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SOCIALISTS AND MALTHUSIANS.

From *Le Voix du Peuple*

First article. (October 29, 1849)

Napoleon said, at Saint Helena:

“Europe will soon be nothing but two warring factions. It will no longer be divided by peoples and territories, but by colors and pure opinions. And who can describe the crises, the hardships, the details of so many storms? For the outcome can be beyond doubt: enlightenment and the ages will not retreat.” The times are fulfilled.

European society has taken immense strides towards the goal of unity that it has pursued for so long, through so many trials and revolutions: it has freed itself from the castes of family and city; the peoples who compose it are no longer divided by prejudices or national hatreds. They no longer turn their weapons against one another; far from it, all extend a fraternal hand to one another across their borders, which are diminishing and disappearing more and more each day.

Yet never have more brilliant and terrible tremors of war arisen from their bosom; never has the breath of the storm so powerfully stirred the depths and abysses of this entire society.

For within it is engaged a fierce, relentless struggle, a fight to the death, without rest or respite; for an ancient fact, that of the old world, is to unravel under the pressure of an idea, still young, but already in its power, which encircles it, embraces it, stifles and crushes it. Do you not hear, with the cries of the colossus about to succumb, cries of terror and fury, the sound of its bones cracking?

And why this merciless and unforgiving struggle that divides European society into two camps?

Have we returned to the times of the religious wars? Are we talking about Arius and Athanasius? Are we preaching a new crusade against the Albigensians? Should we take sides with the Holy League or with the Huguenots?

No; it is not religious fanaticism that is driving us against one another today. It is true that every great question has its roots, at least, in religion; but, at this moment, minds are neither calm enough, nor especially advanced enough, to address the religious question in its own right, from a scientific perspective. This question will have its turn; for, ultimately, it is, in essence, the starting point and the complement of all the others. As for now, for some, religion is merely a mask; for most others, it is only a vague feeling, more or less obliterated, barely conscious of itself in many.

Is it the political question that divides us, and which today, on the battlefield, drives half the world against the other? Is it a question of monarchy or republic?

Ultimately, and in the face of the real issue at hand, the political question, despite its importance, is merely a secondary issue.

Moreover, the facts, in accordance with logic, have at least partially resolved it, and will take care of completing it in its consequences.

To be honest, the political question, posed in this way between the monarchy and the Republic, has ceased to be a question in itself. It can no longer captivate us.

We no longer live in the times when the People, in the naivety of their faith and in their candid ignorance, attributed, by exclusion, to the sovereignty of a single man this character of majesty, this legitimacy of divine right, which belongs to the sovereignty of all and each one.

We are no longer in times when the People, in their humility, would have feared, as if it were sacrilege, to imagine the very soul of their kings and nobles, surrounded by pomp and magnificence, as subject to the same weaknesses and needs that nature imposes on other men. Today, only in the depths of our most remote and savage provinces have we encountered creatures still simple enough to be scandalized to learn that princes also digest after they have eaten.

A day will come, and for many it has already come, when people will be astonished that men could ever have paid another man the degrading homage that is still bestowed today, in some countries, upon kings. A day will come when it will be hard to believe that a man dared to so utterly absolve himself of his own personality, his own dignity, as to bow down, to kneel, as before a god, at the feet of a man who suffered like himself from a pinprick, a head cold or the tremors of fever; whom nature subjected, like himself, to shameful infirmities; whose intelligence often yielded to his own in brilliance and capacity; whose soul, by the very act of these foolish flattery acts, was almost always tainted with crimes.

The memory of royalty will be associated with the idea of the bloodiest outrage printed on the face of humanity, of which it was the shame.

This is what the People are already beginning to understand.

And then, the People also saw clearly into the politics of kings. They know, as one of them said, "that a king is neither father, nor son, nor brother, nor relative, nor husband, nor friend: that he is only king; king, even when he sleeps."

They know that this saying of Frederick the Great means that a king, in his egoism, sacrifices everything to the interests and prerogatives of his crown.

They know that the personal interest of kings, as J. J. Rousseau said, inevitably forces their policy to work towards making the People weak and miserable, so that they can never resist them.

They know that no kind of progress has been made in the world except without the knowledge or in spite of kings, and that, if sometimes they have appeared to favor the

movement of Peoples in the path of science and the arts, it is because vanity closed their eyes to the danger that they were thereby preparing for royalty.

Finally, there is a page written in our annals, dated January 21, 1792, and this page, which cannot be torn from it, is and remains, for the monarchy, an irrevocable death sentence. On that day, by displaying to the People the scaffold of execution reddened with the blood of a king, the monarchy was killed physically and morally; it fell under the blow of the axe, never to rise again; for, with it and at the same stroke, the prejudices and illusions without which it could not exist fell irrevocably.

It is not that since then there have not been several attempts to restore the monarchy in our country. But what has been the result of all the experiments to which France has submitted itself, with, it must be said, rare perseverance? First, to prove five or six times more that the dead do not rise again; and perhaps also that peoples, as M. Guizot said somewhere, try for a long time to endure evil before facing the peril of the day and escaping it.

Frankly, with our hands on our hearts, what man today is so devoid of sense as to seriously champion what is called monarchical legitimacy? Good heavens! Do we not know that if cholera had cords and pensions to give, there would also be theologians vile enough and jurists cowardly enough to maintain that the reign of cholera is by divine right, and that to escape its malignant influences is to make oneself guilty, first and foremost, of the crime of *lèse-majesté*?

So you can see that the question is no longer between the monarchy and the Republic, and that, in essence, on this point, the case is closed.

The political question retains importance only insofar as it is linked to the interests of the social question, a superior and synthetic question, from which it now awaits its final and complete solution; for, after many violent efforts, it has recognized itself as powerless to discover it, to formulate it by its own forces.

The social question is therefore what defines the entire situation today.

This is, above all, a transformation of society, a revolution in the social economy. This is obvious to anyone with eyes; and it probably matters little that a few blind people deny the sun.

The struggle is on between those who call for and provoke this revolution, in the name of justice, truth, and necessity, and those who reject it, in the name of their selfishness.

The former are called Socialists, the latter are called Malthusians.

Let us first characterize these latter.

They are the representatives of the old world; they consequently form the party of resistance; they claim to preserve and maintain human society on the triple basis of lies, cunning, and force.

They proclaim, along with Pangloss and M. Ch. Dupin, not only that everything is good, but that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

It is for them, indeed, for them alone this world was created. To them belong the sweet leisure, the honors, the riches, the pleasures of this world. They march under the banner of privilege.

Why are you maliciously speaking to them about the miseries and suffering under which three-quarters of the human race succumb? Do Malthusians believe in that?

And, besides, what do they care?

What does it matter to them, for example, that five or six million Irish people don't even have two pennies a day to live on, and that hunger is harvesting the population like grass?

What does it matter to them that twenty million French people vegetate in appalling poverty, and that of this number, eight million are condemned, for lack of bread, to feed themselves on nothing but grass and potatoes?

What do they care that alongside excessive opulence, hundreds of poor women can earn no more than 25 cents working fifteen hours a day making lace?

What do they care that some of them, whose bodies are almost translucent from extreme thinness, eat only two kilograms of black bread a week?

What do they care if the life or death of a poor child hangs by a single cent more or less each day?

What do they care that a part of the population, especially in our manufacturing cities, lives in filthy cellars, veritable cesspools, without fire, without furniture, without sun, and agonizes there under the grip of unspeakable tortures?

What does it matter to them that in some localities, out of 21,000 children, 20,000 or more die before the age of five?

What does it matter to them that, in our countryside, in Brittany for example, a crowd of unfortunate people, when they are not kept in their miserable hut by unemployment or illness, work all day for a wage of 75 centimes, in the heat of the sun or under constant rain, having no other food than a piece of rye-bran bread, in insufficient quantity; a kind of food which, for lack of seasoning, makes their poor children prey to the worms that devour them?

What does it matter to them that to these physical miseries are added all the intellectual and moral miseries, which are necessarily its hideous procession?

If, among the Malthusians, some, forced to face the facts, admit the reality of these miseries and tortures; if they deign to discuss them with you, they will tell you – these impious ones! – that they are the result of an irrevocable law; that one must resign oneself to them; that one half of the world has always devoured the other; that one sees, in nature, species of animals that seem to have been created only to serve as prey for the others. – Why should it be any different between men? – Is there anything more sacred in man than in the insect that a passerby crushes under his heel?

And, if you are their son or their friend, they will add in a tone of kindness, almost compassion: “Believe me, no foolish daydreams! Leave all the pensive thoughts of the

heart behind; there is only one thing necessary in this world, and that is to make one's way in it at all costs. I will not tell you bluntly: be a rogue so as not to be duped; but I will tell you: be a wolf, so as not to be a sheep; be a hammer, so as not to be an anvil; and remember that all social morality is summed up in this saying of the Barbarian: *Vae victis! Woe to the vanquished!*"

Second article. (November 19, 1849)

Don't speak of progress to the Malthusians. That word isn't in their vocabulary.

It was in vain that Pascal said: "Not only does each man advance day by day in the sciences, but all men together make continual progress in them as the universe ages, because the same thing happens in the succession of men as in the different ages of an individual; so that the entire succession of men, during the course of so many centuries, must be considered as a single entity that always exists and that continually learns."

It is in vain that, in all eras, the greatest geniuses have likewise recognized and proclaimed that if perfection is the law of heaven, then striving for it ceaselessly is the law of humanity.

It is in vain that, in this thought, Christ went so far as to say: Be perfect, as God himself is perfect.

Despite the teachings of history and philosophy, despite human and divine wisdom, the Malthusians persist in denying the fundamental law of humanity and of each individual within it. For them, humanity, in its evolution, revolves endlessly in an inextensible circle; the work of generations resembles a spider's web, swept away each day by the servant's broom, which the insect rebuilds each day, always in the same way. What has been is always, for them, the complete type of what it should be; what is is always the best. Thus, their materialism does not admit humanity's relationship with the infinite: in their eyes, humanity is no more than the beasts, and its fate is the same.

There is nothing new under the sun, they say with Solomon; and, seeing only one side of the world and its phenomena, they use this ancient proverb to proclaim the doctrine of immobility.

In doing so, they forget only one thing: to take humanity into account, and to consider its existence.

Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun, except the ever-expanding and deepening conception of what is. Now, this progressive conception is precisely the function, the task of humanity: it is what incessantly engenders the struggle of right against fact, that is to say, of what ought to be, of what essentially is, against that which exists only by accident or artifice; the struggle of reality against appearance; of light against shadow; of truth against falsehood and error.

But the Malthusians don't understand this.

They do not understand liberty any better, or at least they claim that it exists only for them and as a privilege.

At a time when the city of Athens had within its walls only 20,000 citizens and 200,000 slaves, when throughout the known world, freedom and slavery existed side by side in the same proportion, Aristotle could feel justified in saying: "It is evident that there are men who are free by nature, and others who are slaves by nature, and that for the latter slavery is as useful as it is just."

But that was over two thousand years ago.

Well! The Malthusians are still stuck in Aristotle's thinking, and, like him, they see slavery as an institution of natural law, an essential and legitimate condition of civil and political society.

Look! they say. And in this they are right, the slavery of antiquity was replaced, in the Middle Ages, by serfdom; it is called today the proletariat. The name has changed, but the thing has remained the same; and, far from loosening, the chain has tightened even further. What could be more compelling than the servitude of hunger?

Yes, hunger! That is indeed the chain by which three-quarters of the human race are bound today.

But the Malthusians do not see that the transition from slavery to serfdom, from serfdom to the proletariat, nonetheless constitutes for humanity, in its march towards liberty, two-thirds of the way; they do not see that, if servitude and hunger are the most cruel of all, they nevertheless have this immense advantage of offending the feeling of human dignity to a much lesser degree; they do not see that slavery, under the name of the proletariat, has taken on its final expression; that it is today threatened in its last redoubt; that it will be forced there tomorrow.

The Malthusians, we say, do not understand this. Liberty, as applied to the People, is for them nothing but an empty word, which they sometimes hurl as a mockery at the multitude when it has not been well-behaved, in order to make it feel more harshly the weight of its misery, or which they use, in certain cases, as a talisman to charm the monster when it has broken the bars of its cage and, with its menacing mouth, claws outstretched, and mane flying in the wind, it leaps into the public square. In this way they always manage, they say, to gently reattach its muzzle and bring it back into line. Once that is done, and they have it securely bound, they give it a sound thrashing with the stirrup leathers, of the kind that it will remember.

Ask instead Italy, Hungary, Germany, France — alas! all wounded at this hour and panting under the executioners' whip!

On the other hand, the Malthusians talk a lot about order: it is a word they constantly use; they justify themselves with it as an irrefutable argument against anything that stands in the way of their domination; and they constantly remind us of this thought from the best mind of the eighteenth century: "Beware," said Diderot, "of those who want to impose order: to order is always to make oneself master of others, by hindering true order. I appeal to all political, civil and religious institutions:

examine them deeply – and, if I am not greatly mistaken, you will see the human race bent century after century under the yoke that a handful of scoundrels promised to impose upon it.”

For these scoundrels, order is really nothing more than organized disorder, organized entirely to their advantage; it is disorder raised to its supreme power.

Surely, if there are people in the world who should be forbidden to speak of order under penalty of sacrilege, it is the Malthusians.

And yet – O weakness and blindness of the human species! – it is thanks to the mysterious virtue of this word that they have succeeded in making property what the most illustrious Fathers of the Christian Church and Proudhon, who came after them, so logically defined as theft and plunder.

It is in the name of order that a son of a wealthy family, whose father has enriched himself through appalling concessions, is permitted to say to another man: “I am a four-times millionaire; I have a splendid townhouse, a magnificent country estate, five profitable leases—and, moreover, I dined well. – You have nothing: you haven't even inherited a mud hut and a pickaxe from your father – and you are hungry. Listen, I am kind. I want to be compassionate and help you. Take this piece of bread and this pickaxe. Every day, you will have the piece of bread, on the condition that, every day as well, from morning to night, and, if necessary, from night to morning, you will work for me, so that after a few years, I may, with the fruits of your labor, buy a sixth farm. And I will keep you in my service as long as I find no one else who is hungrier than you, who eats less and works harder. So work hard and eat as little as possible. You will always owe me gratitude.”

It is in the name of order that the exploitation of man by man is practiced in this way, and that the misery of the working classes increases, as general wealth progresses, concentrated each day more and more in the hands of a smaller number.

It is in the name of order that the Malthusians made marriage, the source of the family, into legal prostitution, bringing to the spouses, with a dowry, the *hopes* that they marry, a right of license somewhat more extensive than before.

It is in the name of order that religion – which for them is nothing, neither as a feeling, nor as a moral, nor as a science – has become, in their hands, as an institution, the most perfidious and cruel instrument of servitude, a brake for the People, added, as they say, to that of labor.

It is in the name of order...

To record all the abuses that have been made of this word would be to unroll the complete annals of all the infamies, all the crimes of tyranny.

Today, Malthusians use this as justification to shoot, hang, imprison or deport their victims, just as they once used it to force Socrates to drink hemlock and to tie Christ to a cross: *Ut non tota gens pereat*, said the Malthusians of the synagogue, condemning the most illustrious of socialists; and their successors, following their example, continue to repeat after them, to justify the harshness and tortures: “Society must be saved!”

Yes. These people have such faith in human stupidity that they dare to present themselves as defenders of society, religion, family and property.

And this abominable hypocrisy has succeeded for them to this day.

And it is only now that the streams of light which, for three thousand years, and in these latter times especially, have, have sprung from the mouths of the wise, are beginning to open the eyes of the multitude, and to make them recognize, under the mask with which these charlatans cover themselves, their true features.

Which of the ancients was the wise observer who did not say: *Univrsus mundus exercet histrioniam*: The whole world is a vast stage prey to actors?

Certainly, in his mind, he resented the world of Malthusians, and knew how to define it.

Third article. (December 31, 1849)

We have shown that the doctrine of the Malthusians can be summed up in a trinity of lies, cunning and force, the supreme dogma of a social religion, outside of which, in their eyes, there is no salvation.

Indifference or hardening to the miseries of humanity erected as a maxim; the permanence of disorder accepted as a principle; the consecration of hatred and war forever among men; the negation of all progress; the narrow calculations of the crudest selfishness put in the place of the laws of morality; the systematic affirmation of the enslavement of humankind for the benefit of a handful of privileged individuals; the worship of the golden calf; the mockery and sacrilegious abuse of all religion, converted for the People into an instrument of servitude; the most scandalous contempt for the family, corrupted at its source by the substitution of legal prostitution for the sacred bond of marriage; the most flagrant violation of the right of property by the sanction of usury, that is to say, of spoliation and theft: — these are the traits which we have used to characterize this abominable doctrine.

To highlight them, it is necessary to go beyond the simple exposition of the opinions and facts that occur every day before our eyes within official society, and which, even recently, drew from Abbé Lacordaire, in one of his homilies at the church of Cannes, this stunning admission: “I am astonished, seeing the impiety and atheism of the bourgeoisie, that the multitude does not break free from its dikes and crush them!”

God forbid that we should want to persuade ourselves, and persuade others, that those who march under the banner of capital; those who make up what is today called the great party of order; those whom, in short, we classify, for some reason, in the crowd of Malthusians, all have, to the same degree, the awareness of this dreadful theory, and that they have coldly analyzed all its principles, all its consequences.

Let's be clear: despite their different points of view, they deserved

Neither this excess of honor, nor this indignity.

And first of all, we have never believed, we will never believe in such a degree of perversity, shared by such a large number.

For our part, yes, we who profess to respect humanity and who believe in its inherent goodness, such an insulting thought to human nature would be more than an absurdity; it would be a contradiction.

A complete and reasoned understanding of Malthusian theory undoubtedly belongs only to a select few who put it into practice. The right to be initiated into it is a privilege reserved solely for the party's leading figures, the ringleaders.

The others follow, like sheep, on the basis of their prejudices and appearances, through ignorance and frivolity, seduced, without their knowledge, by the instincts of their selfishness, by the secret influences of their position, and by the vaneer of words with which, in certain circles, the true meaning of things is concealed.

And then, to be honest, we cannot agree with the Malthusians on a logic deep enough, learned enough, to suppose that they all equally understand where their theory comes from and what end it leads to.

Indeed, you see:

They have so little logic that many, believe it or not, in the naiveté of their minds, are now sincerely attached to the Republic.

Their legal system is so limited that it does not go so far as to understand that with the end one must also want the means; they know so little of the art of linking two ideas together, that they do not even realize that the doctrine to which they belong, both by what it denies and by what it affirms, leads them straight back to the monarchy.

These, it is true, are very few in number; we only mention them here for the record, and ruminates a very rare and curious species.

Apart from this almost imperceptible fraction, all the Malthusians, it must be acknowledged, understand perfectly well that maintaining their privileges is incompatible with a political system that enshrines the dogma of popular sovereignty, exercised through universal suffrage, and which must fully bring about, in the more or less near future, the conditions of liberty and equality that are essential to it, and which must complete its establishment in fact as well as in right. All, or almost all, even readily admit their profound aversion to the Republic, and the regrets and hopes that the monarchy inspires in them.

But here, a huge split occurs between them, and on this new ground, the Malthusian camp is divided into two forever irreconcilable factions, each of which claims to resurrect a monarchy in its own particular image, to its own convenience, and favorable only to its exclusive interests:

The least we can do around the cake,
That's the law of the game, that's the business.

Another maxim that is particularly dear, as we know, to Malthusians.

The largest fraction, but not the most far-sighted, consists of those who, in another era, were on the path of liberty, the avant-garde of the proletariat: those who killed the monarchy by divine right two or three times; those who, with it, shattered and scattered the foundations on which it rested; those whose farmers today cultivate the properties taken from the nobles and clergy by means of the revolutionary axe and sales at rock-bottom prices; those who have since established their workshops, their factories and their rich manufactories in castles, convents and monasteries.

Having come to share in the political rights for which they had fought so long, they forgot their origin; they wanted, in turn, to monopolize liberty; they stood in the way; they laughed at the cries of distress and the demands of the proletariat, who had nevertheless so valiantly supported them in the struggle, and whom they are now abandoning with such ingratitude and such peril for themselves.

Orleanists or Bonapartists, it matters little, what they now cherish in the gilded dreams of their ambition is the return of a constitutional monarchy, a bourgeois monarchy, modeled on the one that was inaugurated in 1830 in the person of Louis-Philippe.

Now, of all the impossibilities of the monarchy, this is surely the greatest. It would be a waste of time to try to demonstrate this.

The restoration of a constitutional monarchy! — Is that a much less stupid idea than that of a democratic republic surrounded by Malthusian institutions?

This is not the case with the other faction, the one in the Malthusian camp made up of the sons of the crusaders of Loyola; it is not this monarchy that is invoked by those who have been stripped of their titles, their privileges and their properties by their allies of today, by the same bourgeois, who pose, at this hour, as inexorable champions of capitalist privilege, which they have so scandalously abused, and who cry so wrongly at the abomination of desolation, as soon as the question of modifying, in the direction of justice, and for the gentlest and most legitimate means, the conditions of property is raised.

On this subject, dear reader, and to touch on the question in passing, do you really believe in a sincere, lasting alliance between the sons of crusaders and the sons of Voltaire, between thieves and the robbed, between the proponents of a capitalist monarchy and the supporters of the monarchy of divine right?

An alliance, on both sides, note it well, equally hideous in hypocrisy and lies; for, in the end, each of the two parties is, for the other, what it hates most.

The pride and arrogance of the nobility is what hurts the bourgeoisie the most in the world.

The vanity and pretentious boasting of the bourgeoisie, the banking aristocracy, is the most antipathetic thing to those who were once called, and still believe themselves to be, noble in name and arms.

Be that as it may, this second faction, though the smallest in number, is nonetheless, it must be admitted, the most consistent in its views and actions; it was

mistaken at its starting point: but it understands, moreover, perfectly the course of the reaction; and its joy must truly be great when it sees its old enemy, its rival, the bourgeoisie, finally, blindly joining, in part, its tendencies and efforts, and preparing, it flatters itself, its triumph in the near future. Its joy, we say, must be great: and it must have laughed up its sleeve when it heard the bourgeois of the *Constitutionnel* cry out, when recently M. De Lamennais, characterizing the ultimate goal of the counter-revolution, said in *La Réforme*:

“The goal is to establish a despotism more gigantic than those that appeared in the depths of the Orient; it is to establish the regime that existed at the time when two races were recognized, one superior, the other inferior: one destined to dominate, the other to obey; it is to reduce the Peoples to the blind existence of the brute.”

And, in fact, what the legitimist fraction knowingly calls its desires; what it pursues with all its strength; what too many of the bourgeoisie pursue with it, without suspecting it, is the restoration of the monarchy which they call *legitimate*, of the autocracy of divine right, further strengthened in its principle, in its action, in all its conditions of existence.

Now, for anyone who has not remained deaf to the lessons of history, for anyone who has grasped a little of the course and logic of contemporary events, it is easy to understand that of all monarchical impossibilities, this one is the least; for, in order to live, to be accepted, to maintain itself, royal despotism, thus restored in all its energy, stirs up by the memory of its personal insults, and recognizing no other law than that of necessity, would at least have to deliver as fodder to the rancors and covetousness of the old aristocracy, and perhaps to the vengeance and misery of the proletariat, as well as to its thirst for equality, the coffers of the bankers, the fortune and the prerogatives of the bourgeoisie.

Frankly, the bourgeoisie has reason to rejoice, for itself and for its people, that one cannot, except as a pure hypothesis, admit degrees of the impossible, and that *legitimate* royalty is, in reality, just as dead as *bourgeois* royalty.

Fourth article. (January 28, 1850)

Inconsistency and absurdity! These are the least of the flaws in Malthusian logic, and it is in this that we must seek the explanation, the excuse, as it were, for all that is cruel, immoral and monstrous in their system; for, for the most part, they are unaware of their opinions or their actions, and we could apply to the vast majority what Christ, addressing God, said of his executioners: “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.”

These vices themselves stem from their excessive egoism and the resulting blindness of mind. It has been said, and it bears repeating: “If it were possible for a man to have an interest in two plus two equaling five, he would never be persuaded that two plus two equals four.” The men of the counter-revolution provide us with proof of this every day.

But what is even more admirable, when one enters the camp of the Malthusians, and studies its composition, is that such strongly antipathetic individuals, by the nature of the principle they obey, by their historical antecedents and to a certain extent by their tendencies and by the very goal they pursue, could have been led to form an alliance among themselves, even if only for a day, or even to conclude a suspension of arms.

We then wonder what superior force is currently chaining these rivalries and these hatreds that we feel fermenting in the depths of souls, and whose signs sometimes erupt with such violence.

This mysterious power, it must be said, is the same one that so long protected the last monarchical attempt made in France, and which exquisite-Philippe exploited for nearly eighteen years with such success: this is the most ignoble passion of the human heart, at once the most cruel and the most blind; cured the passion of the weak and the cowardly: an advisor worse still than hunger is fear.

The fear of Socialism.

Do you want the proof?

Suppress Socialism in thought. Will you not see this alliance immediately dissolve, rivalries run rampant, and the capitalist bourgeoisie and the noble aristocracy, races of Malthusians, draw their swords against each other again and seek to slaughter one another?

Suppose the aristocracy remains victorious. All that would remain is to suppress the bourgeoisie, or merely reduce it to the proportions of the old regime, to see the struggle henceforth confined between this same aristocracy and the monarchy, as in the time of the Fronde under Louis XIV; in the time of Louis XIII and Gaston, under Richelieu; in the time of Henry IV and Mayenne; in the time of Henry III and the Guise; in the time of Charles IX and the Prince of Condé; in the time of Charles VII and the Duke of Orléans; in the time of Louis XI and the League of the Public Weal; in the time of Charles VII, Charles VI, the Armagnacs and the Burgundians, and, always in this way, going back to Charles the Bald and the Treaty of Kiersy-sur-Oise; to Louis the Pious, to Clovis.

A remarkable thing indeed: Who are those who, today, in every way, offer us the order and peace of the old regime, and all the delights of *legitimate* royalty? Who are those who, at this hour, exhaust all the most foolish formulas of devotion and adulation addressed to that model of princes whom they call Henry V, and to that other model, so holy and so pure, of wife and mother, whom they still call the Duchess of Berry, but who also goes by the name of Madame Lucchesi-Palli?

These are mostly the same people who also boast of being, thanks to the chastity of their mothers, descendants of those noble lords, more or less high, more or less powerful, who, for a long succession of centuries, sometimes under the false pretext of relieving, as they said, the poor people, but always in reality in the interest of their vain and petty ambition or their insatiable greed, have more than anyone, after the

kings themselves, vilified and dragged through the mud this royalty, against which they were constantly in revolt, at the same time as they plunged France into the endless horrors of civil war and covered it with ruins and blood.

Certainly, our miseries today are great; but, believe the voice of the past, all was not rosy in the good old days of the monarchy by divine right, and to have the impudence to propose its return as a universal panacea, one must strangely count either on our ignorance or our lack of memory.

To learn how deeply the monarchy of the Ancien Régime cared about our suffering, to appreciate the order and peace we enjoyed under it, I assure you, one need not be particularly wealthy or delve far back into the centuries. It suffices, quite simply, to examine the history of the two reigns that can be considered to have brought the era of kings in France, by the grace of God, to a close.

Tell us then, gentlemen of the nobility, is it to the time of Louis XIV that we should attribute our regrets? Do you, out of sheer kindness no doubt, out of love for the poor people, wish to take us back to the time when Fénelon said: “We now live only by miracle; the State is an old, dilapidated machine, still running on the old momentum it was given, which will finally break down at the first shock. One can no longer perform the service except by swindling on all sides; it is the life of gypsies, not of people who govern.”

Perhaps you will object that Fénelon was a socialist, as were Racine and Vauban, who, for this reason, died in disgrace with the great king.

It is true; but it is also true that Bossuet, until now little suspected of socialism, uttered these accusing words from the pulpit: “When I consider the calamities that surround us, the poverty, the desolation, the despair of so many ruined families, it seems to me that on all sides a cry of misery rises around us that should break our hearts. — Let no one ask anymore how far the obligation to assist the poor extends: hunger has cut through the doubt, despair has settled the matter and we are reduced to those extreme cases where all the fathers and all theologians teach us, in common agreement, that if one does not help one's neighbor according to one's ability, one is guilty of his death, one will answer to God for his blood, his soul, for all the excesses into which the fury of hunger and despair plunges him.”

Indeed, at that time, whatever people say, misery in France was at its peak, thanks to the vices of power, its dynastic pride, and the wars which, as a result, exhausted the nation.

We know that France, then bowed down before foreign powers, under the weight of its humiliations and setbacks, saw its lands everywhere lying fallow and famine further decimating its depopulated provinces.

We know that at that time all we heard from your side were cries of fury and insults against the king; that people gathered in the streets around the princes, asking for bread, and blaming the government for the public misery.

We know that riots broke out everywhere then, and that people exhorted each other until they were no longer so resilient, since after all, there was nothing worse to fear than dying of hunger.

We know that all work had ceased; that the hospitals, lacking bread, were turning away their sick into public places; that the revenue of the town was being eaten up ten years in advance; that the tapestry weavers in Farinée were dying of poverty.

We know that discontent was so great, and the armies in such a bad state, that soldiers were hard to find, and it was only by tyranny and going to *hunt down men* that trembling and miserable militias managed to be dragged from the plow.

We know that even the king's servants were seen begging in the streets of Versailles, and entire companies of cavalry deserted from the borders to the interior in order to openly engage in smuggling and war against the tax authorities.

We know that the finance superintendents Chamillart and Desmarests, in order to replenish the Treasury, were ingenious in finding resources that were further ruining France; we know that they were reduced to imposing taxes on baptisms, on marriages, on deaths; we know that they could no longer find any way to borrow, even at 12 percent, and that, in order to have 8 million in actual funds, the government was subscribing to notes for 32 million; we know that it resorted more than once to partial bankruptcies, and that no other remedy for the financial situation was foreseen than a general bankruptcy, the total debt amounting to 2 billion 300 million.

And now, do you want to know what your noble ancestors were doing during that time?

We'll tell you:

“In this great crisis, the nobility displayed only mediocre devotion, still regretting the sacrifices that necessity forced upon them. They continued to parade in the salons of Versailles, to concern themselves with petty intrigues and matters of etiquette, while peasants went to be killed at the frontier. They even refused military service, which was, after all, their entire social function. When they appeared in the army, it was only to bring discouragement and disorder. ‘I hope that I will find some men,’ said Villars, upon leaving for the army in Flanders; ‘but, so far, I have only recognized them in the soldier... His virtue and fortitude in enduring hunger are a marvel.’”

Beneath the politeness of forms and the hypocrisy of courtly devotion was hidden a frightful corruption in the social elite, among those great lords who lived only by intrigue, who were not ashamed of any kind of gain, and who rebuilt their fortunes, continually eroded by pomp, half with the help of gambling, which had become a universal fury, pushed without shame to the point of roguery, half by means of baseness and plunder.

This is what we know of the benefits of royalty, the virtues of divine right, the morality of its courtiers, and the happiness of the people in the time of Louis XIV.

Do you think we have forgotten to any greater extent the virtues of his successor?

It was the time when, not to mention the Pare-aux-Cerfs, the Vaubernier girl, a prostitute of the lowest class, who became Countess Dubarry, at the same time as she attracted to Versailles all the rabble of the bad places, saw at her feet the even more abject crowd of great lords, bishops and court abbots, and trafficked, in their company, in jobs, pensions, *lettres de cachet*.

This was the time when Abbot Terray, in charge of finances, defined the People as *a sponge that he must squeeze*, used them accordingly and still resorted to bankruptcy to fill the deficit of the royal treasury.

It was the time when, despite the constraints imposed, the People still had to pay the tithe to the clergy and the feudal dues to the lords.

It was the time of the *pacte de famine*; we remember it perfectly.

We remember that a secret society had been formed, in which King Louis XV himself was a shareholder with 10 million.

We remember that this company, after hoarding the wheat, smuggled it out of France, thus driving up prices, and then imported the same wheat with enormous profits.

We remember that when the cry of indignant public conscience had led to the defense of the free movement of grain, this infamous pact nevertheless remained, and the hoarding within continued.

We remember that Louis XV had once again set up a private fund to speculate on the price of wheat, and that he boasted to everyone of the infernal profit he thus raised from his *subjects*: this was a kingly favor.

We remember that the society only released the hoarded grains when the People were about to revolt or die of hunger.

We remember that no one dared to reveal this abominable plot, which had accomplices everywhere, even in parliaments.

It is agreed that writers were forbidden, *under penalty of death*, to speak of finance, and that the slightest complaint was stifled in the dungeons of the Bastille.

This reveals what we know of the benefits of royalty, the virtues of divine right, the morality of its courtiers, and the happiness of the Peoples in the time of Louis XV.

Those were the good old days, you say! — Perhaps for you, gentlemen of the nobility; but for us...!

Such, however, to put it simply, and only in its relationship with the physical existence of the People, such is, from beginning to end, we affirm, with our hand on our annals, the history of the monarchy in France.

It may be good to remember this and to recall sometimes how true it is that the history of kings has always been the martyrology of nations.

Fifth Article. (February 18, 1850)

We have visited the Malthusian camp; we have heard their doctrines; we have learned the aim of their efforts, the object of their regrets, the ideal of their dreams; we know what we should expect from them if, by some impossible chance, they were to remain victorious in the supreme struggle in which the world is currently engaged.

In this regard, the past and the present have borne witness to them and answer us about their future.

Let them, in moments of terror and confusion, half-heartedly confess some of the miseries and sufferings to which we are prey; let them pretend to be moved by them; let them admit that there might be something to be done; let them even lavish themselves with protestations of benevolence and fine promises: these are grimaces born of fear, hypocritical and deceitful words, in keeping with their role. — But it is not for these withered souls to understand the evil and to cure it; it is not from a rotten trunk that the golden bough will spring forth, the one that must open the doors of the future to humanity. — Read instead M. Thiers' report on public assistance; you will find nothing but a panegyric to the past.

It is time to finally penetrate the opposing camp, to question the socialists in turn, and to ask them to account for all their ideas, the principle from which they emanate, the goal they strive for, and the paths they claim to follow to achieve it.

And first of all, what is the meaning of this word that so terrifies the Malthusians? What is Socialism, on which they so liberally lavish all their anger and curses, so reminiscent of the ancient proverb: *Veritas odiumparit*. Truth breeds hatred?

Socialism is both a sentiment and a science.

As a sentiment, it originates in the irresistible aspiration of the human soul towards an indefinite better; it is the instinctive awareness of the future and of the destinies of the social man; it proceeds from that essential driving force of our nature, which leads us without restraint to the search for the good and the beautiful in itself, and which makes the law of progress the first law of humanity.

As a science, Socialism recognizes this law; it approves it, it explains it century by century, day by day, and inquires into the means of realizing its wish in the social order.

Its aim is that man, in society, may finally, through the free development of his threefold nature — physical, intellectual and moral — enjoy all his rights in order to fulfill all his duties. It agrees with the philosophy of all places and times, proclaiming that man's happiness, as well as his wisdom, consists in the harmonious and balanced exercise of his three modes of existence: *Mens sana in corpore sana*.

Socialism today, therefore, has nothing new in itself except the name that expresses it, and the broader and clearer conception of some ideas, eternal in their principle, although new in terms of their expansion among the masses, and in terms of the means of realization.

However, it seems, to hear some people tell it, that the Socialists were the first who, in a fit of ill humor, dared to believe and claim that all is not exactly for the best in this world. But read the economists, the philosophers, the moralists, ancient and modern, and then tell us if all of them, for a very long time, have not raised a unanimous voice against the abuses and iniquities of our social condition; if all of them do not portray a mixture of injustice and brigandage as a hideous arena, where, until now, the weak have been constantly crushed by the strong, the man of merit supplanted by the scoundrel, virtue oppressed by triumphant vice.

It is true that Socialism has exposed, in broad daylight, in the public square, in front of everyone, these injustices, these abuses, these stupidities. This is, without a doubt, its first crime.

At the same time, it brought to light and into the public domain, with more benefit than danger, certainly, the profound questions formerly confined to the circle of a small number of elite intellectuals. Like Christianity at its inception, it brought forth from the shadows of the sanctuary and delivered to the masses truths hitherto reserved for the leisurely pursuits of a privileged few.

In our view, it is a beautiful, a sublime spectacle, to see these great questions of freedom and equality, of human dignity, of social future, of political economy, transported now from the highest regions of science down to the humblest workshop, addressed and discussed at this hour, in front of everyone, by everyone, in the interest of all.

Many, however, do not judge it so, and these same theories which they admired yesterday in Plato, in Seneca, in Bacon, in Leibniz, in Pascal, have today become anathemas to them, since they have ceased to be pure speculations of the mind, and have acquired a beginning of reality.

They are attacking Socialism, and that is undoubtedly its second crime.

As for the word itself, who invented it?

It may have been M. de Lamartine, when in 1833, upon returning from his trip to the Orient, he wrote these remarkable lines, which he has since too often forgotten:

“The proletarian class, a large class, now left to its own devices by the abolition of its employers and by individualism, is in a worse condition than it has ever been; it has regained sterile rights without possessing the necessities, and will continue to agitate society until *Socialism* succeeds this odious individualism. It is from the situation of the proletarians that the question of property, which is being debated everywhere today, has arisen – a question that would be resolved by struggle and division, if it were not soon resolved by reason, politics, and *social charity*. Charity is Socialism; – egoism is individualism.”

“Charity, like politics, commands man not to abandon man to himself, but to come to his aid, to form a kind of mutual insurance, on equitable conditions, between the propertied society and the non-property-owning society. It tells the proprietor: You will keep the property... but it also tells him: You will not forget that your property is not

instituted only for you, but for all humanity; you possess it only on conditions of justice, utility, distribution and *access for all*.”

Now, do you know what these words meant at the time, which M. de Lamartine himself did not fully understand?

They asserted that a choice must be made, and a prompt one, between free credit and division; between justice and violence, between liberty and despotism, between life and death.

Written, we say, in 1833, these words will today have lost none of their meaning.

By giving a new name to the science of progress, M. de Lamartine indicated at the same time, in the form of a dilemma which still remains in all its rigor, the great question, the inescapable problem which, in the order of social economy, this science, in the nineteenth century, is called upon first to solve.

This problem has since been brilliantly posed by the February Revolution of 1848: a revolution whose claim, as manifest as it is legitimate, as magnificent as it is ambitious, is to change, in France, in Europe, throughout the world, not only the political institutions, but the very nature of the social condition of the Peoples.

Imperious as truth, and deeply convinced that “the social state is advantageous to men only insofar as all have something and none of them has anything in excess” (J.-J. Rousseau), it has sworn either to annihilate society, or to make property common and universal.

To eliminate, through the abolition of the proletariat, the last form, the last vestige of slavery; to restore to labor its sacred rights, by stripping capital of its odious privileges; thus to found, on liberty – that is to say, on the absolute sovereignty of each and every person – the equality of their titles in rights and duties; finally, to lead all men, through the reconciliation of their interests in a principle of justice, to recognize and respect in one another the character of fraternity: This is what this Revolution commands, what it demands first and foremost, in the name of what is most sacred and most universal in the world, but also in the name of implacable necessity, and under penalty of plunging us, following horrible upheavals, back into the most dreadful barbarity. – You now know and understand the motto inscribed on its flag: *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity – or death*.

Socialism has frankly accepted the question posed in these terms; it has even striven to clear it of all ambiguity. This is undoubtedly its third crime, and the greatest.

Sixth article. (April 1, 1850)

It doesn't take a great effort of memory to remember it:

Even well before February 1848, when the events that were brewing in the future still appeared only in the mists of an uncertain horizon; when selfish passions, less threatened, allowed judgment more calm and lucidity, all those for whom the annals of the past are not summed up precisely in a sterile list of isolated and incoherent facts;

all those who pride themselves on grasping the necessary lineage, the logical and absolute series of historical phenomena, and on discovering in them the great laws that govern the fate of nations, all of them, we say, were unanimous in predicting the true nature of the revolution that was being prepared; all agreed to recognize that it would be “one of those crises which,” in the words of M. Guizot, “change not only political institutions, but the very nature of the social state.”

And the sentiment of this truth had so well penetrated minds, it had entered so deeply into the current of central thought, that, in all parts of France, in the mold where the definitive ruin of the monarchy was accomplished in our country, it appeared in the laws and in the language of newspapers and pamphlets, and in the speeches of all those who approached the popular tribune of the clubs.

Remember in particular the professions of faith of those who, since then, have thrown themselves with the most fervor and vehemence into the paths of reaction.

They were far from claiming then, as they do now, in the impudence of their apostasy, that this revolution had no reason to exist; that it was only a *surprise*, a *sleight of hand*, a *trick of the cup*.

Overwhelmed by the force of truth, which shone forth in the facts themselves in irrefutable characters, and not daring, moreover, to contradict the great voice of an entire People, free for a moment to make the cry of its soul heard, all then acclaimed with gusto the necessity of a social reform, all recognized it as just as inexorable, all posed as Socialists.

Why is it that today so many renegades and hypocrites have made this name a title of proscription with which they pursue all those who, the next day, remained faithful to their convictions of the day before?

Could it be because under this title there are still hidden, — alas! in too great a number, — turbulent incapacities and vain ambitions?

But what! Is it not the fate of all parties to count in their ranks men who are led there only by the calculations of their greed or their pride?

What doctrine, especially what new doctrine, however holy it may be, has not been tainted by contact with these self-serving adherences?

A fatal necessity, no doubt! But those who today make it a crime to Socialism, those, for the most part such good, such pious Christians, as we know, are they unaware of how many Simons and Peregrinus Christianity counted in its bosom at its cradle, how many it still counts at this hour?

You proscribe the socialists. Could it be because, under the name of Socialism, disordered passions and crude, threatening appetites are stirring in the lower depths of society — worthy fruits, you should know, of that social condition of which you so stubbornly and intrepidly make yourselves the champions?

Well! My God! Shall I tell you again, wasn't it also among the dregs of the nations, among the wretched of every kind, outcasts of Greek and Roman civilization, that

Christianity first recruited its most numerous adherents? Did this prevent it from having, at the same time, as its representatives and defenders, as Socialism does today, men of the purest virtue and the finest intellect? Did it embrace the thought of the future any less? Was it any less, for all humanity, the messenger of good news and the ark of salvation?

These passions, moreover, which rightly terrify you, and whose explosion we fear just as much as you do, these passions, once again, were not given birth by Socialism.

It goes further; without it, they would be a hundred times more threatening. By opening a path of justice and truth to them, by indicating a goal that ennobles them, by purifying them through the idea, Socialism today, like Christianity of old, from which it is, after all, in the historical order, an emanation and a development, Socialism alone has the power to guide them, to sanctify them by its action and thus to preserve society from an otherwise inevitable cataclysm.

But the Socialists, you say, attack the very foundations of the social order; they are the enemies of religion, of the family, of property.

The old Roman world said just as much about Christians; you know that, and you know how Christians responded to it.

In turn, let us once again put this formidable accusation into its proper perspective.

Many of those who address it to us know very well how treacherous and deceitful it is.

Let's admit, however, that for nearly two years they've been repeating it every day, and for it to have worked so well for them, for them not to have been forced to abandon it already, for it to still impress those who are frivolous or ignorant, no doubt, but acting in good faith, it must not be pure slander. A lie alone doesn't have such power, and the illusion it produces is of shorter duration.

We are the enemies of religion.

How do you understand it?

Are you talking about that religion of which M. de Montalembert is the official representative, and which counts M. Thiers among its new converts?

This religion, which, through the mouth of Pius IX and his advisors, fulminates against Italian independence and declares Rome, a papal city, bombarded in its name, forever the slave of the cardinals?

Of this religion, whose priests today, almost everywhere, deserve even more than in the time of the pagans this reproach from the Florentine poet: "Your avarice saddens him, trampling the good and exalting the wicked. It is you, shepherds, whom the Evangelist recognized when he saw her who sits upon the waves prostituting herself (*puttaneggiare*) to kings. — You have made gods of gold and silver for yourselves; and what difference is there between you and the idolaters, except that they worship one idol and you worship a hundred? Ah! Constantine, who brought forth from evils, not your conversion, but that dowry which the first enriched pope received from you!"

Oh! If that's how you understand it, you speak a thousand times right: this religion that you call Catholicism – we don't know why (for it certainly has nothing universal about it); this religion, which has made itself a governmental machine, a police apparatus, this religion is not ours and we are its enemies; for we are the enemies of hypocrisy and slavery, and its name has long since become synonymous with slavery and hypocrisy.

Malthusians! It is by this double title that it is dear to you today. Sons of crusaders and of Voltaire, to explain the ardor with which you have, among yourselves, formed an alliance on this ground, it suffices to recall this saying of Bossuet in his *Meditations*: “Politicians and hypocrites get along very well together.”

This is because some do not believe in God, and others conceive of him only as the genius of evil.

We admit it without shame, religion has a completely different meaning for us. We believe that we are affirming it, in fairly clear terms, in its essence, when we proclaim as the original principle from which all our doctrine proceeds the dogma of human perfectibility, that is to say the relationship of the finite to the infinite.

Tear this dogma from our hearts, from our minds, and from then on we too will no longer believe in God, and your religion can also become ours.

The time has not yet come to express our full thoughts on this matter. Listen carefully to this, and try to understand:

“We want religion; but let no one be mistaken. For us, religion is not symbolism; it is the content, the word of symbolism. To discover true religion, we must begin our exegesis anew, demonstrate philosophically, with the help of new social data, the supernatural in nature, heaven in society, God in man. It is when civilization appears to us as a perpetual apocalypse, and history as an endless miracle; when, through the reform of society, Christianity has been raised to its second power, that we will know religion. Then, too, our slanderers, clinging to their myths, will know what our God is, what our faith is...” (P.-J. Proudhon.) [Manifesto of *Le Peuple*]

Already, we glimpse the dawn of the day when Christianity will undergo a transformation no less radical than that imposed by Christ on Judaism eighteen hundred years ago. Then we will have understood the unity, the catholicity of the religion, as we understand today the unity of humankind despite the diversity of races and individuals, as we discover the catholicity of language through the infinite variety of dialects.

To our sons, more fortunate than we, freed by us from the worries of hunger, and free to boldly promenade their intelligence through the high regions of thought, to our sons, no doubt, are reserved the thorough examination and the precise solution of these great and magnificent problems.

However, and even now, is it really so difficult, with a little good faith, to recognize and appreciate the eminently religious character of Socialism?

It is accused of arousing the sensual passions of the multitude, of preferentially focusing on the material side of the lives of the people.

It is true that Socialism's primary aim is to ensure bread for all; it is true that its main concern is to establish the material foundations of society within the economic order. It thus obeys the laws of logic, conforming to the very nature of things. It proceeds, following the example of the God of Genesis, who also had to fashion the body of man from clay before animating it with his spirit.

But, moreover, we do not hesitate to affirm that Socialism, in less than two years, has sown and brought forth among the popular masses more elements of morality, more religious ideas, more truly Christian thoughts and feelings than had been done, for a very long time, under the restoration in particular, by the missionaries and Jesuits, with all the scandal of their processions and miracles.

You see, there is one issue of *La Voix du Peuple* that is closer, only one, to the Gospel than all the sermons spoken in our churches for the last fifty years.

Let's get to the heart of your triple accusation.

Enemies of religion, we are also, you say, enemies of the family.

Here again, what do you mean?

It was not we, as you well know, who first defined marriage as it is generally conceived and practiced among you, defenders of order, as *legal prostitution*.

Prostitution: that is to say, a union founded above all on shameful calculations of money, on monstrous expectations. Such, in your culture, is the cradle of the family: such is the prelude to the functions and duties of fatherhood.

And the rule is so formal in this respect, the established order so imperious, that whoever deviates from it and presumes to prefer natural attraction, the laws of sympathy, the sweet and pure emotions of love to considerations of fortune, to a marriage of convenience, incurs, by that very fact, the reprobation and mockery of all the others, and remains in their eyes charged and convicted of naivety and folly.

We are all too aware of the disorder and crimes engendered by this disregard for natural propriety and moral principles that governs the marriage contract. Scandal erupts daily before our very eyes.

In this picture, let us choose just one feature, which is perhaps not observed enough: if we meditate on it a little, it is enough to appreciate the family as our social order has made it.

I have known *filis de famille*, as they are called, the sons of wealthy families, and I have sometimes heard their tongues betray their innermost thoughts. I have recognized with horror that once they reach the age of independence, very few of them, in their impatience to take control of their inheritance, in the heat of a covetousness too often inflamed by their fathers' example, do not conceive horrible desires. More than one father has confided in me, with tears, that he had read this abominable wish in his son's soul!

In truth, it costs us little to admit that the family, as it is, inspires in us little veneration or love. Corrupted at the top by the temptations of greed, it is almost equally corrupted at the bottom by the despotism of poverty. We demand, for an institution so sacred in itself, a social environment that restores it to its full purity.

Certainly, this does not mean that we love our children and wives any less.

If you still doubt it, try touching our women and children!

I finally come to the third charge: we are the enemies of property.

This is the big question, the crucial point, for our opponents.

One might well suspect them of, deep down, making rather light of religion and family; – but property!

Property! That, as you know, is the holy ark, the palladium of the Malthusians.

And we attack it every day with sacrilegious audacity, and we have adopted as our war cry: “Property is theft!”

Let's be clear, though, because it is good to define.

Locke, I believe, said somewhere that almost all errors and wars among men arise from discussions revolving around ill-defined terms. If it wasn't Locke who said it, it was Bacon.

In any case, do you mean here property accumulated through usury, through plunder, through oppression, through laws that favor it, through all the means by which, in the past and in the present, certain classes have been able to live in all the enjoyments of luxury, without effort, without labor, without any other hardship than that of being born, while the multitude of the working classes has been and still is deprived of property?

Yes, then, a thousand times yes. We are the enemies of property understood in this way. We will repeat it *ad nauseam*: that kind of property is theft. Is not the true thief the one who comes between the hand and the mouth of the worker, and thus steals from him the fruits of his labor, whether this thief calls himself proprietor, usurer or commission agent?

But do you define property, as we do, as the producer's right to consume and use everything he produces? Oh! So, far from attacking property itself, we assert that all the harm stems from the fact that, until now, the right to property has been brazenly violated, both in principle and in its consequences. We demand that this monstrous injustice finally be brought to an end.

This, moreover, is the path into which we have been driven by both the excess of evil, the force of circumstances and the progress of the human spirit.

Either the February Revolution makes no sense, or it means: *Inviolable respect for property*. But understand it well: respect for the property of the poor as for that of the rich, for the property of the weak as for that of the strong.

Respect for property! This is the exact translation of the motto first adopted by the People: No more exploitation of man by man! No more aristocracy of capital! Right to work!

And the day has come when the surest, or rather the only way for those who own property to preserve it is to respect, in turn, the right which alone now constitutes the property of the poor: their right to work and to all the fruits of their labor.

The Constituent Assembly refused to explicitly recognize the right to work. Does this mean that this right, identical to the right to live, was not, by its very obviousness, proclaimed in the depths of everyone's conscience? No: it is because the application of this right for all is incompatible with the privilege enjoyed by Capital, with the rent of five or six billion that it extracts here each year from the ten or twelve billion in products produced by labor; it is because the Constituent Assembly found itself neither intelligent enough nor strong enough to break down the obstacle that still stands in the way of the reign of justice and liberty, of the institution of the democratic and social Republic; in short, to resolutely attack this extravagant injustice called the right to work, which is nothing other, as our friend Chev e said, than an incessant violation of property, a permanent attack on the security and lives of citizens; a denial of the principle of equality, a scandalous reward given to laziness over work; a last vestige of pagan slavery and the feudal system.

We are attacking, you say, the very foundations of the social order; you are undoubtedly right; but this social order, which is collapsing under the weight of its own vices and the reprobation of centuries, rests, as we have demonstrated, only on force, cunning and lies.

Do you want to put an end to our attacks? Do you want to end the misery of body and soul? Do you want to bridge the abyss of revolutions and wars? Do you want to expel despotism from its last lair? Do you want to spare society the punishment it undoubtedly deserves for a long accumulation of errors and iniquities, in which we are all complicit or in solidarity, and which a providential justice is already too interested in punishing? Do not wait until, to cleanse these Augean stables you call social order, the People, that other Hercules, in an explosion of anger, cause a river of blood to flow through them. Place yourselves without delay on the ground of morality and equity.

Abolition of interest on capital in all its forms; in other words, free and mutual credit; in yet other words, equality in exchanges: this is the final word, the definitive outcome of the revolutionary period, whose whirlwind is carrying us along at this hour.

We challenge society to escape, by any other means, a bloody catastrophe, a return to the most appalling barbarity.

Seventh article. (April 8, 1850)

In this brief overview of the social situation, our only aim has been to summarize and assess the facts themselves, as they present themselves to our understanding, without, moreover, attempting to delve into any of the issues at hand. It was quite sufficient for us to simply point them out.

We will remain faithful to our modest task; we will accomplish it to the end with the same sincerity.

By contrasting the aspirations and doctrines of Socialism, which are ours, with those of the disciples of Malthus, we have hitherto glorified ourselves in our strength; we will humble ourselves today, as is fitting, in our weakness.

The current social order, we have said, is, in essence, nothing but organized dishonor, disorder raised to its supreme power; in its deleterious action, as in the heart of an impure atmosphere, a society agonizes and succumbs, whose diagnosis M. Raudot has vainly described, whose funeral oration M. Donoso Cortés, in language worthy of Bossuet, has already pronounced.

To this artificial order, against which the cry of human conscience has always protested, to this deceitful order, by that very fact irredeemably condemned to perish, Socialism claims to substitute a true order, whose principles conform to those of eternal justice. Far from undermining, as it is accused of doing, the pillars of the social edifice — religion, family, property — it intends, in order to render them henceforth unshakeable, to restore them to their true foundations.

To wrest religion from the hands of the power, which is enervating and corrupting it; to free its spirit from its symbols, or at least to make its veil more transparent; to force it to move beyond the letter and understand itself; to spiritualize it, in short, and to raise it from its degradation, both through science and through freedom; — to surround the family with the primary conditions of morality and happiness, by silencing above all the excitations of greed and the temptations of misery; — to universalize property instantly, by giving it as its title of legitimacy labor instead of usury, which is only a variety of theft, whatever its title and name; to extinguish, for this purpose, the capitalist privilege through the institution of free credit, by converting, for example, the Bank of France into a National Bank: such is, formulated as a whole and reduced to its simplest expression, the symbol acknowledged by all socialists; such they include all the conditions of the democratic Republic; such is the realization of its three terms: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

Unfortunately, — and perhaps we must blame the force of circumstances and an imperious necessity even more than the reason and will of men — through misfortune, the socialists, so completely in agreement on the goal and on the means, still differ as to the method of application: on this last point, heresies also occur among us, and now in our turn the schism divides us into two great fractions: I mean the Socialism of liberty, on the one hand; on the other, Communism in all its shades.

We know quite well that we belong to the first group. As long as there is power, it matters little to us whose hands it falls into. We are the adversaries, not precisely of the men who constitute it, but of power itself, of the very principle of authority. "I want neither to govern nor to be governed." This statement by Proudhon sums up all our theories on this point, and we also readily repeat the words of the good and judicious La Fontaine:

Our enemy is our master:
I'm telling you this in plain French.

Moreover, we are convinced that a People is never free except to the extent that it deserves to be so: instructed by the lessons of history, we know that, in any revolution which takes place by impetuous leaps, there is a danger more to be feared than that of remaining short of the goal marked by the measure of progress achieved, it is that of exceeding it; because one thus throws oneself into the obligation of returning to it only by a long detour; we are persuaded that, in order to practice liberty, one must first understand it; we are certain that, from the day when light is shed on this point, from the day when the emancipation of the People is complete in itself, power, having no further reason for being, will disappear as if by magic under the breath of popular reason.

Consequently, it is only through the free discussion of ideas and facts, through the calm and regular development and under the guarantee of our present institutions, however imperfect they may be, that we intend to progress, without upheavals, in the path of reforms, even the most radical: it is through liberty, and without departing from legality, either by our words or by our actions, that we would bring about, with the redemption of the proletariat, the abolition of the government and the advent of anarchy, the only true type of political and social order.

It is not quite in this way, it must be admitted, that our friends in the dissident church understand it.

Like us, no doubt, they have faith in the power of universal suffrage: like us, they have sworn to rely solely on its decrees, and to wait patiently for the great electoral battle to decide between us and our adversaries; like us, they will break their oath, unless, on a fatal day, we are left with no other weapon than force to resist violence, and unless, by a formal attack on the imprescriptible rights that we all hold, as men, from nature, as citizens, from the Constitution, we are forced into the case of legitimate self-defense, and reduced to one of those extreme and desperate resolutions, where, as they say, one risks everything.

But, moreover, without absolutely denying the value of our theories on liberty, our friends reject their realization in the indefinite future, and maintain, at least for the time being, and for a long time to come, the necessity of the political power and the direction of the State. Arguing both from the People's ignorance and from the fury and dangers of reaction, they intend to take charge of our guardianship in their turn, and it is violently, it is through a kind of dictatorship, that they claim to lead us to liberty.

It is true that at the same time they affirm, in all sincerity, that power, in their hands, would take on a completely new character; they protest that the State, from the moment it was represented by them, from the master that it has always shown itself until now, would humbly become a servant.

It is not our task to point out the contradictions in this hypothesis; but, frankly, we believe that, seduced by the generosity of their excellent intentions, our friends are presuming too much here, both for their own reason and ours. They have not sufficiently reflected on the nature of power.

To substitute one power for another is to kill force with force, to correct injustice with injustice: we, for our part, do not clearly see what this means, and what advantage, what progress, ultimately results for society. In our opinion, it is merely displacing evil, not making it disappear, but perhaps prolonging it.

Let's not be fooled any longer by the hypocrisy of words.

There's this story about a Swiss guard: He was assigned a gate at the Tuileries, with instructions not to let anyone *enter*. A bourgeois appears: "You can't enter," says the Swiss guard. "So," replies the bourgeois, "I don't want to enter, but only to *exit* Pont-Royal." — "Ah! If it's a question of exiting," continues the Swiss guard, "sir, you may pass."

This tale has been, until now, the story of all peoples. Caesar appears in the public square, wanting to be crowned; and the Romans, lacking a precise understanding of the word *royalty*, grant him, under the name of *emperor*, the tyrannical power they deny him under the name of *king*.

Our friends, let the People especially meditate on this example — and others, if necessary, from a more recent date.

The People, thank God! have become completely ungovernable: this is undoubtedly a great step forward; but there remains one thing for them to do: to learn to govern themselves; for it is from themselves, from themselves alone that it comes from now on; they have nothing to expect from anyone but themselves, and it is not given to any man, however powerful he may be, to do for them what they could not do themselves.

Europe, ever attentive, has long since bestowed upon it the title of Initiating People: may it fully deserve this name!

And now, to conclude, one more word addressed to the gentlemen of the reaction.

The People in their masses are socialist: they are so above all by sentiment, by their lively and profound sympathy, by their devotion to all that suffers, by their confidence and faith in a better future.

For this reason and others, Socialism today encompasses all that remains of vital forces within the nation. It would be subject to the hundredth part of truth it contains at this moment, and to the expansive force with which it is consequently endowed, to shatter the old social edifice and break it into pieces like glass.

Ah, gentlemen, what cursed genius possesses you, and drives you to concentrate this force even further? Will you never understand that it alone, after having destroyed, is so powerful in rebuilding, and that it is a crime and madness to dissipate it entirely in a formidable explosion?

You're on the side of reaction: very well! We understand reaction, believe me. Situated in the present, we understand that by this very fact, in moving toward the future, we still cling to the past. We conceive of reaction not only as possible, but as necessary. Without it, in fact, movement alone would sweep us away with the speed of an electric spark, and, in rushing us forward, would plunge us back into chaos; we would cease to be before we had even been. We conceive of reaction in the political and social order, known, in the system of the universe, as the force of repulsion opposed to that of attraction, both necessary for harmony, for order, for the very existence of the world.

But reaction only enters into the realm of eternal wisdom insofar as it is enlightened and intelligent; otherwise, far from moderating the movement, it accelerates it further. Such is the reaction we see at work, which is leading us headlong toward catastrophe. For instead of directing, in some way, the forces of movement, compelling them to gather themselves at times and reflect upon themselves, it claims, in an absolute manner, to halt its momentum. Instead of positioning itself alongside the chariot to prevent it from sliding too quickly down the slope, it intends to oppose it head-on and force it to turn back; but this chariot is time, against whose march no force in the world can prevail, which crushes all obstacles in its course and scatters their debris with all the more rapidity and fury the more directly they were placed in its path.

Believe in Chateaubriand's eloquent sincerity: "You cannot hold back advancing generations by throwing fragments of ruins and debris from tombs at their heads. The fools who claim to lead the past into battle against the future are themselves victims of their temerity: centuries, we resign ourselves, crush them."

END.

A working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur, last revised June 14, 2026.