

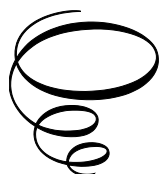
Sources of Revolutionary Politics

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Edited by

R. G. Williams

**Cambridge
Scholars
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I pondered all these things, and how men fight and lose the battle,
and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat,
and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other
men have to fight for what they meant under another name.

—William Morris

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PREFACE

This book is a selection of edited documents, covering the history and politics of some of the great revolutionary thinkers and writers of the modern world. The point of this book is to highlight some of the great revolutionaries of our times and their ideas – through collecting together some of their most important writings. All of the writers, in this book, struggled for a better world. All of these writers were committed to the ideals of the Left – liberty, equality, and fraternity. By studying these writers, we can perhaps develop some new ideas for a better world – for a world based on human freedom.

Revolutions change the world. In order to change the world, revolutions often need revolutionary ideas – ideas like liberty, equality, fraternity, solidarity, Democracy, and Socialism. Revolutionaries help to develop those ideas – through their lives, their ideas, and their struggles.

Revolutionaries struggle to change the world for the better. This is what defines a revolutionary. In modern times, every major revolutionary, who is really committed to changing the world, has been motivated by the struggle for democracy and for Socialism. A real revolutionary, today, fights for a society based on the principle of Socialism – the free development of each and the free development of all.

In the long struggle for a better world, there have been many revolutionaries. Many of them have also been writers, who outlined their ideas through their words, and through their actions – figures like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky, and Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara. This book is based on highlighting the single most important works and essays by these figures – works which helped to further the revolutionary struggle for democracy and for Socialism.

All of the figures in this book contributed to the modern struggle for a better world. While many of these figures often disagreed with each other – often violently – they were all united by their commitment to a better world. Together they outlined powerful ideas for a better world.

This book is a source book. This book is a collection of some of the key documents of modern revolutionary history. This book is a Socialist study. It is a Socialist Humanist study, in the tradition of Democratic Socialism. The politics of Socialism remain the only politics capable of achieving real human freedom.

The book tries to cover the entire spectrum of Left politics in the 19th and 20th centuries - Socialists, Democratic Socialists, Revolutionary Socialists, Marxists, Marxist Leninists, Trotskyists, Anarchists, Libertarian Socialists, Left Communists, Socialist Feminists, and the other sections of the Left. Of course, the book cannot cover every major figure of the Left, or all their work, due to space, but the book does try to be inclusive – covering most of the major figures and their key works.

The history of humanity is the history of revolution. Since the beginning of modern society, following the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, human progress has usually been achieved by revolution and by revolutionary struggle. The writers in this book help to outline this history – through their writing and their struggle for a better world. By following their example, we can perhaps create a better world – a world of real freedom.

R.G. Williams

(2023)

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY - SOURCES OF REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS

This short essay is a study of revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics. I want to briefly outline where revolutionary ideas and politics ultimately come from today. I believe they are crucial to the struggle for a better, Socialist, world.

Ideas are important. Ideas, by themselves, can help to change the world. Revolutionary ideas are especially important - because they can help to shape the struggle for a better world. History, and politics, is full of revolutionary ideas – ideas which are about changing the world. Ideas like philosophy, democracy, human freedom, and the scientific method, have revolutionised human society – ever since they emerged from human history. In the modern world, since the Industrial Revolution, the most radical and revolutionary ideas are those which attempt to argue for a new and better society beyond modern Capitalist society – a society based on human freedom. I believe, as a Socialist, that the most revolutionary ideas and politics, in the world today, are the ideas and politics of Socialism – the struggle for a society based on human freedom. I believe that Socialism, as a revolutionary idea, can achieve the ultimate goal of revolutionary politics: human freedom. I also believe that studying revolutionary ideas can help us to understand the politics we need for actually achieving real social change today – towards human freedom.

Revolutionaries help to make history. They are crucial to the overall struggle for a better world. While revolutions are ultimately made by social classes, specifically revolutionary classes, revolutionaries are still crucial to that process. Revolutionaries like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, and Guevara, were critical to the process of revolution. Revolutionaries, today, remain critical to the struggle for a better world. Without revolution, social progress is impossible. Without revolutionaries, revolution is impossible.

Revolutionary ideas, basically, are ideas which are committed to transforming the world. They are ideas which are about achieving a changed world – a changed society. Basically, revolutionary ideas are those ideas which seek to achieve what Marx called the ‘revolutionary transformation of society’.¹

Revolutionary politics, basically, are politics which attempt to achieve revolutionary ideas in practice. Revolutionary politics seek to use the ideas of revolutionary ideas in order to physically change or alter the world. Revolutionary politics are about taking the theory of revolutionary ideas and putting them into practice – usually through social struggle.

Revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics, basically, are vital – if we are serious about actually changing the world. Every major social struggle for a better world has required revolutionary ideas – ideas based on revolution. In order to have revolution we need revolutionary ideas – alongside revolutionary struggle. Lenin brilliantly summarised this idea in 1902: ‘without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement’.²

Revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics are vital to changing the world today. In order to achieve a new and better society we need both revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics. Revolutionary ideas, like Socialism, democracy, and human freedom, can help inspire us to change the world. Revolutionary politics, like social struggle, political organisation, and radicalism, can help us to achieve a changed world. If we want a better society, we always need to convert revolutionary ideas into revolutionary politics. The world will not get better by itself. We need to change the world ourselves. This is why we need revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics.³ This is why human beings always need revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics.⁴

In order to develop revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics we need to know where they come from. We need to know the sources of revolutionary politics. We need to convert these revolutionary ideas into struggles which actually change the world.

Revolutionary ideas are created by real, living, human beings. It is human beings who develop the revolutionary ideas, and the revolutionary struggles, which can actually change the world. Revolutionary men and women, who have struggled to actually improve the world, have often understood that having serious revolutionary ideas is vital to actually improving the world. People like Marx and Lenin, who struggled for Socialism, democracy, and human freedom, all understood that having revolutionary ideas is vital to changing the world. Revolutionary ideas, as well as revolutionary struggle, allow human beings to translate the struggle for a better world into the reality of a better world. Human beings, in the end, are the real source of revolutionary ideas – because it is only human beings that have the potential, on the planet Earth, to develop revolutionary ideas.

Revolutionary ideas, ultimately, come out of human beings. It is human beings, through their struggles and their hope for a better world, who produce revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics.

Revolutionary ideas, today, are ideas like Socialism, Humanism, Marxism, and Democracy. It is these ideas, together, which can really change the world today – and make it a better world.

Revolutionary ideas and revolutionary politics, ultimately, emerge from the human need for human freedom. Human beings, innately, want to be free human beings. This means that human beings will inevitably struggle against any social system which seeks to exploit or oppress them. This innate human drive for freedom creates the major social struggles in human society. It is the struggle for a better world which motivates most forms of revolutionary politics – such as the ideal of Socialism and a Socialist society. Revolutionary ideas also emerge because of the human desire to change the world – and to overcome obstacles to human freedom. In human history, human beings have developed ideas and struggles in order to change their world - because their world is unjust, exploitative, or oppressive. People develop revolutionary ideas, and revolutionary politics, in order to change society – in order to overcome injustice, exploitation, and oppression. It is the social reality of injustice, exploitation, and oppression which creates revolutionary ideas. It is the struggle against injustice, exploitation, and oppression, which creates revolutionary politics. All of this means that as long as we live in an unjust society, human beings will always develop revolutionary politics – in order to change and overcome that reality. We will always need revolutionary ideas – in order to actually achieve human freedom.

Revolutionary ideas come from revolutionary people. This is where revolutionary ideas ultimately come from – in historical and political terms. They come from people who are really committed to achieving a better world – through revolutionary means. Revolutionaries make no apologies for their radicalism – the radical struggle to change the world. In the end, revolutionary ideas are about achieving both ideas and practice – for real change. A real revolutionary, today, really seeks to achieve a world where the revolutionary ideas of human freedom are achieved in revolutionary reality. A revolutionary idea needs to be put into practice – if it is to actually change the world. If a revolutionary idea can achieve this, it can change the world. If we study revolutionary ideas, and revolutionary politics, we can change the world.

Notes

1. K. Marx, Critique of the Gotha Programme, (1875)
2. V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done?, (1902)
3. C.L.R. James, World Revolution: 1917–1936, (1937)
4. K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto, (1848)

(2023)

NOTE ON ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editor wishes to thank the Marxist Internet Archive (MIA) for permission to publish extracts from its material relating to various revolutionary writers. The work of the MIA is of vital importance to the struggle for Socialism in the world today.

NOTE ON DOCUMENTS

The full editorial information provided for each document is ‘document’, ‘author’, ‘date’, and ‘source’.

The idea of this book is to present these documents with as little editing as possible, so that students and readers can fully engage with them on their own historical and political terms.

LIST OF REVOLUTIONARY WRITERS

Part I – Revolutionaries of the 19th Century

Thomas Paine
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
Pierre-Joseph Proudhon
Mikhail Bakunin
Wilhelm Liebknecht
Louise Michel
William Morris
August Bebel
Peter Kropotkin
Paul Lafargue
Daniel De Leon

Part II – Revolutionaries of the 20th century

James Connolly
Clara Zetkin
Emma Goldman
Eugene Debs
Vladimir Lenin
Rosa Luxemburg
Karl Liebknecht
Alexandra Kollontai
Leon Trotsky
Antonio Gramsci
M. N. Roy
José Carlos Mariátegui
Hal Draper
C.L.R. James
George Orwell
E.P. Thompson
Ho Chi Minh
Ernesto Che Guevara

DOCUMENT LIST

Part I – Revolutionaries of the 19th Century

- Document I - Common Sense – Extract (Thomas Paine)
- Document II - The Rights of Man - Extract (Thomas Paine)
- Document III - The Manifesto of the Communist Party (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels)
- Document IV - What is Property? – Extract (Pierre-Joseph Proudhon)
- Document V - The Immorality of the State (Mikhail Bakunin)
- Document VI - On The Political Position of Social-Democracy (Wilhelm Liebknecht)
- Document VII – The Paris Commune (Louise Michel)
- Document VIII - How I Became a Socialist (William Morris)
- Document IX - Society of the Future (August Bebel)
- Document X – Communism and Anarchy (Peter Kropotkin)
- Document XI – The Right to be Lazy – Extract (Paul Lafargue)
- Document XII – Is Socialism Practical? (Daniel DeLeon)

Part II – Revolutionaries of the 20th century

- Document I - Socialism and Nationalism (James Connolly)
- Document II - Only in Conjunction with the Proletarian Woman will Socialism be Victorious (Clara Zetkin)
- Document III - What I Believe (Emma Goldman)
- Document IV - The Canton Speech (Eugene Debs)
- Document V - What is to be Done? - Extract (Vladimir Lenin)
- Document VI - The State and Revolution - Extract (Vladimir Lenin)
- Document VII - The Crisis of German Social Democracy – Extract (Rosa Luxemburg)
- Document VIII - Call for Revolution (Karl Liebknecht)
- Document IX - International Women's Day (Alexandra Kollontai)
- Document X - What is the Permanent Revolution? (Leon Trotsky)
- Document XI - Neither Fascism nor Liberalism: Sovietism! (Antonio Gramsci)
- Document XII - The Awakening of the East (M. N. Roy)
- Document XIII - History of the World Crisis - Extract (José Carlos Mariátegui)
- Document XIV – The Two Souls of Socialism (Hal Draper)
- Document XV - The World Revolution - Chapter 15 (C.L.R. James)
- Document XVI - Why I Write (George Orwell)
- Document XVII - Socialist Humanism (E.P. Thompson)

Document XVIII - The Heroic Vietnamese People (Ho Chi Minh)

Document XIX - Message to the Tricontinental (Ernesto Che Guevara)

**PART I – REVOLUTIONARIES
OF THE 19TH CENTURY**

Document I

Document: 'Common Sense' – 'Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession'

Author: Thomas Paine - English radical, democrat, and revolutionary.

Date: 1776

Source: 'Common Sense', (1776)

Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession

Mankind being originally equals in the order of creation, the equality could only be destroyed by some subsequent circumstance; the distinctions of rich, and poor, may in a great measure be accounted for, and that without having recourse to the harsh, ill-sounding names of oppression and avarice. Oppression is often the CONSEQUENCE, but seldom or never the MEANS of riches; and though avarice will preserve a man from being necessitously poor, it generally makes him too timorous to be wealthy.

But there is another and greater distinction, for which no truly natural or religious reason can be assigned, and that is, the distinction of men into KINGS and SUBJECTS. Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species, is worth inquiring into, and whether they are the means of happiness or of misery to mankind.

In the early ages of the world, according to the scripture chronology, there were no kings; the consequence of which was, there were no wars; it is the pride of kings which throw mankind into confusion. Holland without a king hath enjoyed more peace for this last century than any of the monarchical governments in Europe. Antiquity favours the same remark; for the quiet and rural lives of the first patriarchs hath a happy something in them, which vanishes away when we come to the history of Jewish royalty.

Government by kings was first introduced into the world by the Heathens, from whom the children of Israel copied the custom. It was the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry. The Heathens paid divine honours to their deceased kings, and the Christian world hath improved on the plan, by doing the same to their living ones. How impious is the title of sacred majesty applied to a worm, who in the midst of his splendor is crumbling into dust!

As the exalting one man so greatly above the rest cannot be justified on the equal rights of nature, so neither can it be defended on the authority of

scripture; for the will of the Almighty, as declared by Gideon and the prophet Samuel, expressly disapproves of government by kings. All anti-monarchical parts of scripture have been very smoothly glossed over in monarchical governments, but they undoubtedly merit the attention of countries which have their governments yet to form. RENDER UNTO CAESAR THE THINGS WHICH ARE CAESAR'S is the scripture doctrine of courts, yet it is no support of monarchical government, for the Jews at that time were without a king, and in a state of vassalage to the Romans.

Now three thousand years passed away from the Mosaic account of the creation, till the Jews under a national delusion requested a king. Till then their form of government (except in extraordinary cases, where the Almighty interposed) was a kind of republic administered by a judge and the elders of the tribes. Kings they had none, and it was held sinful to acknowledge any being under that title but the Lord of Hosts. And when a man seriously reflects on the idolatrous homage which is paid to the persons of kings, he need not wonder that the Almighty, ever jealous of his honour, should disapprove of a form of government which so impiously invades the prerogative of heaven.

Monarchy is ranked in scripture as one of the sins of the Jews, for which a curse in reserve is denounced against them. The history of that transaction is worth attending to.

The children of Israel being oppressed by the Midianites, Gideon marched against them with a small army, and victory, through the divine interposition, decided in his favour. The Jews, elate with success, and attributing it to the generalship of Gideon, proposed making him a king, saying, RULE THOU OVER US, THOU AND THY SON AND THY SON'S SON. Here was temptation in its fullest extent; not a kingdom only, but an hereditary one, but Gideon in the piety of his soul replied, I WILL NOT RULE OVER YOU, NEITHER SHALL MY SON RULE OVER YOU THE LORD SHALL RULE OVER YOU. Words need not be more explicit; Gideon doth not decline the honour, but denieth their right to give it; neither doth he compliment them with invented declarations of his thanks, but in the positive style of a prophet charges them with disaffection to their proper Sovereign, the King of heaven.

About one hundred and thirty years after this, they fell again into the same error. The hankering which the Jews had for the idolatrous customs of the Heathens, is something exceedingly unaccountable; but so it was, that laying hold of the misconduct of Samuel's two sons, who were entrusted with some

secular concerns, they came in an abrupt and clamorous manner to Samuel, saying, BEHOLD THOU ART OLD, AND THY SONS WALK NOT IN THY WAYS, NOW MAKE US A KING TO JUDGE US, LIKE ALL OTHER NATIONS. And here we cannot but observe that their motives were bad, viz. that they might be LIKE unto other nations, i.e. the Heathens, whereas their true glory laid in being as much UNLIKE them as possible. BUT THE THING DISPLEASED SAMUEL WHEN THEY SAID, GIVE US A KING TO JUDGE US; AND SAMUEL PRAYED UNTO THE LORD, AND THE LORD SAID UNTO SAMUEL, HEARKEN UNTO THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE IN ALL THAT THEY SAY UNTO THEE, FOR THEY HAVE NOT REJECTED THEE, BUT THEY HAVE REJECTED ME, THAT I SHOULD NOT REIGN OVER THEM. ACCORDING TO ALL THE WORKS WHICH THEY HAVE SINCE THE DAY THAT I BROUGHT THEM UP OUT OF EGYPT, EVEN UNTO THIS DAY; WHEREWITH THEY HAVE FORSAKEN ME AND SERVED OTHER GODS; SO DO THEY ALSO UNTO THEE. NOW THEREFORE HEARKEN UNTO THEIR VOICE, HOWBEIT, PROTEST SOLEMNLY UNTO THEM AND SHEW THEM THE MANNER OF THE KING THAT SHALL REIGN OVER THEM, I.E. not of any particular king, but the general manner of the kings of the earth, whom Israel was so eagerly copying after. And notwithstanding the great distance of time and difference of manners, the character is still in fashion. AND SAMUEL TOLD ALL THE WORDS OF THE LORD UNTO THE PEOPLE, THAT ASKED OF HIM A KING. AND HE SAID, THIS SHALL BE THE MANNER OF THE KING THAT SHALL REIGN OVER YOU; HE WILL TAKE YOUR SONS AND APPOINT THEM FOR HIMSELF, FOR HIS CHARIOTS, AND TO BE HIS HORSEMAN, AND SOME SHALL RUN BEFORE HIS CHARIOTS (this description agrees with the present mode of impressing men) AND HE WILL APPOINT HIM CAPTAINS OVER THOUSANDS AND CAPTAINS OVER FIFTIES, AND WILL SET THEM TO EAR HIS GROUND AND REAP HIS HARVEST, AND TO MAKE HIS INSTRUMENTS OF WAR, AND INSTRUMENTS OF HIS CHARIOTS; AND HE WILL TAKE YOUR DAUGHTERS TO BE CONFECTIONARIES, AND TO BE COOKS AND TO BE BAKERS (this describes the expense and luxury as well as the oppression of kings) AND HE WILL TAKE YOUR FIELDS AND YOUR OLIVE YARDS, EVEN THE BEST OF THEM, AND GIVE THEM TO HIS SERVANTS; AND HE WILL TAKE THE TENTH OF YOUR SEED, AND OF YOUR VINEYARDS, AND GIVE THEM TO HIS OFFICERS AND TO HIS SERVANTS (by which we see that bribery, corruption, and favouritism are the standing vices of kings) AND HE WILL TAKE THE TENTH OF

YOUR MEN SERVANTS, AND YOUR MAID SERVANTS, AND YOUR GOODLIEST YOUNG MEN AND YOUR ASSES, AND PUT THEM TO HIS WORK; AND HE WILL TAKE THE TENTH OF YOUR SHEEP, AND YE SHALL BE HIS SERVANTS, AND YE SHALL CRY OUT IN THAT DAY BECAUSE OF YOUR KING WHICH YE SHALL HAVE CHOSEN, AND THE LORD WILL NOT HEAR YOU IN THAT DAY.

This accounts for the continuation of monarchy; neither do the characters of the few good kings which have lived since, either sanctify the title, or blot out the sinfulness of the origin; the high encomium given of David takes no notice of him OFFICIALLY AS A KING, but only as a MAN after God's own heart. NEVERTHELESS THE PEOPLE REFUSED TO OBEY THE VOICE OF SAMUEL, AND THEY SAID, NAY, BUT WE WILL HAVE A KING OVER US, THAT WE MAY BE LIKE ALL THE NATIONS, AND THAT OUR KING MAY JUDGE US, AND GO OUT BEFORE US, AND FIGHT OUR BATTLES. Samuel continued to reason with them, but to no purpose; he set before them their ingratitude, but all would not avail; and seeing them fully bent on their folly, he cried out, I WILL CALL UNTO THE LORD, AND HE SHALL SEND THUNDER AND RAIN (which then was a punishment, being in the time of wheat harvest) THAT YE MAY PERCEIVE AND SEE THAT YOUR WICKEDNESS IS GREAT WHICH YE HAVE DONE IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD, AND THE LORD SENT THUNDER AND RAIN THAT DAY, AND ALL THE PEOPLE GREATLY FEARED THE LORD AND SAMUEL. AND ALL THE PEOPLE SAID UNTO SAMUEL, PRAY FOR THY SERVANTS UNTO THE LORD THY GOD THAT WE DIE NOT, FOR WE HAVE ADDED UNTO OUR SINS THIS EVIL, TO ASK A KING. These portions of scripture are direct and positive. They admit of no equivocal construction. That the Almighty hath here entered his protest against monarchical government, is true, or the scripture is false. And a man hath good reason to believe that there is as much of kingcraft, as priestcraft, in withholding the scripture from the public in Popish countries. For monarchy in every instance is the Popery of government.

To the evil of monarchy we have added that of hereditary succession; and as the first is a degradation and lessening of ourselves, so the second, claimed as a matter of right, is an insult and an imposition on posterity. For all men being originally equals, no ONE by BIRTH could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever, and though himself might deserve SOME decent degree of honours of his contemporaries, yet his descendants might be far too unworthy to inherit them. One of the strongest NATURAL proofs of the folly of hereditary right in kings, is, that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently

turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an ASS FOR A LION.

Secondly, as no man at first could possess any other public honours than were bestowed upon him, so the givers of those honours could have no power to give away the right of posterity. And though they might say, “We choose you for OUR head,” they could not, without manifest injustice to their children, say, “that your children and your children's children shall reign over OURS for ever.” Because such an unwise, unjust, unnatural compact might (perhaps) in the next succession put them under the government of a rogue or a fool. Most wise men, in their private sentiments, have ever treated hereditary right with contempt; yet it is one of those evils, which when once established is not easily removed; many submit from fear, others from superstition, and the more powerful part shares with the king the plunder of the rest.

This is supposing the present race of kings in the world to have had an honourable origin; whereas it is more than probable, that could we take off the dark covering of antiquities, and trace them to their first rise, that we should find the first of them nothing better than the principal ruffian of some restless gang, whose savage manners or preeminence in subtlety obtained the title of chief among plunderers; and who by increasing in power, and extending his depredations, overawed the quiet and defenseless to purchase their safety by frequent contributions. Yet his electors could have no idea of giving hereditary right to his descendants, because such a perpetual exclusion of themselves was incompatible with the free and unrestrained principles they professed to live by. Wherefore, hereditary succession in the early ages of monarchy could not take place as a matter of claim, but as something casual or complemental; but as few or no records were extant in those days, and traditional history stuffed with fables, it was very easy, after the lapse of a few generations, to trump up some superstitious tale, conveniently timed, Mahomet like, to cram hereditary right down the throats of the vulgar. Perhaps the disorders which threatened, or seemed to threaten, on the decease of a leader and the choice of a new one (for elections among ruffians could not be very orderly) induced many at first to favour hereditary pretensions; by which means it happened, as it hath happened since, that what at first was submitted to as a convenience, was afterwards claimed as a right.

England, since the conquest, hath known some few good monarchs, but groaned beneath a much larger number of bad ones; yet no man in his senses can say that their claim under William the Conqueror is a very honourable one. A French bastard landing with an armed banditti, and establishing

himself king of England against the consent of the natives, is in plain terms a very paltry rascally original. It certainly hath no divinity in it. However, it is needless to spend much time in exposing the folly of hereditary right; if there are any so weak as to believe it, let them promiscuously worship the ass and lion, and welcome. I shall neither copy their humility, nor disturb their devotion.

Yet I should be glad to ask how they suppose kings came at first? The question admits but of three answers, viz. either by lot, by election, or by usurpation. If the first king was taken by lot, it establishes a precedent for the next, which excludes hereditary succession. Saul was by lot, yet the succession was not hereditary, neither does it appear from that transaction there was any intention it ever should be. If the first king of any country was by election, that likewise establishes a precedent for the next; for to say, that the RIGHT of all future generations is taken away, by the act of the first electors, in their choice not only of a king, but of a family of kings for ever, hath no parallel in or out of scripture but the doctrine of original sin, which supposes the free will of all men lost in Adam; and from such comparison, and it will admit of no other, hereditary succession can derive no glory. For as in Adam all sinned, and as in the first electors all men obeyed; as in the one all mankind were subjected to Satan, and in the other to Sovereignty; as our innocence was lost in the first, and our authority in the last; and as both disable us from reassuming some former state and privilege, it unanswerably follows that original sin and hereditary succession are parallels. Dishonourable rank! Inglorious connection! Yet the most subtle sophist cannot produce a juster simile.

As to usurpation, no man will be so hardy as to defend it; and that William the Conqueror was an usurper is a fact not to be contradicted. The plain truth is, that the antiquity of English monarchy will not bear looking into.

But it is not so much the absurdity as the evil of hereditary succession which concerns mankind. Did it ensure a race of good and wise men it would have the seal of divine authority, but as it opens a door to the FOOLISH, the WICKED, and the IMPROPER, it hath in it the nature of oppression. Men who look upon themselves born to reign, and others to obey, soon grow insolent; selected from the rest of mankind their minds are early poisoned by importance; and the world they act in differs so materially from the world at large, that they have but little opportunity of knowing its true interests, and when they succeed to the government are frequently the most ignorant and unfit of any throughout the dominions.

Another evil which attends hereditary succession is, that the throne is subject to be possessed by a minor at any age; all which time the regency, acting under the cover a king, have every opportunity and inducement to betray their trust. The same national misfortune happens, when a king, worn out with age and infirmity, enters the last stage of human weakness. In both these cases the public becomes a prey to every miscreant, who can tamper successfully with the follies either of age or infancy.

The most plausible plea, which hath ever been offered in favour of hereditary succession, is, that it preserves a nation from civil wars; and were this true, it would be weighty; whereas, it is the most barefaced falsity ever imposed upon mankind. The whole history of England disowns the fact. Thirty kings and two minors have reigned in that distracted kingdom since the conquest, in which time there have been (including the Revolution) no less than eight civil wars and nineteen rebellions. Wherefore instead of making for peace, it makes against it, and destroys the very foundation it seems to stand on.

The contest for monarchy and succession, between the houses of York and Lancaster, laid England in a scene of blood for many years. Twelve pitched battles, besides skirmishes and sieges, were fought between Henry and Edward. Twice was Henry prisoner to Edward, who in his turn was prisoner to Henry. And so uncertain is the fate of war and the temper of a nation, when nothing but personal matters are the ground of a quarrel, that Henry was taken in triumph from a prison to a palace, and Edward obliged to fly from a palace to a foreign land; yet, as sudden transitions of temper are seldom lasting, Henry in his turn was driven from the throne, and Edward recalled to succeed him. The parliament always following the strongest side.

This contest began in the reign of Henry the Sixth, and was not entirely extinguished till Henry the Seventh, in whom the families were united. Including a period of 67 years, viz. from 1422 to 1489.

In short, monarchy and succession have laid (not this or that kingdom only) but the world in blood and ashes. Tis a form of government which the word of God bears testimony against, and blood will attend it.

If we inquire into the business of a king, we shall find that in some countries they have none; and after sauntering away their lives without pleasure to themselves or advantage to the nation, withdraw from the scene, and leave their successors to tread the same idle ground. In absolute monarchies the

whole weight of business, civil and military, lies on the king; the children of Israel in their request for a king, urged this plea “that he may judge us, and go out before us and fight our battles.” But in countries where he is neither a judge nor a general, as in England, a man would be puzzled to know what IS his business.

The nearer any government approaches to a republic the less business there is for a king. It is somewhat difficult to find a proper name for the government of England. Sir William Meredith calls it a republic; but in its present state it is unworthy of the name, because the corrupt influence of the crown, by having all the places in its disposal, hath so effectually swallowed up the power, and eaten out the virtue of the house of commons (the republican part in the constitution) that the government of England is nearly as monarchical as that of France or Spain. Men fall out with names without understanding them. For it is the republican and not the monarchical part of the constitution of England which Englishmen glory in, viz. the liberty of choosing an house of commons from out of their own body — and it is easy to see that when republican virtue fails, slavery ensues. Why is the constitution of England sickly, but because monarchy hath poisoned the republic, the crown hath engrossed the commons?

In England a king hath little more to do than to make war and give away places; which in plain terms, is to impoverish the nation and set it together by the ears. A pretty business indeed for a man to be allowed eight hundred thousand sterling a year for, and worshipped into the bargain! Of more worth is one honest man to society and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived.

Document II

Document: 'The Rights of Man' – Extract

Author: Thomas Paine - English radical, democrat, and revolutionary.

Date: 1791

Source: 'Rights of Man' (March 1791 and February 1792)

AMONG the incivilities by which nations or individuals provoke and irritate each other, Mr. Burke's pamphlet on the French Revolution is an extraordinary instance. Neither the People of France, nor the National Assembly, were troubling themselves about the affairs of England, or the English Parliament; and why Mr. Burke should commence an unprovoked attack upon them, both in parliament and in public, is a conduct that cannot be pardoned on the score of manners, nor justified on that of policy.

There is scarcely an epithet of abuse to be found in the English language, with which Mr. Burke has not loaded the French Nation and the National Assembly. Every thing which rancour, prejudice, ignorance, or knowledge could suggest, are poured forth in the copious fury of near four hundred pages. In the strain and on the plan Mr. Burke was writing, he might have written on to as many thousands. When the tongue or the pen is let loose in a frenzy of passion, it is the man, and not the subject, that becomes exhausted.

Hitherto Mr. Burke has been mistaken and disappointed in the opinions he had formed of the affairs of France; but such is the ingenuity of his hope, or the malignancy of his despair, that it furnishes him with new pretences to go on. There was a time when it was impossible to make Mr. Burke believe there would be any revolution in France. His opinion then was, that the French had neither spirit to undertake it, nor fortitude to support it; and now that there is one, he seeks an escape, by condemning it.

Not sufficiently content with abusing the National Assembly, a great part of his work is taken up with abusing Dr. Price (one of the best-hearted men that lives), and the two societies in England known by the name of the Revolution Society, and the Society for Constitutional Information.

Dr. Price had preached a sermon on the 4th of November 1789, being the anniversary of what is called in England, the Revolution which took place 1688. Mr. Burke, speaking of this sermon, says, 'The Political Divine proceeds dogmatically to assert, that, by the principles of the Revolution, the people of England have acquired three fundamental rights:

1. To choose our own governors.
2. To cashier them for misconduct.
3. To frame a government for ourselves.'

Dr. Price does not say that the right to do these things exists in this or in that person, or in this or in that description of persons, but that it exists in the whole; that it is a right resident in the nation.—Mr. Burke, on the contrary, denies that such a right exists in the nation, either in whole or in part, or that it exists any where; and, what is still more strange and marvellous, he says, 'that the people of England utterly disclaim such a right, and that they will resist the practical assertion of it with their lives and fortunes.' That men should take up arms, and spend their lives and fortunes, not to maintain their rights, but to maintain they have not rights, is an entire new species of discovery, and suited to the paradoxical genius of Mr. Burke.

The method which Mr. Burke takes to prove that the people of England have no such rights, and that such rights do not now exist in the nation, either in whole or in part, or any where at all, is of the same marvellous and monstrous kind with what he has already said; for his arguments are, that the persons, or the generation of persons, in whom they did exist, are dead, and with them the right is dead also. To prove this, he quotes a declaration made by parliament about a hundred years ago, to William and Mary, in these words: "The Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, do, in the name of the people aforesaid,—(meaning the people of England then living)—most humbly and faithfully submit themselves, their heirs and posterities, for ever." He also quotes a clause of another act of parliament made in the same reign, the terms of which, he says, "binds us—(meaning the people of that day)—our heirs, and our posterity, to them, their heirs and posterity, to the end of time."

Mr. Burke conceives his point sufficiently established by producing those clauses, which he enforces by saying that they exclude the right of the nation for ever: And not yet content with making such declarations, repeated over and over again, he further says, 'that if the people of England possessed such a right before the Revolution, (which he acknowledges to have been the case, not only in England, but throughout Europe, at an early period), 'yet that the English nation did, at the time of the Revolution, most solemnly renounce and abdicate it, for themselves, and for all their posterity, for ever.'

As Mr. Burke occasionally applies the poison drawn from his horrid principles, (if it is not a profanation to call them by the name of principles),

not only to the English nation, but to the French Revolution and the National Assembly, and charges that august, illuminated and illuminating body of men with the epithet of usurpers, I shall, sans ceremonie, place another system of principles in opposition to his.

The English Parliament of 1688 did a certain thing, which, for themselves and their constituents, they had a right to do, and which it appeared right should be done: But, in addition to this right, which they possessed by delegation, they set up another right by assumption, that of binding and controuling posterity to the end of time. The case, therefore, divides itself into two parts; the right which they possessed by delegation, and the right which they set up by assumption. The first is admitted; but, with respect to the second, I reply—

There never did, there never will, and there never can exist a parliament, or any description of men, or any generation of men, in any country, possessed of the right or the power of binding and controuling posterity to the “end of time,” or of commanding for ever how the world shall be governed, or who shall govern it; and therefore, all such clauses, acts or declarations, by which the makers of them attempt to do what they have neither the right nor the power to do, nor the power to execute, are in themselves null and void.— Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself, in all cases, as the ages and generations which preceded it. The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave, is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow. The parliament or the people of 1688, or of any other period, had no more right to dispose of the people of the present day, or to bind or to controul them in any shape whatever, than the parliament or the people of the present day have to dispose of, bind or controul those who are to live a hundred or a thousand years hence. Every generation is, and must be, competent to all the purposes which its occasions require. It is the living, and not the dead, that are to be accommodated. When man ceases to be, his power and his wants cease with him; and having no longer any participation in the concerns of this world, he has no longer any authority in directing who shall be its governors, or how its government shall be organized, or how administered.

I am not contending for nor against any form of government, nor for nor against any party here or elsewhere. That which a whole nation chooses to do, it has a right to do. Mr. Burke says, No. Where then does the right exist? I am contending for the rights of the living, and against their being willed away, and controuled and contracted for, by the manuscript assumed