

**Considerant, Victor. *Principles of Socialism: Manifesto of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Democracy*.  
Translated by Joan Roelofs. Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 2006.**

Victor Considerant (1808-1893) published this utopian tract on pacifist socialism in 1843, five years before Marx and Engels laid their violent socialist agenda before the public. Considerant was a disciple of Fourier, who advocated global cooperation, women's equality, and utopian experimentation and incremental restructuring of societies. Considerant founded *La Réunion*, a Fourierian utopian community located outside Dallas, Texas, dedicated to harmonious cooperation and gender equality. That community of 400 dwindled over a period of years; it vanished when absorbed into Dallas. Considerant joined the First International, a 19<sup>th</sup> century umbrella organization for left-wing political radicals, and participated in the Paris Commune, a two-month abortive communist-anarchist takeover of Parisian government in 1871.

**Part One: The State of Society**

**I. Of the Interests and Needs of Society.**

- §I. **The Ancient and Feudal Social Orders.** Prehistoric social conventions boiled down to conquest and slavery. Feudal society softened those rules, but retained their framework.
- §II. **The New Order: Christian and Democratic.** The New Order demonstrates intelligence prevailing over power. The French Revolution is the turning point. In 1789, rights became common to all, and based upon work, rather than conquest. This Considerant calls the Democratic Right.
- §III. **Separation of the Democratic and Revolutionary Principles.** The changes wrought by the French Revolution could have been worked incrementally and peacefully. The violence was incidental and an error. Because of the violence, all of the important work of the New Order remains undone. This work is our present task.
- §IV. **The Revolutionary Work Is Done; The Democratic Work is Hardly Begun.** The French Revolution changed a people's leaders, but not its operating principles. Most especially the Revolution neglected economic reform. All remains *laissez faire* capitalism, with its inherent savagery. The poor remain poor; a new aristocracy reaps all the benefits of work. So, society has become democratic in ideology, but remains feudal in its facts.
- §V. **Rapid Development of a New Feudalism Through Anarchic Free Competition—Collective Serfdom of Workers.** This new industrial feudalism installs a revised aristocracy over a middle class pressed toward serfdom. Workers must reshape the rules of the economy, or accept servitude.
- §VI. **Increasing Misery of Workers Due to Falling Wages; Effect of Free Competition.** Competition among the proletarian poor drives wages ever lower. Competition among capitalists forces them, even when otherwise inclined, to pay the smallest wage possible, just to survive against competitors. Workers spiral downward, competing not only with one another, but also with machines that replace them.
- §VII. **Reduction of the Middle Classes; Dangers Facing Them from the Dominant Moneyed Aristocracy.** Small capitalists suffer the same fate as workers. They lose their competitions with wealthier owners of giant enterprises. Technical developments eject workers from their jobs, and then the small owners from their shops. Only well-heeled speculators and banks prosper.
- §VIII. **Division of Society into Two Classes: a Small Number Owning Everything, the Many Robbed of Everything.** So, capital concentrates in the hands of a few vastly wealthy individuals. There are those who own, and those who work for them. Free competition pours wealth into the coffers of the industrial aristocracy.
- §IX. **Bondage of the Government to the New Aristocracy.** Even the government is castrated. Wealth governs, not sovereign kings.
- §X. **The Social Revolutions.** What will happen if the working masses revolt? Many stand to lose much, including the workers. Leaders should redress the wrongs of industrial capitalism. Grant a right to work, similar to the right to own. Defuse the frustration of workers, so

society can proceed peacefully and systematically. Do not let the slumber of idiots govern the day.

- §XI. **The Social Hell. Absolute Necessity for a Solution.** Free competition guarantees perpetual economic war of all against all: workers against workers, workers against machines, workers against capital. Unregulated capitalism is social Hell. People of good faith in every economic condition must direct their research and passion to resolving these problems.

## II. The Two Solutions to the Social Problem.

- §I. **The Community of Goods—Revolutionary Principle or Approach.** Two approaches to resolving the social hell of capitalism are being considered. The first is violent. Its proponents would abolish private property, raid the rich to benefit the poor, and impose a community of goods and equality among citizens. This simple approach promises rapid change. Its slogans, speed, and intended targets appeal to commoners.
- §II. **The Current Situation and 1789; Bourgeoisie and Proletarians.** The current situation compares deeply to that of the French Revolution. A different, but nonetheless arrogant, aristocracy ignores swelling dissatisfaction from its servants. The middle class makes common cause with the paupers, seeking to stabilize and ameliorate circumstances for them all. Will change arrive in time?
- §III. **Voluntary Association: -- The Peaceful Principle or Method.** There is a second approach to remediation of proletarian misery. The only way to prevent the excesses of revolutionary change is to end the class war of capital and labor. By contract, opponents can find common ground and cease competition. Cannot capital and labor do the same? Capital and labor, once bitter enemies, can unite voluntarily, associating to avoid the calamity of revolutions.
- §IV. **Enormous Increase of Social Wealth Through Association.** When capital, talent, and labor cooperate, the inefficiencies of class warfare disappear. The rich get richer, the poor get well off, and the poor newfound prosperity leads them to purchase things, creating a gigantic consumer market.
- §V. **Vicious Circle; Relationship of Wages and Markets; Stoppage of Industry by Workers' Poverty.** Producers cannot find markets for their overproduction. Workers cannot afford to purchase their product. Without a middle class consumer, industrial production lacks buyers. End the system of unregulated competition. Spread the fruits of production among labor and owners, and all will prosper.
- §VI. **Common Interest of the Three Classes.** The economic war of all against all is a choice, not a necessity. If intelligently organized, the economy would improve the lot of commoners without costing the rich anything. Since they share common interests, it makes no sense to speak any longer of revolution and redistribution. Let labor and capital associate for their common good. Let nations associate and form a united humanity.

**Summary of Part One.** The war of capital against labor can be forestalled only by a reasoned association of capital, labor, and talent. In the new regime, all will exercise a right to work. Effecting these changes is the task of democracy.

## Part Two: The State of Opinion Study of the Great Divisions of Modern Democracy

- §I. **Universality of the Democratic Spirit in France; the Legitimist Party Democratizes.** Considerant seeks to locate his viewpoint among those extant in France of his day. In his view, democracy has won the day. All parties agree to the democratic principle. But their democracies are threefold: 1) retrograde democracy, advocating revolution; 2) immobilist democracy, stuck in its doctrines and the past, and 3) progressive democracy, seeking consensus.
- §II. **Political Questions and Social Questions.** The word “political” addresses governments in their relations to citizens and other governments. The word “social” addresses class relations, economic institutions, morality, education, and human relations, including, but not limited to, the roles of governments, considered in the abstract.
- §III. **Triumph of the Democratic Principle in the Political Order. Collapse of the Old Politics.** The French Revolution addressed political matters, but left economic and social problems to one

- side. The political realm has been democratized. Now, social and economic question must take the fore.
- §IV. **Torpor and Corruption on the Political Terrain.** The press is stuck in ideas of the political realm, which bore and disgust commoners. The press refuses to advocate the real task of our century, which is to address social and economic change.
- §V. **Transition on the Social Terrain and Reawakening of the Public Spirit.** Political reforms have been accomplished; they are old news. Social reform is vanguard. De Maistre, Fourier, and even Napoleon agree: mankind is headed toward European federation and world unity.
- §VI. **The Old Political Parties are Today Immobilist or Retrograde.** The press, political men, and party mouthpieces spout good words about political truth, but entirely neglect social and economic change. Because these men clog up public discourse, they obstruct social change, and so are retrograde or immobilist.
- §VII. **Immobilist Democracy, or the Standpat-Conservative Party. The Doctrinaire School or Systematic Immobilism.** These persons are now-prosperous former revolutionaries, who spout the rhetoric of the French Revolution, but merely use those words to seize the positions of beheaded aristocrats. From there, the Stand-Pat interlopers quash social change. Considerant excoriates one such, Guizot.
- §VIII. **Systematic Immobilism as Provocateur.** Despite the rosy talk of France's Guizots, things deteriorate for commoners. Political freedoms mean little to the starving. If the people do not prevail upon these immovably satisfied politicians, civil wars are inevitable.
- §IX. **Split in the Conservative Party. Formation of Progressive Conservative Party.** Some among the conservative party rebel at Guizot and his ilk. It is the task of Considerant's compatriots to inform and inspire them.
- §X. **The Split in the Old Conservative Party's Publications.** Considerant slots the existing journals in their relation to his program of social change. He notes that revolutionary (retrograde) democracy is twofold: political and socialist.
- §XI. **The Purely Political Party of Retrograde Democracy.** This party seeks to overthrow the government, fight a pan-European war, and to de-regulate the economy absolutely. They hope to rise to power by advocating universal suffrage. They would replace the constitutional hereditary monarch with an elected, term-limited administrator. They entirely miss the point that peace in economic conditions is the big question of this age.
- §XII. **Socialist Party of Retrograde Democracy.** This group, to its credit, prefers social reform to political reform. They recognize the crushing economic oppressions which the masses suffer. But their solution is violent change. They would abolish private property, calling it theft. This party fails to recognize that private property expresses individuality, and its absence crushes individuality. The better path lies, not in abolishing private property, but in creating better institutions within which to hold such property, by voluntary and well-deliberated agreements among the involved groups. Among this group opposed to private property, there are the Owenites and others socialists opposed to violent change. Then there are the Babeuf communists, determined to foment a great revolution. The Saint-Simonian School attacks inheritance, and opposes universal suffrage until such time as the masses are educated enough to intelligently resist exploitation by the wealthy.
- §XIII. **The Legitimate Principles of Each Party.** The adherents of these schools exercise good faith, and each has its point worth hearing. The immobilists defend continuity and counterbalancing extremists of every stripe, especially violent revolutionaries. Workable societies require both stability and progress. The revolutionaries are right to defend workers' rights and promote social justice and economic change. The royalists defend tradition, linking past and present. Each party defends a legitimate interest. People of good faith join these parties, despite their misdirected means, to defend a perceived good. None join to do evil. All people must defend the principles of their parties, but not the parties themselves. Agreement is possible where none vilifies the deeply held principles of another.
- §XIV. **Progressive Democracy, or the Party of Peaceful Reorganization: The Good People from the Old Parties Rally on the Ground of Pacific Democracy.** The French Revolution changed political realities, without addressing the underlying economic and social evils. Large numbers of men forsake political change and embrace social change. They seek stability with progress, a lack

of wars, work for all, cooperation between labor and capital, retention of old rights and extensions into new ones. These persons seek a new faith, but have not yet defined it.

§XV. **Program of the Progressive Democracy Party—True and False Democracy.** True democracy addresses social change. It reorganizes mankind for prosperity in communes, combining into nations, associating into Humanity, promoting harmonies and collaborations. False democracy is violent, riven by jealousies and libertinism, fierce nationalism, and armed insurrections, seeking power. Considerant now introduces his new journal, aimed to defend his views.

### **Doctrines of the Journal, *Peaceful Democracy***

Considerant epitomizes his social and economic principles:

- §I. **Who We Are.** The group works for humanity, calls all men (even the misled) brothers. Men of good faith cherish facts and moral goodness. Such men are surprisingly numerous.
- §II. **Division of Our Work by the Increase of Our forces: General Idea of Human Destiny.** The group charts a journal (*Peaceful Democracy*) to present to the public the social science view of Charles Fourier. These ideas have been presented daily in the newspaper, *The Phalange*, which the new journal supplants. The goal of mankind is to fashion for himself an association of his various groups, and to cause those bonds to grow ever stronger, until it reaches Unity without dissent.
- §III. **The Neutral and Independent Ground to Which We Summon All Progressive Thinkers.** The group's core ideas are sociability and association.
- §IV. **Reasons for Changing the Title of the *Phalange*.** The name "Phalange" [meaning a community and/or the buildings occupied by that community] was appropriate but esoteric. The new title of the journal is in the common idiom.
- §V. **Reasons for Choosing the Title *Peaceful Democracy*.** Considerant's group thinks itself promoting the cause of Christian principle, which is synonymous with democracy. Revolutionists abuse the word "democracy." Considerant seeks to retrieve the term from them. Democracy portends the rule of all by all, which is the essence of self-government.

To summarize the slogans of *Peaceful Democracy*:

- **Fraternity and Unity.** Consensus of all minds under God is the ultimate religious goal. Of all religions, Christianity is the greatest, for it promotes this ideal. Some have believed Christianity dead; they are wrong. The present spirit of intellectuals is identical to Christ's spirit. Christianity has suffered a transition, not a death.
- **Religious Unity; Free Inquiry.** Religious unity encompasses all political, scientific, social, productive, and other unities. Free inquiry serves to reconcile conflicting truth claims. In the future, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Philosophy shall unite. Under no circumstances is force, even the force of duly elected authorities, warranted where matters of conscience are at issue.
- **Social Unity; The Right to Work.** Society must organize and protect the right of the worker to work, just as it shields the right of the wealthy to own. There can be no social unity where the economy is tilted to one group's sole benefit. All societies have a right to exist, and co-exist. War is a bad habit inherited from ancestors, destined to fade. Commercial interests, and democracy itself, dampen war. European wars will cease when the nations formalize a European union. This union exists informally already; the nineteenth century will see it formalized.
- ***Peaceful Democracy, Journal of Governments' and Peoples' Interests.*** Government is not an enemy. Governments err and deserve strong oversight. All rulers seek the prosperity of their peoples. As do the people themselves. Their interests are identical—prosperity. We must correct governments and leaders, not destroy them. To Considerant, constitutional monarchy with elective legislators seems best. But peoples should choose their own governments.
- ***Peaceful Democracy is Monarchical.*** France has great liberty, but it is mostly an idea, not a reality. France is advanced, but needs improvements. Democracy weds well with constitutional monarchy.

- **Political Unity; Election.** Political rights are thought to be legal creatures alone, or, in the alternative, ideological impositions, applicable to every man immediately. Both positions err. Mankind needs transitions. As a minor requires a guardian, so society must entrust political rule to capable hand, while the masses are educated and elevated like a young ward.
- **Conclusion.** Peaceful Democracy advocates other slogans: peaceful progress; global economic well-being; justice and liberty without repression; productive rationality; workers' and owners' associations. The cause is holy. Join it.