

THE BEST OF BASTIAT #1.2

“Bastiat the Revolutionary: Part 1” (Feb.-March 1848)

“Here is the spirit in which I will support the Republic with wholehearted devotion: War waged against all forms of abuse: a people bound by the ties of privilege, bureaucracy, and taxes is like a tree eaten away by parasite plants. Protection for all rights: those of conscience like those of intelligence; those of ownership like those of work; those of the family like those of the commune; those of the fatherland like those of humanity. I have no ideal other than universal justice; no motto other than that on our national flag, liberty, equality, fraternity.”



Claude Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850)

The Best of the Online Library of Liberty <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2465>

The Best of Bastiat <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2477>

[March, 2013]

Editor's Introduction

Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850) was the leading advocate of free trade in France during the 1840s. He made a name for himself as a brilliant economic journalist, debunking the myths and misconceptions people held on protectionism in particular and government intervention in general. When revolution broke out in February 1848 Bastiat was elected twice to the Chamber of Deputies where he served on the Finance Committee and struggled to bring government expenditure under control. He is best known for his clever and humorous criticisms of tariffs and government subsidies in two collections of articles called *Economic Sophisms* (1846, 1848) and his unfinished treatise on economics, *Economic Harmonies* (1850-51).

This collection of articles dates from February and March 1848 when Bastiat and a group of friends were active participants in the Revolution which broke out in Paris on 23-25 February and the Second Republic was declared. Bastiat was a strong believer in the Republic stating that “the republican form of government is the only one which is suitable for a free people.” He, Molinari, and a couple of other friends began *La République française* in order to hand out on the streets of Paris in the first weeks of the revolution. Thirty issues appeared between 26 February and 28 March when it closed down so Bastiat could focus on his election campaign to the Constituent Assembly (in which he was successful). Many of the articles were written to appeal to ordinary working people in the hope that they could be persuaded not to support the socialists’ plans to build a new welfare state with taxpayer funded unemployment relief schemes like the National Workshops.

Bastiat was an eyewitness to the violence and killings and spoke about his experiences in a couple of letters to friends. In a letter from 27 February he talks about trying to stop the troops firing at the protesters so he and others could pull the dead and dying to the safety of the side streets.

The publication of *La République française* in February/March was not Bastiat’s only participation in the Revolution of 1848. In June he and Molinari returned with another small journal, *Jacques Bonhomme*, which appeared briefly before shutting down following the shootings which took place in the streets during the June Days rioting in Paris.

“The revolution began with a cry for reform. ... Today, it is still reform that we want, but of the fundamental kind, reform of our economic organization. ... Two systems ... now confront one another. ... The one we have just described can obviously be put into practice only by an indefinite extension of taxes. ... If we make the state responsible for spreading abundance everywhere, we have to allow it to spread taxes everywhere, since it cannot give what it has not taken.... We, for our part, are convinced that this system is bad, and that there is another for achieving the good of the people, or rather for the people to achieve their own good; this consists in our giving the state all it needs to accomplish its essential mission, which is to guarantee internal and external security, respect people and property, the free exercise of faculties, and the repression of crime, misdemeanors, and fraud, and, after having given this liberally to the state, in keeping the rest for ourselves.”

**Articles from *La République française*
(Feb-Mar, 1848)¹**

**"A Few Words about the Title of our
Journal *The French Republic*" (26 Feb.
1848) [1]**

Let's begin with a few words about the title of our journal.

The provisional government wants a republic without ratification by the people. Today we have heard the people of Paris unanimously proclaim a republican government from the top of its glorious barricades, and we are of the firm conviction that the whole of France will ratify the wishes of the conquerors of February. But whatever might happen, even if this wish were to be misunderstood, we will keep the title which the voice of all the people have thrown to us. Whatever the form of government which the nation decides upon, the press ought henceforth remain free, no longer will any impediment be imposed upon the expression of thought. This sacred liberty of human thought, previously so impudently violated, will be recognised by the people, and they will know how to keep it. Thus, whatever might happen, being firmly convinced that the republican form of government is the only one which is suitable for a free people, the only one which allows the full and complete development of all kinds of liberty, we adopt and will keep our title:

THE FRENCH REPUBLIC.

Time and events are pressing, we can only devote a few lines to stating our program.

France has just got rid of a regime which it found odious, but it is not sufficient just to change men, it is necessary to also change things.

Now, what was the foundation of this regime?

Restriction and privilege! Not only was the monarchy, which the heroic efforts of the people of Paris have just overturned, based upon an electoral monopoly, but it also depended upon numerous

branches of human activity from which it profited with invisible ties of privilege.

"We wish that henceforth labour should be completely free, no more laws against unions, no more regulations which prevent capitalists and workers from bringing either their money or their labour to whatever industry they find agreeable. The liberty of labour ("la liberté du travail") proclaimed by Turgot and by the Constituent Assembly ought henceforth be the law of a democratic France."

We wish that henceforth labour should be completely free, no more laws against unions, no more regulations which prevent capitalists and workers from bringing either their money or their labour to whatever industry they find agreeable. The liberty of labour ("la liberté du travail") proclaimed by Turgot and by the Constituent Assembly ought henceforth be the law of a democratic France.

Universal suffrage.

No more state funded religions. Each person should pay for the religion which he uses.

The absolute freedom of education.

Freedom of commerce, to the degree that the needs of the treasury allow. The elimination of "duties on basic food" as we enjoyed under the Convention. Low prices (la vie à bon marché) for the people!

No more conscription; voluntary recruitment for the army.

Institutions which allow the workers to find out where jobs are available and how to discover the going rate of wages throughout the entire country.[2]

Inviolable respect for property. All property has its origin in labour: to attack property is to attack labour.

¹ This selection of Bastiat's articles from the journal *La République française* comes from Liberty Fund's edition of his *Collected Works*, vol.1, except for "The Sub-Prefectures" and the two "Small Posters" which comes from *CW* vol. 3 (forthcoming).

Finally, in order to crown the work of our glorious regeneration, we demand leniency within the country and peace outside. Let us forget the past, let us launch into the future with a heart without any hatred, let us fraternize with all the people of the world, and soon the day will come when liberty, equality, and fraternity will be the law of the world!

Notes

[1] This statement of principles is provided by Eugène Hatin in a long quote from *La République française* probably from the 1st issue which is dated 26 February 1848. It was probably written by Bastiat with some assistance from Gustave de Molinari who was one of the co-founders of the journal. See Eugène Hatin, *Bibliographie historique et critique de la presse périodique française*, pp. 491-92. Translation by David M. Hart.

[2] The idea of “labour exchanges” was a pet idea of Gustave de Molinari, one of Bastiat’s collaborators in writing *La République française*.

1. “Under the Republic” (26 February, 1848) [1] [2]

No one can say what the repercussions of the Revolution will be in Europe. Please heaven that all the peoples will be able to withdraw from the sad necessity of launching an attack on each other at a signal from the aristocracy and their kings.[3]

But let us suppose that the absolutist powers retain their means of acting abroad for a short time.

I put before you two facts which seem to me incontestable and whose consequences will then be seen:

1. France cannot take the initiative of disarming.
2. Without disarmament, the revolution can fulfill

the hopes of the people only imperfectly.

These two facts are, as we say, incontestable.

As for disarmament, the greatest enemy of France could not advise her to do this as long as the absolutist powers are armed. There is no point insisting on this.

The second fact is also obvious. Keeping oneself armed so as to guarantee national independence is to have three or four hundred thousand men under the flag and thus to find it impossible to make any

significant cuts in public expenditure such as would permit a restructuring of the tax system immediately. [4] Let us allow that, by means of a tax on luxury articles, we might reform the salt tax and a few other exorbitant ones. Is this something that might content the French people?

Bureaucracy will be reduced, they say. This may be so. However, as we said yesterday, the probable reduction in revenue will outweigh these partial reforms, and we should not forget that the last budget[5] ended in a deficit.

But if the revolution finds it impossible to restructure an iniquitous tax system whose incidence is unfair, and which oppresses the people and paralyzes work, it will be compromised.

However, the revolution has no intention of perishing.

Here are the necessary consequences of this situation with regard to foreigners. We, of course, will never advise wars of aggression, but the last thing that can be asked of a people is to commit suicide.

For this reason, if the armed bellicosity of foreigners forces us to keep three or four hundred thousand men in a state of readiness, even if they do not attack us directly, it is as though they were asking us to commit suicide.

“In our view, it is perfectly clear that if France is placed in the situation we have just described, whether she wishes to or not, she will scatter the lava of revolution across Europe. This will be the only way to create embarrassment for kings within their own territory, which will enable us to breathe more freely at home.”

In our view, it is perfectly clear that if France is placed in the situation we have just described, whether she wishes to or not, she will scatter the lava of revolution across Europe.

This will be the only way to create embarrassment for kings within their own territory, which will enable us to breathe more freely at home.

Let foreigners understand this clearly. They can escape danger only by taking the initiative and disarming straightforwardly. This advice will seem foolhardy to them. They will hasten to say, "This is rash." And we, for our part, say, "This is the most consummate prudence."

It is this which we will undertake to demonstrate.

Notes

[1] "Sous la République". (Under the Republic) [26 February 1848, *La République française*] [OC, vol. 7, #42, pp. 210-12] [CW, vol. 1, pp. 435-37]. <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2393/226076 >.

[2] (Paillet's note) In vol. 2, pp. 459 to 465, is shown the contingent supplied by Bastiat to the "Petites affiches de Jacques Bonhomme." [OC, vol. 2, p. 459, "Petites affiches de Jacques Bonhomme"; and p. 462, "Circulaires d'un ministère introuvable."] Through the kindness of M. G. de Molinari, we are now able to reproduce short articles written by Bastiat for two other public broadsheets, which had a short existence in 1848, *La République française* and *Jacques Bonhomme*.

[3] At the outset of the revolution of February 1848, the memory of the Revolution of 1789 was still very fresh, at least in the literature. In this article and the two following ones, Bastiat betrays the fear that the proclamation of the Republic will trigger a resumption of wars on the part of the monarchies. Later on, he wholeheartedly approves a subtle note sent to French embassies by Lamartine, the great poet and statesman, then minister of foreign affairs of the provisional government, aimed at soothing foreign concerns.

[4] According to the budget passed on 15 May 1849 the size of the French army was 389,967 men and 95,687 horses. [This figure rises to 459,457 men and 97,738 horses for the entire French military (including foreign and colonial forces).] The expenditure on the Army in 1849 was fr. 346,319,558 and for the Navy and Colonies was fr. 119,206,857 for a combined total of fr. 465,526,415. Total government expenditure in 1849 was fr. 1.573 billion with expenditure on the armed forces making up 29.6% of the total budget. See the Appendix on "French

Government Finances 1848-1849". See the glossary entry on "The French Army and Conscription."

[5] In the 1848 budget expenditure was estimated at fr. 1,446 million and income was fr. 1,391 million which produced a deficit of fr. 55 million. The deficit ballooned in 1849 to fr. 161 million as a result of the Revolution.

2. "Untitled Article" (26 February, 1848)

"in this immense metropolis at this moment there is no king, no court, no municipal guard, no troops, and no civil administration other than that exercised by the citizens over themselves, when we reflect that a few men, only yesterday emerged from our ranks, are taking care of public affairs on their own, then, judging by the joy, the sense of security, and the confidence shown on every face, our initial feelings are admiration and pride."

26 February 1848

When we go through the streets of Paris, which are scarcely wide enough to contain the throngs of people, and remember that in this immense metropolis at this moment there is no king, no court, no municipal guard, no troops, and no civil administration other than that exercised by the citizens over themselves, when we reflect that a few men, only yesterday emerged from our ranks, are taking care of public affairs on their own, then, judging by the joy, the sense of security, and the confidence shown on every face, our initial feelings are admiration and pride.

We soon return to the past, however, and say to ourselves, “So popular self-government is not as difficult as certain people tried to persuade us it was, and economy in government is not utopian.”

There is no getting round the fact that in France we have become accustomed to excessive and grossly intrusive government. We have ended up believing that we would tear each other to pieces if we had the slightest liberty and if the state did not regulate all our movements.

This great experiment reveals indestructible principles of order within the hearts of men. Order is a need and the first of the needs, if not of all, at least of the vast majority. Let us be confident therefore and draw from this the lesson that the great and extravagant government machine which those involved called indispensable can and should be simplified.

Notes

[1] (Untitled Article) [26 February 1848, *La République française*] [OC, vol. 7, #43, pp. 212-13] [CW, vol. 1, pp. 440-41]. <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2393/226082>.

3. “Untitled Article” (27 February, 1848)[1]

27 February 1848

Let us share this thought in *La Presse*: [2]

What we need to ask a provisional government, [3] those men who devote themselves to public salvation amid incalculable difficulties, is not to govern in exact accord with all of our ideas, but to govern. We should help it, support it and make its rough task easy, and postpone any doctrinal discussion. The agreement of all the newspapers on this will not be among the least glorious events in our revolution.

We can all the more render to ourselves this homage to abnegation in favor of the common cause, because it is deep within us.

In a few of the decrees which follow one another, we see signs of the application of a doctrine which is not ours. We have combated this and will do so again when the time permits.

“Two systems are confronting one another ... The first, more seductive and popular, consists in taking a great deal of the people’s earnings, in the form of taxes, in order to spread largesse among the people by way of philanthropic institutions. The second wants the state to take very little, give very little, guarantee security, and give free rein to the honest exercise of every faculty”

Two systems are confronting one another, both of which are born of sincere convictions and both having the common good as their objective. But, it has to be said, they emanate from two quite different ideas, which moreover oppose one another

The first, more seductive and popular, consists in taking a great deal of the people’s earnings, in the form of taxes, in order to spread largesse among the people by way of philanthropic institutions.

The second wants the state to take very little, give very little, guarantee security, and give free rein to the honest exercise of every faculty; one consists in expanding indefinitely, the other in restricting as far as possible, the prerogatives of power. The one of these two systems to which we are attached [4] through total conviction has few outlets in the press; it could not have had many representatives in government.

However, full of confidence in the rectitude of the citizens, to whom public opinion has entrusted the mission of building a bridge between our fallen monarchy and our burgeoning and well-ordered republic, we are willing to postpone the manifestation of our doctrine, and we will limit ourselves to sowing ideas of order, mutual trust, and gratitude to the provisional government.

Notes

[1] (Untitled Article) [27 February 1848, *La République française*] [OC, vol. 7, #44, pp. 213-14] [CW, vol. 1, pp. 441-42]. <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2393/226082>.

[2] *La Presse* was a widely distributed daily newspaper, created in 1836 by the journalist, businessman, and politician Émile de Girardin (1806-81). Girardin was one of the creators of the modern press and pioneered the publication of novels in serial form which made his newspaper very successful.

[3] A provisional government was formed on 24 February 1848 and presided over by Jacques Charles Dupont de l'Eure, who was a liberal deputy under the restoration and a minister of justice under the July Monarchy. Among the government's most famous ministers were Lamartine (Foreign Affairs), Ledru-Rollin (Interior), Cremieux (Justice), and two socialists without portfolios: Alexandre Martin (called Albert) and Louis Blanc.

[4] (Paillottet's note) Here and elsewhere the use of the plural shows that Bastiat was speaking for his colleagues as well as himself. At this time, his signature appears in the paper as a mark of solidarity.

6. "Untitled Article" (28 February, 1848)[1]

Paris, 28 February 1848

The general good, the greatest sum possible of happiness for everyone, and the immediate relief of the suffering classes are the subjects of every desire, every wish, and every preoccupation.

Such, moreover, constitute the greatest guarantee of order. Men are never better disposed to help one another than when they are not suffering, or at least when they cannot accuse anyone, especially not the government, of those sufferings inseparable from human imperfection.

The revolution began with a cry for *reform*. At that time, this word was restricted just to one of our constitutional arrangements. Today, it is still *reform* that we want, but of the fundamental kind, reform of our

economic organization. The people, their complete freedom restored, are going to govern themselves. Does this mean the realization of all their hopes? We cannot bank on this chimera. The people will choose the measures that appear best suited to their purposes, but choice entails the possibility of error. However, the great advantage of government of the nation by the nation is that it has only itself to blame for the results of its errors and that it can always benefit from its experience. Its prudence now should consist in not allowing system builders to experiment too much on it and at its expense.

“The revolution began with a cry for reform. At that time, this word was restricted just to one of our constitutional arrangements. Today, it is still reform that we want, but of the fundamental kind, reform of our economic organization.”

So, as we have said, two systems, discussed at length by polemicists, now confront one another.

One aspires to create the happiness of the people through direct measures. It says: “If someone suffers in any way, the state will be responsible for relieving him. It will give bread, clothing, work, care, and instruction to all those who need it.” If this system were possible, one would need to be a monster not to embrace it. If somewhere, on the moon perhaps, the state had an always accessible and inexhaustible source of food, clothing, and remedies, who could blame it for drawing on it with both hands for the benefit of those who are poor and destitute?”

But if the state does not have in its possession and does not produce any of these things, if they can be created only by human labor, if all the state can do is to take them by way of taxation from the workers who have created them in order to hand them over to those who have not created them, if the natural result of this operation must be, far from increasing the mass of these things, to discourage their production, if from this reduced mass the state is obliged to keep a part for its agents, if these agents who are responsible for the operation are themselves withdrawn from useful work,

and if, finally, this system which appears so attractive at first sight, generates more misery than it cures, then it is proper to have doubts and seek to ascertain whether the welfare of the masses might not be generated by another process.

The one we have just described can obviously be put into practice only by an indefinite extension of taxes. Unless we resemble children who sulk when they are not given the moon when they first ask for it, we have to acknowledge that, if we make the state responsible for spreading abundance everywhere, we have to allow it to spread taxes everywhere, since it cannot give what it has not taken.

***“there is another (system) for achieving the good of the people, or rather for the people to achieve their own good; this consists in our giving the state all it needs to accomplish its essential mission, which is to guarantee internal and external security, respect people and property, the free exercise of faculties, and the repression of crime, misdemeanors, and fraud, and, after having given this liberally to the state, in keeping the rest for ourselves.*”**

However, major taxes always imply major restrictions. If it were only a question of asking France to provide five or six hundred million, you might conceive an extremely simple financial mechanism for gathering it. But if we need to extract 1.5 to 1.8 billion, we need to use all the ruses imaginable in the operation of the tax laws. We need the town taxes, the salt tax, the tax on drink, and the exorbitant tax on sugar; we need to restrict traffic, burden industry, and limit consumers. An army of tax collectors is needed, as is an endless bureaucracy. The liberty of the citizens must be encroached upon, and all this leads to abuse, a desire for civil service posts, corruption, etc., etc.

It can be seen that, if the system of abundance drawn by the state from the people in order to be

spread over the people by it, has its attractive side, it is also a medal that has its reverse side.

We, for our part, are convinced that this system is bad, and that there is another for achieving the good of the people, or rather for the people to achieve their own good; this consists in our giving the state all it needs to accomplish its essential mission, which is to guarantee internal and external security, respect people and property, the free exercise of faculties, and the repression of crime, misdemeanors, and fraud, and, after having given this liberally to the state, *in keeping the rest for ourselves.*

Finally, since the people are called upon to exercise their right, which is to choose between these two systems, we will often compare these before them, in all their political, moral, financial, and economic aspects.

Notes

[1] (Untitled Article) [28 February 1848] [OC, vol. 7, #47, pp. 218-21] [CW, vol. 1, pp. 442-44]. <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2393/226082>.

7. “The Kings must disarm” (29 February, 1848)[1]

If only the kings of Europe were prudent, what would they do?

England would freely renounce the right of search. [2] She would freely recognize that Algeria is French. She would not wait for these burning questions to be raised, and she would disband half her navy and use these savings to benefit her people by reducing the duties on tea and wine accordingly.

The king of Prussia would liberalize the half-baked constitution of his country,[3] and by giving notice to two-thirds of his army he would ensure the devotion of the people by relieving them of the weight of taxes and military service.

The emperor of Austria would quickly evacuate Lombardy and by reducing his army would put himself in a position to increase Austria’s proverbial power

The tsar would return Poland to the Poles.

All this done, France, no longer anxious as to her future, would concentrate on internal reform and let moral considerations take charge.

“The kings of Europe ... will do exactly the opposite; they will want to stifle liberalism. So they will arm and the republics will arm too. Lombardy, Poland, and perhaps Prussia will become the theater of war. The alternative laid down by Napoléon, that Europe will be Republican or Cossack, will have to be resolved to the sound of guns. In spite of her ardent love of peace, expressed unanimously by the newspapers, but forced by her evident interest, France will not be able to avoid throwing her sword into the balance and . . . kings perish but nations do not.”

The kings of Europe, however, would expect to lose out if they followed this policy, the only one that can save them.

They will do exactly the opposite; they will want to stifle liberalism. So they will arm and the republics will arm too. Lombardy, Poland, and perhaps Prussia will become the theater of war. The alternative laid down by Napoléon, that *Europe will be Republican or Cossack*, will have to be resolved to the sound of guns. In spite of her ardent love of peace, expressed unanimously by the newspapers, but forced by her evident interest, France will not be able to avoid throwing her sword into the balance and . . . *kings perish but nations do not*.

Notes

[1] “Les Rois doivent désarmer” (The Kings must disarm) [29 February 1848, *La République française*] [OC, vol. 7, #48, p. 221-22] [CW, vol. 1, pp. 439-40]. <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2393/226080>.

[2] In 1807, under pressure from such abolitionists as William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, Britain passed an act that abolished the slave trade, much of which was carried in British vessels. The United States followed suit in 1808 with a similar ban. This had significant implications for the southern states of the United States and the French Caribbean, where slavery remained firmly in place. The British Navy patrolled the oceans, insisting upon a “right of inspection” to look for slaves being carried from Africa to the Caribbean and to punish those involved in the trade as pirates. This policy was a serious bone of contention between Britain and France, as the latter viewed the British policy as interference in their sovereign right to engage in trade and shipping.

[3] In fact, the kingdom of Prussia did not have a constitution but a set of laws.

8. “The Sub-Prefectures” (29 February, 1848)[1]

What is a Sub-Prefecture?[2] It is a letter box. The Prefect writes: “Monsieur Sub-Prefect, here is a letter for the mayor of ...; send it to him without delay and send me his reply along with your opinion.”

The Sub-Prefect replies: “Monsieur Prefect, I have received the letter for the Mayor of; I will send it to him without delay and will send you his reply with my opinion.”

For this service, there is a Sub-Prefect in each arrondissement who earns fr. 3,000, fr. 3,000 in administrative costs, a secretary, office rental, etc., etc.

We are mistaken: the Sub-Prefects have another real function, namely that of influencing and corrupting the elections.

For how many days will the Sub-Prefectures be able to survive the February Revolution?

In general, we are in no hurry to call for changes in personnel, but we are adamant in demanding the abolition of useless government jobs.

“In general, we are in no hurry to call for changes in personnel, but we are adamant in demanding the abolition of useless government jobs.”

Notes

[1] “Les sous-préfectures” (“The Sub-Prefectures”) [29 February 1848, *La République française*] [OC, vol. 7, #49, p. 223].

[2] A Prefecture (“la préfecture”) is the town in which the administration of a département is carried out. The Prefect (“préfet”) is the name of the government official who is charge of the Prefecture. The General Council (“le Conseil général”) is the elected body which governs the département. The Départements are further divided into arrondissements (districts), the administrative town of which is called a Subprefecture (“sous-préfecture”) which is administered by a Subprefect (“sous-préfet”). Bastiat was elected to the Conseil général of Les Landes in 1833 and again in 1839. See the glossary entry on “French Government Administrative Regions.”

11. “Petition from an Economist” (2 March, 1848)[1]

At the moment a petition is being signed that asks for: *A Ministry of Progress or for the Organization of Production*. [2] On this subject, *La Démocratie pacifique* [3] has this to say:

“In order to organize production in French society, you have to know how to organize it at the village level, in the living and breathing workshops of the nation. Any serious doctrine of social development must therefore succeed at the level of the basic workshop and be tried out initially on a small parcel of land. Let the Republic therefore create a Ministry of Progress and Organization of Production whose function will be to examine *all the plans put forward* by the various socialist doctrines and to favor over them a local, free, and voluntary experiment carried out in a territorial unit, the *square league*.”

If this idea is put into practice, we will ask that we too be given our square league to try out our ideas. Why, after all, should the various socialist schools of thought be the only ones to have the privilege of having at their disposal *square leagues*, basic workshops,

and everything which constitutes a locality, in short, communes?

They say that it is a matter of *free and voluntary* experiments. Are we to understand that the inhabitants of the commune who will be subjected to socialist experimentation will have to agree to it and that, on the other hand, the state should not take part with revenue raised from other communes? If so, what is the use of the petition, and what prevents the inhabitants of communes from carrying out freely, voluntarily, and at their own expense socialist experiments on themselves?

Or is the intention that the experiment be forced or at the very least supported by funds raised from the entire community?

This in itself will provide a highly inconclusive result for the experiment. It is quite clear that having all the nation’s resources at our disposal, we might squander a great deal of welfare on a square league of land.

In any case, if each inventor in the field of social organization is called upon to carry out his experiment, let us register ourselves and formally request a commune to organize.

Our plan is otherwise very simple.

We will claim from each family and through a single tax a very small part of its income, in order to ensure the respect of persons and ownership, the elimination of fraud, misdemeanors, and crimes. Once we have done this, we will carefully observe how people organize themselves.

Religion, teaching, production, and trade will be perfectly free. We hope that, under this regime of liberty and security, with each inhabitant having the facility, through free trade, to create the largest sum of value possible, in any form which suits him, capital will be built up with great speed. Since all capital is intended to be used, there will be fierce competition between capitalists. Therefore earnings will rise; therefore workers, if they are far-sighted and thrifty, will have a great opportunity to become capitalists; and therefore it will be possible to create alliances or associations whose ideas are conceived and matured by themselves alone.

As the single tax will be modest in the extreme, there will be few civil service posts and few civil servants, no wasted efforts, and few men withdrawn from production.

As the state will have very restricted and well-defined powers, its inhabitants will have total freedom to choose their work. Here it should be noted clearly that any wasteful civil service post is not only a burden on the community but an infringement of the freedom of citizens. About the public services imposed without debate on the citizens, there are no half measures; either they are useful or else essentially *harmful*; they cannot be neutral. When a man exercises an action *with authority*, not over things but over his fellow men, if he does not do them good, he must necessarily do them harm.

With taxes thus reduced to the minimum required to procure *security* for all, lobbyists, abuses, privileges, and the exploitation of laws for individual interests will also be reduced to a *minimum*.

“Since the inhabitants of this experimental commune will have, through free trade, the opportunity of producing the maximum value with the minimum work, the square league will provide as much welfare as the state of knowledge, activity, order, and individual economy allows.”

Since the inhabitants of this experimental commune will have, through free trade, the opportunity of producing the maximum value with the minimum work, the square league will provide as much welfare as the state of knowledge, activity, order, and individual economy allows.

This welfare will tend to spread out in an ever-more egalitarian manner, since, as the highest paid services will be the most sought after,[4] it will be impossible to amass huge fortunes, especially since the minimum level of tax will not allow great public contracts, loans, nor stockjobbing,[5] all sources of the scandalous fortunes we see accumulating in a few hands.

Since this small community will be interested in attacking no one and all the others will have an interest in not attacking it, it will enjoy the most profound peace.

Citizens will feel loyal to the country because they will never feel slighted or held back by the agents of the government, and to its laws because they will recognize them as based on justice.

In the conviction that this system, which has the merit at least of being simple and respecting human dignity, is all the better if it applies to a wider territory and a greater number of people, since it is there that the most security is obtained with the least taxes, we conclude that if it succeeds in a commune, it will succeed at the level of the nation.

Notes

[1] “Pétition d’un économiste” (Petition from an Economist) [2 March 1848, *La République française*] [OC, vol. 7, #52, pp. 227-30] [CW, vol. 1, pp. 426-29]. <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2393/226064>.

[2] The title of the petition was “A Ministry of Progress, Work Organization, and Abolition of the Exploitation of Man by Man.”

[3] *La Démocratique pacifique* (1843-1851) was the most successful of the journals which supported the socialist ideas of Charles Fourier. It was successful partly because it downplayed the ultimate social solution proposed by Fourier (the formation of small communities - the phalanxes where living and production would all be done communally) and focused on its critique of the free market and incremental reforms brought about by legislation. It was also well run by Victor Considérant (1808-1893) whose wife subsidized its running costs.

[4] (Paillottet’s note) In the sense that they attract competition the most.

[5] [DMH - Bastiat uses the term “agiotage” (stockjobbing or speculation). See also ES2 9 “The Utopian” (17 January, 1847) where the term is also used. The Economists drew a distinction between “la spéculation commerciale” (commercial speculation) and “agiotage” (stockjobbing). According to Horace Say, the former was a normal part of doing business where investors took risks in trying to discover what line of economic activity was profitable and which was not. Thus it was “useful and helpful to society.” Agiotage on the other hand was harmful and even “immoral” because it usually involved speculation in government regulated stocks and bonds such as mining leases, railway concessions, and government bonds.

Since the number of stocks and bonds traded on the Paris Bourse were very small (198 in 1847) the proportion of government regulated or issued stocks and bonds played an exaggerated role. Say notes that in such an "interventionist country" (un pays d'intervention gouvernementale) as France the best way to reduce stockjobbing was to cut government expenditure, put an end to budget deficits, and reduce government borrowing. See Horace Say, "Agiotage," *DEP*, vol. 1, pp. 27-31.]

13. "The Scramble for Office" (5 March, 1848)[1]

All the newspapers, without exception, are speaking out against the scramble for office of which the Town Hall[2] is given a sad example. Nobody could be more indignant about, or more disgusted by, this frenzied greed than we.

But at the end of the day we have to find the cause of the evil, and it would be puerile to expect the human heart to be other than it has pleased nature to make it.

In a country in which, since time immemorial, the labor of free men has everywhere been demeaned, in which education offers as a model to all youth the mores of Greece and Rome, in which trade and industry are constantly exposed by the press to the scorn of citizens under the label *mercantilism*, *industrialism*, or *individualism*, in which success in office alone leads to wealth, prestige, or power, and in which the state does everything and interferes in everything through its innumerable agents, it is natural enough for public office to be avidly sought after.

How can we turn ambition away from this disastrous direction and redirect the activity of the enlightened classes toward productive careers?

Obviously by eliminating a great many public posts, limiting government action, leaving a wider, freer, and more prestigious role to private activities and reducing the salaries for high public office.

What should our attitude be then to those theories, so fashionable currently, which propose the transfer into the world of paid public service, of activities still in the realm of private industry? *La Démocratie pacifique* wants the state to provide insurance, public transport,

and haulage, and also to handle the trading of wheat, etc., etc., etc.

"In a country in which, since time immemorial, the labor of free men has everywhere been demeaned, in which education offers as a model to all youth the mores of Greece and Rome, in which trade and industry are constantly exposed by the press to the scorn of citizens under the label mercantilism, industrialism, or individualism, in which success in office alone leads to wealth, prestige, or power, and in which the state does everything and interferes in everything through its innumerable agents, it is natural enough for public office to be avidly sought after."

Do these ideas not provide fresh fuel for this disastrous mania which so offends honest citizens?

We do not want to discuss the other disadvantages of these proposals here. Examine one after the other all the industries managed by the state and see if these are not, indeed, the ones through which citizens are the most badly and most expensively served.

Take education, obstinately limited to the study of two languages dead these two thousand years.

See what kind of tobacco is provided to you and at what price.[3]

Compare in terms of regular supply and proper market price the distribution of printed matter by the public authority in the rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau with that by individual enterprises in the rue de la Jussienne.

However, setting aside these considerations, is it not evident that *the scramble for office* is and will always be proportional to the enticement to it?

Is it not evident that having industry run by the state is to remove work from honest activity in order to deliver it to lazy and indolent intrigue?

Finally, is it not clear that it will make the disorder which the Town Hall exemplifies, a disarray which saddens the members of the provisional government, permanent and progressive?

Notes

[1] “Curée des places” (The Scramble for Office) [5 March 1848, *La République française*] [OC, vol. 7, #54, pp. 232-34] [CW, vol. 1, pp. 431-32]. <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2393/226068>.

[2] The Town Hall of Paris was the seat of the temporary government after the “three glorious days” of February 1848.

[3] The sale of tobacco products was a state monopoly in France.

Two “Small Posters by Jacques Bonhomme” (12 March, 1848)[1]

15a. “The Immediate Relief of the People” (12 March, 1848)

People,[2]

You[3] are being told: “You have not enough to live on; let the State add what is missing.” Who would not wish for this if it were possible?[4]

But alas, the tax collector’s coffers are not the wine pitcher of Cana.[5]

“The advice being given to you can be summed up as follows: You will give the State five francs in return for nothing and the State will give you four francs in return for your work. An exchange for dupes.”

When Our Lord put one liter of wine in this pitcher, two came out, but when you put one hundred sous in the coffers of the tax collector,[6] ten francs do not emerge; not even one hundred sous come out, since the collector keeps a few for himself.

How then does this procedure increase your work or your wages?

The advice being given to you can be summed up as follows: You will give the State five francs in return for nothing and the State will give you four francs in return for your work. An exchange for dupes.[7]

People, how can the State keep you alive, since it is you who are keeping the State alive?

Here are the mechanics of charity workshops presented systematically:[8]

The State takes six loaves of bread from you; it eats two and demands work from you in order to give you back four. If now you ask it for eight loaves, it can do nothing else but this: take twelve from you, eat four and make you earn the rest.

People, be more alert; do as the Republicans of America do: give the State only what is strictly necessary and *keep the rest for yourself*.

Demand the abolition of useless functions, a reduction of huge salaries, the abolition of special privileges, monopolies and deliberate obstructions and the simplification of the wheels of bureaucracy.

With these savings, insist on the abolition of city tolls, the salt tax, the tax on cattle and on wheat.[9]

In this way, the cost of living will be cheaper, and since it will be cheaper each person will have a small surplus of his present wages; with this small surplus multiplied by thirty-six million inhabitants, each person will be able to take on and pay for a new form of consumption. With everyone consuming a little more, we will all get a little more employment for each other and, since labor will be in greater demand in the country, wages will rise. Then, oh people, you will have solved the problem, that of earning more sous and obtaining more things for each sou.

This is not as brilliant as the alleged wine pitcher of Cana of the Luxembourg Palace[10], but it is sure, solid, practicable, immediate and just.

Notes

[1] “Petites affiches de Jacques Bonhomme” (Small Posters by Jacques Bonhomme) [12 March 1848, La

République française] [OC, vol. 2, #68, pp. 459-61]. Soulagement immédiat du peuple (The Immediate Relief of the People) [CW, vol. 3, ES3 19] and Funeste remède (A Disastrous Remedy) [CW, vol. 3, ES3 20].

[2] This and the next piece were designed as a wall poster to be pasted to the walls lining the streets of Paris so the rioting population could read them during the early days of the February Revolution.

[3] In his address to the people Bastiat uses the familiar "tu" form of you.

[4] In this and the next article Bastiat prefigures his definition of the state as "the great fiction by which everyone endeavours to live at the expense of everyone else" which he developed during the course of 1848. A draft of the essay appeared in his revolutionary magazine *Jacques Bonhomme* in June 1848 (see CW, vol. 2, pp. 105-06), a larger article on "The State" appeared in the *Journal des débats* in September 1848, and it was subsequently published as a separate booklet of the same name later that same year (see CW, vol. 2, pp. 93-104).

[5] This is a reference to the first public miracle which Christ was reported to have done when he turned water in wine at a wedding feast in the town of Cana. See John 2, verses 1-11.

[6] Bastiat uses the word "buraliste" which usually refers to a "tobacconist" who would sell state monopolized and heavily taxed tobacco products to smokers. It thus has another meaning to do with the collection of taxes and could also be used more generally to refer to any clerk who collected taxes on behalf of the state.

[7] The words "duperie" (deceit) and "dupes" (those who are deceived) are key terms in Bastiat's theory of plunder ("spoliation"), according to which the plunderers ("les spoliateurs") deceive their victims by means of "la ruse" (deception, fraud) to justify and disguise what they are doing. By means of "Sophisms" (sophistical arguments and fallacies) the dupes are persuaded that the plundering of their property is necessary for the well-being of the nation and thus ultimately for their own good as well. See ES2 I. "The Physiology of Plunder" and the glossary entry on "Bastiat on Plunder."

[8] (Bastiat's note) Jacques Bonhomme does not mean to criticize emergency measures. [DMH - Bastiat is referring to the "National Workshops" created on February 27, 1848 to employ unemployed workers at government expense. The workers got paid 2 francs a

day, which was soon reduced to 1 franc because of the tremendous increase in their numbers (29 000 on March 5; 118 000 on June 15). Struggling with financial difficulties, irritated by the inefficiency of the workshops, the Assembly dissolved them on June 21 prompting widespread rioting in the streets of Paris (known as the "June Days") which was bloodily put down by the army under General Cavaignac. Although Bastiat opposed the policy of the National Workshops he defended the right of the workers to protest and opposed the army shooting them in the streets. See the glossary entry on "The National Workshops."]

[9] See the glossary entry on "French Taxes."

[10] The Luxemburg Palace was the headquarters of the "Government Commission for the Workers". See the glossary entry on "The National Workshops."

15b. "A Disastrous Remedy"[1] (12 March, 1848)

When our brother suffers we must come to his aid.

However, it is not the goodness of the intention that makes the goodness of the medicine. A mortal remedy can be given in all charity.

A poor worker was ill. The doctor arrived, took his pulse, made him stick out his tongue and said to him: "Good man, you are undernourished." "I think so too," said the dying man, "however, I did have an old doctor who was very skilled. He gave me three-quarters of a loaf of bread each evening. It is true that he took the whole loaf from me each morning and kept a quarter of it as his fee. I turned him away when I saw that this regime was not curing me." "My friend and colleague was an ignorant man who thought only of his own interest. He did not see that your blood was anemic. This has to be *reorganized*.[2] I am going to transfuse some new blood in your left arm and to do this I have to take it out of your right arm. But provided that you take no account either of the blood that comes out of your right arm or the blood that will be lost during the operation, you will find *my* remedy admirable." [3]

This is the position we are in. The State tells the people: "You do not have enough bread; I will give you some. But since I do not make any, I will begin by taking it from you and when I have satisfied my

appetite, which is not small, I will make you earn the rest.”

“The State tells the people: ‘You do not have enough bread; I will give you some. But since I do not make any, I will begin by taking it from you and when I have satisfied my appetite, which is not small, I will make you earn the rest’.”

Or else: “Your earnings are not high enough, pay me more tax. I will distribute part to my agents and with the surplus, I will set you to work.”

And if the people have eyes only for the bread being given to them and lose sight of the bread being taken away from them;^[4] if they can see the small wage which taxes provide but don't see the large part of their wage which taxes take away, then we can predict that their illness will become more serious.

Notes

[1] This and the last piece were designed as a wall poster to be pasted to the walls lining the streets of Paris so the rioting population could read them during the early days of the February Revolution.

[2] Bastiat uses the word "réorganiser" to make reference to one of the key slogans of the socialists in February 1848, namely "l'organisation" (the organisation of labor and industry by the state for the benefit of the workers). See Louis Blanc's highly influential book *L'Organisation du travail* (1839) which was reprinted many times. See also the glossary entries on "Blanc" and "Association and Organization.”

[3] Recall Bastiat's parody of Molière's parody of 17th century doctors who bled their patients in ES2 IX. "Theft by Subsidy", above p. ??? See "Bastiat's Rhetoric of Liberty" in the Introduction, above, pp. ??? for a discussion of this.

[4] See Bastiat's pamphlet which follows entitled "What is Seen and What is not Seen" for an extended discussion of this point.

Further Information

SOURCE

The edition used for this extract: This selection of Bastiat's articles from the journal *La République française* comes from Liberty Fund's edition of his *Collected Works*, vol.1, except for "The Sub-Prefectures" and the two "Small Posters" which comes from *CW* vol. 3 (forthcoming).

LF's edition of *The Collected Works of Frédéric Bastiat*, in 6 Vols. ed. Jacques de Guenin (2011). As each vol. is published it will appear on the OLL at <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2451>.

The copyright to this edition, in both print and electronic forms, is held by Liberty Fund, Inc.

FURTHER READING

More works by Bastiat can be found here <oll.libertyfund.org/person/25>.

"I love all forms of freedom; & among these, the one that is the most universally useful to mankind, the one you enjoy at each moment of the day and in all of life's circumstances, is the freedom to work & to trade. I know that making things one's own is the fulcrum of society & even of human life."
(Draft Preface to Economic Harmonies, 1847)



ABOUT THE BEST OF THE OLL

The Best of the Online Library of Liberty is a collection of some of the most important material in the Online Library of Liberty. They are chapter length extracts which have been formatted as pamphlets in **PDF**, **ePub**, and **Kindle** formats for easier distribution. These extracts are designed for use in the classroom and discussion groups, or material for a literature table for outreach. The full list can be found here <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2465>.

A subset of *The Best of the OLL* is *The Best of Bastiat* which is a collection of some of the best material in Liberty Fund's 6 volume edition of *The Collected Works of Frédéric Bastiat* (2011-). The full list can be found here <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2477>.

Another useful sampling of the contents of the OLL website is the collection of weekly *Quotations about Liberty and Power* which are organized by themes such as Free Trade, Money and Banking, Natural Rights, and so on. See for example, Richard Cobden's "I have a dream" speech <oll.libertyfund.org/quote/326>.

COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE

The copyright to this material is held by Liberty Fund unless otherwise indicated. It is made available to further the educational goals of Liberty Fund, Inc. and may be used freely for educational and academic purposes. It may not be used in any way for profit.

ABOUT THE OLL AND LIBERTY FUND

The *Online Library of Liberty* is a project of Liberty Fund, Inc., a private educational foundation established in 1960 to encourage the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals. The OLL website has a large collection of books and study guides about individual liberty, limited constitutional government, the free market, and peace.

Liberty Fund: <www.libertyfund.org>.

OLL: <oll.libertyfund.org>.