

Tocqueville on Poverty in Industrial Democracies

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Jimena Hurtado Prieto
Department of Economics
University of los Andes

Introduction

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) has been considered as one of the greatest advocates of liberal democracy. His well-known *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840) has been presented as one of the most important analysis on the democratic revolution and its consequences. Sent by the French government to observe the penitentiary system with Gustave de Beaumont, Tocqueville spent around nine months in the United States between 1831 and 1832. But what he found there was what he foresaw as the future: the gradual progress of equality (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 12). He believed a “great democratic revolution” was taking place in his times (ibid. p. 9) and there was no turning back (ibid. p. 12).

This situation called for a new political science which would

“educate democracy; to put, if possible, new life into new beliefs; to purify its mores; to control its actions; gradually to substitute understanding of statecraft for present inexperience and knowledge of its true interests for blind instincts; to adapt government to the needs of time and place; and to modify it as men and circumstances require.”
(ibid.)

He welcomed this new world but felt it his duty to warn about its consequences, good and bad. Tocqueville is a keen observer of his times, who describes accurately and impartially what he sees and tries to derive lessons and trends from his observations. His foresight has been highly praised and his work vastly commented. There is however one aspect of his work that even if it has been noticed has not attracted as much attention: pauperism in industrial democracies¹. The reason maybe, as Goldberg (2001) notes, that his writings on poverty are not considered to be part of his major works. Another sociological explanation could be advanced: due to the central place that the belief that individuals are responsible for their own fates occupies in classical liberal thought, it is this aspect of Tocqueville’s thought, as a liberal author², which has been emphasized. According to this belief poverty would be the outcome of bad individual choices rather than of social, economic or demographic circumstances.

Tocqueville certainly believes in individual responsibility as concomitant to individual freedom and dignity. But he also believes industrial democracies have certain characteristics that may

¹ Notable exceptions have recently appeared such as Goldberg, 2001 and Keslassy, 2000 and 2001.

² He has been classified as an aristocratic liberal or a civic conservative. Most accounts of Tocqueville’s treatment of poverty point to what has come to be interpreted as his rejection of a welfare State.

be detrimental to individual freedom and do not depend exclusively upon the individual³. In particular, in spite of permanent social mobility, Tocqueville perceives an increasing separation between classes and certain compatibility between aristocracy and industry. Both phenomena show the coexistence between real inequality and formal equality which undermines individual opportunities and the exercise of freedom.

In fact, Tocqueville's main concern is the trade-off between liberty and equality that arises in democratic societies. A new type of despotism haunts democratic societies, one which will result from the free choice of individuals obsessed by the passion of equality (ibid, p.57) ⁴. Tocqueville writes to make us aware of such threat and calls for the explicit and willful defense of political liberty.

It is within this main concern that Tocqueville raises the question about poverty. Industrial democracies will produce a new type of poverty, where the poor are more fragile and less visible than before. The poor will not be able to exercise their political freedom and exclusion will become a source of conflict and a threat to the stability of these societies. It is then, in the name of liberty that Tocqueville deals with pauperism. He believed that "without the economic and material resources needed to fully exercise citizenship rights, citizens are unable to participate fully in public affairs" (Goldberg, 2001, p. 294) and the tendency toward despotism would be reinforced.

What is even more distressing for Tocqueville is that he thought the causes of this new type of poverty are "systemic and rooted in capitalist development and industrialization rather than the result of individual failing." (ibid, p. 299). He comes to this conclusion after observing what seemed like a paradox at the time: there were more poor people in England, considered the richest country on earth, than in Spain or Portugal. This apparent paradox and the debate on individual rights during his time made Tocqueville pay close attention to poverty as a source of social and political stability. In this paper I will explore this aspect of Tocqueville's thought and the answers and possible solutions he gives to this characteristic of industrial democracies leading to rethink the notion of individual agency and social citizenship.

³ Regarding his vision of history Tocqueville wrote in his *Souvenirs*: "For my part, I hate all those absolute systems that make the events of history depend on great first causes linked together by the chain of fate and thus succeed, so to speak, in banishing men from the history of human race. Their boasted breadth seems to me narrow, and their mathematical exactness false. I believe, pace the writers who find these sublime theories to feed their vanity and lighten their labors, that many important historical facts can be explained only by accidental circumstances while many others are inexplicable; and lastly, that chance, or rather the concatenation of secondary causes, which we call by that name because we can't sort them all out, is a very important element in all that we see taking place on the world's stage. But I am firmly convinced that chance can do nothing unless the ground has been prepared in advance. Antecedent facts, the nature of institutions, turns of mind and the state of mores are the materials from which chance composes the unexpected events that surprise and terrify us" (quoted in (Luckacs, 1982)).

⁴ "I think democratic peoples have a natural taste for liberty; left to themselves, they will seek it, cherish it, and be sad if it is taken from them. But their passion for equality is ardent, insatiable, eternal, and invincible. They want equality in freedom, and if they cannot have that, they will still want equality in slavery. They will put up with poverty, servitude, and barbarism, but they will not endure aristocracy." (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 506).

In the next two parts of the paper I will show the basic characteristics of industrial democracies, that is democracy and industrialization. The first part analyses the component elements of democratic revolution: the love of equality and the love of comfort. These passions will be able to develop fully in democratic societies, accounting for its benefits and its dangers. The same forces behind general prosperity can lead to isolation, exclusion and, finally, despotism. The second part deals with industrialization and its consequences. In particular, industrialization leads to the concentration of industrial property leading to the creation of a new aristocracy Tocqueville will call a monster in democratic times. As a simultaneous effect industrialization produces a new class of poor and pauperism appears as a salient feature of democratic times. It represents a threat to social order because of its individual and social effects and therefore calls for public action.

Democratic Revolution

Tocqueville equates the democratic revolution he sees spreading throughout the world with the expansion of the equality of conditions. He believes every revolution is made in the name of some sort of equality (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], pp. 638-9) and this one aims at materializing the idea of a society made of individuals with equal rights. As equality becomes a reality, individuals increasingly praise its worth and benefits (ibid, pp. 503, 504) because

“The advantages of equality are felt immediately, and it is daily apparent where they come from... Equality daily gives each man in the crowd a host of small enjoyments. The charms of equality are felt the whole time and are within the reach of all; ... The passion engendered by equality is therefore both strong and general” (ibid, p. 505).

This force will guide individuals in democratic societies and they will seek to materialize this equality of rights in their relationships with each other and in their daily lives. The passion for equality will take the form of enlightened self-interest, showing individuals the best ways to take advantage of equality of conditions and make the best for each one of them.

Members of democratic societies will demand the abolishment of all privileges and equal opportunities in the pursuit of their own interests. Thus, this passion will make democratic individuals prudent and forward-looking. They learn their own well-being depends on the well-being of others and they will work to achieve this well-being. Tocqueville makes a direct link between the love of equality and the love of well-being. Both will be the driving forces of democratic societies making them industrial societies with an infinite potential to create material wealth. These passions are also the greatest threats to industrial democracies. They isolate individuals making them lose sight of society as a whole and making them indifferent to the general interest and its direct influence on their own. This section presents the analysis of both these forces and their possible effects on industrial democracies and its members.

Love of Equality

Even if Democratic Revolution is the result of the spirit of freedom and equality, during democratic times it is equality that will prevail. Democracy makes all citizens equal

guaranteeing equal rights to each one of them and making them expect reciprocity of rights and obligations. Great differences disappear and privileges are illegitimate and unjustified.

Democracy does not make individuals actually equal or just equal in rights (Manent, 1982, p. 55). They think of each other as equals and their shared perception is incarnated in their equality before public opinion (ibid). Equality becomes a state of mind with positive and negative consequences:

“One must admit that equality, while it brings great benefits to mankind, opens the door, as I hope to show later, to very dangerous instincts. It tends to isolate men from each other so that each thinks only of himself.” (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 444)

Isolation is one of the most important consequences of this new state of mind. Democracy makes equality a condition for liberty. Liberty means autonomy and self-government and only equality can guarantee each individual will be able to exercise her autonomy. Each one has the same right to define and pursue the life she considers worth living. So “living in democracy with others means obeying only to oneself and hence commanding only over oneself: obeying what one has wanted and also doing all that one’s will has ordered” (Manent, 1982, p. 38 my translation). Each citizen then retreats to her private space and concentrates on her own goals.

Autonomy and self-government also give each individual a renewed sense of her own value. If each individual is her own master no one has the right to impose anything upon others. Superiority and subordination become unacceptable to such a point that individuals will even renounce to freedom:

“There is indeed a manly and legitimate passion for equality which rouses in all men a desire to be strong and respected. This passion tends to elevate the little man to the rank of the great. But the human heart also nourishes a debased taste for equality, which leads the weak to want to drag the strong down to their level and which induces men to prefer equality in servitude to inequality in freedom.” (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 57)

At the same time, this idea of equal worth will foster envy among individuals (ibid, p. 198). If they cannot clearly understand the origin of the difference their relationships will be marked by this potentially dangerous feeling. This feeling will become more powerful when it comes to material equality.

The progress of equality will not make fortunes equal. It will give the individuals the idea of their equal value as human beings. This idea makes privileges unacceptable in democracies. Only merit, understood as industry and hard work, is a legitimate source of inequality among individuals. They will all try to become meritorious emulating the actions and behavior of those who are considered to be successful.

“In times of freedom and enlightened democracy there is nothing to separate men from one another or to keep them in their place. They rise or fall extraordinarily quickly. They are so close to each other that men

of different classes are continually meeting. Every day they mix and exchange ideas, imitating and emulating one another. So the people get many ideas, conceptions, and desires which they never would have had if distinctions of rank had been fixed and society static” (ibid, p. 458)

The love of equality produces a series of feelings and perceptions that will make individuals concentrate in their own private worlds and strive at making their lives worth living. In order to do this they need material resources and come to associate the possibility of living the lives they value with these resources. This is how they develop a love of comfort and the idea that, as the authors of their own destiny, they can always improve their situation.

Love of Comfort and Desire of Bettering one’s Condition

“A passion for well-being is, as we shall see, the most lively of all the emotions aroused or inflamed by equality, and it is a passion shared by all. So this taste for well-being is the most striking and unalterable characteristic of democratic ages.” (ibid, p. 448).

Love of comfort becomes the most tenacious and pervading characteristic of democratic individuals. They will concentrate all their efforts in attaining material wealth (ibid, pp. 614-5). Wealth is a means to empowerment. It is not the goods people search but what they enable them to do. People will work and make sacrifices if they perceive this will improve their conditions and give them hope in the achievement of their goals.

Tocqueville gives great importance to property because it allows individuals to have a tangible measure of their value. Property guarantees independence and the possibility to make plans and project oneself in the future. With property comes responsibility and self-respect. Property keeps individuals from losing total interest in public affairs because any decision can affect them through its consequences on property. It also makes people more stable and prudent, attaching them to their community and to the institutions that guarantee and protect their right to enjoy their property.

However, wealth, as an idea, is infinite and individuals will never have it all. This impossibility will make the live in a perpetual state of anxiety and dissatisfaction trying to figure out which is the shortest and most expedient path that will lead them to wealth and never being sure of having made the right choice (ibid, p. 536).

Equality makes them think they have the same opportunities and abilities to achieve their goal. They live under a legal system that has abolished all privileges and discover their social environment allows them to change themselves and their situation permanently. “They all therefore conceive the idea of bettering themselves” but they do not “succeed in the same way” so that “fortunes become unequal as soon as every man exerts all his faculties to get rich.” (ibid, pp. 457, cf.462)⁵.

⁵ This is how Tocqueville comes to the conclusion that democracy and industrialization come hand in hand. This idea has been contested and one of the first to do so in reviewing Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* is John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1994).

The combination of the love of equality and the love of comfort make individuals prudent and industrious. Prudence and industry become major virtues in democratic societies. Each citizen concentrates on her own well-being and knows the best way to attain it is through industry.

Industrialization

The democratic revolution brings with it important changes in social relationships. Tocqueville describes in detail how it affects relations within the family and the workplace, between the sexes and classes. The changes in the relations between master and servant and between employer and employee are of particular interest for my purposes.

Even if all members of society as individuals are considered equal, in reality their relationships depend on the social group they belong to. They might belong to different groups during their lives due to high social mobility but at each point they will be considered as a member of a certain class and will thus be regarded.

As their main goal is to obtain wealth most of their interactions with others will have to do with the way they pursue it. More precisely, most of these interactions will take place in their working environment as employers or employees. Tocqueville believes there is an increasing distance between the worker and his employer (ibid, p. 556) and they will only see each other as “the first and last links in a long chain” where the first commands and the last obeys (ibid).

In the Age of Equality this kind of relation does not fit. Whereas in aristocratic times, relations between masters and servants were considered natural and made each part see the other as an inferior or superior extension of their self, in democratic times individuals do not accept such extensions (Bendix, 1961, p. 101). Such relations tend to disappear except in industry. There the employer keeps the power to command and the employee is bound to obey; each one accepts his part because it is in his advantage to do so. However, subordination remains a degrading situation for equal citizens and is almost those who work shamefully accept it (ibid).

This means that even as the equality of conditions expands throughout democratic societies possible sources of inequality are also created. Workers are submitted and their living conditions do not necessarily improve. Societies as a whole become more productive as their members concentrate all their efforts on obtaining wealth. However, they do not all have the same access to it. The democratic revolution, with its equalizing force, does not eliminate poverty. Market society does not necessarily lead to equality of conditions for all. So Tocqueville recognizes that the “real advantage of democracy is not, as some have said, to favor the prosperity of all, but only to serve the well-being of the greatest number” (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 233).

The increasing division of labor characteristic of these societies not only increases productivity, it also degrades human beings making them lose sight of their work as a whole and concentrating all their abilities in a single task (ibid, pp. 555, 556). Laborers will form a new “impoverished and debased working class” which depends upon a new aristocracy (Goldberg, 2001, p. 299).

A New Aristocracy

In the Age of Equality industry becomes a source of inequality where individuals do not relate to each other as equals but as superiors and inferiors. It would appear then “that a natural impulse is throwing up an aristocracy out of the bosom of democracy.” But, contrary to what happens in aristocratic societies, there is no relation between the rich and the poor other than wage labor. This relation is established within a legal framework accepted and respected by all members of society as equal citizens. This legal framework determines the conditions that make a contract acceptable expressing an agreement between worker and employer regarding the terms and conditions under which the latter pays the former for his work. There is no other obligation for neither of them besides those established in the contract (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 577). Especially, “the one contracts no obligation to protect, nor the other to defend, and they are not linked in any permanent fashion either by custom or by duty” (ibid, p. 557).

Thus wage labor even if it sanctions a relation between equal citizens produces separation and inequality among them. According to Tocqueville “Such a condition is revolutionary, not democratic” (ibid, p. 580). It does not necessarily take the form of a class struggle because social mobility does not allow the formation of stable social classes. Thus confrontation is not between classes but among individuals. In industrial democracies competition is between individuals who as a result pass from one social and economic position to another (Birnbaum, 1970, pp. 93-5). Competition and mobility neutralize the revolutionary character of wage labor. But “if ever permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy make their way into the world, it will have been by that door that they entered.” (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 558).

The owners of industry profit from the positive effects of the division of labor on productivity and increase their wealth. Each new industrial venture requires more capital to undertake the necessary investments. Wealth tends to concentrate in fewer hands as competition and increasing demand promote industry. Each time there are less owners and more workers. This is the new aristocracy Tocqueville talks about. He considers it to be a monster within democratic societies. Even if this aristocracy stays away from political power it forms a separate society and cuts itself from the rest of the community. It is an exception within democratic relations and so it might ignore democratic institutions and their laws. The other side of this new aristocracy, always becoming richer, is its workers, always becoming poorer. With industrialization comes pauperism.

Pauperism

The debate about the Poor Laws in England⁶, the increasing importance of the subject in France and his trips to England led Tocqueville to write a *Memoir on Pauperism* in 1835 (Tocqueville, 1997[1835]). He promised a sequel to this work which he started writing in 1837 but never finished (Tocqueville, 2006). In both texts Tocqueville addressed what he perceived as a paradox:

⁶ Tocqueville knew well these laws through his friend Nassau Senior, who prepared the report leading to the Reform of 1834.

“The countries appearing to be the most impoverished are those which in reality account for the fewest indigents, and among the peoples most admired for their opulence, one part of the population is obliged to rely on the gifts of the other in order to live.” (Tocqueville, 1997[1835], p. 17).

This situation seemed to be contrary to the general perception of prosperity and well-being (ibid, p.17) and it was troubling because the number of those living from public charity, at least in England, had been increasing constantly. Democracy and equality seemed unable to provide all the benefits expected. Even if equality of fortunes was not part of the promises, a sensible reduction in the gap between the rich and the poor due to increasing opportunities, mobility and productivity was associated with the progress of the equality of conditions. In industrial societies capable of producing unlimited wealth it could be expected that the share of the poor would increase or, at least, that those who participated directly in production would be better off (ibid, p. 22).

As equal citizens and with a growing demand for consumer goods workers would be in a better position to negotiate their wages. This, according to Tocqueville, explains why wages in democratic societies would tend to rise. There is, however, a notable exception to this trend: the wages of workers in great industries (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], pp. 583-4). In this case, the small number of owners would put them in a stronger position vis-à-vis workers in wage negotiations. This explains the existence of the working poor. And the working poor are the majority of the population⁷.

The working poor are in a particularly fragile situation. The demand for the goods they produce varies. Most of them work in the production of goods that are not considered to be primary ones. Thus, at any moment the demand for these goods can decrease inducing a fall in the demand for industrial labor (Tocqueville, 1997[1835], p. 23). Therefore, their situation depends on a variety of factors over which they have no control (Tocqueville, 2006, p. 7).

This lack of control is increased with the extension of the market. When an industry supplies not only the national but also the international markets, industrial workers not only depend on the situation of the national economy but also of the economies of all the other countries which consume what they produce (Tocqueville, 1997[1835], pp. 26-7). In modern terms, globalization makes the situation of industrial workers even more precarious (Tocqueville, 2006, pp. 8-9).

The unemployed have no safety net to help them live through crisis periods. Being specialized workers they are unable to provide for all their needs and these needs have grown as society progresses. The diversification of needs differentiates the poverty lived in industrial

⁷ According to Tocqueville as civilization expands and private property is established new desires appear which can only be satisfied increasing productivity. The enlarged productive capacity of society made “comfort available to the majority” (Tocqueville, 1997[1835], p. 22) but did not necessarily give people the means to obtain it. Summarizing, Tocqueville asserts “Today the majority is happier but it would always be on the verge of dying of hunger if public support were lacking” (ibid, p. 23). This class which Tocqueville calls the industrial class will keep growing not only as needs grow but also as the migration from the countryside to the cities continues because of concentration of agricultural property (Tocqueville, 2006, p. 5).

democracies from any other that had previously existed. It is a new kind of poverty. It is more difficult to accept because of its members marked preference for equality which also introduces the idea of relative poverty (Birnbaum, 1970, pp. 104-5). People get used to those goods that when they were first available were considered luxuries (Tocqueville, 1997[1835], p. 24). Poverty then is not reduced to lacking food, it is perceived as not being able to have the goods made necessary by social and cultural norms and habits. This deprivation is even more acute when individuals are used to see themselves as equal and compare their situations with their equals. Hence, it is not absolute poverty which becomes a major problem in industrial democracies but relative poverty. People who do not have access to consumer goods that can guarantee them a standard of living considered normal in their societies have difficulties participating in social life. Exclusion becomes a part of these societies. And exclusion threatens citizenship and social order.

Pauperism represents a political problem. Democracy should guarantee the reciprocity of rights and obligations (Bendix, 1961, p. 115). However there is a space within democracy where such reciprocity is, at the least, fragile. In industry workers are under the obligation to obey and the employers to pay wages. But there is no equivalence in these obligations because the former implies subordination and a progressive degradation of self-esteem⁸. The employer is under no obligation to alleviate such consequences and while he keeps his right to profit from the worker's labor the worker has no right to the product of his labor. Tocqueville stresses the negative effects this inequality will have on the mental attitudes and psychological health of the working class. When most citizens are workers these consequences will affect the whole community because most of its members will stop seeing its advantages.

Welfare Programs

The inequality created by the progress of the Age of equality will become a source of conflict because

“when distinctions of rank are blurred and privileges abolished, when patrimonies are divided up and education and freedom spread, the poor conceive an eager desire to acquire comfort, and the rich think of the danger of losing it. A lot of middling fortunes are established. The owners have enough physical enjoyments to get a taste of them, but not enough to content them. They never win them without effort or indulge in them without anxiety.” (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 531)

This is the first and most common reason why something has to be done about pauperism. Tocqueville is well aware of the risks of class conflict that arises when not all members of society have access to property⁹. But potential social conflict is not the only reason why

⁸ As Manent (1982) points out democracy means the government of the people and for Tocqueville the people governs only if each individual only obeys herself in each and every aspect of her life (Manent, 1982, pp. 22,41).

⁹ In 1847 Tocqueville writes: “The time is coming when the country will be again divided between two great parties. The French Revolution, which abolished all privileges, and destroyed all exclusive rights, did leave one, that of property. The holders of property must not delude themselves about the strength

pauperism should be considered seriously. According to Tocqueville the degradation of the poor weakens freedom. Not only have they less resources to live their lives as they please, poor people can also strengthen the tendency to willingly renounce to individual freedom in the name of equality. Even worse, pauperism could cause an increasing sense of inferiority which eventually would lead the poor and weak to “give up hope for themselves and allow themselves to fall below the proper dignity of mankind” (ibid, p. 28).

There is a third reason: not only can the poor threaten social order. Others may perceive this inequality as illegitimate and unjustifiable. Tolerance towards inequality decreases as equality increases (ibid, p. 538) and people will not accept crying differences in distribution. But it is not solidarity that will move them. In fact, it is the risk of becoming poor. High social mobility in industrial democracies means not only that people ascend within the social hierarchy; it means they can also descend.

This permanent risk also explains envy. Individuals believe the rich are safer and better protected against any possible fall. Envy produces

“an unspoken warfare between all the citizens. One side tries by a thousand dodges to infiltrate, in fact or in appearance, among those above them. The others are constantly trying to push back these usurpers of their rights. Or rather the same man plays both parts, and while he tries to insinuate himself into the sphere above him, he fights relentlessly against those working up from below.” (ibid, p. 566).

These three reasons make pauperism a public concern and ask for public action. Tocqueville considers what he calls two kinds of welfare: private charity and public charity (Tocqueville, 1997[1835], pp. 25-6). In his *Memoir* Tocqueville rules out public charity because it acts against natural human inclinations. Human beings have “a natural passion for idleness” which can be overcome only because they need to live and have a desire to better their conditions (ibid, p. 27). Public charity promotes the natural passion for idleness because it weakens the two incentives people have to work. Therefore “Any measure which establishes legal charity on a permanent basis and gives it an administrative form thereby creates an idle and lazy class, living at the expense of the industrial and working class” (ibid, pp. 30, cf.36).

Moreover, welfare programs have consequences on social interactions. This type of programs, affirms Tocqueville, make poverty a source of rights. Poor people instead of considering their situation as temporary and trying to change it may come to believe that society has a debt with them and that poverty gives them the right to live from public aid (ibid, p.30-1)¹⁰. The

of their position, or suppose that, because it has so far nowhere been surmounted, the right to property is an insurmountable barrier; for our age is not like any other... Soon the political struggle will be between the Haves and the Have-nots; property will be the great battlefield; and the main political questions will turn on the more or less profound modifications of the rights of property owners that are to be made.” (quoted in (Luckacs, 1982)).

¹⁰ Besides, this right, according to Tocqueville, “affects the pauper’s freedom” (ibid, p.32) because it restricts their freedom of movement. The programs that existed at the time required local governments to administer and provide the aid to the poor. These governments would force them to stay in their jurisdiction as long as they were benefitting from the aid (ibid). If people just above poverty felt their

programs also increase potential social conflict because those who are taxed to support welfare consider it a burden. Thus the relations between rich and poor become more difficult (ibid, 31).

In 1848 during the discussion of an amendment to the Second Republic's Constitution which sought to introduce the right to labor for every French, Tocqueville opposes it because he believes the people must understand "the implacable character of political economy" and thus be led "to understand that well-being cannot be bought with the sacrifice of human freedom and dignity" (quoted by (Birnbaum, 1970, p. 13)).

However, pauperism must be dealt with in order to reduce its negative effects. Government action is called for because "there comes a point where the mistakes or misfortunes of individuals compromise the general welfare, and [that] to prevent the ruin of a private person must sometimes be a matter of public importance" (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], p. 681). So there is, after all, some space for public welfare.

Tocqueville recognizes public welfare is necessary to help individuals during particular periods or situations in their lives, namely childhood, old age, sickness and insanity (Tocqueville, 1997[1835], pp. 36-7). It is also useful as a temporary relief in times of economic crises resulting from natural disasters (ibid). The problem then is with permanent, regular and generalized welfare systems rather than with all welfare understood as an unwanted State intervention¹¹.

It is possible then to find in Tocqueville's writings on poverty some indications as to what kind of programs would seem acceptable considering their consequences on individual rights and responsibility. These programs propose preventive rather than compensatory measures (Goldberg, 2001, pp. 304-310) and would be temporary, particular and restricted (Keslassy, 2001, pág. 100).

In his *Second Memoir* Tocqueville examines the different possibilities available to relief the poor. There are two types of poor: those in agriculture and the industrial class. Tocqueville does not spend much time on the first because they are not the source of dissatisfaction and potential conflict as are the latter¹². The solution for poverty in the countryside is the division of property (Tocqueville, 2006, p. 6). Facilitating the access to the property of land allows the poor to overcome their deprivations.

This solution is not possible for industrial workers (ibid). The division of industrial property may lower productivity because of the large amounts of capital needed in these ventures (ibid, p. 7). This is why it is the only place in democracies where aristocratic institutions remain (ibid). Tocqueville believes it is necessary to find an arrangement which would give the industrial worker "the hope and habits that come with property" (ibid). This can be achieved by giving the workers a part of the industry's profits through shares or participating in its direction (ibid,

situation to be deteriorating in a certain place instead of moving legal charity would make them stay (ibid, 33).

¹¹ Keslassy, 2001 reminds how a paragraph of *Democracy in America* warning against centralization and the uncontrolled growth of the State and his discourse against the right to labor have generalized the idea that Tocqueville opposes any type of State intervention.

¹² Besides, as already noted, the poor in the countryside will migrate and enlarge the industrial class.

p.9-10)¹³. However, Tocqueville does not believe workers are ready to take over production and other measures must be implemented in the meantime. The government should promote savings on their wages creating special financial institutions (ibid, 10-11). These financial institutions, not necessarily public, should guarantee not only a competitive interest rate but also access to credit to their clients, that is, the poor (ibid, 12-18). Knowing they will receive some profit from their savings, the poor will acquire the means to improve their situation and have a safety net for times of crisis.

This kind of projects should find public support because democracy, through universal suffrage, is the government of the poor particularly as they become owners (Tocqueville, 1969 [1835, 1840], pp. 209-211). Such a government will promote policies tending to better “the lot of the poor, who cannot help themselves” (ibid, p.211) avoiding the negative social and individual effects of pauperism.

Concluding remarks

Even if Tocqueville has been presented as a nostalgic author regretting the end of aristocratic times, nostalgia does not inspire his analysis of democracy. It is not out of nostalgia that Tocqueville shows the risks and dangers of democracy. This is an author engaged with his times and his political environment. Democracy and its capacity to enforce the equality of conditions are true advantages and represent real progress for all. But it comes at a cost. Tocqueville calls on us to see it and do something about it. He warns us all: “We should not delude ourselves. Let us look calmly and quietly on the future of modern societies. We must not be intoxicated by the spectacle of its greatness; let us not be discouraged by the sight of its miseries” (Tocqueville, 1997[1835], p. 25) .

Democracy brings about a change in people’s attitudes and perceptions. Love of equality and of material well-being direct all actions and pursuits. They also bring increasing demands for more equality and wealth and make inequality and poverty unacceptable. However, they open the door to these very evils. Inequality and poverty lead to social and political exclusion and, eventually, can open the door to despotism. The political community is built upon the reciprocity of rights and duties, when this reciprocity is broken citizens might willingly renounce to their participation in it.

Love of equality and of material well-being makes each individual concentrates all her efforts only in improving her life. The deprivation that comes with them affects individuals only as it becomes a real possibility for each one of them. Pauperism is not limited to the lack of material resources; it has implications on citizenship and individual freedom. It is in the name of freedom that Tocqueville calls for action against pauperism understood as a deprivation of rights. Without material means, individuals will not be able to pursue their own ends, they will not be able to live the life they consider worth living.

¹³ Tocqueville is particularly hopeful about the future of what he calls industrial associations, meaning companies owned and directed by their workers (Tocqueville, 2006, p. 10).

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