

PROUDHON - 1845

Just as the first critical moves in every science are necessarily entangled in the assumptions of the science which they are intending to combat, so Proudhon's work *Qu'est ce que la propriété?* is a criticism of political economy. Since the criticism of political economy forms the chief subject of interest, we need not here examine the legal section of the book, which criticizes law from the standpoint of law. Proudhon's book is therefore scientifically surpassed by the critical school of political economy, even of political economy as conceived by Proudhon. This work of criticism was only rendered possible by Proudhon himself, just as Proudhon's criticism had as its antecedents, the criticism of the mercantile system by the physiocrats, that of the physiocrats by Adam Smith, that of Adam Smith by Ricardo, as well as the labours of Fourier and Saint-Simon.

All the developments of political economy have private property as their major premise. This fundamental assumption is regarded by it as an unassailable fact, which needs no demonstration, and about which it only chances to speak casually, as M. Say naively confesses.

Now Proudhon subjects private property, the basis of political economy, to a critical examination, which is in fact the first decisive, ruthless, and at the same time scientific analysis. This constitutes the great scientific progress which he made, a progress which revolutionized political economy, and first rendered possible a real science of political economy.

Proudhon's work *Qu'est ce que la propriété?* has the same significance for modern political economy as Sieyès' pamphlet: *Qu'est ce que le tiers état?* has for modern politics.

If Proudhon did not conceive the various forms of private property, as, for example, wages, trade, value, price, money, etc., as such, but used these forms of political economy as weapons against political economy, this was quite in accordance with his whole standpoint, as above described and historically justified.

Political economy, which accepts the relationships of private property as human and reasonable relationships, moves in a perpetual contradiction to its fundamental assumption, which is private property, a contradiction analogous to that of theology, which constantly gives a human interpretation to religious ideas, and thereby constantly violates its fundamental assumption, which is the supramundane character of religion. Thus in political economy wages appear at the outset as labour's proportionate share in the product. Wages and the profit of capital exist in the most friendly and apparently human relations, alternately assisting each other. Subsequently it transpired that they stand in the most hostile, in an inverted, relationship towards each other. In the beginning value is

apparently determined on rational principles, by the costs of production of an article and by its social utility. Subsequently it transpires that value is a purely accidental determination, which does not need to have any connection at all either with the costs of production or with social utility. The magnitude of wages is in the beginning determined by a free capitalist. Subsequently it transpires that the worker is compelled to let it be determined, just as the capitalist is compelled to fix it as low as possible. Coercion takes the place of the freedom of the contracting parties. The same observation applies to trade and all the other relations of political economy. Political economists occasionally have an intimation of these contradictions, the development of which forms the principal content of their mutual wrangling. When, however, they become fully aware of them, they proceed to attack private property in one of its partial manifestations, as the falsifier of wages which are rational in themselves, that is, in the ideas they have formed about wages; or of value that is rational in itself, or of commerce that is rational in itself. Thus Adam Smith occasionally attacks the capitalists, Destutt de Tracy attacks the money-changers, Simonde de Sismondi attacks the factory system, Ricardo attacks landed property, and thus almost all political economists attack the non-industrial capitalists who regard property merely as consumable goods.

Sometimes, therefore, the political economists invest economic conditions with a human semblance, that is, when they are attacking a particular abuse, but at other times, which is mostly the case, they interpret these conditions in their strict economic meaning, as distinguished from human conditions. They reel unconsciously in this contradiction.

Now Proudhon has made an end once for all of this unconsciousness. He took seriously the human semblance given to economic conditions and sharply confronted it with their inhuman reality. In all seriousness he accepted the human gloss which the political economists had put upon economic conditions, and sharply compared it with their inhuman reality. He demanded that these conditions should be in reality what they are in fancy. In other words, the ideas which have been formed of them should be abandoned and their veritable inhumanity should be acknowledged. He was therefore consistent in plainly representing private property in its most universal aspect to be the falsifier of economic relationships, and not this or that kind of private property, to a partial degree, as did most of the other political economists. He achieved everything that could be achieved by the criticism of political economy from the standpoint of political economy.

All political economy hitherto has taken as its starting-point the wealth which the movement of private property ostensible creates for the nations in support of private property.

Proudhon starts out from the reverse side, which is sophistically covered up in political economy, that is, from the poverty created by the movement of private property, in order to reach his conclusions, which are unfavourable to private property. The first criticism of private property was naturally prompted by the phenomenon which embodies

its essence in the most striking and clamorous form, a form which directly violated human feeling -- by the phenomenon of poverty.

The critics of Proudhon cannot deny that Proudhon also perceives an inner connection between the facts of poverty and of property, as he proposes to abolish property on account of this connection, in order to abolish poverty. Proudhon has done even more. He has demonstrated in detail how the movement of capital creates poverty. The critics of Proudhon, on the other hand, will not enter into such trivialities. They perceive only that poverty and private property are opposites: which is fairly obvious.

Proletariat and wealth are antitheses. As such they constitute a whole; both are manifestations of the world of private property. The question to be considered is the specific position which both occupy in the antithesis. To describe them as two sides of a whole is not a sufficient explanation. Private property as private property, as wealth, is compelled to preserve its own existence, and along with it that of its antithesis, the proletariat. Private property satisfied in itself is the positive side of the antithesis. The proletariat, on the other hand, is obliged, as proletariat, to abolish itself, and along with it private property, its conditioned antithesis, which makes it the proletariat.

It is a negative side of the antithesis, the internal source of unrest, the disintegrated and disintegrating proletariat.

The possessing class and the proletarian class represent the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels perfectly satisfied with this self-estrangement, knowing that in this estrangement resides its own power, and possesses therein the semblance of a human existence; the latter class feels itself to be destroyed by the estrangement, perceives therein its impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence.

Within the antithesis, therefore, the owner of private property is the conservative, and the proletarian is the destructive party. From the former proceeds the action of maintaining the antithesis, from the latter the action of destroying it. From the point of view of its national, economic movement, private property is, of course, continually being driven towards its own dissolution, but only by an unconscious development which is independent of it, and which exists against its will, and is limited by the nature of things; only, that is, by creating the proletariat as proletariat, poverty conscious of its own physical and spiritual poverty, and demoralized humanity conscious of its own demoralization and consequently striving against it.

The proletariat fulfils the judgment which private property by the creation of the proletariat suspends over itself, just as it fulfils the judgment which wage-labour suspends over itself in creating alien riches and its own condemnation. If the proletariat triumphs, it does not thereby become the absolute side of society, for it triumphs only by abolishing itself and its opposite. In this way both the proletariat and its conditioned opposite, private property, are done away with.

SELECTED ESSAYS \* KARL MARX

Translated by H. J. Stenning  
(Eng.)

THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION \* - 1850

Pourquoi la revolution d'Angleterre a-t-elle  
reussi. Discours sur l'histoire de la revolution d'Angleterre,  
Paris, 1850.\*

The object of M. Guizot's pamphlet is to show why Louis Philippe and Guizot's policy ought not to have been overthrown on the 24th February 1848, and how the reprehensible character of the French is to blame for the fact that the July monarchy of 1830 ignominiously collapsed after eighteen years of laborious existence and was not blessed with the security of tenure enjoyed by the Best English monarchy since 1688.

From this pamphlet it may be seen how even the ablest individuals of the ancien régime, how even people who in their own way are not devoid of historical talent have been so completely thrown off their balance by the fatal event of February (1848) as to have lost all historical comprehension, even the comprehension of their former behaviour. Instead of being impelled by the February Revolution to study more closely the wholly different positions occupied respectively by the various classes of society in the French monarchy of 1830 and in the English monarchy of 1688, M. Guizot gets rid of the entire difference between the two situations in a few moral phrases and asserts in conclusion that the policy overthrown on the 24th February "can alone master revolutions, as it can sustain States."

The question which M. Guizot professes to answer may be precisely formulated as follows: Why has middle-class society developed in England under the form of a constitutional monarchy for a longer period than in France?

The following passage serves to show the nature of M. Guizot's acquaintance with the course of middle-class development in England: "Under the reigns of George I and George II, public opinion veered in another direction; foreign policy ceased to be its chief concern; internal administration, the maintenance of peace, questions of finance, of the colonies, of trade, the development and the struggles of the parliamentary régime, became the dominant preoccupations of the Government and of the public" (p.168)

M. Guizot discovers only two factors in the reign of William III that are worthy of mention: the maintenance of the equilibrium between parliament and the Crown, and the maintenance of the European equilibrium by means of the struggle against Louis XIV. Under the Hanoverian dynasty, public opinion suddenly "veered in another direction," nobody knows how and why.

It is obvious that M. Guizot has applied the most banal platitudes of French parliamentary debate to English history, believing he has

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\* Why the English Revolution was successful. A lecture on the history of the English Revolution, Paris, 1850.

thereby explained it. Similarly, when he was Minister, M. Guizot imagined he was balancing on his shoulders the pole of equilibrium between Parliament and the Crown, whereas in reality he was only juggling the whole of the French State and the whole of French society bit by bit to the Jewish financiers of the Paris Bourse.

M. Guizot does not think it worth the trouble to mention that the wars of competition for the destruction of French commerce and of French sea power; that under William III, the rule of the financial middle class received its first sanction through the establishment of the Bank of England, and the introduction of the national debt; that a new upward impetus was given to the manufacturing middle class through the consistent enforcement of the protective fiscal system.

For him only political phrases have importance. He does not even mention that under Queen Anne the ruling parties could only maintain themselves and the constitutional monarchy by forcibly prolonging the life of Parliament to seven years, thus almost entirely destroying popular influence over the government.

Under the Hanoverian dynasty England had already progressed so far as to be able to wage competitive war against France in the modern form, England herself combating France only in America and the East Indies, whilst on the Continent she was content to pay foreign princes like Frederick II to wage war against France. When, therefore, foreign politics assumed another aspect, M. Guizot says: "foreign policy ceased to be a chief concern" and its place was taken by "the maintenance of peace." The extent to which "the development and the struggles of the parliamentary régime became the dominant preoccupation of the Government and of the public" may be inferred from the bribery stories about the Walpole ministry, which at any rate bear a close resemblance to the scandals which came to light under M. Guizot.

Why the English Revolution entered on a more prosperous career than the French Revolution subsequently did is explained by M. Guizot from two causes: first, from the fact that the English Revolution bore a thoroughly religious character, and therefore broke in no way with the traditions of the past, and secondly from the fact that from the outset it did not wear a destructive, but a constructive aspect, Parliament defending the old existing laws against the encroachments of the Crown.

As regards the first point, M. Guizot forgets that the free thought of the French Revolution, which makes him shudder so convulsively, was imported into France from no other country than England. Locke was its father, and in Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke it assumed that lively form which later underwent such a brilliant development in France.

Thus we reach the strange result that the same freethought upon which, according to M. Guizot, the French Revolution came to grief was one of the most essential products of the religious English Revolution.

With respect to the second point, M. Guizot forgets that at the outset the French Revolution was just as conservative as the English, if not more so. Absolutism, especially in the guise which it had latterly assumed in France, was an innovation even there, and against this innovation the parliaments arose and defended the old laws, the us et coutumes of the old estates of the realm monarchy. And whereas the first step of the French Revolution was the revival of the Estates General which had been extinct since Henry IV and Louis XIII, the English



Revolution has no feature of an equally classical conservative nature to exhibit.

According to M. Guizot, the chief result of the English Revolution was this that it was made impossible for the king to govern against the will of Parliament and of the House of Commons in Parliament. The entire revolution may be summed up by saying that at the commencement both sides, the Crown and Parliament, overstepped their limits and went too far until under William III they reached the proper equilibrium and neutralized each other. That the subjection of the monarchy was its subjection to the rule of a class M. Guizot deems it superfluous to mention.

Consequently, he does not feel it incumbent on him to ascertain how this class acquired the power necessary to make the Crown its servant. He appears to think that the whole struggle between Charles I and Parliament related to purely political privileges. For what purpose Parliament and the class represented therein needed these privileges we are not told. Neither does M. Guizot refer to the direct interferences of Charles I with free competition, which rendered the commerce and the trade of England increasingly impossible; or the dependence upon Parliament into which Charles fell ever more hopelessly, through his continuous financial distress, the more he tried to defy Parliament. According to M. Guizot, therefore, the whole Revolution is to be explained by the evil intent and religious fanaticism of a few disturbers of the peace who could not content themselves with a moderate freedom. M. Guizot has just as little enlightenment to furnish with regard to the connection of the religious movement with the development of middle-class society. Of course, the Republic was likewise the mere work of a number of ambitious, fanatical, and malevolent spirits. That simultaneously efforts were being made to introduce the Republic in Lisbon, Naples, and Messina, as in England, under the influence of the Dutch example, is a fact which is not mentioned at all.

Although M. Guizot never loses sight of the French Revolution, it does not occur to him that the transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy is everywhere effected only after violent struggles and after passing through the stage of the Republic, and that even then, the old dynasty, being useless, must give way to a usurping collateral branch. Consequently, he has nothing but the most trivial commonplaces to utter respecting the overthrow of the English restored monarchy. He does not even cite the proximate causes: the fears entertained by the great new landowners, who had been created by the Reformation, at the prospect of restoration of Catholicism, when they would have been obliged to surrender all the former Church property which had been stolen, which meant that the ownership of seven-tenths of the entire soil of England would have changed hands; the horror of the trading and industrial middle class at Catholicism, which by not means suited its commerce; the nonchalance with which the Stuarts had sold, for their own advantage and that of the Court nobility, the whole of English industry and commerce, that is, had sold their own country, to the Government of France, which was then maintaining a very dangerous, and in many respects, successful competition with the English.

As M. Guizot everywhere leaves out the most important factors, there is nothing for him to do but to present an extremely inadequate and banal narration of merely political events.

The great riddle for M. Guizot, which he can only solve by pointing to the superior intelligence of the English, the riddle of the conservative character of the English Revolution, is explained by the continuous alliance which united the middle class with the largest section of the great landowners, an alliance that essentially distinguishes the English Revolution from the French Revolution, which destroyed large landed property by parcelling out the soil. This class of large landowners, which had originated under Henry VIII, unlike the French feudal land-ownership in 1789, did not find itself in conflict but rather in complete harmony with the conditions of life of the bourgeoisie. Its land-ownership, in fact, was not feudal, but middle class. On the one hand, it placed at the disposal of the middle class the necessary population to carry on manufactures, and on the other hand, it was able to impart to agriculture a development which corresponded to the state of industry and of commerce. Hence its common interests with the middle class, hence its alliance with the latter.

With the consolidation of the constitutional monarchy in England, English history comes to a full stop, as far as M. Guizot is concerned. All that follows is for him confined to a pleasant sea-saw between Tories and Whigs, and this means the great debate between M. Guizot and M. Thiers.

In reality, however, the colossal development and transformation of commercial society in England began with the consolidation of the English monarchy. Where M. Guizot sees only soft repose and idyllic peace, the most violent conflicts, the most drastic revolutions, were in reality developing. First of all, under the constitutional monarchy manufactures underwent an expansion hitherto undreamed of, in order then to make way for the great industry, the steam-engine and the gigantic factories. Whole classes of the population disappeared, new classes took their place, with new conditions of life and new needs. A large new middle class emerged; while the old bourgeoisie fought the French Revolution, the new captured the world market. It became so all-powerful that even before the Reform Act placed political power directly in its hands, it had compelled its opponents to legislate almost solely in its interests and according to its needs. It captured direct representation in Parliament and utilized it for the destruction of the last vestiges of real power which remained to landed property. Lastly, it is at this moment engaged in razing to the ground the splendid structure of the English constitution before which M. Guizot stands in admiration.

And while M. Guizot congratulates the English that among them the noxious growths of French social life, republicanism and socialism, have not undermined the foundation pillars of the unique all-blessing monarchy, the class antagonisms in English society have been developing to a point that is without example in any other country. A middle class without rival in wealth and productive forces confronts a proletariat which is likewise without rival in power and concentration. The tribute which M. Guizot pays to England finally resolves itself into this; that there under the protection of the constitutional monarchy the elements making for social revolution have developed to a far greater extent than in all the other countries of the world put together.

When the threads of English development get entangled in a knot, which no seemingly can no longer cut by more political phrases, M. Guizot takes refuge in religious phrases, in the armed intervention of God. Thus the spirit of God suddenly comes over the Army and prevents Cromwell from proclaiming himself king, etc. M. Guizot saves himself from his conscience through God, and from the profane public through his style.

In fact, it <sup>is</sup> not merely a case of les rois s'en vont, but also of les capacités de la bourgeoisie s'en vont.

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