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Joseph Déjacque

Down with the Bosses!

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April, 1859

Translator's note (Shawn P. Wilbur): Here's a translation of an article from *Le Libéraire*, originally published as "L'autorité. — La Dictature," April, 1859. I've also recently translated his poem, "To the Ci-Devant Dynastics." I think the difficulties, and the resulting rough spots, in both translations will be fairly obvious.
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April, 1859

– Let he who loves me follow me! says the other, it is the dictatorship of force intellectualized, the hominal dictatorship. One has the support of all the shepherds, all the herders, all those who command or obey in the fold, all that which is domiciled in Civilisation. The other has for it individualities made men, decivilized intelligences. One is the last representation of the modern Paganism, the eve of final closure, its farewells to the public. The other is the debut of a new era, its entry onto the scene, the triumph of Socialism. The one is so old that it touches the tomb; the other is so young that it touches the cradle.

– Old one! It is the Law, – it is necessary to perish!

– It is the law of nature, child! – you will grow!!

New York, April 1859

tend, is to give each and everyone the possibility, that is to say in the necessity of acting, in order that the movements, communicating with each other, give and receive the impetus of progress and thus increase the force tenfold and a hundredfold. What is necessary in the end, is as many dictators as there are thinking beings, man or women, in the society, in order to shake it, to rise up against it, to pull it from its inertia, — and not a Loyola in red hat, a general politics to discipline, that is immobilize one another, to settle on their chests, on their hearts, like a nightmare, in order to suppress the pulsations, and on their forehead, on their brain, as an compulsory or catechismal instruction, in order to torment its understanding.

Governmental authority, dictatorship, whether it is called empire or republic, throne or chair, savior of order or committee of public safety; whether it exists today under the name of Bonaparte or tomorrow under the name of Blanqui; whether it comes out of Ham or Belle-Ile; whether it has in its insignias an eagle or a stuffed lion. . . dictatorship is only the violation of liberty by a corrupted virility, by the syphilitic; it is a cesarian sickness inoculated with the seeds of reproduction in the intellectual organs of popular generation. It is not a kiss of freedom, a natural and fruitful manifestation of puberty, it is a fornication of virginity with decrepitude, an assault on morals, a crime like the abuse of the tutor towards his pupil, it is a humanicide!

There is only one revolutionary dictatorship, only one humanitarian dictatorship: it is the intellectual and moral dictatorship. Is not everyone free to participate there? It is enough to want it to be able to do it. There is no need apart from it, and no need, in order to make it recognized, for battalions of lictors nor of trophies of bayonets; it advances escorted only by its free thoughts, and has for scepter only its beam of enlightenment. It does not make the Law, it discovers it; it is not Authority, but it makes it. It exists only by the will of labor and the right of science. He who denies it today will affirm it tomorrow. For it does not command the maneuver by buttoning itself up in inactivity, like the colonel of a regiment, but it orders the movement by preaching by example, and demonstrates progress by progress.

— Everyone marching in step! says the one, and it is the dictatorship of brute force, the animal dictatorship.

We are no longer in the fabled times of Saturn, when the father devoured his children, nor in the times of Herod, when one massacred an entire generation of frail innocents — which, after all, did not prevent Jesus from escaping the massacre, or Jupiter the devouring. We live in an era where we no longer kill children much by the sword or the teeth, and where it appears natural enough that the young bury the old. Hercules is dead; why seek to resuscitate him? One can at the most only galvanize him. The club is less mighty than saltpeter, saltpeter is less mighty than the electric battery, and the electric battery is less mighty than the idea.

To every idea, present and to come, welcome! Authority had reigned so long over men, that it has taken such possession of humanity. It has left garrisons everywhere in the mind. Even today, it is difficult, other than in thought, to chip it away from top to bottom. Each *civilizée* is a fortress for it, which, under the guard of prejudices, stands hostile to the passage of that invading Amazon, Liberty. Thus, those who believe themselves revolutionaries and swear only by liberty, proclaim nonetheless the necessity of dictatorship, as if dictatorship did not exclude liberty, and liberty dictatorship. What big babies there are, truth be told, among the revolutionaries! — and big babies who cling to their daddy — for whom the democratic and social Republic is necessary, doubtless, but with an emperor or a dictator — it's all one — for the governor; people mounted sidesaddle, and faced towards the rump, on their donkey's carcass, and who, their eyes fixed on the perspective of progress, move away from it as fast as they approach it, — the feet in this position galloping in the opposite direction ahead of the head. These revolutionaries, bare-necked politickers, have preserved with the imprint of the collar, the moral stain of servitude, the stiff neck of despotism. Alas! They are only too numerous among us. They call themselves republicans, democrats and socialists, and they have fondness, they have love only for authority in the arms of iron: more monarchistic in reality than the monarchists, who beside them could nearly pass for anarchists.

Dictatorship, whether it is a hydra with a hundred heads or a hundred tails, whether they are autocratic or demagogic, can certainly do nothing for liberty: it can only perpetuate slavery, morally and physically. It is not by regimenting a people of helots under a yoke of iron, since there is iron, by imprisoning them in a uniform of proconsular wills,

that intelligent and free men can result. All that which is not liberty is against liberty. Liberty is not a thing that can be allocated. It does not pertain at the whim of whatever personage or committee of public safety that orders it, that makes a gift of it. Dictatorship can cut off the heads of men, but it cannot make them increase and multiply; it can transform intelligences into corpses, but it cannot transform cadavers into intelligences; it can make the slaves creep and crawl under its boots, like maggots or caterpillars, flattening them under his heavy tread, — but only Liberty can give them wings. It is only through free labor, intellectual and moral labor, that our generation, civilization or chrysalis, will be metamorphosed into a bright and shiny butterfly, will take on the human type and continue its development in Harmony.

Many men, I know, speak of liberty without understanding it; they have neither the science of it nor even the sentiment. They never see in the demolition of the reigning Authority anything but a substitution of names or persons; they don't imagine that a society could function without masters or servants, without chiefs and soldiers; in this they are like those reactionaries who say: "There are always rich and poor, and there always will be. What would become of the poor without the rich? They would die of hunger!" The demagogues do not say exactly that, but they say: "There have always been governors and governed, and there always will. What would become of the people without government? They would rot in bondage!" All these antiquarians, the reds and the whites, are just partners and accomplices; anarchy, libertarianism disrupts their miserable understanding, an understanding encumbered with ignorant prejudices, with asinine vanity, with cretinism. Plagiarists of the past, the revolutionaries retrospective and retroactive, the *dictatorists*, those subservient to brute force, all those crimson authoritarians who call for a saving power, will croak all their lives without finding what they desire. Fellows to the frogs who asked for a king, we see them and will always see them change their Soliveau for a Grue, the government of July for the government of February, the perpetrators of the massacres of Rouen for those of the massacres of June, Cavaignac for Bonaparte, and tomorrow, if they can, Bonaparte for Blanqui. . . . If one day they cry: "Down with the municipal guard!" it is in order to cry at the next instant: "Long live the guard mobile!" Or they swap the guard mobile for the imperial guard,

archers, like the feudal barons; — it is asserted in the people, as stars become apparent in the firmament, by shining on its satellites!!

What greater power would Proudhon have had being a governor? Not only would he have not had more of it, but he would have had much less, supposing even that he could have preserved in power his revolutionary passions. His power coming to him from his brain, all that which would have been of a nature to impede the labor of his brain would have been an attack on his power. If he had been a dictator, in boots and spurs, armed from head to toe, invested with the suzerain sash and cockade, he would have lost to politicking with his entourage all the time that he employed to socialize the masses. He would have made reaction instead of revolution. See instead the chatelaine of the Luxembourg, Louis Blanc, perhaps the best-intentioned in all the provisional government, and yet the most perfidious, the one who has delivered the sermonized workers to the armed bourgeois; he has done all the preachers in vestments or authoritarian badges have done, preached Christian charity to the poor in order to save the rich.

The titles, the government mandates are only good for the non-entities who, too cowardly to be anything by themselves, want to be seen. They have no reason to be, except for the reason of these runts. The strong man, the man of intelligence, the man who is everything by labor and nothing by intrigue, the man who is the son of his works and not the son of his father, of his uncle or of any patron, has nothing to sort out with these carnivalesque attributions; he despises and hates them as a travesty which will sully his dignity, as something obscene and infamous. The weak man, the ignorant man, who still has the feeling for Humanity, must also fear them; he needs for that only a little common sense. For if every harlequinade is ridiculous, it is more horrible when it carries a stick!

Every dictatorial government, whether it be understood in the singular or the plural, every demagogic Power could only delay the coming of the social Revolution by substituting its initiative, whatever it may be, its omnipotent reason, its civic and inevitable will to anarchic initiative, to the reasoned will, to the autonomy of each. The social revolution can be made only by the organ of all individually; otherwise it is not the social revolution. What is necessary then, that towards which it must

A dictatorial committee composed of workers is certainly the thing one could find most inflated with self-importance and nullity and, consequently, the most anti-revolutionary. If one could take seriously the notion of public safety, it is first and in every occasion to unseat the workers from all governmental authority, and then and always to oust as much as possible from society governmental authority itself. (Better for power to have suspected enemies than doubtful friends.)

Official or legal authority, by whatever name one decorates it, is always false and harmful. Only natural or anarchic authority is true and beneficial.

Who had authority in fact and in law, in 48? Was it the provisional government, the executive commission, Cavaignac or Bonaparte? None of the above. For, if they had violent force in hand, they were themselves only instruments, the meshed gears of the reaction; thus, they were not motors, but machines. All the governmental authorities, even the most autocratic, are only that. They function at the will of a faction and in the service of that faction, except for the accidents of intrigues, and the explosions of compromised ambition. The true authority in 48, the authority of universal safety cannot be thus not in the government, but, as always, outside the government, in individual initiative: Proudhon was its most eminent representative (among the people, I mean, not in the Chamber). It was in him that was personified the revolutionary agitation of the masses. And for that representation, he had no need of legalized title or mandate. His sole title came to him from his work, his science, his genius. His mandate, he did not hold it from another, from the arbitrary suffrages of brute force, but from itself alone, from conscience/consciousness and from the spontaneity of his intellectual force. Natural and anarchic authority had any share of influence to which it was entitled. And that is an authority which has only to make *de prétoriens*, for it is the dictatorship of the Intelligence: it stirs and it invigorates. Its mission is not to garrotter or to shorten men, but to but to grow them all the height of the head, but to develop in all of them the force of expansion of their mental nature. It does not produce, like the other, slaves in the name of public liberty, it destroys slavery in the name of private authority. It does not impose itself on the plebs by crenellating itself in a palace, by armoring itself with iron mail, by riding among its

as they would swap the imperial guard for the revolutionary battalions. Subjects they were; subjects they are; subjects they will be. They neither know what they want nor what they do. They complained yesterday that they did not have the man of their choice; they complain the next day of having too much of him. Finally, at every moment and every turn, they invoke Authority “with his long, sharp beak, helved on his slender neck” [*au long bec emmanché d’un long cou*], and they find it surprising that it crunches them, that it kills them!

Whoever calls himself revolutionary and speaks of dictatorship is only a dupe or a rogue, an imbecile or a traitor: imbecile and dupe if he advocates it as the auxiliary of the social Revolution, as a mode of transition from the past to the future, for it is always to conjugate Authority in the present indicative; rogue and traitor if he only envisions it as a means of taking their place in the budget and of playing the representative in all modes and at all times.

How many dwarves are there, indeed, who would like nothing better than to have official stilts: a title, a salary, some representation to pull themselves out of the quagmire where ordinary mortals flounder and give themselves the airs of giants. Will the common people always be stupid enough to provide a pedestal for these pygmies? Will they always be told: “You speak of suppressing those elected by universal suffrage, to throw the national and democratic representation out the windows, but what will you put in its place? For finally, something is necessary, and someone must command: a committee of public safety, then? You do not want an emperor, a tyrant, this is understood, but who will replace it: a dictator? . . . because everyone can not drive, and there must be one who devotes himself to govern others. . .” Eh! Gentlemen or citizens, what good is it to replace it if it is only to replace it? What is needed is to destroy evil and not displace it. What does it matter to me whether he bears one name or another, whether he is here or there, if, under this mask or that appearance, he is still and always in my way. — One removes an enemy; one does not replace it.

Dictatorship, the sovereign magistracy, the monarchy, so to speak, — for to recognize that the Authority which is evil can do good, is this not to declare oneself monarchist, to sanction despotism, to renounce the Revolution? — If one asks them, these absolute partisans of brutal

force, these advocates of demagogic and compulsory authority, how they would exercise it, in what manner they will organize this strong power: some will respond to you, like the late Marat, that they want a dictator in ball and chains, and sentenced by the people to work for the people. First let us distinguish: either the dictator acts by the will of the people, and thus will not really be a dictator, and will only be like a fifth wheel on a carriage; or else he will really be a dictator, will have he leads and whip in his hands, and he will act only according to his own good pleasure, which is to say for the exclusive profit of his divine person. To act in the name of the people is to act in the name of everyone, isn't it? And everyone is not scientifically, harmonically, intelligently revolutionary. But I admit, in order to conform to the thought of the blanquists, for example — that tail of carbonarism, that *ba-be-bou-vist* freemasonry, those invisibles of a new species, that society of secret . . . intelligences, — that there is a people and a people, the people of the initiated brothers, the disciples of the great popular architect, and the uninitiated. These affiliates, these outstanding characters, do they always agree among themselves? Let one decree be issued on property, or the family — or you-name-it — some will find it too radical, and others not radical enough. A thousand daggers, for the moment, are raised a thousand times a day against the dictatorial slavery. Whoever would accept a similar role would not have two minutes to live. But he would not accept it seriously, he would have his coterie, all the men scrabbling for gain who will squeeze around him, and would be for him a consecrated battalion of manservants in order to have the left-overs of his authority, the crumbs of power. Then perhaps he can indeed command in the name of the people, I do not deny it, but without fail, against the people. He will deport or have shot all those who have libertarian impulses. Like Charlemagne or whatever other king, who measured men by the height of his sword, he would decapitate all the intelligences that surpassed his level, he would forbid all progress which goes further than him. He will be like all men of public safety, like the politicals of 93, followers of the Jesuits of the Inquisition, and he will propagate the general dumbing-down, he will crush individual initiative, he will make the night of the dawning day, cast shadows on the social idea. He will plunge us back, dead or alive, into the charnel house of Civilization, and will make for the people, instead of intellectual

and moral autonomy, an automatism of flesh and bone, a body of brutes. Because, for a political dictator as for a Jesuit director, what is best in man, what is good, is the corpse! . . .

Others, in their dream of dictatorship, differ somewhat from these, in that they do not want the dictatorship of one alone, of a one-headed Samson, but the jawbones of a hundred or a thousand donkeys, a dictatorship of the small wonders of the Proletariat, deemed intelligent by them because they have reeled off one day or another some banalities in prose or verse, because they have scribbled their names on the polling lists or on the registers of some small politico-revolutionary chapel; the dictatorship finally of heads and arms hairy enough to compete with the Ratapoils, and with the mission, as usual, to exterminate the aristocrats or the philistines? They think like the others, that the evil is not so much in the liberticidal institutions as in the choice of tyrants. Egalitarians in name, they are for castes in principle. And by putting the workers in power, in the place of the bourgeois, they do not doubt that all will be for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Put the workers in power! In truth, we need only to think back. Haven't we had Albert in the provisional government? Is it possible to see anything more idiotic? What was he, if not a plastron? In the constituent or legislative assembly we have had the delegates from Lyons; if it was necessary to judge the represented by the representatives, that would be a sad specimen of the intelligence of the workers of Lyon. Paris gave us Nadaud, a dull nature, intelligent enough for a porter, who dreamed of transforming his trowel into a presidential scepter, — the imbecile! Then also Corbon, the reverend of the Atelier, and perhaps much the least Jesuitical, for he, at least, was not slow to cast off the mask and to take his place in the midst of, and side by side with, the reactionaries. — As on the steps of the throne the lackeys are more royalist than the king, so in the echelons of official or legal authority the republican workers are more bourgeois than the bourgeoisie. And that is understood: the freed slave who becomes master always exaggerates the vices of the planter who has trained him. He is disposed to abuse his command just to the extent that he has been prone or forced into submission and baseness by his commanders.