Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Political Reform Comes to Great Britain, with a Nobleman's Support

Lord John Russell (1831)

Allow me to imagine, for a moment, a stranger from some distant country, who should arrive in England to examine our institutions. All the information he would have collected would have told him that this country was singular for the degree which it had attained in wealth, in science, and in civilization. He would have learned that in no country have the arts of life been carried further, nowhere the inventions of mechanical skill been rendered more conducive to the comfort and prosperity of mankind. He would have made himself acquainted with its fame in history, and, above all, he would have been told that the proudest boast of this celebrated country was its political freedom. If, in addition to this, he had heard that once in six years this country, so wise, so renowned, so free, chose its representatives to sit in the great council where all the ministerial affairs were discussed and determined, he would not be a little curious to see the process by which so important and solemn an operation was effected.

What, then, would be his surprise, if he were taken by his guide, whom he had asked to conduct him to one of the places of election, to a green mound, and told that this green mound sent two members to parliament; or to be taken to a stone wall with three niches in it, and told that these three niches sent two members to parliament; or, if he were shown a green park with many signs of flourishing vegetable life but none of human habitation, and told that this green park sent two members to parliament? But his surprise would increase to astonishment if he were carried into the north of England, where he would see large flourishing towns, full of trade and activity, containing vast magazines of wealth and manufactures, and were told that these places had no representatives in the assembly which was said to represent the people.

Suppose him, after all, for I will not disguise any part of the case,--suppose him to ask for a specimen of popular election, and to be carried for that purpose to Liverpool; his surprise would be turned to disgust at the gross venality and corruption which he would find to pervade the electors. After seeing all this, would he not wonder that a nation which had made such progress in every kind of knowledge, and which valued itself for its freedom, should permit so absurd and defective a system of representation any longer to prevail? ...

I repeat that the confidence of the country in the construction and constitution of the House of Commons is gone--and gone forever. I would say more: I affirm that it would be easier to transfer the flourishing manufactories of Leeds and Manchester to Gatton and Old Sarum than to reÃ¢â‚¬Ëoestablish the confidence and sympathy between this House and those whom it calls its constituents. I end this argument, therefore, by saying that if the question be one of right, right is in favor of reform; if it be a question of reason, reason is in favor of reform; if it be a question of policy and expediency, policy and expediency speak loudly for reform.

"What Is Property?": A Socialist's Answer

Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1840)

If I were called upon to answer the following question: *What is slavery?* and I replied: *It is murder,* my meaning would be comprehended immediately. There would be no need for amplification to demonstrate that the power to deprive a man of his thought, will, and personality is the power of life and death and that to make a man a slave is to kill him. Why, therefore, may I not meet this other question: *What is property?* by replying: *It is theft,* without feeling certain I shall be misunderstood, although this second proposition is no more than a transformation of the first?

I am taking it upon myself to discuss property, the essential principle of our government and our institutions. I am within my rights. I may be deceived in the conclusion to which my researchers lead me. I am within my rights. It pleases me to state my conclusion at the outset. I am still within my rights.

Such and such an author preaches that property is a civil right, generated by labor and sanctioned by law. Another maintains that it is a natural right which derives its origin from work. Both these doctrines, contradictory though they may appear, are endorsed and promoted. It is my contention that neither labor, nor business, nor law can create property: that it is an effect without a cause. Should I be reproved for this?

Yet I hear murmurs arising!

--*Property is theft!* This is the slogan of '93! This is the rallying cry of revolution.

Reader, reassure yourself. I am not an instrument of discord, a seditious incendiary. I am anticipating history a little; I am revealing a truth the march of which we are attempting in vain to halt. I proclaim the preamble of our future constitution. If our prepossessions would permit us to consider it, the definition *Property is theft,* which you deem heretical, might prove a lightning rod to deflect the thunderbolt. But how many interests, how many prejudices stand in the way! Philosophy, alas, will not alter the progress of events. Destiny will fulfill itself regardless of prophecy.

A Socialist Activist Takes the Message to the Workers

Flora Tristan (1844)

Yesterday I saw the silk workers.--What men! There you have serious, reasonable, fearless workers.--There should be 10,000 workers of this temper in the city of Lyon.--I spent three very satisfying hours at this meeting.--That is what I call talking to workers--in other words, chatting with them--letting them expose their needs themselves; one of them is to give me some notes on the board of arbitration (*prud'hommes*)--but this institution is a veritable hoax for the worker! and in Paris not one politician speaking about the arbitrators knows what is happening in Lyon.-- It was really a touching sight, all these heads of workshops, husbands, fathers of families; intelligent, educated men, already from thirty to forty years of age, who have come to listen to a woman's voice, thank her for her sympathy; each one telling her his troubles, his tribulations, the injustices, the thefts that the masters perpetrate on the poor, ignorant workers incapable of defending their interests.--Oh yes! What goes on here is a subject and sight worthy of attention.--There is in it the germ of a new order of things--here are men who no longer have confidence in other men, not in deputies, scholars, priests, or kings; they know that all these so-called superior men are ... egotists without feelings, without fraternity for the working class.--These workers know that all rich men are their enemies--and that scholars do not concern themselves with them--and so these men, guided by their good sense, have said to themselves: there is a woman who comes to us in order to serve us, it is God who sends her, let us go and listen to her; and all of them come, no matter what their party.--There I am, without having premeditated it, in the role of Woman-Guide, just as I too had instinctively conceived of it.--What I am doing at this moment--the results that I obtain--speak more in favor of the superiority of woman than everything that could be written and said on the question.--The problem is resolved by actual deed--the mathematical proof; thus the first person in all humankind who really speaks to the unpolished, ignorant people is a woman! I consider the Chalon affair[1] wholly an act of God; it is He who made me say:--"Sirs, I am traveling through France to speak to the workers and not to the bourgeois. Yes, it is a woman who will have been the first to have the wholly religious idea of speaking to the workers!"--and see what happens--man in the person of the royal prosecutor forbids me to speak to the workers.--"Sir," I said to him, "since this worker's union troubles you so much, I can dispense with their written adherence and will be satisfied with speaking to them."--"Madame, I cannot permit you to do it. To speak to the workers is too dangerous." Man thinks that the word of life is dangerous--and see what a difference, woman is impelled to propagate that word of life.--Woman is life and man is its limitations.--That is why woman is superior to man. These silk workers, heads of their shops, are the best thing I have encountered here; they have their own ideas--they combine to form a society--an "organized coalition"--they are very capable men and a year from now they will have brought into their association all of their intelligent counterparts in the city. Once these men have understood my little book, we shall see. ...

The following day I saw the journeymen carpenters, the "Gavots." Well! I am forced to say that I found those men very backward--out of fifty men present there, only two had read my little book--without comprehending it.--However, I tried to get them to talk; but no one understood what is meant by "right to work."--I explained, and in the end they understood and then seemed very astonished that this right had not been thought of sooner.--The conversation touched on important questions and as soon as these men were at ease with me I saw that four of five of them were very intelligent.--One said to me: "What harms us, madame, is that we are kept from discussing political matters in our meetings; we would be able to exchange views as we are now doing with you."--The observation of this young man was very sensible--well, two elders intervened and argued against the ideas that the young journeymen had just expressed.--The workers must not talk politics, the police forbid it and if we talk politics they will have our society dissolved.--I found myself in a very critical

position for I could not let pass the obscurantist doctrines of the two old journeymen and yet I knew very well that I risked being arrested in *flagrante delicto* if a police spy was present.--No matter, I did not recoil before the principle and I made a spirited address to them to make them understand that it was their duty as citizens, as brothers, and as progressive men to be concerned with questions of social economy, so-called political, that such matters entered into even household affairs--and that particular questions depended on general questions.--All the young were of my opinion and the old journeymen stuck in their obsolete ideas did not dare to contradict me.--So you see, the crudest and most ignorant men are capable of being instructed and very quickly.--There is thus but one course of action, and that is to talk to them.--It was agreed that they would come and take fifteen little books, that they would study them together, and that before my departure we would have another meeting in order to be able to have a discussion with knowledge of the facts.

When I arrived among these men my heart was wrung upon seeing their state of ignorance. On leaving I said to myself: well, I must not despair of anyone, all are capable of seeing and hearing.