

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon
Election Manifesto
of
Le Peuple

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Translator: Paul Sharkey

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Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology

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Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*

The central electoral committee, comprising delegates from the fourteen Seine *arrondissements* and designed to make preparation for the election of the president of the Republic, has just concluded its operations.

Citizen Raspail, the people's representative, has been selected unanimously as the candidate of the democratic and social republican party.¹

The central committee is to publish its circular to electors without delay.

As for ourselves, who have associated ourselves intellectually and emotionally with that candidature, who, in that context, have seen fit, in defence of the dignity of our views, to stand apart from other, less advanced factions of the democracy, we consider it our duty here to recall what our principles are: that being the best way of justifying our conduct.

Our *principles*!

Throughout history, men who have sought popular endorsement in order to succeed to power have abused the masses with alleged declarations of principle which, in essence, have never been anything other than declarations of PROMISES!

Throughout history, the ambitious and scheming have, in more or less pompous language, promised the people:

Liberty, equality, fraternity;

Work, family, property and progress;

Credit, education, association, order and peace;

Participation in government, equitable distribution of taxes, honest and inexpensive administration, fair courts, movement towards equality of income, liberation of the proletariat and eradication of poverty!

So much have they promised that, coming after them, it has to be confessed, there is nothing left to be promised.

But then again, what have they delivered? It is for the people to answer: Nothing! . . .

The true friends of the people must henceforth adopt a different tack. What the people expects of its candidates, what it asks of them, is not promises now, but PRACTICALITIES.

It is upon these practicalities that they suggest men should be judged: and it is upon such that we ask that we be judged.

As socialist-democrats, we belong, in truth, to no sect, no school. Or, rather, if we were obliged to come up with a description of ourselves, we should say that we are of the *critical* school. For us, socialism is not a system: it is, quite simply, a protest. We believe, though, that from socialist works is dedicated a series of principles and ideas at odds with economic convention, and which have been absorbed into popular belief: which is why we call ourselves socialists. Professing socialism while embracing nothing of socialism, as the more artful do, would be tantamount to mocking the

¹ François-Vincent Raspail (1794-1878) was a French chemist, naturalist, physiologist, and socialist politician. Stood as the Socialist candidate in the Presidential elections of 10th December 1848 but came fourth (with 0.49% of the vote). (Editor)

people and abusing its credulousness... Being a republican is not the last word: it is not the last word to acknowledge that the Republic ought to be surrounded by social institutions: it is not enough to inscribe upon one's banner, *Democratic and social Republic*: one must plainly point up the difference between the old society and the new: one has to spell out the positive product of socialism: and wherein and why the February Revolution, which is the expression thereof, is a social revolution.

For a start, let us recall socialism's underlying dogma, its pure dogma.

The objective of socialism is liberation of the proletariat and eradication of poverty, which is to say, effective equality of circumstances between men. In the absence of equality, there will always be poverty, always be a proletariat.

Socialism, which is egalitarian above all else, is thus the democratic formula par excellence. Should less honest politicians be mealy-mouthed about admitting it, we respect their reservations: but they ought to know that, in our view, they are no democrats.

Now, what can be the origin of this inequality?

As we see it, that origin has been brought to light by a whole series of socialist criticisms, particularly since Jean-Jacques [Rousseau]: that origin is the realisation within society of this triple abstraction: *capital, labour, talent*.

It is because society has divided itself into three categories of citizen corresponding to the three terms in that formula — that is, because of the formation of a class of capitalists or proprietors, another class of workers, and a third of talents — that caste distinctions have always been arrived at, and one half of the human race enslaved to the other.

Wheresoever an attempt has been made to separate these three things — capital, labour and talent — effectively and organically, the worker has wound up enslaved: he has been described, in turn as slave, serf, pariah, plebeian and proletarian: and the capitalist has proved the exploiter: he may go variously by the name of patrician or noble, proprietor or bourgeois: the man of talent has been a parasite, an agent of corruption and servitude: at first he was the priest, then he was the cleric, and today the public functionary, all manner of competence and monopoly.

The underlying dogma of socialism thus consists of reducing the aristocratic formula of *capital-labour-talent* into the simpler formula of **LABOUR!**... in order to make every citizen simultaneously, equally and to the same extent capitalist, worker, and expert or artist.

In reality as in economic science, *producer* and *consumer* are always one and the same person, merely considered from two different viewpoints. Why should the same not be true of capitalist and worker? of worker and artist? Separate these qualities in the organisation of society and inexorably you create castes, inequality and misery: amalgamate them, on the other hand, and in every individual you have equality, you have the Republic. And that is how in the political order, all these distinctions between governors and governed, administrators and administered, public functionaries and tax-payers, etc., must some day be erased. Each citizen must, through the spread of the social idea, become all: for, if he be not all, he is not free: he suffers oppression and exploitation somewhere.

So, by what MEANS is this great amalgamation to be brought to pass?

The means is indicated by the affliction itself. And, first of all, let us try to define that affliction better, if possible.

Since the organic *origin* of the proletariat and of poverty is located in the division of society into two classes: one that works and does not own; the other that owns but does not work; and, consequently, consumes without producing; it follows that the affliction by which society is beset consists of this singular fiction according to which capital is, of itself, productive: whereas labour, of itself, is not. In fact, for all things to be equal in this hypothesis of the separation of labour and capital, then, because the capitalist profits by his capital without working, so the worker should profit from his labour, in the absence of capital. Now, that is not the case. So, in the current system, equality, liberty and fraternity are impossible: and thus, poverty and proletariat are the inevitable consequence of property as presently constituted.

Anyone knowing this but not confessing it is lying equally to bourgeoisie and to proletariat. Anyone courting the people's votes but keeping this from it is neither a socialist nor a democrat.

We say again:

The productivity of capital, which Christianity has condemned under the name of USURY, is the true cause of poverty, the true origin of the proletariat, the eternal obstacle to establishment of the Republic. No equivocation, no mumbo-jumbo, no sleight of hand! Let those who profess to be socialist democrats join us in signing this profession of faith: let them join our company: then, and then only, will we acknowledge them as brothers, as true friends of the people, and will we associate ourselves with their every act.

And now, what is the means whereby this affliction can be eradicated, this usury terminated? Is it to be an attack upon *net* product, seizure of revenue? Is it to be, while professing utmost regard for property, the ravishing of property by means of taxation, as it is acquired through work and enshrined by law?

It is on this count above all that the true friends of the people stand apart from those whose only wish is to command the people: it is on this count that true socialists part company with their treacherous imitators.

The means of destroying usury, is not, let us repeat, the confiscation of usury: it is by countering principle with principle, in short, by *organising credit*.

As far as socialism is concerned, the organisation of credit does not mean lending at interest, since that would still be an acknowledgement of capital's suzerainty: it is, rather, organising the workers' mutual solidarity, introducing their mutual guarantees, in accordance with that common economic principle that *anything that has an exchange value is susceptible to becoming an article of exchange* and can, in consequence, furnish the basis for credit.

Just as the banker lends money to the businessman who pays him interest upon the loan:

Or the estate-owner lends his land to the peasant who pays him a rent for it:

Or the house-owner lets his tenant have lodgings in return for payment of rent:

Or the merchant lets his goods go to the customer who pays on the instalment plan:

So the worker lends his labour to the employer who pays him by the week or by the month. Every one of us vouchsafes something on credit: do we not speak of *selling on credit, working on credit, drinking, eating on credit?*

Thus labour can make an advance of itself, and can be as much the creditor as capital can.

Furthermore, two or more workers can advance one another their respective products, and, if they were to come to an arrangement regarding permanent transactions of this sort, they would have organised credit among themselves.

This is what those labour associations are to be admired for having grasped which have spontaneously, without prompting and without capital been formed in Paris and in Lyon, and which, merely by liaising with one another and making loans to one another, have organised labour as we said. So that, organisation of credit and organisation of labour amount to one and the same. It is no school and no theoretician that is saying this: the proof of it, rather, lies in current practice, revolutionary practice. Thus application of one principle leads the people towards discovery of another, and one solution arrived at always opens doors to another.

If it were to come about that the workers were to come to some arrangement throughout the Republic and organise themselves along similar lines, it is obvious that, as masters of labour, constantly generating fresh capital through work, they would soon have wrested alienated capital back again, through their organisation and competition: they would attract to their side, to start with, small property, small traders and small industries: then large-scale property and large industries: then the very biggest ventures, mines, canals and railways: they would become the masters of it all, through the successive affiliation of producers and the liquidation of property without the proprietors' being despoiled or indemnified.

Organising labour and credit along these lines would build an alliance between agriculture and industry which, at the present time, are instantly at loggerheads with each other. For who is there but industry to extend loans to the farmer? And what market is agriculture going to have but industry?

Such is the undertaking upon which the people has spontaneously embarked before our very eyes, an undertaking that it prosecutes with admirable vigour, weathering all difficulties and the most frightful privations. And we ought not to weary of saying that this movement was initiated, not by the leaders of schools, and that the primary instigation came not from the State but from the people. We are merely its spokesmen here. Our creed, the democratic and social creed, is not a utopia any more: it is a fact. This is not our doctrine that we are preaching: these are the people's ideas that we have taken up as themes for our explorations. Those who sneer at them, who prattle to us of association and Republic and yet do not dare to acknowledge the true socialists, the true republicans as their brothers are not of our ilk.

Committed to this idea these ten years past, we have not waited for the people to triumph before lining up on its side; it didn't take Christ's resurrection to persuade us of the divinity of his mission.

Should the government, the National Assembly, the bourgeoisie itself sponsor and assist us in the accomplishment of our undertaking, we will be grateful for that. But let none try to distract us from what we regard as the people's true interests: let none try to deceive us with the empty sham of reforms. We are too clear-sighted to fall for

that again, and we know more of the workings of the world than the politicians who regale us with their admonitions.

We should be delighted if the State were to contribute through its budgetary provisions to the emancipation of the workers: We would look only with mistrust upon what is termed State organisation of credit, which is, as we see it, merely the latest form of man's exploitation of his fellow-man. We repudiate State credit, because the State, in debt to the tune of eight billions, does not possess a centime that it could advance by way of a loan: because its finances rest solely upon fiat money [*papier à cours forcé*²]: because fiat money necessarily entails depreciation, and depreciation always hits the worker rather than the proprietor: because as associated workers or workers in the process of association, we need neither the State nor fiat money to organise of our exchanges: because, in the end, credit from the State is always credit from capital, not credit from labour, and still monarchy rather than democracy.

Under the arrangement suggested to us and which we reject with all of the vigour of our convictions, the State, in the awarding of credit, first has to secure capital. For such capital, it must look to property, by way of taxation. So we still have this reversion to principle when the point is to destroy it: we have displacement of wealth, when we ought to have its creation: we have withdrawal of property, after it has been declared by the constitution to be inviolable. Let others of less advanced and less suspect ideas, meticulous in their morals, support such ideas, and we will not question their tactics. But we, who wage war, not upon the rich but upon principles: we, whom the counter-revolution never wearies of vilifying, we have to be more demanding. We are socialists, not despoilers.

We do not want progressive taxation, because progressive taxation is the validation of *net* product and we wish to do away with *net* product, through association: because, if progressive taxation fails to divest the rich man of all his wealth, it is merely a concession made to the proletariat, a sort of ransom for the right of usury, in short, a trick: and if it seizes all income, it amounts to confiscation of property, to expropriation without prior indemnification and is of no public use.

So let those who claim to be primarily politicians invoke progressive taxation by way of a reprisal against property, a punishment for bourgeois selfishness: we respect their intentions and if it should ever happen that they get the chance to implement their principles, we will bow to the justice of God.³ As far as we representatives of those who have lost everything to the rule of capital are concerned, progressive taxation, precisely because it is an enforced restitution, is off-limits to us: we will never propose it to the people. We are socialists, men of reconciliation and progress: we seek neither reaction nor agrarian law.

We do not want levies upon State revenues, because such a levy is, like progressive taxation in the case of *rentiers*, mere confiscation, and in the case of the people, mere sleight of hand, trickery. We believe that the State is entitled to repay its debts, and thus to borrow at the lowest rates of interest: we do not think that it is licit for it, under cover of taxation, to default upon its commitments. We are socialists, not bankrupters.

² *cours forcé* (forced rate/price) refers to inconvertible money, which is legal tender by government declaration and not backed by, nor convertible into, gold or silver. (Editor)

³ As in "The voice of the people is the voice of God" ("Vox populi, vox dei"). (Editor)

We do not want taxes upon inheritance, because such a tax is likewise merely a retreat from property, and, property being a constitutional right acknowledged universally, the wishes of the majority must be respected with regard to it: because that would be a trespass against the family: because, in order to emancipate the proletariat, we need not indulge in such fresh hypocrisy. Under the law of association, transmission of wealth does not apply to the instruments of labour, so cannot become a cause of inequality. So, let the assets of the deceased proprietor pass to his most distant and often his most impoverished relative. We are socialists, not stealers of inheritances.

We do not seek taxes upon luxury items, because that would be to strike a blow against the luxury industries: because luxury items are the very badge of progress: because, with labour in the ascendant and capital subordinated, luxury must extend to each and every citizen. Why, having encouraged property, would we retaliate against proprietors for their pleasures? We are socialists, not begrudgers.

Taxation represents the contribution made by each worker towards the costs of the community: the natural basis for taxation, therefore, is the *product*. A few centimes in every hundred added to the purchase price of everything that circulates or is consumed. As to the land and capital, these can only be taxed to the extent that they are appropriated: direct taxation being nothing but the price of the tolerance shown to the proprietor. Then again, since, under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership, it follows that direct taxation must be little by little done away with, like the veneration of privilege, the badge of feudalism and usury. This is the very opposite of what the neophytes of social democracy propose to us.

At the moment, the costs of tax collection stand at over 50 millions. — Under association, as conceived of and implemented by the People, such costs can and must be whittled down to virtually nothing. What have the new socialists, those official but rather dull-witted champions of property, to say to that?

Customs tariffs, which is to say, protection for the nation's labours, sets the country back twenty six millions. People would enjoy both free exchange and equal exchange. Labour would be protected by the simple fact that it could be exchanged only against labour: such protection would not cost a thing. It is not a mere *overhaul* of customs tariffs that socialism asks for, as do its young friends: it is their utter abolition.

We do not want expropriation by the State of the mines, canals and railways: it is still monarchical, still wage-labour. We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations operating under State supervision, in conditions laid down by the State, and under their own responsibility. We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic.

We do not want the government of man by man any more than the exploitation of man by man: have those who are so quick to seize upon the socialist formula given it any thought?

We want savings in State expenditure, just as we want the worker to enjoy the full range of the rights of man and the citizen, the attributes of capital and of talent. For which reason we ask for certain things that socialism suggests, and which men who purport to be particularly political fail to understand.

Politics tends to lead to specialisation and indefinite proliferation of jobs: socialism tends to amalgamate them all.

Thus we believe that virtually the totality of public works can and should be carried out by the army: that such participation in public works is the primary duty that the republican youth owes to its homeland: that, as a result, the army budget and the public works budget duplicate each other. That represents a saving of more than 100 millions: politics overlooks that.

There is talk of trades education. We believe that agricultural training comes in the form of agriculture: the school for arts, crafts and manufacture is the workshop: the school for commerce is the counting-house: the mining school is the mine: the navigation school the navy: the administration school the civil service, etc.

The apprentice is as necessary to the job as the journeyman: why put him to one side in a school? We want the same education for everybody: what good are schools which the people sees as only schools for aristocrats and which represent a double drain upon our finances? Organise association, and by the same token, every workshop becoming a school, every worker becomes a master, every student an apprentice. Elite figures are turned out as well and better by the workshop as by the study hall.

Likewise in government.

It is not enough to say that one is opposed to the presidency unless one also does away with ministries, the eternal focus of political ambition. It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power through its joint deliberations and votes. Ministers, under-secretaries of State, departmental heads, etc., duplicate the work of the representatives, whose idle, dissipated life, given over to scheming and ambition, is a continual source of troubles for the administration, of bad laws for society and of needless expense for the State.

Let our young recruits get this straight in their heads: socialism is the contrary of governmentalism. For us, that is a precept as old as the adage: *There can be no familiarity between master and servant.*

Besides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the imperative mandate [*mandat impératif*]. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty!... That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.

We seek unbounded freedom for man and the citizen, along as he respects the liberty of others:

Freedom of association;

Freedom of assembly;

Freedom of religion;

Freedom of the press;

Freedom of thought and of speech;

Freedom of labour, trade and industry;

Freedom of education;

In short, absolute freedom.

Now, among these freedoms, there is still one that the old politics will not countenance, which makes a nonsense of all the rest! Will they tell us once and for all if they want freedom on condition or unconditional freedom?

We want the family: where is there anyone who respects it more than we do?... But we do not mistake the family for the model of society. Defenders of monarchy have taught us that monarchies were made in the image of the family. The family is the *patriarchal* or dynastic element, the rudiment of royalty: the model of civil society is the fraternal association.

We want property, but property restored to its proper limits, that is to say, free disposition of the fruits of labour, property MINUS USURY!... Of that we need say no more. Those who know us get our meaning.

Such, in substance, is our profession of faith. The *Declaration* by the deputies of the Mountain leaves us duty-bound to reproduce it so that a judgement may be made as to whether, by not welcoming the honourable Mr Ledru-Rollin's candidacy on the say-so of friends, we are letting down the democratic and social cause, or whether it is the authors of that *Declaration* who are lagging behind in socialism.

We acknowledge the inclinations of the young Mountain, we applaud its efforts and take note of its onward march. Today, it is the Mountain that comes to the prophet: politics is evolving into socialism; just a few steps more and all the shades of republicanism will be indistinguishable.

But even though it may say the opposite, and doubtless believes it, the Mountain is only socialist in intention. The people has read its *Declaration* and will read our own *Manifesto*. Let it compare and judge. Let it say if, in the light of this document, as lightweight in ideas as it is compromising of us in terms of its politics, we should cover our tracks and fold up our tents.

The Mountain, which is, for all its ambition, only slightly or not at all socialist, is still only slightly or not at all revolutionary, for all its fervour. Its political deeds and ideas alike are the proof of that.

Was it revolutionary in September, in the elections?

Was it revolutionary in June?

Was it revolutionary in April?

Was it revolutionary during the proceedings in the Luxembourg?

We were every bit as much as it was, and more than it was, in February.

The Mountain bemoans the fact that we are not *politicians*!

To which our retort is that the Mountain is sorely mistaken if it imagines that politics amounts to anything in the absence of socialism. Socialism is politics defined in its aims and in its means. Prior to this, politics has been mere deftness. In short, socialism is the thing, politics the man. From which it follows that socialism can manage very well without politics, whereas politics cannot dispense with socialism. We see the evidence of that in the profound mediocrity of the political deeds that have come to pass, not just over the last nine months, we should say, but over the past eighteen years! ...

And now to this miserable question of the Presidency.

Assuredly, it is a serious business knowing on the one hand whether the people should vote or abstain: and, on the other, under what colours, under what profession of faith the election would proceed. And as far as the candidate goes, ours was the first.

Democratic and social opinion had to be directly consulted: the Mountain has acted alone.

It publishes its *Declaration* the way Louis XVIII did the charter he granted, without consulting anyone.

It puts up a candidate in Paris and in the departments without a word of warning.

Then, once the election committee has been formed, it walks up and tells it: Things are too far advanced, and to withdraw would be impossible! No divisiveness! The Mountain simultaneously rams the vote, the programme and the candidate down our throats. As if to say to us: You have come thus far, but you will go no further. To borrow an expression that has become parliamentary language, it has leapfrogged socialism to its own advantage!

We shall not dwell upon the personality issue. It is a matter of regret for us that a politician (and we are using that term here without the least irony) such as the honourable Mr Ledru-Rollin should have played into the hands of clumsy friends. He already had our personal sympathies and preferences. The bullying approach and hurtful mistrust of his entourage, however, have pushed us into the opposition ...

Besides, it is our belief that this division, far from decreasing the strength of the democratic and social camp, will increase it. As things presently stand, no candidate could attract all the votes: between the old-style socialist democracy and tomorrow's the disagreements still run too deep.

The central electoral committee has decided unanimously to support citizen RASPAIL in his candidacy for the presidency.

Raspail, returned by 66,000 Parisian and 35,000 Lyonnais votes;

Raspail, the socialist democrat;

Raspail, the implacable exposé of political mythologies;

Raspail, whose work in the field of healing has elevated him to the ranks of the benefactors of mankind.

In lending our backing to this candidature, we do not, as the honourable Monsieur Ledru-Rollin had written somewhere, intend to endow the Republic with a possible CHIEF: far from it. We accept Raspail as a living protest against the very idea of the Presidency! We offer him to the people's suffrage, not because he is or believes himself possible, but because he is impossible: because with him, presidency, the mirror-image of royalty, would be impossible.

Nor do we mean, in calling for votes for Raspail, to issue a challenge to the bourgeoisie which fears this great citizen. Our primary intention is reconciliation and peace. We are socialists, not muddleheads.

We back Raspail's candidacy, so as to focus the eyes of the country all the more strongly upon this idea, that henceforth, under the banner of the Republic, there are but two parties in France, the party of labour and the party of capital.

It will not be through any fault of ours if the last remaining vestige of this ancient division is not soon erased.