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César de Paepe, [*On the People's
State (Volksstaat)*]⁵⁴

[...] The institutions that Guillaume, following Proudhon's ideas in his *General Idea of the Revolution*, considers to be constitutive of any state are therefore in our view only particular powers of the state peculiar to transitory social forms; they are a special aspect of the role of the state considered as the management of social interests. In a society that needs to protect itself against other societies and against that which is below and outside all society, the institution in charge of the general interests – the state – needs to have the means of defence at its disposal (army, clergy, police, judges, jailers, executioners, etc.). In a society that is federated with other societies and in which the old sub-social strata are incorporated into society, the state no longer has to defend society and no longer needs priests, soldiers, jailers, executioners, etc., but that does not mean it would no longer have any powers, or that there would no longer be a need for an institution in charge of managing the general interests – on the contrary. In sum, the real culprit is not the state but society; the state is as the society is, since the state is only a manifestation of society. [...]

We believe that, in a society where there are no longer any slaves, any serfs, any proletarians, public services of every kind, as objects of general interest to be administered, will be more numerous than they are today. So the powers of the state, though shorn of the army, the Church, etc., will in reality be more numerous than today.

Besides, despite all kinds of impediments, despite the narrowness of the bourgeois mind and the principles of *chacun pour soi* and *laissez-faire*, the present state is already unable to avoid running certain public services that

⁵⁴ This text is an excerpt from the synopsis of a long speech by César De Paepe (see note 22) at the same session referred to in note 53. It was published in B1876 and is also found in PI, IV: 471–9.

were completely unknown in any earlier state, and which the future state (or future public administration), in the *reorganized society*, will undoubtedly develop and supplement. So, far from tending towards the abolition of the state (again we add: or public administration, for those who find the word 'state' scary), we think that the powers of the state will be considerably more numerous in the future. [...]

When people speak of the state, they generally forget to distinguish between these two functions: legislation and administration. For the first of these functions, we readily accept that in a more or less distant future the role of the state may and should diminish and eventually die out altogether. Once the all-round development of everyone's faculties, with a complete and equal education for all, has led us to agree on the great natural laws that preside over the organization and life of societies, as scholars are today in agreement over the main laws constituting inorganic matter, we will simply submit to those universally recognized social laws, and there will be no point in artificial laws adopted by legislators of any kind. But we think we are still a long way from that time, and that meanwhile the present state (like the future state, during a more or less lengthy transitional period) should intervene legislatively in a host of cases, even in those where the *laissez faire, laissez passer* of the bourgeois economists today seems to be accepted almost without dispute.

As to the second function, we think that the role of the state, far from diminishing, should tend to increase more and more with the development of civilization. There are two main reasons for this necessary increase in the administrative powers of the state: (1) the growth of needs, the birth of a host of new needs (material and especially moral), whose satisfaction requires the creation of new public services, or at least the expansion and improvement of the existing public services; (2) the transformation of the old individual means of action into means of action based on collective strength; what used to be individual enterprise or household labour has now become collective enterprise and large-scale industry, and has become, or is tending to become, a veritable public service: for example, railways, coalmines, gasworks, metallurgical factories, etc., etc. [...]

To make this easier to understand, let us take some practical examples from the realm of fact. Let us see how what some call the destruction of the state and

we call the transformation of the state – that is, suppression of the army, official religion, the police and judiciary, the national bank, etc. – might actually come to pass, while nevertheless maintaining the administration of major public services. [...]

Is the state without a police or official religion still the state, so long as it retains the other powers mentioned above? Is the state without a judiciary or a national bank still the state? Yes, of course. If the state no longer has any of the four aforementioned powers but continues to manage public services and still has an army to defend itself against other states, is it still the state? Yes, of course. And if public services were to grow in number and importance, if the army gradually changed from a war-making institution into a peaceful workers' army engaged in major works of public utility (an *industrial army*, as Fourier put it), we ask when the state would cease to be the state; we ask at which point it would need to be 'debaptised'? For our part, we would see no need to debaptise it; the forms, procedures, methods and powers of the state would have changed, but the state would still be, as before, the social institution managing the interests of society. [...]

It is therefore necessary, at all costs, to ensure the regular continuation of public services, and thus to have an administration that runs all of them harmoniously. With the old state in ruins, it will be necessary to form another state; its powers will not be identical, nor will its way of appointing citizens to be part of it. Yet it will still be the same institution in charge of managing the interests of society. Only, since the interests of society will no longer be mainly the interests of a class but the interests of the whole people, it will no longer be a *Klassenstaat*, a state of one class, but a *Volksstaat*, a people's state.

All this may seem very theoretical, very abstract. I shall try to be even more practical. [...] In the towns, as in country districts where big industry exists (mills, metallurgy, collieries, quarries, etc.), the workers develop through meetings, lectures, special courses, study and propaganda groups, rationalist philosophical societies in which the atheistic, materialist element is dominant; on the other hand, in terms of material interests, they organize into resistance societies or trade unions, start to form countrywide federations of unions in the same trade as well as local federations and cross-trade societies (local chambers of labour). The tendency is to form such organizations in localities

and industries where they do not yet exist, and then to form a general federation of all the trade corporations in a country – a federation that is thus the General Chamber of Labour, a kind of parliament of the proletariat. Those are the facts, those are the tendencies. Now, let us suppose that these facts and tendencies are quite well developed, and that one of those events that occur every century in the history of our country, a revolution, then breaks out. If the bourgeoisie was overthrown, what would the proletariat do? Would it have to dissolve the organization it had given itself? We think it would very wary of doing that? We think it would keep its labour parliament up and running; and one of the first tasks of that parliament would be to appoint delegates to the various public services (as happened spontaneously in the Paris Commune), carefully taking into account their particular aptitudes and adding specialists for the very special services (mining and railway engineers, doctors and chemists in the public health service, etc., etc.). And what would this labour parliament be with its various executive commissions for the public services – for health, education, and so forth? What would it be if not a state, with its various ministries? We dare say that for a time it would even be necessary for that state to preserve some of the powers or institutions listed by James Guillaume. The clergy would be abolished, I assume, as religion would become a private matter; the jury would probably replace the present justice system. But if the struggle carried on, might not a militia, a citizens' army, be maintained for a certain time? And how long might the bank be preserved as a central body of circulation, serving as a temporary intermediary for the business that groups of producers in the various industries would have to conduct with one another? These are questions that it is scarcely possible to answer, since they depend on highly variable circumstances.

What would happen if, instead of acting so, the labour parliament – that is, the workers' federation in each country – followed an opposite path? What if, imbued with ultra-anarchist ideas or simply not feeling equal to the situation, it was content to overthrow the bourgeois state and allowed the public services to fall into a state of neglect? The first person to stake a claim, on the pretext of getting us out of the social chaos, would take over public affairs in the name of restoring order and saving society: that is, the people would once again have made a revolution for nothing and find itself back at square one.

To conclude: we would say that the state is a necessary element for society, but one that is eminently modifiable in accordance with the organization of society; the state is as society is. – Of the various social institutions past and present, the state appears to us (irrespective of its form) as an element of socialization and progress, in the sense that it represents the general interest of society vis-à-vis the interests of individuals; whereas other institutions, especially private property, represent the particular interest as opposed to the general interest. At present, we demand of the state that it should remain true to its mission of managing the general interests of society, by intervening wherever the general interest is damaged in the interests of a few individuals. Consequently, we demand that the state, even in its present form, should not abandon public services to private companies but intervene with restrictive laws wherever *laissez faire* is harmful to general interests (e.g., laws on child labour and others relating to factory work, laws on public health and dangerous work, laws on falsification and commercial fraud, etc.). – In the transitional period between bourgeois society and the new society, the workers should take hold of the state and make it serve the emancipation of their class; this would not even deflect the state from its role, which is to safeguard the general interests. [...] In the end, without some organization of the state as an administrative body rather than a legislative power, without the existence of a public, general administration, society would not take long to return to barbarism and savagery!