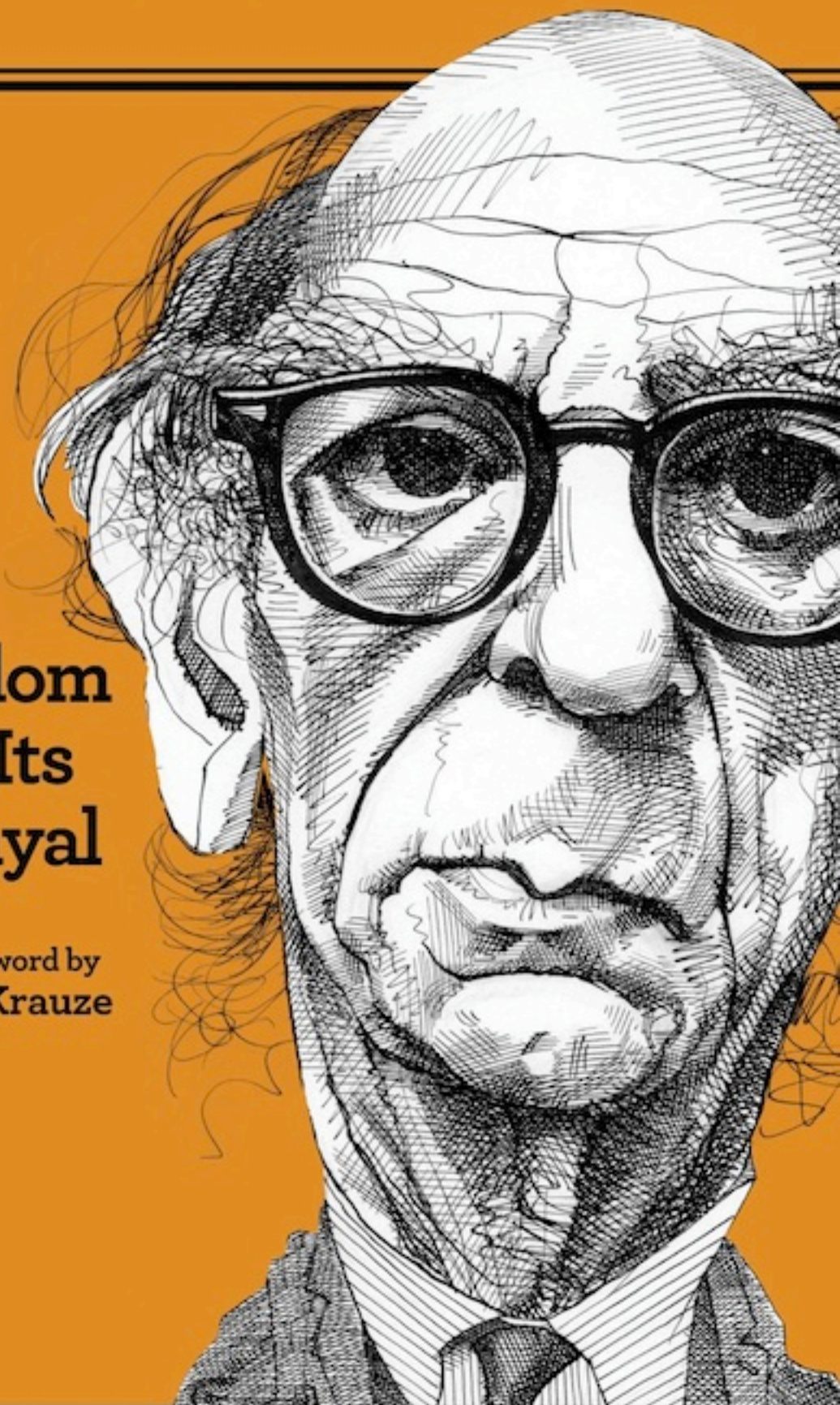


Isaiah Berlin

Freedom and Its Betrayal

With a foreword by
Enrique Krauze



Edited by Henry Hardy

Saint-Simon

COMTE HENRI DE SAINT-SIMON is the greatest of all the prophets of the twentieth century. His writings and his life were confused and even chaotic. He was regarded in his own lifetime as an inspired lunatic. He wrote badly – with flashes of intuition mingled with immense tracts of naive and fantastic imagining. His reputation grew posthumously. The fact that Karl Marx, who borrowed so much from him, relegated him to the ranks of utopian socialists, so called, did a great deal to create the impression that, although a gifted man, he was too naive and too foolish and too monomaniacal to be worth close study. Yet if prophecy is laid along prophecy and the predictions of Karl Marx are compared to those of Saint-Simon, the balance will turn out to be more than favourable to Saint-Simon.

All his life, Saint-Simon was possessed with the idea that he was the great new Messiah who had at last come to save the earth, and he lived at a time when a great many people were under that peculiar impression. There never was a period to compare with the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century for the extraordinary density of megalomaniac Messiahs. Everybody at that period seemed to think that he at last had been gifted with that unique power of penetration and imagination which was destined to solve all human evils. If you read Rousseau, you get the impression that although he thinks he has predecessors it is only he to whom the final light has been vouchsafed. Similarly with Fichte: you feel that he is saying that, although naturally Luther was important and Christ was important, and

the great Greek philosophers were important, yet the final illumination may be obtained only from him – that it is his mission, his dedication, to open to humanity those gates which no doubt have been prised half or a quarter open by previous thinkers, but which it was his privilege to fling open finally and for ever.

You get exactly the same impression when you read Hegel, who felt that he was the summation, the complete synthesis, of all the thought that had gone before, finally, in an immense harmonious composition which at last was the sum of all human wisdom, of all human knowledge, so that, after him, all that his disciples, and indeed humanity, would have to do was simply to work out the results and apply them. Similarly in France, with the so-called utopian socialists, Saint-Simon, Fourier and even their successors Bazard and Leroux, you get the impression that they say: 'Well, of course, there are predecessors; there was Moses, there was Socrates, there was Christ, there was Newton, or Descartes, or other important thinkers, even geniuses. But all these people merely adumbrated, they merely hinted; they merely obtained a corner of the truth. The final revelation is what I now have to say to you.' In spite of that, Saint-Simon remains an important, and indeed marvellous, thinker.

Let me try to enumerate some of the doctrines of which he was as much an originator as anyone. It is very difficult ever to attribute a doctrine or an idea to one person and one person only in so inexact a subject as the humane sciences. Nevertheless, one can without great fear of contradiction say that Saint-Simon is the father of European historicism far more than the Germans; that he is the person who really criticised the unhistorical methods of the eighteenth century and put forward an interpretation of history of his own which was at the root of the great French historical school of the early nineteenth century, and which really provided those weapons in terms of which concrete history came to be written, rather than those much more shadowy ideological schemata which the German idealists provided at the same time.

He is not only the father of historical writing – at any rate in France, and arguably in Western Europe. He is also the father of what I should like to call the technological interpretation of history. This is not quite the same as the materialistic interpretation of history which we associate with the name of Marx, but it does lie at its root, and in certain respects is a much more original and tenable view. Saint-Simon is the first person to define classes in the modern sense, as economic social entities, dependent in a direct way upon the progress of technology – the progress of machinery, the progress of the ways in which people obtain and distribute and consume products. In short, he is the first person to draw serious attention to the economic factors in history. Moreover, wherever there is talk about a planned society, about a planned economy, about technocracy, about the necessity for what the French call *dirigisme*, anti-laissez-faire; wherever there is a New Deal; wherever there is propaganda in favour of some kind of rational organisation of industry and of commerce, in favour of applying science for the benefit of society, and, in general, in favour of everything which we have now come to associate with a planned rather than a laissez-faire State – wherever there is talk of this sort, the ideas which are bandied saw the light originally in the half-published manuscripts of Saint-Simon.

Again, Saint-Simon more than anyone else invented the notion of the government of society by elites, using a double morality. There is of course something of that in Plato and in other previous thinkers, but Saint-Simon is almost the first thinker who comes out and says that it is important for society to be governed not democratically, but by elites of persons who understand the technological needs and the technological possibilities of their time; and that, since the majority of human beings are stupid, and since they mostly obey their emotions, what the enlightened elite must do is to practise one morality themselves and feed their flock of human subjects with another. So the notion of the double morality, of which we have heard so much in, for

example, the hideous Utopias of Aldous Huxley or Orwell, has its origin in the golden, optimistic view of Saint-Simon, who, so far from thinking such a double standard immoral or dangerous, thinks that it is the only way to progress, to advance humanity towards the gate of that paradise which, in common with the thinkers of the eighteenth century, he thinks it best deserves and is on the point of attaining – if only it will listen to his views.

He is one of the most trenchant attackers of such eighteenth-century shibboleths as civil liberty, human rights, natural rights, democracy, laissez-faire, individualism, nationalism. He attacks them because he is the first person to see – as the thinkers of the eighteenth century never did quite clearly see – the incompatibility between the view that wise men ought to direct society and the view that people ought to govern themselves; the incompatibility, in short, between a society which is directed by a group of wise men who alone know towards what goal to move and how to get humanity to move towards it, and the notion that it is better to govern oneself, even than to be governed well. He chooses, of course, in favour of good government. But he is perfectly aware that this means the impossibility of self-government. He is the first person to make that clear, and that is why his attack on all the cherished liberal ideas of the eighteenth century, and indeed of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has not only a modern ring, but something truly original about it. It is as if he were the first person to feel the logical consequences of the beliefs which seem to be held so comfortably together with their opposites in the far shallower and apparently far clearer thought of the great thinkers of the eighteenth century, both in France and in Germany.

Finally, Saint-Simon is the first originator of what might be called secular religions – that is to say, the first person to see that one cannot live by technological wisdom alone; that something must be done to stimulate the feelings, the emotions, the religious instincts of mankind. He is the first person – not cold-bloodedly,

because he did it with a great deal of enthusiasm and warmth, which were natural to him – to invent that substitute for religion, that secularised, humanised, de-theologicalised variant of Christianity of which so many versions began to circulate in the nineteenth century and after – something like the religion of humanity of Kant; something like all the pseudo-religions, all the moralities with a faint religious flavour, which were regarded as a substitute, for rational men, for the blindly dogmatic and anti-scientific theological darkness of the past. That alone gives Saint-Simon a claim to be regarded as one of the most seminal, one of the most original, and one of the most influential thinkers – if not the most influential thinker – of our own day; and like other thinkers whom I have been discussing, he is more relevant to our own century than he was to the nineteenth, as I propose to show.

Let us begin with the notion of historicism, for which, as I say, he was largely responsible. The problem which occupied Saint-Simon and his contemporaries was the failure of the French Revolution. Saint-Simon was born in 1760 and died in 1825, and I ought to say something about his life in order to explain how his views came to be what they were. He was a member of the great family of Saint-Simon, which had produced, about a hundred years before, the famous Duke, the author of the *Mémoires*, and he was very proud of that. He even traced his descent from Charlemagne. Let me quote him on the subject:

I write because I have new ideas. I express them in the form in which they have taken shape in my mind. I leave it to professional writers to polish them. I write as a gentleman, as a descendant of the Counts of Vermandois, and as the literary heir of the Duke of Saint-Simon. All the great things that were ever done and said were done and said by gentlemen: Copernicus, Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Leibniz – they were all members of the gentry. Napoleon too would have written down all his ideas

instead of practising them, had he not happened upon a vacant throne.

This is a fair example of Saint-Simon's bombastic style. It was said that he got his valet to wake him every morning with the words: 'Rise, M. le Comte – you have great things to achieve.' When he was a young man, being of a restless disposition and imaginative temperament and warm heart, he went to America, where he entered into American service and took part in the siege of Yorktown under General Washington. After the American War of Liberation he went down to Mexico, where, being already possessed by ideas of the necessity of reforming society by vast technological schemes, he tried to persuade the Spanish Viceroy of Mexico to pierce the Isthmus of Panama and dig a canal, which he thought would revolutionise trade in those waters. At that time the idea was very premature and nobody took the slightest notice of it. From there he went to Holland, where he tried to stimulate an attack on British colonies; from there to Spain, where he tried to get a canal dug between Madrid and the sea. He was preoccupied with the notion of making nature serve mankind, getting something for nothing – getting a canal dug and then letting the water, nature herself, perform the work which was so laboriously and so wastefully performed by human beings. None of this came about; indeed the Spanish canal, which nearly went through, was overwhelmed by the French Revolution.

In the Revolution, of course, he sympathised most warmly with the reformers. He had been a pupil of the great mathematician and essayist, the editor of the *Encyclopedia*, d'Alembert. He knew some of the *Encyclopedists* of the end of the eighteenth century quite well personally and he was, at that time, set to complete the cycle of the century's enlightened men. He needed to drop the title of Count, and he called himself Monsieur Bonhomme. He took part in the Revolution on the side of the rebels, of the Gironde. Presently the Revolution developed into

the Terror, and Saint-Simon, as an aristocrat, was almost arrested – a warrant went out in his name. Somebody else was arrested by mistake and Saint-Simon, very characteristically, as soon as he learnt this, gave himself up in order to liberate the man who was innocently incarcerated. He miraculously survived the Terror, and when he emerged threw himself with undiminished zeal into the stream of life, his great theory being that he wanted to reform humanity. Something was obviously gravely wrong with the affairs of men if all these admirable ideas conceived by men of such high character and such omniscience, such exquisite wit and such penetrating intelligence, such scrupulous attention to the truth, nevertheless ended in the slaughter of the guillotine.

But in order to reform mankind one must know, one must learn, one must study all the sciences and all the arts; and more than that, one must quaff the cup of experience, one must understand the true nature of virtue and of vice, and in order to do that one must have as many and as varied experiences as possible. One must touch life at as many points as possible. In short, one must live. In order to do this one must have money. But Saint-Simon's estate had been sequestered by the Revolution. Consequently, he threw himself into financial speculation, took part in the sales of the confiscated estates of the nobility, made an enormous fortune, was cheated out of it by his German partner Baron Redern, and ended as he had begun in the Revolution – penniless.

By this time he had lived. He had given enormous dinner parties to which he invited those he regarded as the most interesting men of the time – the physicists, the chemists, the physiologists, the mathematicians – from all of whom he hoped to learn about the secrets of their craft. Some mathematics he already knew through d'Alembert. He complained in later life that these scientists consumed his food and talked about everything under the sun except the sciences about which he wished to question them. Nevertheless he did pick up, here and there, fragments of this and that, and became a typical imaginative autodidact. His

head was a perpetual buzz of the most extraordinary confusion and chaos. In his writings the ideas of the greatest depth and brilliance alternate with absolute nonsense.

You begin, for example, reading an early treatise about the freedom of the seas, about which he had political theories, and suddenly, without knowing where you are, you find that you are in the midst of a disquisition on gravitation, and not just on gravitation in Newton's sense, but a quite mystical gravitation which affects the intellectual as well as the physical sphere. You think that you are reading about historical facts of the Middle Ages and you are suddenly told that humanity is like a single man – an idea already found in Pascal – and then that the age of mankind today is about forty – between thirty-five and forty-five – and in another place that the age of the French people is about twenty-one. You read pages of the greatest interest about his views on the development of mankind in the classical age and into the Christian Middle Ages, and suddenly you are told that Homer, who invented polytheism, also invented democracy, because there was democracy on Olympus, and that is how there came to be democracy on earth.

But let us leave out all the fantastic, naive and ludicrous aspects of Saint-Simon. His hypothesis about why the French Revolution had failed was perhaps the most original by then put forward. Everyone had explained the disaster in accordance with his own views. Why did the Revolution fail? The liberals said, because of the Terror, in other words, because the Revolutionaries were not liberal enough – did not respect human rights sufficiently. The orthodox and religious and conservatives said, because men had broken away from tradition, or from the word of God, and the spirit of God was sent to visit those who had preferred their own unaided human reason to the divine faith. The socialist fanatics – people like Babeuf – said, because the Revolution had not gone far enough, because equal distribution of property ought to have occurred, because, in short, though

there may have been liberty, that liberty was nothing without economic equality. Many other explanations were also put forward.

Saint-Simon's explanation in a sense resembled Hegel's explanation, but was infinitely more concrete, infinitely more to do with actual living human beings and real history as opposed to the vast shadowy metaphysical ideas, like the shadows of a great Gothic cathedral, in which Hegel seemed permanently to dwell. Saint-Simon said this was because he was not understood, and in his early writings he begins to put forward his own view of what history is. He is really the father of the quasi-materialist explanation, as I said before. For him, history is a story of living men trying to develop their faculties as richly and many-sidedly as possible. In order to do this, they exploit nature; in order to exploit nature, they have to have tools or weapons. Consequently their imagination, their inventiveness, everything that they have with which to think and to will, is directed upon the discovery of the optimum weapons for the subjugation of nature and the procuring to themselves of what will satisfy their desires, their inclinations and what he likes to call their interests.

The very invention of weapons in this way creates what is called technological advance, and the technological advance itself creates classes. It creates classes because the people who have the weapons can dominate those who have not. This very simple, basic idea Marx borrowed from Saint-Simon, if not totally, then certainly more than from anyone else. Once you have a class association on the part of the able, the gifted, the superior, who have invented tools and weapons by which they can procure more, by which they can extract more from nature than others, the others gradually find themselves dominated by this superior elite. They are not dominated for long, because ultimately they become rebellious, they become discontented, they think that they too, if only they allowed their imaginations and their reasons to work, can invent something with which they can

not only get more from nature than they are getting, but perhaps overthrow the elite. The elite gradually, as with all elites, becomes obsolete, their ideas become ossified, they do not realise that invention and discovery are going on underneath them, among the lower class; and gradually, because they cling for too long to weapons of production (if one can speak in such terms), or anyhow to economic forms of life which are no longer suitable to the new weapons, to the new technological advances which the recalcitrant, indignant, active, imaginative, ambitious slaves are in the meanwhile perfecting, they are duly overthrown by this lower class, which itself then comes to power, only gradually to be ousted and made obsolete by the persons whom they exploit, whom they use.

In a way this looks exactly like the Marxist, materialist view of history, but Saint-Simon does not say what Marx says, namely, that all ideas are dominated by the conditions of distribution or production, by economic factors. He does think ideas are born only at the time when they satisfy an interest. In that sense people make inventions and discoveries, and think thoughts, and invent mathematics or poetry or whatever it may be, only in response to the general conditions of their time – only when this kind of thing satisfies their particular impulses, which are themselves conditioned to some degree by the economic environment and by the way in which people live. But he thinks that these ideas have a vast independent influence far greater than Marxists accord them, and therefore he thinks that inventions are as much the products of ideas, and in particular that classes are as much the products of ideas, as they are of technological evolution as such.

For example, he thinks that slavery is an idea which was born at a certain period when people realised they would have much more leisure if they could make slaves do their work; similarly, the abolition of slavery was not so much the result of the pressure of economic circumstances, because it had become uneconomic

to use slaves, which is the typical Marxist interpretation of this event, but because of the rise of Christianity. Christianity itself may have something to do with the economic world in which it was born; nevertheless it was Christian ideas – which were primarily religious, spiritual, ethical – that actually abolished slavery, when it need not have been abolished but for the birth of these ideas. Hence Saint-Simon's tremendous emphasis on the role of genius in history, on the fact that unless there are men of genius and unless they are given an opportunity of functioning, unless, in short, the great ideas of great men who perceive and understand the circumstances of their own time with a deeper insight and greater imagination are given scope, progress will be retarded. Progress is by no means automatic, by no means depends on some kind of inevitable machinery of the clash of classes or technological advance.

From this he developed the notion that history must be understood as a kind of evolution of mankind in the satisfaction of its various needs, and for that reason where the needs are different the satisfaction will be different. Therefore the dogmatic judgments which the eighteenth century was so fond of passing upon the Middle Ages or upon earlier periods as periods of darkness, ignorance, prejudice, superstition, ages of emptiness, and indeed contemptible and detestable in comparison with the dawning light of the rationalism of the eighteenth century – that was a profoundly unhistorical and totally untenable view.

Everything must be judged in its proper context. This idea, so familiar to us now, so simple, was not at all familiar to the people of the beginning of the nineteenth century. Everything must be judged in its context: Saint-Simon makes this idea much clearer than Herder. The Middle Ages, which we call dark, were not dark to themselves. The Middle Ages were a period when human needs were very different from ours, and an age ought to be approved of or disapproved of, praised or blamed, thought great or small, progressive or reactionary, in accordance with

whether it satisfied the needs of its time, not the needs of some later period completely alien to its own time. Saint-Simon says: We always hear about this idea of progress, but what are we told about what progress is? What is this inevitable progress by which the eighteenth century is better than the seventeenth, and the seventeenth better than the sixteenth, and the sixteenth better than all the preceding ages? We are told that it is because men learn from nature, and because men apply reason, and something about more being done for the common good – but these, he says, are very vague terms; we do not know what people mean by reason, what they mean by nature. Let me give you some criteria for progress, he says, which will be concrete and which we may be able to use in writing history properly. He is as good as his word. He gives four criteria of progress, and very interesting they are.

The first is this: The progressive society is that which provides the maximum means of satisfying the greatest number of needs of the human beings who compose it. Anything is progressive which does this, which satisfies the maximum number of needs – that is the central idea of Saint-Simon from the beginning to the end. Human beings have certain needs – not necessarily for happiness, not necessarily for wisdom, for knowledge, for self-sacrifice or whatever it may be – and what they want is to satisfy them. These needs should be indulged, without asking why, and anything which gives a rich and many-sided development to these needs, which assists the greatest growth of personality in as many directions as is possible, that is progress or progressive.

The second criterion is this: Anything that is progressive will give the opportunity to the best to reach the top. The best, for him, are the most gifted, the most imaginative, the cleverest, the most profound, the most energetic, the most active, those who want the full flavour of life. For Saint-Simon there are very few classes of men: those who enhance life and those who are against it, those who want to get things done and want to provide things for people – who want a thing to happen, who want to satisfy

needs – and those who are in favour of lowering the tone, making things quieter, allowing things to sink, who are against all the bustle, who want things, on the whole, to descend, decline and ultimately approach the condition of complete nullity.

The third criterion of progress is the provision of the maximum unity and strength for the purpose of a rebellion or an invasion; and the fourth criterion is conduciveness to invention and discovery and civilisation. For example, leisure conduces to these, and that is why slavery was seen, in his own time, as a progressive institution – or the invention of writing, or whatever it may be.

These are concrete criteria and, Saint-Simon says, if you judge history in terms of these the picture changes very deeply from that which has been presented to us by the dogmatists of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The dark ages cease to be dark if you think of what, for example, Pope Gregory VII or St Louis did in their day. These men, after all, built roads, they drained marshes. They built hospitals, they taught vast numbers of men to read and to write. Above all, they preserved the unity of Europe, they held back the invaders of the East, they civilised sixty million people, and sixty million people lived in a unitary manner, under roughly the same regime, and were able to develop harmoniously together. This is by no means a dark age; this is an age far less broken, far less turbid, far less frustrated for those who lived in it than the ages which followed. An age is progressive in which the largest number of people can do as much of what they want at that particular moment as is possible for them. The so-called dark ages were a period of the richest possible development of mankind at that time and in that condition of technological advance.

Of course, all these things pass, these institutions become obsolete, because they are superseded. New inventions occur, new discoveries are made, new men of genius arrive who automatically, by stirring people's minds, create new needs. The old

institutions cannot satisfy the new needs, or become vested interests; they press against those needs, they try to repress them, restrain them, stop them, and they become a drag upon progress. Ultimately they become obsolescent, and somebody arises who destroys them, throws them over. That is a revolution. A revolution always means that somebody or other must arise for the purpose of clearing out what has become a completely antiquated, no longer useful institution which has outlived any possible good which it might conceivably once have done. Therefore history for Saint-Simon is a kind of rhythm of what his disciples called organic and critical periods.

Organic periods are periods when humanity is unified, when it develops harmoniously, when the people who are in charge of it on the whole foster progress – progress in the sense of providing the maximum number of people with the maximum of opportunities for satisfying the maximum number of their needs, whatever they are. Critical periods are periods when these arrangements are becoming obsolescent, when the institutions themselves become obstacles to progress, when human beings feel that what they want is different from that which they are getting, when there is a new spirit which is about to sunder the old bottles in which it is still imprisoned – when, for example, as Saint-Simon thought of his own day, we have an industrial age which is still ludicrously and artificially confined within obsolete feudal frameworks.

The critical age is an age when destruction predominates over construction. It is something inferior in Saint-Simon's eyes, but nevertheless it is inevitable and necessary. For example, in his discussion of the eighteenth century and what made the French Revolution he says the French Revolution was really made by lawyers and metaphysicians. These are fundamentally destroyers. What do lawyers do? Lawyers employ such concepts as absolute rights, natural rights and liberty, and liberty is always a negative concept. The invocation of liberty means that somebody is

trying to take something away from you which you then try to invent some reason for keeping. In short, a situation has arisen in which humanity, or the greater part of it, does not have enough to live by, and you feel hemmed in, you feel repressed. So you engage professionals called lawyers, or professionals called metaphysicians, for the purpose of doing something which you cannot do yourself, namely somehow or other to extract out of the ruling class something which you are too weak to force them to deliver by sheer violence on your own part. So lawyers are people who are engaged in inventing good and bad reasons for circumventing the old, worn-out machinery of government, the old obsolete tradition which is stifling vast sections of the population; and metaphysicians are people, particularly in the eighteenth century, who perform the very necessary task of undermining the old religions.

Christianity, says Saint-Simon, was a great thing in its own day, as was Judaism, but it must develop, it must advance. If it remains static, it will burst, it will be overthrown. That is why, of all the great religious reformers, he dislikes Luther the most. Luther to him is a man too riveted to his particular faith, which was no doubt necessary for the purpose of overthrowing Catholicism, which Saint-Simon thought was becoming somewhat old-fashioned, obsolete, oppressive in Luther's day. For that Luther substituted devotion to the Bible, a single book. No doubt the Bible was all very well for a semi-nomadic Jewish tribe living in a small country in the eastern Mediterranean, but it cannot cope with the development of nations. Flexibility is wanted, perpetual change, perpetual advance. The Roman Church, whatever may be said against it, has a flexible element. No doubt it is reactionary in some ways, repressive and oppressive in others, but by means of endless legal fictions, by asserting that the source of authority is not an unalterable printed text but an altering human institution, which after all consists of generations of men, each of which is a little different from those of the past, it made itself

sufficiently flexible to be able to guide humanity through the Middle Ages with immense success. This is precisely what Luther put an end to. He broke the European unity, he tied religion to something unaltering, he asserted private, absolute principles. If there is anything which Saint-Simon detests it is the notion of absolute principle – nothing is stable, nothing is absolute, everything evolves, everything responds to the movement of the times, to the evolution of humanity, to the new inventions, new discoveries, new minds, new souls, new hearts which it is gradually producing. Consequently he is on the whole pro-Catholic and anti-Protestant; but towards the end he is not an orthodox Christian at all.

As for the French Revolution, what was that? That was simply a revolution which occurred at the end of a period of long elaboration. The development of industry and commerce, and economic changes of a very violent and upsetting kind, had been occurring since at any rate the beginning of the seventeenth century. Too little notice had been taken of this by those whose business it was to govern mankind. Duly, as a result of mismanagement on the part of people who lived in the traditional past and did not understand that a new industrial age was dawning or that the middle classes were now the persons with the real power (and Saint-Simon is nowhere more eloquent or more penetrating than when he is discussing what he means by real power, and the people who really win it), the French government, like those of other nations, did not proceed in accordance with these changes, did not shift their arrangements accordingly. Consequently the Treasury had gone bankrupt when they called upon the State to assist them. The Third Estate, in whose hands by this time the real power was, though it did not know it, suddenly realised that it did not need to compromise. It had the power: all it had to do was to use it. Why should they pay for what they could take? Why should they use persuasion when they could use force? And the Revolution occurred.

In short, Saint-Simon interprets the Revolution as the rising of the middle class to class-consciousness, consciousness of its real place and the fact that it could satisfy its demands by simply blowing away the few simple rules, the completely hollowed-out earlier classes – the clergy and the aristocracy and the army – which had been sitting on their shoulders, suppressing them, with no *raison d'être* that applied in the new world. And the lawyers, what part had they played? They supplied arguments, slogans to the new bourgeoisie; but any slogans become obsolete in time, and their slogans – ‘All Power for the People’, ‘Human Liberty’ and so forth – were just as hollow as the slogans of the reactionaries whom they opposed. No doubt they performed a very necessary task, the task of termites, in boring under the old building, which had to collapse. They are the scavengers, the gravediggers, who are expected to remove the semi-ruined old regime, but they are not going to build a new citadel – that will need creative persons, constructive abilities, not people trained in circumventing, in pettifogging, in writing pamphlets under conditions of censorship in which you say one thing and mean another, not sly, cunning, ultimately small-minded lawyers with minds not attuned to the big constructive task of the future. But since the lawyers were the only people the lower classes trusted, because it was they who wrote the revolutionary pamphlets and put them in power, the revolution was lost. The revolution ought to have been conducted by the people who really were the new men, by the great new merchants, the great new captains of industry, the great new bankers, the people who belonged to the modern world.

Here one of Saint-Simon's most original, penetrating and creative ideas comes in. In every age there is a distribution of power. There are the people who matter and the people who do not. There are the people who represent what is coming, the new, and the people who represent what is dying away, the old. In the Middle Ages feudal lords represented the principle

of progress because they defended the peasants, who were then the producers of the goods that were needed by humanity. They protected them against interruption of their work, and in general did their best to enhance that particular order. Soldiers were needed by the order too, and priests. Christianity in its day was an immense progressive force, and so long as it was a progressive force the priests who taught it were progressive men, people who taught something more adjusted to the needs of their time than the Roman religion or the Greek religion or the Jewish religion would have been. But they became obsolete, they have given way to quite a different set of men.

Today it is not priests, it is not soldiers, it is not feudal lords who matter, it is quite a different class of men: scientists, industrialists, bankers, experts – people, ultimately, who represent science and industry. Science and industry have come to stay, but the only way in which we can organise a world in which human beings can satisfy their wishes is by applying science in the most productive manner, that is to say in the manner that will develop the great new disciplines which are at last rising in the world – commerce, industry, and above all credit banking.

Saint-Simon is extraordinarily obsessed by the importance of bankers, because he is so committed to the game of playing historical analogies, so deeply affected by the notion of history, by the notion of development and evolution, by the fact that nothing stands still and that everything in one age may correspond to something (which is never identical) in any other age. He often asks who corresponds in his own age to the people who were responsible for unity and centralisation in the Middle Ages, say, or in the Roman Empire. The Romans were great because they reigned over almost all mankind and their laws were universal. The Middle Ages were great because the Church disciplined the whole world, civilised it, and therefore prevented strife, prevented provincialism, prevented the waste which is for Saint-Simon the worst of all crimes – the flooding away, the complete

destruction of human resources in isolated, private, individual directions. Who is like that now? Banks, he says: credit is the great octopus, the great universal force which holds everybody together, and people who slight it, people who defy it, people who think they can do without it are destroyed by it. The greatest power in the world is the interconnection of international finance. But far from attacking it, far from being against it as an oppressive system which sucks the blood out of the people (as for example Cobbett or even Sismondi were apt to do at about that time), he welcomed it as a great riveting, centralising, connecting force, because unity to him is everything.

The only way in which humanity can develop is by the rational concentration of its resources, so that every single object which is possessed, every single art, every single gift, every single aspiration which people have, shall not be wasted but used in the best way, directed to its best possible use. Anything which unifies is better than anything which disintegrates. It is bad enough to have to obey stupid rulers, but chaos is worse still, and Saint-Simon, like Hobbes after the English revolution in the seventeenth century, is frightened above all of meaningless bloodshed, violence, mobs sweeping through the streets, maddened Jacobins, their heads filled with empty slogans provided by rhetorical lawyers who do not understand the time in which they live – hence his worship of industrialists, bankers, men of business, and his conception of society as an enormous business establishment, something like ICI¹ or General Motors. The State for him is already obsolescent, though needed at one time for the protection of individuals against the power of the encroaching Church. Then he suddenly observes that of course the clergy purported to be scientists; but now that the clergy have been discredited there is no further need for protection against them, and therefore the useful, the creative part of the State, which made possible economic and social and

¹ [Imperial Chemical Industries (1926–2008).]

spiritual development for human beings without the dead hand of the no longer living Church, is gone, and the State itself has become dead, oppressive and unnecessary. Therefore (he says very firmly) what we need is simply a State which has become a kind of industrial enterprise of which we are all members, a kind of enormous limited liability company – or unlimited liability, perhaps, precisely as envisaged by Burke, who was also historically minded. Saint-Simon demands not merely what Burke calls ‘a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue’, although he believes in that, of course, passionately, but also a partnership in the most literal sense (in the sense in which Burke’s State was decidedly not meant as a partnership), a partnership in trade, in calico – exactly what Burke denied – a partnership in commerce, in industry, in the sale of all that humans need, and in knowledge, without which men cannot get anything done at all.

What are the purposes of society? Well, says Saint-Simon, we are told it is the common good, but that is very vague. The purpose of society is self-development, the purpose of society is ‘the best application, in order to satisfy human needs, of knowledge acquired by the sciences, in the arts and crafts, the dissemination of such knowledge, and the development and maximum accumulation of its fruits, that is, in the most useful combination of all separate activities, in the sphere of the sciences, the arts and crafts’. Enough homage to Alexanders, he says: long live the Archimedeses. Enough homage, in other words, to soldiers, priests and kings. These persons are as dead and obsolete as astrologers and athletes. What we need are scientists and industrialists, because theirs is the realm where the knowledge and the needs of today are to be found. These are the people who get things done. These are the people under whose regime we do in fact live, although we do not know it and they do not know it. They themselves stupidly obey feudal relics, which they do not realise they could flick off with their little finger. But why should

we suffer this to happen? The whole of history is the tale of the sordid exploitation of human beings by human beings, which is a most dreadful waste. Why should human beings waste their energies on exploiting other human beings, when they might be exploiting nature? When one human being oppresses another, too much energy is lost, both by the oppressor and by the oppressed, who resists. Let the oppressor cease to oppress; let the resister cease to resist; let them both throw themselves into the sacred task of exploiting the wealth of mankind – nature – building, creating, making a material culture. Hence all those paeans of Saint-Simon's to production, to organisation.

As for rights, 'right' is an empty sound: there are only interests. Interests are that which humanity happens to want at any given moment. It is the business of producers to give it to them. Humanity divides into two vast classes, the idle and the industrious, the *oisifs* and the *producteurs*, he calls them sometimes – the indolent and the workers. By 'workers' he does not seem to mean manual workers or the proletariat; he means anybody who works, including managers, captains of industry, bankers, industrialists.

Above all, we must have professionals and not amateurs. Poverty is always due to incompetence, and we must replace the appalling waste of competition by concerted planning: what we want is a centralised industrial plan for society. We want association in place of competition, we want labour, which must be compulsory if necessary, because that is the end of man, and we want to take every opportunity for the maximum advance of research – and of the arts too, because unless the human imagination is kindled, by artists, by people who work upon the emotions, nothing will occur at all. The arts have their part to play also in this vast human advance, which will consist of the harnessing and conditioning of human emotions, human passions, human energies, towards that which the present age makes so attainable, namely a kind of vast self-effecting industrial system in which everybody will have enough, nobody will be miserable,

and all human ills will disappear. In order to conduct the system, we must have elites, because the people have certainly been too busy to create it – here he talks like an eighteenth-century Encyclopedist – and to run it themselves.

Of whom shall these elites consist? Saint-Simon's view changed through his long life. First he thinks it ought to be scientists, then he alters his view and thinks it ought to be bankers and industrialists. In early life he has mysterious bodies called the Councils of Newton – these are a kind of international co-operative or scientific academy, administered by public subscription and a mysterious system of voting, in which artists and industrialists and mathematicians combine in some inscrutable manner. By the end he has a parliament consisting of three parts. First of all there is the Chamber of Invention, which is populated by engineers and artists – painters, poets and so forth – men who produce, men with ideas, men who, whether in the arts or the sciences, are the first to have flashes of genius. The second chamber sifts and checks: it consists of mathematicians, physicists, physiologists and the like. The final chamber consists of executives – industrialists, bankers, people who really know how to get things done because they understand the nature of the time in which they live and because the sheer struggle for survival, the sheer necessity of competition, has taught them what can be done, and what cannot.

He has various other plans which always come to the same thing – we must produce. We must produce, we must invent. Creativity is the great cry. Every man must realise himself in as many directions as possible. That great medieval notion according to which the flesh was martyred and the human ideal consisted in some kind of self-subjugation, in some kind of self-refusal, in escaping to some inner life from temptations of the flesh and the devils of the outer world – let that be buried for ever. The Christian doctrine that rewards shall be laid up for us in another world, while here the flesh is subordinate to the spirit,

must be abolished; harmony between the flesh and the spirit must be introduced. The spirit cannot work without a great material development; no material development can occur without a great spiritual awakening, without the ideas of genius after genius, without general human advance in all possible directions. It is a picture rather like Tintoretto's notion of Paradise – a vast happy conglomeration of humanity holding hands, circling in an endless dance of gaiety and joy in which all their faculties, all their desires, all their inclinations are richly – over-richly – satisfied in the great cornucopias which only the industrialists and the bankers, now no longer oppressed by ancient institutions and ludicrous laws which hem them in, can produce.

About the elite he sounds a very modern note, when he says that they must practise two moralities. What was so wonderful about the priests of Egypt, for example, who were a very early and original elite, was that they believed one thing and fed the population with another. That is good, that is exactly how things should be conducted, because the people cannot be expected to face the truth at once, but must be gradually educated. Consequently we must have a small body of industrialists and bankers and artists who gradually wean mankind, who gradually condition them to take their proper part in the industrial order. That is a familiar kind of neo-feudalism. The great phrase, indeed, on which Communism is built – 'From everyone according to his capacity [...]' – comes from Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonians. Again, when Stalin said that artists – novelists, for example – are 'engineers of human souls', that their business is applied, not pure, that the end of art is not itself, but the moulding and the conditioning of human beings – that is a Saint-Simonian idea. Everybody, then, must be an engineer, whether of unanimated stuff or of human souls. But if this is to be done we cannot have a lot of outworn unintelligible metaphysical beliefs obstructing us. Therefore Saint-Simon devised anti-democracy, for example, because nothing could be achieved by democracy; no great plan can

be achieved except by intelligent men who understand the time in which they live, who have power concentrated in their hands and who do things as experts, because only experts can get things done. Only experts ever have got anything done, and experts will never be overthrown, as by the French Revolution, whose result was bloodshed, chaos and terrible human retrogression.

Similarly, liberty is a ludicrous slogan. Liberty is always disorganising; liberty is always something negative, against oppression from outside. But in an advanced regime where everything is progressive there is no oppression, there is nothing to resist, there is no need to use a battering ram. Liberty is always a kind of dynamite which will blow things up, but in a constructive era, in a creative era as against a destructive one, dynamite is not to be used – not for that kind of purpose at any rate. Hence all his cries that individual liberty is dangerous and must be suppressed.

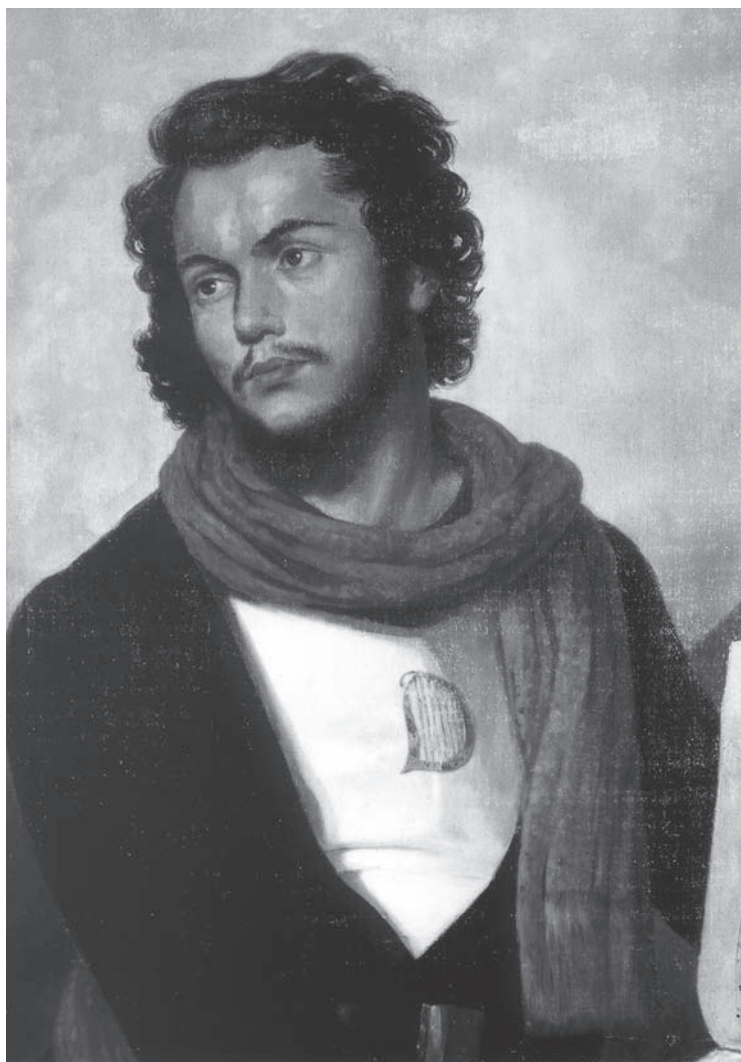
He deals similarly with *laissez-faire*. At one period he believed in *laissez-faire*, being a disciple of the man whom he calls ‘the divine Smith’; but *laissez-faire*, again, leads to absolute chaos; it is quite impossible to get anything done unless we plan things, direct things from the centre. Consequently we have the terrifying notion of the great neo-feudal hierarchy, with bankers at the top, industrialists somewhat below them, engineers and technicians below them, then artists and painters and writers. Every imaginative human being who has something to offer is somewhere in this hierarchy, this great new feudal regime in which everything is arranged in a rigid order. This is the way in which advance can be achieved, this is the way in which an army marches, and we are an army, the whole of history is an army, for Saint-Simon – he more or less calls it that.

Similarly, he is violently against equality, which he regards as an idiotic cry on the part of the oppressed masses, which should have nothing to do with a world ordered by rational government. We must have the administration, not of persons, but of things. The administration of things means leading us towards a proper

goal, which is the satisfaction of wishes by the best – most efficient – methods possible. If that is to be the human goal, then the great cry is not equality, not liberty, but fraternity – for all men certainly are brothers.

This brings us to the last phase of Saint-Simon's thought, his *nouveau christianisme* – his new Christianity. He felt towards the end of his life that a cult was needed, that something must be done, because we do not know by technology alone; that the beliefs of men must be fixed upon something. He says: Consider the age of Cicero; the Romans' religion was dying, although the temples were still visited, and Cicero believed in preserving the outer husk of the Roman religion, although he himself no longer believed in its inner essence. This cannot be done. There are plenty of people now who do not believe in the God of Christianity or in Christ or in any of the *dogmata*, but who have a good deal of use for the Church because they think it curbs the evil instincts of men. But it is no use when the belief is worn away, the Church will collapse. The shell cannot continue without the yolk. We must therefore create a new religion, a new faith which will respond to the needs of the time. The golden age is before us: it is a blind tradition which places it behind us; we are marching towards it with rapid step. Our children will arrive there; it is for us, he says, to trace the path.

How are we to trace the path? He is not very clear about that. Above all, by association and by love. If human beings understand each others' needs, identify themselves with them, then their creative imaginations will pour themselves out in the direction of the greatest and most harmonious production of those goods which will go to everyone according to his need. Enfantin, the leader of Saint-Simon's sect after he died, said: 'You are an aspect of me, and I am an aspect of you.' Indeed when the sect – for it became a religious sect – went to live in the outskirts of Paris, a special tunic was designed which could be buckled on only from behind, so that every member of the little



Félicien David in Saint-Simonian Attire by Raymond Bonheur

Saint-Simonian sect was dependent upon someone else. This was a symbol of co-operation rather than competition, and there is an exquisite picture by Raymond Bonheur of the composer Félicien David wearing one of these Saint-Simonian tunics with a great 'D' embroidered in front, incorporating strings like those of a harp. Saint-Simonians were in love with medieval pageantry, and wanted to reconstitute the medieval hierarchy in industrial terms: this is really what is original in Saint-Simonism.

It is quite clear in what way Saint-Simonism influences us whenever there is an attempt to construct a coherent society by applying science to the solution of human problems – not as in the eighteenth century, when it is a question of the solution of perennial problems which are always the same, and in terms of principles which are always the same, which never alter, because they are engraved in the human heart, or because they are discovered in nature or by metaphysical insight or by whatever means; but in terms of values which themselves evolve with the times. We ask which invention affects which other invention, which human beings affect which other human beings, and the notion that one must make human society coherent, that one must create some kind of planned single entity out of it, and not allow human beings to freewheel, not allow them to do what they want to do simply because they want to do it, because this might interfere with a state of affairs in which many more of their faculties might be realised, if only they knew – that is the Saint-Simonian idea.

It takes mild and humane forms in the case of, for example, the American New Deal, or the post-war socialist State in England. It takes violent, ruthless, brutal, fanatical forms in the case of directly planned Fascist and Communist societies. In their case the notion of a new secular religion which should be an opiate for the masses, urging them on towards an idea which they may not intellectually be able to understand, has been taken over from Saint-Simon also. So too has the conflation of the

notion that we are part of the historical stream going forward – and therefore there are no absolute ideals, and any ideal is to be estimated in terms of its own perfection, the degree to which it satisfies present needs, not the needs of some past or future age – with the notion that history is a history of altering technology, because technology represents the human spirit at its most active, and humanity is to be divided into those who work and those who do nothing, the drones and the producers, the active and the passive, the doers and the done-to.

At the heart of the whole conception is science, or scientism – the belief that unless things are done under a rigorous discipline by people who alone understand the material of which the world is composed, human and non-human, chaos and frustration are the result. This can be achieved only by the elite. The elite cannot but practise a double morality – one for themselves, one for others. Liberty, democracy, laissez-faire individualism, feudalism – all these metaphysical notions, slogans, words which do not mean very much, must go in order to make room for something clearer, bolder, newer: big business, State capitalism, scientific organisation, an organisation of world peace, a world parliament, a world federation. All this is Saint-Simonian.

Saint-Simon did not believe in revolutions, because he had seen one. He believed in powers of persuasion. But revolution need not be the means. The one thing that he cared about most deeply was that humanity itself should at last obtain the satisfaction of its wishes. On his death-bed he said to his disciples, ‘There is one thing I wish to say to you: love each other and help one another. My whole life can be summed up in one single thought – to assure all men the freest development of their faculties.’ And ‘The party of the workers shall be built [by “workers” he meant those who were productive] – the future is with us.’ It was, but perhaps not quite in the sense in which Saint-Simon, who was the most liberal, generous, optimistic and ultimately naive man, believed.

In all this talk about fraternity and love and association and organisation with which the dying Saint-Simon adjures his friends and humanity in general, what about liberty? What about liberty, not perhaps in the empty sense in which he says the eighteenth-century lawyers used it, as a battering-ram against the survival of feudalism, but real liberty, civil liberty, the liberty of human beings to do what they wish within a limited sphere? On this point Saint-Simon says something which strikes a chillier note than anything else he said, for he really was against it. He did not care who put forward his ideas, or how oppressively they were put forward, whether by Napoleon or the Holy Alliance or King Louis XVIII, to all of whom he appeals indifferently. He says that the discussions about liberty which so greatly agitate the middle classes have become a matter of indifference to the lower classes, since we know all too well that in the current state of civilisation the arbitrary use of power does not affect them very much. The small men, the lower classes, the largest and poorest class of mankind, without which no reconstruction of humanity can occur – these people do not care about liberty; they are bored by justice, as the Russian left-wing socialist thinker Chernyshevsky was to say later in the century. What the people want is not parliament, liberty and rights. These are the cravings of the bourgeoisie. What they want is boots, and this cry for bread, boots and not a lot of liberty and liberal slogans then becomes the staple refrain of all the hard-boiled left-wing parties up to Lenin and Stalin. This somewhat sinister note may also be traced to the gentle, humanitarian, noble Saint-Simon.