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[Working draft translation]

## **Review of Imperial Policy.**

### **Depression, Bankruptcy, Famine.**

For almost two years now, France has endured the ordeal of imperialism with stoic patience. The silence of the press, the prescription of parties, the police tracking down, imprisoning and deporting anyone who dares to express an opinion contrary to official policy, allowed the saviors of December to apply their theories at leisure. We will no longer come and say: If Napoleon were the master... If he had no opposition!... The opposition, it is to be reduced, in exile, in Algeria, in Cayenne. The Emperor and his proconsuls control our finances and our liberties. No one contradicts him; nothing can resist him.

It is time to review the results of the experiment.

We will say nothing of the brilliant maneuvers of the well-built and entrenched camps of Boulogne, of Helfaut, of Satory: these are names that have become forever historic; we will not describe any further the peaceful assaults given to our cities on the passage of deaf majesties, with the object of distracting them without frightening them; we will count neither the heroism displayed by our soldiers nor the laurels with which our generals covered themselves. Everyone knows the details of this spectacular parody, renewed and rejuvenated from the story of Don Quixote. Then these are, as they say, foreplay, and we can't wait to get to the bottom of things.

It is an imperial tradition that large budgets give a powerful impetus to trade. So the endowments of the emperor, of the political bodies and officials are less a matter of personal interest than a happy speculation for the benefit of the whole nation. Expenditures have increased, since the empire only in civil lists, increases in salaries, for prefects, bishops, gendarmes, priests, non-commissioned officers, etc., by 70 million per year. 70 million, when you could take 100, 200, 500, that's moderation. When Caesar and his court are drunk, France has dined.

However, if some spend, others must pay. Taxes are therefore most prosperous. The common folk are there to fill the purse. What would they complain about?

By crunching them, my Lord,  
You have done us a great honor.

[reference to Aesop]

However, the account balances are not always funny. The deficit foreseen in 1853 was about 250 millions.

We know what the deficit forecasts mean. Jacques Bonhomme may well pay the principal and the additional centimes, the direct and indirect taxes, these are larks in the mouth of Gargantua.

In the meantime, as money is needed, more money, always money, the Minister of Finance negotiates treasury bonds. There are currently 500 million in circulation.

The treasury bonds, we must explain to those who do not know, are a means of discounting taxes not yet collected. They are several months and up to a year away. A wise administration should use this expedient with reserve. Such are not the imperial procedures. The circulation, which rose at the beginning of the year to 120 millions, today exceeds, let us say, 500 millions.

500 million out of a budget of one and a half billion is just a third. We still have three months before we reach the end of 1853. At that point, half of the receipts for 1854 will already be devoured.

Suppliers of the empire, sing a hosanna! One would like to take out a loan; but that is not possible. What do we say? The loans are all contracted: that is what you have provided. Donations issued will be consolidated; holders will receive, in lieu of cash, perpetual annuity securities. The annual debt including pensions amounts to approximately 375 million. 25 million more will make a round number. Creditors of the state, shout *Long Live the Emperor* at the rise; you will need it to negotiate your titles.

If the government goes bankrupt, at least commerce leaves nothing to be desired. Let us judge instead.

The Emperor does not want anything to be done in business without his approval. He had authorized the issue of mortgage bonds for the Crédit foncier de Marseille and Nevers; for a small commission of 4,800,000 francs, M. Mirés took charge of the operation. The Emperor had wanted; the emperor no longer wants: the bonds subscribed are being reimbursed. Rumors have been spread on this subject: according to some, the Crédit foncier de France, jealous of the eagerness of the speculators to take the bonds offered, tending to disdain those of Mr. Wolowski, would have obtained this measure against his rival; according to others, Mr. Mirés would have himself requested the termination of his contract. What do capitalists care? It is enough for them that the emperor commands everything. You will pour in your capital here, and withdraw it from there! It is his way of creating confidence

He forbids the public funds to fall; stockbrokers have strict instructions and full powers in this regard.

The Bank of England has raised its discount rate to 4½ per cent. That of France wanted to imitate it as an easy to understand precaution. The paper, instead of placing itself in London, comes to seek the reduction in Paris. The result is the export of our cash.

Exporting cash for discount at low prices, exporting cash by purchasing grain abroad, which will employ no less than 260 million this year, is a commercial panic. Better informed than the financiers and traders, the emperor did not intend for the bank rate to rise. Let trade lament, provided Caesar's will is accomplished.

Where the government proves intractable is in the question of subsistence, "We don't hear anyone talking," the police say. An agricultural journal has just been suppressed for concerning

itself with the crop deficit. The supply of grain indeed figures in the political program of December, formulated in these terms by the oracle of the system, M. de Garsigny: "Nobody up to now has understood anything about government; what France needs is a rich and powerful financial aristocracy, a small bourgeoisie; to the people enough bread to keep them from crying out, illuminations to amuse them, priests to lull them to sleep."

In illuminations, with the millions of taxpayers, it is easy to work wonders. As for Jesuitism, if it were not insatiable, one might believe it at the height of its greatness. The director of the bookstore once said to the bookseller Hachette: "The power does not intend that in history books, the beautiful role be left to Protestants and the odious role to Catholics, even with regard to Saint-Barthélemy."

Let us see the question of bread, over the solution of which imperialism recognizes itself as having sole jurisdiction.

First, let's talk about the maximum imposed on bakers in the capital. By the first agreement, the prefect of police was to grant them tax compensation; that is to say, instead of paying for four pounds of bread 18 sous at one time, 16 sous at another; 12 sous at another, the Parisian would have had it for years at the fixed price of 16 sous. A new combination is to compensate bakers by the city. In this way, the inhabitants will continue to pay in dues for wine, wood, coal, oils, meat, etc., 25 and 40 per cent above their value, in order to give the city the way to keep the bread tax at 16 sous. It is popularism in the imperial taste.

Here is a far more fruitful idea. In order to bring about a decline, the government imagines buying wheat with public funds and selling it below the price on the Marseilles market.

The merchants of the interior, justly alarmed by a maneuver that tends to ruin them, hasten to send by electric telegraph to their correspondents in the maritime towns, the order to direct to Belgium and England the ships loaded with grain. Anger and disappointment of the statesmen. The *Moniteur*, by an audacious lie, affirms in vain that the government does not meddle in the grain trade. Who believes the denials of the Monitor?

The result of this escapade is the immediate deficit in supplies, moreover the panic thrown into the grain trade, which threatens to withdraw. It is the popular organization of famine.

Jealous of such great zeal, the prefects wrote no less ingenious circulars to the mayors of the communes. Landlords and tenants are worried; they are forbidden to sell at home; they are forced to take their entire harvest to the market. We set out to prove to them, the farmers, that the year is above average. The police in turn verbalize right and left against the buyers. Searches, requisitions, maximums, hassles whose result is to scare people and precipitate the crisis, this is the know-how of the great politicians of December.

Let the idiots used to cursing the hoarders applaud! They will see in six months.

Grain grabbing! A number of bourgeois, merchants of wood, wine, colonial foodstuffs and various products, hoarders of the articles of their trade in the same way as the *blatiers* are hoarders of wheat, most of the workers, the imperial government, as strong in economy as the

most ignorant, a notable portion of the population, finally, still believes in this chimera of monopolization. Poor fools!

That one accumulates gold, of which it can hold several millions in a few barrels of Burgundy wines, it is possible; rent is cheap. But to keep wheat, the merchandise that is most cumbersome and most susceptible to deterioration, what a rich idea. The grains exist in a dry, well-ventilated store; they cannot be piled up in large heaps for fear of fermentation; it is a very heavy commodity, badly placed on the ground floor and whose weight crushes the floors. Add to all these difficulties the transport, loading and unloading that the mania for monopolizing would require, and it will be seen that so many expenses, added to the rent of the stores, would soon have absorbed the principal and the profits.

Let the fools and the Emperor's officials tell each other.

Incapacity or treason among the men in power, it is all one as for the results. But is it really unwittingly that the government organizes famine? If the high cost of food causes discontent, hunger weakens courage. The hungry do not fight, except at the doors of the charity offices. The years of scarcity are times of prosperity for the societies of Saint Francis Xavier, of Saint Vincent de Paule, for all the Jesuit establishments where one obtains bread and soup for a notice of confession.

The enervation of the race by privations is the secret of imperial policy. This secret has just been revealed in Minister Fortoul's circular on the high school diet.

"Considering," he said, "that intellectual labors require fortifying food... the ration of meat allotted to the pupils, per day and per head, will be 70 grams for the large, 60 for the medium, 50 for the small." 50 grams of meat, the tenth of a pound, 70, a seventh, this is the official ration granted to children, to young people in the age of growth; this is what M. de Fortoul, under the impression no doubt of the vapors arriving from an orgy, has dared to call a fortifying food. Did we ever see a more cynical contempt for humanity?

It is now a question of applying to the whole nation the fortifying regime of the high schools. This is why the government does not hear the cry of alarm being raised about the scarcity. But do we want to get an idea of the imminence of the danger; here are facts no less positive than the Fortoul circular.

The year 1853 is as bad as the year 1846; and in 1846, 16 million hectoliters of wheat had to be imported from abroad: customs figures testify to this.

16 million hectoliters is, at 75 kilos per hectolitre, a weight of 1 billion 200 thousand kilos to transport, or twelve hundred thousand barrels. To bring them in a single voyage, 24,000 ships of 500 tons would be needed. The French navy is made up of 15,000 merchant ships, at most, of which 250 are steam-powered, and all about 800,000 tons. So that to transport from the Black Sea to Marseilles the wheat necessary to feed France, our entire navy would have to make a trip and a half.

Most of our vessels are in America, Australia, California. Shipowners who up to now made squall changes are repelled by the maneuvers we have reported on. Are the ships of the State going to supply? They are neither conducive nor sufficient. Besides, isn't our fleet at Besica, ready to move on Constantinople and bombard the city, in order to protect the [ ] against their own training?

You see well that scarcity is certain; but Bonaparte does not want anyone to talk about it; he wants it to catch everyone off guard without a single voice crying out to France: Save yourself!

There is too much population! it is still an imperial tradition. In the absence of war, famine will be the scourge of God at the hands of the new emperor.

Come the Riot! we have provided for it. The destination of low-cost housing in Paris forces the workers every day to seek asylum far from the center: we will only have rest when we have driven back outside the barrier, these proletarians whom they love so much in official announcements. The riot, the massacres of December call for it with all their wishes. Aren't there crosses, pensions, ranks to be gained in plunder and slaughter? come the riot so that the lead, the iron and the grapeshot help to make it, too slow to destroy.

Decimating the proletariat is the imperial way of emancipating it.

To the creditors of the State bankruptcy, to commerce panic and ruin, to the people famine, to France civil war, these are the results of the policy of December. It takes no less than all these scourges together to enervate the nation and make it docile under the yoke that is being prepared for it; Didn't Bonaparte, God's chosen one, swear to bring her back to the holy way; and the holy way, the religious universe, which in default of the pope crowned the emperor, defined it as follows: "Restoration of the old regime, reconstitution of the equality and property of the clergy, restoration of the feudal rights of the tithe and serfdom."

This is the providential mission devolved to the emperor. It was the Jesuits, his oracles, who traced it to him, and he would not fail.

However the times draw near; the crisis is rushing; we have an infallible symptom of it. Financiers and speculators hastily realize their fortune and send it to England or America. When the rats move, the house is not far from collapsing. It is a question of knowing whether it is the nation or the emperor it will crush under its debris.

[P.-J. Proudhon]