

NOTE ON THE ABOLITION OF ALL POLITICAL PARTIES

Simone Weil

Translated by Laura Mitterrand

The word "party" is used here in the sense it holds on the European continent. The same term in Anglo-Saxon countries refers to an entirely different reality. It is rooted in the English tradition and cannot be transplanted elsewhere. A century and a half of experience clearly demonstrates this. In Anglo-Saxon parties, there is an element of play or sport, which can only emerge from an institution of aristocratic origin. By contrast, everything is serious in an institution that is plebeian at its inception.

The idea of a party was absent from the French political framework at the time of the 1789 Revolution, except as an evil to be avoided. However, the *Club des Jacobins* did exist. Initially, it was solely a place for open discussion. Its transformation was by no means an inevitable demise. It was only under the pressure of war and the guillotine that it eventually turned into a totalitarian party.

The factional struggles during the Terror were governed by the notion so aptly expressed by Tomsy: "One party in power and all the others in prison." Thus, on the European continent, totalitarianism is the original sin of all political parties.

Political parties were established in European public life as a legacy of the Terror, on the one hand, and the influence of the British example, on the other. Their mere existence is no justification for their preservation. The only legitimate reason for preserving anything is its goodness, and the evils of political parties are all too obvious. The issue to consider is whether there is enough good in them to outweigh their evils to make their existence desirable.

It is however much more pertinent to ask: Is there the slightest bit of good in them? Or are they not pure evil, or close to it?

If they are evil, it is certain that, in both fact and practice, they can produce nothing but evil. This is a matter of principle. "A good tree can never bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear beautiful fruit."

First, one must establish the criterion for goodness.

Goodness can only be measured by truth and justice, and, secondly, by public utility.

Democracy and the power of the majority is not a good in itself. It is a means to an end, rightly or wrongly, considered effective. For example, if the Weimar Republic, instead of Hitler, had decided through the most rigorous parliamentary and legal means to place Jews in concentration camps and torture them to death, the tortures would not have been an atom more legitimate than Nazi policies now. Such a thing is by no means inconceivable.

Only what is just can be legitimate. In no circumstance can crimes and lies be legitimate.

Our republican ideal is entirely rooted in Rousseau's notion of general will. However, the meaning of this notion was almost immediately lost because it is complex and demands a high level of attention. Apart from some of its chapters, few books are as beautiful, powerful, lucid, and clear as *The Social Contract*. It is said that few books have had as much influence. Yet everything has happened—and continues to happen—as if it had never been read.

Rousseau began with two self-evident truths. First, reason discerns and chooses what is just and innocently useful, whereas every crime is driven by passion. Second, reason is identical in all people, whereas their passions most often differ. Consequently, if each person reflects individually on a general issue and expresses an opinion, and if these opinions are then compared, they will likely coincide in their just and reasonable aspects while differing in their injustices and errors.

It is based on this reasoning that we accept universal consensus as an indicator of truth.

Truth is one. Justice is one. Errors and injustices are infinitely varied. Thus, all men converge on what is just and true, whereas lies and crimes make them endlessly diverge. Since unity is a material force, it offers hope that truth and justice can be made materially stronger than crime and error.

To achieve this, an appropriate mechanism is necessary. If democracy constitutes such a mechanism, it is good. Otherwise, it is not.

In Rousseau's view, the unjust will of a whole nation was in no way superior to the unjust will of one person — and he was right. However, Rousseau also believed that the general will of an entire people is, more often than not, aligned with justice, because individual passions tend to neutralize and compensate one another. This was the sole reason he preferred the will of the people over that of the individual.

Similarly, a body of water, although made up of particles constantly moving and colliding, remains in perfect balance and stillness. It reflects the images of objects with flawless accuracy. It precisely indicates the horizontal plane. It reveals the density of submerged objects without error.

If individuals, who are driven by their passions toward crime and falsehood, can still collectively form a truthful and just people, then it is good for the people to be sovereign. A democratic constitution is good if it first enables the people to reach this state of balance, only then can the will of the people be executed.

The true spirit of 1789 lies in the belief that something is just not because the people desire it, but that, under certain conditions, the will of the people is more likely than any other to conform to justice.

There are several conditions that are indispensable in order to apply the notion of general will. Two deserve particular attention.

First, at the moment the people become aware of their will and express it, there must be no form of collective passion.

It is entirely clear that Rousseau's reasoning fails as soon as collective passion comes into play. Rousseau was well aware of this. Collective passion is an infinitely more powerful impulse toward crime and lies than any individual passion. In such cases, evil impulses do not cancel each other out; instead, they amplify one another a thousandfold. The pressure becomes almost irresistible, except perhaps for a true saint.

Water set in motion by a violent, impetuous current no longer reflects objects, no longer has a horizontal surface, and no longer indicates densities.

And it matters very little whether it is moved by a single current or by five or six currents clashing and creating turbulence. In either case, the water is equally disturbed.

If a collective passion seizes an entire country, the entire nation becomes unanimous in crime. If two, four, five, or ten collective passions divide it, the country is split into as many criminal factions. Divergent passions do not neutralize each other, as they would with a cluster of individual passions; the number of collective passions is far too small, and the force of each is far too great for neutralization to take place. Conflicts only exacerbate them. They clash with a truly infernal noise, one that makes it impossible to hear even for a moment the soft voice of justice and truth.

When collective passion dominates a country, it is likely that any individual will be closer to justice and reason than to the general will—or rather, its caricature.

The second condition is that the people should express their will about the problems of public life, rather than merely choosing problems between individuals, or, worse, between irresponsible organizations. General will doesn't have any connection to such choices.

If there was, in 1789, a certain expression of the general will—despite the adoption of the representative system, due to a lack of alternatives—it was because much more than elections had occurred. Everything alive across the country—the nation brimming with vitality—sought to express its thoughts through the *cahiers de revendications* (grievance books). The representatives had for the most part made themselves known during this shared intellectual collaboration; they retained its warmth and felt the attentive gaze of the nation, eager to ensure their aspirations would be faithfully translated. For an all too short time these representatives truly served as simple organs of expression for public opinion.

Such a thing never happened again.

The mere statement of these two conditions reveals that we have never experienced anything even remotely resembling true democracy. In what we currently call democracy, the people have neither the opportunity nor the means to express an opinion on any issue of public life. Everything beyond private interests is left to the sway of collective passions, which are systematically and officially inflamed.

The way we use the words *democracy* and *republic* forces us to examine with the utmost care the following two problems:

How can we genuinely provide the people of France with the opportunity to occasionally express a judgment on major public issues?

How to prevent, when people are asked, any form of collective passion from spreading among them?

If these two points are not considered, it is pointless to speak of republican legitimacy.

It is difficult to devise solutions. Yet it is obvious, upon careful examination, that any solution would first involve the abolition of political parties.

To assess political parties according to the criteria of truth, justice, and the common good, we need to start by identifying their essential characteristics.

Three can be enumerated:

- A political party is a machine designed to generate collective passion.
- A political party is an organization structured to exert collective pressure on the thoughts of each of its individual members.
- The primary goal, and ultimately the sole goal, of any political party is its own limitless growth.

Through these three characteristics, every political party is inherently totalitarian in its essence and aspirations. If it is not so in practice, it is only because the other parties surrounding it are no less totalitarian.

These three characteristics are factual truths, evident to anyone who has ever been close to the life of political parties.

The third is a specific case of a phenomenon that occurs whenever the collective dominates thinking individuals. It is the reversal of the relationship between ends and means. Everywhere, without exception, all things generally considered as ends are by nature, by definition, by essence, and in the most obvious way, merely means. One could cite countless examples in all domains: money, power, the state, national pride, economic production, university degrees, and many others.

Goodness alone is an end. Everything that belongs to the realm of facts belongs to the category of means. But collective thought is incapable of rising above the realm of facts. It is an animal form of thinking. It has just enough notion of the good to mistake means for an absolute good.

So it is with political parties. In principle, a party is an instrument meant to serve a certain conception of the public good.

This holds true even for parties tied to the interests of a particular social group, as there is always some notion of the public good by which those interests and the public good are thought to coincide. However, this conception is extremely vague. This is always true, with almost no degree of variation, regardless of whether the party is loosely structured or the most strictly organized. No one, no matter how deeply they have studied politics, would be capable of providing a precise and clear exposition of the doctrine of any party, including, if applicable, their own.

People hardly ever admit this to themselves. If they did, they would be naively tempted to see it as a sign of personal limitations. In reality, however, the expression "Doctrine of a political party" is essentially meaningless.

A person, who spends their life writing and examining problems of ideas, very rarely elaborates a doctrine. A collective never has one. A doctrine is not a collective product.

It is true that one can speak of Christian doctrine, Hindu doctrine, Pythagorean doctrine, and so on. What is designated by this term, however, is neither individual nor collective; it is something situated infinitely above both realms. It is, purely and simply, the truth.

The purpose of a political party is something vague and unreal. If it were real, it would require a great amount of attention, for a conception of the public good is not something easy to think about. The existence of the party, on the other hand, is tangible, obvious, and requires no effort to recognize. It is thus unavoidable that the party becomes, in fact, its own end.

It is, therefore, idolatry, for only God can legitimately be an end in Himself.

The transition is straightforward: an axiom is established that the necessary and sufficient condition for a party to effectively serve the public good it claims to represent is that it must hold a substantial amount of power.

But, once obtained, no amount of power can ever be considered sufficient. The party finds itself in a constant state of impotence, which is always attributed to the limited power it holds. Even if it were the absolute ruler of a country, international necessities would impose strict limits.

Thus, the essential tendency of political parties is totalitarian, not only on a national scale but also on a global scale. It is precisely because the conception of the public good particular to a given party is a fiction—an empty, unreal thing—that it demands the pursuit of total power. Any reality, by its very nature, involves a limit. What does not exist can never encounter limits.

This is why there is an affinity, an alliance, between totalitarianism and lies.

It is true that many people never think of total power; the thought would frighten them. It is dizzying, and it takes a kind of greatness to face it. When these people take an interest in a party, they are content to desire its growth—as something with no limit. If there are three more members this year than last year, or if the fundraising brought in an extra hundred francs, they are pleased. But they want this to continue indefinitely in the same direction. They would never conceive that their party could, under any circumstances, have too many members, too many voters, or too much money.

The revolutionary temperament leads to envisioning totality. The petit-bourgeois temperament leads to the image of slow, continuous, and unlimited progress. But in both cases, the material growth of the party becomes the sole criterion by which good and evil are defined. It is as if the party were an animal to be fattened, and the universe had been created solely to feed it.

One cannot serve both God and Mammon. If one's criterion of goodness is not goodness itself, one loses the very notion of what is good.

Once the growth of the party becomes a criterion of goodness, it inevitably leads to collective pressure on the thoughts of individuals. This pressure is very real. It is displayed publicly and is openly admitted. It would horrify us if we were not so accustomed to it.

Parties are organizations that are publicly and officially structured to kill the sense of truth and justice in all souls. Collective pressure is exerted on the general public through propaganda. The avowed purpose of propaganda is not to shed light, but to persuade. Hitler understood very well that the aim of propaganda was always to enslave minds. All parties engage in propaganda. Any party that wouldn't do so would disappear since all the others practice it. All parties admit to engaging in propaganda. None is bold enough in its lies to pretend to educate the public or to inform people's judgment.

It is true that parties speak of educating those who join them—sympathizers, young people, new members. This is a lie. What is involved is conditioning, a preparation for a much stricter control the party will exert over its members' minds.

Let us imagine a member of a party—a member of parliament, a candidate for office, or simply a militant—publicly making the following commitment: “Whenever I examine any political or social issue, I pledge to completely forget that I

am a member of the such-and-such party and to concern myself exclusively with how best to serve justice and the public good."

Such language would be very poorly received. Their own party members, and even many others, would accuse them of betrayal. The least hostile would say: "Why, then, did they join a party?" — thus naively admitting that by joining a party, one renounces the sole pursuit of justice and the public interest. This person would be expelled from the party or, at the very least, would lose its endorsement; and certainly would not be elected.

Furthermore, it does not seem possible for such language to be used. In fact, if I am not mistaken, it has never been used. If words that appear somewhat similar have been spoken, it was only by individuals wishing to govern with the support of parties besides their own. In such cases, those words sounded like a dishonorable compromise.

On the other hand, it is considered entirely natural, reasonable, and honorable for someone to say: "As a conservative—" or "As a socialist—I think that..."

This tendency is not unique to political parties. People also feel no shame in saying: "As a Frenchman, I think that..." or "As a Catholic, I think that..."

Some young girls, who considered themselves attached to Gaullism as the French equivalent of Hitlerism, added: "Truth is relative, even in geometry." They touched upon the central issue.

If there is no truth, it would be legitimate to think in a certain way simply because one happens to belong to a particular position. Just as one's hair is black, brown, red, or blonde because that is how one happens to be born, one also expresses certain thoughts. Like hair, thought is the product of a physical process of elimination.

However, if one acknowledges the existence of truth, one is only permitted to think what is true. One then thinks a certain way, not because one happens to be French, Catholic, or socialist, but because the undeniable light of evidence compels one to think thus, and no other way.

If there is no evidence and doubt exists, it is then obvious that the question, given the current state of knowledge, is uncertain. If there is a slight probability on one side, it is evident that this probability is slight, and so on. In any case, inner light always offers whoever seeks it a clear answer. The response may be more or less affirmative; it does not matter. It is always open to revision, but no correction can be made except through a greater inner illumination.

If a person who is a member of a party is absolutely determined to remain faithful in all thoughts to this inner light and nothing else, they cannot reveal this resolution to the party. They are then in a state of falsehood in relation to the party.

This situation can only be accepted because of the necessity to belong to a party in order to participate effectively in public affairs. But this necessity is an evil, and it must be ended by abolishing parties.

A person who has not resolved to be exclusively faithful to their inner light places falsehood at the very center of their soul. Inner darkness is the punishment.

One cannot escape this by drawing a distinction between inner freedom and outer discipline. In that case, one would have to lie to the public, to whom every candidate or elected official has a particular obligation to tell the truth.

If I am about to say things on behalf of my party that I believe to be contrary to truth and justice, will I issue a prior warning to indicate this? If I do not, I am lying.

Of these three forms of lies—lying to the party, lying to the public, and lying to oneself—the first is by far the least harmful. But if belonging to a party inevitably compels one to lie all the time, the existence of parties is absolutely and unconditionally evil.

It was common to see meeting announcements that stated: "Mr. X will present the communist perspective (on the issue being discussed)." "Mr. Y will present the socialist perspective." "Mr. Z will present the radical perspective."

How did these unfortunate individuals determine the perspective they were supposed to present? Whom could they consult? What oracle? A collective entity has neither a voice nor a pen. All the instruments of expression are individual. The socialist collective resides in no single individual. Neither does the radical collective. The communist collective resides in Stalin, but he is far away; one cannot call him before speaking at a meeting.

No, Messrs. X, Y, and Z each consulted themselves. But, being honest, they first placed themselves in a special mental state, one similar to the atmosphere they had often encountered in communist, socialist, or radical circles.

Once in this state, if one simply follows their reactions, they naturally produce language that aligns with the "communist," "socialist," or "radical" point of view. Evidently, this requires strictly prohibiting oneself from making any effort to discern justice or truth. Should one attempt such an effort, one might—horror of horrors—risk expressing a "personal viewpoint."

Today, striving for justice and truth is regarded as nothing more than a personal viewpoint.

When Pontius Pilate asked Christ, "What is truth?" Christ did not reply. He had already answered when he said, "I came to bear witness to the truth."

There is only one answer. Truth is all the thoughts that arise in the mind of a thinking creature whose unique, wholly, and exclusive desire is the truth.

Lies or errors—synonymous terms—are the thoughts of those who do not desire truth, or those who desire truth and something else. For example, they desire truth but also conformity with certain established ideas.

But how can one desire truth without knowing anything about it? This is the mystery of mysteries. Words that express an inconceivable perfection—God, truth, justice—when pronounced inwardly with desire and without attachment to any preconceived notion, have the power to elevate the soul and flood it with light.

It is by desiring truth in the void, without attempting to guess its content in advance, that one receives enlightenment. This is the entire mechanism of attention.

It is impossible to examine the frighteningly complex problems of public life while simultaneously focusing on discerning truth, justice, and the public good, as well as maintaining the mindset appropriate for a member of a particular group. The human capacity for attention cannot handle two concerns at once. In fact, whoever clings to one abandons the other.

Yet no suffering awaits those who abandon justice and truth. Whereas the party system enforces the most painful penalties for disobedience. These penalties affect almost everything— career, affections, friendships, reputation, the external aspects of honor, and sometimes even family life. The Communist Party has developed this system to perfection.

Even for those who do not compromise their integrity, the existence of penalties inevitably distorts judgment. If one wishes to resist the party's influence, the very will to resist becomes a motivation foreign to the truth and must be suspect. But that suspicion also must be questioned, and so the cycle continues endlessly. True attention is a state so difficult for men, so violent, that any personal disturbance can derail it. Therefore, one must make a concerted effort to protect the faculty of discernment from the tumult of personal hopes and fears.

If a person is performing very complex numerical calculations, knowing they will be punished every time the result is an even number, their situation becomes very difficult. Something in the carnal part of the soul will incline the person to give the calculations a slight twist to always end up with odd numbers. In trying to resist the temptation, they risk finding an even number where none belong. Caught up in this oscillation, the person's attention is no longer intact. If the complexity of the calculations demands their full attention, inevitably they will make frequent mistakes, no matter how intelligent, brave, or committed to the truth the person is.

What should this person do? It is simple. If they can escape from the hands of those who threaten with the whip, they must flee. If the person could avoid falling into their hands in the first place, they should avoid it.

The situation is exactly the same with political parties.

When political parties exist in a country, sooner or later it becomes impossible to intervene in public affairs without joining a party and playing its game. Whoever is interested in public affairs wishes to do so effectively. Thus, those who care about the public good must either renounce such concerns and turn to other pursuits, or pass through the grinding mill of the parties. In the latter case, they become burdened with concerns that exclude the pursuit of the public good.

Political parties are a marvelous mechanism by which, across an entire nation, not a single mind devotes its attention to the effort of discerning what in public affairs is good, just, and true.

As a result—except for a very small number of fortuitous coincidences—only measures contrary to the public good, to justice, and to truth are decided and executed.

If the organization of public life was entrusted to the devil, he could not imagine anything more ingenious.

If reality is slightly less grim, it is only because the parties have not yet devoured everything. But in fact, is it truly less grim? Or is it exactly as bleak as the picture outlined here? Haven't recent events confirmed this?

We must acknowledge that the mechanism of spiritual and mental oppression unique to political parties was historically introduced by the Catholic Church in its fight against heresy.

A convert joining the Church—or a believer, who after inner deliberation decides to remain in it—has perceived what is true and good within its dogma. However, in crossing the threshold, they simultaneously profess not to be affected by the *anathema sit*; that is, accepting all the so-called “strict articles of faith” en bloc without studying them. Even with a high degree of intelligence and education, a lifetime would not suffice for such a study given that it would require examining the historical circumstances of each condemnation.

How can one adhere to assertions they do not know? By submitting unconditionally to the authority from which these assertions emanate.

This is why Saint Thomas Aquinas insists on defending his affirmations only through the authority of the Church, to the exclusion of any other arguments. Nothing more is needed, he said, for those who accept this authority; and no argument could persuade those who reject it.

Thus, the inner light of evidence—this faculty of discernment granted from above to the human soul in answer to its desire for truth—is discarded, relegated to menial tasks like arithmetic, and excluded from all inquiries related to the spiritual destiny of humankind. The driving force of thought is no longer the unconditional and undefined desire for truth, but the desire to conform with a pre-established teaching.

That the Church founded by Christ has so widely stifled the spirit of truth—though despite the Inquisition, it did not do so entirely, as mysticism offered a safe refuge—is a tragic irony. This has been often noted, but another tragic irony has received less attention: the rebellion against the stifling of minds under the inquisitorial regime took such a direction that it ended up continuing the work of stifling minds.

The Reformation and Renaissance humanism, both products of this revolt, contributed significantly, after three centuries of maturation, to the spirit of 1789. After some delay, this resulted in our democracy, founded on the interplay of political parties, each like a small secular church armed with the threat of excommunication. The influence of these parties has permeated all aspects of mental life in our epoch.

When people join a party, they must have noticed aspects of its actions and propaganda that seemed just and good. However, they never studied the party's stance on all the issues of public life. By joining the party, they accept positions they are unaware of. Thus, their thoughts are subject to the party's authority. When they eventually learn about these positions, they will accept them without scrutiny.

This is exactly the situation of someone adhering to Catholic orthodoxy as formulated by Saint Thomas. If someone were to say, while requesting membership to a party: "I agree with the party on this, this, and this point; I have not studied its other positions and entirely reserve my judgment until I have done so," he would likely be asked to come back later.

In fact, except in very rare cases, someone joining a party adopts the mindset that they will later express with phrases like: "As a monarchist, as a socialist, I believe that..." It is so comfortable! Because it means not thinking. And nothing is more comfortable than not thinking.

As for the third characteristic of parties—the fact that they are machines for generating collective passion—it is so obvious that it does not need to be further demonstrated. Collective passion is the only energy parties have for external propaganda and for exerting pressure on the soul of each of its members.

It is acknowledged that party spirit blinds people, makes them deaf to justice, and even drives honest individuals to the cruelest persecution of innocents, but no one considers abolishing the institutions that produce such a spirit.

Yet narcotics are banned.

There are, nonetheless, people addicted to narcotics.

But there would be far more of them if the State organized the sale of opium and cocaine in every tobacco shop with advertising posters to encourage consumers.

The conclusion is that the institution of parties seems to constitute an almost unmixed evil. They are bad in principle, and their practical effects are bad.

The abolition of parties would be an almost pure good. It is eminently legitimate in principle and seems likely to have only positive effects in practice.

Candidates would then address voters not by saying, "I have this label"—which, in practice, tells the public absolutely nothing about their concrete stance on concrete issues—but by saying, "I believe such and such regarding such and such major problems."

Elected officials would associate and dissociate naturally and fluidly according to affinities. I might very well agree with Mr. A on the question of colonialism and yet disagree with him on the topic of peasant property; and vice versa for Mr. B. If colonialism is being discussed, I would talk a bit with Mr. A before the session; if it's about peasant property, with Mr. B.

The artificial crystallization into parties coincides so poorly with real affinities that a member of parliament could disagree on every stance with a colleague from within their party while agreeing with someone from another party.

How many times, in Germany in 1932, have a Communist and a Nazi, while discussing in the street, experienced mental vertigo upon realizing they agreed on all issues!

Outside of Parliament, intellectual circles would naturally form around journals of political ideas. But these circles should remain fluid. This fluidity distinguishes a circle based on affinity from a party and prevents it from exerting harmful influence. When one socializes amicably with the director of a particular journal, and with its frequent contributors, as when one occasionally writes for it, one knows they are "in touch" with the circle surrounding that journal, but one does not know whether they are "part of it"; there is no clear distinction between inside and outside. Further out, there are those who read the journal and know one or two of its contributors. Further still, there are regular readers who draw inspiration from it. Further still, there are occasional readers. But no one would think to say or believe: "As someone connected to this journal, I think that..."

When contributors to a journal run for office, they should be prohibited from claiming affiliation with the journal. The journal should be prohibited from endorsing them, of supporting directly or indirectly their candidacy, or even mentioning it. Any group of "friends" of such a journal should be banned. If a journal prevents its contributors, under penalty of termination, from contributing to other publications of any kind, it should be shut down immediately.

This would imply a set of press regulations that would make it impossible for publications that are dishonorable to be associated (such as *Gringoire* or *Marie-Claire*). Whenever a group attempts to crystallize itself by giving a defined character for membership, penal sanctions would follow.

Of course, there might be clandestine parties. But their members would have a guilty conscience. They would no longer be able to openly declare allegiance to a party or publicly propagate servility of thought. They will not be able to engage in propaganda in the name of the party. The party will no longer be able to trap them in a web of interests, sentiments, and obligations.

Whenever a law is impartial, fair, and based on a vision of the public interest, easily grasped by everyone, it weakens what it prohibits simply by its existence, independently of the repressive measures meant to ensure its compliance. This intrinsic majesty of the law is a long-forgotten factor in public life that should be made good use of.

It seems that clandestine parties cause no greater harm than legal parties and often present far fewer dangers.

There seems to be no significant drawback tied to the abolition of political parties in any respect.

Paradoxically, such measures—free of disadvantages—are the least likely to be enacted. People think: if it's so simple, why hasn't it been done long ago? Yet, most often, great solutions are simple and easy.

This measure would extend a cleansing virtue far beyond public affairs, for a partisan spirit has contaminated everything. Thanks to the prestige of power, the institutions that shape public life always influence a country's general mentality. We have come to think almost exclusively in terms of taking sides—“for” or “against” an opinion. Arguments are then sought to either support or oppose, depending on the case. This mirrors exactly the dynamics of party adherence.

Just as there are believers in democracy who accept the existence of multiple parties, similarly, in the realm of opinions, there are broad-minded individuals who value even those they disagree with.

This shows a complete loss of the very sense of truth and falsehood.

Others, having aligned themselves with a specific opinion, refuse to consider anything opposing it. This reflects the totalitarian mindset. When Einstein came to France, intellectual circles—even scientists—divided into two camps, for or against him. Every new scientific idea has its supporters and opponents, both animated to a regrettable extent by a partisan spirit. Even in scientific circles, there are tendencies and cliques, in various stages of crystallization.

In art and literature, this is even more visible. Cubism and Surrealism became akin to parties. People were “Gideans” as they were “Maurrassians.” To make a name for oneself, it is useful to be surrounded by a group of admirers driven by partisanship. Similarly, there was little difference between allegiance to a party and allegiance to a Church—or anti-religious attitudes. People were for or against belief in God, for or against Christianity, and so on. Religion became a domain of militants.

Even in schools, thought is no longer stimulated without inviting children to take sides. They are given a quote from a great author and asked, “Do you agree or disagree? Develop your arguments.” In exams, the poor students, needing to complete their essays in three hours, spend barely five minutes deciding their stance. And yet it would be so easy to tell them, “Meditate on this text and express the ideas that come to mind.”

Almost everywhere—even in purely technical matters—the act of thinking has been replaced by that of taking sides.

This is a plague that originated in political circles and has spread across the country, infecting almost all forms of thinking.

It is doubtful that we can cure this plague, which is killing us, without first beginning with the abolition of political parties.

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Simone Weil: On the Abolition of All Political Parties, features a new English translation of *Note sur la suppression générale des partis politiques* (1943) by French philosopher and activist Simone Weil whose life united thought and action. Located at Washington Windows gallery, the street-level public exhibition also includes archival material from the Sylvère Lotringer Papers and Semiotext(e) Archive at Fales Library and Special Collections, NYU.

Written before her death and published posthumously with the support of her peer Albert Camus, Weil's essay offers a critique of how political parties suppress individual will and moral conscience by transforming these energies into collective passions that

can be manipulated by its totalitarian tendencies. Weil believed that formal democracy alone does not guarantee a moral society, but rather it is an ambivalent mechanism that needs individuals to act freely and ethically without corruption by institutions and political ideologies.

As a graduate of the École Normale Supérieure, Simone Weil's (1909–1943) practice included working in a Renault Factory in Paris, supporting labor strikes, and supporting the Republican resistance in the Spanish Civil War against Francisco Franco Nationalists. Reflecting on her Jewish heritage, her spiritual journey led her to Christianity, where she developed a mystical theology centered on attention to suffering, universal truth, and human needs.