

Gracchus Babeuf 1795

Prospectus for *Le Tribun du Peuple*

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The goal of society is the common happiness. This was my motto before the government of a free people gave me a forever memorable proof of its respect for the sacred right of the press.

This goal of society, this fundamental maxim, mother of all the principles of the just, will still be the only lamp by whose light I will continue to march, since the cannons of 13th Vendémiaire, which broke my irons, allowed the rearmament of my truthful and plebian pen.

The goal of the French Revolution is also the common happiness. The honorable task of a tribune, that I had the courage to embrace, imposes upon me the sublime obligation of indicating to the French the path that shall lead them to this greatest of goals. If they follow me they will arrive there, despite the obstacles profusely spread across that route, despite the maneuvers, the intrigues, and the plots of royalists and patricians.

Since the fatal Thermidorian reaction patricians and royalists have managed to lead the people towards the counter-goal, towards common unhappiness. The people have now reached the apex of this revolutionary period. Its position there is too unnatural, too horrible. It is time that it came to an end. Its up to the advocate of the true people, to the enemy of the gilded people, to teach 24 million oppressed how to counter-react, how one can revolutionize after having de-revolutionized, how there exist no forces, however formidable they might appear, that can prevent the arrival at the true goal, the only equitable goal, at *society's goal*, at *common happiness*.

We too know a little bit about what elements are used to move men. The best lever is their own interest. The late tyrants, the starvers, the directors-in-chief of assassinations, knew this well. They did everything to persuade the people that a government of freedom was a monstrous chimera, that the more one sought to pursue it the more refinement in slavery, famine, persecution and death one met...that consequently it was in everyone's interest to hope for the return of absolute domination. We will use the same lever of interest, but in a

truer manner, less iniquitous, less horrible. We'll prove to all our fellow citizens that freedom is freedom, that the republic can be not the gathering of all tyrannies, of all evils, that popular government should and can have as a result the ease and happiness of all individuals, the inalterable happiness of all members of the association.

The people are apathetic, pusillanimous, their detractors say; and so, they add, being strangled is their inevitable lot. Be silent, imbecilic dominators! Be silent as well, slaves! The people will prove to you that they are not heedless; they will make you definitively see that they know what to do when their guides have let them know the "why and wherefore" of the revolution, when we will have clearly and demonstratively explained to them what in the last analysis that revolution should be for them, despite all the opposition of the enemies of the common happiness. The people will expose to your dumbstruck eyes, frozen in fear, their intrepid, their prodigious energy when they will have come to know for what great and majestic motive they deploy it...when they will have come to know (let us tear all the veils and let the final word escape) that it is in order to guarantee to each of its members *a state of stable happiness, and the fulfillment of the needs of all*, an inalterable fulfillment, independent of the ineptitude, the immorality and the malevolence of those who govern..., when they will have come to know that there can be a term to the precarious and constantly unhappy state in which the tyrants of all regimes have made the great mass of men languish. There is no tyrannical dam that the torrent of the people would not then be capable of smashing and carrying away in its impetuous effervescence, in those rivers before which everything retreats.

This is the doctrine of which I loudly declare myself the apostle. Frenchmen! Men free and just! Ready yourselves to follow this new gospel: I will call on you to decide whether the morality of it is pure. The benevolence of all of you who received my first essays was too generous; I only showed you a half-light there. I am now going to offer you nature's great clarity. My hardy brush will be dipped in the colors of original justice, of first truths. Republicans of the North and the South, no, no, you will not sink into discouragement. You will not condescend to the reestablishment of a king or any other tyranny. You will not allow the opinion to prevail that subjection is necessary for the good and tranquility of peoples. You are not tired, as they say; long ago you proved that this is not so. The same recent experience has also demonstrated that it's not yet true that you are no longer strong. Despite cowardly massacres and horrible assassinations you are still superior to the partisans of slavery. You will not allow it to grow stronger, in whatever form it shows itself.

Rally with confidence around my coat of arms. My battle-ready lance is not the stiletto of a paid assassin of the Appian faction or the descendants of Tarquin. Compared to us, what are those miserable athletes who I see mechanically battling in the arena, who all have the

physiognomy of venal gladiators who've broken their spears on behalf of all parties, and whose only trade will ever be that of breaking them for whoever pays best? Compared to us, what can these pygmy champions, these armor carriers of the throne and the patricians do? No, there is no need to receive a stipend to be inspired to fight like Hercules. If it's already been seen that I tossed thunderbolts, it's because I was as independent as the master of the gods. My quiver and arrows have been returned to me and we'll yet again see thunder and lightning fly from them. Along with you, friends, patriots, I am proud enough to guarantee my ability to pulverize and annihilate, with the flick of a wrist, Atlas and all the giant-indoctrinators and warriors, who so zealously work to win over souls, be it from the gilded million or from the monarch of France and Navarre.

Far from the defenders of the people, far from the people itself this diplomacy, this so-called Machiavellian prudence, this hypocritical policy that's only worthy of tyrants and, when it was employed this past period by the patriots, cost them the best fruits of the victory of 13 Vendémiaire. Based on all available examples, my ideas led me to believe that in a people's state the truth must always stand clear and naked. It must always be spoken: make it public, confide in the people all that concerns its major interests. Circumspection, dissimulation, whisperings among exclusive groups of men and so-called regulators only serve to kill energy, to render opinion erroneous, unstable, uncertain, and because of this, heedless and servile. It provides tyranny with all it needs to organize itself without any obstacles. Eternally persuaded that nothing great can be done without the People, I believe that in order to do anything with them its always necessary to tell them everything, ceaselessly show them *what must be done*, and we should fear less the inconveniences of the publicity from which politics profits, than count on the advantages of the colossal force that always undoes politics...we must calculate all the strength that is lost by leaving opinion apathetic, without aliment or object, and all that we gain in activating it, in enlightening it, in showing it a goal.

P.S. My journal will appear irregularly, five to six times a month, and even more. The size of the issues will not be uniform, since the importance of the subjects and the circumstances will lead each issue to have more or less pages. All reasonable readers will feel that a labor both substantive and of a kind that must be clearly thought through, cannot be measured in the same way as the routine work of newspapers that simply cover the news or are full of nothing.

Gracchus Babeuf and the Conspiracy of the Equals