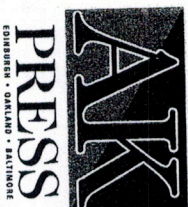


Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

PROPERTY IS THEFT!

A PIERRE-JOSEPH PROUDHON ANTHOLOGY

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Translation by Mitch Altkor ("Declaration to the French People" and "International Workers' Association: Federal Council of Parisian Sections") and Paul Sharkey ("On the Organisation of the Commune," "Paris Today Is Free..." and "On the Production of Goods During the Commune").

APPENDIX: THE PARIS COMMUNE

"The Parisian gentlemen had their heads full of the emptiest Proudhonist phrases. They babble about science and know nothing... Proudhon did enormous mischief... he himself is only a petty-bourgeois utopian... the workers, particularly those of Paris, who as workers in luxury trades are strongly attached, without knowing it, to the old rubbish. Ignorant, vain, presumptuous, talkative, blusteringly arrogant, they were on the point of spoiling everything... I shall... rap them on the knuckles..."

—Karl Marx, 9th October 1866

"The direct antithesis to the Empire was the Commune... the commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet... each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the mandat impératif (formal instructions) of his constituents... The very existence of the Commune involved, as a matter of course, local municipal liberty... the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour... the Commune intended to abolish that class property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few... It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land, capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour... Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society..."

—Karl Marx, 30th March 1871

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' ASSOCIATION

FEDERAL COUNCIL OF PARISIAN SECTIONS

WORKERS:

A LONG TRAIN of reverses, a catastrophe that would necessarily seem to bring about the complete ruin of our country; such is the balance sheet of the situation created for France by the governments that have dominated it.

Have we lost the qualities needed to raise us up from this degradation? Have we degenerated to the point that we resignedly submit to the hypocritical despotism of those who delivered us to the foreigner and that we only have no energy except that needed to render our ruin irremediable through civil war?

Recent events have demonstrated the might of the people of Paris; we are convinced that a fraternal accord will soon demonstrate their wisdom.

The principle of authority is powerless to re-establish order in the streets, to put the shop floors back to work, and this powerlessness is its negation.

The lack of solidarity has created general ruin and engendered social war. It is from freedom, equality and solidarity that we must ask for the assurance of order on new foundations and for the recognition of labour, which is its primordial condition.

WORKERS:

The Communal Revolution affirms its principles and casts aside all future causes of conflict. Can you hesitate to give it your definitive sanction?

The independence of the Commune is the guarantee of the contract whose clauses, freely debated, will bring an end to class antagonism and will assure social equality.

We have demanded the emancipation of the workers, and the Communal delegation is the guarantee of this; for it shall furnish each citizen with the means of defending his rights and effectively controlling the acts of its representatives charged with the managing of its interests and determining the progressive applications of social reforms.

The autonomy of each commune removes any oppressive character from its demands and affirms the republic in its highest expression.

WORKERS:

We have fought and we have learned to suffer for our egalitarian principles; we cannot retreat now that we can assist in laying the first stone of the social edifice.

What have we asked for?

The organisation of credit, exchange, and association in order to assure the worker the full value of his labour;

Free, secular, and integral education;

The right to meet and to form associations; the absolute freedom of the press and of the citizen;

The municipal organisation of police services, armed forces, hygiene, statistics, etc.;

We were the dupes of those who governed us, we allowed ourselves to be caught up in their game while they alternately caressed us and repressed the factions whose antagonisms assured their existence.

Today the people of Paris sees things clearly and refuses the role of a child guided by a preceptor, and at the municipal elections—the product of a movement of which it is itself the author—it will remember that the principle that presides over the organisation of a group or an association is the same as that which should govern all of society, and just as it rejects any administrator or president imposed by an external power, it will also reject any mayor or prefect imposed by a government foreign to its aspirations.

It will affirm its superior right to a vote of the Assembly to remain master of its city and to constitute as it sees fit its municipal representation, without imposing it on others.

We are convinced that on Sunday March 26 the people of Paris will vote for the Commune.

—The Delegates present at the session of the night of March 23rd, 1871
Federal Council of Parisian Sections of the International Association

ON THE ORGANISATION OF THE COMMUNE

Manifesto of the "Committee of the 20 Arrondissements"

The commune is the basic building block of every political state.

It should be autonomous, that is to say, self-governing and self-administering [...] The autonomy of the commune guarantees the citizen's freedom, the city's order and, through the effect of reciprocity, boosts the strength, markets and resources of every single one of the federated communes by making them the beneficiaries of the efforts of them all.

Implicit in this are the widest freedom of speech, of the written word, of assembly and association; respect for the individual and his thoughts free from trespass by the sovereignty of universal suffrage as he remains at all times his own master, free to invoke and relentlessly demonstrate the accountability of underpinning the principle of election of all officials and magistrates who are thus subject at all times to recall under the imperative mandate, which is to say, that the powers and mission of the mandatory is specific and limited [...]

Citizens, you are the masters of your destiny; with your support behind them, the representatives you have just chosen will repair the disasters caused by the outgoing authorities. Industry in jeopardy, work suspended, commercial transactions paralysed, all are to be given a vigorous boost. This very day

we have had the long-awaited decision on rents and tomorrow it will be the turn of payments due.

All public services restored and streamlined.

The National Guard, once the city's only armed force, reorganised without delay. These are our first steps.

For the triumph of the Republic to be copper-fastened, all that the people's elected representatives ask is the reassurance of your trust. As for them, they will do their duty.

March 1871

PARIS TODAY IS FREE AND IN POSSESSION OF HERSELF AND THE PROVINCES ARE IN SLAVERY

ONCE A FEDERATED France comes to understand Paris, Europe will be saved.

Today, my appeal goes out to the artists and I call upon their brains, their feelings, their gratitude. Paris has nurtured them like a mother and given them their genius. In the present hour, every effort of the artists (and there is a debt of honour at stake here) should be geared towards the reconstruction of her morale and the restoration of the arts which are her treasure. As a result, the museums must be reopened as a matter of urgency and serious thought given to a forthcoming exhibition; so let everybody, starting here and now, set to work and the artists of friendly nations will answer our call.

Vengeance has been wrought and genius must have its day; for the real Prussians were not the ones who initially attacked us. By causing us to perish of hunger, they have helped us regain our moral life and elevated every single individual to the dignity of a human being.

Ah, Paris, the mighty city of Paris, has just shaken off the dust of all vassalage. The most heartless Prussians, the exploiters of the poor, were in Versailles. Her revolution is all the more equitable in that it springs from the people. Its apostles are workers, her Christ has been Proudhon.

For the past eighteen hundred years, men of heart have faced death with a sigh, but the heroic people of Paris will defeat Versailles's banboozlers and torturers, man will have the run of himself, federation will be understood and Paris will have a lion's share of a glory unprecedented in history.

And now I say it again: let everyone set to work selflessly. This is a duty we all owe to our soldier brethren, these heroes who face death for the blessed cause.

Yes, with the genius of everyone given free rein, Paris will double her importance and the international European city will be in a position to offer the arts, industry, commerce and intercourse of all sorts and visitors from

around the globe an imperishable order. A pledge given by her citizens, one that cannot be broken by the monstrous ambitions of monstrous claimants.

Our era is about to begin and by a strange coincidence next Sunday is Easter Day! Will our resurrection come on that day?

So long to the old world and its diplomacy!

Gustave Courbet

Journal Officiel

April 5th, 1871

DECLARATION

TO THE FRENCH people:

In the painful and terrible conflict that again threatens Paris with the horrors of a siege and bombardment; that causes French blood to flow, sparing neither our brothers, our wives nor our children; crushed beneath cannon-balls and rifle shot, it is necessary that public opinion not be divided, that the national conscience be clear.

Paris and the entire nation must know the nature, the reason, and the goal of the revolution that is being carried out. Finally, it is only just that the responsibility for the deaths, the suffering, and the misfortunes of which we are the victims fall on those who, after having betrayed France and delivered Paris to the foreigners, pursue with a blind and cruel obstinacy the ruin of the great city in order to bury, in the disaster of the republic and liberty, the dual testimony to their treason and their crime.

The Commune has the obligation to affirm and determine the aspirations and wishes of the populace of Paris, to define the character of the movement of March 18th, misunderstood, unknown and slandered by the politicians seated at Versailles.

Once again, Paris works and suffers for all of France, for whom it prepares, through its combats and sacrifices, the intellectual, moral, administrative and economic regeneration, its glory and prosperity.

What does it ask for?

The recognition and consolidation of the Republic, the only form of government compatible with the rights of the people and the normal and free development of society.

The absolute autonomy of the Commune extended to all localities in France and assuring to each one its full rights, and to every Frenchman the full exercise of his faculties and abilities as man, citizen and producer.

The only limit to the autonomy of the Commune should be the equal right to autonomy for all communes adhering to the contract, whose association shall insure French unity.

The inherent rights of the Commune are:

The vote on communal budgets, receipts and expenses; the fixing and distribution of taxes; the direction of public services; the organisation of its magistracy, internal police and education; the administration of goods belonging to the Commune.

The choice by election or competition of magistrates and communal functionaries of all orders, as well as the permanent right of control and revocation. The absolute guarantee of individual freedom and freedom of conscience.

The permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas, the free defence of their interests, with guarantees given for these manifestations by the Commune, which alone is charged with overseeing and assuring the free and fair exercise of the right to assemble and publish.

The organisation of urban defence and the National Guard, which elects its chiefs and alone watches over the maintenance of order in the city.

Paris wants nothing else as a local guarantee, on condition, of course, of finding in the great central administration—the delegation of federated Communes—the realisation and the practice of the same principles.

But as an element of its autonomy, and profiting by its freedom of action, within its borders it reserves to itself the right to operate the administrative and economic reforms called for by the populace as it will; to create the institutions needed to develop and spread instruction, production, exchange and credit; to universalise power and property in keeping with the needs of the moment, the wishes of those concerned and the facts furnished by experience.

Our enemies are fooling themselves or are fooling the country when they accuse Paris of wanting to impose its will or its supremacy over the rest of the nation and to pretend to a dictatorship, which would be a veritable attack on the independence and sovereignty of other communes.

They are fooling themselves or are fooling the country when they accuse Paris of pursuing the destruction of that French unity constituted by the Revolution to the acclaim of our fathers, who hastened to the *Fete de la Federation* from all corners of the old France.

Unity, as it has been imposed on us until today by the Empire, the monarchy or parliamentarism is nothing but unintelligent, arbitrary or onerous centralisation.

Political unity, as Paris wants it, is the voluntary association of all local initiatives, the spontaneous and free concurrence of all individual energies in view of a common goal: the well-being, the freedom and the security of all.

The communal revolution, begun by popular initiative on March 18, begins a new era of experimental, positive, scientific politics.

It is the end of the old governmental and clerical world, of militarism and bureaucracy, of exploitation, speculation, monopolies and privileges to which the proletariat owe their servitude and the Fatherland its misfortunes and disasters.

Let this beloved and great country—fooled by lies and calumnies—be reassured! The fight between Paris and Versailles is one of those that cannot

be ended through illusory compromises. The end cannot be in doubt. Victory, pursued with an indomitable energy by the National Guard, will go to the idea and to right.

We call on France.

Apprised that Paris in arms possesses as much calm as bravery, that it supports order with as much energy as enthusiasm, that it sacrifices itself with as much reason as energy, that it only armed itself in devotion to the liberty and glory of all: let France cease this bloody conflict.

It is up to France to disarm Versailles through the solemn manifestation of its irresistible will.

Called upon to benefit by our conquests, let it declare itself in solidarity with our efforts. Let it be our ally in this combat that can only end in the triumph of the communal idea or the ruin of Paris.

As for us, citizens of Paris, our mission is the accomplishing of the modern Revolution, the largest and most fecund of all those which have illuminated history.

It is our obligation to fight and to win.

The Paris Commune

Journal Officiel

April 20th, 1871

PROPOSAL ON THE PRODUCTION OF GOODS

By DECISION OF THE Paris Commune:¹

All the big workshops of the monopolists, their equipment, machinery, raw materials, agencies, premises, etc. are to be commandeered after an inventory has been made with an eye to compensation at a later date.

Said workshops are to be temporarily ceded to such workers' associations as may make application and the assets of the Commune are to be transferred to said workers' associations through the opening of a line of credit for those associations. The *Lowere Workshops* which churned our armaments were one instance of such requisitioning. The leaders of the workers' council, the workshop heads, team leaders, etc., were chosen by the workers of each section and could be stood down at any moment.

Pierre Vesinier

May, 4th 1871

¹ This was proposed by a member of the International and Commune but never formally agreed or implemented; nonetheless, it gives an indication of what was aimed for. (Editor)