

The Present Utility and Future Possibility of the State

Regarding Louis Blanc

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

January 11, 1850

The following objection has been addressed to me:

Your theory is only a sophism. This so-called anarchic organization of credit and banks is only a delegation by the people renewed by the State, a little State alongside the State. So where, if you please, is the difference between the two systems? Why believe that the present state, which is already organized, should not add circulation and credit to its present responsibilities, and administer the national Bank according to the principle of gratuity [of credit], as well or better than independent functionaries, appointed, overseen and directed by the chambers of commerce! It was not, in truth, worth speaking so loudly of the abolition of the State, only to then give us a pale copy of the State. Why don't you want the State?

That observation could not fail to be addressed by me: I would not weaken or conceal it.

I admit that if you judge my theory by a first, unique example, the difference between the governmental system and the one that I call anarchic is imperceptible. The people, as a collectivity, acts with the arms, as it thinks with the head of each citizen; and, since the functions are divided, it is true to say further that in each function there are one or several individuals who think and act for all. In this regard, I am in agreement with the governmentals: the people are represented by each citizen, and society by each laborer, as humanity is represented by each man.

But there is not one single public function, one single industry in society; and the question is precisely to know if the public thought or action can and should be exerted *ex æquo*, in equal measure and by equal title, by all the citizens individually and independently of one another: that is the democratic or anarchic system;—or whether that collective thought and action collective should become the exclusive attribute of an elite of functionaries, appointed for that purpose by the people and with respect to whom the people are then no longer colleagues, but obedient, passive subjects or instruments. It is this latter system that has, for reasons that it is useless to recall, in force in society up to the present, and that we call in turn, according the scarcely varied modes of its application, *hierarchic* or *theocratic*, monarchic, oligarchic, etc., all designations that, at based, always indicate the same thing, namely the State, sometimes of the priests, sometimes of a dynasty, here of the patricians or nobles, there of the tribunes or demagogues.

The spirit of that system has been perfectly expressed in the Charter of 1830, of which the Constitution of 1848 is only, in this regard, a degeneration.

“The legislative power,” said that Charter, article 14, “is exercised collectively by the king, the Chamber of Peers and the Chamber of Deputies.”

So much for thought, and so much for counsel. The people do not think for themselves, through the totality of their members; they think and legislate through their representatives. And the thought of the people, expressed by the legislative delegation, without any other criterion or guarantee of certainty than the good pleasure of the delegates, acquires the force of *law*. There is nothing left but to obey.

Now comes action.

“The king is the head of the State. He commands the forces on land and sea, declares war, makes treaties of peace, alliance and commerce, fills all the jobs involving public administration, and makes the rules and ordinances necessary for the execution of the laws.”

I do not speak of the innumerable restrictions then brought to bear against the initiative of the people, their action, and their spontaneity, which are all the consequence of the principle of authority. Bossuet has deduced them in his *Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte*. I limit myself to these citations. The State is the constitutional silencing of the people, the legal alienation of their thought and their own initiative into the hands of one man, a monarch, or a few men, oligarchs; and the two powers, legislative and executive, once established, the people no longer have anything to do but keep silent and obey.

But we, the anarchists, say on the contrary:

A social science exists: political economy has posited it, and develops its principles every day.

These principles, rid of every individual and arbitrary character, pure ideas of individual reason, are the necessary and immutable axioms that steer societies, at first unknowingly, and later with reflection and that, once promulgated by the people, exclude every political convention, all human legislation. The rule of the law is succeeded by the reign of the idea.

We say further:

Universal suffrage exists: it is the imprescriptible and inalienable right of the people, the form of its expressions. According to article 13 of the Charter of 1830, which assigns to the executive power, delegate of the people, the nomination of all jobs, and thus the full exercise of the public power, universal suffrage implies the nomination by the people of all the functionaries without exception, their permanent revocability, and consequently the government of the people by the people.

So the people appoint, no more than one or two degrees from election, according to the importance of the jobs, all their functionaries; and as, through the natural division of labor and the separation of industries, the ensemble of the functions is nothing other than the social organism itself; as the totality of the functionaries includes the totality of the citizens, it results that all the people enter into the administration and the State; that each citizen fulfills a function, not servile or subordinate, but independent and responsible; that all, in short, are elected by one another, and exercise their specific share of public authority.

Centralization, single and hierarchical as it was in the past, becomes multiple and democratic. What we call the State, the existence of which supposes, on the one hand, some citizens (so-called delegates or agents) in very small numbers, who make the law and command, and on the other, a countless multitude, reputed sovereign who can only obey—the *State*, I say, no longer exists. It is society. The *law* is repealed. It is the idea.

That is what we will express in a still more concrete, intelligible and practical manner, by saying: *The people award no general mandate; they only give special delegations.* The general mandate is hierarchy, royalty, despotism; the special delegation is, on the contrary, liberty, equality and fraternity: it is anarchy.

The State, organism of convention, essentially parasitical, distinct from the people, apart from and above the people, receiving from the people a mandate at once special and general, the State, having by itself neither science nor ideas, replaces them with the law.—Anarchy, on the contrary, is the living society, the people having consciousness of their ideas, governing themselves as they work, through division of industries and special delegation of jobs, in short by the egalitarian distribution of forces.

Now, it is easy to understand why we do not want the state, either in the organization of the national Bank, or in the exercise of any function or any industry.

We do not want the State in the Bank: by what title could we desire it? Hasn't the Bank been established by the people? Haven't the administrators, directors, and managers received their investiture from the sovereign? Aren't they placed under the immediate supervision of the chambers of commerce, which are the popular associations for all that concerns credit, circulation and finances! What good is a hierarchical director or overseer, paid dearly, when the people direct and oversee themselves without salaries!

We do not want the State, because the State, so-called agent or servant of the people, as general and unlimited proxy of the voters, no sooner exists than it creates an interest of its own, apart from and often contrary to the interests of the people; because, acting then in that interest, it makes civil servants its own creatures, from which results nepotism, corruption, and little by little to the formation of an official tribe, enemies of labor as well as of liberty

We do not want the State, because the State, in order to increase its extra-popular power, tends to multiply its employees indefinitely and then, in order to attach them to it always more, to constantly increase their pay. Since 1830, without any known utility, the sum of salaries for functionaries employed by the State in the service of the people has been increased by 65 million, and the budget for expenditures increased from a billion 1,800 millions.

We do not want the State, because, when the taxes are no longer sufficient for its misappropriations, for the payment of its favors and sinecures, the State has recourse to loans and embezzlements, and after taking the money of others, it still finds means to make its plunder applauded. It is in this way that, under the reign of Louis-Philippe, the floating debt has reached 800 million, and the State, after having robbed the savings banks, the *fonds des communes*, the securities of privileged functionaries, and eaten the money of the bearers of treasury bonds, has been forced, in order to escape bankruptcy, to consolidate all its thefts, which means to establish them as perpetual rents, the interest on which the people pay today.

Democrats, do you want to perpetuate theft and exploitation, to generalize it forever among you! Preserve the regime of the State; maintain that alienation of public power for the profit of a few ambitious men, who will pay you for your credulity with shame and misery; and then deliver to those supposed delegates of them people, to those servants of the people, the national Bank.

Soon you will see them draw with both hands from the till. When there are not coins, they will take notes. Now, you know that some Bank notes, given without cover, in exchange for nothing, notes that consequently represent nothing, that circulate without security or mortgage, are *assignats*; and the *assignat*, citizens, is theft.

You will see them, in order to increase their take and pay their henchmen, under the pretext that interest collected by the State profits the community and is not usury, successively raise the rate of discounts to 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 percent. Since February, haven't you heard them, these theorists of the government, demand for the State the net profit of the railroad, mines, insurance policies, and finally the banks!

The net profit, do you understand? That is to say agio, interest, and usury, everything, finally, that is not the fruit of labor. Did they think then of free credit? Did they want to seize power to establish that gratuity? And you, when you asked the provisional government to abolish the exploitation of man by man, did you doubt that the joining of the banks to the State was only a new form of exploitation?

We do not want the State, because we would like to purge society of all those called bankrupts, usurers, *loups-cerviers*, speculators, robbers, swindlers, *stellionataires*, bribe-takers, forgers, counterfeiters, jugglers, parasites, hypocrites and men of State; because in our eyes all the men of State look alike, and they are all, to varying degrees, enemies of justice and liberty, eaters, as Cato said, of human flesh.

And in this regard, judge, by what happens today, what can yet occur under this dreadful and devouring tutelage of the State. The *Constitutionnel* cited yesterday, with a mean-spirited satisfaction, a passage from the *Voix du peuple*, in which we invoked the inevitable dangers to the country from a revolution whose object has not been determined, with the course mapped in advance in [popular] opinion. See, it said to its readers, that is what the democratic and social Republic promises you!

Instead of reporting our world, it should have cited the acts, the proper acts of the present government, the acts and deeds of Mr. Louis Bonaparte!

There, it is General Gémeau who, in the name of the State, for reasons of State, and in the exclusive interest of the State, suspends, in the sixth military division, the freedom of the press, closes the cafés and public establishments, and prohibits commerce: all that, because the democratic newspapers displease the State; because the gatherings, even by chance, of citizens in certain places of consumption are suspect to the State; because truthful and egalitarian commerce threatens to supplant the commerce of monopolies, protected by the State.

Certainly, it is indubitable that if Louis Blanc was president of the Republic, and the delegates of the Luxembourg were prefects and generals under his orders, not only *Le Constitutionnel* and *L'Univers* would have been suspended, but *La Voix du peuple* itself and all the anarchist newspapers. It is certain that, with the dictatorship of Louis Blanc, the worker associations that were not established according to the model drawn by the master would not be tolerated by the State. Every citizen designated as a laborer of the first rank would see themselves, in the name of fraternity, impounded [confisqué] by the State: for fear that they will exploit their brothers through free industry, we make them exploit them through official industry; one will make him a parasite of the State. Could a dictator, a servant of the people, responsible for the order and security of all, do less for good order and good mores? That is what we would see, without any doubt, with the governmentism of Mr. Louis Blanc. But by what right does the *Constitutionnel* accuse the copyist of their own patron, the one that the patriots have nicknamed the Thiers of the republican party!

Here, it is the minister of public education, Mr. de Parieu, who, assisted by a Jesuitical majority, suppresses, with one blow of parliamentary authority, or should we say a *coup d'État*, the liberty of education. Doubtless there are no lack of democrats, or so-called democrats, as little interested

in the liberty of education as they are in any other liberty, who, on some occasion, would find no fault in following the example of the present majority; and I am sure that if Louis Blanc was in the place of Mr. de Parieu, he would do as he has done. Could a man of State, a friend of the people, responsible for the future of the younger generations, abandon the instruction of the young to paternal care?... But with what insolence the *Constitutionnel* dares to condemn the schismatics of democracy to the hatred of its readers! How is it that the sacred name of liberty does not choke it? How does it not burn its tongue?

Ah! If there still existed friends of liberty, men seeking justice and peace, true revolutionaries, finally, on the volcano that rumbles, whose crater is called government, they would form a league against that concentration of powers that kills us, that will make us perish, when the inevitable reaction of opinion will make it return, from the hands of a stupid absolutism to those of a drunken demagoguery. But why speak of liberty to men whom the zeal for pleasures holds enslaved, who have never known how to do anything but cut each other's throats over the choice of their princes and their men of State! Liberty! They have stifled it in the arms of their mistresses. Pass then, Bonaparte; come, come, Louis Blanc, come, in your turn, to avenge, by force of despotism, Liberty!

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