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César de Paepe

Anarchy

1898

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An excerpt from the speech published as “Discours du citoyen

César de Paepe prononcé à Patignies (Namur) en 1863” in 1898. Shawn P. Wilbur’s translation includes some remarks on the transition to anarchy not included in the 19th century translation.

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Anarchy

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The ideal of democracy can only be anarchy; not anarchy in the sense of disorder, or confusion, but anarchy as indicated by the etymology of the word (de a, privative, and archi, commander, authority, power, government.) An-archy, then, is the absence of all government, of every power. Yes, anarchy, that is where the aspirations of man, toward an always increasing liberty and an increasingly rigorous equality, must ultimately lead us. Yes, anarchy, where we must end up one day, carried by the power of the democratic principle, by logic, by the fatality of history.

Humanity, starting from absolute monarchy, the primitive and most expressive form of government, advances, passing through constitutional monarchy, through presidential power, through the government of the assembly, through direct legislation, towards anarchy, the final and most elevated form of liberty. Such are the destinies of humanity, and such are the revolutionary tendencies that are inherent in man.

What indeed is a revolution, if it is not the constant lessening of authority for the benefit of liberty, the progressive destruction of power for the benefit of the emancipation of individuals? And what is constitutionalism, the presidency, par-

liamentarianism, universal suffrage, if not the stages of the revolution, that eternal traveler? And what, finally, is direct legislation, if it is not a bridge pitched between governmentalism and anarchy, between the old governmental society and the new industrial and economic world?

It is an incontestable historical fact that liberty increases to the degree that governmental power is decreased, and vice-versa, power increase in inverse proportion to liberty. So in order to bring liberty to its highest degree (and this is the tendency of democracy), we must reduce government to zero.

But it is nevertheless true that humanity in its present phase, given the moral and economic disorder that reigns everywhere, still needs to be governed; the government and laws are still for it elements of order and security. Anarchy could only be established after a social reorganization that would eliminate poverty and emancipate the proletariat through free credit, the formation of workers' associations and the transformation of property, in short, by reestablishing balance between the economic forces. Then, but only then, the government could be dissolved into the industrial organism; for, as Henri Saint-Simon said, the one whom Béranger calls the prophet: "the human race has been destined to pass from the governmental or military regime to the administrative or industrial regime, after having made sufficient progress in the sciences and industry."

And since this is the case, since humanity cannot yet se passer encore de government, what is the government that it must choose and that it must accept in the last analysis? The one that is least contrary to the democratic principle, to direct legislation, but taking care to give the minority the greatest possible guarantees and to put above the right of the majority, as absolutely inviolable, the following rights, in their fullness, without the least restriction:

Right of each to propose and amend the law without the intervention of representatives.

Freedom of conscience.
Freedom of education.
Freedom of the press.
Freedom of association.
Right of assembly.

With the use of these liberties, the minority can work to become the majority in its turn; and if it has truth of its side, it will succeed sooner or later. These guarantees, without destroying the vices of the system, still reduce them a tiny bit.

As for administrative tasks, they will be done in each commune by some employees under the immediate jurisdiction of the people, revocable at any time, who will be vested with no authority, but will be quite simply the servants of the commune. It is useless to add that it will be in the interest of each commune to simplify, as much as possible, the work of administration.

In summary:

No more absolute monarchy.

No more constitutional monarchy.

No more inheritance.

No more presidency.

No more representation or alienation of powers.

No more political or administrative centralization.

We want:

Direct legislation of the people by the people.

Guarantees for the minority.

Political and administrative decentralization.

Communal independence.

The federation of communes.

But the eventual aim pursued by the revolution is the annihilation of every power, it is — after a transformation of society — the elimination of politics through social economy, of governmental organization through industrial organization, it is anarchy.

Anarchy, dream of the lovers of complete liberty, idol of the true revolutionaries! Long have men slandered and shamefully insulted you; in their blindness, they have confused you with disorder and chaos, while, on the contrary, government, your sworn enemy, is only a result of social disorder, of economic chaos, as you would be the result of order, harmony, balance and justice. But already the prophets have glimpsed you under the veil that covers the future and have proclaimed you the ideal of democracy, the hope of liberty, the ultimate aim of the revolution, the sovereign of future times, the promised land of regenerated humanity!.. It is for you that the Hebertists succumbed in 1793, they did not dream that your time had not come! And in this century, how many thinkers have had a premonition of your coming and have descended into the grave saluting you as the dying patriarchs saluted the redeemer! Let your reign arrive, Anarchy!