

THE BEST OF BASTIAT #2.1

“The State” (1848)

“The state is the great fiction by which everyone endeavors to live at the expense of everyone else... This is illusionary, absurd, puerile, contradictory, and dangerous.”



Claude Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850)

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Editor's Introduction

Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850) was the leading advocate of free trade in France during the 1840s. He made a name for himself as a brilliant economic journalist, debunking the myths and misconceptions people held on protectionism in particular and government intervention in general. When revolution broke out in February 1848 Bastiat was elected twice to the Chamber of Deputies where he served on the Finance Committee and struggled to bring government expenditure under control.

Knowing he was dying from a serious throat condition (possibly cancer), Bastiat attempted to complete his magnum opus on economic theory, his *Economic Harmonies*. In this work he showed the very great depth of his economic thinking and made theoretical advances which heralded the Austrian school of economics which emerged later in the 19th century.

Bastiat's essay "L'État" (The State) is probably his best-known work in English. In this volume we are reprinting a draft of his essay that appeared in the 11–15 June 1848 issue of *Jacques Bonhomme*, about a week before the shootings of the rioters began in Paris and shortly before the journal was forced to close. The essay was written to appeal to people on the streets of Paris and to attempt to woo them away from the spread of socialist ideas. Three months later Bastiat rewrote the piece, and it appeared in the 25 September 1848 issue of *Le Journal des débats*, where it was featured on the front page of the journal's four very densely printed pages. Sometime later it was republished as a standalone pamphlet.

“(This) bountiful and inexhaustible being that calls itself the state, which has bread for every mouth, work for every arm, capital for all businesses, credit for all projects, oil for all wounds, balm for all suffering, advice for all perplexities, solutions for all doubts, truths for all intelligent minds, distractions for all forms of boredom, milk for children, wine for the elderly, a being that meets all our needs, anticipates all our desires, satisfies all our curiosity, corrects all our errors and all our faults, and relieves us all henceforth of the need for foresight, prudence, judgment, wisdom, experience, order, economy, temperance, and activity.”

“The State” (draft June, 1848)¹

“The state has nothing it has not taken from the people, it cannot distribute largesse to the people. The people know this, since they never cease to demand reductions in taxes. That is true, but at the same time they never cease to demand handouts of every kind from the state.”

“There are those who say, ‘A financial man, such as Thiers, Fould, Goudchaux, or Girardin, will get us out of this.’ I think they are mistaken.”

“Who, then, will get us out of this?”

“The people.”

“When?”

“When the people have learned this lesson: since the state has nothing it has not taken from the people, it cannot distribute largesse to the people.”

“The people know this, since they never cease to demand reductions in taxes.”

“That is true, but at the same time they never cease to demand handouts of every kind from the state.

They want the state to establish nursery schools, infant schools, and free schools for our youth, national workshops for those that are older, and retirement pensions for the elderly.

They want the state to go to war in Italy and Poland.

They want the state to found farming colonies.

They want the state to build railways.

They want the state to bring Algeria into cultivation.

They want the state to lend ten billion to landowners.

They want the state to supply capital to workers.

They want the state to replant the forests on mountains.

They want the state to build embankments along the rivers.

They want the state to make payments without receiving any.

They want the state to lay down the law in Europe.

They want the state to support agriculture.

They want the state to give subsidies to industry.

They want the state to protect trade.

They want the state to have a formidable army.

They want the state to have an impressive navy.

They want the state to . . .”

“Have you finished?”

“I could go on for another hour at least.”

“But what is the point you are trying to make?”

“This. As long as the people want all of this, they will have to pay for it. There is no financial man alive who can do something with nothing.”

Jacques Bonhomme is sponsoring a prize of fifty thousand francs to be given to anyone who provides a good definition of the word state, for that person will be the savior of finance, industry, trade, and work.

“The state! What is this? Where is it? What does it do? What ought it to be doing? All we know about it is that it is a mysterious being and is definitely the one that is most solicited and most tormented and is the busiest; the one to whom the most advice is given; the one most accused, most invoked, and most provoked in the world.”

¹ Originally published as a draft dated 11–15 June 1848, in the first issue of *Jacques Bonhomme. OC*, vol. 7, p. 238. *CW*, vol. 2, pp. 105-6.

“The State” (September, 1848)²

I would like someone to sponsor a prize, not of five hundred francs but of a million, with crowns, crosses, and ribbons for whoever can provide a good, simple, and understandable definition of the words “the state.”

What a huge service this person would be doing to society!

The state! What is this? Where is it? What does it do? What ought it to be doing?

All we know about it is that it is a mysterious being and is definitely the one that is most solicited and most tormented and is the busiest; the one to whom the most advice is given; the one most accused, most invoked, and most provoked in the world.

For, sir, I do not have the honor of knowing you, but I will bet ten to one that for the last six months you have been constructing utopias; and if you have been doing so, I will bet ten to one that you are making the state responsible for bringing them into existence.

And you, madam, I am certain that in your heart of hearts you would like to cure all the suffering of humanity and that you would not be in the slightest put out if the state just wanted to help in this.

But alas! The unfortunate being, like Figaro, does not know whom to listen to nor which way to turn. The hundred thousand voices of the press and the tribune are all calling out to this being at once:

Organize work and the workers.
Root out selfishness.
Repress the insolence and tyranny of capital.
Carry out experiments on manure and eggs.
Criss-cross the country with railways.
Irrigate the plains.
Reforest the mountains.
Set up model farms.
Set up harmonious workshops.
Colonize Algeria.
Provide children with milk.
Educate the young.
Succor the elderly.
Send the inhabitants of towns to the country.
Bear hard on the profits of all industries.
Lend money interest free to those who want it.
Liberate Italy, Poland, and Hungary.

Breed and improve saddle horses.

Encourage art and train musicians and dancers for us.

Prohibit trade and at the same time create a merchant navy.

Discover truth and toss into our heads a grain of reason. The mission of the state is to enlighten, develop, expand, fortify, spiritualize, and sanctify the souls of peoples. [1]

“Oh, sirs, have a little patience,” the state replies pitifully. “I will try to satisfy you, but I need some resources to do this. I have prepared some projects relating to five or six bright, new taxes that are the most benign the world has ever seen. You will see how pleased you will be to pay them.”

“Oh, sirs, have a little patience,” the state replies pitifully. “I will try to satisfy you, but I need some resources to do this. I have prepared some projects relating to five or six bright, new taxes that are the most benign the world has ever seen. You will see how pleased you will be to pay them.”

At that, a great cry arises: “Just a minute! Where is the merit in doing something with resources? It would not be worth calling yourself the state. Far from imposing new taxes on us, we demand that you remove the old ones. You must abolish:

The tax on salt; [2]

The tax on wines and spirits;

Postage tax;

City tolls; [3]

Trading taxes; [4]

Mandatory community service.” [5]

In the middle of this tumult, and after the country has changed its state two or three times because it has failed to satisfy all these demands, I wanted to point out that they were contradictory. Good heavens, what was I

² “L’État.” Originally published in the 25 September 1848 issue of *Le Journal des débats*. Republished in *OC*, vol. 4, p. 327. *CW*, vol. 2, pp. 93-104.

thinking of? Could I not keep this unfortunate remark to myself?

Here I am, discredited forever, and it is now generally accepted that I am a man without heart or feelings of pity, a dry philosopher, an individualist, a bourgeois, and, to sum it up in a single word, an economist of the English or American school.

“(This) bountiful and inexhaustible being that calls itself the state, which has bread for every mouth, work for every arm, capital for all businesses, credit for all projects, oil for all wounds, balm for all suffering, advice for all perplexities, solutions for all doubts, truths for all intelligent minds, distractions for all forms of boredom, milk for children, wine for the elderly, a being that meets all our needs, anticipates all our desires, satisfies all our curiosity, corrects all our errors and all our faults, and relieves us all henceforth of the need for foresight, prudence, judgment, wisdom, experience, order, economy, temperance, and activity. “

Oh, excuse me, you sublime writers whom nothing stops, not even contradictions. I am doubtless mistaken, and I most willingly retract my statements. I do not ask for more, you may be sure, than that you have genuinely discovered, independently from us, a bountiful and inexhaustible being that calls itself the state, which has bread for every mouth, work for every arm, capital for all businesses, credit for all projects, oil for all wounds, balm for all suffering, advice for all perplexities, solutions for all doubts, truths for all intelligent minds, distractions for all forms of boredom, milk for children, wine for the elderly, a being that

meets all our needs, anticipates all our desires, satisfies all our curiosity, corrects all our errors and all our faults, and relieves us all henceforth of the need for foresight, prudence, judgment, wisdom, experience, order, economy, temperance, and activity.

And why would I not desire this? May God forgive me, but the more I reflect on this, the more the convenience of the thing appeals to me, and I too am anxious to have access to this inexhaustible source of wealth and enlightenment, this universal doctor and infallible counsellor that you are calling the state.

This being so, I ask you to show it to me and define it for me, and this is why I am proposing the establishment of a prize for the first person who discovers this phoenix. For in the end, people will agree with me that this precious discovery has not yet been made, since up to now all that has come forward under the name of the state has been overturned instantly by the people, precisely because it does not fulfill the somewhat contradictory conditions of the program.

Does this need to be said? I fear that we are, in this respect, the dupes of one of the strangest illusions ever to have taken hold of the human mind.

“We are, in this respect, the dupes of one of the strangest illusions ever to have taken hold of the human mind... that all pain accrues to some and all satisfaction to the others. From this we get slavery or even plunder, in whatever form it takes: wars, imposture, violence, restrictions, fraud.”

Man rejects pain and suffering. And yet he is condemned by nature to the suffering privation brings if he does not embark upon the pain of work. All he has, therefore, is a choice between these two evils. How can he avoid both? Up to now, he has only found and will only ever find one means, that is, to enjoy the work of others, to act in such a way that pain and satisfaction do not accrue to each person in accordance with natural proportions, but that all pain accrues to some and all satisfaction to the others. From this we get slavery or even plunder, in whatever form it takes: wars,

imposture, violence, restrictions, fraud, etc., all monstrous forms of abuse but in line with the thought that has given rise to them. We should hate and combat oppressors, but we cannot say that they are absurd.

Slavery is receding, thank heaven, and on the other hand, our aptitude for defending our property means that direct and crude plunder is not easy to do. However, one thing has remained. It is this unfortunate primitive tendency within all men to divide into two our complex human lot, shifting pain onto others and keeping satisfaction for themselves. It remains to be seen in what new form this sorry tendency will manifest itself.

“It is plain that the state cannot procure satisfaction for some without adding to the work of the others ... The state is the great fiction by which everyone endeavors to live at the expense of everyone else.”

Oppressors no longer act directly on the oppressed using their own forces. No, our conscience has become too scrupulous for that. There are still tyrants and victims certainly, but between them has placed itself the intermediary that is the state, that is to say, the law itself. What is more calculated to silence our scruples and, perhaps more appealing, to overcome our resistance? For this reason, we all make calls upon the state on one ground or pretext or another. We tell it, “I do not consider that there is a satisfactory relation between the goods I enjoy and my work. I would like to take a little from the property of others to establish the balance I desire. But this is dangerous. Can you not make my task easier? Could you not provide me with a good position? Or else hinder the production of my competitors? Or else make me an interest-free loan of the capital you have taken from its owners? Or raise my children at public expense? Or award me subsidies? Or ensure my well-being when I reach the age of fifty? By these means I will achieve my aim with a perfectly clear conscience, since the law itself will have acted on my behalf and I will achieve all the advantages of plunder without ever having incurred either its risks or opprobrium!

As it is certain, on the one hand, that we all address more or less similar requests to the state and, on the other, it is plain that the state cannot procure satisfaction for some without adding to the work of the others, while waiting for a new definition of the state I think I am authorized to give my own here. Who knows whether it will not carry off the prize? Here it is:

The state is the great fiction by which everyone endeavors to live at the expense of everyone else.

For today, as in the past, each person more or less wants to profit from the work of others. We do not dare display this sentiment; we even hide it from ourselves, and then what do we do? We design an intermediary, we address ourselves to the state, and each class in turn comes forward to say to it, “You who can take things straightforwardly and honestly, take something from the general public and we will share it.” Alas! The state has a very ready tendency to follow this diabolical advice as it is made up of ministers and civil servants, in short, men, who like all men are filled with the desire and are always quick to seize the opportunity to see their wealth and influence increase. The state is therefore quick to understand the profit it can make from the role that the general public has entrusted to it. It will be the arbiter and master of every destiny. It will take a great deal; therefore a great deal will remain to it. It will increase the number of its agents and widen the circle of its attributions. It will end by achieving crushing proportions.

But what we should clearly note is the astonishing blindness of the general public in all this. When happy soldiers reduced the conquered to slavery, they were barbaric, but they were not absurd. Their aim, like ours, was to live at someone else’s expense, but they did not fail to do so like us. What ought we to think of a people who do not appear to have any idea that reciprocal pillage is no less pillage because it is reciprocal, that it is no less criminal because it is executed legally and in an orderly fashion, that it adds nothing to public well-being, and that, on the contrary, it reduces well-being by everything that this spendthrift of an intermediary that we call the state costs us?

And we have placed this great illusion at the forefront of the Constitution to edify the people. These are the opening words of the preamble:

France has set itself up as a republic in order to . . . call all its citizens to an increasingly higher level of morality, enlightenment, and well-being.

“Reciprocal pillage is no less pillage because it is reciprocal, that it is no less criminal because it is executed legally and in an orderly fashion.”

Thus, it is France, an abstraction, that calls French citizens, real persons, to morality, well-being, etc. Is it not wholeheartedly going along with this strange illusion that leads us to expect everything from some energy other than our own? Does it not give rise to the idea that there is, at hand and outside the French people, a being that is virtuous, enlightened, and rich that can and ought to pour benefits over them? Is it not to presume, quite gratuitously of course, that there is between France and the French, between the simple, abbreviated, abstract name of all these unique individuals and these individuals themselves, a relationship of father and child, tutor and pupil, teacher and schoolchild? I am fully aware that it is sometimes metaphorically said that the fatherland is a tender mother. However, to catch a constitutional proposition in flagrant inanity, you need to show only that it can be inverted, not without inconvenience but even advantageously. Would accuracy have suffered if the preamble had said:

The French people have set themselves up as a republic in order to call France to an increasingly higher level of morality, enlightenment, and well-being?

Well, what is the value of an axiom in which the subject and attribute can change places without causing trouble? Everyone understands that you can say: “Mothers suckle their children.” But it would be ridiculous to say: “Children suckle their mothers.”

The Americans had another concept of the relationship between citizens and the state when they placed at the head of their Constitution these simple words:

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain, etc. [6]

Here we have no illusions, no abstraction from which its citizens ask everything. They do not expect anything other than from themselves and their own

energy. They place no expectations on anything other than themselves and their own energy. Or they place their expectations only on themselves and their own energy.

“They (the American people) do not expect anything other than from themselves and their own energy. They place no expectations on anything other than themselves and their own energy. Or they place their expectations only on themselves and their own energy.”

If I have taken the liberty of criticizing the opening words of our Constitution, it is because it is not a question, as one might believe, of wholly metaphysical subtlety. I claim that this personification of the state has been in the past and will be in the future a rich source of calamities and revolutions.

Here are the public on one side and the state on the other, considered to be two distinct beings, the latter obliged to spread over the former and the former having the right to claim from the latter a flood of human happiness. What is bound to happen?

In fact, the state is not and cannot be one-handed. It has two hands, one to receive and the other to give; in other words, the rough hand and the gentle hand. The activity of the second is of necessity subordinate to the activity of the first. Strictly speaking, the state is able to take and not give back. This has been seen and is explained by the porous and absorbent nature of its hands, which always retain part and sometimes all of what they touch. But what has never been seen, will never be seen, and cannot even be conceived is that the state will give to the general public more than it has taken from them. It is therefore a sublime folly for us to adopt toward the state the humble attitude of beggars. It is radically impossible for the state to confer a particular advantage on some of the individuals who make up the community without inflicting greater damage on the community as a whole.

The state therefore finds itself, because of our demands, in an obvious vicious circle.

If the state refuses to supply the services being demanded of it, it is accused of impotence, lack of

willpower, and incapacity. If it tries to provide them, it is reduced to inflicting redoubled taxes on the people, doing more harm than good, and attracting to itself general dislike from the other direction.

Thus there are two hopes in the general public and two promises in the government: a host of benefits and no taxes. Hopes and promises that, since they are contradictory, can never be achieved.

“The state is not and cannot be one-handed. It has two hands, one to receive and the other to give; in other words, the rough hand and the gentle hand. The activity of the second is of necessity subordinate to the activity of the first.”

Then is this not the cause of all our revolutions? For between the state, which is hugely generous with impossible promises, and the general public, which has conceived unattainable hopes, have come two classes of men, those with ambition and those with utopian dreams. Their role is clearly laid out by the situation. It is enough for these courtiers of popularity to shout into the people’s ears: “The authorities are misleading you; if we were in their place, we would shower you with benefits and relieve you of taxes.”

And the people believe this, and the people hope, and the people stage a revolution.

No sooner are their friends in power than they are required to fulfill these promises. “So give me work, bread, assistance, credit, education, and colonies,” say the people, “and notwithstanding this, deliver me from the clutches of the tax authorities as you promised.”

The new state is no less embarrassed than the former state since, when it comes to the impossible, promises may well be made but not kept. It tries to play for time, which it needs to bring its huge projects to fruition. First of all, it tries a few things timidly: on the one hand, it expands primary education a little; second, it makes slight modifications to the tax on wines and spirits. [7] But the contradiction still stands squarely before it; if it wants to be philanthropic it is obliged to maintain taxes, and if it renounces taxation it is also obliged to renounce philanthropy.

These two promises always, and of necessity, block each other. Making use of borrowing, in other words consuming the future, is really a current means of reconciling them; efforts are made to do a little good in the present at the expense of a great deal of evil in the future. However, this procedure evokes the specter of bankruptcy, which chases credit away. What is to be done then? The new state in this case takes its medicine bravely. It calls together forces to keep itself in power, it stifles public opinion, it has recourse to arbitrary decisions, it calls down ridicule on its former maxims, and it declares that administration can be carried out only at the cost of being unpopular. In short, it proclaims itself to be governmental.

And it is at this point that other courtiers of popularity lie in wait. They exploit the same illusion, go down the same road, obtain the same success, and within a short time are engulfed in the same abyss.

This is the situation we reached in February. [8] At that time, the illusion that is the subject of this article had penetrated even further into the minds of the people, together with socialist doctrines. More than ever, the people expected the state, in its republican robes, to open wide the tap of bounty and close that of taxation. “We have oft en been misled,” said the people, “but we ourselves will see to it that we are not misled once again.”

“If (the State) wants to be philanthropic it is obliged to maintain taxes... Making use of borrowing, in other words consuming the future, is really a current means of reconciling them; efforts are made to do a little good in the present at the expense of a great deal of evil in the future.”

What could the provisional government do? Alas, only what has always been done in a like situation: make promises and play for time. The government did not hesitate to do this, and to give their promises more solemnity they set them in decrees. “An increase in well-being, a reduction of work, assistance, credit, free education, farming colonies, land clearance, and at the

same time a reduction in the tax on salt, on wine and spirits, on postage, on meat, all this will be granted ... when the National Assembly meets.”

The National Assembly met, and since two contradictory things cannot be achieved, its task, its sad task was to withdraw as gently as possible and one after the other all the decrees of the provisional government.

However, in order not to make the disappointment too cruel, a few compromises simply had to be undertaken. A few commitments have been maintained, and others have been started to a small degree. The current government is therefore endeavoring to dream up new taxes.

At this point, I will move forward in thought to a few months in the future and ask myself, with iron in my soul, what will happen when a new breed of agents goes into the countryside to raise the new taxes on inheritance, on income, and on farming profits. May the heavens give the lie to my presentiments, but I can still see a role in this for the courtiers of popularity.

Read the latest Manifesto of the Montagnards, [9] the one they issued regarding the presidential elections. It is a bit long, but in the end it can be briefly summarized thus: The state must give a great deal to its citizens and take very little from them. This is always the same tactic, or if you prefer, the same error.

The state owes “free instruction and education to all its citizens.”

It owes:

“General and vocational education that is as appropriate as possible to the needs, vocations, and capacities of each citizen.”

It must:

“Teach him his duties toward God, men, and himself; develop his sensibilities, aptitudes, and faculties; and in short, give him the knowledge needed for his work, the enlightenment needed for his interests, and a knowledge of his rights.”

It must:

“Make available to everybody literature and the arts, the heritage of thought, the treasures of the mind, and all the intellectual enjoyment that elevates and strengthens the soul.”

It must:

“Put right any accident, fire, flood, etc. (this et cetera says far more than its small size would suggest), experienced by a citizen.”

It must:

“Intervene in business and labor relations and make itself the regulator of credit.”

It owes:

“Well-founded encouragement and effective protection to farmers.”

It must:

“Buy back the railways, canals, and mines,” and doubtless also run them with its legendary capacity for industry.”

It must:

“Stimulate generous initiatives, encourage them, and help them with all the resources needed to make them a triumphant success. As the regulator of credit, it will sponsor manufacturing and farming associations liberally in order to ensure their success.”

The state has to do all this without prejudicing the services which it currently carries out; and, for example, it will have to maintain a constantly hostile attitude toward foreigners since, as the signatories of the program state, “bound by this sacred solidarity and by the precedents of republican France, we send our promises made on high and our hopes soaring across the barriers that despotism raises between nations: the right we wish for ourselves we also wish for all those oppressed by the yoke of tyranny. We want our glorious army to continue to be, if necessary, the army of freedom.”

As you can see, the gentle hand of the state, that sweet hand that gives and spreads benefits widely, will be fully occupied under the Montagnard government. Might you perhaps be disposed to believe that this will be just as true of the rough hand that goes rummaging and rifling in our pockets?

“The rough hand (of the State) goes rummaging and rifling in our pockets.”

Don’t you believe it! The courtiers of popularity would not be masters of their trade if they did not have the art of hiding an iron fist in a velvet glove.

Their reign will certainly be a cause for celebration for taxpayers.

“Taxes must reach the superfluous, not the essentials,” they say.

Would it not be a fine day if, in order to shower us with benefits, the tax authorities were content to make a hole in our superfluous assets?

That is not all. The aim of the Montagnards is that “taxes will lose their oppressive character and become just a fraternal act.”

Good heavens! I was well aware that it is fashionable to shove fraternity in everywhere, but I did not think it could be inserted into the tax collector’s notice.

Coming down to detail, the signatories of the program say:

“We want the taxes levied on objects of first necessity, such as salt, wines and spirits, et cetera, to be abolished immediately;

“The land tax, city tolls, and industrial licenses to be reformed;

“Justice free of charge, that is to say, a simplification of the forms and a reduction in the fees” (this is doubtless intended to milk the stamp duty).

Thus, land tax, city tolls, industrial licenses, stamp duty, salt tax, tax on wine and spirits, [10] and postage would all go. These gentlemen have found the secret of giving feverish activity to the gentle hand of the state while paralyzing its rough hand.

Well then, I ask the impartial reader, is this not childishness and, what is more, dangerous childishness? What is to stop the people mounting revolution after revolution once the decision has been taken not to stop doing so until the following contradiction has been achieved: “Give nothing to the state and receive a great deal from it”?

Do people believe that if the Montagnards came to power they would not be victims of the means they employed to seize it?

“(The new system of government) consists in demanding everything from the state while giving it nothing, this is illusionary, absurd, puerile, contradictory, and dangerous.”

Fellow citizens, since time immemorial two political systems have confronted one another and both have good arguments to support them. According to one, the state has to do a great deal, but it also has to take a great deal. According to the other, its twin action should be little felt. A choice has to be made between these two systems. But as for the third system, which

takes from the two others and which consists in demanding everything from the state while giving it nothing, this is illusionary, absurd, puerile, contradictory, and dangerous. Those who advocate it to give themselves the pleasure of accusing all forms of government of impotence, and of thus exposing them to your blows, those people are flattering and deceiving you, or at the very least they are deceiving themselves.

“We consider that the state is not, nor should it be, anything other than a common force, instituted not to be an instrument of mutual oppression and plunder between all of its citizens, but on the contrary to guarantee to each person his own property and ensure the reign of justice and security.”

As for us, we consider that the state is not, nor should it be, anything other than a common force, instituted not to be an instrument of mutual oppression and plunder between all of its citizens, but on the contrary to guarantee to each person his own property and ensure the reign of justice and security. [11]

Notes

[1.] (Paillottet’s note) This last sentence is from M. de Lamartine. The author quotes it again in the pamphlet that follows. (OC, vol. 4, p. 342, “La Loi.” [The sentence itself is found on p. 387.]

[2.] Before the Revolution of 1789 the salt tax was known as the “gabelle.” Because of its symbolic association with the ancien régime, it was much hated and was one of the first things abolished after the Revolution. However, it soon returned as a more straightforward “salt tax.” See Coquelin, “Gabelle,” in *Le Dictionnaire de l’économie politique*, vol. 1, pp. 814–15.

[3.] The word Bastiat uses is “octrois,” a form of hated taxes during the pre-Revolutionary period. An octroi was a consumption tax levied by a town or city in order to pay for the activities of the communal administration. It was much abused during the ancien régime because it was “farmed out” to private

contractors. Although the octroi was abolished in the early years of the Revolution, it was reintroduced by the city of Paris in 1798. See Esquirou de Parieu, “Octrois,” in Coquelin, *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*, vol. 2, pp. 284–91.

[4.] The word Bastiat uses is “patentes,” direct taxes imposed on any individual who carried out a trade, occupation, or profession. The patentes were first imposed in 1791 by the Constituent Assembly and were completely reformulated in 1844.

[5.] The French word used here is “prestations,” which is an abbreviation of “prestations en nature” (or “obligatory services in kind”), according to which all able-bodied men were expected to spend two days a year maintaining roads in and around their towns. The prestations were a reform of the much-hated and burdensome compulsory labor obligations known as the “corvée,” dating from the ancien régime. The corvée was abolished by Turgot in 1776; however, it returned, as did the “gabelle” (salt tax), in a less onerous form during the Consulate period under Napoléon, only to be abolished again in 1818. Under the law of 1824 the modern form of the prestations was introduced, whereby the compulsory labor was used only for local roads. A further modification took place in 1836, when the labor service could be commuted to the payment of a monetary equivalent. See also Courcelle-Seneuil, “Prestations,” in Coquelin, *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*, vol. 2, pp. 428–30.

[6.] We have used the original English wording for the words of the Constitution.

[7.] 1830.

[8.] Revolution of 1848.

[9.] During the Second Republic deputies on the extreme left adopted the name “Montagnards” (or Mountain), which had first been used during the French Revolution by Robespierre and his supporters. See also the entry for “La Montagne” in the Glossary of Subjects and Terms and the entry for “Robespierre, Maximilien de,” in the Glossary of Persons.

[10.] See the entry “Wine and Spirits Tax” in the Glossary of Subjects and Terms.

[11.] (Paillottet’s note) See chapter 17 of the *Harmonies* in vol. 6 and the small work dated 1830 titled “To the Electors of the Département of the Landes,” in vol. 1. (*OC*, vol. 6, p. 535, “Services privés, service publique”; and vol. 1, p. 217, “Aux électeurs du département des Landes.”)

Further Information

SOURCE

The 2 pieces by Bastiat on “The State” come from Vol. 2 *“The Law,” “The State,” and Other Political Writings, 1843-1850* (June 2012) <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/2450>>.

- “The State” (draft June, 1848), pp. 105-6 <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2450/231337>.
- “The State” (September 1848), pp. 93-104 <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2450/231335>.

LF’s edition of *The Collected Works of Frédéric Bastiat*, in 6 Vols. ed. Jacques de Guenin (2011). As each vol. is published it will appear on the OLL at <oll.libertyfund.org/title/2451>.

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FURTHER READING

More works by Bastiat can be found here <oll.libertyfund.org/person/25>.

“I love all forms of freedom; and among these, the one that is the most universally useful to mankind, the one you enjoy at each moment of the day and in all of life’s circumstances, is the freedom to work and to trade. I know that making things one’s own is the fulcrum of society and even of human life.”

(Draft Preface to Economic Harmonies, 1847)



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