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Panarchy

Paul-Emile de Puydt

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July 1860

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Note by John Zube: This is the April 1998 version of the English translation (with corrections based on the original French text: November 2001 – March 2004 and April 2005, GPdB – May 2006, MB)

At first my wife and I produced a rough translation. Then Adrian Falk and, perhaps, his sister, put it into a better shape.

It was then first reproduced in *Peace Plans* 4, with some comments by me and a draft of individual rights. Later, it was reproduced in *Rampart Journal of Individualist Thought*, Fall 1966 and in *Peace Plans* 16–18 & 61–63 and, in German, in *Peace Plans* 399–401.

Any criticism and supplementary ideas and arguments are welcomed.

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a particular thing is lacking, there is idle capital and discontented shareholders are looking elsewhere for investments ... then one launches one's program, quickly recruits members, and when one thinks one is strong enough, instead of descending into the streets, as in the language of the riot, one goes to the Bureau for Political Membership. One hands in one's declaration supported by a list of basic statutes and a register for members to enter their names — then one has a new government. The rest are internal problems, management affairs about which only the members need worry.

I propose a minimum fee for registrations and transfers of allegiance, raised for the benefit of the Bureau for Political Membership. A certain amount for setting up a government; a very small sum for moving, as an individual, from one to another. The employees would receive no other remuneration, but I imagine that they would be well paid as I expect these offices to do plenty of business.

Are you not surprised by the simplicity of this apparatus, this powerful machinery which even a child could handle, which nevertheless would satisfy all needs? Search, scrutinise, test, and analyse it. I defy you to find fault with it in any particular.

Furthermore, I am convinced that no one will bother with it: such is human nature. It is this conviction, in fact, which induced me to publish my idea.

Indeed, if I do not find followers, this is nothing but an intellectual exercise; and no existing power, no majority, no organisation, in short, nobody, however mighty, has any right to bad feelings towards me.

And if, just by chance, you had converted me?

Shhh ... You might compromise me!

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beautiful ones. Expenses will decrease faster than any decrease in incomes; no more loans and no more financial difficulties. What has so far been seen only in the New World will become reality: economic systems which at last could make happy human beings. What dynasty would not like to inscribe its name for the eternal future in such a way? What majority would not agree to let the minority emigrate en masse?

At last you see how a system, based on the great economic principle of “laissez faire”, can deal with all the difficulties. Truth is not only a half-truth but the whole truth, neither more nor less.

Today we have ruling dynasties as well as fallen ones; princes wearing a crown and others who certainly would not mind a chance of wearing one. Each has his party, and each party is primarily interested in putting spokes in the wheels of the coach of the State, until they have tipped it up, thus gaining the chance of climbing into it themselves, risking the same fate in turn. It is the charming game of seesaw, which people pay the price for and yet never seem to tire of, as Paul-Louis Courier used to say.

In our system there will be no more expensive balancing acts or catastrophic downfalls; no more conspiracies or usurpations. Everybody is legitimate and nobody. One remains legitimate without objection as long as one is accepted, and for one's supporters alone. Apart from this, there will be neither divine nor secular rights, no right except that to change, to perfect one's program and to make fresh appeals to one's followers.

No exiles, banishments, confiscations, persecutions of any kind! A government, unable to meet the demands of its creditors, may leave its palace with head held high, if it has been honest, its book-keeping is in order, and its statutes, constitutional or otherwise, have been faithfully upheld. The rulers may retire to the country and write their self-justifying memoirs. Under different circumstances, when ideas have changed, a deficiency is felt in the collective arrangements,

I do not deny the validity of this objection. Notice though that, due to the law of competition, each government would necessarily endeavour to become as simple and economical as possible. The government departments, which cost us, God knows! our very eyes, would reduce themselves to bare necessities; and superfluous office-holders would have to give up their positions and take on productive work. This way the question would be only half answered, and I dislike incomplete solutions. Too many governments would constitute an evil and give rise to excessive expense, if not confusion. However, once one notices this evil, the remedy is at hand. The common sense of the people would not stand for any excesses, and soon only workable governments would be able to carry on. The others would starve to death. You see, freedom is the answer to everything.

Perhaps! And what about the existing dynasties, the prevailing majorities, the established institutions and accredited theories? Do you believe that they would retreat and quietly line up under the banner of laissez-faire, laissez-passer? It's all very well to say that you are not putting forward concrete proposals, but you cannot avoid debate just like that.

Tell me first of all if you really think they would be so confident of themselves to be able always to afford to refuse large concessions? I myself would not overthrow anybody. All governments exist through some kind of innate power which they more or less skilfully use to survive. From now on they have an assured place in my system. I do not deny that at first they may lose a considerable number of their less willing followers; but without considering the chances of it coming about, what wonderful compensations result from the security and stability of power! Less subjects, in other words, less taxpayers; but in compensation they will have complete submission — voluntary, moreover, for the whole term of the contract. No more compulsion, fewer security officers, hardly any police, some soldiers, but only for the sake of parades, therefore only the

I. Preface

A contemporary has said: "If the truth were in my hands, I should be careful not to open them."

This is perhaps the saying of a savant, certainly that of an ego-tist.

Another has written: "The truths which one least likes to hear are those which most need to be pointed out."

Here then are two thinkers whose views differ widely. I would rather agree with the second, although in practice his outlook presents difficulties. Wise men of all nations teach me that "not all truths should be disclosed." But, how to know which ones to conceal? In any case, the Gospel says: "Hide not your light under a bushel." "

Thus I am now confronted with a dilemma: I have a new idea, at least so I believe, and I feel it my duty to expound it. Although on the point of opening my hands, I hesitate; for what innovator has not been persecuted a little? The theory itself, once published, will make its way on its own merits, for I consider it autonomous. My concern is rather for the author. Will he be forgiven for having had a new idea?

There was once a man who saved Athens and Greece, who, in an argument following a discussion, said to some brutish person who was lifting a stick against him: "Strike — but listen!"

Antiquity abounds with such good examples. Thus, following Themistocles, I put forward my idea, saying to the public: "Read it to the end. You may stone me afterwards if you please."

However, I don't expect to be stoned. The brutish person I spoke of died in Sparta 24 centuries ago, and we can all see how far humanity has come in 2,400 years. In our times ideas may be freely expressed; and if occasionally an innovator is attacked, it is not as an innovator, like in former times, but as a supposed agitator or utopian. Reassured by these thoughts I proceed resolutely to the point.

II

“Sirs, I am a friend of all the world.”

(*Sosie, a double, in Molière’s writings*)

I have a high esteem for political economy and would that the world shared my opinion. This science, of recent origin, yet already the most significant of all, is far from reaching fulfilment. Sooner or later (I hope it is sooner) it will govern all things. I am justified in this opinion, for it is from the works of the economists that I have derived the principle whereof I propose a new application still farther reaching and no less logical than all others.

Let us first quote a few aphorisms whose train of thought will prepare the reader for what follows.

“Freedom and property are directly connected — one favours the distribution of wealth, the other makes production possible.”

“The value of wealth depends on the use to which it is put.”

“The price of services varies directly with demand and inversely with supply.”

“Division of labour multiplies wealth.”

“Freedom brings about competition, which in turn generates progress.”

(Charles de Brouckere, *Principes généraux d’économie politique*)

Thus there is a need for free competition, first of all between individuals, then internationally — freedom to invent, work, exchange, sell, and buy, freedom to price one’s products — and simply no intervention by the State outside its special sphere. In other words: *Laissez-faire, laissez-passer.*

agreement. My idea is merely a seed in the wind. Will it fall on fertile ground or on the cobbled road? I can have no say in this. I propose nothing.

Everything is just a matter of time. Who, a century ago, believed in freedom of conscience, and who, these days, would dare question it? Is it so very long since people scoffed at the idea of the Press being a power within the State? Yet now statesmen too bow before it. Did you foresee this new force of public opinion, whose birth we have all witnessed, which, although still in its infancy, imposes its verdict on empires? It is of utmost importance even in the decisions of despots. Would you not have laughed in the face of anyone daring to predict its rise?

Since you are not advancing proposals, we can talk. Tell me, for instance, how anyone is to recognise his own members among this confusion of authorities? And if one may at any time register under this government and withdraw from that, on whom or what could one rely to settle the State budget and to finance the civil list?

In the first case, I do not suggest one should be free to change one’s government capriciously, causing it to go bankrupt. For this sort of contract one must prescribe a minimum term; say one year. Judging from the examples of France and elsewhere, I think it might very well be possible to tolerate for a whole year the government to which one has subscribed. Regularly approved and balanced State budgets need oblige everyone only to the extent found necessary as a result of free competition. In any disputes, regular courts would make decisions. Regarding a government’s identification of its subjects, constituents, or taxpayers, would this really present more difficulties than for each church to keep a record of its congregation, or each company its shareholders?

But you would have ten or twenty governments instead of one; thus, as many budgets and civil lists; and general expenses would multiply with the number of government departments.

Some would be content, some indifferent, some would find faults, some would be openly dissatisfied, some would even conspire against it. Whatever happens, you can count on human nature to ensure that the number satisfied would be smaller than the number of dissenters. However perfect a government might be — be it absolutely perfect — there will always be opponents: the people whose natures are imperfect, to whom all perfection is incomprehensible, even disagreeable. In my system the most extreme dissatisfaction would merely be similar to the marital dispute, with divorce as its final solution.

However, under the reign of competition, which government would allow itself to be overtaken by the others in the race for progress? What improvements available to one's happy neighbour would one refuse to introduce in one's own house? Such constant competition would work wonders. In fact, subjects would become models of perfection too. Since they would be free to come and go, to speak or be silent, to act or to leave things alone, they would have only themselves to blame if they were not completely happy. From now on, instead of fomenting dissent in order to gain attention, they will satisfy their vanity by assuring themselves and persuading others that their own government is the most perfect imaginable. Thus, between rulers and ruled a friendly understanding will grow up, a mutual trust and simplicity of relationships easily conceivable.

What! Despite being wide awake you seriously dream of complete harmony between parties and political movements? You expect them to live side by side in the same territory without tensions? Without the stronger seeking to subdue and annex the weaker? You imagine that this great Tower of Babel will produce a universal language?

I believe in a universal language, just as I believe in the supreme power of freedom to bring about world peace. I can predict neither the hour nor the day of this universal

There, in a few lines, is the basis of political economy, a summary of the science without which there can be nothing but faulty administration and deplorable government. One can go further still, and in most cases reduce this great science to one final formula: *Laissez-faire, laissez-passer*.

Taking hold of this idea, I go on to say: In science there are no half truths. There are no truths which are true on the one side and cease to be true under another aspect. The system of the universe exhibits a wonderful simplicity, as wonderful as its infallible logic. A law is true in general; only the circumstances are different. All beings, from the most noble to the lowest, from the human being to the living plant, down to the mineral, show intimate similarities in structure, development and composition; and striking analogies link the moral and material worlds. Life is a unity, matter is a unity; only the physical manifestations vary. The combinations are innumerable, the singularities infinite; yet the general plan embraces all things.

The feebleness of our understanding and our fundamentally deceptive education are alone responsible for the confusion of systems and inconsistency of ideas. Of two conflicting opinions there is one true and one false, unless both are false; they cannot both be true. A scientifically demonstrated truth cannot be true here and false elsewhere; true, for example, for political economy and false for politics. This is what I want to prove.

Is the great law of political economy, the law of free competition, *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*, applicable only to regulate industrial and commercial affairs or, more scientifically, only to the production and exchange of wealth?

Think of the economic confusion which this law has dispelled: the permanently troubled condition, the antagonism of conflicting interests, which it has resolved. Are not these conditions equally present in the domain of politics? Does not the

analogy indicate a similar remedy for both cases? *Laissez-faire, laissez-passer.*

We should realise though that there do exist, here and there, governments as liberal as human weakness actually permits, and yet everything is far from well in the best of all possible republics. Some say: "This is precisely because there is too much freedom"; the others: "This is because there is still not enough freedom."

The truth is that there is not the right kind of freedom, the fundamental freedom to choose to be free or not to be free, according to one's preference. Every human being becomes a self-appointed judge, and settles this question according to his particular tastes or needs. Since there abound as many opinions as individuals, *tot homines, tot sensus*, one can see what confusion is graced by the fine name of politics. The freedom of some denies the rights of others, and vice versa. Even the wisest and best of governments never functions with the full and free consent of all its subjects. There are parties, either victorious or defeated; there are majorities and minorities in perpetual struggle; and the more confused their notions are, the more passionately they hold to their ideals. Some oppress in the name of right, the others revolt in the name of liberty, to become oppressors themselves, if their turn should come.

I see! — the reader might say.

You are one of those utopians who would construct out of many pieces a system wherein society would be enclosed, by force or consent. Nothing will do the way it is, and your panacea alone will save mankind. Your Magic Solution!

You are wrong! I have no magic solution other than everybody's solutions. I do not differ from all the others except on one point, namely, that I am open to any persuasion whatsoever. In other words, I allow any of the forms of government — at least all those that have some adherents.

I do not follow you at all.

Not so fast please, dear reader.

You freely admit that all would then be in harmony, and you call this going back to where we began? Your objection gives support to my fundamental principle, in so far as it expects this universal agreement to be established by the simple expedient of "laissez-faire, laissez-passer."

I could seize this opportunity to declare you convinced, converted to my system, but I am not interested in half-convictions and I am not looking for converts.

No, we would not revert to having a single form of government, unless perhaps in the far distant future when governmental activities will be reduced by common consent to the simplest form. We are not there yet, not anywhere near it.

It is obvious that men are neither of the same opinion or moral attitude, nor as easily reconciled as you suppose. The rule of free competition is therefore the only possible one. One man needs excitement and struggle — quietness would be deadly to him. Another, a dreamer and philosopher, is aware of the movements of society from a distance — his thoughts are formed only in the most profound peace. One, poor, thoughtful, an unknown artist, needs encouragement and support to create his immortal work, a laboratory for his experiments, a block of marble to sculpt angels. Another, a forceful and impulsive genius, endures no fetters and breaks the arm that would guide him. For one a republic is satisfactory, with its dedication and self-denial; for another an absolute monarchy, with its pomp and splendour. One, an orator, would like a parliament; another, incapable of speaking ten connected words, would have nothing to do with such babblers. There are strong spirits and weak minds, some with insatiable ambitions, and some who are humble — happy with the small share which befalls them.

Finally, there are as many needs as different personalities. How could all these be reconciled by a single form of government? Clearly, people would accept it only in varying degrees.

Then imagine that all compulsion ceases; that every adult citizen is, and remains, free to select from among the possible offered governments the one which conforms to his will and satisfies his personal needs; free not only on the day following some bloody revolution, but always, everywhere, free to select, but not to force his choice on others. At that point all disorder comes to an end, all fruitless struggle becomes impossible.

This is only one side of the matter; there remains another: from the moment when forms of government are subject to experimentation and free competition, they are bound to progress and perfect themselves; that is the law of nature. No more hypocrisy, no more apparent profundities which contain merely a void. No more machinations passing for diplomatic subtlety. No more cowardly moves or impropriety camouflaged as State policy. No more court or military intrigues deceitfully described as being honourable or in the national interest. In short, no more lies regarding the nature and the quality of the government's actions. Everything is open to scrutiny. The subjects make and compare observations, and the rulers finally see this economic and political truth, that in this world there is only one condition for a solid, lasting success, and that is, to govern better and more efficiently than others. From that moment on a universal agreement arises, and forces formerly wasted on useless labour, on friction and resistance, will unite to bring about an unprecedented, marvellous and powerful impulse towards the progress and happiness of mankind.

Amen!

Allow me, however, one small objection: When all possible types of government have been tried everywhere publicly and under free competition, what will be the result? One form is sure to be recognised as the best, and thus finally everyone will choose it. This would lead us back to having one government for all, which is just where we began.

Then, allow me to go on.

“There is a general tendency to push theories too far; but does it follow that all the elements of such a theory must be wrong? It has been said that there is perversity or foolishness in the exercise of human intelligence; but to declare one does not like speculative ideas and detests theories, would that not mean a renunciation of our reasoning powers?”

These considerations are not my own; they were held by one of the greatest thinkers of our time, Jeremy Bentham. Royer-Collard expressed the same thought with great succinctness: “To hold that theory is good for nothing and that experience is the sole authority, means the impertinence of acting without knowing what one does and of speaking unaware of what one is talking about.”

Although nothing is perfect in human endeavours, at least things move towards a never attainable perfection: that is the law of progress. The laws of nature alone are immutable; all legislation must be based on them, for they alone have the strength to support the structure of society; but the structure itself is the work of mankind.

Each generation is like a new tenant who, before moving in, changes things around, cleans up the facade, and adds or pulls down an annex, according to his own needs. From time to time some generation, more vigorous or shortsighted than its predecessors, pulls down the whole building, sleeping out in the open until it is rebuilt. When, after a thousand privations and with enormous efforts, they have managed to rebuild it to a new plan, they are crestfallen to find it is not much more comfortable than the old one. It is true that those who drew up the plans are set up in good apartments, well situated, warm in winter and cool in summer; but the others, who had no choice, are relegated to the garrets, the basements or the lofts.

So there are always enough dissenters and troublemakers, of whom some miss the old building, whilst some of the more enterprising already dream of another demolition. For the few

who are satisfied there is an innumerable mass of disgruntled ones.

We must remember however that some are satisfied. The new edifice is indeed not faultless, but it has advantages; why pull it down tomorrow, later, indeed ever, as long as it shelters enough tenants to keep it going?

I myself detest the wreckers as much as the tyrants. If you feel your apartment is inadequate or too small or unhealthy, then change it — that is all I ask. Choose another place, move out quietly; but for heaven's sake don't blow up the whole house as you go. What you found unsuitable might delight your neighbour. Do you understand my metaphor?

Almost, but what are you aiming for? No more revolutions — that would be fine! I feel that nine times out of ten their costs outweigh their achievements. We then keep the old building, but where do you accommodate those who move out?

Wherever they like, this is none of my business. I believe that in this respect everyone will be totally free to take his decisions. This is the basis of my system: Laissez-faire, laissez-passer.

I think I understand: those who are not content with their government must look elsewhere for another. Actually, there has been a choice, starting from the Moroccan empire, without mentioning all the other empires, right up to the republic of San Marino; from the City of London to the American Pampas. Is that all your theory amounts to? It is nothing new, I must tell you.

It is not a matter of emigration. A man does not carry his native land on the soles of his shoes. Moreover, such colossal expatriation is and always will be impracticable. The expense involved could not be met by all the wealth in the world. I have no intention of resettling the population according to its convictions, relegating Catholics to the Flemish Provinces, for example, or marking the liberalist frontier from Mons to Liège. I hope we can all go on living together wherever we are, or elsewhere, if one likes, but without discord, like brothers, each

of their own bloodthirsty passions.

“Kill them all! God will recognize His own!”

What has become of such implacable hatreds? The progress of the human spirit has swept them all away, like the wind the dead leaves of autumn. The religions, in whose names were set up stakes and instruments of torture, survive and live together peacefully, under the same laws, eating from the same budget; and if each sect preaches only its own excellence, it is quite rare that it persists in condemning its rivals.

Then, what has become possible in this obscure, unfathomable region of the conscience, with the proselytism of some, the intolerance of others, the fanaticism and ignorance of the masses; what is possible to the extent that it is practised in half the world without resulting in unrest or violence; on the contrary, particularly where there are divergent creeds, numerous sects exist on a footing of complete legal equality; and people are, in fact, more circumspect and careful of their moral purity and dignity than anywhere else; could not this, which has become possible under such difficult conditions, be all the more possible in the purely secular domain of politics, where the whole science can be expressed in four words?

Under the present conditions a government exists only by the exclusion of all the others, and one party can rule only after smashing its opponents; a majority is always harassed by a minority which is impatient to govern. Under such conditions it is quite inevitable that the parties hate each other and live, if not at war, at least in a state of armed peace. Who is surprised to see that minorities intrigue and agitate, and that governments put down by force any aspiration to a different political form which would be similarly exclusive? So society ends up composed of ambitious resentful men, waiting for vengeance, and ambitious power-sated men, sitting complacently on the edge of a precipice. Erroneous principles never bring about just consequences, and coercion never leads to right or truth.

ment with its hands full of well-paid positions, impressive titles, striking decorations, with customs at the frontiers to protect industry against the consumers, with legions of public servants to maintain the fine arts, theatres and actresses. I know also that those are empty slogans propagated by governments playing at providence, such as we have mentioned before. Until experimental freedom has done justice to them, I see no harm in letting them continue to the satisfaction of their adherents. I ask one thing only: Freedom of choice.

In a nutshell: Freedom of choice, competition. “Laissez faire, laissez passer!” This marvellous motto, inscribed on the banner of economic science, will one day be the principle of the political world too. The expression “political economy” gives some foretaste of it and, interestingly, some people have already tried to change this name, for instance, into “social economy”. The intuitive good sense of the people has disallowed this concession. The science of economics is and always will be the political science par excellence. Was it not the former which created the modern principle of non-intervention and its slogan “laissez faire, laissez passer”?

So, free competition in the business of government as in all other cases.

Imagine, after your initial surprise, the picture of a country exposed to governmental competition — that is to say, simultaneously possessing as many regularly competing governments as have ever been conceived and will ever be invented.

Yes indeed, that will be a fine mess! Do you suppose we could extricate ourselves from such a confusion?

Very much so, and nothing is simpler to grasp if only one applies oneself to it a little. Do you remember the times when people shouted religious opinions more loudly than anyone ever shouted political arguments? When the divine creator became the Lord of Hosts, the avenging and pitiless God in whose name blood flowed in rivers? Men have always tried to take the divine cause into their own hands — to make Him an accomplice

freely holding his opinions and submitting only to a power personally chosen and accepted.

I am now totally lost.

I am not at all surprised. My plan, my utopia, is apparently not the old story you first thought it to be; yet nothing in the world could be simpler or more natural. However, it is common knowledge that in government, as in mechanics, the simplest ideas always come last.

We are coming to the point: Nothing lasts if it is not based on liberty. Nothing that already exists can maintain itself or operate with full efficiency without the free interplay of all its active parts. Otherwise energy is wasted, parts wear out rapidly, and there are, in fact, breakdowns and serious accidents. Thus I demand, for each and every member of human society, freedom of association according to inclination and of activity according to aptitude. In other words, the absolute right to choose the political surroundings in which to live, and to ask for nothing else. For instance, you are a republican ...

Me? May heaven help me!

Just suppose you were. Monarchy does not suit you — the air is too stifling for your lungs and your body does not have the free play and action your constitution demands. According to your present frame of mind, you are inclined to tear down this edifice, you and your friends, and to build your own in its place. But to do that you would come up against all the monarchists who cling to their beliefs, and in general all those who do not share your convictions. Do better: assemble, declare your program, draw up your budget, open membership lists, take stock of yourself; and if numerous enough to bear the costs, establish your republic.

Whereabouts? In the Pampas?

No, certainly not; here, where you are, without moving. I agree that it is necessary, up to the present, to have the monarchists' consent. For the sake of my argument, I suppose this matter of principle to be settled. Otherwise I am well aware

of the difficulty of changing the state of affairs to the way it should be and must become. I simply express my idea, not wishing to impose it on anyone; but I see nothing which might stop it but the routine.

Don't we know how bad a household governments and governed make together, everywhere? On the civil level we provide against unworkable households by legal separation or divorce. I suggest an analogous solution for politics, without having to circumscribe it with formalities and protective restrictions, for in politics a first marriage leaves no children or physical marks. My method differs from unjust and tyrannical procedures followed in the past in that I have no intention to do anyone violence. Does anybody want to carry out a political schism? He should be able to do so but on one condition, namely, that he will do it within his own group, affecting neither the rights nor the creed of others. To achieve this, it is absolutely not necessary to subdivide the territory of the State into so many parts as there are known and approved forms of government. As before, I leave everyone and everything in its place. I only demand that people make room for the dissenters so that they may build their churches and serve the almighty Power in their own fashion.

And how are you going to put this into practice, may I ask?

This is precisely my strong point. Do you know how a civil registry office works? It is just a matter of making a new application of this. In each community a new office is opened, a "Bureau of Political Membership". This office would send every responsible citizen a declaration form to fill in, just as for income tax or dog registration.

Question: What form of government would you desire?

Quite freely you would answer, monarchy, or democracy, or any other.

Question: If monarchy, would you have it absolute or moderate ..., if moderated, how?

You would answer constitutional, I suppose.

all governments like to do? You do not have to migrate South like the swallows in autumn or geese in November. All you desire is here, there, everywhere; enter your name and take your place!

What is most admirable about this innovation is that it does away, forever, with revolutions, mutinies, and street fighting, down to the last tensions in the political tissue. Are you dissatisfied with your government? Change over to another! These four words, always associated with horror and bloodshed, words which all courts, high and low, military and special, without exception, unanimously find guilty of inciting to rebellion, these four words become innocent, as if in the mouths of seminarists, and as harmless as the medicine so wrongly mistrusted by Mr. de Pourceaugnac.

"Change over to another" means: Go to the Bureau for Political Membership, cap in hand, and ask politely for your name to be transferred to any list you please. The Commissioner will put on his glasses, open the register, enter your decision, and give you a receipt. You take your leave, and the revolution is accomplished without spilling any more than a drop of ink.

As it affects you alone, I cannot disagree with it. Your change affects no one else — that is its merit; it does not involve a victorious majority or a defeated minority; but nothing will prevent 4.6 million Belgians from following your example if they wish. The Bureau for Political Membership will ask for more personnel.

What, basically, all preconceptions apart, is the function of any government? As I have indicated above, it is to supply its citizens with security, in the widest sense of the word, under optimum conditions. I am well aware that on this point our ideas are still rather confused. For some people not even an army is protection enough against outside enemies; for some not even a police force, a security force, a royal prosecutor and all the honourable judges suffice to assure internal order and protect rights and property. Some people want a govern-

I would not rebel over this matter — I have said that I detest revolutions — but I would feel injured, and entitled to change at the expiring of the contract.

Madame de Staël once said to the Czar: “Sir, your character is your subjects’ constitution and your conscience a guaranty.”

“If that were so”, answered Alexander, “I would be merely a happy accident.”

These words, so lucid and true, completely convey my ideas.

My panacea, if you will allow this term, is simply free competition in the business of government. Everyone has the right to look after his own welfare as he sees it and to obtain security under his own conditions. On the other hand, this means progress through contest between governments forced to compete for followers. True worldwide liberty is that which is not forced upon anyone, being to each just what he wants of it; it neither suppresses nor deceives, and is always subject to a right of appeal. To bring about such a liberty, there would be no need to give up either national traditions or family ties, no need to learn to think in a new language, no need at all to cross rivers or seas, carrying the bones of one’s ancestors.

It is simply a matter of declaration before one’s local political commission, for one to move from republic to monarchy, from representative government to autocracy, from oligarchy to democracy, or even to Mr. Proudhon’s anarchy — without even the necessity of removing one’s dressing gown or slippers.

Are you tired of the agitation in the forum, the hair-splitting of the parliamentary tribune, or the rude kisses of the goddess of freedom? Are you so fed up with liberalism and clericalism as to sometimes confuse Mr. Dumortier with Mr. De Fré, to forget the exact difference between Mr. Rogier and Mr. De Decker? Would you like the stability, the soft comfort, of an honest despotism? Do you feel the need for a government which thinks for you, acts for you, sees everything and has a hand everywhere, and plays the role of deputy-providence as

Anyway, whatever your reply, your answer would be entered in a register arranged for this purpose; and once registered, unless you withdrew your declaration, observing due legal form and process, you would thereby become either a royal subject or citizen of the republic. Thereafter you would in no way be involved with anyone else’s government — no more than a Prussian subject is with Belgian authorities. You would obey your own leaders, your own laws, and your own regulations. You would pay neither more nor less, but morally it would be a completely different situation.

Ultimately, everyone would live in his own individual political community, quite as if there were not another, nay, ten other, political communities nearby, each having its own contributors too.

If a disagreement came about between subjects of different governments, or between one government and a subject of another, it would simply be a matter of observing the principles hitherto observed between neighbouring peaceful States; and if a gap were found, it could be filled without difficulties by human rights and all other possible rights. Anything else would be the business of ordinary courts of justice.

This is a new gold mine for legal arguments, which would bring all lawyers on to your side.

Indeed, I’m counting on this.

There might and should be also common interests affecting all inhabitants of a certain district, no matter what their political allegiance is. Each government, in this case, would stand in relation to the whole nation roughly as each of the Swiss cantons, or better, the States of the American Union, stand in relation to their federal government. Thus, all these fundamental and seemingly frightening questions are met with ready-made solutions; jurisdiction is established over most issues and would present no difficulties whatsoever.

Certainly it will happen that some malicious spirits, incorrigible dreamers and unsociable natures, will not accommodate

themselves to any known form of government. Also there will be minorities too weak to cover the costs of their ideal States. So much the worse for them. These odd few are free to propagate their ideas and to recruit up to their full complement, or rather, up to the needs of their budget, for everything would resolve into a matter of finance. Until then they will have to opt for one of the established forms of government. It is assumed that such small minorities will not cause any trouble.

This is not all. Problems rarely arise between extreme opinions. One fights more often, one struggles much harder, for shades of colour than for strongly contrasted ones. I have no doubt that in Belgium the overwhelming majority would opt for the current institutions, a few accepted shortcomings notwithstanding; but, when it came to specific applications, would we be so united? Do we not have two or three million Catholics who follow only Mr. de Theux and two or three million Liberals who swear allegiance only to themselves? How can they be reconciled? By not trying to reconcile them at all; by letting each party govern itself, and at its own cost. Even choosing Theocracy if one so wishes. Freedom should extend to the right not to be free, and should include it.

However, since shades of opinion must not be allowed to complicate government machinery infinitely, we will endeavour to simplify this machinery, in the general interest. We will apply the same cog to achieve a twofold or threefold effect.

I shall explain myself: a wise and openly constitutional king could suit both Catholics and Liberals; only the ministry would have to be doubled, Mr. de Theux for some, Mr. Frère-Orban for the others, the King for all.

In a situation where certain gentlemen, whom I shall not name, convened to introduce political absolutism, who would hinder this same prince from using his superior wisdom and rich experience to manage those gentlemen's business, freeing them of the regretful necessity of having to express their opinions about government affairs? Truly, when I think of it, I do not

see why, by turning this arrangement the other way round, this one prince should not make a quite acceptable president for an honest, moderate republic. Holding such a plurality of offices should not be prohibited.

III

“Though freedom has its drawbacks and pitfalls, in the long run it always leads to deliverance.”

M.A. Deschamps

One of the many incomparable advantages of my system is to render uncomplicated, natural, and completely legal, those differences of opinion which in our time have brought some upright citizens into disrepute, and which have been cruelly condemned under the name of political apostasies. Such impatience for change, which has been considered criminal in honest people, which has caused both old and new nations to be accused of wantonness and ingratitude, what is it but the will to progress?

Furthermore, is it not strange that, in most cases, those accused of capriciousness and instability are precisely those who are most consistent with themselves? The faith one would like to have in one's party, flag, and prince, is possible if party and prince are unwavering; but what if they change, or give way to others who are not their equals? Suppose I had selected as guide and master the best prince of the times, I had acquiesced to his powerful and creative will and foregone my personal initiative, to serve his genius. On his death he might be followed, by succession, by some narrow-minded individual, full of wrong ideas, who little by little squandered his father's achievement. Would you expect me to remain his subject? Why? Simply because he was the direct, legitimate heir? Direct, I allow, but not legitimate in the least, as far as I am concerned.