

# JACOBIN IDEOLOGY

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TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST PART OF

*L'IDÉOLOGIE JACOBINE*

*It is a fact that everything called Jacobin, mountaineer, patriot, etc., is busy every day composing the lies of the next day.*

La Harpe

*As the only enlightened man and the only patriot, he is the only one worthy to command, and his imperious pride judges that any resistance is a crime.*

Taine

*De facto tyranny in the service of a liberty of principle: that's the whole Revolution.*

Cochin

*Rousseau, a lover of freedom, was used in the French Revolution to build up a model of social oppression.*

Michel Foucault

*We are not fooled by your language: we have learned too well to know it. In your mouth, love freedom, love the constitution, love the republic, all this means only one and the same thing: love our domination, and in conscience I do not believe that we are obliged to do so.*

La Harpe

# CHARACTERISTICS OF JACOBINISM

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VI - HYPOCRISY - LIE - DOUBLESPEAK

# CHARACTERISTICS OF JACOBINISM

## I - OMNIPOTENCE OF THE STATE

“ARBITRARY”, “ABSOLUTE” AND “ENDLESS” POWER

REASON OF STATE / “PUBLIC SALUT” / TERROR

“We're back to the processes of the past. What is the decree of the 19th vendémiaire year II: “the government will be revolutionary until peace,” if not the negation of any principle? What is it to inaugurate the system of “public salut”, if not to put reason of state above reason?” (E. Joyau)

“A HUGE CENTRAL POWER”

“Since the French Revolution was not only intended to change an ancient government, but to abolish the old form of society, it had to attack all forms of established powers, destroy all recognized influences, erase traditions, renewing manners and usages, and in some way emptying the human mind of all the ideas on which respect and obedience had hitherto been based. Hence its character so singularly anarchic.

But discard this debris: you see a huge central power that has attracted and engulfed in its unity all the parcels of authority and influence that were previously scattered in a host of secondary powers, orders, classes, professions, families and individuals, and as scattered throughout the social body.

No such power had been seen in the world since the fall of the Roman Empire. The Revolution created this new power, or rather it grew spontaneously out of the ruins the Revolution made.” (Tocqueville, *The old regime and the revolution*)

## II - DESPOTISM OF PARIS

*In a great centralized state, whoever holds the head has the body; by dint of being led, the French have contracted the habit of letting themselves be led. Unintentionally the provincials turn their eyes to the capital, and, in crisis days, they go beforehand on the high road to learn from the mail which government has fallen to them. This central government, into whatever hands it happens to have fallen, the majority accepts or suffers it. (Taine, *The French revolution*)*

“THE HEAD OF LIBERTY HAS BEEN SIMPLY PLACED ON A  
SERVILE BODY”

*Paris, which became more and more the only preceptor of France, finished to give to all minds the same shape and a common aspect.*

*I have shown how the king's government, having abolished provincial liberties and substituted itself in three quarters of France for all local authorities, had attracted to itself all the affairs, the smallest as well as the largest; I have shown, on the other hand, how, by a necessary*

*consequence, Paris had become the master of the country of which it had hitherto been only the capital, or rather had then become itself the whole country.*

“The old regime had contained, indeed, a whole set of modern-day institutions, which, not being hostile to equality, could easily take place in the new society, and yet offered to despotism singular facilities. They were searched for and found in the middle of the debris of all the others. These institutions had once given rise to habits, passions, ideas which tended to keep men divided and obedient; they were restored and used as help. Centralization was retaken from its ruins and restored; and as, at the same time as it rose, all that had once been able to limit it remained destroyed, from the entrails themselves of a nation which had just overthrown royalty, one suddenly saw a more extensive, more detailed, more absolute power emerge than that which had been wielded by any of our kings.

The enterprise seemed incredibly bold and unprecedentedly successful, because people only thought of what they saw before them and forgot what they had seen. The despot fell, but the most substantial part of his work remained; his government dead, his administration continued to live, and ever since, whenever an attempt has been made to bring down absolute power, the head of Liberty has been simply placed on a servile body.” (Tocqueville, *The old regime and the revolution*)

### III - COLONIALISM

“EXPANSION OF THE FRENCH NAME”

“THE SUPERIOR RACES HAVE A RIGHT VIS-À-VIS THE INFERIOR RACES”

*Gentlemen, we must speak higher and truer! It must be said openly that indeed the superior races have a right vis-à-vis the inferior races...*

Jules Ferry

*I will tell you that an opinion is spreading quite here: that the French Republic should only have the Rhine as its boundary. Are the spirits well-disposed on your side toward this reunion?*

*They must be prepared for it. We hear talk of a deputation from the States. It will be rejected. Savoy will be reunited today.*

Brissot

*The nations of Europe are divisible because it is in the interest of the Republic, the French Republic is indivisible because it is its interest.*

Giroud (cited by Vidan Blagoyévitch in *Le principe des nationalités*)

“If the Republic cannot do without having a European, Eastern, Mediterranean policy, it needs, for similar reasons, a colonial policy: which means that we must not be, on this side, either forgetful or inattentive, out of disdain or by weariness; but vigilant, active, determined to make all the sacrifices that necessity commands for the conservation of old or new settlements, which contribute, to varying degrees and in the most different latitudes, to the expansion of the French name through the World.” (Jules Ferry)

#### IV - CULTURAL GENOCIDE

*...to erase all pretexts and all misunderstandings, and to take away from tyrants, from our enemies, a treacherous weapon, I ask for the suspension of the French name, like those of Bourguignon, Normand, Gascon... (Cloutz)*

*We no longer have provinces, and we still have about thirty patois that remind us of their names. (Grégoire)*

*In point of fact colonization is not a matter of mere conquest — like the annexation in 1870 by Germany of Alsace-Lorraine; it is, of necessity, CULTURAL GENOCIDE. [...] The inevitable consequence is that the colonized peoples lose their NATIONAL INDIVIDUALITY, their CULTURE and their CUSTOMS, sometimes even their LANGUAGE... (J.-P. Sartre)*

“...AFTER THE LAWS CHANGES MANNERS, CUSTOMS AND EVEN THE MOTHER TONGUE...”

“Meanwhile, the Revolution follows its course: as we see the monster's head appear, and as its singular and terrible physiognomy is discovered; as after destroying political institutions it abolishes civil institutions, after the laws changes manners, customs and even the mother tongue; when, after ruining the fabric of government, it shakes the foundations of society and finally seems to want to attack God himself; when soon this same revolution overflows outside, by dint of processes unknown before, a new tactic, murderous maxims, *armed* opinions, as Pitt said, an unheard-of power that breaks down the barriers of empires, shatters the crowns, crushed the peoples, and, strange thing! wins them at the same time to its cause; as all these things break out, the point of view changes.

What at first seemed to be, to the princes of Europe and the statesmen, an ordinary accident in the life of the peoples, appears to be a fact so new, so contrary even to all that had happened before in the world, and yet so general, so monstrous, so incomprehensible, that on seeing it the human spirit remains as distraught.” (Tocqueville, *The old regime and the revolution*)

“EVEN AMONG THE “CI-DEVANT” BASQUES AND BRETONS”

“Let us encourage anything that can benefit the fatherland; from that moment, the idiom of liberty must be at the order of the day, and the zeal of the citizens must forever proscribe the jargons, which are the last vestiges of the destroyed feudalism. He who, half-knowing our language, spoke it only when he was drunk or angry, will feel that one can conciliate the habit of it with that of sobriety and of sweetness. A few bastard locutions, a few idiotisms will further prolong their existence in the canton where they were known. Despite Desgrouais's efforts, *corrected gasconisms* are still to be corrected. The citizens of Saintes will still see their *borderie*, those of Blois their *closerie*, and those of Paris their *métairie* (*farm*). Towards Bordeaux they will clear *landes* (*moors*), towards Nîmes *garrigues*; but finally the true denominations will prevail even among the “ci-devant” Basques and Bretons, to whom the government will have lavished its means: and without being able to assign the fixed epoch in which these idioms will have completely disappeared, we can augur that it is close.” (Henri Grégoire, *Report on the necessity and means to annihilate the patois and to universalize the use of the French language*, 1794)

“...INSTITUTIONS, BELIEFS, EVEN LANGUAGES, MAINTAIN THE HOSTILITY OF THE NATIVES...”

“The most skillful conquering races understood the necessity of not offending the beliefs of their subjects and of respecting their institutions. The French, on the contrary, tried to transform indigenous societies before they had even established their conquest. They profess that institutions, beliefs, even languages, maintain the hostility of the natives against the new state of affairs, and that to obtain their

sympathy or resignation, there is only one effective method: assimilation.” (Léopold de Saussure, *Psychology of French colonization in its dealings with indigenous societies*, 1899)

## V - REJECTION OF THE *SOCIAL CONTRACT* AND FEDERALISM

*Federalism will be the supreme counter-revolutionary crime, and they will make it clear to the Girondins.* (Aulard, *The French revolution: a political history*)

*“To find a form of association which defends and protects, with the whole force of the community, the person and property of each associate, and by which each one uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before?” Such is the fundamental problem for which the social contract provides the solution.*

*The clauses of this contract are so determined by the nature of the act that the slightest modification would render them vain and of no effect; so that, although they may never have been formally enunciated, they are everywhere the same, everywhere tacitly accepted and recognised; until, the social pact being violated, everyone then regains his first rights and recovers his natural liberty, losing the conventional liberty he renounced it for.* (Rousseau, *The social contract*)

“BUT WHAT?  
DIDN'T ROUSSEAU PRAISE THE SOCIAL PACT?”

“It is necessary, said Isnard, in order to follow the natural order of social organization, to proceed, before any constitutional law, to the drafting of a social pact. This act must be intermediate between the declaration of rights, which serves as its basis, and the constitution to which it serves as a barrier and regulator.” And he recalled this passage from the *Social Contract*:

“Everyone has the innate right to commit oneself and to oblige oneself to others only by his consent.

No relations can be established between contracting members other than relations based on an free act of the will of each.

A legitimate association can have no other basis than the will of the associates.”

Then he declared, on behalf of his constituents, that he was ready to associate with the rest of the French to form a one and indivisible republic, in which the majority of particular wills would form the common will. But he laid down certain preconditions; he wanted a social pact to guarantee him his “natural rights, equality, liberty, and above all property.”

Marat shouted to him: “So you're very rich, since you're talking all the time about property?”

Without being moved, the speaker entered into a definition of property rights that was both subtle and childish. The kind of property that this industrialist designated as the most sacred was industrial property. In return for this guarantee, he signed a social pact, the first article of which he wrote as follows:

“All the inhabitants of the various territories, the whole of which is known as *France*, all those of the various territories whose National Convention has accepted and decreed the union to France, and who at this moment have representatives in the said Convention, will form in the future one and the same association, under the denominations of *French People* or *French Nation*.”

Thus, in May 1793, at a time when the greatest patriotic exaltation was needed, this Girondin proposed to make a moment *clean slate* of the fatherland in order to reform the social pact. Those who



would like to separate would leave, he said, with their belongings, as long as it was not to enter into war with the society they had thus left.

The invaded French would lay down their arms and ask themselves if they are French! They would be really French only after having written in commercial style an act of association containing meticulous guarantees, duly worded and notarized.

More serious thing! this act would only be valid for thirty years. Isnard's fatherland was only granted until the year 1823. In 1823, there would be no more France; but the contract was renewable.

Such was the influence of Rousseau's ideas, under whose patronage Isnard presented himself [...], that the reading of the *Social Pact* project caused at first only embarrassment and stupor. The danger of these chimeras was clearly felt: one had understood the scope of a certain article 10 which decapitalized Paris; one could guess under these sentences a provincial selfishness and a fear of a rich man. But what? Didn't Rousseau praise the social pact? And were there not in Isnard's project the most democratic reforms, right to work, tax proportional to income? [...]

Already Buzot, in hatred of Paris, was loudly approving.

It was a girondin, the honest Lasource, who first exclaimed *that the project of a social pact was purely chimerical*. Roux then protested.

*fear of offending any of Rousseau's ideas.*

But no one dared to show all the absurdity of the motion for fear of offending any of Rousseau's ideas. Danton confined himself to saying that the constitution would be the true pact, and he made understand, rather obscurely, that by making August 10, the people had shown their willingness to remain united. The social pact actually exists: let's make the constitution. That was Danton's argument.

Marat says brutally [...]: "The motion of social pact really only tends to dissolve the republic, by leading us to ideas of federal government." (A. Aulard, *The orators of Legislative and Convention*)

## VI - HYPOCRISY - LIE - DOUBLESPEAK

*It is a fact that everything called Jacobin, mountaineer, patriot, etc., is busy every day composing the lies of the next day. (La Harpe)*

*Since their purpose was not to enlighten, but to dominate, not only did they not communicate to the people all their knowledge, but they corrupted by means of errors those they were disposed to reveal to them; they taught them not what they believed to be true, but what was useful to them. (Condorcet)*

*We have known for a long time that revolutionary agitations have distorted the language. (Benjamin Constant)*

*The people, I have already told you, have never been led astray, but they have often been cruelly deceived.*

*See in the midst of the intrigues of royalism and aristocracy how many factious have taken the mask of popularity to turn the revolution to their advantage. (Dubois-Crancé, September 19, 1794)*

“MISINTERPRETATION OF THE WORDS!”

*De facto tyranny in the service of a liberty of principle: this is the outcome of the Revolution. The idea contradicts reality. The meaning of the words is inverted.*

“From the front, the principles: all men equal, all men free, all men freed from all authority.

On the other side of this medal, the facts: the sovereign people are the small people of closed, sorted, purified, reduced societies, the only authentic representative of the people in themselves and of the general will.

And this little people has nothing in common with the great people of France since they oppress them and in the end tyrannize them. In numbers, the small people are a tiny minority. Practice is the opposite of theory. De facto tyranny in the service of a liberty of principle: this is the outcome of the Revolution. The idea contradicts reality. The meaning of the words is inverted.

Moral denominations change their meaning. It is no longer to human morality that one asks for the meaning of the just, it is to the revolutionary idea. Every act, every decree of the sovereign people is called revolutionary and therefore declared legitimate. The fanaticism of the killers, the murderous courts, “justice of the people”; odious vices, “civic virtues.”

Misinterpretation of the words! Should we say lies? No. It is neither a concerted lie nor a machinated conspiracy. A plot would not have this power, nor this scope, nor this duration. They don't lie; they are convinced and trained. They undergo the law of the regime and that law is beyond them.”  
(Augustin Cochin, *Revolution and free thought*)