• That the principle of authority and government has its source in the dominating attitude of the family.

• That it has been used by the unanimous consent of all peoples, as a condition of social order.

• That at a certain period of history this principle began to be denied spontaneously, and to be replaced by another idea, which until then had seemed subordinate, the idea of Contract, which implies a quite different social order.

In this second part, I shall recall briefly the causes, or rather the grounds, as much of fact as of right, which led society to deny Power, and which exhibit the reason for its condemnation. The criticism which you are about to read is not mine, it is that of the people themselves, a criticism entered upon often, and always from a different point of view; but the conclusion is always the same at the end of each experiment, and promises in our days to become operative. It is not my thought which I give: it is the thought of the centuries, the thought of the human race. I but report it.

1. Thesis. — Absolute Authority.
Every idea is established or refuted by a series of terms which are, as it were, its organism; of which the last term demonstrates infallibly its truth or error. If the development instead of being merely in the mind and in theory is carried out at the same time in facts and institutions, it constitutes history. This is the case with the principle of authority or government.

The first form under which the principle is manifested is that of absolute power. This is the purest, the most rational, the most efficient, the most straightforward, and taken altogether, the least immoral and the least disagreeable form of government.

But absolute power, in its simplest expression, is odious to reason and to liberty: the feeling of the people is always aroused against it: following feeling, revolt makes its protest heard. Then the principle of authority is forced to retire: it retires step by step, by a series of concessions, each one more insufficient than the other, of which the last, pure democracy, or direct government, ends in the impossible and the absurd. The first term of the series then being **Absolutism**, the last fateful term is **Anarchy**, in every sense.

We are about to pass in review, one after the other, the principal terms of this great evolution.

Humanity asks its masters: Whence these pretensions of yours to reign over me and govern me?

They answer: Because society cannot dispense with order: because in a society it is necessary there should be some who obey and labor, while others give orders and directions: because, individual faculties being unequal, interests opposite, passions antagonistic, the advantage of one opposed to the general advantage, some authority is needed which shall assign the boundaries of rights and duties, some arbiter who will cut short conflicts, some public force which will put into execution the judgments of the sovereign. The power of the State is just this discretionary authority, this arbiter who renders to each what is his, this force which assures that the peace shall be respected. Government, in a word, is the principle and guaranty of social order: that is what both nature and common sense tell us.

This explanation has been repeated since the origin of societies. It is the same at all epochs, and in the mouth of all powers. You will find the identical, invariably, in
the books of Malthusian economists, in Opposition newspapers, and in the professions of faith of Republicans. There is no difference among them, except in the proportion of the concessions to liberty that they propose to make, in derogation of the principle of authority:—illusory concessions, which add to the forms of government called moderate, constitutional, democratic, &c., a flavoring of hypocrisy, of which the taste renders them only the more contemptible.

Thus Government, in its unmodified nature, presents itself as the absolute, necessary, sine qua non condition of order. For that reason it always aspires toward absolutism, under all disguises; in fact, according to the principle, the stronger the Government, the nearer order approaches perfection. These two notions then, government and order, are in the relation to each other of cause of effect: the cause is Government, the effect is Order. It is thus that primitive societies have reasoned. We have already remarked upon this subject, that, from what such societies could conceive of human destiny, it was impossible that they should have reasoned otherwise.

But this reasoning is none the less false, and the conclusion is quite inadmissible, because, according to the logical classification of ideas, the relation of government to order is not that of cause to effect, as statesmen pretend, it is that of a particular to a general. Order is the genus: Government is the species. In other words, there are many ways of conceiving order; but who has proved to us that order in a society is what its masters choose to call it?

On the one hand is alleged the natural inequality of faculties, whence is deduced that of conditions; on the other, the impossibility of uniting the divergence of interests and of harmonizing opinions.

But in this antagonism there is at most but a problem to be solved, it should not be a pretext for tyranny. Inequality of faculties! divergence of interests! Well, sovereigns, with your crowns, robes and fasces, that is precisely what is meant by the social question; and you think to solve it with club and bayonet! Saint Simon was quite right in regarding the words government and military as synonyms. Government cause order in society? It is like Alexander untying the Gordian knot with his sword!

Who then, shepherds of the public, authorizes you to think that the problem of opposition of interests and inequality of faculties cannot be solved; that the
distinction of classes necessarily springs from it; and that, in order to maintain this natural and providential distinction, force is necessary and legitimate? I affirm, on the contrary, and all they whom the world calls Utopians, because they oppose your tyranny, affirm, with me, that the solution can be found. Some believe that they have found it in the community, others in association, yet others in the industrial series. For my part, I say that it is found in the organization of economic forces, under the supreme law of **Contract**. Who can assure you that none of these hypotheses is true?

The advance of labor and of ideas sets this liberal theory, through my lips, against your governmental theory, which has no basis but your ignorance, no principle but a sophism, no method but force, no object but the robbery of humanity.

To find a form of transaction which, in drawing together the divergence of interests, in identifying individual advantage, in effacing the inequality of nature by that of education, solves all political and economical contradictions; under which each individual will be both producer and consumer as synonymous, both citizen and prince, ruler and ruled; under which his liberty steadily increases, with no need of giving up any part of it; under which his material prosperity grows indefinitely, without his experiencing any loss through the act either of society or of his fellow citizens, either in his property, or in his work, or in his recompense, or in his relations of interest, of opinion, or of attachment among his fellows.

What, do these conditions seem to you impossible to satisfy? Does it seem to you impossible to imagine anything more inextricable than the social contract, when you think of the frightful number of relations that it must regulate—something like squaring the circle, or finding perpetual motion? That is the reason why, wearied of the struggle, you fall back upon absolutism and force.

Consider, moreover, that if the social contract can be solved between two producers,—and who doubts terms?—it can as well be solved among millions, as it relates always to a similar engagement; and that that the number of signatures adds nothing to it, while making it more and more effective. Your plea of inability then does not exist, it is ridiculous, and you are left without excuse.

However that may be, listen, men of power, to the words of the Producer, the proletarian, the slave, of him whom you expect to force to work for you: I demand neither the goods nor the money of anybody; and I am not disposed to allow the
fruit of my labor to become the prey of another. I, also, want order, as much as they who are continually upsetting it by their alleged government; but I want it as the result of my free choice, a condition for my labor, a law of my reason. I will not submit to it coming from the will of another, and imposing sacrifice and servitude upon me as preliminary conditions.

2. Laws.

What with the impatience of the people, and the imminence of revolt, the Government must yield. It has promised institutions and laws; it has declared that its most fervent desire was that each one should enjoy the fruit of his labor under his own vine and fig tree. This was a necessity of its position. From the time that the Government presented itself as the judge of what was right, as the sovereign arbiter of destinies, it could not pretend to drive men at its own good pleasure. King, President, Directory, Committee, Popular Assembly, it matters not: power must have rules of conduct: how can it establish discipline among its subjects without them? How can citizens conform to orders, if they are not notified of what the orders are; or if the orders are revoked when scarcely announced; if they change from day to day, from hour to hour?

So the Government must make laws; that is to say, place limits for itself; for whatever is a rule for the citizen is a limit for the ruler. It must make as many laws as it finds interests; and, as interests are innumerable, relations arising from one another multiply to infinity, and antagonism is endless, law-making must go on without stopping. Laws, decrees, edicts, ordinances, resolutions, will fall like hail upon the unfortunate people. After a time the political ground will be covered with a layer of paper, which the geologists will put down among the vicissitudes of the earth as the papyraceous formation. The Convention in three years one month and four days passed eleven thousand six hundred laws and decrees: the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies passed as many: the Empire and the Governments that followed continued the work. at present, the Bulletin of Laws contains, it is said, more than fifty thousand: if our representatives do their duty, this enormous figure will soon be doubled. Do you suppose that the people, or even the Government itself, can keep their reason in this labyrinth?

Certainly we are already far from the primitive institution. It is said that the
Government fills the part of father in Society; but what father ever made an agreement with his family, or granted a charter to his children, or arranged a balance of power between himself and their mother? The head of a family is inspired by his heart in his government: he does not rob his children; he supports them by his labor: guided by his love, he thinks only of their interests and circumstances: his will is their law, and all, mother and children, have confidence in it. The little State would be doomed if paternal action encountered the least opposition, if it were limited in its prerogatives or determined in advance in its effects. What! can it be true that Government is not a father to the people, since it submits to regulations, compromises with its subjects, and makes itself the slave of a rule, which, whether divine or popular, is not its own?

If this is so, I do not see why I myself should submit to this law. Who guarantees to me its justice, its sincerity? Whence comes it? Who made it? Rousseau teaches in unmistakable terms, that in a government really democratic and free the citizen, in obeying the law, obeys only his own will. But the law has been made without my participation, despite my absolute disapproval, despite the injury which it inflicts upon me. The State does not bargain with me: it gives me nothing in exchange: it simply practices extortion upon me. Where then is the bond of conscience, reason, passion or interest which binds me?

But what do I say? Laws for one who thinks for himself, and who ought to answer only for his own actions; laws for one who wants to be free, and feels himself worthy of liberty? I am ready to bargain, but I want no laws. I recognize none of them: I protest against every order which it may please some power, from pretended necessity, to impose upon my free will. Laws! We know what they are, and what they are worth! Spider webs for the rich and powerful, steel chains for the weak and poor, fishing nets in the hands of the Government.

You say that you will make but few laws; that you will make them simple and good. That is indeed an admission. The Government is indeed culpable, if it avows thus its faults. No doubt the Government will have engraved on the front of the legislative hall, for the instruction of the legislator and the edification of the people, this Latin verse, which a priest of Boulogne had written over the door to his cellar, as a warning to his Bacchic zeal:

Pastor, ne noceant, bibe pauca sed optima vina.
Few laws! Excellent laws! It is impossible. Must not the Government regulate all interests, and judge all disputes; and are not interests, by the nature of society, innumerable; are not relations infinitely variable and changeable? How then is it possible to make few laws? How can they be simple? How can the best law be anything but detestable?

You talk of simplification. But if you can simplify in one point, you can simplify in all. Instead of a million laws, a single law will suffice. What shall this law be? Do not to others what you would not they should do to you: do to others as you would they should do to you. That is the law and the prophets.

But it is evident that this is not a law; it is the elementary formula of justice, the rule of all transactions. Legislative simplification then leads us to the idea of contract, and consequently to the denial of authority. In fact, if there is but a single law, if it solves all the contradictions of society, if it is admitted and accepted by everybody, it is sufficient for the social contract. In promulgating it you announce the end of government. What prevents you then from making this simplification at once?

Translator’s note 18. Pastor, for your health, drink but little wine, but of the best.

3. The Constitutional Monarchy.

Before ’89, the Government in France was what it is still in Austria, in Prussia, in Russia, and in several other countries of Europe, an uncontrolled Power, with certain institutions that had the force of law for all. It was, as Montesquieu said, a qualified monarchy. This Government disappeared, together with the feudal and ecclesiastical privileges which it had consented to defend, inadvisedly, although quite conscientiously. It was replaced, after violent shocks, and many oscillations, by the so-called representative Government, or Constitutional Monarchy. It would be too much to say that the liberty and prosperity of the people thereupon increased, except for the relief from the feudal rights which were abolished, and the sale of national property which was seized. Nevertheless it is certain and it must be admitted that this new retreat of the governmental principle caused the revolutionary denial of government to advance by just so much. That is the real,
decisive reason that makes, for us who consider only the right, the constitutional monarchy preferable to the qualified monarchy; in the same way that representative democracy, or the rule of universal suffrage, seems to us preferable to constitutionalism, and direct government preferable to representation.

But it may already be forseen that when we arrive at this last term, direct government, confusion will be at its height; and there will be nothing for it but one of these two things, either to continue the development of government, or to proceed to the abolition of it.

Let us resume our criticism.

Sovereignty, say the Constitutionalists, is in the People. Government emanates from them. Therefore let the most enlightened part of the Nation be called upon to elect citizens who are the most notable, through their fortune, their wisdom, their talents or their virtues, who are the most directly interested in the justice of the laws and the good administration of the State, and who are the most capable of taking their part therein. Let these men, periodically assembled and regularly consulted, enter into the councils of the prince, and participate in the exercise of his authority. We shall then have done all that it is possible to expect from the imperfection of our nature, for the liberty and prosperity of men. Then the Government will present no danger, as it will always be in contact with the People.

Surely these are great words, but words that would indicate some notable swindle, if, since '89, and thanks chiefly to Rousseau, we had not learned to believe in the good faith of all who mingle with public affairs.

We must first understand the constitutional system, the interpretation of the new dogma, the sovereignty of the People. Some other time we shall seek to comprehend what this sovereignty is.

Until the Reformation, Government had been regarded as of divine right: Omnis potestas a Deo. After Luther, it began to be considered a human institution: Rousseau, who was one of the first to grasp this view, deduced his theory from it. Government had been from on high: he made it come from below, through the machinery of the suffrage, more or less universal. He took no care to understand that if the Government in his time had become corrupt and weak, it was because the principle of authority applied to nations is false and mischievous; that, in consequence, it was not the form nor the origin of Power that it was necessary t
ochange, but rather to deny its application.
Rousseau did not see that authority, of which the proper sphere is the family, is a mystical principle, anterior and superior to the will of the parties interested, of the father and mother, as well as of the children; that what is true of authority in the family would be equally true of authority in Society, if Society contained in itself the principle and reason of any authority whatsoever; that, once the theory of a social authority is admitted, it cannot in any case depend upon an agreement; that it is contradictory that they who must obey authority should begin by decreeing it. On the other hand, that if Government ought to exist, it exists by the necessity of things; that, as in the family, it is part of the divine or natural order, which for us is the same thing; that it is not proper for anybody to discuss it, or to pass judgment upon it; that therefore, far from power submitting itself to the control of representatives, to the jurisdiction of popular assemblies, it belongs to government alone to preserve, develop, renew, and perpetuate itself, by inviolable method, which no one has the right to touch, and which leaves to its subjects only permission to offer their very humble opinions, information and condolence, to enlighten the justice of the prince.

There are not two kinds of government, just as there are not two kinds of religion. Government is by divine right, or it is nothing, just as religion is from heaven or it is nothing. Democratic Government and Natural Religion are two contradictions, unless you prefer to see in them two mystifications. The People have no more voice in the State than they have in the Church: their part is to believe and obey.

Moreover, as principles cannot be mistaken, as only men have the right to be illogical, Government, as well that of Rousseau as that of the Constitution of '89, and all that have followed it, is always, despite the form of elections, only a Government by divine right, a mystical and supernatural authority, which imposes itself upon liberty and conscience, while assuming the air of asking their support.

Follow this series:
In the family, in which authority is closely bound up with human feelings, authority imposes itself by generation.
Among savage or barbarous peoples, it imposes itself by the patriarchate, which is included in the previous category, or by force.
Among sacerdotal peoples, it imposes itself by faith.
In aristocracies, it imposes itself by *primogeniture*, or *caste*.
In Rousseau’s system, it imposes itself by *lot*, or by *number*.
Generation, force, faith, primogeniture, lot, number, all things equally unintelligible and impenetrable, upon which one must not reason, only submit; such are, I will not say the principles,—Authority, like Liberty, recognizes only itself as a principle,—but the different modes through which is accomplished, in human societies, the investiture of Power. For a primitive, superior, anterior, undebateable principle, popular instinct has always sought an expression which should be equally primitive, superior, anterior and undebateable. As far as concerns the production of Power, force, faith, heredity, or number, are the variable forms which clothe this ordeal; they are the judgments of God.

Does number offer to your mind something more rational, more authentic, more moral, than faith or force? Does the ballot seem to you more trustworthy than tradition or heredity? Rousseau declaims against the right of the strongest, as if force, rather than number, constituted usurpation. But what is number? What does it prove? What is it worth? What relation is there between the opinion of the voters, more or less sincere and unanimous, and that which rules all opinion, all voting,—truth and right?

What! the question is as to all that is dearest to me, my liberty, my labor, food for my wife and children; and when I am expecting to make an agreement with you, you send the whole business to an assembly, selected by the accident of drawing lots! When I present myself to make a contract, you tell me that it is necessary to elect arbiters, who, without knowing me, without understanding me, will pronounce my acquittal or condemnation! What relation is there, I ask, between this assembly and me? what guaranty can it offer me? why should I make this enormous, irreparable, sacrifice to its authority, to accept whatever it may be pleased to resolve, as the expression of my will, as the just measure of my rights? And when this assembly, after debates of which I understand nothing, proceeds to impose its decision upon me as law, at the point of the bayonet, I ask, if it is true that I am a sovereign, what becomes of my dignity? if I am to consider myself as party to a contract, where is the contract?

They pretend that the representatives will be the most capable, the most honest, the most independent men of the country, selected as such by citizens chosen as
most interested in order, in liberty, in the prosperity of the laborers, and in progress. A plan wisely conceived, which answers for the good intentions of the candidates!

But why do the honorable bourgeois who compose the middle class understand my true interests better than I myself? The question is as to my labor, and the exchange of my labor, the thing which, next to love, least bears authority, as the poet says:

Non bene conveniunt, nec in una sede morantur Majestas et amor! ...

And you are going to dispose of my labor, my love, by proxy, without my consent! Who can assure me that your proxies will not use their privilege to make the Power that it gives them an instrument for plunder? Who will guarantee me that the smallness of their number will not deliver them to corruption, hands, feet and consciences bound? And if they will not permit themselves to be corrupted, if they fail to make authority listen to reason, who can assure me that authority will submit?

From 1815 to 1830, the country, as legally constituted, was continually at war with authority: the struggle ended in a revolution. From 1830 to 1848, the electoral class, duly strengthened after the unfortunate experiment of the Restoration, was exposed to the seductions of Power; the majority had already been corrupted when the 24th of February burst: the betrayal ended once more in a revolution. Proof has been made: it will not be tried again. Now then, partizans of representative rule, you will do us a real service if you can preserve for us forced marriages, ministerial corruption, popular insurrections: A spiritu fornicationis, ab incursu et daemonio meridiano.

Translator’s note 19. All power is from God. &#8617;

Translator’s note 20. Authority and love do not fit well together, nor stay long together. &#8617;

Translator’s note 21. From the spirit of fornication: from the attack of the noonday fiend. &#8617;
4. Universal Suffrage.

The solution is found, cry the courageous. Let all the citizens take part in the voting: there will be no power that can resist them, no seduction that can corrupt them. That is what the founders of the Republic thought, the day after the 24th of February.

Some added: Let the mandate be imperative, the representative always subject to recall, and the integrity of the law will be guaranteed, the fidelity of the legislator assured.

We proceed to take a hand in the discussion.

I have no belief at all, and with good reason, in this divinatory instinct of the multitude, which enables it to discern at a glance the merit and worth of the candidates. Examples abound of persons elected by acclamation, who, on the very platform on which they presented themselves in view of the people, were already preparing the net for their betrayal. Hardly could the people at election pick out one honest man from a dozen scamps.

But, once more, what do all these elections matter to me? What need have I of proxies, any more than of representatives? And, since it is necessary that I specify what I want, can I not explain it without the aid of anybody? Will it cost me any more? Am I not more sure of myself than of my attorney?

It is said that it is necessary to do something; that it is impossible that I should attend to so many different interests; that after all, a council of arbitrators, whose members have been appointed by the votes of all the people, promises an approximation to truth and right, far superior to the justice of an irresponsible monarch, represented by insolent ministers, and by magistrates whose irremovable places them as much out of my reach as the prince himself.

In the first place, I do not see the necessity of doing anything at such a price: I do not see moreover that anything is accomplished. Neither election nor voting, even if unanimous, solves anything. During the sixty years that we have used all sorts of methods of electing, what have we accomplished? What have we even outlined? What light have the people obtained from their assemblies? What guaranties have they obtained? Does it add a cent to their income that they have to repeat their commands ten times a year, and to reëlect every month their municipal officers and judges? Are they any more sure when they go to bed at night, that they will
have something to eat, something wherewith to feed their children, on the morrow? Can they even be sure that they will not be arrested and dragged to prison?

I understand that one may submit to an arbitrary decision upon questions that are not susceptible of a regular solution, for unimportant interests, for ordinary affairs. Such transactions have this moral, this consolation, that they prove the existence in the soul of something superior even to justice, the fraternal sentiment. But upon principles, on the essence of rights, on the direction to impress upon society, on the organization of industrial forces, upon my labor, my subsistence, my life, upon this very hypothesis of Government that we are discussing, I reject all presumptive authority, all indirect solutions; I recognize no star-chamber; I desire to negotiate directly individually, for myself; universal suffrage is in my eyes nothing but a lottery.

One the 25th of February, 1848, a handful of Democrats, after having driven out the monarchy, proclaimed the Republic at Paris. They took counsel with themselves only for this step: they did not wait until the people had pronounced upon it, in their primary meetings. The support of the citizens was boldly presumed by them. I believe upon my soul and conscience, that they did well: I believe that they acted in the fullness of their right, although they were to the rest of the people as 1 to 1000. And, because I was convinced of the justice of their work, I did not hesitate to associate myself therewith: the Republic, in my opinion, being but the cancellation of a lease between the People and the Government. Adversus hostem aeterna auctoritas esto says the Law of the Twelve Tables. Against Power the right to reclaim cannot lapse; usurpation is meaningless.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of the sovereignty of numbers, of the imperative mandate, and of universal suffrage, which are more or less accepted by us, these citizens committed an act of usurpation, a criminal attack against public faith and the law of nations. By what right did they without a mandate, they, whom the People had not elected, they who were only an imperceptible minority in the mass of citizens; by what right, I ask, did they rush upon the Tuileries like a band of pirates, abolish the Monarchy and proclaim the Republic?

The Republic is above universal suffrage! we said in the elections of 1850; and this was repeated afterwards from the tribune, amid acclamations, by a man not suspected of anarchical opinions, General Cavaignac. If this is true the morality of
the revolution of February is vindicated; but what can we say of those who, while proclaiming the Republic, saw in it nothing but the exercise of universal suffrage, the establishment of a new form of government? The governmental principle admitted, it was for the People to pronounce upon the form; and who can say that the People would have voted in favor of the Republic, if they had been appealed to?

On the 10th of December, 1848, the People were consulted upon the choice of their first magistrate, and they named Louis Bonaparte, by a majority of five and a half millions, out of seven and a half million voters. In choosing this candidate, the People, in their turn, took counsel only with their own inclinations: they took no account of the predictions and opinions of Republicans. For my part, I disapproved this election for the same reasons that led me to support the proclamation of the Republic. And, because I disapproved of it, I have since opposed, as far as in me lay, the government of the People’s Choice.

Nevertheless from the point of view of universal suffrage, of the imperative mandate, and of the sovereignty of numbers, I ought to believe, that Louis Bonaparte expresses the ideas, the needs and the tendencies of the nation: I ought to accept his policy as the policy of the People. Even if it were opposed to the Constitution, the mere fact that the Constitution did not emanate directly from the People, while the President was the personification of the majority of votes, his policy should be held as approved, inspired and encouraged by the sovereign People. They who went to the Conservatory on the 13th of June, 1848, were but factionaries. Who gave them the right to suppose that the People, at the end of six months, would discard their President? Louis Bonaparte presented himself under the auspices of his uncle; everybody knows what that means.

Do you still talk about the People? I mean the People as it show itself in mass meetings, at the ballot box; the People, which they did not dare to consult about the Republic in February; the People, which on the 16th of April and in the days of June, declared itself by an immense majority against Socialism; the People, which elected Louis Bonaparte, because it adored Napoleon Bonaparte; the People, which elected the Constituent Assembly, and afterwards the Legislative Assembly; the People, which did not rise on the 13th of June; the People, which did not protest on the 31st of May; the People which signed petitions for revision and petitions against revision. Is this the People which will be enlightened from above, its
representatives, inspired by its wisdom, be rendered thereby infallible, when it comes to picking out the most virtuous and most capable, and of deciding upon the organization of Labor, of Credit, of Property and of Power itself?

Neither M. Rittinghausen, who discovered the principle of Direct Legislation in Germany, nor M. Considerant, who asked pardon of God and man for having so long rejected this sublime idea, nor M. Ledru-Rollin, who refers them both to the Constitution of '93 and to Jean Jacques Rousseau, nor M. Louis Blanc, who, placing himself between Robespierre and M. Guizot, summons all three back to pure Jacobinism, nor M. Ledru-Rollin, who, having no more confidence in direct legislation than in universal suffrage or representative monarchy, believes it to be more expeditious, more useful, more easily accomplished, to simplify the Government;—not one of these men, the most advanced of the age, knows what is necessary to be done in order to bring about security of labor, justice in property, honesty in commerce, morality in competition, productiveness in credit, equality in taxation, &c.; or, if any of them knows, he dares not tell.

Yet ten million citizens, who have not studies, analyzed, referred to their causes, compared in their affinities, the principles of social organization, as have these professional thinkers; ten million, feebly minded, who have sworn by all the idols, have applauded all programs, have been the dupes of all political schemes,—these ten millions, drawing up their platforms, and naming their proxies for the purpose, will infallibly solve the problem of the Revolution! Ah, sirs, you do not really think so, you do not really hope so. What you do believe, what you are almost sure of is that you will all be elected by some portion of the people, as men of well-known ability, M. Ledru-Rollin as President of the Republic, M. Louis Blanc as Minister of Progress, M. de Girardin as Minister of Finance, M. Considerant as Minister of Finance, M. Rittinghausen as Minister of Justice and Public Instruction; after which the problem of the Revolution may solve itself as it will. Enough, let us be frank, universal suffrage, the imperative mandate, the responsibility of representatives, in fact, the whole elective system, is but child’s play; I will not trust them with my labor, my peace of mind, my fortune; I will not risk a hair of my head to defend them.

Translator’s note 22. Against the enemy the right of defense is inalienable.
5. Direct Legislation.

Direct legislation! Willy-nilly, we have got to take it up. Robespierre, quoted by Louis Blanc, cries in vain: Do you not see that this project (the appeal to the people) tends only to destroy the Convention itself; that the primary assemblies, once convened, would be forced by political intrigue and agitation to deliberate upon all the propositions which might serve their perfidious purposes; that they would question even the proclamation of the Republic? ... I can see in your system nothing but a project to destroy the work of the People, and to rally the enemies that have been overcome by it. If you have such a scrupulous regard for its sovereign will, learn to respect it; fulfill the duties which it has confided to you. It is trifling with the majesty of a sovereign to refer to him business which he has ordered you to attend to. If the People had the time to assemble to judge in trials, and to decide questions of State, they would not have entrusted to you the care of their interests. The only way of showing your fidelity is by making just laws, not by arousing civil war.

Robespierre does not convince me at all. I perceive his despotism too plainly. If the primary assemblies, says he, were summoned to judge questions of State, the Convention would be destroyed. True, clearly. If the People become the legislators, what need for representatives? If the People themselves govern, what need for ministers? If we give them the control, what becomes of our authority? ... Robespierre was one of those who by preaching respect for the Convention, withdrew the people from the habit of taking part in public affairs, and paved the way for the reaction of Thermidor. To make himself head of this reaction, he had only to guillotine his competitors, instead of foolishly allowing himself to be guillotined by them. Then, while awaiting the invincible Emperor, he might have taken his place as one of a Triumvirate or Directory. There would have been no difference in the fate of the Republic; there would have been only one more recantation.

Finally he says, the people have not time! ... Possibly. But that is no reason why I
should trust to Robespierre. I wish to do my own bargaining, I repeat, and, if there must be legislation, to be my own legislator. Let us begin then by discarding this intolerant sovereignty of the Arras lawyer; then, when we have duly buried his theory, we come to that of M. Rittinghausen.

And what is that?

That we should bargain with each other, in proportion to our needs, directly and without intermeddling? Not at all. M. Rittinghausen is not an enemy of power to that extent. He only wishes instead of using universal suffrage for the election of legislators, to use it for the direct enactment of uniform and impersonal laws. So it remains still a contest, a mystification.

I will not repeat, in relation to the application of universal suffrage to legislation, the objections that have always been made to deliberative assemblies; for example, that, as a single vote may make a majority, by a single vote the law may be passed. If this vote goes one way, the legislator says: Yes; if it goes the other way, he says: No. This parliamentary absurdity which is the mainspring of the political machine, carried into the field of universal suffrage, would undoubtedly bring terrible conflicts, along with monstrous scandals. The People, as a legislator, would soon become discredited, and odious to itself. I leave such objections to petty critics, and insist only upon the fundamental error, and the unavoidable deception attending this so-called direct legislation.

What M. Rittinghausen is in search of, although he may not always say so, is the general, collective, synthetic, indivisible Thought; in a word, the Thought of the People, considered, not as a multitude, nor, on the other hand, as a creature of the imagination, but as a superior living being. The theory of Rousseau himself led to this view. What did he intend; what do his disciples intend, by this talk of universal suffrage and of the law of the majority? They intend to approximate, as far as possible, the general, instinctive feeling, regarding the opinion of the greater number as an adequate expression of that feeling. M. Rittinghausen supposes that a vote upon a law by all the people will give a closer approximation than the mere vote of a majority of representatives: all the originality, all the morality of his theory lies in this hypothesis.

But this supposition necessarily implies another, to wit, that there is in the collectivity of the People some special kind of thought, capable of representing at
once collective and individual interests; which can be reached, with more or less exactitude, by some sort of balloting process; consequently that the People is not only a *creature of the mind, a personification of thought*, as Rousseau said, but a true personality, which has its own reality, its own individuality, its own essence, its own life, its own reasoning power. If it were not so; if it were not true that the vote, or universal suffrage, were regarded by their partizans as giving an approximate opinion superior to truth, on what, I ask, would rest the obligation of the minority to submit to the majority? The idea of the *reality* and *personality* of the Collective Being, an idea which Rousseau’s theory negatives from the beginning, in the most express manner, is then at the foundations of this theory; all the more must it be of those whose aim is to cause the People to take part in the making of the law more completely and immediately.

For the present, I shall not dwell on the reality and personality of the Collective Being, an idea which has not occurred, in its fullness, to any philosopher, until the present day; and which would require a book as big as this one to explain. I confine myself to observing that this idea, which only expresses concretely the sovereignty of the human race, identical with the sovereignty of the individual, is the secret, although unadmitted, principle of all systems that consult the People.

Returning to M. Rittinghausen, I say to him: How can you believe that an expression of opinion at once particular and general, collective and individual, in a word, synthetic, can be obtained by balloting, which is the official expression of diversity? A hundred thousand voices singing *in unison* would hardly give you the vague feeling of the Popular Being. But a hundred thousand voices that were consulted individually, each one answering according to his own opinion,—a hundred thousand voices singing separately, in different keys, could only give a frightful uproar; and the greater the number of the voices, the greater the confusion. All you have to do then, in order to approximate the collective opinion, which is the essence of the People, is, after having gathered the *real* opinions of every citizen, to form an abstract of all their opinions, to compare their motives, and then reduce them, by a more or less exact induction, to form the synthesis, which is the general opinion, superior to individual opinions, which alone can be attributed to the people. But how long would be needed for such an operation? Who would undertake to execute it? Who would answer for the fidelity of the work, and
for the certainty of the result? What logician would undertake to draw from this ballot box, which contains only dead ashes, the living and life-giving germ, the Popular Idea?

Evidently, such a problem is inextricable, insoluble. Moreover, M. Rittinghausen, after bringing forward the finest maxims upon the inalienable right of the people to legislate their own laws, ends, like all political operations, by juggling the question. The people are not to propose the questions: the government is to do that. Only to questions proposed by the government, the people may answer Yes or No, like a child in the catechism. The people will not even have a chance to make amendments.

Thus it must be in this system of discordant legislation if anything is to be obtained from the multitude. M. Rittinghausen recognizes this frankly. He admits that if the people, assembled in meeting, had the power of amending questions, or, what is still more important, of proposing them, direct legislation would be only a Utopia. To make this kind of legislation practicable, it is necessary that the sovereign should have to decide on but one alternative, which therefore should embrace in one of its terms, all the truth, nothing but the truth; in the other, all error, nothing but error. If one or the other of the two terms contained more or less than truth, more or less than error, the sovereign, deceived by his minister’s question, would inevitably answer foolishly.

But it is impossible in universal questions, embracing the interests of a whole people, ever to arrive at a rigorous dilemma, which means that, no matter how the question is put to the people, they are almost sure to vote wrongly.

Let me give some examples.

Suppose that the question is: Shall the government be direct or indirect? After the success which the ideas of Messrs. Rittinghausen and Considerant will have obtained in the democracy, it may be presumed, almost with certainty, that the answer, by an immense majority, will be direct. But whether the government be direct or indirect, it remains at the bottom, the same; one is as bad as the other. If the people answer, indirect, they abdicate; if they answer, direct, they strangle themselves. What do you say of this result?

Another question.
Shall there be two powers in the government, or shall there be only one?
In clearer terms, *Shall a President be elected?*

In the present state of mind, no one doubts that the answer, inspired by republicanism that deems itself *advanced*, would be negative. But, as everybody knows who is engaged in governmental organization, in thus concentrating all power in a single assembly, the people would be falling out of the frying pan into the fire. The question nevertheless seemed so simple.

*Shall taxation be proportional or progressive?*

At some other period, the proportional would appear to be the nature thing: today, the preference has changed, and it would be a hundred to one that the people would choose the progressive tax. In either case, the sovereign people would commit an injustice. If the tax is proportional, labor is sacrificed; if progressive, talent. In either case, public interest is injured, and individual interest suffers. Economic science, superior to all ballots, teaches this. Yet the question seemed one of the most elementary.

I might multiply examples to infinity; I prefer to cite two given by M. Rittinghausen, who naturally thought them sufficiently explicit and convincing.

*Shall there be a railroad from Lyons to Avignon?*

The people surely will not say, no; since their greatest desire is to place France on a par with Belgium and England, by shortening distances and by fostering the transportation of men and goods as far as possible. They will then vote, yes, as M. Rittinghausen foresaw. This yes may involve a serious mistake; in any case, local rights are infringed.

There is between Chalons and Avignon a navigable route which offers transportation 70 per cent. below railroad rates. This charge can be further lowered, I happen to know, to 90 per cent. below. Instead of building a railroad, at a cost of 40 million dollars, why not use this water route, costing almost nothing? ... But it is not thus understood at the Legislative Chamber, where there is no commissioner; and as the people of France, with the exception of those who live along the Rhone and the Saone, know no more than their representatives, what goes on upon the two rivers, they will decide, it is easy to foresee, not according to their own opinion, but according to the wishes of their deputies. Eighty-two departments will sentence to ruin the four others. Such is direct legislation.

*Who shall build the railroad, the State or a stock company?*
In 1849, companies were in favor. The people subscribed to their savings; M. Arago, a true republican, voted for them. They did not know then what companies were. The State is the choice nowadays: the people, always well instructed, would undoubtedly give it the preference. Whichever course the sovereign legislator takes, he is the puppet of the ambitious of one kind or another. With a company, low price is sacrificed; commerce is under toll; with the State, labor is no longer free. It is the system of Mehemet-Ali applied to transportation. What difference to the Country, whether the railroads fatten certain contractors, or furnish sinecures for the friends of M. Rittinghausen? What is really needed would be to make of the railroads a new kind of property, to perfect the law of 1810 relating to mines, and make it applicable to railroads, granting the privilege of running them, under fixed conditions, to responsible companies, not of capitalists, but of workmen. But direct legislation will never go so far as to emancipate a man: its formula is general; it enslaves everybody.

How shall the State build the railroad? Shall it raise the money needed by taxation? Shall it borrow from the bankers at 8 or 10 per cent., or shall it issue circulating notes, secured by the railroad itself?

Answer: Let it issue circulating notes.

I ask pardon of M. Rittinghausen; the solution which he gives here in the name of the people, is not worth as much as it would seem. It may very well happen, and indeed is very likely, that the circulating notes will lose 5, 10, 15 and more per cent. discount; so that his method may prove more burdensome for the people than either taxation or loans. Again, what difference does it make to the people, whether they pay usurious interest to the bankers, or profits to government agents, who come in on the ground floor?

Shall the State furnish gratuitous transportation, or shall it derive a revenue from the railroad?

If the people demand gratuitous transportation, they deceive themselves, for all services must be paid for. If the people decide that the State shall derive a revenue, they neglect their own interests, since public service should be without profits. The question is not properly phrased. It should be: Shall the charge for transportation be equal to the cost or not? But as the cost continually varies, and as special investigation and legislation would be necessary in order to follow it,
it is clear that on this point, as on the rest, the people’s answer would be not a law but a blunder.

Is it clear that direct legislation can be nothing but continual trickery? Of a hundred questions proposed to the People by the Government, ninety-nine will be in like case with the foregoing; and the reason is, M. Rittinghausen, as a logician, cannot ignore it, that the questions proposed to the people will usually be *special* questions, while universal suffrage can give only *general* replies. The routine legislator, forced to yield to the dilemma, is unable to modify his formula, according to the requirements of place, time and circumstances; the answer, calculated beforehand from the fancies of the public, will be known in advance, and, whatever it may be, will always be a mistake.

Translator’s note 24. 27th of July, 1794, by which Robespierre himself was overthrown. &amp;#8617;

6. Direct Government or the Constitution of ’93, Reduction to Absurdity of the Governmental Idea.

The position which M. Ledru-Rollin has taken in this controversy is remarkable. If I understand his thought, he wanted, first, to restore the original idea of direct government of the authors of the Constitution of ’93, and in the second place, to show, at the same time, that this Constitution, which was the culmination of democratic process, reaches, if it does not pass, the limits of possibility; finally, to distract attention from the empty curiosities of utopias, and to fix it again upon the authentic line of the Revolution.

It costs me nothing to recognize that in this M. Ledru-Rollin has shown himself more liberal than M. Louis Blanc, who is an inflexible follower of Robespierre’s governmentalism; and more intelligent in political matters than Messrs. Considerant and Rittinghausen, whose theory, entrenched in the impossible, has not even the merit of frank and irreproachable logic.

M. Ledru-Rollin, personifying the Constitution of ’93, seems to be a living problem, which says to the People: You may not stop short of it, but you must not go beyond it. And it must be admitted, this estimate of the Constitution of ’93 is correct.
But I conclude that the Constitution of '93, compiled by the most liberal spirits of the Convention, is a monument raised by our fathers as a witness against political rule; that we should see in it a lesson, not a program, and take it for a point of departure, not as an aim to be reached. M. Ledru-Rollin is a man of progress; he cannot refuse to admit a conclusion which takes the Constitution of '93 as the latest expression of governmental practice; and from this as a starting point, rises into a higher sphere, and completely changes the revolutionary field.

From this point of view I shall try to show unmistakable, by a final proof, the absolute incompatibility of Power with Liberty, summing up, in a single proposition, all my remarks upon the Constitution of '93, and upon the comments on it recently added by M. Ledru-Rollin.

M. Ledru-Rollin has perceived very clearly that with the enormous restriction placed upon the popular prerogative, by reserving to the Government the right of proposing questions which the people may only answer, direct legislation is but a puerile and immoral mystification. Referring again to the Constitution of '93, he said, in accordance with the good sense of ages: The People should pass upon only the most general questions: matters of detail should be left to the ministers and the Assembly.

The distinction, said he has been justly made between Laws and Decrees: the line of demarcation is easy to preserve, whatever may be said to the contrary.

No doubt in practice, and when fundamental points of public right are in question, the people can always decide; and it was thus understood by the authors of the Constitution of '93. But in theory, where precise distinctions are wanted, it is quite otherwise; in such matters the Constitution of '93 seems to consecrate a usurpation. For, as Louis Blanc observes, when your 37,000 townships can vote upon the law, by what right do you take from them the power to determine what is a law. By what right do you impose on them decrees which they would not recognize as such, which might very well allow the old tyranny to continue to exist under another name?

The Pacific Democracy, the organ of M. Considerant, is even more explicit. Enough primordial principles are found formulated in all constitutions, in all the fundamental laws of Europe. They are fixed, as a whole, by the laws, but they are upset, ruined in detail by what you call decrees. To introduce your system is to
have liberty of the press proclaimed by the people, in order to have it destroyed by parliamentary decrees upon the sale of newspapers, upon stamps, upon printers’ licenses, upon all the apparatus of repression that is forged in legislative assemblies. It is to have universal suffrage acclaimed by the People, in order thereupon to have the *vile multitude* excluded by a mandatory decree: it is to have the rights of man published by the People, in order shortly afterwards to have a *state of siege* established by a decision of the Chamber; and that too under a pretext of saving the country and civilization. ... How, too, will you prevent a conflict of jurisdiction between your two legislative powers, a conflict of jurisdiction which the natural antagonism of your representatives (and the instinct of resistance which is natural to the masses) will not fail to arouse every moment? ... These considerations have their merit; nevertheless, with a Constitution like that of ‘93, I do not believe, I repeat, that they are worth much except in theory. Here is something that seems to me to bear upon the facts more directly.

The distinction between *laws* and *decrees*, followed by the Constitution of ‘93 and by M. Ledru-Rollin, is essentially that between the *Legislative* and *Executive Powers*, after the rule laid down by Rousseau.

The law being but the declaration of the general will, it is clear that the People cannot be represented in the legislative power, but they can and should be represented in the executive power, which is only force applied to the law.

Through this principle of Rousseau’s, under the Charters of 1814 and 1830, while the legislative power resided in the King and the two Chambers, the executive power belonged to the King alone, who thus became, by Rousseau’s rule, the single, true representative of the Country.

But before making any distinction between *laws* and *decrees*, and before assigning the former to the People, the latter to the Government, it is necessary, in the opinion of all democratic minds, to put the following preliminary question to the People:

*Shall the separation of powers be a condition of Government?*

That is to say:

*Shall the People be represented in the Executive branch of the*
Government, seeing that it cannot be represented in the Legislative branch?

In other terms:

*Shall there be a President or not?*

I defy anybody in the whole democracy to answer affirmatively. So if you want neither a President, nor a Consul, nor Triumvirs, nor Directors, nor a King, nor, despite the oracle of Rousseau, any Representative for the Executive Power, of what use is your distinction between laws and decrees? the People must vote on everything, laws and decrees both included, as M. Rittinghausen wishes. But this is what we have shown is impossible. *Direct Legislation* is buried. We need not return to it.

M. Ledru-Rollin, or rather the Constitution of ’93, thought to get around the difficulty by saying, with Condorcet, that the Executive Power should be chosen not by the People, who are incapable of choosing, but by the Assembly.

I ask pardon of Condorcet. What! you begin by saying that the People can and must be represented in the Executive branch, but when the question comes of selecting this *Representative* of the People, instead of having him elected directly by the citizens, you want to have him named by their *deputies*? This is taking away from the People the best half of the Government; for the Executive is more than half the Government; it is, indeed, the whole Government. After relieving the People of all legislative duties, you would place upon them the responsibility for every act of Power, pretending that it is but the application of their own laws. You seem to say to the People, the Sovereign, Legislator, and Judge: Talk, decide, legislate, vote, command! We, your deputies, charge ourselves with the interpretation and afterwards with the execution of your orders. But whatever we do, you are responsible. *Quidquid dixeris, argumentabimur.*

If M. Ledru-Rollin made a mistake, it was in calling this *Direct Government*, after the example of M. Considerant.

In the first place, if the People, instead of answering *yes* or *no*, on all affairs of State, as M. Rittinghausen wished, can pronounce upon the laws only, nine-tenths of all questions are removed from their initiative, under the name of *decrees*.

In the second place, the whole *Executive* power is snatched from them: not only may they not make any appointments, they may not even elect their
Representative, who makes appointments for them.

As the climax of this contradiction, the said Representative is elected by the People’s deputies, so that the People who ought not to have any representative, nor delegate any power, whose direct sovereignty, on the contrary, should remain in permanent exercise, the People would find that they have less authority than their deputies, and be forced to recognize, as their Representative in the executive power, one or more individuals, whose title had been decreed by their deputies in the legislative branch! ...

I say no more, but I ask all honest men, whether the Constitution of ’93, which promises everything to the People and gives them nothing, standing at the extreme limit of the rational and the real, does not seem to them a beacon, erected by our fathers at the entrance of a new world, rather than a plan for the future, whereof they confided the execution to their descendants?

I dismiss the more advanced systems, which cannot fail to arise, following those of Messrs. Rittinghausen and Ledru-Rollin; it would be too tedious to begin a like criticism on each of these; I pass to the final hypothesis.

This is one in which the People, returning to absolute power, and taking themselves, as a whole, as their own Despot, in consequence deal with themselves: in which therefore they would, as is proper, hold all privileges, unite in their own person all powers, legislative, executive, judicial, and others, if there are any others; in which they would make all laws, pronounce all decrees, ordinances, resolutions, sentences, judgments, send out all orders, take charge themselves of all their agents and functionaries, from the highest to the lowest of the hierarchy, transmit to them their will, directly and without intermediaries, supervise and secure their execution, laying on each his share of responsibility, themselves award all endowments, civil lists, pensions, rewards; in fact, would enjoy, as king in fact and of right, all the honors and advantages of sovereignty, power, money, pleasure, leisure, etc.

I try as much as I can, to infuse a little logic into this system, which is our last hope, and which, in clearness, simplicity, rigor of principles, severity in their application, and for democratic and liberal radicalism leaves far behind it the timid, entangled, half-way projects of Héraut, Séchelles, Considérant, Rittinghausen, Louis Blanc, Robespierre, and their consorts.
Unfortunately, this system, irreproachable, I venture to say, as a whole and in detail, meets with an insurmountable difficulty in practice.

It is that Government implies as a correlative somebody to be governed; and if the whole People, claiming sovereignty, assumes Government, one seeks in vain where the governed will be. Remember, the aim of government is not to harmonize antagonistic interests, it admits that it is quite incompetent to do this; but to keep order in society, despite the conflict of interests. In other words, the object of government is to supply the defects of the economic order and the lack of industrial harmony. Therefore if the people, in the interest of their liberty and sovereignty, take charge of government, they can no longer busy themselves with production, since by the nature of things production and government are incompatible functions, and to endeavor to unite them would be to spread division everywhere. Once more then, where will the producers be, where the governed, where the subjects, where the criminals, where the condemned?

When we were a monarchy, absolute or modified, the Government being the King, the correlative was the Nation. — We did not like this government; we accused it, not without reason, of corruption and licentiousness.

When we were a constitutional monarchy, the Government being composed of the King and the two Chambers, both of them formed after some fashion by heredity, by the choice of the King, or from a certain class of the nation, the correlative was all that took no part in the operation of the government; these were, in differing degrees, an immense majority of the nation. — We have changed all that, not without reason, the Government having become a cancer on the people.

At present we are a quasi-democratic Republic: all the citizens are permitted, every third or fourth year, to elect, first, the Legislative Power, second, the Executive Power. The duration of this participation in the Government for the popular collectivity is brief; forty-eight hours at the most for each election. For this reason the correlative of the Government remains nearly the same as before, almost the whole Country. The President and the Representatives, once elected, are the masters; all the rest obey. They are subjects, to be governed and to be taxed, without surcease.

When, in this same system, the President and the Representatives were elected every year, and subject to recall at all times, the correlation was felt to be but little
different. Some days more for the mass, some days less for the governing minority: the thing was not worth talking about.

That system is worn out: there is no longer anybody, either in the Government or among the people, that wants it.

In despair of their case, they are offering other schemes, under the names of Direct Legislation, Direct Government, etc.; as, for instance, to have the legislative work done by all the People, 10 million citizens, or at least by a part of them; or to have some of the agents and functionaries of the Executive Power, who are now appointed by the President, selected by these same 10 million men. The tendency of these different systems is to give the Government at least a half plus one of the citizens, the reverse of what Rousseau taught, that it is against the natural order that the smaller number should be governed by the greater.

We have just proved that these schemes, which are distinguished from each other only by more or less inconsistency, encounter insurmountable difficulties in practice; that moreover they are all discredited in advance, marked by tyranny and brute force, since the Law of the People, obtained by means of the ballot, is necessarily the law of chance; and the Power of the People, based upon numbers, is necessarily the power of brute force.

It is impossible then to stop in this descent. We must come to the last hypothesis, that wherein the People enters into Government in the mass, and wields all the branches of Power; in which they are always unanimous, and have above them neither president, nor representatives, nor deputies, nor law-made country, nor majority; in a word, they are, in their collectivity, the sole legislator and the sole functionary.

But if the People, thus organized for Power, have nothing above them, what, I ask, have they below? In other words, where is the correlative of government; where are the laborers, the mechanics, the merchants, the soldiers, where are the workers and the citizens?

Will you answer that the People are everything at once, that they produce and legislate at the same time, that Labor and Government are united in them? It is impossible, because, as, on the one hand, the reason for the existence of government is the divergence of interests, as, on the other, no separation of authority nor of majority is possible, the People alone as a whole having the power
to make laws; consequently the legislative debate would be prolonged with the number of legislators, the affairs of State growing in direct proportion to the multitude of statesmen, there is no longer time nor leisure for citizens to attend to their industrial occupations, all their daytime is not too much to dispose of the business of Government. There is no middle course: either work or rule: it is the law of the People as of the Prince; ask Rousseau.

Thus it was that affairs were conducted at Athens, where, during several centuries, the whole People were in the public place of gathering, discussing questions from morning till night. But the twenty thousand citizens of Athens, who constituted the sovereign power, had four hundred thousand slaves working for them; while the French People have no one to slave for them, and a thousand times as much business to transact as the Athenians had. I repeat my question: When the People have become both legislator and ruler, upon what will they legislate, for what interests, to what end? And while they are governing, who will support them? Sublata causa, tollitur effectus, says the School. When the mass of the People becomes the State, the State no longer has any reason to exist, since there is no longer any People, the governmental equation reduces to zero.

Thus the principle of authority, carried from the family to the nation, tends unavoidably to do away with both Government and the People, through the successive concessions which it is compelled to make against itself, concessions of definite laws, concessions of constitutional charters, concessions of universal suffrage, concessions of direct legislation, etc., etc. And since the elimination of Government and People is impossible, at least for the latter, the movement, after a short period, is interrupted by a conflict; then begins again by a restoration. Such is the course which France has followed since 1789, which will continue for ever, if the public common sense does not end by understanding that a false hypothesis causes the swing back and forth. The publicists who recall to us the tradition of '93 cannot ignore that, for our fathers, direct government was but the step to dictatorship, which itself was the entrance to despotism.

When the Convention, of lamentable memory, had passed, on the 24th of June, 1793, the famous act by which the People were summoned to govern themselves directly, the Jacobins and the Mountain, all-powerful since the fall of the Girondins, understood perfectly what the Utopia of Héraut-Séchelles was worth: they had a
decree passed by their humble servant, the Convention, that direct government should be postponed until peace. Until peace, as you know, meant twenty-five years at the start. The organizers of Direct Government wisely thought that the People, as legislators, laborers, and soldiers, could not fulfill these noble functions while working with one hand and fighting with the other, that first the country must be saved, and afterwards, when the People had nothing to fear, they could enter upon their sovereignty.

This was the reason that was given to the People at the time of the postponement of the Constitution of ’93.

Three months, six months, a year, passed, and neither the Mountain nor the Plain demanded that this unconstitutional provision, which attacked the sovereignty of the People, should be repealed. The Committee of Public Safety was reconciled to the revolutionary Government; as for the People, they seemed to care little for Direct Government.

Finally Danton, who had spoken upon the necessity of putting an end to the dictation of committees, was the first to be delivered to the revolutionary tribunal, accused of moderation and sent to the scaffold. Unlucky man! he was perhaps the first, with Desmoulins, Héraut-Séchelles and Lacroix, who believed in the Constitution of ‘93, or who at least wanted to try the experiment of it: he was guillotined. Direct Government, in the eyes of the experienced, was pure quackery: Robespierre was not willing to permit the discovery of this piece of trickery. A firm disciple of Rousseau himself, he had always expressed himself clearly, strongly, as Louis Blanc recently showed, in favor of indirect government, which is no other than that of 1814, or that of 1830, representative government.

I am not a republican, said Robespierre in ’91, after the treason of Varennes, but I am not a royalist either. He meant to say: I am neither for direct government, nor am I for absolutism: I am for the middle course. In fact, it is doubtful whether there was in this assembly a single republican, except some Girondists, artists, sacrificed after the 31st of May, and some Mountainists, of simple faith, whom the Convention immolated following the days of Prairial. The greater part shared the ideas of Robespierre, with insensible variations, which were the ideas of ’91, and served in the Constitution of the Directory. That was what appeared above all at the 9th of Thermidor.
No historian that I know of has given a satisfactory explanation of this day, which made an apostate from democracy into a martyr of the Revolution. Nevertheless the affair is plain enough.

Robespierre, having relieved himself successively by the guillotine of the factions then deemed *anarchic*, the Enragés, the Hébertists, the Dantonists, of all those whom he suspected of taking the Constitution of ‘93 in earnest, thought that the moment had arrived to strike a last blow, and to reëstablish indirect government upon a normal basis. These were those views of governmental restoration, today condemned by experience, but which in the time of Robespierre were still esteemed by the coalition of powers. What [he] demanded then from the Convention on the 9th of Thermidor, was, after preliminary purification, always by the guillotine, Committees of Public Safety and of General Security, *a greater concentration of power*, a unifying tendency in the Government, something, in fact, resembling the presidency of Louis-Bonaparte. That is proved by the sequel of his speech, which is recognized by his apologists, notably by Messrs. Buchez and Lebas, and was later made a part of history.

Robespierre knew perfectly well that he was responding to the secret desires of the majority of the Convention. He felt that he was in accordance with them upon principles: no doubt he was not unaware that foreign diplomacy began to look upon him as a statesman with whom it might come to an understanding. He could not doubt that the *honest men* of the Convention, to whom he had always truckled, would be delighted to reinstate constitutionalism, the object of all their desires, and at the same time to see themselves relieved of a certain number of democrats, whose sanguinary energy terrified their middle-course tendencies. The stroke was well prepared, the plan skilfully conceived, the occasion could not have been more favorable. What happened immediately after Thermidor, the trials of the revolutionaries, the Constitution of the year V., the policy of the Directory and of Brumaire, were but a continuation of the application of Robespierre’s ideas. The place of the man should have been alongside of the Sieyès, the Cambacérès, and others, who, knowing perfectly what to hold upon direct government, wished to return to indirect as soon as possible, that the reaction which they were about to begin against democracy might carry them even to empire.

Unfortunately for himself, Robespierre had few friends in the Convention: his
project was not clear: in men who saw him near at hand, his genius inspired little confidence; he opposed them to violently; and then there was the danger for him that the constitutional, middle-class majority in the Convention, to whom he addressed himself, and whom he made thereby masters of the situation, might seize the idea that he suggested, and turn it against the author and his rivals at the same time.

That was precisely what happened.

The leaders of the majority, who had been wheedled by Robespierre, thought that they might kill two birds with one stone; as in 1848 the honest and moderate majority found itself in a position to turn out both the National and Reform parties. At the decisive moment they abandoned the dictator, who became the first victim of his own reaction. As Robespierre had struck down Danton; as he intended to strike down Cambon, Billaut, Varennes and others; so the moderates of the Convention, upon whom he had counted, and who in fact did not fail him in his expectations, struck him down in turn; the others came afterwards. Indirect government, delivered from its fiercest enemy, Danton, and from its most surly competitor, Robespierre, might again appear.

Some have said that Robespierre aspired to the dictatorship; others that he wished to reëstablish the monarchy. These accusations refute each other. Robespierre, who did not abandon his convictions any more than he renounced his popularity, aspired to be the chief of the executive power in a constitutional government. He would have accepted a place under the Directory or under the Consulate: he would have been of the opposition to the dynasty after 1830: we should have seen him approving the Provisional Government after February: his hatred for atheists, his instinctive love for priests, would have caused him to vote for the expedition to Rome.

Let those who, with more honesty than prudence, following the footsteps of Danton, revive today the proposition for direct government; who, again like Danton, remind the People of their imperscriptible rights, and cry: No more dictators! No more doctrinaires! let them not forget that the Dictatorship is at the end of their theory, and this Doctrine, of which they are so much afraid, is that of the justly punished traitor of Thermidor. Direct Government is nothing but the long known transition, through which the People, tired of political schemes, bring themselves to
rest in absolute government, where the ambitions of the reactionaries await them. Has not the thought of a dictatorship already, as I write these lines, been cast among the people, and accepted by the impatient and the timid? The very same men whom we see combatting both direct government and chaos at the same time, sometimes invoking the reputation of Robespierre, sometimes hating his name, have we not seen them all, the day after the revolution of February, putting a stop to the assertion of liberty, giving a different outlet to the aspirations of the People, voting for the recall of candidates, and always, everywhere, paying in talk and slander, where the People demanded acts and ideas.

I have more than one friend among men who follow, or think that they follow, even now, the Jacobin tradition: it is for them chiefly that I write these lines. May the resemblance of our times to those at last discover to them, what until now it has been difficult for them to suspect, the true signification of the 9th of Thermidor, and the real intention of Robespierre.

Just as in '93, they who boasted most loudly of the title of revolutionaries desired that questions of property and social economy should not be agitated, sending to the scaffold the Anarchists who demanded for the people guaranties of work and living wages; so to-day, in the midst of a revolution, the successors, open or secret, of Jacobinism, take their stand solely on questions of politics, and avoid expressing themselves on economic reforms; or, if they touch upon them, it is only to murmur some innocent percepts of fraternity, coming down to us from the love-feasts of Jerusalem. all the popularity hunters, mountebanks of the Revolution, have taken for their oracle Robespierre, the eternal denouncer, with an empty head and a viper’s tongue, who, when summoned to formulate his plans, to describe his ways and means, did nothing but beat a retreat before difficulties, while accusing his opponents of making the difficulties. This cowardly rhetorician, who in '90, for fear of embroiling himself with the Court, disavowed a pleasantry that fell from his leaps and was reported by Desmoulins; who, in '91, opposed the declaration of abdication by Louis XVI, and found falt with the petition of the Champ de Mars; who, in '92, opposed the declaration of war, because it would give too much reputation to the Girondists; who, in '93, antagonized the rising in mass; who, in '94, always and everywhere, advised the people to take no part in it; who always thwarted, without understanding them, the plans of Cambon, of Carnot, of all those whom he
disdainfully called expedition-people; this indefatigable calumniator of all the notable men whom he envied and plagiarized, fifty years later serves as patron saint to all the dazed revolutionaries, helping their cause as much as a lame led-horse helps draw the carriage. Tell us, for once, all you disciples of the great Robespierre, what you mean by the Revolution? What are your ways and means? Alas! one is never betrayed but by his friends. In 1848, and in 1793, the Revolution had for leaders men who represented it. Our republicanism, like the old Jacobinism, is now only a bourgeois fancy, without principle and without plan, which wants and doesn’t want, which always scolds, suspects, and none the less is duped; which sees everywhere, outside its set, nothing but factions and Anarchists; which, searching the police records, can find only the real or fancied weaknesses of patriots; which forbids the worship of Chatel, and has masses sung by the archbishop of Paris; which, on all questions, avoids the proper answer, for fear of compromising itself, reserves decision on everything, settles nothing, distrusts plain reasons and clear positions. Once again, is not all this Robespierre, the talker without initiative; who found in Danton too much virility; blamed his generous boldness, because he had none himself; held back from the 10th of August; neither approved nor disapproved of the massacres of September; voted for the Constitution of ‘93 and its postponement until peace; condemned the Feast of Reason, and established that of the Supreme Being; prosecuted Carrier and supported Fouquier-Tinville; gave the idea of peace to Camille Desmoulins in the morning, and had him arrested that night; proposed the abolition of the death penalty, and drew up the law of Prairial; outbid, in turn, Sieyès, Mirabeau, Barnave, Pétion, Danton, Marat, Hébert, and then had guillotined and proscribed, one after the other, Hébert, Danton, Pétion, Barnave, the first as an Anarchist, the second as too lenient, the third as a federalist, the fourth as a constitutionalist; held in esteem only the governmental bourgeois and the refractory clergy; cast discredit upon the Revolution, sometimes about the ecclesiastical oath, sometimes on the occasion of the assignats; spared only those to whom silence or death offered a refuge, and at last succumbed, on the day when, remaining almost alone among the middle-course men, he endeavored, by connivance with them, and for his own profit, to bind in chains the Revolution. Ah! I know this reptile too well; I have felt too often the waving his tail that I should spare in him the secret vise of democrats,
the ferment that corrupts every republic, Envy. It was Robespierre who, in ’94, opening the door to those who were called after the Thermidorians, lost the Revolution; it was upon the example and through the authority of Robespierre that Socialism was proscribed in 1797 and 1848; it is Robespierre who today would bring back a new Brumaire, if his hypocritical and detestable influence had not been finally annihilated.

A revolution is always split by parties and sects, which work to pervert it, while its natural enemies fight it. Christianity had from the beginning, its heresies, and later its great schism. The Reformation had its divisions and sects; the French Revolution, to mention the most famous names, its Constitutionalists, Jacobins and Girondists.

The Revolution of the nineteenth century has also its Utopians, its Schools, its parties, all more or less retrograde reflections of reactionary types. You find among revolutionaries, as well as in the ranks of reaction, *friends of order*, who declare themselves ready to march against anarchy, when the stillness of despair reigns among the persecuted radicals; you find *saviors of society*, for whom society means all that the Revolution opposes; you find *middle-course men*, whose policy is to take the part of the Revolution as one takes the part of a conflagration; you find *radicals*, for whom revolutionary phrases take the place of ideas; you find *terrorists*, who, as they cannot be Mirabeaus or Dantons, are willing to accept the immortality of Carriers or Jourdan Headchoppers. To some the Constitution of 1848; to others, direct government; to these the Dictatorship; to those the Revolutionary Tribunal or the Council of War, serve as banner and bass drum. Moreover all these have taken their stand upon the governmental idea. Power is the only idea they can conceive, when Power is breaking down everywhere; the last trace that warns them of their fate, and exhibits them to us as the precursors and victims of the last exterminator, Robespierre.

On the 10th of August, 1792, Royalty fell beneath the bullets of the suburbs; while Robespierre and his Jacobins were still at the Constitution of ’91, soaked with the blood of the soldiers of Nancy, and of the patriots of the Champs de Mars.

They kept firing from the heights of their parliamentary citadel, and distrusted those who talked of destroying both Royalty and Constitution. They never pardoned bold revolutionaries like Danton, who had dragged them, like skulking dogs, to hunt
down constitutional monarchy, of which they hoped to become in their turn the rulers and masters. *The Constitution*, said Robespierre, *suffices for the Revolution*.

The hatred of this party, which has drunk the blood of the best citizens, pursues us still. I can reconcile myself to men, because, like them, I may make a mistake; but to parties, never! Let them continue to hate us, for alas! it [is] not so soon that the Revolution can be released from the bridle. We will gladly sacrifice our initiative to those who are less advanced, provided that by their hands the Revolution is accomplished. We say to Robespierre, as Themistocles said to Eurybiades: *Strike, hanger-on of Government; strike, sycophant of the Revolution; strike, degenerate follower of Loyola, hypocritical worshiper of the Supreme Being; strike, but hear me.*

Translator’s note 25. Whatever you say, we will bring proof. &#8617;

Translator’s note 26. The cause removed, the effect ceases. &#8617;

From: fair-use.org.

**Chronology:**

- **November 30, 1850**: Study 4 -- Publication.