"César de Paepe, [*On the Organization of Public Services in the Society of Future*]."
Workers Unite!: The International 150 Years Later. Ed. Marcello Musto. New York:
Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 187–191. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501302367.0052>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023,
11:44 UTC.

Copyright © Marcello Musto, 2014. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only,
provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the
Creative Commons licence.

César de Paepe, [*On the Organization of
Public Services in the Society of Future*]⁵²

A great number of socialists have cried out: War on the state! They do not want to hear talk about the state in any form, no matter how interpreted. They declare very plainly that they seek the absolute destruction of the state, of all states: and the more logical among them, perceiving rightly that the commune is, in the final analysis, merely a mini-state, a state with a tinier territory, whose functions are performed on a smaller scale than ordinary states, declare that they want no more to do with the communal state than with the state proper. Upon their standard they have daubed the device: An-archy! Not ‘anarchy’ in the sense of disorder, since, on the contrary, they believe in the possibility of arriving at true order through spontaneous organization of economic forces, but An-archy, in the sense in which Proudhon intended it, that is, absence of power, absence of authority, and in their minds, in the sense of abolition of the state, the terms authority and power being in their view absolute synonyms for the word state.

But alongside this traditional historical notion of the state, which, in fact, has thus far never been anything other than authority, power, and, further, despotism, (and the worst of despotisms at that, since it has always been exercised by an idle minority over the toiling majority), these socialists have taken account of a true fact and one that will become increasingly true, a fact that is one of the greatest economic phenomena of modern times: they have

⁵² This text by César de Paepe (see note 22) is an excerpt from a pamphlet (Brussels: Brismée, 1874) that appeared just before the ‘autonomist’ IWMA Brussels Congress (1874), and also presented during a session of the latter on 12 September. A partial reprint of this paper was included in the collection edited by Daniel Guérin, *Ni dieu, Ni Maître*. Paris: Maspero, 1980, later translated into English by Paul Sharkey, and published under the title *No Gods, No Masters*. Oakland, CA: AK, 2005, pp. 221–9. To this version, partially reproduced here, have been added new parts, translated for the first time by Christine Henderson. The full version is in the PI, IV: 292–338.

seen, in the chief branches of modern production, large industry increasingly replacing small-scale industry, centralization of capital, more and more massive application of collective effort and division of labour, the incessant introduction of mighty steam-driven machinery powering a host of tools and machines, tools hitherto isolated, now requiring that huge masses of workers be gathered into enormous factories, and that all of this cannot but add day by day to the domain of big industry. They have seen that in this great modern production, the isolated worker or artisan gives way to collective labour force, to workers' collectives; they have seen that these workers' collectives, faced with the allied capitalists whose interests are diametrically and openly opposed to their own, had a necessity to form themselves into resistance groups, into trades unions, and indeed implicate the workers of small industries in this movement: that association by trade must spread, and their conclusion is that such spontaneous grouping is not unlike the spontaneous banding together into bourgeois communes in the Middle Ages: community of interests inevitably impelling trades bodies to spread in order to support one another, out of this grows a whole range of federations—at first local, then regional, then international. What is more, not content with these theoretical observations, they have embarked upon practice: like the English workers, they have founded trade unions, they have federated with one another, and they have quite rightly, sought to found the International Association upon this federative economic basis. Thus they have embraced this grouping of workers' bodies which is rooted in the depths of modern life as a counter to the more or less artificial and obsolete grouping into communes and purely political states, and predicted the future decline of these latter.

So far so good. But we wonder whether the workers' bodies, the associated trades bodies of the same locality, whether this commune of proletarians, in short, on the day that it replaces today's official commune or bourgeois commune, will not act just like the latter vis-a-vis certain public services whose survival is essential to the life of society? We wonder whether, in the new commune, there will be no need for security, a civil state, maintenance of roads and public squares, street lighting, drinking water in the houses, sewer maintenance, and a whole host of public services that we listed at the start of this work? Would there not be a need for workers' groups, the commune's

trade bodies, to select from among their number delegates to each of the public services, delegates charged with operating these various services, unless these groups prefer instead to act as a bloc in appointing a delegation to share management of these various services? In either instance, do you still not have a local public service administration, a communal administration?

But all public services cannot be handled by a purely local administration, since many of them, and the most important of them at that, are by their very natures fated to operate over a territory larger than that of the commune: is one commune about to run the railways, maintain the highways, dam the rivers, channel the stream, see to delivery of mail and the despatching of telegrams to other localities, etc.? Obviously not! So communes have to come to some arrangement, organize themselves into a Federation of communes and choose a delegation to look after public services. Whether that delegation be appointed with a general remit to run all great regional public services, or with a special remit applicable to a particular service, matters not: in any event these delegates have to be in direct and ongoing contact with one another, so they still represent a regional or national public administration, the name having no bearing upon the thing. [...]

And what is that regional or national Federation of communes going to be, in essence, other than a state? Yes, a state, for we should call things by their name. Except that this will be a federative state, a state formed from the bottom up. A state having at bottom, at its origins, an economic association, the grouping of trades bodies making up the commune, and, in addition, having, no doubt, alongside its great public service administration directly emanating from the federal communes, a Labour Chamber emanating directly from the general unions (in England they call them amalgamated unions) made up of local unions from the same trade federated at regional level.

It will, perhaps, be objected that what we are here calling a state has nothing in common with what has hitherto been designated as such; until now, the state has represented nothing other than the organization of despotism, rather than a free association based upon economic forces. Well, if this free association has precisely as its principal objective and effect the delivery of public services by way of an ad hoc administration, which is the main function of all states (regardless of the many vicious forms taken by existing states and

the many superfluities with which the dominant classes have burdened states past and present), why should we not call this a state? Because this institution has always been defective in its organization, because, thus far, it has only ever served as an instrument for the exploitation of the masses, must we seek to abolish it, even while recognizing the necessity of reconstructing it on a basis which corresponds to new ideas? Because public education has had, to date, the aim of instilling prejudice in the masses while, at the same time, providing the privileged classes with a means of oppression and exploitation, must we want its elimination? Because industry has, to this day, been the means of further enriching the wealthy and of further impoverishing the poor, must we preach its annihilation?

Not long ago, labourers, seeing that they were being supplanted by machinery in their workshops, threw themselves violently upon these machines and destroyed them. The voices of Luddites called out: War on machinery! Today, they say that machinery is useful, necessary even to a society that could not survive without large-scale production, and they cry out: Machinery belongs to us! The state is a machine, it is the instrument of the great public services.

Like any other machine, this one too is essential for large-scale modern production and for substantial circulation in the products resulting from the same: like any other machine, the latter too has been murderous for the workers and has thus far always worked for the exclusive benefit of privileged classes. If there is to be an end of that, the workers must take over that machine. But in taking it over, let us check whether the state machine does not stand in need of important modifications so that it cannot injure anyone: let us check whether certain gears which bourgeois exploitation had imposed do not need removing and others, which bourgeois carelessness had neglected, added: let us see indeed if it does not need to be established upon wholly new foundations. With those reservations, we can say, workers, the machine belongs to us, the state belongs to us! [...]

Is there anything very authoritarian about expressions like state postal service, state railways, state-sponsored clearance of scrubland, etc.? We have no difficulty conceiving of a non-authoritarian state. [...]

And so, to the commune fall the merely local and communal public services under the purview of the local administration appointed by the trades' bodies

of the area and operating under the supervision of all local inhabitants. To the state fall the more widespread regional or national public services, under the management of a regional administration appointed by the Federation of communes and operating under the gaze of the regional Chamber of Labour. Is that all? No; there are and increasingly there will be public services which, by their very nature, are international or inter-regional (the actual name matters very little here). [...]

To the Jacobin conception of the omnipotent state and the subordinate commune, we oppose the idea of the liberated commune, itself appointing all its administrators, with no exceptions: shifting for itself in respect of laws, justice, and police. The liberal conception of the gendarme-state we counter with the nation of the state disarmed, but charged with educating the young and centralizing the great joint undertakings. The commune becomes essentially the organ of political functions or what are described as such: law, justice, security, the guaranteeing of contracts, the protection of the incapable, civil society, but at the same time it is the organ of all public and local services. The state becomes essentially the organ of scientific unity and of the great joint undertakings necessary to society.

Political decentralization and economic centralization, such is, it seems to us, the situation to which this new understanding of the double role of the commune and the state leads, an understanding based on the examination of the public services which logically fall within the powers of each of these organs of collective life.