

## The Revolution

Satan frowned as he read through the contract documents. He was always uncomfortable in the presence of lawyers, even though some of the best lawyers in history now worked for him. Satan didn't particularly like written contracts. He much preferred to do business with a handshake. This client had insisted on a written contract, though, and to make matters worse he had one prepared by his own lawyers. On top of everything else, Satan's neck hurt. He had adopted a human form to avoid making his client nervous, and the starched white collar of his three-piece suit was chafing his skin. After staring at the last page for a long time he set the papers down. "I guess everything is in order" he said with resignation.

"If you would just initial here . . ." the lawyer to the left of Satan's client began to speak but Satan silenced him by raising his index finger.

"There is still time to change your mind" Satan said, looking directly at his client. "You have as yet made no commitment, and I will not hold it against you if you do not sign." He always offered his clients a chance to back out. They almost never did, and Satan could use this offer to further humiliate them at the end, when they begged for release.

Philippé D'Costa looked straight into Satan's eyes with an air of arrogant defiance. "I am doing this for The People" he said. "The People who for years have been slaves to the rich. The People who do all the work, while the rich keep all the profits. And I am doing this for our lost brethren. The People who languish under the yoke of a foreign king in the province which was unjustly taken from us. I am sacrificing my soul so The People can live in peace and prosperity."

There was a moment of tense silence after Philippé spoke. He continued to stare directly into Satan's face, and Satan stared back.

The lawyer who had been silenced finally spoke up. "Ahem. As I was saying, if you would just initial here, and here, and sign and date the contract here. . ." He pointed to the appropriate paragraphs as he spoke these words.

Satan touched the papers with his finger. The requested marks burned themselves into the paper at the indicated locations. A slight wisp of smoke curled up from his signature.

"And if you would sign here, Mr. D'Costa. . ." the lawyer said to his client.

Philippé smiled as he signed the papers. Then he looked back at Satan to confirm what was written in the contract. "So, you guarantee the revolution will succeed and I will overthrow the king?" he asked.

"And in return, I will own your soul when you die" Satan replied.

"If I am still the leader when I die" Philippé stressed. "That's specified in paragraph 5b. I think you should know, however, that these gentlemen have also prepared paperwork which specifies that I

voluntarily relinquish power to whoever shall replace me five minutes before my death, whenever that should occur. So, I will not be the leader when I die.” Philippé smiled at Satan. “I thought I should clarify that so you won’t be disappointed when it happens.”

Satan smiled for the first time. “It’s nice of you to concern yourself with my feelings,” he said, “but you needn’t bother. I’m not often disappointed.” Then he disappeared in a puff of crimson smoke.

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Philippé Acosta found Satan to be true to his word. The revolution quickly succeeded. The sitting king had once been feared as a tyrant, but he had grown old and tired. He quickly surrendered when Philippé’s army surrounded the palace, supported by a screaming mob of angry citizens. The king hoped that if he abdicated without a fight he might be permitted to live in comfortable exile. Philippé made a grand speech from the palace balcony. He said The People had won a tremendous victory, and The People were now in charge. He promised to assist them in any way he could as Provisional Premier for Life. He announced that they were now entering a new era of peace and prosperity. The slate was wiped clean. People were absolved of all debt. He considered all prisoners to be “political prisoners” because they had been forced into committing crimes by the injustices of the deposed king. They would therefore be pardoned and immediately released. Philippé bore malice toward no one, and to insure no one would threaten The People’s regime he was reluctantly ordering the execution of the king, his heirs, and all his high government officials.

Premier Philippé’s first edict to benefit The People was to have all the richest men and women in the kingdom arrested as “enemies of the people.” He explained that they had not worked for their wealth and should have given it to the people who had actually done something to earn it. They were soon found guilty by juries of their peers, assisted no doubt by Premier Philippé’s pronouncement than any jurist who did not vote for conviction would be demonstrating that he too was an enemy of the people. The estates of the rich were confiscated and Premier Philippé made a very public showing of redistributing the money to The People and to worthy charities. There were so many people and so few rich that no one person actually received very much money, but the gesture was wildly applauded. A few paranoid malcontents claimed that more money was seized than was redistributed, but since only Philippé’s accountant knew how much money had been seized and since the penalty for accusing the Premier of misconduct was death, those complaints quickly died out. The Premier then appointed “Peoples’ Representatives” to oversee the lands and run the businesses that had been seized from the rich. To ensure these representatives were committed to the goals of the People’s regime, it was only natural that the men and women who had most strongly supported Philippé during the revolution were the ones who were appointed to these positions.

Premier Philippé’s next move was to extend his beneficence to the brethren in the “lost province.” The loss of this province had been especially grievous to The People because, in addition to their brethren who lived there, the province contained the most fertile farmlands and the richest mineral deposits in the continent. Nearly a hundred years had passed since the province had been lost so the anguish over its loss had diminished somewhat, but it did not take long for Philippé and his supporters to rekindle it. The fact that the neighboring kingdom had gradually reduced the size of its army over the

years helped their cause. A border dispute was quickly escalated into a national insult, and Premier Philippé sent his army across the border to liberate the province. The war turned out to be longer and bloodier than anyone expected, but in the end Philippé's army prevailed. When the joy of the victory subsided and the cost began to be felt, Premier Philippé forestalled all criticism by announcing that the grateful freed citizens in the province had offered to pay all the military costs of the campaign through a special one-time tax. "We bought their liberty with our blood, and they are repaying us with their gold!" the Premier proudly announced. He was declared to be both a political and a military genius, at least by his supporters.

A certain segment of any population is attracted to wealth and power, and Philippé was soon surrounded by admirers and sycophants. There were many beautiful women within this crowd, and it was not long until Philippé chose a bride who bore him a son to serve as heir to the premiership. Thanks to Philippé's poorly concealed extramarital affairs there were also many other sons and daughters who could challenge this claim, but Philippé did not concern himself with that. The courts or the swords could decide who became the next Provisional Premier for Life. It really did not matter to Philippé. As long as someone took over, he would not be the Premier when he died and hence would regain his soul.

Despite Philippé's earnest intentions, some problems proved difficult to solve. The debtors whose debts were forgiven when Philippé took power were soon in debt again. Similarly, many of the political prisoners who were released from the jail returned to their old careers. Robberies and murders skyrocketed. A large police force was needed to cope with the mayhem, but the government didn't have enough money to pay for the police force it already had. Even with the one-time tax on the citizens of the liberated province, the national treasury was quickly being depleted. Existing government programs and personnel required funding to continue operations, and the generous social programs Philippé had instituted required even more money. To his dismay, Philippé discovered that there was no one left to pay the taxes he needed to maintain his government. The king had taxed the rich to pay for his kingdom. The poor had been exempted from taxes, as it was neither practical nor profitable to tax them. Premier Philippé, however, had arrested the rich and confiscated their wealth. They could no longer be taxed.

Originally, Philippé had hoped to abolish all taxes. The profits from the farms and businesses he had turned over to the Peoples' Representatives were supposed to fund the government. To no one's surprise but Philippé's, those representatives had emulated their Premier by siphoning money for themselves from properties they were supposed to oversee. Worse still, it appeared these representatives had neither the motivation nor the skill to successfully run the businesses he had entrusted to them. It was almost as if the hated rich, who had not done the physical labor to earn their profits, had some magical power that enabled them to successfully run the enterprises they had created. Without this magical power, businesses went bankrupt and crops failed. Soon the people of the kingdom were starving. Cynics began to claim they had fared better under the greedy capitalists than under the benevolent People's regime.

The rich farmlands and mineral resources of the reclaimed province also failed to produce revenue. Many of the rich profiteers who had run these enterprises fled to the neighboring kingdom when Philippé's army advanced. Those who remained behind were, of course, arrested and stripped of their

unearned fortunes while their businesses were turned over to Peoples' Representatives. The net result was that the once prosperous farms and mines failed. The grateful citizens in the lost province, who had been instantly rendered poor by the one-time tax to pay for the war, started asking each other who among them had actually offered to pay for the war. For that matter, none of them could recall asking Premier Philippé to go to war on their behalf. These ingrates seemed to feel they had been doing quite well while languishing under the neighboring king.

Philippé summoned his wisest economists and accountants and told them to find the money which the Peoples' Representatives had stolen and return it to the kingdom. They soon returned to explain that reclaiming the money would be virtually impossible, as the Representatives had hidden it in numbered bank accounts in the same country where Philippé kept his money. With much trepidation, they also said that even if the money could be reclaimed it would only keep the country running for a few weeks, or a month at best. They then tried to confuse Philippé with a long technical explanation of how the wealth of a nation is more than just piles of gold. Wealth depended upon economic activity, liquidity, trust, debt, leverage, and a host of other magical phrases. Philippé interrupted them and demanded they provide a solution. They immediately said he must turn the lands and businesses over to people who knew how to run them. When he asked who that was, there was a long, uncomfortable silence.

Finally someone timidly suggested "The rich?"

"We'd have to let them keep the profits as an incentive" another cautioned.

At this point Philippé declared them to be "Enemies of the People" who were trying to undo the revolution. He had them thrown into prison with the rich capitalist dogs whom they so obviously admired.

Since Philippé had redistributed the nation's wealth to The People, it was only fair that The People should now be the ones to pay the taxes. Surprisingly, they didn't see it that way. They resorted to subterfuge to avoid paying their fair share of the government's expenses. Schemes such as showing the tax collectors they had no money proliferated, and the Premier ordered his army to collect the taxes.

Protests broke out, and the protests became riots. Premier Philippé tried to suppress the protests with his army, but the rank and file of his army were near starvation themselves and many of them had friends and relatives among the protestors. When the army refused to confront the protesters, the government fell. The People abolished the Premiership and established a democracy. Premier Philippé was arrested for the murder of his predecessor and of the hundreds of other people who had perished during his reign. He was quickly sentenced to death.

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The night before his execution he received a visitor in his prison cell. No jailor escorted this visitor because Satan doesn't need such services. He merely appeared in the cell, accompanied by a faint smell

of burning sulfur. The prisoner was sitting on his bed with his face buried in his hands. Satan sat on a golden throne that had appeared beside the bed.

“You look as if the revolution hasn’t turned out as well as you’d expected,” Satan commented.

“Those ungrateful swine!” Premier Philippé spat out the words. “Everything I did was for them. I gave them the land they worked. I gave them the businesses they slaved for. I gave them the fortunes of the rich and I won back the land they yearned for, but still it wasn’t enough. They turned against me.”

Satan chuckled. “Even after all these millennia, the human capacity for self-deception still astonishes me.”

“It’s true!” Philippé protested. “I gave it all to them!”

“Not all. You kept a fortune for yourself,” Satan reminded him.

“I liberated our citizens in the lost province!” Philippé insisted.

“They were happier under the neighboring king,” Satan observed. “And how many lives were lost in that war you started?”

“OK. So I’m not a saint.” Philippé snorted.

“That is true” said Satan. “I’ve known all the saints, and you clearly are not a saint.”

“The people who threw me into this prison clearly are not saints, either!” Philippé countered.

“Maybe not,” Satan said thoughtfully. “But overall they seem to be doing more good than evil. I’m afraid that’s not something I can say about your government, and I’m an expert on good and evil.”

“If that’s true, this new government can’t be good for your line of work” said Philippé.

“Oh my dear Philippé! You underestimate your fellow man. My business flourishes in any environment, and with any government. Just as there are religious zealots who are willing to kill in the name of God, so too are there political zealots who will commit any crime to further their political ambitions. Lies, slander, theft, even murder. People who crave power will jump at the chance to do these things, and they will justify it to themselves by claiming they’re doing it for The People. I don’t corrupt anyone. I simply present people with an opportunity to fulfill their ambitions. It’s amazing how eagerly some people will choose short term gains, even when they know there’s a long term cost. I suspect that I will feast on as many souls during the current democracy as I did during past regimes.”

“Well, at least you won’t feast on my soul” Philippé declared.

“What makes you so certain of that?” asked Satan.

“We have a contract!” Philippé insisted.

“Oh, that” Satan said dismissively. “I could argue that since the new democracy means no one will inherit your premiership, technically you will still be the Premier when you die. But why bother? The truth is that even before we signed that scrap of paper I owned your soul. The evil you had already done meant that, barring the unlikely event of a redemption, your soul was mine. That contract merely gave you the illusion that you could get away with doing the things you’d already decided to do. And the things you did after that! If I hadn’t already owned your soul, I certainly would have earned it for the evil you did after you became Premier. And even now, on the night before your execution, there’s no hint of remorse. You’re sorry you got caught, but you’re not sorry for what you did. You still can’t admit, even to yourself, that what you did was wrong. You talked about the good of The People, but you acted for the good of yourself. I don’t see a redemption in your future. I will now leave you with that thought. Don’t bother to get up, I can see myself out. And I won’t say good-bye, because I will see you tomorrow.”