
II. Man's True Nature

A Mass Strike—For the Benefit of Mankind

by Paul Gallagher

Jan. 18—The surprise protest victory of the “Brexit” vote in Britain in June 2016 has been followed by uprisings “out of nowhere” since then: in the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President, the election of what are called “populist” or “nationalist” governments in many European countries, the sudden eruption of the “yellow vest” protests in France that have persisted and shown up in many other countries, and other events such as the emergence of the new Mexican Presidency, resembling the institutional revolutionary Mexican presidents of old. Above all, these are rebellions against economic austerity, against lost livelihoods. They are rebellions to protect productivity and household survival, which have been under attack for decades across Europe and North America.

The question in which the Schiller Institute and the political movement of Lyndon and Helga LaRouche are involved, is whether these uprisings will lead to nations acting for the betterment of humanity as a whole; whether these rebellions will rise to a fight for a higher paradigm of human culture and artistic creativity. People enter these protests because they have a sense in this crisis for their livelihoods, that real change is not only urgent, but suddenly possible. We want these actions to lead to improvement in the condition of mankind, to the elimination of poverty, and to the creation of new capabilities. We want them to become not only

political, but moral and cultural as well. The Schiller Institute is convening an international conference in February in the United States. Its first session poses the question, “Can humanity govern itself to guarantee our existence as a species?”



Percy Shelley

Portrait by Alfred Clint, 1829

‘A Crisis of Beneficial Innovation’

Just over 200 years ago, an English teenager with an intense desire to better the condition of mankind by moral and political reform, decided to write a pamphlet which he would distribute as widely as possible by his own efforts. At the center of his pamphlet, the 19-year-old stated—and many times restated—an idea, which may never have been expressed by anyone in this way before.

The new idea was that a crisis—in that case, of a nation’s constitution cancelled and a people’s self-government stolen—could cause an *improvement* in the thinking and feelings, even

the morality, of large numbers of people, turning their thoughts toward the benefit of their fellow human beings even more than their own. A people so moved would not then know *what to do* to solve the crisis, but would want *to act* to benefit their nation and even all of humanity.

A crisis is now arriving which shall decide your fate,

the young man announced to the population to whom he addressed the pamphlet:

Man cannot make occasions, but he may seize those that offer. None are more interesting to Philanthropy than those which excite the benevolent passions that generalize and expand private into public feelings, and make the hearts of individuals vibrate not merely for themselves, their families and their friends, but for *posterity*, for a people, till their country becomes the world and their family, the sensitive creation. . . .

I perceive that the public interest is excited; I perceive that individual interest has, in a certain degree, quitted individual concern to generalize itself with universal feeling. . . .

A benevolent and disinterested feeling has gone abroad, and I am willing that it should never subside. I desire that means should be taken with energy and expedition, *in this important yet fleeting crisis*, to feed the unpolluted flame at which nations and ages may light the torch of Liberty and Virtue!" (*Address to the Irish People and Postscript*, 1812)

The pamphleteer made it clear that he was talking about a crisis in itself uplifting popular morality:

The crisis to which I allude as the period of your emancipation, is not the death of the present king, or anything which has to do with kings; it is *the increase of virtue and wisdom* which will lead people to find out that force and oppression is wrong and false; and this crisis, once it gains ground, will prevent government from severity. It will restore those rights which government has taken away.

This teenager was Percy Shelley, famous now for his poetry. In the eleven years of life then remaining to him, he would write some of the most passionate and best known poems in the English language, such as the "Ode to the West Wind," "Ode to a Skylark," "The Masque of Anarchy," "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," "Ode to Liberty," "Triumph of Life," and the bold play in verse, *Prometheus Unbound*.

In 1812 young Percy Shelley was a pamphleteer who intervened and spoke at political meetings, a trumpeter of the American Revolution, but also influenced

by the English "Whig enlightenment" of Charles Fox and William Godwin, which was a reaction to America's Revolution.

But he had a fundamentally new idea, unknown to such skeptical circles. This was, that a crisis of the European monarchies and aristocracies triggered by the American War of Independence, was increasing the potential intelligence and creativity of the populations of Europe and making them—for a brief political moment—better people.

As for poetry, then it was just one of his many hobbies, which also included conducting Benjamin Franklin's electrical experiments and trying to make contact with ghosts. The teenage poems he had written were juvenile spoofs, or gestures of dislike for authority.

Yet in the 1812 pamphlet that he hawked for two months in the streets of Dublin and Derry and at mass meetings—aided by his servant Daniel Hill and several contacts, and surveilled even then by British intelligence officers—one could see him expressing what he would express in the searing stanzas of the famous "Masque of Anarchy" seven years later:

Are you slaves, or are you men? If slaves, then crouch to the rod, and lick the feet of your oppressors, glory in your shame; it will become you, if brutes, to act according to your nature. But you are men. A real man is free, so far as circumstances will permit him. Then firmly, yet quietly, resist. When one cheek is struck, turn the other to the insulting coward. The discussion of any subject is a right that you have brought into the world with your heart and tongue. Resign your heart's blood before you part with this inestimable privilege of man. For it is fit that the governed should inquire into the proceedings of Government. (*Address to the Irish People and Postscript*)

The *Postscript* introduced a *Proposal for the Formation of an Association of Philanthropists*. This was the first of ten pamphlets Shelley would write and attempt to put out between 1812 and 1820, including four before his 22nd birthday. His attempts to form a political group—or as he preferred it, a philanthropical and philosophical association—bore no fruit at all in his short lifetime. His strong criticisms of the Church of England made him notorious in the British press and with the government; he became an exile in Italy; sur-

vived at least one assassination attempt there by a British army officer; helped establish two journals of art and politics edited by the literary rebel Leigh Hunt; and died when his boat sank in a storm in the Bay of Naples after being rammed under circumstances never explained.

But during his few years, Shelley continued to disseminate his idea that a political crisis could take the form of new powers of thinking in the members of a large population. One aspect of what he meant was the increased power of *imagination*, making possible appreciation of other peoples' needs and benevolence toward them. As his few years went on, he identified this power of creative and loving imagination more and more with the art of poetry.

Percy Shelley in 1812 was intervening in mass meetings in Ireland over the issue of "Catholic emancipation" from the proscription of the Catholic religion by the British. He clearly thought the real source of this crisis was the British suppression of Ireland's 1782 republican Constitution and British imposition of the 1801 Act of Union which forced Ireland back under the caprices of what was called "British law." Therefore in the *Appeal*, he constantly stressed the consent of the governed in government. But above all, the pamphlet called on Irish people to lift up their thinking, improve the morality of their actions.

I look with an eye of hope and pleasure on the present state of things, gloomy and incapable of improvement as they may appear to others. It delights me to see that men begin to think and to act for the good of others. . . . It is in vain to hope for any liberty and happiness without reason and virtue. . . . It is this work which I would earnestly recommend to you, O Irishmen: REFORM YOURSELVES . . .

You can in no measure more effectually advance the cause of reform, than by employing your leisure time in reasoning, or the cultivation of your minds. Think, and talk, and discuss. The only subjects you ought to propose are those of



Portrait by Benjamin Haydon, 1846
Leigh Hunt

happiness and liberty. Be free and be happy, but first be wise and good.

I earnestly desire . . . that Protestants and Catholics unite in a common interest, and that whatever be the belief and principles of your countryman and fellow sufferer, you desire to benefit his cause at the same time that you vindicate your own.

I look forward, then, to the redress of both these grievances; or rather, I perceive the state of the public mind that precedes them, as a *crisis of beneficial innovation*.

And of the new association he was trying to form, Shelley wrote:

That it should be an association for diffusing knowledge and virtue throughout the poorer classes of society in Ireland, for co-operating with any enlightened system of education, for discussing topics calculated to throw light on any methods of alleviation of moral and political evil, and as far as lies in its power, interesting itself in whatever occasions may arise for benefiting mankind.

Within four months Shelley had written a *Declaration of Rights* (printed in Dublin) and then a pamphlet for freedom of the press, attacking the Lord Chief Justice, "A Letter to Lord Ellenborough occasioned by the sentence which he passed on Mr. D.I. Eaton as publisher of the third part of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*." This pamphlet was printed in London, but then confiscated by the printer, who was made afraid of the political statements in it. Shelley was able to salvage and distribute only 150 copies. The following year, 1813, he published a pamphlet against the death penalty, *On the Punishment of Death*.

The Pamphleteer as a Poet

But by 1815 Shelley was composing poetry of great strength and beauty expressing the potential of sudden growth in the power of human reason. That

year he wrote the “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” which begins,

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats, though unseen, among us . . .

and whose final stanzas are so moving. Often a writer starts composing such a poem, with the thought by which it will end. The “Hymn” ends with this:

The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past—there is a harmony
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,
Which through the summer is not heard or seen,
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!
Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm—to one who worships thee
And every form containing thee,
Whom, spirit fair, thy spells did bind
To fear himself, and love all humankind.

The final line is a surprise; a reader or listener did not expect that thought, but it belongs there. Whether the spirit Shelley is invoking here is *poetry*, or simply his idea of beauty as the growing power of thought and imagination in human beings, the thought of it makes him fear his own selfishness and rather love the good of humanity. It is still the idea of *An Address to the Irish People*.

That Shelley could speak so naturally while using a very complex stanza form of poetry (known as the “Spenser stanza”), showed that now he was a master whenever his poetry was passionately inspired by his philosophy.

By 1816, though Shelley kept writing pamphlets, no printer would take them from such a publicly notorious figure amid the officially reactionary policies of the period of the Congress of Vienna. But he could get at least some of his poetry published, and so developed the art of lengthy prefaces to major poems, which continued the appeals to the public of the pamphlets.

One subject of his epic-length poem *The Revolt of Islam* was clearly the disastrous failure of the French Revolution to follow the upward path of the American War of Independence. (This title was a nonsensical effort by Shelley’s publisher, Charles Ollier and Sons, to hide the poem’s content from censors; the poet had

called it *Laon and Cythna*.) Its first canto opened with the struggle between Zeus and Prometheus. In its Preface, Shelley wrote he believed the populations of Europe were “shaking off” the depression among intellectuals caused by the French Revolution’s terrible failure. He wrote that the poem—

is an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives . . . the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live. . . . It is a succession of images illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind.

And the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, written in 1818-19 but not published until 1820, included the first of several statements by Shelley—as we will see—that poetry is merely the “herald” of changes for the better in the minds of large numbers of people, brought on by political crisis:

The great writers of our own age are, we have reason to suppose, the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition, or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between opinions and institutions is now restoring, or is about to be restored.

The endings of many of Shelley’s best poems express the same urgent desire as the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, that his appeal to embrace the good of others should be understood by millions, through an increased power of reason among humanity. They end in a way both natural and surprising. There is the “Ode to a Skylark”:

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then—as I am listening
now.

And one of the best-known final lines in all of English poetry concludes the “Ode to the West Wind”:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Many people who may never have read a poem of Shelley's, repeat this last line as an aphorism, by which they mean something may be coming which is at the same time expected, hoped for, and yet also surprising. Nor does this mean that the line has been made crude by common use; it is just the way Shelley meant it, and would have wished that it be used by millions of people.

A Philosophical View of Reform

When he wrote "Ode to the West Wind," "Ode to a Skylark," "The Masque of Anarchy" and *Prometheus Unbound* in 1819-20, Shelley was still writing political pamphlets; his most interesting by far is *A Philosophical View of Reform* of 1819. Notes for both "Ode to the West Wind," "The Masque of Anarchy," and *Prometheus Unbound* are found on the original manuscript on which he was writing *A Philosophical View of Reform*. It appears that he wrote the pamphlet and "The Masque of Anarchy" very rapidly, almost simultaneously.

The *Philosophical View* is one of the most extraordinary political works never published—no one would print it for the notorious "atheist" poet, and it was only first printed a century after Shelley's death, in a collection. In it, the poet presented a detailed, accurate and scathing analysis of the effects upon the British economy and people, of the 1694 creation of the Bank of England, the earlier creation of the British East India Company, and of more than a century of resulting massive speculation in the country's debt, with the creation of both ruinous taxation and masses of paper currency solely to support that speculation. He called it the cre-



"Sketch of a Woman and Children": Bridget O'Donnell and her two children during the Irish Potato Famine in 1849.

ation of a second (financial, speculating) aristocracy by the first (landed, titled) aristocracy, with the latter's borrowings from the former paid off by working to death the poor, the industrial workers, and their children.

Anyone who has read, for example, about the causes of the mass death and emigration of the Irish peasantry in the years after Shelley wrote, knows that his description and forecast were precisely correct.

Shelley's program in this pamphlet included the gradual cancellation of the British so-called "public" debt; regulations to limit hours and fairly reward adult labor and to end child labor; and parliamentary (electoral) reform. He wrote:

Labour and skill and the immediate wages of labour and skill is a property of the most sacred and indisputable right. . . . And the right of a man to property in the exertion of his own bodily and mental faculties, or to the produce and free reward from that exertion, is the most inalienable of rights.

A Philosophical View also included a blistering attack on Thomas Malthus and Malthusianism, and on the "Private Vices, Public Benefits" ideology then popular through Adam Smith and other British East India Company writers, claiming that the good of society resulted solely from individuals' greedy pursuit of riches

and pleasures. And it contained a full vindication of the American Revolution, with this statement which would come at that time only from Shelley: “The just and successful Revolt of America corresponded with a state of public opinion in Europe of which it was the first result” (emphasis added).

But the most interesting part of the pamphlet was its second chapter, “On the Sentiment of the Necessity of Change”—the obsession and story of Percy Shelley’s life!

Here in 1819, for the first time in a pamphlet, Shelley identified this mass sentiment of the necessity of change, with *poetry*—which, he meant to make clear, is not produced only by poets. This unique idea was repeated two years later in his article “A Defence of Poetry,” which is much better known although it, too, was never published until well after Shelley’s death. But here in *A Philosophical View of Reform* this thought stands out like a sudden bombshell in the midst of a long and trenchant political and economic discussion:

For the most unfailing herald, or companion, or follower of an *universal employment of the sentiments of a nation to the production of beneficial change*, is poetry, meaning by poetry an intense and impassioned power of communicating intense and impassioned impressions respecting man and nature. The persons in whom this power takes its abode may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little tendency [to] the spirit of good of which it is the minister. But although they may deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve that which is seated on the throne of their own soul. And whatever systems they may [have] professed to support, they actually advance the interest of Liberty. It is impossible to read the productions of our most celebrated writers ... without being startled by the electric life which there is in their words. They measure the circumference or sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit at which they are themselves



Cartoon by George Cruikshank, 1819
Depiction of the Peterloo Massacre at St. Peter’s Field, Manchester, England on August 16, 1819.

perhaps most sincerely astonished, for it is less their own spirit than the spirit of their age. They are the priests of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they conceive not; the trumpet which sings to battle and feels not what it inspires; the influence which is moved not but moves. Poets and philosophers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

... Is there not in England a desire of change arising from the profound sentiment of the exceeding inefficiency of the existing institutions to provide for the physical and intellectual happiness of the people? It is proposed in this work (1) to state and examine the present condition of this desire, (2) to elucidate its causes and its object, (3) to then show the practicability and utility, nay, the necessity of change, (4) to examine the state of parties as regards it, and (5) to state the probable, the possible, and the desirable mode in which it should be accomplished.

Two circumstances arrest the attention of those who turn their regard to the present political condition of the English nation—first, that there is an almost universal sentiment of the approach of some change to be wrought in the institutions of the government; and secondly, the necessity and desirableness of such a change.

‘The Masque of Anarchy’

Shelley’s writing of this pamphlet was interrupted by his learning of an attack by British cavalry on a demonstration of some 80,000 people for reform of parliamentary representation, near Manchester, England, on Aug. 16, 1819. This savagery became known as the Peterloo Massacre, as murderous as the massacres in India for which British armed forces became notorious. Reportedly in great anger, Shelley rapidly wrote “The Masque of Anarchy.”

It was as if he had begun to rewrite the pamphlet, but with much greater power and passion, in this amazing poem. The “Masque” begins in images of an England ruled by bloody Anarchy, its “God and king and law” worshipped by all the leaders of the two aristocracies just skewered in the pamphlet, and erupting in brutal and murderous force only to maintain Anarchy as king. The government ministers whom the poet caricatures, like Castlereagh, become the ministers of Anarchy, cheered and worshipped and fed with the hearts of the people.

And then arises, first, the faint mist of hope; and something—what?

With step as soft as wind it passed
Over the heads of men—so fast
That they knew the presence there,
And looked,—but all was empty air.

As flowers beneath May’s footstep waken,
As stars from Night’s loose hair are shaken,
As waves arise when loud winds call,
Thoughts sprung where’er that step did fall.

Thoughts! Reason rising among the population. This is Shelley of the “crisis of beneficial innovation.” Then arises a song to the “men of England.” If Anarchy is dead, its antidote is Liberty. “What is freedom? Ye can tell that which slavery is, too well”—and these stanzas repeat and intensify the riot of debt-speculation and poverty described in *A Philosophical View of Reform*, and repeat Shelley’s lifelong urging against violent protest. Freedom is bread, clothes, fire, food, Justice, Wisdom, Peace, Love. “Science, poetry and thought are thy lamps.”

The song to the men of England moves on to its invocation to non-violent action by every part of the population, holding each other’s welfare in common, and concludes the poem:

“Let a great Assembly be
Of the fearless and the free
On some spot of English ground
Where the plains stretch wide around.

“Let the blue sky overhead,
The green earth on which ye tread,
All that must eternal be,
Witness the solemnity.

“From the corners uttermost
Of the bounds of English coast,
From every hut, village and town
Where those who live and suffer moan
For others’ misery or their own,

“From the workhouse and the prison
Where pale as corpses newly risen,
Women, children, young and old
Groan for pain, and weep for cold—

“From the haunts of daily life
Where is waged the daily strife
With common wants and common cares
Which sows the human heart with tares—

“Lastly from the palaces
Where the murmur of distress
Echoes, like the distant sound
Of a wind alive around

“Those prison halls of wealth and fashion,
Where some few feel such compassion
For those who groan, and toil, and wail
As must make their brethren pale—

“Ye who suffer woes untold,
Or to feel, or to behold
Your lost country bought and sold
With a price of blood and gold—

“Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free—

“Be your strong and simple words
Keen to wound as sharpened swords,
And wide as targets let them be,
With their shade to cover ye.

“Let the tyrants pour around
With a quick and startling sound
Like the loosening of a sea,
Troops of armed emblazonry.

“Let the charged artillery drive
Till the dead air seems alive
With the clash of clanging wheels,
And the tramp of horses’ heels.

“Let the fixed bayonet
Gleam with sharp desire to wet
Its bright point in English blood
Looking keen as one for food.

“Let the horsemen’s scimitars
Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars
Thirsting to eclipse their burning
In a sea of death and mourning.

“Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war,

“And let Panic, who outspeeds
The career of armed steeds
Pass, a disregarded shade
Through your phalanx undismayed.

“Let the laws of your own land,
Good or ill, between ye stand
Hand to hand, and foot to foot,
Arbiters of the dispute,

“The old laws of England—they
Whose reverend heads with age are gray,
Children of a wiser day;
And whose solemn voice must be
Thine own echo—Liberty!

“On those who first should violate
Such sacred heralds in their state
Rest the blood that must ensue,
And it will not rest on you.

“And if then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,

Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,—
What they like, that let them do.

“With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

“Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.

“Every woman in the land
Will point at them as they stand—
They will hardly dare to greet
Their acquaintance in the street.

“And the bold, true warriors
Who have hugged Danger in wars
Will turn to those who would be free,
Ashamed of such base company.

“And that slaughter to the Nation
Shall steam up like inspiration,
Eloquent, oracular;
A volcano heard afar.

“And these words shall then become
Like Oppression’s thundered doom
Ringing through each heart and brain,
Heard again—again—again—

“Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number—
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few.”

There may have been no earlier instance in an English-speaking country, in which the action of non-violent civil disobedience was narrated, and the spontaneous “shaming” and discrediting precisely forecast, by which it would achieve its effect, as later seen in India’s independence struggle and America’s civil rights movement, for example.

The “Masque” has a characteristic that Gotthold Lessing ascribed to Homer’s *Iliad*, giving the example



The Foundry Painter, ca.490-480 BCE

Hephaestus presenting Achilles' new armor to Thetis.

of the shield that Hephaestus, god of fire and the forge, made for Achilles. Homer did not describe what the great bronze shield looked like on Achilles' arm; instead he told in rich detail how Hephaestus had forged it. The "Masque" is poetry of action, mental and physical, not description. Shelley wrote in the *Prometheus Unbound* Preface, written just after this:

The imagery which I have employed will be found, in many instances, to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed. This is unusual in modern poetry.

The stanzas have a simple ballad form, and like a ballad, the poem never stumbles or slows. The rhyming is completely persistent yet becomes almost imperceptible, because the flow of thought and speech rushes and rolls right through it, completely uncontrolled by the rhyme; it adds impulses to the reader's thoughts rather than pausing them. The verse is extremely musical like that of Milton and Shakespeare. Shelley's poetry is not always so; but when inspired by his passion for justice and liberty, it has a great power. Having heard "The Masque of Anarchy," you will call it up when you think of doing something for intellectual beauty, for humanity.

Shelley immediately sent the "Masque" to his friend Leigh Hunt for publication in *The Examiner*,

one of the magazines Shelley had supported. But the rebel Hunt, who had been imprisoned before for his publishing, this time lost his nerve. "I did not insert it," he wrote in a preface when he finally published it thirteen years later, "because I thought that the public at large had not become sufficiently discerning to do justice to the sincerity and kind-heartedness of the spirit that walked in this flaming robe of verse." By late 1819 the only people who wanted to publish Shelley were several leaders of the English Chartists, the very workers' movement which had called the demonstration which was attacked in the Peterloo Massacre at Manchester.

Among that movement some of Shelley's earlier poetry was widely read, discussed and used as an impulse for political reform. This was particularly true of his youthful poem "Queen Mab," written about the same time as *An Appeal to the Irish People*. In fact, his pamphlet for a free press, *Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, suppressed by its printer in 1812, was partly reprinted by the Chartists as a preface to "Queen Mab," and circulated widely among them.

It is interesting to think what would have been the effect on the Chartist movement had Leigh Hunt published "The Masque of Anarchy" in 1819 immediately after the Peterloo Massacre. Their leaders would have become aware of it and would have found a way for its mass printing and circulation, as they had with "Queen Mab"—and as they did with selected stanzas of "The Masque of Anarchy," but only in the 1840s. This is not to pass judgement on the Chartists, except as that they were mass workingmen's movement for constitutional reform, and to consider here what they might have become with access to the full power of ideas in Shelley's writings, rather than just snatches of a few of his ideas.

Shelley's final prose writing in 1821, "A Defence of Poetry," was accepted by the magazine, *Ollier's Literary Miscellany*, as the first part of a reply to Thomas Peacock's article, "The Four Ages of Poetry." Ironically, Peacock, a former friendly acquaintance of Shelley and amateur poet, had chosen a career with that colonial looting army known as the British East India Company, and now wrote about how the "utilitarian age" of the early 19th century had no different use for poetry than for jewelry or other adornments. The magazine folded before it could run Shelley's "Defence," so it too was not published until well after his death, and the planned second and third parts of it were never written. Nevertheless, its influence has

steadily grown since its publication in 1840.

The central tenet of the “Defence” is that poetry, and the ability to experience its intellectual beauty, is the cause of human benevolence and morality. Great poets never write poems as lessons in particular morality, but the increased power of imagination with which poetry resonates in a population, is the cause of greater love for humanity:

The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry ministers to this effect, by acting upon its cause... Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner that exercise strengthens a limb.

Shelley concluded the article with the same statement made in the *Philosophical View of Reform* of the elevated receptivity to poetic beauty in a people going through dramatic political change, and in the writers themselves who create that beauty. There are slight differences two years later; for example, now simply “poets” rather than “philosophers and poets” are “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” In the “Defence” Shelley pronounced the truest philosophers, and specifically Plato, to be among the greatest poets. This illustrates the development of his view that poetic beauty is actually a mutual, or universal creation of an aroused population and its best thinkers.

Most importantly, he now gave priority to the increased potential imaginative power of “a great people” in a political crisis, as being the cause of new



Rosa Luxemburg, in 1915.

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and beneficial ideas, rather than defining poetry, which strengthened that power, as being that power itself:

The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is Poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature. The persons in whom this power resides may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little apparent correspondence with that spirit of good of which they

are the ministers. But even whilst they deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve the Power which is seated upon the throne of their own soul. It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words. They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations, for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age. Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

Political Mass Strike

About a century later, at the time of World War I, a young Polish revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, discovered the same idea Shelley had discovered. She called the rise in popular intelligence and morality in a crisis,



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LaRouche organizers leading the Columbia University student strikers in 1969.

the *political mass strike*. As befits human intellectual progress, Rosa Luxemburg improved upon Shelley, by describing very precisely what characterizes such a genuine uprising of popular creativity, and what distinguishes it from mere periods of unrest or public anger. The breakthrough by the pamphleteer/poet was being scientifically advanced and filled out.

Another fifty years later, in 1967, the American economist and philosopher Lyndon LaRouche, knowing well both Shelley's and Luxemburg's ideas of a "mass strike," employed his own ideas to start building an extraordinary political and cultural movement.

LaRouche, for example, wrote a pamphlet, *The Third Stage of Imperialism*, which he initially circulated, with the help of a half-dozen of his students, at a huge protest in New York City's Central Park against the Vietnam War, and afterwards at other student protests. The pamphlet's central idea was that the mass student ferment against that war—a British imperial project foisted on the United States to ruin it—should be transformed into a *mass movement for the economic advancement and development of underdeveloped countries*. Already then, the "Third World" was becom-



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Lyndon LaRouche speaking with youth in 1973.

ing a cheap-labor re-location for some European and U.S. industries, a phenomenon of deindustrialization described and denounced, probably for the first time, by LaRouche at that moment.

The student protesters were becoming alienated from the American working population, which already then was facing the start of a series of currency and financial crises; yet the students were open at the same time to the highest ideas and most important missions in life.

During the late 1960s LaRouche's idea of a "political mass strike" was much sharper than Shelley's. He insisted that—and described how—the Vietnam War tragedy, combined with the developing financial crises and deindustrialization, were changing Americans' powers of comprehension and impelling a thinking group of youth among them, to act. But there was also the danger that people could potentially be driven by crisis against each other—student protesters against unions and other working people—in the direction of fascist radicalization. LaRouche's *Campaigner* magazine explained exactly how that could happen—with Wall Street's manipulation—in order to successfully fight that manipulation, and move to a higher level in which those Americans could go to each other's support and embrace each other's benefit.

LaRouche's small forces organized "strike support" actions bringing strikes and protests backing from other parts of the American population, showing that a political crisis could impel different groups within populations

potentially to see the benefit of the others, and to act for it. They could even see the benefit of others in the world, such as the underdeveloped nations—if the policy ideas were circulated among them which made such common human benefit clear.

And it was necessary, LaRouche emphasized immediately, that the instigators of such beneficial change should commit themselves to the intellectual power that comes from love of beauty and love of humanity. LaRouche debated with his own students that it was essential they immerse themselves in the music of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and discard the 1960s pop-rot they still tended to prefer. The performance of beautiful music and poetry gradually became a universal hallmark of his movement.

Through large student strikes at Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania and a long and controversial strike of New York City teachers, the truth of this “strike support” or “mass strike” idea was shown and LaRouche’s political movement grew, especially among university graduate students. During the 1968 student strike at Columbia University, LaRouche personally, briefly dominated the educational process among its student body; his associates had similar effect in other university student strikes. The method of anticipating dramatic and apparently sudden changes for the better in people’s ability to think, was shown to work.

LaRouche had accurately forecast the currency crises of the late 1960s and the resulting 1971 breakup of the post-War Bretton Woods monetary system. And in the political shockwave caused by President Richard Nixon’s ending the Bretton Woods gold reserve system,



A manifestation of the mass-strike process today. Yellow Vest movement activists gather at the Carrefour de l'Espérance (Crossroads of Hope) traffic circle in Belfort, France on November 17, 2018.

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LaRouche defeated a leading liberal academic economist in a public debate on the policies causing that crisis. LaRouche’s influence and movement leapt upward.



Percy Shelley as sketched by E.E. Williams, 1821

In his writings, classes and speeches in the decades since then, Lyndon LaRouche has repeatedly cited Percy Shelley’s 1821 article, “A Defence of Poetry,” testifying to the power of this “mass strike” idea; and has quoted particularly the article’s concluding statement as to what poetry is, and what a crisis in human thinking is:

The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of

communicating and receiving the most intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature.

It is up to those who know the power of LaRouche’s ideas, to make this a “crisis of beneficial innovation.”