Black Flag

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Michael Bakunin

1814-1876

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Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of *Black Flag* in 2026!

Following on from our Kropotkin (Volume 2, Number 3) and Proudhon (Volume 5, Number 1) specials, this issue is a Bakunin special to mark the 150th anniversary of his death in 1876. We include articles on and by Bakunin, including new translations as well as reprints of his writings from the anarchist press.

Born into the Russian aristocracy in 1814, he became a left-Hegelian and republican. He met both Proudhon and Marx when he came to Western Europe to study. An advocate of pan-Slavism, he was a keen participant in the 1848 Revolution, taking to the barricades in Prague and Dresden. Imprisoned and sentenced to death, he was extradited multiple times before being handed to the Tsar and placed in solitary confinement in 1851. Exiled to Siberia in 1857, he escaped and returned to Western Europe. After the failure of the 1863 Polish revolt, Bakunin turned to socialism as he realised that the peasants were not interested in helping the Polish nobility to rule and exploit them. After failing to convince the *League of Peace and Freedom* to embrace the social question, he joined the *International* in 1868 and became a leading champion of collectivism within it – and became an anarchist.

Accounts of Bakunin's anarchist politics are a mixed bag. Many of the hostile ones base themselves on texts for which the evidence that Bakunin wrote them is lacking. Some mix his earlier ideas with his anarchist ones. The obvious problems with both these dubious activities rarely hinder their acceptance by non-anarchists. Unsurprisingly, such accounts begin with Marx and Engels in their diatribes seeking to combat Bakunin's rising influence within the International. Suffice to say, what anarchists take from Bakunin has little or no resemblance to such articles as the texts we include here show – both those on and by Bakunin.

We start with articles on Bakunin, starting with two written to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth, followed by two written for the 100th anniversary of his death. We follow this with more recent accounts of his ideas, seeking to show the importance of Bakunin as both an activist and as a thinker to revolutionary anarchism.

Then we move onto Bakunin's own writings, grouped by theme. While best remembered for his struggle against, and prescient critique of, Marx within the International, Bakunin's legacy is far greater as this selection of writings show. We include texts on a range of subjects, including the labour movement, federalism, socialism, social revolution, the role of anarchist groups and libertarian education. We have decided to reprint some of Bakunin's articles which we have published in previous issues to make them easily accessible to readers and to present all the relevant writings in a single issue of *Black Flag*. All should be of interest to anarchists and radicals today – particularly given that Bakunin has usually been proven correct in his analysis, not least as regards Marxism.

While Bakunin advocated what became known as revolutionary syndicalism (as noted by the French syndicalists themselves), as Max Nettlau suggests his ideas were wider than that and so he cannot be reduced to simply being a syndicalist. His advocacy of the importance of anarchists organising as anarchists to influence the labour movement from within is an obvious point of divergence. So as well as being a precursor of syndicalism, he was also a precursor of *especifismo* – recognising the need, necessity, of a specific anarchist federation.

We end with reviews of works about and by Bakunin which should be of interest to those seeking to discover more about Bakunin's life and ideas. Mark Leier's 2006 biography, *Bakunin: The Creative Passion*, covers both well.

If you want to contribute rather than moan at those who do, whether its writing new material or letting us know of on-line articles, reviews or translations, then contact us: blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk

On Bakunin

Michael Bakunin played a key role in the development of anarchism as a socio-economic theory and movement. Understandably, given this, he has been the subject of many articles over the years and we reproduce a few here.

We start with two articles written to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth on the 30th of May 1814. The first, from *Mother Earth*, by Max Baginski (see *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 3 No. 2 [Summer 2023]) summarises his life and influence, correctly noting that his ideas were being practiced by the likes of the I.W.W. The second is from *Freedom*, by noted anarchist historian Max Nettlau, discusses both in more detail.

These are followed by two articles written for the 100th anniversary of Bakunin's death on 1st of July 1876. The first is by French anarcho-syndicalist activists seeking to provide an accurate account of Bakunin's contributions to libertarian politics. Then comes an account of his influence on Russian anarchism by veteran anarchist Sam Dolgoff who had recently produced a comprehensive collection of Bakunin's writings in *Bakunin on Anarchy* (the second edition was entitled *Bakunin on Anarchism*). It should be noted that Bakunin, like Kropotkin, became an anarchist during his exile in Western Europe and had far more influence on the movement there than in his homeland. However, he did have an impact on the Russian revolutionary movement, as Dolgoff indicates.

Next is an article debunking a neo-Trotskyist attack on Bakunin, contrasting the claims made with what he actually argued and did. It is of note that anarchists accounts of his ideas are radically different to those by those hostile to anarchism, whether liberal or Marxist. The latter rarely discuss his positive ideas nor his syndicalism but rather concentrate on misleading claims about secret conspiracies or dubious – and unsupported – claims about terrorism. Suffice to say, anarchist accounts show the real Bakunin and his actual influence upon anarchism as both a theory and as a social movement.

This is followed by an account of Bakunin's ideas on the organisation of anarchists and the role secret societies played in his politics. While Bakunin's writings on this subject are a constant source for cherry-picking by Marxists, what was actually meant is vastly different than these suggest. Rather, as Andrew Flood explores, the reality is more nuanced and do contain useful ideas even if certain aspects of the suggested organisational structure are flawed and should be rejected. Ultimately, the social context must be remembered when evaluating these ideas along with Bakunin's personal experience of being imprisoned in a Tsarist dungeon for years. Unsurprisingly, Marxists working in similarly repressive regimes have organised secretly.

We end with an overview of Bakunin's revolutionary ideas which remain relevant to anarchists today as well as an account of his views on national self-determination. Needless to say, more could be written in terms of aspects of his ideas not covered (his Hegelianism, for example) but enough is covered to indicate why further reading should be considered essential by socialists today.

Michael Bakunin (1814-1914)

M. Baginski

Mother Earth, May 1914

In the spring of 1861 there arrived in San Franciso a man who had a long and eventful journey behind him. He came all the way from Siberia, where he had passed four years in exile. Previous to that he was imprisoned in the dungeons of Saxony, Austria and Russia. In Saxony he had been sentenced to death because of his participation in the Dresden uprising. Extradited to Austria, he was again condemned to die. Then followed his extradition to Russia, where he was kept six years in the Petro-Pavlov fortress. Transferred to the dreaded Schlisselburg casemates, he was subsequently doomed to lifelong exile in Siberia.

Twelve years of this persecution and torture passed before he succeeded in finding his way to liberty. Under many difficulties he escaped from Siberia, crossed Japan, and thence reached the United States. Soon he was in London, where he immediately renewed his revolutionary connections and threw himself into his former work with an energy and enthusiasm as if all the persecution he had suffered merely served to rejuvenate him.

The hundredth anniversary of the birth of Michael Bakunin (1814-1914) falls at a time when the workers in every country are learning to realise more clearly the power of labour solidarity and of united militant effort – sentiments that Bakunin sowed broadcast in every revolutionary movement of his day.

"Observation and Comments"
***Mother Earth*, May 1914**

The name of this refugee was Michael Bakunin. Born May 20th (May 8th, according to the Russian calendar), 1814, he enjoyed all the advantages of a child of a wealthy family that belonged to the oldest Russian nobility. Young Bakunin might have easily attained to something "great" in the official circles of Russia, after he graduated from the Imperial Artillery School and became an army officer. But his rebellious temperament, his passionate love of liberty, and his rich mental endowments all combined to alienate him from the world of bureaucracy, and made him one of the great, significant personalities whose name will for all time be associated with the noblest struggles of humanity to break its fetters.

In the personality of Bakunin was incarnate the spirit of the Social Revolution. He was the very reverse of the genus politician who cunningly builds up his party and becomes absorbed therein. He gave himself fully, abandoned himself completely to his ideal, while the politician carefully calculates the steps he must climb to reach his goal. 'Tis the eternal contrast between the idealist and the politician: the one espouses liberty as wide as the world, the other awaits a favourable opportunity for advancement; the one devotes himself entirely to revolution, the other adapts himself to circumstances. It is because of this contrast that the politician wins momentary triumph, the real value of which soon shrinks, while the revolutionist achieves little success during his lifetime and personally often suffers a tragic fate, – but the fire of his being, the directness and oneness of his purpose continue to inspire the hearts and minds of mankind long after his death.

No doubt Karl Marx, Bakunin's antagonist in the International Workingmen's Association – organised fifty years ago – is still held in high esteem. But one thinks of him as a scholastic, a theoretician, the founder of a system that began with the claim of infallibility, but which is now doomed to disintegration, its very foundations crumbling to dust. No such musty chill breathes from Bakunin. His lifework is not an appeal to mere intellectuality; he speaks to the whole man, the most precious part of whom is still his strong will, his instincts and passions.

Young Bakunin worked his way through the abstruse books of the German philosophers, and later became active in the conspiratory and revolutionary uprisings of almost every country in Europe. In all these struggles his efforts were directed towards the demolition of every form of tyranny: God, State, capitalism, every metaphysical as well as physical despotism was to be destroyed before justice and liberty could triumph. His

manifold activities brought him in personal contact with most of the thinkers and propagandists of the social revolutionary movement of his time. He carried on long discussions of social problems with Proudhon; he was in close touch with Netchayev, the most zealous and reckless of Russian revolutionists, as well as with Alexander Herzen. Common ideas made Richard Wagner kin to him in the days of the Dresden uprising, and he was an intimate friend of the poet-revolutionist George Herwegh. There was hardly any individual type of revolutionist that Bakunin failed to meet in his stormy career. From the wealth of his experience – with individuals, events, theories, principles – there crystallised in his later years the conviction that the proletariat can never hope for liberation except through its own efforts. In a letter to the members of the Jura Federation, with whom he had worked and struggled and who stood by him in spite of all the slanders of the Marx clique, he left a sort of testament that is of especial significance at the present time when the workers throughout the world are beginning to see the emptiness of political phrases. In this letter – the last greeting to his former comrades – he says:

> "By birth and personal position I am a bourgeois, and as such I could carry on only theoretical propaganda amongst you. But I have come to the conclusion that the time for theoretical work, written or spoken, is past. * * * This is not a time for ideas; it is the time for action, for deeds. And first of all it is necessary to organise the power of the proletariat. But this organisation must be the work of the proletariat itself. If I were young I would go into the midst of the workers and by taking part in the daily life and struggles of my brothers, I would aid in this most important work of organisation. But neither my age nor my health permit it now. Organise, constantly organise the international militant solidarity of the workers, in every trade and country, and remember that however weak you are as isolated individuals or districts, you will constitute a tremendous, invincible power by means of universal cooperation."

This is the same militant spirit that breathes now in the best expressions of the Syndicalist and I.W.W. movements. Indeed, the 1ooth anniversary of Michael Bakunin comes at a time of a strong world-wide revival of the ideas for which Bakunin laboured throughout his life with such wonderful devotion, perseverance and courage.

Michael Bakunin

N. [Max Nettlau]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, June 1914

Most centenarians, even when born much later and still among us, are but dried-up relics of a remote past; whilst some few, though gone long since, remain full of life, and rather make us feel ourselves how little life and energy there is in most of us. These men, in advance of their age, prepared new ways for coming generations, who are often but too slow to follow them up. Prophets and dreamers, thinkers and rebels they are called, and of those who, in the strife for freedom and social happiness for all, united the best qualities of these four descriptions, Michael Bakunin is by far the best known. In recalling his memory, we will not forget the many less known thinkers and rebels, very many of whom from the "thirties" to the early "seventies" of last century had, by personal contact, their share in forming this or that part of his personality None of them, however, had the great gift of uniting into one current of revolt all the many elements of revolutionary thought, and that burning desire to bring about collective revolutionary action which constitute Bakunin's most fascinating characteristics. Courageous and heroic rebels always existed, but their aims were too often very Darrow they had not overcome political, religious, and social prejudices. Again, the most perfect "systems" were worked out theoretically; but these generous thinkers lacked the spirit to resort to action for their realisation, and their methods were tame, meek, and mild. Fourier waited for years for a millionaire to turn up who would hand him the money to construct the first Phalanstery. The Saint-Simonians had their eyes on kings or sons of kings who might be persuaded to realise their aims "from above." Marx was content to "prove" that the decay of Capitalism and the advent of the working classes to power will happen automatically.

Among the best known Socialists, Robert Owen and Proudhon, Blanqui and Bakunin, tried to realise their ideas by corresponding action Blanqui's splendid "No God, No Master," is, however, counteracted by the authoritarian and narrow political and nationalist character of his practical action. Both Owen and

Proudhon represent, as to the means of action, the method of *free experimentation*, which is, in my opinion, the only one which holds good aside of the method of *individual and collective revolt* advocated by Bakunin and many others. Circumstances – the weakness of small minorities in face of the brute force of traditional authority, and the indifference of the great mass of the population – have as yet no chance to either method to show its best, and, the ways of progress being manifold, neither of them may ever render the other quite superfluous. These experimental Socialists and Anarchists, then, are neither superior nor inferior, but simply different, dissimilar from Bakunin, the fiercest representative of the idea of real revolutionary action.

His economics are not original; he accepted willingly Marx's dissection of the capitalist system; nor did he dwell in particular on the future methods of distribution, declaring only the necessity for each to receive the full produce of his labour. But to him exploitation and oppression were not merely economic and political grievances which fairer ways of distribution and apparent participation in political power (democracy) would abolish; he saw clearer than almost all Socialists before him the close connection of all forms of *authority*, religious, political, social, and their embodiment, *the State*, with economic exploitation and submission. Hence, *Anarchism* – which need not be defined here – was to him the necessary basis, the essential factor of all real Socialism. In this he differs fundamentally from ever so many Socialists who glide over this immense problem by some verbal juggle between "Government" and "administration," "the State" and "society," or the like, because a real desire for freedom is not yet awakened in them. This desire and its consequence, the determination to revolt to realise freedom, exists in every being; I should say that it exists in some form and to some degree in the smallest particle that composes matter, but ages of priest- and State- craft have almost smothered it, and ages of alleged democracy, of triumphant Social Democracy even, are not likely to kindle it again.

Here Bakunin's Socialism sets in with full strength mental, personal, and social freedom to him are inseparable – *Atheism, Anarchism, Socialism* an organic unit. His Atheism is not that of the ordinary Freethinker, who may be an authoritarian and au anti-Socialist; nor is his Socialism that of the ordinary Socialist, who may be, and very often is, an authoritarian and a Christian; nor would his Anarchism ever deviate into the eccentricities of Tolstoi and Tucker. But each of the three ideas penetrates the other two and constitutes with them a living realisation of freedom, just as all our intellectual, political, and social prejudices and evils descend from one common source – authority. Whoever reads "God and the State," the best known of Bakunin's many written expositions of these ideas, may discover that when the scales of religion fall from his eyes, at the same moment also the State will appear to him in its horrid hideousness, and anti-Statist Socialism will be the only way out. The thoroughness of Bakunin's Socialist propaganda is, to my impression, unique.

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From these remarks it may be gathered that I dissent from certain recent efforts to revindicate Bakunin almost exclusively as a Syndicalist. He was, at the time of the International, greatly interested in seeing the scattered masses of the workers combining into trade societies or sections of the International. Solidarity in the economic struggle was to be the only basis of working-class organisation. He expressed the opinion that these organisations would spontaneously evolve into federated Socialist bodies, the natural basis of future society. This automatic evolution has been rightly contested by our Swiss comrade Bertoni But did Bakunin really mean it when he sketched it out in his writings of elementary public propaganda We must not forget that Bakunin – and here we touch one of his shortcomings – seeing the backward dispositions of the great masses in his time, did not think it possible to propagate the whole of his ideas directly among the people. By insisting on purely economic organisation, he wished to protect the masses against the greedy politician who, under the cloak of Socialism, farms and exploits their electoral "power" in our age of progress!

He also wished to prevent their falling under the leadership of sectarian Socialism of any kind. He did not wish them, however, to fall into the hands and under the thumbs of Labour leaders, whom he knew,

to satiety, in Geneva, and whom he stigmatised in his *Egalité* articles of 1869. His idea was that among the organised masses interested in economic warfare thoroughgoing revolutionists, Anarchists, should exercise an invisible yet carefully concerted activity, co-ordinating the workers' forces and making them strike a common blow, nationally and internationally, at the right moment. The secret character of this inner circle, *Fraternité* and *Alliance*, was to be a safeguard against ambition and leadership. This method may have been derived from the secret societies of past times; Bakunin improved it as best he could in the direction of freedom, but could not, of course, remove the evils resulting from every infringement of freedom, however small and well-intentioned it may be in the beginning. This problem offers wide possibilities, from dictatorship and "democratic" leadership to Bakunin's invisible, preconcerted initiative, to free and open initiative, and to entire spontaneity and individual freedom. To imitate Bakunin in our days in this respect would not mean progress, but repeating a mistake of the past.

In criticising this secret preconcerted direction of movements, considered worse than useless in our time, we ought not to overlook that the then existing reason for making such arrangements has also nearly gone. To Bakunin, who participated in the movements of 1848-49, in the Polish insurrection in the early "sixties," in secret Italian movements, and who, like so many, foresaw the fall of the French Empire and a revolution in Paris, which might have happened under better auspices than the Commune of 1871 – to him, then, an international Socialist '89 or '48, a real social revolution, was a tangible thing which might really happen before his eyes, and which he did his best to really bring about by secretly influencing and co-ordinating local mass movements. We in our sober days have so often been told that all this is impossible, that revolutions are hopeless and obsolete, that, with few exceptions, no effort is ever made, and the necessity of replacing semi-authoritarian proceedings like that of Bakunin by the free play of individual initiative or other improved methods, never seems to arise.

Bakunin's best plans failed from various reasons, one of which was the smallness of the means which the movements, then in their infancy, offered to him in every respect. Since all these possibilities are a matter of the past, let me dwell for a moment on the thought of what Bakunin would have done had he lived during the First of May movements of the early "nineties" or during the Continental general strike efforts of the ten years next following With the tenth part of the materials these movements contained, which exploded some here, some there. Like fireworks, in splendid isolation, Bakunin would have attacked international Capitalism and the State everywhere in a way never yet heard of. And movements which really create new methods of successful struggle against a strong Government, like the Suffragette and the Ulster movements, would never have let him stand aside in cool disdain, because their narrow purpose was Dot his own. I fancy he would never have rested day and night until he had raised the social revolutionary movement to the level of similar or greater efficiency. To think of this makes one feel alive; to see the dreary reality of our wise age lulls one to sleep again. I am the last one to overlook the many Anarchists who sacrificed themselves by deeds of valour – the last also to urge others to do what I am not doing myself: I merely state the fact that with Bakunin a great part of faith in the revolution died, that the hope and confidence which emanated from his large personality were never restored, and that the infinite possibilities of the last twenty-five years found many excellent comrades who did their best, but none upon whose shoulders the mantle of Bakunin has fallen.

What, then, was and is Bakunin's influence?

It is wonderful to think how he arose in the International at the right moment to prevent the influence of Marx, always predominant in the Northern countries, from becoming general. Without him, dull, political, electioneering Marxism would have fallen like mildew also on the South of Europe. We need but think how Cafiero, later on the boldest Italian Anarchist, first returned to Naples as the trusted friend and admirer of Marx; how Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, was the chosen apostle of Marxism for Spain, etc. To oppose the deep-laid schemes of Marx, a man of Bakunin's experience and initiative was really needed; by him alone the young movements of Italy and Spain, those of the South of France and of French-speaking Switzerland, and a part of the Russian movement, were welded together, learnt to practise international solidarity, and to prepare international action. This alone created a lasting basis for the coming Anarchist movement, whilst everywhere else the other Socialist movements, described as Utopian and unscientific, had to give way to Marxism, proclaimed as the only scientific doctrine! Persecutions after revolutionary attempts often reduced these free territories of Anarchism to a minimum; but when Italy, Spain, and France were silenced, some corner in Switzerland where Bakunin's seed had fallen always remained, and in this way, thanks to the solid work of Bakunin and his comrades, mainly from 1868 to 1874, Anarchy, was always able to face her enemies and to revive.

The immediate influence of Bakunin was reduced after he had retired from the movement in 1874, when

certain friends left him; bad health – he died in June, 1876 – prevented him continuing his work with fresh elements gathered round him. Soon after his death a period of theoretical elaboration began, when the methods of distribution were examined and *Communist* Anarchism is its present form was shaped. In those years also, after the failure of many collective revolts, the struggle became more bitter, and individual action, propaganda by deed was resorted to, a proceeding which made preconcerted secret arrangements in Bakunin's manner useless. In this way, both his economic ideas, *Collectivist* Anarchism, and his favourite method of action alluded to, became so to speak obsolete, and were neglected.

Add to this that from about 1879 and 1880 Anarchism could be openly propagated on a large scale in France (mainly in Paris and in the Lyons region). This great extension of the propaganda gave so much new work, a new spirit entered the groups, soon arts and science were permeated with Anarchism – Elisée Reclus' wonderful influence was at work. In Bakunin's stormy days there was no time for this, through no fault of his. In short, Anarchism in France and in many other countries was in its vigorous *youth*, a period when the tendency to look ahead is greatest, and the past is neglected like a cradle of infancy. For this reason, and because very little information on Bakunin was accessible to the Anarchists of the "eighties," Bakunin's influence in those years remained small. I ought to have mentioned that certain opinions of Bakunin's gained much ground in the Russian revolutionary movement of the "seventies" and later, but cannot dwell further on this.

In 1882, Reclus and Cafiero published the choicest extract from the many manuscripts left by Bakunin: "Dieu et Etat!" (God and the State), a pamphlet which B. R. Tucker fortunately translated into English (1883 or 1884). This or its English reprint circulated in England when no other English Anarchist pamphlet existed, and its radical Anarchist freethought or thoroughly freethinking Anarchism certainly left lasting marks on the early Anarchist propagandists, and will continue to do so. Of course, the same applies to translations in many countries.

About 1896, a considerable part of Bakunin's correspondence was published, preceded and followed by many extracts from his unpublished manuscripts, a part of which is now before us in the six volumes of the Paris edition of his works. It became possible, with the help of these and many other sources, to examine his life in detail, and in particular to give. proofs in hand, the story of the great struggle in the International, and to scatter the calumnies and lies heaped up by the Marxist writers and the bourgeois authors who followed them.

it is preposterous to think that Bakunin would have been a Syndicalist and nothing else – but *what he would have tried to make of Syndicalism*, how he would have tried to group these and many other materials of revolt and to lead them to action

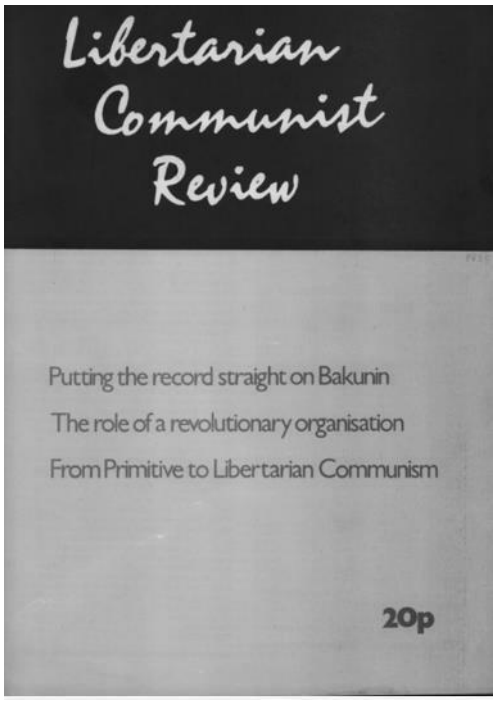
All this brought about a revival in the interest for Bakunin; but is there not a deeper cause for such a revival When Bakunin was gone, his friends felt perhaps rather relieved, for the strain he put on their activity was sometimes too great for them. We in our times, or some of us, at least, ala perhaps in the opposite situation: there is no strain at all put on us, and we might wish for somebody to rouse us. Thus we look back at any rate with pathetic sympathy on the heroic age of Anarchism, from Bakunin's times to the early "nineties" in France Many things have happened since then also – I need but recall Ferrer's name; but, in my opinion at least, a complacent admiration of Syndicalism has too often replaced every thought of Anarchist action. I say again: it is preposterous to think that Bakunin would have been a Syndicalist and nothing else – but *what he would have tried to make of Syndicalism*, how he would have tried to group these and many other materials of revolt and to lead them to action, this my imagination cannot sketch out, but I feel that things would have gone otherwise, and the capitalists would sleep less quietly. I am no admirer of personalities, and have many faults to find with Bakunin also on other grounds, but this I feel, that where he was rebellion grew round him, whilst to-day, with such splendid material, rebellion is nowhere. South Africa, Colorado, are ever so hopeful events, but think what a Bakunin would have made of them – and then we can measure the value of this man in the struggle for freedom.

Putting the record straight on Mikhail Bakunin

Libertarian Communist Review No. 2, 1976

The following text comes from *Solidarite Ouvriere*, the monthly paper of the "Alliance Syndicaliste Revolutionnaire et Anarcho-syndicaliste". Originally published in *Libertarian Communist Review* No. 2 1976. Translated from the original French by Nick Heath.

On the eve of the centenary of Bakunin, the return of all the gross stupidities which have been said about Bakunin requires a considerable work. Without hesitation whatsoever, the prize for falsification goes to Jacques Duclos, the former head of the PCF, who has devoted a huge book of several hundred pages to the relationship between Marx and Bakunin, which is a masterpiece of fiction. Now is the time to compile a catalogue of falsifications that surround Bakunin. For if Duclos holds — with Marx himself — the sad privilege of the thought of Bakunin, the anarchists are unrivalled in being his greatest unconscious falsifiers. Of the things in common that the two leaders of the First International have, the foremost is perhaps that their thought has been misrepresented in an identical way by their own disciples. We wish here to follow the development of this misrepresentation of Bakunin's positions. Later, we will explain what we think to be his true theory of revolutionary action.



Bakunin continually moves between the mass action of the proletariat and action of organised revolutionary minorities. Neither of these two aspects of the struggle against capitalism can be separated: however, the libertarian movement after the death of Bakunin divided into two tendencies which emphasised one of the two points while neglecting the other. The same phenomenon can be found in the Marxist movement with the reformist social democrats in Germany and the radical and Jacobin social democrats in Russia.

In the anarchist movement, one current advocates the development of mass organisation, exclusively acting within the structures of the working class, and arrives at a state of a-politicism completely foreign to the ideas of Bakunin; another current refuses the very principle of organisation as this is seen as the beginnings of bureaucracy: they favour the setting up of affinity groups within which individual revolutionary initiative and the action of example will facilitate the passage without transition to an ideal communist society. where everyone will produce according to their his/her ability and will consume according to his/her need: joyful work and taking from the common store.

The first current advocated the action of the mass of workers within a structured organisation, collectivisation of the means of production and the organisation of these into a coherent whole, preparation of the workers for social transformation.

The second current completely refused authority and the discipline of organisation; tactically this is seen as temporisation with capital. This current defines itself in an essentially negative way: against authority, hierarchy, power and legal action. Its political programme is based in the concept of communal autonomy, directly inspired by Kropotkin, in particular *The Conquest of Bread*. This current triumphed in the Congress of the CNT at Saragossa in 1936, whose resolutions expressed misunderstanding of the economic mechanisms of society, scorn for economic and social reality. The Congress developed in its final report "The confederal concept of libertarian communism", founded on the model of organisational plans of the future society which flourished in socialist literature of the 19th century. The foundation of the future society is the free commune. Each commune is free to do what it wishes. Those which refuse to be integrated outside the agreements of "conviviencia collectiva" with industrial society could "choose other

modes of communal life, like for example, those of naturists and nudists, or they would have the right to have an autonomous administration outside the general agreements"

In today's parlance, one could say that the followers of Bakunin can be divided in one "right wing deviation" which is traditional anarcho-syndicalism, and one "leftist deviation" which is anarchism. The first one emphasises mass action, economic organisation and methodology. The second one hangs on to the objectives. "the programme" quite independent of immediate reality. And each of these currents claims for itself — by the way very frequently — Bakunin.

We have distinguished four principal misrepresentations of Bakunin's thought:

SPONTANEISM

From time to time, Bakunin seems to sing the praises of spontaneity of the masses; at other times he affirms the necessity of mass political direction. In general anarchists have clung to the first aspect of his thought, and completely abandoned the second. In reality, Bakunin said that what the masses lacked in order to emancipate themselves was organisation and science, "precisely the two things which constitute now, and have always constituted the power of governments" (*Protest of the Alliance*). "At the time of great political and economic crisis when the instinct of the masses, greatly inflamed, opens out to all the happy inspiration, where these herds of slave-men manipulated, crushed, but never resigned, rebel against the yoke, but feel themselves to be disoriented and powerless because they are completely disorganised, ten, twenty or thirty men, well-intentioned and well-organised amongst themselves, and who know where they're going and what they want, can easily carry with them a hundred, two hundred, three hundred or even more" (*Oeuvres* 6, 90).

Later on, he says, similarly, that in order that the minority of IWMA can carry with it the majority, it is necessary that each member should be well versed in the principles of the International.

"It is only on this condition," he says "that in times of peace and calm will he be able to effectively fulfil the mission of propagandist and missionary, and in times of struggle, that of a revolutionary leader."

The instrument for the development of Bakunin's ideas was the Alliance of Socialist Democracy. Its mission was to select revolutionary cadres to guide mass organisations, or to create them where they didn't already exist. It was an ideologically coherent grouping.

"It is a secret society, formed in the heart of the International, to give it a revolutionary organisation, and to transform it and all the popular masses outside it, into a force sufficiently organised to annihilate political, clerical, bourgeois reaction, to destroy all religious, political, judicial institutions of states."

It is difficult to see spontaneism here. Bakunin only said that if the revolutionary minority must act within the masses it must not substitute itself for the masses.

In the last analysis, it is always the masses themselves that must act on their own account. Revolutionary militants must push workers towards organisation, and when circumstances demand it, they must not hesitate to take the lead. This idea contrasts singularly with what anarchism subsequently became

Thus, in 1905, when the Russian anarchist Voline was pressed by the insurgent Russian workers to take on the presidency of the soviet. of St Petersburg, he refused because "he wasn't a worker" and in order not to embrace authority. Finally, the presidency fell to Trotsky, after Nossar, the first President, was arrested.

Mass action and minority revolutionary action are inseparable, according to Bakunin. But the action of revolutionary minorities only has sense when it is linked to mass working class organisation. If they are isolated from the organised working class, revolutionaries are condemned to failure.

"Socialism... only has a real existence in enlightened revolutionary impulse, in the collective will and in the working class's own mass organisations — and when this impulse, this will, this organisation, falls short, the best books in the world are nothing but theories in a vacuum, impotent dreams."

APOLITICISM

Anarchism has been presented as an apolitical, abstentionist movement by playing with words and giving them a different meaning to that which the Bakuninists gave them.

Political action, at the time, meant parliamentary action. So to be anti-parliamentarian meant to be anti-political. As the marxists at this moment in time could not conceive of any other political action for the proletariat than parliamentary action, the denial of the electoral mystification was understood as opposition to every form of political action.

The Bakuninists replied to the. accusation of abstentionism by pointing out that the term was ambiguous and that it never meant political indifference, but a rejection of bourgeois politics in favour of a "politics of work".

Abstention is a radical questioning of the political rules of the bourgeoisie's game.

"The International does not reject politics generally. It will certainly be forced to involve itself insofar as it will be forced to struggle against the bourgeois class. It only rejects bourgeois politics."

Bakunin condemned suffrage as an instrument of proletarian emancipation. He denies the use of putting up candidates. But he didn't elevate abstentionism to the level of an absolute principal. He recognised a degree of interest in local elections.

He even advised Gambuzzi's parliamentary intervention.

Nowhere in Bakunin will you find hysterical, vicious condemnations that became dear to anarchists after his death. Elections are not condemned for moral reasons, but because they risk prolonging the bourgeoisie's game. On this point, Bakunin proved to be right over and above the Marxists, right up to Lenin.

Anti-parliamentarianism was so unfamiliar to Marxists that from the start of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks — at least at the beginning — passed as Bakuninists in the European workers' movement.

THE REFUSAL OF AUTHORITY

The Bakuninists called themselves "anti-authoritarians". The confusion that arose as a result of the use of this word has been bitterly taken up since Bakunin's death. Authoritarian in the language of the time meant bureaucratic. The anti-authoritarians were simply anti-bureaucratic in opposition to the Marxist tendency.

The question then was not one of morals or character, and attitude to authority influenced by temperament. It was a political standpoint. Anti-authoritarian means "democratic". This last word existed at the time but with a different meaning.

Less than a century after the French Revolution, it described the political practices of the bourgeoisie. It was the Bourgeoisie who were "democrats".

When it was applied to the working class movement, the word 'democrat' was accompanied by 'social' or 'socialist', as in 'social democrat. The worker who was a. 'democrat' was either a 'social-democrat' or anti authoritarian.

Later democracy and proletariat were associated in the expression 'workers democracy'.

The anti-authoritarian tendency of the International was in favour of workers democracy, the tendency qualified a authoritarian was accused of bureaucratic centralisation.

Authoritarian in the language of the time meant bureaucratic. The anti-authoritarians were simply anti-bureaucratic in opposition to the Marxist tendency… Anti-authoritarian means "democratic". This last word existed at the time but with a different meaning

But Bakunin was far from being opposed to all authority. His tendency allowed power if it came directly from the proletariat, and was controlled by it. He opposed the revolutionary government of the Jacobin type with insurrectionary proletarian power through the organisation of the working class.

Strictly speaking, this is not a form of political power but of social power.

After Bakunin's death, anarchists rejected the very idea of power. They only referred to the writings that were critical of power, and to a sort of metaphysical anti-authoritarianism. They abandoned the method of analysis which came from real facts. They abandoned this as far as the foundation of Bakuninist theory based on materialism and historical analysis. And with it they abandoned the field of struggle of the working class in favour of a particular form of radicalised liberalism.

THE CLASS MOVEMENT

Bakunin's political strategy did not depart from his theory of the relations between the classes. This should be established once and for all.

When the proletariat was weak, he advised against indiscriminate struggle against all the fractions of the bourgeoisie.

From the point of view of working class struggle, not all political regimes are equivalent. It is not a matter of indifference whether the struggle is against the dictatorial regime of Bismarck or the Tsar, or against that of a parliamentary democracy.

"The most imperfect of republics is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy."

In 1870, Bakunin recommended using the patriotic reaction of the French proletariat and turning it into revolutionary war. In his *Letters to a Frenchman* he makes a remarkable analysis of the relationships between different fractions of the bourgeoisie and the working class, and develops some months in advance

and prophetically, what were to be the Paris and provincial Communes.

A thorough reading of Bakunin shows that his entire work consisted of constant enquiry, the relationships which could exist between the fractions which make up the dominant class and their opposition with the proletariat. His strategy for the workers movement is intimately linked with his analysis of these relationships.

In no case can it be separated from the historical moment in which these relationships take place. In other words, not every time is ripe for revolution, and a detailed understanding of the relationship of forces between the bourgeoisie and the working class permits one at the same time not to miss suitable occasions and to avoid making tragic mistakes.

Bakunin's successors thought, on one hand, that there existed between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat a sort of immutable and constant relationship; on the other hand, that the relationship between the classes could not in any way enter into the scheme of things to determine revolutionary action. In the first case, they adopted a certain number of basic principles that were considered essential, and they gave themselves the objective of putting them into practice at some time or another in the future, whatever the circumstances of the moment.

Thus, the report of the Saragossa Conference already mentioned could have been written at any period. It stands absolutely outside time.

On the eve of the Spanish Civil War, the military problems for example, and agitation in the heart of the army, are dealt with one phrase: "Thousands of workers have been through the barracks, and are familiar with modern revolutionary warfare."

In the second case, they thought that the relationships of power between the classes were unimportant as the proletariat must act spontaneously. It is not related to any social determinism, but on the contrary to the hazards of exemplary action. The whole problem lies then in creating the right detonator.

The history of the anarchist movement is full of these sensational actions, which were useless and bloody. In the hope of encouraging the revolution, they attacked the town hall by the dozen: they made speeches, they proclaimed — very often in an atmosphere of complete indifference — about libertarian communism. They burnt local archives whilst waiting for the police to arrive.

Attentism or voluntarism, in either case the reference made to Bakunin is insulting. Very often, the libertarian movement has replaced the scientific method of analysis of relations between classes with magical incantations. The scientific and sociological nature of Bakuninist analysis of social relations and political action was completely rejected by the libertarian movement.

The intellectual failure of the libertarian movement can be seen in the accusations of 'marxism' made about every attempt to introduce the slightest notion of scientific method in political analysis.

For example Malatesta said: "Today, I find that Bakunin was in political economy and in the interpretation of history, too Marxist. I find that his philosophy debated without any possibility of resolution, the contradiction between his mechanical conception of the universe and his faith in the effectiveness of free will over the destinies of man and the universe."

The "mechanical conception of the universe", that is in Malatesta's mind, is the dialectical method which makes of the social world a moving whole, about which one can determine general laws of evolution. "The effectiveness of free will" is voluntarist revolutionary action. The problem can therefore be reduced to the relationship of mass action on society and the action of revolutionary minorities.

Malatesta is incapable of understanding the relationship of interdependence which exists between the human race and environment, between the social determinism of the human race and its capacity to transform the environment.

The individual cannot be separated from the environment in which he/she lives. Even though the individual is largely determined by environment, he/she can act upon it and modify it, provided the trouble is taken to understand the laws or evolution.

CONCLUSION

The action of the working class must be the synthesis of the understanding of the "mechanics of the universe" – the mechanics of society – and "the effectiveness of free will" – conscious revolutionary action. There lies the foundation of Bakunin's theory of revolutionary action.

Two Bakunins do not exist — one which is libertarian, anti-authoritarian and who glorifies the spontaneous action of the masses; the other one 'marxist', authoritarian, who advocates the organisation of the vanguard.

There is only one Bakunin, who applies to different times in diverse circumstances principles of action which flow from a lucid understanding of the dialectic between the masses and the advanced revolutionary minorities.

Bakunin's Impact on Russian Anarchism

Sam Dolgoff

Freedom's Anarchist Review, 6 November 1976

This paper deals exclusively with the impact of Bakunin's ideas on Russian anarchism and on the Russian revolutionary movement in general. It omits discussion of anarcho-pacifists; Tolstoyans; anarcho-terrorists in the style of Ravachol, anarchists who believe that the free society can be attained by gradual reforms; anarchists who oppose struggle for better conditions under capitalism; amoral "Nechaevists"; anti-social individualists who are against all but the most primitive forms of organisation; and other tendencies whose ideas are foreign to the main body of Bakunin's thought.

Russian anarchism—a synthesis of communalism and syndicalism—derived its orientation from the ideas of Bakunin. Rural communes were deemed best able to cope with the problems of revolutionising the peasant economy in a country where the oppressed restless peasants constituted, in Bakunin's time, the vast mass of the populace. Urban communes (sometimes called "free cities") and industrial syndicates were considered best suited to deal with the problems generated by the industrialisation of Russia in the later years of the nineteenth century, problems further complicated by the emergence of a new class of rootless proletarians. Co-ordination of the economy would be achieved through an interlocking network of local, district, regional and national federations of communes and syndicates.

Kropotkin considered himself a disciple of Bakunin: "…the theoretical aspects of anarchism as they were beginning to be expressed in the Jura Federation—especially by Bakunin's criticism of state socialism, fear of economic despotism, appealed strongly to my mind…" In his *Modern Science and Anarchism*, Kropotkin further wrote that "…Bakunin in a series of brilliant pamphlets formulated the fundamental principles of anarchism…"

In the main, Kropotkin's anarchism, like Bakunin's, combined communalism (Kropotkin declared that Bakunin was "really a communist") and syndicalism ("…independent communes for the territorial organisation and federations of trade unions in accordance with their different functions…") supplemented by voluntary associations of all descriptions, for the economic organisation. Thus, the program of Russian anarcho-syndicalism incorporated the ideas of both Bakunin and Kropotkin. This fact is stressed in all the anarcho-syndicalist literature, and in the declaration of principles of the Anarcho-Syndicalist International organised in Berlin in 1922.

Bakunin's ideas reached Russia through political refugees (mostly in Switzerland) in close touch with the revolutionary underground. In Switzerland the Russian refugees—who adhered to the Russian section of the [First] International—published and (through the underground) circulated anarchist propaganda literature like *Statism and Anarchy* by Bakunin; *The Historical Development of the International*; *Anarchism According to Proudhon*, etc. Illustrating how highly regarded Bakunin was, a declaration protesting Marx's defamation of Bakunin declared: "…as for Russia, we can assure Mr. Marx that Bakunin is too well known and esteemed for calumny to touch him…" The protest was signed by the highly respected Russian revolutionists Vladimir Ozerov, Nicholas Ogarev, Bartholemew Zaitsev, Armand Ross (Michael Sashin), Zampirir Railli, Alexander Celnitz, and Valerian Smirnov.

Youth

The first issue of *Narodnoe Delo* ("The People's Cause"), written almost entirely by Bakunin and, and his *Statism and Anarchy*, had an enormous effect on the Russian youth. Stepniak tells how "Bakunin inspired the young revolutionaries for whom Bakunin's writings symbolised revolution". Count Pahlem, the Czar's Minister of Justice, bemoaned the fact that the "…writings of Bakunin and Lavrov had a devastating bad effect on the subversive movements in Russia…", inciting the youth to "commit crimes against the state". Kropotkin recalls in the Chaikovsky circle to which he belonged "…our youth listened to the mighty voice of Bakunin and the agitation of the International had a fascinating effect upon us…" (*Memoirs of a Revolutionist*).

Bakunin decisively influenced the Russian radical movement. Although no specific Bakuninist organisation was established in Russia during his lifetime, Bakunin "…inspired a revolutionary spirit in Russia…from Bakunin, the Russian populists sought—and obtained—not so much an organisation as a conception of the world which had a profound and lasting effect on the entire revolutionary movement…" (see Franco Venturi's pioneering study of Russian Populism, *Roots of Revolution*).

Bakunin's pamphlet, *Some Words to My Young Brothers in Russia*, foreshadowing Kropotkin's *Appeal to the Young*, called upon the upper and middle-class intellectuals to live with the people and struggle together with them for their liberation.

"…so my young friends, leave this dying world, these universities, academies in which you are now locked and permanently separated from the people, GO TO THE PEOPLE…"

GO TO THE PEOPLE! Became the celebrated watchword of the Narodnik (People's) movement.

Populism

There is, indeed, a striking resemblance between Bakunin's ideas and the libertarian tendencies that emerged from the Populist movement. The essence of Populism (as the name implies) is an abiding faith in the creative and revolutionary capacity of the "ordinary" people. As against Marx, the Populists insisted that the will of man and not the mode of production is the prime condition for social change. Moreover, capitalism was not the indispensable progressive precondition for the transition to socialism and the state was not the consequence but the cause of inequality and subjugation. "…they argued that it was possible to avoid the evils of capitalism, the despotism of a centralised economy or a centralised government, by adopting a loose federal structure composed of self-governing units of producers and consumers…" The potential for such a society already existed in the Russian peasant commune—the Mir, a federation of self-governing communes "along the lines of the French anarchist-socialist Proudhon" (Isaiah Berlin, introduction to *Roots of Revolution*).

Cherny Peredel ("Black Partition"—division of the land to the former serfs, who used to be called "Blacks") broke away from the Populist *Zemlya i Volya* ("Land and Liberty") because it violated the principles of Bakuninism by placing altogether too much emphasis on terrorism and neglecting propaganda among the worker and peasant masses, isolating itself from the people. Land and Freedom became a sect and not a movement. Every attentat increased the fury of reaction. The revolutionary movement needlessly lost its best and bravest militants. Franco Venturi concludes that *Cherny Peredel's* program called for a "return to the Bakuninist sources of Populist thought…"

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The Peasantry

As regards the peasantry, Bakunin did not share the blind faith of the Populists of the Mir. To fulfil its true potential, Bakunin insisted, the Mir would have to be revolutionised from within, purged of paternalism, "the absorption of the individual", and the "cult of the Czar":

"…the family patriarch is simultaneously a despot and a slave; a despot exerting his tyranny over all under his roof…but the domestic despot is the servant of the Mir and the slave of the Czar…the Russian family is a whitewashed graveyard…"

"…the Russian rural community, already weakened by paternalism, is hopelessly corrupted and crushed by the state…communal elections are a mockery. The persons elected by the people became the tools of the oppressors and venal servants of the rich landlords…"

Bakunin deplored the fact that each community "constitutes a closed circle…therefore one of the main tasks of revolutionary youth is to establish a vital line of revolt between the isolated rural communities…"

With respect to the establishment of co-operatives under capitalism, founding of communist rural colonies like Cabet's New Icaria in America, "organising their own domestic life on the basis of full liberty…" to serve as an example, and other schemes to reform capitalism or undermine the state, Bakunin argued that "…experience of different countries…has conclusively shown that emancipation of the people…" by such means is impossible: "…there must be a general uprising embracing the whole countryside…that this is possible has been demonstrated by the vast populist

uprisings led by Stenka Razin and Pougachev…" but spontaneity is not enough. The revolution must be organised with a realistic consistent program (see Appendix "A" in *Statism and Anarchy*.

Makhno

The Makhno movement, a half century later, was an example of what Bakunin had in mind. Makhno, writes Avrich, "expropriated the gentry and established a Cossack-style republic…while the government denounced him and Arshinov as "bandits"—the epithets with which Moscow maligned its guerilla opponents since the 17th century" (*Russian Rebels*). A proclamation of the Revolutionary Makhno Insurgent Movement (Jan. 7, 1920) addressed to "All Peasants and Workers" practically duplicates the Bakuninist program.

"…the Insurgent Army fought persistently to create a true soviet socialist order…the land of the Gentry, the Church and other enemies of the toilers with all livestock and equipment must be transferred to the peasants who will live on it by their own labour…the transfer will take place in an organised manner according to the decisions of the Peasant Assemblies…"

"…the factories, workshops, mines and other means of production, are to become the possession of the working class as a whole, which through its trade unions…will resume production, link together the industry of the whole country in a single united organisation…the true worker-peasant order is not the rule of the Social Democrat Communist Bolsheviks, which now falsely calls itself 'Soviet Power', but a higher form of anti-statist, anti-authoritarian socialism…" (Paul Avrich, *Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*—translation).

South…and North

Venturi notes that "…Bakuninism prevailed in the working class centers of Southern Russia…" In 1879 the Bakuninist Axelroad organised the Southern Union of Russian Workers, which collapsed after Axelrod left to join *Cherny Peredel*. (Both Axelrod and the Bakuninist Plekhanov, Lenin's teacher, became leaders of the Russian Marxists.) The Union, however, was reorganised a year later by "…two revolutionary Populists to pursue to the end earlier attempts to bring Bakuninism to the working class…"

The program of the Northern Union of Russian Workers also reflected Bakuninist ideas (abolition of the state and private property, communal autonomy, federalism, etc.) though paradoxically, the "last paragraph of its program was taken directly from the catechism of the German Social Democrat…"

Socialist Revolutionary Party

The next generation of Populists likewise fell under Bakunin's influence. Thus while the neo-populist Socialist Revolutionary Party (organised 1901) was by no means an anarchist organisation, its economic program was in many ways Bakuninist. Instead of nationalisation, the Party proposed the socialisation of land and industry to be directly administered by peasant communes and workers' syndicates. Similarly, the Maximalists, a group that split off from the Socialist Revolutionary Party, rejected parliamentary action, arguing that "…Russia required, not a constituent assembly but the federation of revolutionary communes…" (Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets*).

Bakunin's disciple, Z. K. Ralli, published a 530-page book, *The Sated and the Hungry*, a "real encyclopedia of Anarchist Populism". The book explained the policies of the First International. Ralli's circle helped launch the revolutionary syndicalist paper *Rabotnik* ("Worker"), which urged the workers to "Seize the factories from the employers! Seize the land and divide it among the peasants! Do not rebuild the state! Organise a federation of peasant Communes and industrial artels!"

Soviets

The council movement during the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 also embodies Bakunin's revolutionary concepts. Oskar Anweiler (*The Soviets*) concludes that "…Bakunin's proposals were strikingly similar to the structure of the subsequent Russian system of Councils. Lenin's condemnation (1905) of the anarcho-syndicalist tendencies among the proletariat was anarchists, the soviets that arose spontaneously embodied the libertarian principle of the *Mir* or *Obschina*; a suitable form for workers' self-management of industry. "…Lenin assimilated the anarchist program to secure the support of the masses for the Bolsheviks…" (Anweiler). I P. Goldenberg, a veteran Russian Marxist, declared that "…Lenin has now made himself a candidate for the throne of Bakunin…His new words echo…the old superannuated truths of primitive anarchism…" (Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*).

Organisation!

At the turn of the century, the spontaneous revolts of the oppressed workers which swept the industrial areas of Russia, inspired anarchists to participate. Anti-syndicalists and many who opposed all but the most primitive forms of organisation, even self-discipline, revised their ideas, while the workers, for their part, proved receptive to anarchist propaganda and spurred the growth of the movement.

In France the revival of anarchism began when anarchists recovered from their anti-social individualism (attentats, esoteric cults, etc.) and resumed action in labour an other mass movements in accordance with the principles championed by Bakunin and his comrades in the First International. In Russia, although the anarchist movement was just beginning to be organised, a similar process was taking place.

By dint of hard work and intensive propaganda the anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-communists achieved a foothold in the labour movement—so much so that "…fearful of the dangerous competition of the pro-syndicalists, the socialists strove to exclude them from the soviets, trade unions and workers' committees (set up during the 1905 revolution…" (Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*).

"The Declaration of the Petrograd Union of Anarcho-Syndicalist Propaganda (adopted June 4, 1917) a blending of communalism and syndicalism applied to the problems of the Russian Revolution, recapitulates familiar Bakuninist themes:

"…the state must be replaced by an all-Russian Federation of Free Cities and Free Communes, in urban and rural communes united from the bottom up in local, district and regional federations…the soviets expressing the political will of the masses must take upon themselves the political reconstruction of the country on the basis of the widest introduction of federalism…

"…the second task, the total economic reconstruction, must be left to other popular organisations better fitted for the purposes: industrial unions and other economic organisations of the workers and peasants. The confiscation of the land and factories can be undertaken only by federations of unions and labouring peasants, industrial unions, factory committees…and the like, in local districts throughout the country…" (translated in Avrich, *Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*).

In the style of Kropotkin, the Declaration also calls for the incorporation of voluntary associations of all types and purposes in both the political and economic structure of the free society.

Libertarian Direction

The anarcho-syndicalists did not behave like impotent grumblers, but developed constructive, practical measures designed to propel the revolution in a libertarian direction. The purged Bolshevik Victor Serge (an ex-anarchist who had not entirely rejected all he had learned) criticised the criminal inefficiency of the Bolshevik administration in dealing with the economic crisis. In suggesting a different solution to the economic problems, Serge inadvertently illustrated the relevance of anarchist organisational principles, practically duplicating the proposals offered by the anarcho-syndicalists"

"…certain industries could have been revived merely by appealing to groups of producers and consumers, by freeing the state strangled cooperatives and inviting various associations to take over the management of different branches of economic activity…in a word, I argued for a 'communism of associations'—in contrast to communism of the state variety. I thought of the total plan not as something to be dictated by the state from on high, but rather, as resulting from the harmonising by congresses and specialised assemblies of initiatives from below…" (Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*).

Revolution…

Anarchism, on a scale never before attained, was beginning to take root from 1917—the beginning of the revolution—until the crushing of the Makhno movement and the Krondstadt rebellion in 1921. Thousands of Russian revolutionists returned from exile. The weekly organ of the 10,000 member Union of Russian Workers of the United States and Canada, *Golos Truda* (The Voice of Labor) was transferred to Russia. *Golos Truda* and other groups published a mass of anarchist literature including the works of Bakunin and Kropotkin. Anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-communists were active in the unions, soviets and factory committees which included bakers, seamen, stevedores, printing, railway workers, metal industry and other trades. Soviet sources recently revealed that in 1918, 55 anarchist newspapers and magazines were published in cities and towns all over Russia. The circulation of the organ of the Anarchist Communist Federation, *Anarkhia* reached 20,000 and the Anarcho-Syndicalist *Volny Golos Truda* (Free Voice of Labor) 18,000.

Aborted

The abortion of the Russian Revolution spurred the search for libertarian alternatives to authoritarian socialism. As the current re-evaluation of traditional socialist theory proceeds, the ideas of Michael Bakunin, the founder of the international anarchist movement, are arousing increasing interest and have become increasingly relevant. In such an examination much can still be learned by the achievements—and the failures—of Bakunin and the pioneers who fought for freedom a century ago.

Will the real Bakunin please stand up?

Iain McKay

August, 2001

The SWP are at it again. Obviously trying to recruit from the anti-globalisation movement, they yet again try to rubbish anarchism. Since libertarian ideas are perceived to be dominant in that movement, what better why to try and gain a foothold than attacking those ideas? Sadly for the SWP, they cannot do that accuracy or honesty. Nor can they do so with showing the bankruptcy of their own ideology.

In **Socialist Worker** (12 May 2001) Kevin Ovenden produced an article claiming to be about Bakunin entitled *"Anarchist founder."* The article is so flawed that the only charitable thing that can be said of it is that at least it gets the dates right.

Ovenden argues that Bakunin, in the process of taking part in workers' struggles against capitalism, *"developed his 'anarchist' ideas"* (why anarchist is placed in quotation marks is lost on me). He also argues that *"at various points since have been held up as an alternative to Marxism as a guide to overthrowing capitalism."* Anarchism, of course, is an alternative to Marxism. However, we are anarchists, not Bakuninists, and so we reject the idea of blindly worshipping a person. Bakunin was human and made mistakes. We use our critical judgement and embrace the positive aspects of his ideas and reject the negative.

we are anarchists, not Bakuninists, and so we reject the idea of blindly worshipping a person. Bakunin was human and made mistakes. We use our critical judgement and embrace the positive aspects of his ideas and reject the negative

This means that generalising from any famous anarchist or their life onto anarchism as a whole is prone to failure. However, this is a common approach for Marxists. Being unable to attack anarchism directly, they have to attack it indirectly, concentrating on the faults of individual anarchists. After all, to argue against anarchism means to argue against working class self-management of society and that would mean Marxists having to admit that the party, not the working class, is in charge. That, obviously, is **not** something they willingly admit to. Hence the compulsive need to attack and misrepresent individual anarchists rather than actually combat anarchist thought. This is usually done by misrepresenting their ideas, quoting them out of context and concentrating on the elements of their thoughts which were not totally libertarian and which latter anarchists have rejected. Ovenden's article is an example of this technique.

Ovenden admits that *"Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin had much in common"* yet repeats the usual Marxist myth that Bakunin *"thought that the factory workers tended to be 'corrupted' by capitalism"* and that he *"looked instead to peasants and poor city dwellers who were on the margins of the working class."* Ovenden contrasts this with Marx, who *"saw how the growing industrial working class had the power to bring capitalism to a halt."*

That this is a myth can quickly be seen from Bakunin's writings. Yes, Bakunin did argue that *"the upper layer"* of the proletariat did become *"semi-bourgeois."* Marx and Lenin argued the same thing. Yet Bakunin did not consider all factory workers to be in this layer. He constantly argued that workers should organise internationally and *"form factory, artisan, and agrarian sections."* His politics was based on workers organising into unions (as Marx himself noted, Bakunin urged workers to *"only organise themselves by trades-unions"*). As the industrial workers were a small minority in the European working class, Bakunin considered it essential that they organise with artisans and peasants.

It is this union movement of city and rural toilers that has the power to end capitalism. *"Organise the city proletariat,"* argued Bakunin, *"in the name of revolutionary socialism ... unite it into one preparatory organisation together with the peasants. An uprising by the proletariat alone would not be enough ... Only a wide-sweeping revolution embracing both the city workers and peasants would be sufficiently strong to overthrow the State, backed as it is by all the resources of the possessing classes."* The state was *"the natural protector of capitalists"* and so "political

transformation ... [and] economic transformation ... must be accomplished together and simultaneously."

Ovenden admits this by feebly noting that *"despite his views, Bakunin became drawn to workers' struggles as they did indeed move centre stage."* This is simply the acknowledgement that Bakunin placed workers' struggle at the centre of his anarchist views (a fact quickly discovered if Bakunin's works are actually read).

Our Trotskyist then moves on to history. He argues that *"the greatest workers' struggle of the 19th century was the Paris Commune of 1871. It showed the differences between Marx and Bakunin sharply."*

This is much truer than the author would like to admit. Like the Bolsheviks in February 1917, Marx initially opposed the idea of the workers rising in struggle. He wrote that *"any attempt to upset the new government in the present crisis, when the (Prussian) army is almost knocking at the doors of Paris, would be a desperate folly."* Luckily for him (and his followers), the Parisian workers ignored his advice. The greatest workers' struggle of the 19th century would not have happened if the Parisian workers had followed Marx.

In addition, the workers who took part in the Paris Commune were not Marx's proletariat. Rather, factory workers were a small minority of the workforce at the time. The workers' of Paris were predominantly artisans (Marxist Frank Jellinek noted that *"the Paris workers were still largely artisans"*). This confirmed Bakunin's ideas, who had argued for a union of all workers – proletarian, artisan and peasant – as the force to crush capitalism. Moreover, as Marx himself noted, these workers were influenced by anarchist ideas. Marx stated in 1866 that the French workers were *"corrupted"* by *"Proudhonist"* ideas, *"particularly those of Paris, who as workers in luxury trades are strongly attached, without knowing it [!], to the old rubbish."* This can be seen from the ideas of the Commune, its federalism and mandated delegates, which Proudhon had been arguing for since the 1840s (Bakunin incorporated these ideas into his own politics in the 1860s).

Ignoring these facts, Ovenden continues:

> *"The working class and poor of Paris rose up that year and managed to hold on to the city from 18 March to 21 May. They established a new form of political power.*
>
> *"Delegates were elected, but could be recalled immediately by the electorate. They were paid the average worker's wage. The Commune broke the old capitalist state machine and began replacing many of its functions with new forms of organisation. For Marx, it became the model of how workers could form their own political power, a workers' state, and use it to crush the capitalists. They could then move towards a society where class divisions were abolished and production was for need, not profit."*

Ironically, these events reflected Bakunin's viewpoints almost exactly. Writing three years before the Commune, Bakunin argued that *"the federative alliance of all working men's associations ... [will] constitute the Commune ... [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of ... delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first reorganising on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation..."*

The similarity of this vision with the events of the Paris Commune is clear. Bakunin criticised the Commune for organised themselves *"in a Jacobin manner"* (i.e. as a government) rather than as a federation of workers' councils.

Ovenden argues that *"Marx's main criticism of the Commune was that it did not centralise its power and use it to the full. That allowed the French state to eventually crush the Commune, drowning it in blood. Bakunin, however, took a different view."*

In fact, Bakunin had long argued that a revolution needed to spread and co-ordinate its defence. As he put it, *"the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."* Isolation, for Bakunin and Marx, signified the defeat of any revolution. They differed on the issue of whether this co-ordination and self-defence would be from the bottom-up (federalist) or from the top-down (centralist). To state otherwise is simply a lie.

Ovenden states that Bakunin *"argued that the problem facing the mass of people was not really capitalism, but authority – any exercise of power over other people"*

This, of course, is simply nonsense. This is for three reasons.

Firstly, Bakunin argued that the problem facing the mass of people (the working class) was two-fold – economic exploitation (capitalism) and political oppression (government). The *"program of social revolution"* was *"the total and definitive liberation of the proletariat from economic exploitation and state oppression"* and so *"the abolition of all classes"* and *"the state."* Clearly, he argued that capitalism **was** a problem facing the mass of people. To state otherwise is nonsense. However, he did not see it as the only problem nor did he dismiss the issue of oppression. Unlike Lenin, he did not think that changing the person giving the orders ended inequality in power or oppression.

Secondly, Bakunin clearly did not oppose "all" authority or power. He clearly differentiated between types of authority/power in his writings. As he put it, *"does it follow that I reject all authority? Perish the thought."* Bakunin always acknowledged the difference between being **an** authority – an expert – and being **in** authority, for example. He also respected the authority *"of the collective and public spirit of a society founded on equality and solidarity and the mutual respect of all its members"* as this was *"natural and rational."* He also talked about *"the development and organisation"* of the *"social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses"* and *"the revolutionary organisation of the natural power of the masses."*

he fails to mention that socialists like Lenin and Trotsky appointed managers with dictatorial powers to run Russian industry. They also created a secret police force that was used to break strikes, arrest workers and suppress working class freedom and democracy

Clearly, then, Bakunin opposed hierarchical authority/power and not authority/power as such. He was in favour of the power of people to control their own fates and the power required to free themselves from the domination of others. This meant an opposition to authoritarian/hierarchical structures and a support for self- management (to use today's terminology).

Thirdly, the reason why the capitalist can exploit workers is simply because they have power over them. That power, in turn, is defended by political power, the state. The worker sells their liberty to the capitalist and the circumstances that permit that specific social relationship are guaranteed by the state. Thus authority is the means by which capitalism exists, directly because it allows the exploitation of the worker and indirectly as the state exists to defend this authority and the property which is its base.

In other words, capitalism is a sub-set of a wider social problem, namely hierarchical authority and so capitalism needs to be fought while fighting other forms of oppression and authority. As the Russian Revolution shows, changing the boss does not end exploitation and oppression.

Ovenden acknowledges this when he states that *"at first glance there does not seem to be much of a difference."* He even argues that *"all socialists reject the 'authority' of the boss, the police, the head teacher and so on."* Needless to say, he fails to mention that socialists like Lenin and Trotsky appointed managers with dictatorial powers to run Russian industry. They also created a secret police force that was used to break strikes, arrest workers and suppress working class freedom and democracy. Indeed, the Bolsheviks went so far as to reject the authority of the soviets in whose name they claimed to rule. They disbanded soviets that were elected with non-Bolshevik majorities and repressed those, like the Kronstadt sailors, who called for free soviets. In other words, all non- anarchist socialists have no problem with authority when they, or their party leaders, are the boss or the police.

He continues that arguing that *"Bakunin, and anarchists, said any form of authority breeds exploitation and oppression."* As proven above, Bakunin made no such claim. He clearly argued that hierarchical authority did so, not authority as such. Ovenden asserts that *"denouncing all 'authoritarianism' could sound superficially radical. But fighting the capitalists requires organised power – the picket line in a strike, majority decisions at mass meetings, occupations, militant mass demonstrations which unite against the enemy, and so on."* Yet, as he acknowledges, *"Bakunin, like every serious anarchist, in practice recognised this."* Bakunin also recognised it in theory as well, arguing for *"the development and organisation"* of the *"social power of the working classes,"* that strikes represented *"collective strength"* and by organising *"the practical militant solidarity of the workers"* you would *"constitute an immense irresistible force."*

In other words, Bakunin, and anarchists, was well aware of the need for the oppressed to organise and have the power to resist exploitation and oppression as well as the power to run their own lives and so society. We reject the idea of giving a minority (a government) the power to make our decisions for us. Rather, power should rest in the hands of all, not concentrated in the hands of a few. In an anarchist organisation, to quote Bakunin, *"hierarchic order and advancement do not exist"* and there would be *"voluntary and thoughtful discipline"* for *"collective work or action."* Discipline *"is simply the voluntary and thoughtful co- ordination of all individual efforts towards a common goal."* In other words, *"power is diffused in the collective and becomes the sincere expression of the liberty of everyone."*

Only a sophist would confuse hierarchical power with the power of people managing their own affairs, yet this is what Ovenden is doing. Simply put, to organise yourself to manage your own affairs, resisting those (such as governments or bosses) who oppress and exploit you and overthrowing their authority (*"the enemy"*) is hardly *"power over other people."* Rather, it is power over yourself and the **destruction** of power over others. It is an act of liberty, not authority.

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Ovenden moves on and gives an account of the failed uprising at Lyons Bakunin participated in:

> *"He travelled to the French city of Lyons the year before the Paris Commune to put himself at the head of a short lived uprising. He announced that the state was 'abolished' and with it all 'authoritarianism'. He then called for capital punishment for anyone who 'interfered in any way whatsoever' with the new society he and his 20 supporters had declared!"*

Significantly, E.H. Carr does not mention this call for capital punishment in his (hostile) biography of Bakunin. Carr does, however, call this event an *"unorganised popular riot"* and that the uprising involved a *"crowd some thousands strong."* It took place in a city that had recently proclaimed itself a republic as part of a *"spontaneous popular rising."* In other words, Lyons was already in political upheaval when Bakunin arrived and, as Carr puts it, *"the masses ... were riper for revolution than their leaders."* Thus Ovenden's account leaves much to be desired!

Carr also quotes Bakunin's proclamation as stating that the *"Committees for the Saving of France ... will exercise full powers under the immediate supervision of the people"* and the *"French people resumes full possession of its destinies."* Rather than 20 people imposing their will, Bakunin clearly saw them as delegates of the people, accountable to them and executing their wishes. This was the idea he had expressed in writings before (and after) the failed uprising in Lyons. If the revolt had succeeded, the Lyons workers would have organised themselves just as they did in Paris after the start of the Paris Commune.

Our Trotskyist notes that *"the death penalty is, of course, a highly authoritarian act"* and yet does not mention that it was re-introduced by the Bolsheviks in 1918 and used against their political opponents on the left (including anarchists). In summary, the death plenty was used extensively for anyone whom the Bolshevik leadership considered as interfering with the new state they were constructing.

Ovenden argues that *"Marx saw how workers could establish a collective democratic power. He called for socialists to be organised openly inside the working class."*

The Paris Commune, as Marx himself argued, was *"formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town."* In other words, Marx saw ***"collective democratic power"*** in the usual, bourgeois, sense of representative government. Bakunin, in contrast, argued that *"the future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* In other words, by a federation of workers' councils. Marxists only started paying lip-service to this vision in 1917!

Marx and his followers called for socialist governments. This means that workers would give their collective power to others by the usual (bourgeois) democratic means of voting for socialists in elections. Rather than manage society directly, Marx argued that they elect others to run it for them. In other words, the socialist leaders would hold power, not the workers. As Bakunin put it, *"by popular government they mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. So-called popular representatives and rulers of the state elected by the entire nation on the basis of universal suffrage – the last word of the Marxists, as well as the democratic school – is a lie behind which the despotism of a ruling minority is concealed, a lie all the more dangerous in that it represents itself as the expression of a sham popular will."*

Ovenden argues that *"a revolutionary party had to fight over every political question and seek to win over the mass of workers"* and argues that *"Bakunin's alternative was hopelessly contradictory, less than revolutionary and highly authoritarian."* This was because *"he rejected democracy as the authoritarian rule of the majority over the minority. So his own political organisation was undemocratic. He thought that 100 members of his secret International Brotherhood, with half a dozen people issuing orders, could act as 'invisible pilots' directing mass struggles."*

Significantly, our Trotskyist makes no attempt to explain Bakunin's ideas on this issue. Nor does he mention that no modern anarchist subscribes to the organisational structures Bakunin suggested, making his account only of historic interest and of no use in evaluating modern anarchism.

Firstly, Bakunin argued that his organisation would be based on the idea that *"all members are equal; they know all their comrades and discuss and decide with them all the most important and essential questions bearing on the programme of the society and the progress of the cause. The decision of the general meeting is absolute law... The society chooses an Executive Committee from among their number consisting of three or five members who should organise the branches of the society and manage its activities ... on the basis of the programme and general plan of action adopted by the decision of the society as a whole."* Hardly undemocratic.

Similarly, Bakunin argued that *"each member ... and each regional group have to obey it [the Executive Committee] unconditionally, except in such cases where the orders of the Committee contradict either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all ... have participated equally in the discussion of them... In such a case members of the group must halt the execution of the Committee's orders and call the Committee to judgement before the general meeting ... If the general meeting is discontented with the Committee, it can always substitute another one for it..."* Again, hardly a case of a few issuing orders and the rest blindly obeying.

While few, if any, anarchists would subscribe to Bakunin's vision today, it is clear that Ovenden's summary of Bakunin's ideas is deeply flawed.

Secondly, Bakunin did not think that his organisation would impose themselves onto popular struggles. Rather, it would *"direct"* such struggles through the *"natural influence"* of its members. As Bakunin put it, its influence is *"not contrary to the free development and self- determination of the people, or its organisation from below according to its own customs and instincts because it acts on the people only by the natural personal influence of its members who are not invested with any power."*

This *"natural influence"* is *"nothing but the entirely natural organisation – neither official nor clothed in any authority or political force whatsoever – of the effect of a rather numerous group of individuals who are inspired by the same thought and headed toward the same goal, first of all on the opinion of the masses and only then, by the intermediary of this opinion (restated by ... propaganda), on their will and their deeds."* Thus it is based on discussion and getting people to agree to your ideas and is ***not*** imposed upon them. As Bakunin noted, governments *"impose themselves violently on the masses, who are forced to obey them and to execute their decrees"* while anarchist *"influence will never be anything but one of opinion."*

Thirdly, the similarities between Bakunin's ideas and Lenin's on this issue are clear. Ironically for our Trotskyist, Lenin's scheme for *"democratic centralism"* meant that the membership followed the orders of the central committee (and once the party was in power, the whole of society would follow these orders). If Bakunin is to be attacked, then so must Lenin. It is also significant that, unlike Lenin, Bakunin explicitly argued that *"this organisation rules out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control"* and *"these groups would not seek anything for themselves, neither privilege nor honour nor power."* Rather, *"the revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."*

Lastly, in terms of anything being *"hopelessly contradictory, less than revolutionary and highly authoritarian"* then it is the ideas of Trotskyism. They are contradictory as they confuse workers power with that of the party (as Lenin put it *"the very presentation of the question – 'dictatorship of the Party or dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders or dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' – is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind ... [because] classes are usually ... led by political parties"*). It is less than revolutionary as it reproduces all the hierarchical aspects of bourgeois society in the so- called *"vanguard"* party (and, like bourgeois society, tries to hide it by representative democracy). It is highly authoritarian as it bases itself on a highly centralised system of government in which a few party leaders tell the rest of society what to do.

In the words of Trotsky:

> *"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities – the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution ... Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."*

Our Trotskyist distorts history some more:

> *"He attacked Marx for 'teaching the workers theories'. Bakunin believed people should just rely on instinct instead. He thought revolutionaries would gain influence by voicing 'the instincts of the people' rather than by open argument in mass democratic organisations."*

Of course nothing is further from the truth. Indeed, it would be interesting to see where in Bakunin's writings he attacked Marx on this issue. He considered it common sense that socialist organisations like the International Workers' Association would *"propagandise its principles."* One of the objectives of his organisation was to *"wage active propaganda."* He thought that *"it is absolutely impossible to ignore political and philosophical questions. An exclusive pre-occupation with economic questions would be fatal for the proletariat"* and so such questions "must necessarily be discussed."

As for the question of *"instinct", he argued that "instinct is not an adequate weapon to safeguard the proletariat ... in so far as it has not yet been transformed into conscious, clearly defined thought, easily lets itself be misled."* The means of making *"the thought of the working masses"* reach *"the level of their instinct"* is *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses."* In other words, "emancipation through practical action," *"the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses,"* would educate the worker, combined with propaganda from people who were already socialists/anarchists. Bakunin did not think people should *"just rely on instinct,"* rather he considered *"the goal, then, is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants, to unjam within him a stream of thought corresponding to his instinct."*

Did Bakunin reject *"open argument in mass democratic organisations"*? Of course not. Indeed, quite the reverse. As regards his organisation, Bakunin argued that *"everything was done in broad daylight, openly, for everyone to see ... The Alliance had regular weekly open meetings and everyone was urged to participate in the discussions... The old procedure where members sat and passively listened to speakers talking down to them from their pedestal was discarded."* He stressed that *"it was established that all meetings be conducted by informal round-table conversational discussions in which everybody felt free to participate: not to be talked at, but to exchange views."*

This can also be seen from Bakunin's discussion of union bureaucracy and how anarchists should combat it. Taking the Geneva section of the International, Bakunin notes that the construction workers' section *"simply left all decision- making to their committees ... In this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership."* To combat this bureaucracy, *"the construction workers... sections could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies... In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed."*

Hardly what would be expected from someone who shunned *"open argument."* Nor are the many articles written by Bakunin explaining his ideas or his polemics against non-anarchists mentioned. Nor is his attending meetings of his local section of the International, nor his attending its 1868 Basle congress to argue for his ideas worthy of a mention. But why let facts get in the way of a good rant?

Our authority asserts that Bakunin *"spent his life rushing from one place to another trying to artificially spark uprisings. He died in 1876, bitter at the mass of people for not listening to him."*

Participating in two uprisings (Lyons, 1870, Bologna, 1874) when he was an anarchist (i.e. between 1866 and 1876), hardly constitutes *"rushing from one place to another."* Bakunin also argued that a revolution must be popular in nature and could not be artificially sparked. As he put it, *"revolutions are not improvised. They are not made arbitrarily either by individuals or even the most powerful associations. They occur independently occur independently of all volition and conspiracy and are always brought about by force of circumstances. They can sometimes be foreseen and their approach can sometimes be sensed. but their outbreak can never be hastened."* Just as Marx failed to predict the Paris Commune, so Bakunin failed to sense that Lyons and Bologna were not ripe for revolt. However, as we will indicate, Bakunin got more right than he got wrong.

As for people *"not listening to him,"* the reverse was the case! The labour movement in Switzerland, Italy and Spain were predominately libertarian at the time of his death. The Marxist Paul Thomas acknowledged that *"the International was to prove capable of expanding its membership only at the behest of the Bakuninists [sic!]"* and *"wherever the International was spreading, it was doing so under the mantle of Bakuninism."* Indeed, Marx expelled Bakunin from the International precisely **because** too many people were listening to him!

Bakunin… predicted the end of social democracy in reformism. He predicted that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* would become the dictatorship *over* the proletariat by the followers of Marx. If we rate a theory by the correctness of its predictions then, clearly, Bakunin's ideas are stronger than Marx's

Our author ends by arguing that *"Bakunin is a symbol of revolutionary opposition to capitalism. But his ideas do not offer a way to overthrow it."* In fact, the opposite is the case. Marx may be a symbol of *"anti-capitalism"* for many, but his ideas have failed time and time again. Bakunin, on the other hand, has had his ideas confirmed time and time again. He predicted numerous aspects of the Paris Commune. He predicted the soviets of the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions. His ideas on workers' struggle predicted those of revolutionary syndicalism and the I.W.W. He also predicted the fate of Marxism. He predicted the end of social democracy in reformism. He predicted that the *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* would become the dictatorship **over** the proletariat by the followers of Marx. If we rate a theory by the correctness of its predictions then, clearly, Bakunin's ideas are stronger than Marx's.

All in all, the SWP's account of Bakunin is so flawed as to be either the product of deceit or of ignorance. If they do desire to be taken seriously in the anti-capitalist movement then they should learn the first principles of honest debate – do not misrepresent your opponent's ideas. Given their track run on anarchism, the SWP seem genetically programmed to be incapable of this. One thing is sure, by murdering the truth they murder the revolution – both literally and figuratively. Just as the Bolsheviks did in the Russian Revolution.

In a word, we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even though arising from universal suffrage, convinced that it can turn only to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters against the interests of the immense majority in subjection to them.

This is the sense in which we are really Anarchists.

– Bakunin, *God and the State*

Bakunin's idea of revolution & revolutionary organisation

Andrew Flood

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The Russian revolutionary liberal Alexander Herzen, who was a close friend of Micheal Bakunin, told a story of how when Bakunin was travelling from Paris to Prague he came across a revolt of German peasants *"making an uproar around the castle, not knowing what to do. Bakunin got out of his conveyance, and, without wasting any time to find out what the dispute was about, formed the peasants into ranks and instructed them so skilfully that by the time he resumed his seat to continue his journey, the castle was burning on all four sides"*.[1]

Bakunin was the giant of the revolutionary movement in Europe from 1848 to his death in 1876. At 6'4" and 240lbs he was a literal giant as well as the demon that stalked the bourgeois imagination. Yet although he is often cited as the father of the anarchist movement, today his ideas of revolutionary organisation are poorly understood by anarchists and Marxists. Instead he is most remembered for his role in countering the authoritarian aspects of Marxism in the 1st International.

There are several good reasons why Bakunin is not remembered for his positive ideas. The years Marx spent in the British Library perfecting *Das Kapital* were spent by Bakunin in a series of prisons, chained to walls, and losing his teeth through scurvy. Not the best environment for research or writing!

There are several good reasons why Bakunin is not remembered for his positive ideas. The years Marx spent in the British Library perfecting *Das Kapital* were spent by Bakunin in a series of prisons, chained to walls, and losing his teeth through scurvy. Not the best environment for research or writing! And in any case as he admitted in 1870*"I am neither a scientist, nor a philosopher nor even a professional writer. I have written very little in my life time, and have only ever done so in self-defence"*.[2] In fact he wrote thousands of letters but relatively few articles or pamphlets. Many of those available today are drafts of unpublished works.

Also he never claimed any consistency to his life's writings or activity. Even in 1871, when he and Marx were fighting over the future of the First International, he could write *"As far as learning was concerned, Marx was* [in 1844]*, and still is, incomparably more advanced than I. I knew nothing at that time of political economy, I had not yet rid myself of my metaphysical observations.... He called me a sentimental idealist and he was right;...."*[3]

Many Marxists came to see Marx as a sort of prophet whose writings comprise a perfect materialist 'revelation' that can be used to answer all of today's questions. This may be a foolish approach but it's true to say that Marx's life's writings are more consistent than Bakunin's are. The writings of the young Bakunin have quite different politics to his writings at the end of his life.

Bakunin's early life

Bakunin followed a similar path of development to many of the other revolutionaries from a bourgeois background of that generation. Like Marx and Engels this included involvement with the left Hegelians. In 1844 he was a member of Marx's Democratic Federation in Paris where he also met and was

[1] Quoted in *To the Finland Station*, Edmund Wilson, Fontana 1960, p271.

[2] Bakunin in "Who am I", p126, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, taken from *La Commune de Paris et la notion de l'Etat* 1870, *Oeuveres* IV, p249ff.

[3] Quoted in Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p14.

influenced by Proudhon. When the 1848 revolutions (which centred on the demand for bourgeois parliaments and home rule) erupted, he served in the Workers' National Guard in Paris. When that rising was defeated he headed to Germany in March as the revolutions there started, hoping to encourage a Polish revolt.

Bakunin's political ideology at the time was fairly unformed but is usually described as 'Pan Slavist'. Many commentators since have had problems putting this in any sensible context. Anarchists have tended to see it as irrelevant, while Marxists have generally concentrated on attacking Bakunin for the anti-German (Prussian) aspect to it.

His writings and activity in this period bear more then a passing resemblance to what has been called left republicanism in Ireland. The idea that the 'national struggle' can be an impetus towards the abolition of class rule even as it achieves national independence is also found in many Marxist writings, including those of Connolly and Trotsky. His anti-German rants are echoed much later in the anti - US diatribes of Marxist South American revolutionaries who, sometimes identified the enemy as the 'blue eyed blondes of the north'.

1848 also saw Bakunin participate in the Slav congress in Prague and publish 'An appeal to the Slavs'. This appeal had many things in common with later left republican statements, for instance the call for revolutionary Slavic unity against the German, Turkish and Magyars occupations *"while we stretched our fraternal hands out to the German people, to democratic Germany"*. He sought to make socialism an inevitable part of the national liberation struggle writing; *"Everybody has come to the realisation that liberty was merely a lie where the great majority of the population is reduced to a miserable existence, where, deprived of education, of liberty and of bread, it is fated to serve as an underprop for the powerful and the rich."* The appeal ends with *"The social question thus appears to be first and foremost the question of the complete overturn of society."*[1]

Years in jail

Bakunin moved to Dresden where he met and befriended the composer Richard Wagner. There, in May 1849, a constitutional crisis led to another rising. With Wagner he joined the insurrection and became a revolutionary officer. Marx gives a summary of events in a letter to the *New York Daily Tribune* (October 2, 1852) on 'Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany' *"In Dresden, the battle in the streets went on for four days. The shopkeepers of Dresden, organised into 'community guards' not only refused to fight, but many of them supported the troops against the insurrectionists. Almost all of the rebels were workers from the surrounding factories. In the Russian refugee Michael Bakunin they found a capable and cool headed leader"*.

Bakunin was arrested after the rebellion was put down. His luck had run out. He was already wanted by the Russians, the Czar having confiscated all his property and removed all his rights in 1844. He spent 13 months in jail in Dresden under sentence of death. One night he was led out, he presumed to be executed, but instead he was handed over to the Austrians. They jailed him in Prague for nine months before moving him to the Olmutz fortress where he was chained to the wall for two months. They condemned him to hang for high treason. Instead he was handed to the Russians where he was jailed in the Peter-Paul Fortress. Here he lost his teeth from scurvy and came close to losing his mind.

He spent nearly ten years in the various prisons until he was exiled to Siberia in 1857. There, once he had recovered his health, he fled via Japan to the US and then to London at the end of 1861. His incredible escape from Siberia (Japan had only just opened up to the west in 1853) only added to the mystification that surrounded Bakunin.

In prison he had remained a pan Slavist and was clearly not yet an anarchist. The Czar, like later generations of Russian rulers, had a fondness for extracting confessions from his victims. Bakunin used his as a chance to outline his program which included the idea that what Russia needed was *"a strong dictatorial power"* to raise the standard of living and education. While some have correctly pointed out that what is said in such a confession should be taken with a pinch of salt, even as late as 1862 Bakunin *"thought the Tsar was capable of really working with the people, and the people capable of imposing its will on the Tsar through a National Assembly"*.[2]

However alongside and contrary to this he was clearly developing his thoughts in a libertarian direction. In 1862 Herzan's journal 'The Bell' published his open letter with the title "To my Russian, Polish and other Slav friends". The section addressed to university students reads *"Go to the people. This is your field, your life, your science. Learn from the people how best to serve their cause! Remember, friends, that educated youth must be neither the teacher, the paternalistic*

[1] *Appeal to the Slavs* (1848), in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, Sam Dolgoff, Black Rose Books, 1973, p63-68.

[2] Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p26.

benefactor, nor the dictatorial leader of the people, but only the midwife for the self-liberation, inspiring them to increase their power by acting together and co-ordinating their efforts"[1] In that period the denial of education to the working class in most countries made it inevitable that the vast bulk of revolutionary writers would come from the bourgeois. Leaving that aside, Bakunin suggests a relationship between the 'revolutionary intellectual' and the people that anarchists would still hold with today.

He finally came to reject pan Slavism after the 1863 Polish insurrection when he saw that the Polish nationalists were more interested in Ukrainian land then the support of the Ukrainian Slavs and that they more afraid of peasant insurrection than the Czar. He visited Marx in London on his return. Marx invited him to join the 1st International and wrote to Engels (Nov 4, 1864) saying *"On the whole he is one of the few people whom I find not to have retrogressed after 16 years, but to have developed further"*.[2]

Bakunin had not yet seen the value of the 1st International (which was then in an embryonic form as a combination of British trade unions and French followers of Proudhon or Blanqui). He went to Italy where he worked on an international project of revolutionary organisation. According to Daniel Guerin *"The few members of the brotherhood were .... former disciples of the republican Giuseppe Mazzini, from whom they acquired their taste for and familiarity with secret societies"*.[3] Brian Morris includes Polish and Russian exiles in this list.[4]

[Secret Societies]

Bakunin comes in for a lot of criticism from modern day revolutionaries over his advocacy of secret societies in this period. Such criticisms though are looking back from the comparative safety of 20th century western Europe or the US where mass unions are a fact and revolutionaries are comparatively free to hold meetings and publish papers. In Bakunin's time such activity was almost always illegal and liable to get the author sentenced to years in prison, if not death. Marx and Engels had published the 'Communist Manifesto' from one such secret society, the League of the Just, and had continued in another up to the founding of the International despite the fact they were in the relative safety of liberal England.

The group around Bakunin had worked in similar secret societies for years, there were no legal revolutionary organisations in Poland or Russia in this period. In Italy and France these societies, often based on the Freemasons, were also the norm. It is thus hardly surprising that they concluded that "*an association with a revolutionary purpose must necessarily take the form of a secret society"*[5]

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They drew up sets of rules for such groupings, the first under the title Revolutionary Society/Brotherhood in 1865. Arthur Lehning, editor of the Archives Bakunin points out that such programs and statues mirror Bakunin's evolving thoughts, rather than *"the operation of an organisation"*.[6] They were intended to be a blueprint of an 'ideal' organisation rather than a description of an already fully formed one.

The first of these documents, while clearly on the path to libertarian organisation, is firmly rooted in Bakunin's pre anarchist phase. It combines ideas of libertarian organisation with the contradictory aim of setting up a parliament; *"For the governance of common affairs, a government and provincial assembly or parliament will of necessity be formed"*.[7]

It also reduces the question of revolution to an organisational one. The assumption is that everywhere the people are ready to rise and that all that is needed is for a relatively small number of revolutionaries to co-ordinate this rising. This an idea also common in 20th century Marxism either in the Trotskyist idea of the 'crisis of leadership' or the Gueverist revolutionary foci.

[1] Sam Dolgoff, ed, *Bakunin on Anarchy*, New York, 1973, p388.
[2] Quoted in Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p29.
[3] Daniel Guerin in *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p 132.
[4] Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p30.
[5] Bakunin in *The Program of the Brotherhood* (1865) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p138.
[6] *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p 132.
[7] Bakunin in *The Program of the Brotherhood* (1865) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p142.

If this program cannot be considered any sort of final blueprint this does not mean that it is irrelevant. The kind of new society they advocated was a radical advance in the Europe of the 1860's and remains surprisingly relevant. The selection [below] gives the flavour of how they saw post-revolutionary society.

"the advent of liberty is incompatible with the existence of States.…

...the free human society may arise at last, no longer organised … from the top down… but rather starting from the free individual and the free association and autonomous commune, from the bottom up…

… women, different from man but not inferior to him, intelligent, hardworking and free as he is, should be declared his equal in all political and social rights …religious and civil marriage should be replaced by free marriage, and that the upkeep, education and training of all children should be a matter for everyone, a charge upon society … children belonging neither to society nor to their parents but rather to their future liberty…

the revolution … can … be effected only by the people … the revolution … cannot succeed unless, sweeping, like a worldwide conflagration .. it encompasses the whole of Europe for a start and then the world … the social revolution .. will not … put up its sword before it has destroyed every state … across the whole civilised world" [1]

Bakunin next attempted to introduce a revolutionary socialist program into the League of Peace and Freedom. This was founded at a conference in Geneva in August of 1867 attended by 6,000 people, *"all friends of free democracy"*. Bakunin is described rising to speak at the conference; *"the cry passed from mouth to mouth: 'Bakunin!' Garibaldi, who was in the chair, stood up, advanced a few steps and embraced him. This solemn meeting of two old and tried warriors of the revolution produced an astonishing impression .... Everyone rose and there was a prolonged and enthusiastic clapping of hands"*. [2]

Some people date Bakunin's advocacy of anarchism from this point, not least because as part of his speech he denounced nationalism - a break with his previous pan-Slavism. Others date it from the following congress of Berne in 1868. In any case it is from this period onward that Bakunin becomes centrally involved in the building of mass revolutionary organisations, including that of the 1st International.

It is from this point that he starts to advocate methods of organisation consistent with anarchism. His last major work, written in 1873, outlines the following program for the revolutionary youth in Russia.

"....they must go the people, because today - and this is true everywhere, but especially in Russia - outside of the people, outside of the multi-million-strong labouring masses, there is neither life, nor cause, nor future" [3]

"The chief defect which to this day paralyses and makes impossible a universal popular insurrection in Russia is the self-containment of the communes, the isolation and separateness of the local peasant worlds. At all costs we must shatter that isolation and introduce the vital current of revolutionary thought, will, and deed to those separate worlds. We must link together the best peasants of all the villages, districts, and, if possible, regions, the progressive individuals, the natural revolutionaries of the Russian peasant world, and, where possible, creating the same vital link between the factory worker and the peasantry.

....We must convince these progressive individuals - and through them, if not all the people then at least a sizeable segment of them, the most energetic segment - that the people as a whole .... share one common misfortune and therefore one common cause. We must convince them that an invincible force lives in the people, which nothing, and no one can withstand, and that if it has not yet liberated the people it is because it is powerful only when it is concentrated and acts simultaneously, everywhere, jointly in concert, and until now it has not done so. In order to concentrate that force, the villages, districts and regions must be linked and organised according to a common plan and with the single objective of universal liberation of the people. To create in our people a feeling and consciousness of real unity, some sort of popular newpaper must be established .... which would immediately spread information to every corner of Russia, to every region, district and village, about any peasant or factory uprising that breaks out in one locality or another, and also about the significant revolutionary movements produced by the proletariat of western Europe.

.. the Russian people will acknowledge our educated youth as their own only when they encounter them in

[1] Bakunin in *The Program of the Brotherhood* (1865) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p133-137.

[2] Report from a Russian positivist quoted in Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1993, p34.

[3] Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchism*, Appendix A (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p212.

their own lives, in their own misfortunes, in their own cause, in their own desperate rebellion. The youth must be present from now on not as witnesses but as active participants, in the forefront of all popular disturbances and uprisings, great and small .... Acting in accordance with a rigorously conceived and fixed plan, and subjecting all their activity to the strictest discipline in order to create that unanimity without which there can be no victory.."[1]

This one quotation refutes the most common misrepresentations of Bakunin's model of organisation. It does confirm one common criticism of Bakunin, that he did not confine his revolutionary subject to the industrial working class, but looked as much, if not more so, to the artisans and the peasants. However while this criticism might make some sense in modern Europe or North America today, in the 1870's any revolution which only mobilised the urban workers would have been doomed to defeat. At that time urban workers were a tiny minority of society.

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For instance in advocating a similar strategy for revolutionaries in Italy Bakunin estimates that *"....Italy has a huge proletariat.... It consists of two or three million urban factory workers and small artisans, and some 20 million landless peasants."*[2] Bakunin, unlike Marx, saw that the peasants could be actively won over to the side of the revolution, and, because of the numbers involved there could be no libertarian revolution in that period without the peasants.

But Bakunin did not, as is often claimed, dismiss the industrial workers. In fact, in advance of Marx and in anticipation of the factory committee movement of the Russian revolution, he insisted that *"The co-operative associations already have proven that workers are quite capable of administering industrial enterprises, that it can be done by workers elected from their midst and who receive the same wage."*[3] He was however critical of a certain layer of the British, German and Swiss working class who he believed had become a labour aristocracy that could be hostile to the interests of the proletariat as a whole.

[Secret Dictatorship?]

Bakunin's view of how revolutionaries should organise is often criticised for appearing to advocate a secret dictatorship over the people. The documents on revolutionary organisation he produced in 1867 (above) and in 1868 do indeed contain an odd contradiction, captured by the quotation below.

"That association starts from the basis that revolutions are never made by individuals, nor even by secret societies. They are, so to speak, self-made, produced by the logic of things, by the trend of events and actions.... All that a well organised society can do is, first, to play midwife to the revolution by spreading among the masses ideas appropriate to the masses' instincts, and to organise, not the Revolution's army - for the people at all times must be the army - but a sort of revolutionary general staff made up of committed, energetic and intelligent individuals who are above all else true friends of the people and not presumptions braggarts, with a capacity for acting as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the people's instinct

The numbers of such individuals, then, need not be huge. A hundred tightly and seriously allied revolutionaries will suffice for the whole of Europe. Two or three hundred revolutionaries will be enough to organise the largest of countries".[4]

This contradiction is emphasised in the last couple of lines where Bakunin seems to be suggesting that on the one hand two or three hundred revolutionaries are required in the larger countries but on the other only 100 (a smaller figure) are required for Europe (a larger area.).

[1] Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchism*, Appendix A (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p215.
[2] Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchism* (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p6.
[3] *The Capitalist System*, http://struggle.ws/anarchists/bakunin/writings/capitalist_system.html
[4] Bakunin in *Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (1868) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p156.

This 'contradiction' appears again and again in Bakunin's writings, for instance in 1870 he was to write

"Thus the sole aim of a secret society must be, not the creation of an artificial power outside the people, but the rousing, uniting and organising of the spontaneous power of the people; therefore, the only possible, the only real revolutionary army is .... the organisation should only be the staff of this army, an organiser of the people's power, not its own.... A revolutionary idea is revolutionary, vital, real and true only because it expresses and only as far as it represents popular instincts which are the result of history. To strive to foist on the people your own thoughts-foreign to its instinct-implies a wish to make it subservient to a new state.... The organisation must accept in all sincerity the idea that it is a servant and a helper, but never a commander of the people, never under any pretext its manager, not even under the pretext of the people's welfare.

The organisation is faced with an enormous task: not only to prepare the success of the people's revolution through propaganda and the unification of popular power; not only to destroy totally, by the power of this revolution, the whole existing economic, social and political order; but, in addition .... to make impossible after the popular victory the establishment of any state power over the people-even the most revolutionary, even your power-because any power, whatever it called itself, would inevitably subject the people to old slavery in a new form....

We are bitter foes of all official power, even if it were ultra-revolutionary power. We are enemies of all publicly acknowledged dictatorship; we are social-revolutionary anarchists. But you will ask, if we are anarchists, by what right do we wish to and by what method can we influence the people? Rejecting any power, by what power or rather by what force shall we direct the people's revolution? An invisible force-recognised by no one, imposed by no one-through which the collective dictatorship of our organisation will be all the mightier, the more it remains invisible and unacknowledged, the more it remains without any official legality and significance.

Imagine.... a secret organisation which has scattered its members in small groups over the whole territory of the Empire but is nevertheless firmly united: inspired by a common ideal.... an organisation which acts everywhere according to a common plan. These small groups, unknown by anybody as such, have no officially recognised power but they are strong in their ideal, which expresses the very essence of the people's instincts, desires and demands....

This dictatorship is free from all self-interest, vanity and ambition for it is anonymous, invisible and does not give advantage or honour or official recognition of power to a member of the group or to the groups themselves. It does not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official character...."[1]

On the one hand Bakunin recognised that "*The future social organisation should be carried out from the bottom up"*[2] On the other hand the possibility for the creation of this new society would not come about due to a spontaneous revolution but would require an international organisation of revolutionaries which would be *"centralised by the idea and by the sameness of a program"*[3]

As we have seen Bakunin had some considerable experience of insurrection. He was also of course, like Marx, a disciple of Hegel and hence the dialectical method by which two apparently contradictory things would interact to create a new situation/idea that was an advance on both. At this stage in his writing Bakunin was advocating a way of overcoming the contradiction between the goal of a libertarian society and the organisational methods needed to overthrow an authoritarian one. Other and later revolutionaries faced with this contradiction have tended to either argue for a strongly centralised party that would aim for state power or to pretend that serious organisational methods were not necessary. Bakunin was attempting to go beyond these two opposing ideas to find a new solution that satisfied reality.

[Conclusions]

Bakunin's views on revolutionary organisation can be presented as a sort of wedding cake with separate but informally connected tiers of revolutionaries. At the top were the '100', the general staff whose role it would be to establish and maintain the informal links between countries. They would allow some judgement of when the time was ripe for revolutionary insurrection on the one hand and on the other a means of trying to co-ordinate this insurrection. This was to be a secret (because of the danger of arrest) and (after 1868) an informal set of contacts who would attempt to influence the course of events through the power of their ideas.

Beneath this was to be a second, much larger and more open organisation. This was the Alliance and its role

[1] *Bakunin to Nechayev on the role of secret revolutionary societies*, June 2, 1870

[2] *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State* (1871)

[3] Bakunin in *The Program of the Brotherhood* (1865) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p139.

was primarily to introduce revolutionary ideas into the mass organisations of the proletariat, in particular through the building of regional sections of the international.

After 1868 he would come to see the base of this 'cake' as the International. The base was to be the creation of organs of working class struggle that would favour direct action and reject political (i.e. electoral) activity. The Alliance would act within the international to push these politics to the fore. This was necessary because, he wrote, the mass of the workers - being illiterate and working long hours just to survive - would not be won to socialism through abstract ideas alone. Rather Bakunin wrote

"It follows then that in order to touch the heart and gain the confidence, the assent, the adhesion, and the co-operation of the illiterate legions of the proletariat - and the vast majority of proletarians unfortunately still belong in this category - it is necessary to begin to speak to those workers not of the general sufferings of the international proletariat as a whole but of their particular, daily, altogether private misfortunes. It is necessary to speak to them of their own trade and the conditions of their work in the specific locality where they live; of the harsh conditions and long hours of their daily work, of the small pay, the meanness of their employer, the high cost of living, and how impossible it is for them properly to support and bring up a family."[1]

This was the work that Bakunin came to see as necessary in the preparation of the revolution. But he did not see the higher tiers commanding the lower, quite the opposite he also insisted that *"the peoples' revolution.... will arrange its revolutionary organisation from the bottom up and from the periphery to the centre, in keeping with the principle of liberty"*.[2]

"As regards organisation of the Commune, there will be a federation of standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade, one per street or per district, these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times."[3]

"An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set by the capital, to reorganise along revolutionary lines for a start and to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of these deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces in furtherance of the same principles and to organise a revolutionary force with the capability of defeating the reaction. Not official revolutionary commissars in any sort of sashes, but rather revolutionary propagandists are to be dispatched into all the provinces and communes and particularly among the peasants who cannot be revolutionised by principles, nor by the decrees of any dictatorship, but only by the act of revolution itself, that is to say, by the consequences that will inevitably ensure in every commune from complete cessation of the legal and official existence of the state".[4]

This is not simply a historical question. It is true that in western countries revolutionaries are in general free to sell papers and hold meetings in a manner they were generally not in Bakunin's time. Yet this liberalism from the state is largely a result of the fact that most revolutionary organisation is not seen as a serious threat. Where revolutionaries of one form or another have been seen to be a threat, from the Black Panthers, to the Irish civil rights movement, to 1970s Italy, the gloves have come off and the full array of state oppression, including infiltration and provocation have been deployed against them. At the moment the relatively trivial threat of the Black Blocs on the globalisation demonstrations is seeing an increasing array of state oppression being deployed, including now a fatal shooting. Bakunin's writings provide us with one starting point for looking at the apparent contradiction between wanting to create a libertarian society and needing to overthrow a powerful and authoritarian state to do so.

The base was to be the creation of organs of working class struggle that would favour direct action and reject political (i.e. electoral) activity. The Alliance would act within the international to push these politics to the fore.

[1] *Founding of the Workers International*, http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/bakunin/bakunin3.html

[2] Bakunin in *Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (1868) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p155.

[3] Bakunin in *Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (1868) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p155.

[4] Bakunin in *Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (1868) as published in *God and the State*, *No Gods, No Masters* Vol 1, p156.

The Revolutionary Ideas of Bakunin

Iain McKay

2008

Undoubtedly, Bakunin is one of the key anarchist thinkers and activists of the 19th century.

Building upon the federalist and libertarian socialist ideas of his friend Pierre-Joseph Proudhon as well as those in the European labour movement, Bakunin shaped anarchism into its modern form. His revolutionary, class struggle based anarchism soon became the dominant form of anarchism in the First International. He combated the state socialism of Marx and Engels and laid the foundations for both communist-anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism. His predictions about Marxism have been confirmed and his critique of capitalism, the state and religion as just as valid as when they were first expounded. Both the Russian and Spanish revolutions have confirmed the power of his ideas on revolution.

Yet Bakunin's ideas are less well known than they should be outside the anarchist movement. This is due to the fact that Marxists hate him while liberals cannot understand him. Their combined distortions of his ideas have ensured that many radicals have failed to read him and see for themselves the power of his theories. So why should we be interested in what a dead Russian had to say in the 1860s and 1870s?

I

Bakunin's revolutionary ideas where rooted in materialism. For him, *"facts are before ideas"* and the ideal was *"but a flower, whose root lies in the material conditions of existence."* From this base he produced a coherent defence of individual freedom and its basis in a free society and co-operation between equals. Rejecting the abstract individualism of liberalism and other idealist theories, he saw that real freedom was possible only when economic and social equality existed: *"No man can achieve his own emancipation without at the same time working for the emancipation of all men around him. My freedom is the freedom of all since I am not truly free in thought and in fact, except when my freedom and my rights are confirmed and approved in the freedom and rights of all men who are my equals."*

For Bakunin, *"man in isolation can have no awareness of his liberty ... Liberty is therefore a feature not of isolation but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection."* As capitalist ideology glorifies the abstract individual, it *"proclaims free will, and on the ruins of every liberty founds authority."* This was unsurprising, as every development *"implies the negation of its point of departure."* Thus *"you will always find the idealists in the very act of practical materialism, while you see the materialists pursuing and realising the most grandly ideal aspirations and thoughts."* This is obvious today when the "libertarian" right's defence of individual liberty never gets far from opposing taxation while defending "the management's right to manage" to maximise profits. Abstract individualism cannot help but justify authority over liberty. Anarchism, however, *"denies free will and ends in the establishment of liberty."*

This meant that anarchism *"rejects the principle of authority."* While Engels never could understand what Bakunin meant by this, the concept is simple. For Bakunin, *"the principle of authority"* was the *"eminently theological, metaphysical and political idea that the masses, always incapable of governing themselves, must submit at all times to the benevolent yoke of a wisdom and a justice, which in one way or another, is imposed from above."* Instead of this, Bakunin advocated what latter became known as "self-

management." In such an organisation *"hierarchic order and advancement do not exist"* and there would be *"voluntary and thoughtful discipline"* for *"collective work or action." "In such a system,"* Bakunin stressed, *"power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone, the faithful and sincere realisation of the will of all ... this is the only true discipline, the discipline necessary for the organisation of freedom."*

Freedom, as Bakunin argued, is a product of connection, not of isolation. How a group organises itself determines whether it is authoritarian or libertarian. By the term *"principle of authority"* Bakunin meant hierarchy rather than organisation and the need to make agreements. He rhetorically asked *"does it follow that I reject all authority?"* and answered quite clearly: *"No, far be it from me to entertain such a thought."* He acknowledged the difference between being an authority — an expert — and being in authority. Similarly, he argued that anarchists *"recognise all natural authority, and all influence of fact upon us, but none of right."* He stressed that the *"only great and omnipotent authority, at once natural and rational, the only one we respect, will be that of the collective and public spirit of a society founded on equality and solidarity and the mutual respect of all its members."*

Given his love of freedom and hostility to hierarchy, Bakunin also rejected the state, capitalism and religion. In essay **"God and the State"** Bakunin argued the necessity of atheism, arguing that *"if God is, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free, then, God does not exist"* for the *"idea of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and in practice."* Not mincing his words, he stated that *"if God really existed it would be necessary to abolish him."*

As well as opposing divine authority, he rejected more concrete ones as well. The state, he argued, is an instrument of class rule. It *"is the organised authority, domination and power of the possessing classes over the masses"* and *"denotes force, authority, predominance; it presupposes inequality in fact."* This inequality in power is required to maintain class society and so the state has evolved a hierarchical and centralised structure: *"Every state power, every government, by its nature places itself outside and over the people and inevitably subordinates them to an organisation and to aims which are foreign to and opposed to the real needs and aspirations of the people."* For Bakunin, a popular or truly democratic state was impossible as every state meant *"the actual subjection of ... the people ... to the minority allegedly representing it but actually governing it."*

His critique of capitalism built upon Proudhon's. Under capitalism *"the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time"* and *"concluded for a term only and reserving to the worker the right to quit his employer, this contract constitutes a sort of voluntary and transitory serfdom."* Property meant for the capitalist *"the power and the right, guaranteed by the State, to live ... by exploiting the work of someone else."* For Bakunin, the consistent libertarian must also be a socialist, as *"only associated labour, that is, labour organised upon the principles of reciprocity and co-operation, is adequate to the task of maintaining ... civilised society."*

His opposition to oppression was not limited to just the economy. He opposed sexism and supported the equality and liberty of women. His opposition to imperialism is well known. Unlike Marx and Engels, who happily supported imperialism against "backward" peoples, for Bakunin *"every people, like every person, ... has a right to be itself."*

II

Bakunin was no passive critic of the existing system. In his eyes there were three methods to escape the misery of capitalism: the pub, the church and social revolution. The first was *"debauchery of the body,"* the second *"of the mind."* Only the last offered genuine hope and so he took part in the First International and saw collective class struggle and organisation as the means of both fighting for improvements today and as the means of creating a free society. *"Organise the city proletariat in the name of revolutionary Socialism,"* he argued, *"and in doing this unite it into one preparatory organisation together with the peasantry."* Prefiguring anarcho-syndicalism, he stressed that anarchists should take an active part in the labour movement for *"to create a people's force capable of crushing the military and civil force of the State, it is necessary to organise the proletariat."*

The strike played a key role in his ideas, as it was *"the beginnings of the social war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie"* and *"awaken"* in the masses *"the feeling of the deep antagonism which exists between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie"* and establishes *"very fact of solidarity."* They *"create, organise, and form a workers' army, an army which is bound to break down the power of the bourgeoisie and the State, and lay the ground for a new world."* Bakunin supported the general strike, for *"with the ideas of emancipation that now hold sway over the proletariat, a general strike can result only in a great cataclysm which forces society to shed its old skin."*

His activity in the First International brought him into conflict with Marxism. He rejected Marx's ideas for numerous reasons. He opposed the participation of radicals in bourgeois elections, correctly predicting that when *"the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment ... will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois."* The descent of Marxist social-democracy into reformism and opportunism confirmed Bakunin's worse fears.

Instead of political action, Bakunin argued for *"the social (and therefore anti-political) organisation and power of the working masses of the cities and villages."* This meant that the *"proletariat ... must enter the International [Workers' Association] en masse, form factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations"* for *"the sake of its own liberation."* Anarchism, however, *"does not reject politics generally. It will certainly be forced to involve itself insofar as it will be forced to struggle against the bourgeois class. It only rejects bourgeois politics ... [as it] establishes the predatory domination of the bourgeoisie."*

Instead of a "revolutionary" government ruling the masses from above in a centralised state, an anarchist revolution would be based on a federation of communes and workers' councils. The very process of collective class struggle would, for Bakunin create the basis of a free society

As for Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat," Bakunin rejected it for two reasons. Firstly, if taken literally, the term at the time meant a dictatorship by a minority. As Marx himself admitted, the peasantry and artisans made up the majority of the working masses in every European country bar the UK. This meant Marx's vision of "revolution" excluded the majority of working people. Bakunin objected that this was *"nothing more or less than a new aristocracy, that of the urban and industrial workers, to the exclusion of the millions who make up the rural proletariat and who ... will in effect become subjects of this great so-called popular State."*

Secondly, he doubted whether the whole proletariat would actually govern in the new state. Rather *"by popular government"* the Marxists *"mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. So-called popular representatives and rulers of the state elected by the entire nation on the basis of universal suffrage ... is a lie behind which lies the despotism of a ruling minority is concealed*."

Lenin's regime proved him right, quickly becoming the dictatorship ***over*** the proletariat.

Bakunin's opposition to the "workers' state" had nothing to do with organising or defending a revolution, as Marxists claim. Bakunin was well aware of the need for both after destroying the state and abolishing capitalism. For him, the anarchist abolition of the state did not mean the workers (to quote Marx) *"lay down their arms."* Bakunin was clear that *"in order to defend the revolution ... volunteers will ... form a communal militia."* These would *"federate... for common defence."* The communes would *"organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction"* and *"it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."*

No, Bakunin's opposition to Marxism rested on the question of power. If working class emancipation was to be genuine, the state had to be destroyed. For if *"the whole proletariat ... [are] members of the government ... there will be no government, no state, but, if there is to be a state there will be those who are ruled and those who are slaves."* Thus anarchists do *"not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."*

Instead of a "revolutionary" government ruling the masses from above in a centralised state, an anarchist revolution would be based on a federation of communes and workers' councils. The very process of collective class struggle would, for Bakunin create the basis of a free society. The *"federative Alliance of all working men's [sic!] associations ... [would] constitute the Commune"* and so the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* The councils from bottom to top would be

composed of *"delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."*

The basic structure created by the revolution would be based on the working classes own combat organisations, as created in their struggles within, but against, oppression and exploitation. And these, not a ruling party, would make the decisions: *"Since revolution everywhere must be created by the people and supreme control must always belong to the people organised in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation."* The revolutionary group *"influences the people exclusively through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power"* within popular organisations.

Yet Bakunin's vision of revolution was not purely directed at the state, it was directed also against capitalism. A free society was based on *"the land, the instruments of work and all other capital"* becoming *"the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations."* Thus one of the firsts act of the revolution was the workers making *"a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building."* For *"no revolution could succeed ... unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution."* The social revolution to be, at the same time, the abolition of the state and of capitalism.

The new, free, society would be organised *"from the bottom-up,"* as a *"truly popular organisation begins from below, from the association, from the commune. Thus starting out with the organisation of the lowest nucleus and proceeding upward, federalism becomes a political institution of socialism, the free and spontaneous organisation of popular life."* Economically, wage slavery would be replaced by co-operative production, which would *"flourish and reach its full potential only in a society where the land, the instruments of production, and hereditary property will be owned and operated by the workers themselves: by their freely organised federations of industrial and agricultural workers."*

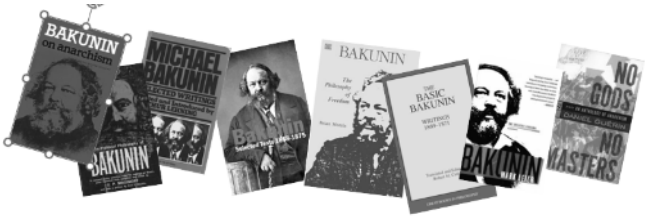
In this way, *"every human being should have the material and moral means to develop his humanity."* Bakunin's anarchism was about changing society and abolishing all forms of authoritarian social relationship, putting life before the spirit-destroying nature of the state and capitalism. For the anarchist *"takes his stand on his positive right to life and all its pleasures, both intellectual, moral and physical. He loves life, and intends to enjoy it to the full."*

III

Bakunin's ideas of what to replace capitalism with are still valid, as are his suggestions on how to achieve socialism. The Paris Commune was a striking confirmation of many of his ideas, as were the soviets of the Russian Revolution and the collectives of the Spanish. His critique of Marxism has been proven right: Social democracy became as reformist as he predicted while Bolshevism was as authoritarian. These suggest that Bakunin's ideas are worth considering today. Not, though, to mindless repeat but to be built on and developed.

Of course there are many aspects of Bakunin's ideas which are not discussed here, both positive and negative. His bigotry against Jews and Germans are examples of the latter, as is his fondness for secret societies. For all that, Bakunin is rightfully considered a key anarchist thinker. This is because anarchists are not "Bakuninists" and can reject the personal flaws and failings of any important anarchist thinker. Anarchists agree that in many aspects of his ideas and life Bakunin was wrong. This does not detract from the positive ideas he contributed to the development of anarchist theory and practice.

The Anarchist Federation's pamphlet **"Basic Bakunin"** is a good, cheap and short introduction to the ideas of Bakunin. Those looking for a more substantial account of his life and ideas then **"Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom"** by Brian Morris is highly recommended. The best (and most expensive) account of Bakunin's ideas is Richard B. Saltman's **"The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin."** Mark Leier's "**Bakunin: The Creative Passion"** is an excellent biography which summarises his ideas well.

However, reading Bakunin's writings first hand is always the best. Freedom Press' "**Marxism, Freedom and the State**" is a good, short, collection of texts. **"Bakunin on Anarchism"** is a comprehensive collection of his works while **"The Basic Bakunin"** contains some important essays from the late 1860s and early 1870s. **"Bakunin: Selected Texts 1868-1875"** includes letters and texts. Bakunin's classic essay **"God and the State"** is still available and is highly recommended while his only book **"Statism and Anarchy"** is worth reading (but the critique of Marxism within it is only a very small part of the whole). Daniel Guérin's anthology **"No Gods, No Masters"** contains a representative collection of his key anarchist works.

Bakunin on National Self-Determination

Wayne Price

Of all the questions dividing anarchists and other libertarian socialists, perhaps the most contentious is that of national self-determination. In recent years this has become a particularly fraught issue with the resistance of the Palestinians to Israeli domination, and, even more, the defensive war of the Ukrainians against the Russian state's invasion. The question became even more immediate with the U.S./Israeli assault on Iran. Many deny that anarchists can support the efforts of oppressed peoples for independence from imperialist domination.

In my opinion, it can be a useful contribution to examine what Mikhail Bakunin, a founder of revolutionary anarchism, really thought about the self-determination of oppressed nations. (I am not discussing conflicts where both sides are imperialist and colonialist, such as a war between the U.S. and today's China. In such a case, anarchists would oppose both sides.)

Bakunin distinguished between the State and the nation… He opposed "nationalism" because it did not make this distinction but rather subordinated the homeland-nation to the State and its ruling class

In a selection of Bakunin's writings, Sam Dolgoff (1980) summarizes: "Bakunin argues that the nation-state is not a natural community. He defines the contrast between Nationality, one's natural love for the place and the people with whom one is reared and indissolubly connected, and Patriotism, the absolute power of the state over its native subjects and conquered national minorities." (p. 401) Bakunin had a two-sided view of the issue. He was for "the place and the people" but against the State, the bureaucratic-military-capitalist institution which ruled over them.

Bakunin declared, "Nationality, like individuality, is a natural fact. It denotes the inalienable right of individuals, groups, associations and regions to their own way of life. And this way of life is the product of a long historical development. And this is why *I will always champion the cause of oppressed nationalities* struggling to liberate themselves from the domination of the State." (same; my emphasis)

By calling nationality a "natural fact," he did not mean that it was biological but that it develops through unplanned historical interactions. By "the domination of the State," in this instance, he means the domination of the foreign imperial State. He goes on to say that with "the abolition of the accursed state," he expects nationalities, provinces, and communes to freely federate from the bottom up. "Socialism is federalist." (p. 402) (Bakunin called himself a "revolutionary socialist" as well as an anarchist, unlike some current anarchists who reject the socialist label.)

Bakunin distinguished between the State and the nation (country, people, national community, or homeland). Although they interact and overlap, he distinguished between them in principle. He opposed "nationalism" because it did not make this distinction but rather subordinated the homeland-nation to the State and its ruling class.

He declared that "each individual, each association, commune, or province, each region and nation, has the absolute right to determine its own fate, to associate with others or not, to ally itself with whomever it will, or break any alliance…." (Guerin 1970; p. 67) This was not nationalism – he remained completely opposed to national States – but anarchism.

After Pan-Slavism

Before he became a revolutionary anarchist, Bakunin was a leading pan-Slavist. He advocated democratic revolutions to free Poland and other Eastern European nations from the Russian, Prussian, and other empires. As he evolved into an anarchist-socialist, he did not abandon his belief in national liberation. He continued to support the struggles for self-determination of Poland and the other Slavic countries. "His project of national liberation of the Slav peoples was not supplanted or completely reconsidered but incorporated into his revolutionary socialism…." (Correa 2024; p. 430) It became integrated with the goal of class liberation of the peasants and workers exploited by their own nation's rulers.

Bakunin wrote, sarcastically, “Both in international relations as well as relations between classes [one must] always be on the side of those who others want to civilize.” (Correa 2024; p. 406) In his study of Bakunin’s life and theory, Correa writes, “The defence of internationalism and anti-imperialism in no way means abandoning national liberation struggles…. After all, engagement in these causes does not inevitably imply support for the State since [the State] is not synonymous with nation, race, or homeland.” (same)

Bakunin declared, “The State is not the homeland…. That is why I feel frankly and always *the patriot of all the oppressed homelands*.” (same; p. 407; emphasis in original.)

The great revolutionary asserted, “Every people, weak or strong, every nation, large or small, every province, every commune has the absolute right to be free, autonomous, to live and govern themselves according to their particular interests and needs.” (same) This does not rule out federations of free peoples, which he advocated. Correa summarizes, “When, because of national domination or imperialism, this self-determination is being undermined, it is the duty of every revolutionary socialist to accept this *patriotism of oppressed homelands* – that is, an *anti-imperialist perspective*.” (same; emphasis in original)

As a revolutionary anarchist-socialist, Bakunin asserted his “strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression” and recommended that dominated peoples review the history of the Spanish guerrilla war against Napoleon’s army. (Guerin 1970; p. 68)

Bakunin vs. Lenin on National Liberation

What is striking is how much Bakunin’s support for the self-determination of oppressed peoples is an integral part of his anarchism. He rarely just speaks of the rights of nations separately from other social forms. In the quotations I have cited above, he refers to “the inalienable right of individuals, groups, associations and regions to their own way of life.” He mentions “each individual, each association, commune, or province, each region and nation” and “Every people, weak or strong, every nation, large or small, every province, every commune.” For him, freedom and self-determination should be at every level and in any way involving human society. *This is what he meant by anarchism.*

Lenin advocated national self-determination as one more of his party’s demands. And it was transactional: his goal was to win over the people of oppressed nations so that they will – eventually – agree to voluntary mergers into a centralized single unit. It would become a country with a centralized economy, managed by a centralized State, overseen by a single centralized party. This will, he hoped, end in a centralized world society – a monstrous vision.

Bakunin’s support for the self-determination of oppressed peoples is an integral part of his anarchism… For him, freedom and self-determination should be at every level and in any way involving human society. *This is what he meant by anarchism*

Some ignorant anarchists claim that national self-determination was invented by Lenin and therefore cannot be an anarchist idea. I have demonstrated, by referring to the words of Bakunin, that this is factually untrue. The reverse thought is expressed by Guerin:

“True internationalism rests on self-determination, which implies the right of secession…. Lenin and the Congresses of the Third International adopted this concept from Bakunin, and the Bolsheviks made it the foundation of their policy on nationalities and of their anti-colonialist strategy – until they eventually belied it to turn to authoritarian centralization and disguised imperialism.” (Guerin 1970; p. 67)

It is unlikely that Lenin adopted any concepts from Bakunin, given Lenin’s low opinion of anarchist theory. In any case, the right of national self-determination was raised well before either Lenin or Bakunin. It was part of the early democratic program, from the 17th century on. This included free speech, freedom of assembly, habeas corpus, election of officials, land to those who work it, the right to bear arms, the equality of all before the law, and so forth. These demands were only honoured by the capitalists’ State when under pressure from below. They are now under siege in the present-day decline of capitalism – as appears in the international rise of ultra-right and supposed-left authoritarian governments.

Some people argue that they are all for national self-defence against imperialist aggression, but not if the oppressed nation has a State. As anarchists, they say, they cannot support the oppressed country against the

imperialist invader. Unlike Bakunin, they confuse the nation with the State.

Currently all oppressed nations either have their own States (such as Ukraine) or are led by those who want to set up a State (such as Palestine). Unfortunately anarchists have not yet persuaded the working people of these countries of a no-state solution. Therefore to oppose these countries in their national resistance is to reject – in practice – all cases of national rebellion, whatever your abstract opinion. Such a stance will continue to make the people think that anarchists have nothing to say to them.

Conclusion

The Brazilian anarchist Correa notes that many anarchists downplay or ignore Bakunin's solidarity with oppressed peoples. He suspects this has to do with Western imperialist prejudices.

"There is, on the part of different researchers, a minimization of the theme of national and anti-imperialist liberation in Bakunin's life and work from 1864 onward. Perhaps this is explained…by the fact that these researchers live, in most cases, in the central countries of the North Atlantic axis." (Correa 2024; p. 307)

I do not quote Bakunin because I think that his writings prove that my views are correct. Bakunin was not a holy prophet and his writings are not sacred scripture. Some things he got wrong, in my opinion. We are anarchists, not Bakuninists. (For an overview of Bakunin, his contributions and his errors, see Price 2025.)

However, (1) his writings demonstrate the falsity of claiming that real anarchists never support national self-determination. Bakunin declared himself "the patriot of all the oppressed homelands" who "will always champion the cause of oppressed nationalities" and expressed ""strong sympathy for any national uprising." And clearly Bakunin was an anarchist.

(2) Bakunin argued that the State and the nation (homeland) were distinct. Anarchists were opposed to the State and sought to overturn it, while rejecting the statist ideology of "nationalism." (Anarchists develop tactics for what to do when statists are leading the national resistance and the anarchists are not yet strong enough to turn it into a social revolution.)

Bakunin supported the peoples, the homelands, the nations, against oppression by the rulers of other nations. This was seen by him as part of internationalism, not opposed to it. He expected nations to associate through bottom-up voluntary federation. "Socialism is federalist."

(3) Bakunin demonstrated that countries' self-determination, as he saw it, was integral to his vision of anarchism. A program which supports self-determination for individuals, communities, cities, self-managed industries, regions, and provinces, but not for nations, would be a peculiar sort of anarchism.

Anarchism means freedom, equality, community, and democratic self-determination for every part of society, at every level and in every way.

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Thus, then, the *antiquity*; and *universality*; of a belief should be regarded, contrary to all science and all logic, as sufficient and unimpeachable proof of its truth. Why?

Until the days of Copernicus and Galileo everybody believed that the sun revolved about the earth. Was not everybody mistaken? What is more ancient and more universal than slavery? Cannibalism perhaps. From the origin of historic society down to the present day there has been always and everywhere exploitation of the compulsory labour of the masses — slaves, serfs, or wage workers — by some dominant minority; oppression of the people by the Church and by the State. Must it be concluded that this exploitation and this oppression are necessities absolutely inherent in the very existence of human society? These are examples which show that the argument of the champions of God proves nothing.

– Bakunin, *God and the State*

The Anarchist Bakunin

Robert Graham

In his description of the emergence of anarchist movements in Europe, Peter Kropotkin, one of the best known exponents of anarchism in the 19th and early 20th centuries, wrote that it was Michael Bakunin who "established the principles of modern Anarchy in a series of powerful pamphlets, newspaper articles and letters."[1] That Bakunin was an anarchist who was instrumental in the establishment of anarchist movements in Europe would appear to be uncontroversial. Both his allies and his opponents regarded him as an anarchist, and histories of anarchism typically highlight his role in the development of anarchist ideas and movements.

Yet there are some who think it more appropriate to describe Bakunin as a revolutionary socialist or syndicalist, including Bakunin's collaborator, James Guillaume.[2] René Berthier has even gone so far as to argue that the anarchist movements that emerged in the 1870s from the International Working Men's Association (IWMA – later known as the "First International") constituted a break with rather than a continuation of "Bakuninism."[3]

In discussing whether it is more appropriate to describe Bakunin as an anarchist or as a revolutionary socialist, it is worth examining what Bakunin himself said in this regard.

Bakunin first publicly identified himself as an anarchist in 1867, writing in the Italian journal, *Libertà e Giustizia*, that in contrast to the Pan-Slavists, who were "unitarians at all costs, always preferring public order to freedom," he was "an anarchist" who preferred "freedom to public order."[4]

Then in Bakunin's 1868 *Programme and Purpose of the Revolutionary Organization of International Brothers*, he wrote this endorsement of anarchy itself:

"We do not fear anarchy, but invoke it, convinced as we are that anarchy, meaning the full affirmation of unfettered popular life, must inaugurate liberty, equality, justice, the new order and the clash between Revolution and Reaction. This new life – popular revolution – will probably not be slow to organize, but it will create its revolutionary organization from the bottom upwards and from the circumference inwards, in accordance with the principle of liberty, and not from the top downwards and from the centre outwards, as is the way of all authority – for it makes precious little difference to us whether authority dubs itself Church, Monarchy, constitutional State or even revolutionary dictatorship. We loathe and reject them all alike as never-ending sources of exploitation and despotism."[5]

Bakunin uses "anarchy" in a positive sense as "meaning the full affirmation of unfettered popular life," not chaos and destruction. He then describes various top-down organizations… rejecting them all because they are organized "from the centre outwards." The alternative to these "sources of exploitation and despotism" is the new revolutionary organization, created "from the bottom upwards […] in accordance with the principle of liberty"

Here Bakunin uses "anarchy" in a positive sense as "meaning the full affirmation of unfettered popular life," not chaos and destruction. He then describes various top-down organizations, such as the Church, a constitutional State and a revolutionary dictatorship, "as never-ending sources of exploitation and despotism," rejecting them all because they are organized "from the centre outwards." The alternative to these "sources of exploitation and despotism" is the new revolutionary organization, created "from the

[1] P. Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchy* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2018), ed. I. McKay, p. 161.
[2] See Max Nettlau's biographical sketch of Guillaume at https://jguillaume.hypotheses.org/74, written in 1935.
[3] René Berthier, *Social Democracy and Anarchism in the International Workers' Association 1864-1877* (London: Merlin Press, 2015), pp. viii-ix.
[4] Bakunin, quoted in W. Eckhardt, *The First Socialist Schism: Bakunin vs. Marx in the International Working Men's Association* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), p. 453, n. 47.
[5] M. Bakunin, *Selected Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), ed. A. Lehning, p. 170.

bottom upwards […] in accordance with the principle of liberty" – a positive form of anarchy that constitutes "the full affirmation of unfettered popular life."

Later in the *Programme*, Bakunin refers to anarchy as revolutionary upheaval, writing that for the revolution to triumph over reaction, "*the unity of revolutionary thought and action must find an agent* in the thick of the popular anarchy which will constitute the very life and all the energy of the revolution."[1]

In *Science and the Urgent Revolutionary Task* (1870), Bakunin argued that anarchy conceived as revolutionary upheaval, while leading "to the destruction of the State," could either result in "the enslavement of the country by another State, as was the case with the unfortunate Poland, or the full emancipation of the toiling people and the abolition of classes, which, we hope, will soon take place all over Europe."[2]

Although anarchy conceived as revolutionary upheaval can destroy a particular state, that destruction can lead to two diametrically opposed things: it may ultimately result in another state enslaving the country in which the state has been destroyed, as in Poland, or it may lead to something altogether different, the complete emancipation of the people. Because Bakunin sought to avoid the replacement of one state by another, foreign or otherwise, his argument was that revolutionaries should harness the destructive power of anarchy not only to destroy the state but to ensure that the end result was not the reconstitution of the state, but its permanent abolition, the full emancipation of the people and the abolition of classes, a positive form of anarchy.

Bakunin made similar arguments in *Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis*, published in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War. The "terrific whirlwind of revolutionary anarchy" will destroy the state and the private property rights sanctioned and enforced by it.[3] In the countryside, this "revolutionary anarchy will bring back to life and will arm with an irresistible power" the enslaved masses, with the economically advantaged having "to give way before the collective power" of the greater "number of poor and very poor peasants, as well as the rural proletarians."[4]

After destroying "*all the political and civil institutions*" that oppress and exploit them, the peasants and rural proletarians will then be able "*to establish and organize anarchy in the villages.*"[5] Bakunin refers to anarchy in both a negative and a positive sense here, as a destructive and creative force, and as the end result of the revolutionary process. All of this comprises what Bakunin described as the "anarchic revolution."[6]

In his 1871 *Circular Letter to My Friends in Italy,* Bakunin wrote that:

> "Outside of the Mazzinian system, which is the system of the republic in the form of a State, there is no other system but that of the republic as a commune, the republic as a federation, a Socialist and a genuine people's republic — the system of Anarchy. It is the politics of the Social Revolution, which aims at the abolition of the State, and the economic, altogether free organization of the people, an organization from below upward, by means of a federation."[7]

What is the "system of Anarchy" to which Bakunin was referring? It is the republic as a socialist commune and federation, the "free organization of the people... from below upward, by means of a federation." This is a positive form of anarchy. But "anarchy" is also "the abolition of the State," which is only a negative form of "anarchy" in the sense that destruction is the negation of something existing (the state), but the result is not something negative, either "anarchy" in the sense of chaos, or a reconstituted state, but something positive, the federation of socialist communes.

In addition to arguing for the "anarchic revolution" that will sweep away the state and create a positive form of anarchy, the federation of socialist communes, Bakunin continued to describe himself as an anarchist in distinguishing his position from that of other socialists, particularly Marx and his followers.

In an 1871 essay published posthumously as *God and the State*, Bakunin denounced religious and political authority as follows:

> "In a word, we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even though arising from

[1] Lehning, ed., p. 172, original emphasis.
[2] M. Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* (New York: Free Press, 1964), ed. G. Maximoff, p. 364.
[3] Maximoff, ed., p. 405.
[4] Maximoff, ed., p. 407.
[5] Maximoff, ed., p. 403, original emphasis.
[6] "Lettre à un Français," in M. Bakounine, *Oeuvres*, Vol. II, ed. J. Guillaume, p. 242.
[7] Maximoff, pp. 297-298; Maximoff's translation of "Anarchie" as "anarchism" has been corrected. For an alternate translation which correctly uses "anarchy" instead of "anarchism," see M. Bakunin, *Selected Texts 1868 - 1875* (London: Merlin Press, 2016), ed. and trans. A. Zurbrugg, p. 23.

> universal suffrage, convinced that it can tum only to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters against the interests of the immense majority in subjection to them.
>
> "This is the sense in which we are really Anarchists."[1]

During his conflicts with Marx within the International Working Men's Association (IWMA), Bakunin distinguished "the authoritarian theories of Marx" from the "anarchistic theories" promoted by Bakunin and his associates.[2]

In an unpublished letter to the editorial board of the socialist paper, *La Liberté* (1872), Bakunin wrote that "between the Marxists and ourselves there is a chasm. They are for government, we, for our part, are anarchists."[3] In arguing against Marx's attempts to impose as official IWMA policy that the national federations should form political parties with the object of achieving state power, Bakunin noted that "the anarchic program is accepted, with very few exceptions, by all the Latin Federations; the Slavs will accept none other."[4] In Bakunin's view, each national federation should be free to determine its own approach to politics.

That Bakunin identified himself and his positions as anarchist was further emphasized by Bakunin himself in the 1872 programme that he wrote for the Slavic Section of the IWMA in Zurich, which he explicitly described as an "anarchist revolutionary program, which alone, in our opinion, reflects all the conditions for the real and total liberation of the masses." Being "convinced that the existence of the state in any form whatsoever is incompatible with the liberty of the proletariat, [in] that it does not permit the fraternal international alliance of peoples, we want to abolish all states."[5]

In his last major work published during Bakunin's lifetime, *Statism and Anarchy* (1873), Bakunin made his anarchist position very explicit. The book was subtitled "The Struggle of the Two Parties in the International Working Men's Association," and was clearly intended to distinguish Bakunin's anarchist approach from Marx's promotion of electoral activity, with the ultimate aim of a socialist party achieving state power.

Bakunin sets forth his alternative conception of "the *anarchist* social revolution, which arises spontaneously within the people and destroys everything that opposes the broad flow of popular life so as to create new forms of free social organization out of the very depths of the people's existence."[6]

He identifies himself and his associates as "revolutionary anarchists" who advocate "universal popular education, liberation, and the broad development of social life." As revolutionary anarchists, they are therefore "enemies of the state and of any form of statehood."[7] Any state, including a transitional socialist "people's state," is "a yoke which gives rise to despotism on the one hand and slavery on the other."[8]

Bakunin acknowledges that his opponents call him and his allies "anarchists," but does "not object to this term because we are in fact the enemies of all power, knowing that power corrupts those invested with it just as much as those compelled to submit to it. Under its pernicious influence the former become ambitious and avaricious despots, exploiters of society for their own personal or class advantage, and the latter become slaves."[9]

The alternative to state power and organization is a society in which people "create their own life, organizing themselves from below upward by means of independent and completely free associations, subject to no official tutelage but open to the free and diverse influences of individuals and parties."[10] Bakunin describes this as a form of "anarchy," namely "the voluntary organization of the workers from below upward."[11] He defines "anarchy" as "the free and independent organization of all the units and parts of the community and their voluntary federation from

[1] M. Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 35.
[2] "Letter to Tómas González Morago: May 1872," *Selected Texts*, ed. A. Zurbrugg, p. 215.
[3] Lehning, ed., p. 238.
[4] Bakounine, *Oeuvres*, Vol. IV, p. 430.
[5] M. Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ed. and trans. M. Shatz, Appendix A, p. 183.
[6] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 122, original emphasis.
[7] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 124.
[8] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 155.
[9] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 124.
[10] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 124.
[11] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 155.

below upward, not by the orders of any authority, even an elected one, and not by the dictates of any scientific theory, but as a result of the natural development of all the varied demands put forth by life itself."[1]

When Bakunin's political writings between 1867 and his death in July 1876 are examined, he clearly set forth a revolutionary anarchist position, regardless of the number of times that he may have explicitly identified himself as an anarchist.

In his 1868 *Programme and Purpose of the Revolutionary Organization of International Brothers*, Bakunin set forth his intention "to destroy all States and all Churches, together with all their institutions and all their religious, judicial, financial, police and university, economic and social laws, so that all those millions of poor human beings now hoodwinked, enslaved, tormented and exploited shall be delivered from all their official and officious guides and benefactors and breathe at last in total freedom as associations and individuals."[2] The desire to destroy the State and all of its institutions is something shared by virtually every anarchist.

Bakunin advocated insurrection and direct action in order to abolish the state and all of its institutions, and to replace capitalism with a socialist system based on worker self-management…

Bakunin was opposed to the creation of so-called "revolutionary States" or governments, which would "condemn the popular masses" to "enslavement and exploitation at the hands of a new quasi-revolutionary aristocracy."[3] Bakunin was one of the first to argue that a "revolutionary" state or government would create a new class of government officials and functionaries who would exploit and rule over the people, regardless of whether capitalist economic relationships had been abolished.

All "productive capital and means of production" would be taken over by the "workers' associations, who are to put them to collective use." The workers' associations would be voluntarily federated together, forming a revolutionary "Commune," and then regional, national and international federations.[4] As Bakunin put it in the 1868 *Programme of the International Socialist Alliance*, "a new society" would be reconstituted "on the strict basis of freely associated labour, taking collective ownership, equality and justice as starting-points."[5] That productive capital and the means of production were to be self-managed by the workers' associations, rather than controlled and managed by the State, was a view shared by subsequent socialist and communist anarchists.

Being opposed to the creation of a "revolutionary" state or government, Bakunin did not support Marx and Engels' strategy of creating socialist political parties that would participate in national elections when legally able to do so, with the ultimate aim of achieving state power, the coercive force of which would then be used to abolish capitalism and to lay the groundwork for the transition from socialism to communism by increasing productive capacity to the point where products could be distributed according to need, after which the State would gradually "wither away" or "die out" (to use Engels' phrase).[6]

In addition to being opposed to the State, including one with a representative government, Bakunin regarded representative government itself as "a sham." Given that it would "be impossible" for "tens or hundreds of thousands of men to wield [political] power effectively," that power would "have to be exercised by proxy, which means entrusting it to a group of men elected to represent and govern them […] After a brief flash of liberty or orgiastic revolution, the citizens of the new State will wake up slaves, puppets and victims of a new group of ambitious men."[7]

Consequently, Bakunin wrote in *Statism and Anarchy* that the "political and social theory of the anti-state socialists, or anarchists, leads them directly and inexorably to a complete break with all governments and all forms of bourgeois politics, leaving no alternative but social revolution. Meanwhile, the opposing theory, the theory of the state communists and scientific authority, inexorably enmeshes and

[1] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 169.
[2] Lehning, ed., p. 167.
[3] Lehning, ed., p. 169.
[4] Lehning, ed., p. 170.
[5] Lehning, ed., p. 173.
[6] F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring - Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1947), p. 186.
[7] "*Letter to the Editorial Board of* La Liberté," in Lehning, ed., p. 255.

entangles its adherents, under the pretext of political tactics, in endless accommodations with governments and the various bourgeois political parties– that is, it thrusts them directly into reaction."[1]

As with subsequent anarchists, many of whom were inspired by Bakunin, Bakunin advocated insurrection and direct action in order to abolish the state and all of its institutions, and to replace capitalism with a socialist system based on worker self-management. That he also advocated the creation of trade union organizations that would prepare the workers for revolution and for running the economy after the revolution does not mean that he was not, contrary to his own statements, an anarchist.

Bakunin… also advocated the creation of trade union organizations that would prepare the workers for revolution and for running the economy after the revolution… Bakunin did not limit the means for achieving the anarchist social revolution to syndicalist methods, such as the general strike. He also advocated insurrection

To the contrary, Bakunin believed that the once the "economic solidarity" upon which workers' organizations, including the International, are based becomes "seriously accepted and well established," that economic solidarity will produce "everything else, every principle of the International – the most sublime and the most subversive; those most destructive for religion, law and the state, for all authority be it human or divine, the most revolutionary in a word, from a socialist viewpoint – being nothing but the natural and necessary development of that economic solidarity." The principles of revolutionary socialism will therefore be "demonstrated to workers not through theoretical reasoning, but through tragic and living experience of a struggle that daily becomes ever broader, more profound, more terrible: such that even the least informed workers – ones who are least thoughtful and most malleable, being drawn on by the very consequences of this struggle, end up by recognising themselves as atheists, anarchists and revolutionaries, without their knowing how they became so."[2]

Rather than seeing any conflict between his advocacy of workers' organizations that would focus on economic solidarity instead of political activity, and his advocacy of an anarchist social revolution, Bakunin believed that it was through participation in the workers' struggles that the workers would become anarchists.

As with other anarchist revolutionaries, including Errico Malatesta, who worked with Bakunin in the IWMA, Bakunin did not limit the means for achieving the anarchist social revolution to syndicalist methods, such as the general strike. He also advocated insurrection, in words and in deed, participating in two failed attempts at insurrection during his anarchist period. The first was in Lyon in September 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, when Bakunin and others tried to proclaim a revolutionary commune. The second was in Bologna in 1874, when Bakunin and various Italian Internationalists attempted to foment an insurrection that would provoke a social revolution.[3]

In his 1872 "*Letter to the Editorial Board of* La Liberté," Bakunin had hailed the "communalist insurrection" of the 1871 Paris Commune for having "ushered in the social revolution."[4] In *Statism and Anarchy*, Bakunin wrote that "Liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organization of the workers from below upward."[5] When discussing the situation in Russia, Bakunin argued that the only course that could deliver the Russian people from tyranny was "the militant, insurrectionary one."[6]

Although Bakunin did argue that the IWMA should have no official political doctrine, so that each federation would be free to determine its own political orientation, he was quite frank regarding the type of programme that he thought the workers should follow. He took the position that within the IWMA, "every doctrine should have the greatest freedom to develop – the authoritarian theories of Marx as much as our

[1] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 155.
[2] Bakunin, *The Alliance Protests* (1871), *Selected Texts*, pp. 140 – 141.
[3] For details, see Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 82–105.
[4] Lehning, ed., p. 261.
[5] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 155.
[6] *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 180.

anarchistic theories, provided only that none should have the folly or the odious pretension to impose themselves as an *official truth*, and none should infringe on this practical proletarian solidarity in economic struggles in various lands." Within the IWMA, Bakunin and his allies, with their "explicitly revolutionary programme […] organize for revolution," imposing their "programme on no one," but propagating "it freely, being certain that it is the only one that will accomplish full proletarian emancipation."[1]

At the September 1872 St. Imier Congress of various IWMA sections and federations opposed to Marx's imposition of a compulsory programme of electoral participation, Bakunin supported the sections and federations continuing to enjoy the freedom "to decide for themselves and to follow whatever line of political conduct they deem best."[2] Nevertheless, he drafted three declarations accepted at the Congress that clearly set forth an anarchist position.

Turning on its head the Hague Congress resolution that the "constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social revolution," the first declaration stated that "the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat."[3] The second declaration denounced any "revolutionary political authority" that purported to ensure the destruction of political power as "nothing but another fraud," as "dangerous to the proletariat as any government now in existence."[4] The third declaration urged "the proletarians of every land" to "establish solidarity of revolutionary action outside of all bourgeois politicking."[5]

the anarchists in the reconstituted IWMA continued and expanded upon Bakunin's legacy, advocating, as Bakunin had before them, an anarchist social revolution that would abolish the state and capitalism

Advocating the destruction of all political power, denouncing all so-called revolutionary governments as a fraud, and urging the workers to take revolutionary action rather than engaging in bourgeois politics, are all quintessentially anarchist positions. The anarchists who continued working within the anti-authoritarian International after Bakunin retired from the IWMA in October 1873, and who continued to support the anarchist programme advocated by Bakunin when he was active in the IWMA, cannot be said to have somehow betrayed Bakunin's legacy. As I have endeavoured to show in *'We Do Not Fear Anarchy – We Invoke It: The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement* (Oakland: AK Press, 2015), the anarchists in the reconstituted IWMA continued and expanded upon Bakunin's legacy, advocating, as Bakunin had before them, an anarchist social revolution that would abolish the state and capitalism, replacing them with free federations of self-managed associations that would enable everyone to live in freedom and equality.

I bow before the authority of special men because it is imposed upon me by my own reason. I am conscious of my inability to grasp, in all its details and positive developments, any very large portion of human knowledge… Thence results, for science as well as for industry, the necessity of the division and association of labour. I receive and I give – such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination.

– Bakunin, *God and the State*

[1] Bakunin, "Letter to Tómas González Morago" (1872), *Selected Texts*, p. 215.

[2] "The St. Imier Congress," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, *Vol. One: From Anarchy to Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), ed. R. Graham, p. 98.

[3] The Hague Congress Resolutions can be found at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1872/hague-conference/resolutions.htm; the St. Imier declarations are at p. 99 of *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume One*.

[4] *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume One*, p. 99.

[5] *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume One*, p. 99.

Introductory

While the number of works published during Bakunin's lifetime was small, he did write about numerous issues and subjects. This means that much, but not all, of his writings have been published posthumously. These are usually a combination of letters and extracts from his much worked upon but never completed *L'empire Knouto-Germanique et la Révolution Sociale* (*The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution,* a reference to a treaty between Russia and Germany at the time). Extracts from this text include his most famous works, including *God and the State* and *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*.

Here we present writings from various periods which give an overview of certain key ideas in his works, starting with extracts from the pamphlet based upon his speech at the 1867 Geneva Congress of the *League of Peace and Freedom*. After the *League* refused to address the social question, Bakunin and his comrades left to join the International. These extracts place Bakunin in the libertarian socialist tradition started by Proudhon as well as defining "the principle of authority."

This is followed by a letter to the Parisian journal *La Démocratie* which discusses the themes Bakunin had raised at the Geneva Congress. While not yet anarchist, the letter clearly shows progress towards it.

Next comes a short extract from *L'empire Knouto-Germanique et la Révolution Sociale* in which contrasts the authoritarian discipline of the class systems with the libertarian discipline of free association. He sketches how self-management ensures the freedom of all even if individuals do not always see their favoured ideas implemented by the group. This predates Rosa Luxemburg's similar comments by decades:

> **"The discipline Lenin has in mind is being implanted in the working class not only by the factory but also by the military and the existing state bureaucracy – by the entire mechanism of the centralised bourgeois state.**
>
> **"We misuse words and we practice self-deception when we apply the same term – discipline – to such dissimilar notions as: 1. the absence of thought and will in a body with a thousand automatically moving hands and legs, and 2. the spontaneous coordination of the conscious, political acts of a body of men. What is there in common between the regulated docility of an oppressed class and the self-discipline and organisation of a class struggling for its emancipation?" (*Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*)**

We end this section with another extract from *L'empire Knouto-Germanique et la Révolution Sociale* which summarises Bakunin's critique of capitalism, previously published as the pamphlet *The Capitalist System*. This critique reflects the usual socialist one as expressed by the likes of Proudhon and Marx. As becomes clear from his writings, Bakunin highly respected Marx's economic analysis of capitalism while being rightly critical of his political strategy and ideas. For these, Bakunin followed the path laid down by Proudhon and argued for action on the economic terrain to create a socio-economic federation.

Federalism, Socialism and Anti-Theologism

A Reasoned Proposal to the Central Committee of the League for Peace and Freedom

Michael Bakunin

1867

[…]

I. Federalism

We are pleased to be able to declare that this principle [of federalism] has been unanimously acclaimed by the Geneva Congress.

Switzerland itself, which, moreover, practices it today with such success, adhered to it without any reservation and accepted it in all its implications Unfortunately, in the resolutions of the Congress, this principle has been poorly formulated and is only indirectly mentioned, first in connection with the League that we are to establish, and later, in relation to the newspaper we are to publish under the title "United States of Europe", whereas it should, in our opinion, have occupied the foremost place in our declaration of principles.

Bakunin's membership card

This is a most regrettable gap which we must hasten to fill. In accordance with the unanimous sentiment of the Geneva Congress, we must proclaim:

1. That to make freedom, justice, peace triumph in the international relations of Europe, to make civil war impossible between the different peoples that make up the European family, there is only one way: to establish the *United States of Europe*.

2. That the [United] States of Europe will never be formed with States as they are constituted today, given the monstrous inequality that exists between their respective forces.

3. That the example of the defunct Germanic Confederation has proved in a definitive manner that a confederation of monarchies is a mockery; that it is powerless to guarantee either the peace or the freedom of peoples.

4. That no centralised, bureaucratic and thereby militaristic State, even if it called itself a republic, can seriously and sincerely enter into an international confederation. By its constitution, which must always be an overt or covert negation of freedom within, it would necessarily be a permanent declaration of war, a threat against the existence of neighbouring countries. Essentially founded upon an ulterior act of violence, conquest, or what in private life is called breaking and entering – an act blessed by the Church of any religion, consecrated by time and thereby transformed into historic right – and relying upon this divine consecration of triumphant violence as an exclusive and supreme right, every centralised State thereby posits itself as an absolute negation of the rights of all other States, recognising them in the treaties it concludes with them only out of political interest or helplessness.

5. That all members of the League must therefore strive with all their efforts to reconstitute their respective homelands, in order to replace their old organisation founded, from top to bottom, on violence and on the principle of authority, with a new organisation based solely upon the interests, the needs and the natural attractions of populations, nor any other principle than the free federation of individuals into communes, of

communes into provinces[1], of provinces into nations, and finally of nations into the United States of Europe first and later of the entire world.

6. Consequently, the absolute abandonment of everything called the historic right of States; all questions relating to natural, political, strategic, commercial borders must henceforth be considered as belonging to ancient history and energetically rejected by all members of the League.

7. Recognition of the absolute right of every nation, large or small, of every people, weak or strong, of every province, of every commune, to complete autonomy, provided that its internal constitution is not a threat or a danger to the autonomy and freedom of neighbouring countries.

8. The fact that a country has been part of a State, even if it joined it freely, does not in any way entail an obligation for it to remain attached to it forever. No perpetual obligation can be accepted by human justice, the only one that can have authority amongst us, and we will never recognise other rights, nor other duties than those founded upon freedom. The right of free union and of equally free secession is the first, the most important of all political rights: without which the confederation would never be more than a masked centralisation.

The League will recognise *nationality* as a natural fact, having an incontestable right to a free existence and development, but not as a principle – every principle having to bear the characteristic of universality and nationality being on the contrary only an exclusive, separating fact

9. It follows from all of the above that the League must openly proscribe any alliance of any national faction of the European democracy with monarchical States, even if this alliance had the aim of regaining the independence or freedom of an oppressed country; – such an alliance, which can only lead to disappointments, would at the same time be a betrayal of the revolution.

10. By contrast, the League, precisely because it is the League for Peace, and because it is convinced that peace can only be conquered and founded upon the closest and fullest solidarity of peoples in justice and in freedom, must loudly proclaim its sympathies for any national insurrection against any oppression, whether foreign or native, provided that this insurrection is made in the name of our principles and in the political as well as the economic interests of the masses, but not with the ambitious intent of founding a powerful State.

11. The League will wage a relentless war against all that is called glory, grandeur, and power of States. To all these false and malevolent idols to which millions of human victims have been sacrificed, we will oppose the glories of human intelligence manifested in science and of a universal prosperity founded upon labour, justice, and freedom.

[1] The illustrious Italian patriot, Giuseppe Mazzini, whose republican ideal is none other than the French Republic of 1793, recast in the poetic traditions of Dante and in the ambitious memories of Rome, sovereign of the world, then revised and corrected from the point of view of a new theology, half rational and half mystical – this eminent patriot, ambitious, passionate and always exclusive, despite all the efforts he made to rise to the level of international justice, and who always preferred the greatness and power of his country to his own well-being and freedom – Mazzini has always been a staunch opponent of provincial autonomy, which he believed would naturally disrupt the strict uniformity of his grand Italian State. He claimed that the autonomy of the communes would suffice to counterbalance the omnipotence of the strongly constituted republic. He was mistaken: no isolated commune would be able to resist the power of this formidable centralisation; it would be crushed. To avoid succumbing in this struggle, it should therefore federate with all neighbouring communes for the purpose of common resistance, that is to say that it should form an autonomous province with them. Furthermore, since the provinces will not be autonomous, they will have to be governed by functionaries of the State. There is no middle ground between rigorously consistent federalism and a bureaucratic regime. From this it follows that the republic desired by Mazzini would be a bureaucratic and, consequently, militaristic State, founded for external power and not for international justice nor internal freedom. In 1793, under the Reign of Terror, the communes of France were recognised as autonomous, which did not prevent them from being crushed by the revolutionary despotism of the Convention, or rather by that of the Commune of Paris, which Napoleon naturally inherited.

12. The League will recognise *nationality* as a natural fact, having an incontestable right to a free existence and development, but not as a principle – every principle having to bear the characteristic of universality and nationality being on the contrary only an exclusive, separating fact. This so-called *principle of nationality*, as it has been posed in our time by the governments of France, Russia and Prussia, and even by many German, Polish, Italian, and Hungarian patriots, is merely a diversion opposed by the reaction to the spirit of revolution: eminently aristocratic in essence, to the point of despising the dialects of uneducated peoples, implicitly denying the freedom of provinces and the real autonomy of communes, and supported in all countries not by the popular masses, whose real interests it systematically sacrifices to a so-called public good, which is never anything but that of the privileged classes – this principle expresses nothing but the alleged historical rights and ambitions of States. The right of nationality can therefore never be considered by the League as anything other than a natural consequence of the supreme principle of freedom, ceasing to be a right the moment it is posed either against freedom, or even merely outside freedom.

13. Unity is the goal towards which humanity irresistibly strives. But it becomes fatal, destructive of the intelligence, the dignity, the prosperity of individuals and peoples whenever it is formed outside of freedom, either by violence or under the authority of any theological, metaphysical, political, or even economic idea. Patriotism which tends toward unity outside of freedom is an evil patriotism, always disastrous to the popular and real interests of the country it claims to exalt and serve, a friend, often unwittingly, of reaction – an enemy of the revolution, that is to say of the emancipation of nations and men. The League can recognise only one unity: that which will be freely constituted by the federation of autonomous parts within the whole, so that this, ceasing to be the negation of particular rights and interests, ceasing to be the graveyard where all local prosperities must inevitably be buried, will instead become the confirmation and the source of all these autonomies and all these prosperities. The League will therefore vigorously attack any religious, political, economic and social organisation that is not thoroughly permeated by this great principle of freedom; without it, there is no intelligence, no justice, no prosperity, no humanity.

Patriotism which tends toward unity outside of freedom is an evil patriotism, always disastrous to the popular and real interests of the country it claims to exalt and serve… an enemy of… the emancipation of nations and men

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These are, gentlemen, in our opinion and without doubt also in yours, the necessary developments and consequences of this great principle of Federalism which the Geneva Congress so emphatically proclaimed. These are the absolute conditions for peace and for freedom.

Absolute, yes – but are they the only ones? – We do not think so.

[…]

Citizens and slaves – such was the antagonism in the ancient world, as in the slave states of the new world. Citizens and slaves, that is, forced workers, slaves not in law but in fact – such is the antagonism of the modern world. – And just as the ancient States perished through slavery, so too will modern States perish through the proletariat.

It is futile to try to console ourselves with the idea that this is a fictitious rather than a real antagonism, or that it is impossible to establish a line of demarcation between the owning classes and the dispossessed classes, [as] these two classes merge with each other by a number of intermediate and elusive distinctions. In the natural world these lines of demarcation do not exist either; in the ascending series of beings, it is impossible for example to indicate the point where the vegetable kingdom ends and the animal kingdom begins, where bestiality ceases and humanity begins. Nevertheless, there is a very real difference between plant and animal, between the latter and man. Similarly, in human society, despite the intermediate positions that form an imperceptible transition from one political and social existence to another, the difference between classes is nevertheless very marked, and everyone can distinguish the noble aristocracy from the financial aristocracy, the upper bourgeoisie from the petty bourgeoisie, and the latter from the proletariat of the factories and cities; as well

as the great landowner, the rentier, the peasant landowner who cultivates the land himself, the farmer from the simple proletarian of the countryside.

All these different political and social existences can today be reduced to two main categories, diametrically opposed to each other, and natural enemies of each other: the *privileged classes*, composed of all those privileged in land or capital, or even only from bourgeois education[1] – and the *working classes* dispossessed of both capital and land, and deprived of all education and all instruction.

One would have to be a sophist or blind to deny the existence of the abyss that separates these two classes today. As in the ancient world, our modern civilisation, comprising a comparatively very small minority of privileged citizens, is based upon the forced labour (by hunger) of the immense majority of the population, [who are] inevitably condemned to ignorance and to brutality.

It is also futile to try to persuade ourselves that this abyss can be bridged merely by diffusing knowledge amongst the masses. It is all very well to establish schools for the people; we must still ask whether the man of the people, living from day to day and feeding his family by the labour of his hands, himself deprived of education and leisure, and forced to be worn down and stupefied by work in order to provide his family with bread for tomorrow — we must ask ourselves whether he only has the thought, the desire and even the possibility of sending his children to school and supporting them throughout their education? Will he not need the help of their feeble hands, their child labour, to provide for all the needs of his family? It would be a lot if he pushes the sacrifice to making them study for a year or two, barely giving them enough time to learn to read, write and count, and allow their minds and hearts to be poisoned by the Christian catechism, which is deliberately and profusely distributed in the official public schools of all countries. Would this meagre education ever be able to raise the working masses to the level of bourgeois understanding? Would it bridge the abyss?

It is obvious that the vital question of popular instruction and education depends upon the solution of this other far more difficult question of a radical reform in the current economic conditions of the working classes. – Improve working conditions, return to labour all that according to justice belongs to labour, and thereby give the people security, comfort, leisure, and then, believe me, they will educate themselves; they will create a civilisation broader, saner, higher than yours.

It is also futile to say with the economists that the improvement in the economic situation of the working classes depends upon the general progress of industry and commerce in each country and their complete emancipation from the supervision and protection of the State. The freedom of industry and of commerce is certainly a great thing and one of the essential foundations of the future international alliance of all the peoples of the world. Friends of freedom regardless, of all freedoms, we must also be friends of this. But on the other hand, we must recognise that as long as the present States exist and as long as labour continues to be the serf of property and of capital, this freedom, by enriching a tiny portion of the bourgeoisie at the expense of the immense majority, will produce only one benefit: that of frustrating and demoralising the small number of the privileged, of increasing the misery, the grievances, and the just indignation of the working masses, and thereby hastening the hour of the destruction of States.

[...]

II. Socialism

[…]

In general, regulation was the common passion of all the socialists before 1848, except one: Cabet, Louis Blanc, Fourierists, Saint-Simonists, all had a passion for indoctrinating and organising the future; all were more or less *authoritarians*.

But then Proudhon appeared: son of a peasant, and in act and instinct a hundred times more revolutionary than all these doctrinaire and bourgeois socialists, he armed himself with a critique as profound and penetrating as it was merciless to destroy all their systems. Opposing freedom to authority, against these state socialists, he boldly proclaimed himself an anarchist, and in defiance of their deism or their pantheism, he had the courage to call himself simply an atheist or rather, with Auguste Comte, a *positivist*.

His own socialism, based upon both individual and collective freedom, and on the spontaneous action of free associations, obeying no laws other than the

[1] In the absence of any other asset, this bourgeois education, with the help of the solidarity which links all members of the bourgeois world, assures anyone who has received it an enormous privilege in the remuneration of their work – the work of the most mediocre bourgeois almost always being paid three, four times more than that of the most intelligent worker.

general laws of social economy, discovered or yet to be discovered by social science, outside of all governmental regulation and all protection of the State, subordinating politics to the economic, intellectual, and moral interests of society, was later and by a necessary consequence to lead to federalism.

[...]

The exclusively political republican is a stoic; he recognises no rights, only duties; or, as in Mazzini's republic, he accepts one right only: that of eternally devoting and sacrificing himself to the homeland, living only to serve it, and gladly dying for it, as in the song M. Alexander Dumas bestowed upon the Girondins: "*To die for one's homeland is the finest, the most enviable fate*." The socialist, on the contrary, draws upon his positive rights to life and to all pleasures of life, intellectual, moral, and physical. He loves life, and he wants to enjoy it to the fullest. His convictions being a part of himself, and his duties toward society being indissolubly linked to his rights, to remain faithful to both, he will know how to live in accordance with justice, like Proudhon, and if necessary die like Babeuf; but he will never say that the life of humanity must be a sacrifice, nor that death is the sweetest fate. […]

[...]

A republic? But which republic? Political only, or democratic and social?[1] Are the people still socialist? Yes, more than ever.

What succumbed in June 1848 was not socialism in general, it was only *state socialism*, authoritarian and regimented socialism, that which had believed, hoped, that full satisfaction of the needs and the legitimate aspirations of the working classes would be provided by the State, and that it, armed with its plenipotence, wanted and could inaugurate a new social order. It was therefore not socialism that died in June, on the contrary it was the State which declared bankruptcy in the face of socialism and, proclaiming itself incapable of paying the debt it had incurred with it, tried to kill it to free itself from this debt in the easiest way possible. It did not succeed in killing it, but it did kill the faith that socialism had placed in it, and at the same time, annihilated all the theories of authoritarian or doctrinaire socialism, some of which, like Cabet's "L'Icarie" and like Louis Blanc's "L'Organisation du Travail", had advised the people to rely in all things upon the State – whose worthlessness others had demonstrated through a series of ridiculous experiments. Even Proudhon's bank, which under more favourable circumstances could have prospered, crushed by the censure and the general hostility of the bourgeoisie – succumbed.

[...]

That freedom without socialism is privilege, injustice; and that socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality

We do not propose to you, gentlemen, this or that socialist system. What we ask of you is to proclaim anew that great principle of the French Revolution: that every man must have the material and moral means to develop his full humanity, a principle which, according to us, translates itself into the following challenge:

To organise society in such a manner that every individual, male or female, entering life finds roughly equal means for the development of their various faculties and for their utilisation through their labour; to organise a society which, by rending it impossible for any individual, whoever they may be, to exploit the labour of others, only allows to partake in the enjoyment of social wealth, which is in reality never produced except by labour, except to the extent that they have directly contributed to its production by his own labour.

[...]

[…] We are making no proposals on this subject, just as we generally refrain from making any proposals regarding this or that problem of social science and policy, convinced that all these questions must become the subject of serious and thorough discussion in our journal. – Today, therefore, we will limit ourselves to proposing the following statement:

"Convinced that the serious realisation of freedom, justice and peace in the world will be impossible as long as the vast majority of the population remains dispossessed of all property, deprived of education and condemned to political and social nullity and to a de facto, if not de jure, slavery by poverty as well as by the necessity in which they find themselves to toil without respite or leisure, producing all the wealth of which the

[1] A reference to the demand of the 1848 revolution for a democratic and social republic, that is a republic with substantial socio-economic reforms of a socialist nature. This terminology was popular with most socialists of the time, including Proudhon. (*Black Flag*)

world boasts today and obtaining so little from it that it is barely enough to secure their bread for the next day;

"Convinced that for all these peoples, so horribly mistreated through the ages, the question of bread is that of intellectual emancipation, of freedom and of humanity;

"That freedom without socialism is privilege, injustice; and that socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality;

"The League loudly proclaims the need for a radical social and economic reform, aimed at the liberation of the people's labour from the yoke of capital and proprietors, based on the strictest justice, not legal, nor theological, nor metaphysical, but simply human, on positive science and on the most absolute freedom.

"At the same time, it decides that its Journal will open widely its columns to all serious discussions on economic and social questions, when they are sincerely inspired by the desire for the broadest possible popular emancipation, both materially and from a political and intellectual perspective."

[…]

III. Anti-Theologism

Gentlemen, we are convinced that no great political and social transformation has taken place in the world without it being accompanied and often preceded by a similar movement in the philosophical and religious ideas that guide the consciousness of both individuals and society.

[…]

No offence to all the semi-philosophers, to all the so-called religious thinkers: *The existence of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice, it is the negation of human freedom and necessarily leads to a slavery that is not only theoretical but actual.*

Therefore, unless we desire slavery, we cannot and must not make the slightest concession to theology, because in this mystical and rigorously consistent alphabet, whoever begins with A will inevitably arrive at Z, and whoever wishes to worship God will have to renounce their freedom and their human dignity.

God exists, therefore man is a slave.

Man is intelligent, just, free – therefore God does not exist.

We challenge anyone to break free from this cycle, and now let us choose.

[…]

Whether internally federated or not, each State, under penalty of perishing, must therefore seek to become the most powerful. It must devour in order not to be devoured, conquer in order not to be conquered, enslave in order not to be enslaved – for two powers, similar yet foreign to one another, cannot coexist without destroying each other.

The State is therefore the most blatant, cynical and complete negation of humanity. It breaks the universal solidarity of all people on earth, and associates only a portion in order to destroy, conquer and enslave the rest. It extends its protection only to its own citizens, recognising human rights, humanity, civilisation only within its own borders; recognising no rights outside of itself, it logically arrogates to itself the right to the most ferocious inhumanity against all foreign populations, whom it can plunder, exterminate or enslave at will. If it appears generous and humane towards them, it is never out of duty; because it has duties only to itself first, and then to those of its members who freely formed it, who continue to constitute it freely or even, as always happens in the long run, who have become its subjects. Since international right does not exist, and since *it could never exist in a serious and real way without undermining the very foundations of the principle of the absolute sovereignty of States* – the State cannot have duties towards foreign populations. Therefore if it treats a conquered people humanely, if it only half plunders and exterminates them and does not reduce them to the utmost degree of slavery, it will be for political reasons and prudence perhaps, or out of pure magnanimity, but never out of duty – for it has the absolute right to dispose of them as it pleases.

This blatant denial of humanity, which constitutes the very essence of the State, is from the point of view of the State the supreme duty and the greatest virtue: it is called *patriotism*, and constitutes the entire *transcendent morality* of the State. We call it transcendent morality because it ordinarily surpasses the level of human morality and justice, whether shared or private, and thereby usually contradicts them. Thus, to offend, oppress, despoil, plunder, murder or enslave one's neighbour, according to ordinary human morality, is considered a crime. In public life on the contrary, from the point of view of patriotism, when it is done for the greater glory of the State, to preserve or even to expand its power, all this becomes duty and virtue. And this virtue, this duty, is obligatory for every patriotic citizen; each one is supposed to exercise them, not only against foreigners, but against his fellow citizens themselves, members or subjects like him of the State, whenever the salvation of the State demands it.

This explains why, from the very beginning of history, that is, from the birth of State, the world of politics has always been and continues to be the stage for high knavery and sublime brigandage – brigandage and knavery are, moreover, highly honoured, since they are commanded by patriotism, by transcendent morality and by the supreme interest of the State. This explains why the entire history of ancient and modern States is nothing but a series of revolting crimes; why kings and ministers, past and present, of all times and all countries, statesmen, diplomats, bureaucrats and warriors, if judged from the point of view of simple morality and human justice, have a hundred times, a thousand times deserved the gallows or the galleys; for there is no horror, cruelty, sacrilege, perjury, imposture, infamous transaction, cynical theft, brazen plunder, or foul treason that has not been, or is being, committed daily by the representatives of States, with no other excuse than that elastic expression, at once so convenient and so terrible: *reason of State!*

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[…]

Any logical and sincere theory of the State is essentially founded upon the principle of *authority*, that is to say on that eminently theological, metaphysical, political idea that the masses, *always* incapable of governing themselves, must at all times submit to the benevolent yoke of a wisdom and a justice, which in one way or another, is imposed on them from above. But imposed in the name of what and by whom? Authority recognised and respected as such by the masses can only have three sources: force, religion, or the action of a superior intelligence. We will postpone discussion of States founded on the dual authority of religion and force, because as long as we are discussing the theory of the State founded upon the free contract, we must disregard both. So for the moment we only have left the authority of superior intelligence, always represented, as we know, by minorities.

What do we indeed see in all States past and present, even those endowed with the most democratic institutions, such as the United States of North America and Switzerland? Self-government of the masses, despite the apparatus of popular omnipotence, remains for most part a fiction. It is always, in reality, minorities who govern. In the United States, up to the recent war of liberation [of the slaves] and even partly now – indeed even the entire party of the current president [Andrew] Johnson – they were and still are the so-called democrats, the supporters of slavery and the ferocious oligarchy of the [Southern] planters, demagogues without faith or conscience, capable of sacrificing everything to their greed, to their malignant ambition, and who, through their detestable actions and influence, exercised practically without hindrance for almost fifty successive years, have greatly contributed to the corruption of political morality in North America. Today, a truly intelligent, generous minority – but still and always a minority – the Republican party, is successfully combating their pernicious policies. Let us hope that its triumph will be complete, let us hope so for the good of all humanity; but however sincere this party of liberty may be, however grand and generous the principles it professes, let us not expect that, once in power, it will renounce this exclusive position of a governing minority, to merge with the mass of the nation, and for popular self-government to finally become a reality. For that to happen, a revolution far more profound than any that has shaken the old and new worlds so far will be necessary.

[...]

Let it not be thought that by this we want to criticise democratic government in favour of monarchy. We are firmly convinced that the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy, because at least in a republic there are moments when the people, although continually exploited, is not oppressed, whereas in monarchies they always are. And besides the democratic regime gradually raises the masses to public life, which the monarchy never does. But while we prefer the republic, we are nevertheless forced to recognise and proclaim that, whatever the form of government, as long as human society remains divided into different classes as a result of the *hereditary* inequality of occupations, of wealth, of education, and of rights, there will always be exclusive government and the inevitable exploitation of majorities by minorities.

The State is nothing other than this domination and this exploitation regulated and systematised. […]

The Programme of *La Démocratie*

Michael Bakunin

La Voix de l'Avenir (Chaux-de-Fonds), 24 May 1868[1]
(First published in the programme issue of *La Démocratie* (Paris), April 1868)[2]

Need I say that as far as a foreigner may be allowed to meddle in your affairs, I sympathise with all my heart with your courageous enterprise and that I subscribe completely to your programme? You have the noble ambition of restoring the press in your country to the heights from which it should never have descended, whatever the storms that have assailed it, and of once again accustoming us to seek our inspirations there, a habit that we have lost for nearly 19 years.

Be sure that, in all countries, all men to whom liberty and humanity are dear will happily salute the end of the French eclipse, even when they no longer have need of the resplendent sun of France in order to know their way.

The time of the *messiah-peoples* has passed. Liberty, justice, reason will no longer be the monopoly of any one nation. – The *initiative*, – to make use of the favourite expression of Mazzini – that initiative (which, in the case of Dante, he wanted to bestow exclusively upon fair Italy, his homeland) belongs from now on to all the peoples; it is, to different degrees, it is true, divided among them all. This is a true division of labour, proportionate to the intellectual and moral power of each nation; and the last word of that division will be *the federal organisation of Europe.*

All for each and all by each: such must be today our motto, our watchword. But the harmony would be very imperfect, it would be impossible, if the light and the powerful participation of France was lacking. That is the sense in which we all greet happily its reawakening to liberty.

I can only subscribe fully to the principle of decentralisation that you set down as one of the principal bases of your programme. Seventy-five years of sad, hard experience, passed in a fruitless tossing between a liberty, re-conquered several times, but always lost again, and the despotism of the increasingly triumphant State, have proven to France and the world that in 1793 your Girondins were in the right against your Jacobins. Robespierre, St.-Just, Carnot, Couthon, Cambon and so many other citizens of the Mountain have been great and pure patriots, but it remains no less true that they have organised the governmental machine, that formidable centralisation of the State, which has made possible, natural and necessary, the military dictatorship of Napoleon I, which, surviving all the revolutions that have followed, in no way diminished, but on the contrary preserved, caressed and developed, through the Restoration, the July Monarchy and the Republic of 1848, has inevitably led to the destruction of your liberties.

No, communal autonomy will never be sufficient to establish liberty in any country; the isolated commune will always be too weak to resist the crushing centralisation of all the legislative and executive powers in the State

Many of the democrats of the old unitary school and I should even say Catholic – although they most often are so without realising it – still think today that communal autonomy can suffice, and that with emancipated communes on one side, and on the other side a powerful centralisation of the State, the organisation of Liberty is possible. Such is the belief boldly professed by the illustrious Italian democrat Joseph Mazzini.

Despite the deep and sincere respect that I bear for this great creator of modern Italian unity, the distressing spectacle presented by that same Italy today would suffice by itself to make me doubt the goodness of his doctrine. I do not hesitate to say that

[1] https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/the-program-of-la-democratie-1868/
[2] Extracts from this letter were previously translated in "Bakunin on Political Action", *Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, November 1904. (*Black Flag*)

Mazzini and all those who think like him fall into a profound error. No, communal autonomy will never be sufficient to establish liberty in any country; the isolated commune will always be too weak to resist the crushing centralisation of all the legislative and executive powers in the State. – in order for communal Liberty to be real, an intermediary more powerful than the commune is required between the commune and the State: the autonomous department or province. We can be certain that where commercial autonomy does not exist, the self-government of the commune will never be anything but a fiction. On the other hand, whatever Mazzini may say, a State powerfully centralised internally will never be anything externally but a war machine, which could enter into a federation of peoples in order to dominate it, but never to submit, on equal conditions with all the other nations, to the supreme law of international justice, that is to say purely human justice and, as such, contrary to the transcendent, theological, political and legal justice of States.

I am happy to see the flag of *antitheologism* bravely displayed in France. A mind enveloped in theological and metaphysical fictions, which bows before any authority whatsoever, other than that of rational and experimental science, can only produce the political and social slavery of a nation. Whatever is said by your representatives of the official morality and your spiritualist democrats, scientific and humanitarian materialism alone is capable of establishing liberty, justice, and consequently also morality on branches truly broad and unshakeable. Is it not indeed a remarkable thing that, while the spiritualists, taking their point of departure in free will, end inevitably at the doctrine of authority, to the more or less open or masked, but always complete negation of liberty, – we materialists, we start from inevitability, both natural and social, in order to proclaim the progressive emancipation of humanity.

You are *socialist*. One does not have the right to call oneself a democrat today if, alongside the most complete political emancipation, one does not want as fully the economic emancipation of the people. You are a thousand times right to no longer wish to separate those two great questions which make up, in reality, only a single one: *the political question and the social question.*

Like you, I deplore the blindness of that party – and not too considerable a party, let us hope – of workers in Europe, who imagine that by abstaining from any intervention in the political affairs of their country, they serve that much better their own material interests, and who think that they could attain economic equality and justice, to which the working classes aspire today, by another road than that of liberty. The unanimous testimony of the history of all times and all countries shows us that justice is never given to those who do not know how to take it themselves; logic confirms, by explaining it to us, that demonstration of history. It is not in the nature of a privilege, of a monopoly, of an existing power to cede or abdicate without being forced to do it; in order for right to triumph, it must become a force in its turn.

Let us be socialists, but let us never become sheeplike peoples. Let us seek justice, all political, economic and social justice, only on the path of liberty

This truth is so simple, it is so well proven by the experience of each day, that we have the right to be astonished that people are still found who can doubt it. Equality without liberty is a noxious fiction created by scoundrels to deceive fools. Equality without liberty is the despotism of the State, and the despotic State could not exist a single day without having at least an exploiting and privileged class; the bureaucracy, a *hereditary* power as in Russia and China, or *de facto* as in Germany and amongst you.

The great and true master of us all, Proudhon, has written, in his fine book on *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, that the most disastrous combination that could be formed would be that which would join together socialism with absolutism, the tendencies of the people toward economic emancipation and material well-being with dictatorship and the concentration of all political and social powers in the State.

So let the future preserve us from the favours of despotism; but let it save us from the disastrous and mind-numbing consequences of *authoritarian, doctrinaire or State socialism.* Let us be socialists, but let us never become sheeplike peoples. Let us seek justice, all political, economic and social justice, only on the path of liberty. There can be nothing living and

human apart from liberty, and a socialism that would cast it from its bosom or that would not accept it as the unique creative principle and basis would lead us straight to slavery and brutishness.

But if, on the one hand, we must energetically reject [*repousser*] every socialist system not inspired by the principle of collective and individual liberty, we must separate ourselves with the same energy and frankness from all the parties that declare their wish to remain strangers to the social question, the most formidable but also the greatest of all those questions that occupy the world today.

Your great revolution, which began its sublime work with the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" would only have ended when it had organised – not only in your country, but on the whole surface of the globe – *society according to justice:* a society that, at the beginning of the life of each of its members, whether of masculine or feminine sex, would ensure *equality at the starting point*, as that equality would depend on social organisation, setting aside the natural differences between individuals; a society that, in economic and social respects, would offer to each the *equally real possibility for all* to raise themselves up – in proportion to the energy and individual capacities of each – to the greatest heights of humanity, first through education and instruction, then through the labour of each, freely associated or not associated, – labour at once muscular and nervous, manual and intellectual, which, becoming the legitimate source of all individual, but not hereditary, property, would in the end be considered the principal basis of all political and social rights.

Such is, in my opinion, the last word of the revolutionary programme. We could protest the difficulties of its realisation; but we could not, without renouncing all logic, be unaware that this is an absolute condition of true justice. And we who have renounced every theological faith in order to have the right and the power to embrace the human faith, we must still maintain the programme of justice.

Finally you are persuaded, are you not, that all new wine must be poured in new bottles and that, turning your back on the henceforth exhausted mob of the cripples of theologism, of privilege, of anti-socialist democracy and transcendent politics, we should base all of our hopes of that party of the intelligent and studious, but not doctrinaire youth, who, feeling in themselves the need to merge with the mass of the people, in order to draw a life from it that begins to be conspicuously lacking in the higher regions of society, love, respect the people enough to have the right to instruct them and if necessary that of guiding them; – but especially on the working classes who, moralised by labour and not being exhausted by the abuse of the pleasures of life, are today the bearers and dispensers of every future?

Here is, my dear [Charles-Louis] Chassin, my profession of faith. If it does not displease you too much, accept me among your numerous collaborators. In the meantime, please record me among your subscribers.

Truly Human Discipline

Michael Bakunin

1870

"L'empire Knouto-Germanique et la Révolution Sociale: Première livraison", *Œuvres*, Tome II (1907)

[…]

Discipline and trust are like unity. These are excellent things when they are properly applied, disastrous when directed at that which does not warrant them. A passionate lover of liberty, I confess that I am very wary of those who constantly invoke discipline. It is extremely dangerous, especially in France, where discipline, for the most part, means, on the one hand, despotism, and on the other automatism. In France, the mystical cult of authority, the love of command and the habit of being commanded have destroyed in society, as well as in the vast majority of individuals, all sense of freedom, all faith in the spontaneous and living order that only freedom can create. Speak to them of freedom, and they will immediately cry anarchy; for it seems to them that the moment that this discipline, always oppressive and violent, of the State ceases to act, the whole of society must tear itself apart and collapse. There lies the secret of the astonishing enslavement that French society has endured since its great revolution. Robespierre and the Jacobins bequeathed to it the cult of State discipline. You will find this cult in full in your bourgeois Republicans, official and unofficial, and it is this that is destroying France today. It is destroying it by paralysing the only source and only means of deliverance that remains to it: the free deployment of popular forces; and by making it seek its salvation in the authority and illusory action of a State, which today represents

nothing more than an empty despotic pretension, accompanied by absolute impotence.

Although I am an enemy of what is called discipline in France, I recognise that a certain discipline, not automatic, but voluntary and thoughtful, and perfectly in accord with the freedom of individuals, remains and will always be necessary whenever many individuals, freely united, undertake any collective work or action. This discipline is then nothing more than the voluntary and considered alignment of all individual efforts towards a common goal. At the moment of action, in the midst of the struggle, roles are naturally divided according to the abilities of each, appreciated and judged by the entire group; some lead and command, others execute the commands. But no position becomes fixed, immutable or irrevocably attached to any one person. Hierarchical order and advancement do not exist, so the commander of yesterday can become the subordinate of today. No one rises above the others, or if they do, it is only to fall back down a moment later, like the waves of the sea, always returning to the salutary level of equality.

In this system, there is no longer power properly speaking. Power is absorbed into the collective, and it becomes the sincere expression of the freedom of each, the faithful and serious realisation of the will of all; each only obeys because the leader of the day commands nothing but what they themselves would want. This is truly human discipline, the discipline necessary for the organisation of freedom. This is not the discipline advocated by your republican statesmen. They want the old French discipline, automatic, routine and blind. The leader, not freely elected and only for a day, but imposed by the State for a long time if not forever, commands, and you must obey. The salvation of France, they tell you, and even of the Freedom of France, depends upon it. Passive obedience, the foundation of all despotisms, will therefore also be the cornerstone upon which you will build your republic.

[…]

The Capitalist System

Michael Bakunin

November-December 1870

[This pamphlet is an excerpt from "The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution" and included in *The Complete Works of Michael Bakunin* under the title "Fragment." Parts of the text were originally translated into English by G.P. Maximoff for his anthology of Bakunin's writings, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (1953), with missing paragraphs translated by Jeff Stein from the Spanish edition, Diego Abad de Santillan, trans. (Buenos Aires 1926) vol. III, pp. 181–196.[1]]

Is it necessary to repeat here the irrefutable arguments of Socialism which no bourgeois economist has yet succeeded in disproving? What is property, what is capital *in their present form*? For the capitalist and the property owner they mean the power and the right, guaranteed by the State, to live without working. And since neither property nor capital produces anything when not fertilised by labour — that means the power and the right to live by exploiting the work of someone else, the right to exploit the work of those who possess neither property nor capital and who thus are forced to sell their productive power to the lucky owners of both.

Note that I have left out of account altogether the following question: In what way did property and capital ever fall into the hands of their present owners? This is a question which, when envisaged from the points of view of history, logic, and justice, cannot be answered in any other way but one which would serve as an indictment against the present owners. I shall therefore confine myself here to the statement that property owners and capitalists, *inasmuch as they live not by their own productive labour* but by getting land rent, house rent, interest upon their capital, or by speculation on land, buildings, and capital, or by the commercial and industrial exploitation of the manual labour of the proletariat, all live at the expense of the proletariat. (Speculation and exploitation no doubt also constitute a sort of labour, but altogether non-productive labour.)

I know only too well that this mode of life is highly esteemed in all civilised countries, that it is expressly and tenderly protected by all the States, and that the States, religions, and all the juridical laws, both criminal

[1] Michael Bakounine, "Appendice: Considérations philosophiques sur le Fantôme divin, sur le Monde réel et sur l'Homme", *Œuvres* (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1908) Tome III. (*Black Flag*)

and civil, and all the political governments, monarchies and republican — with their immense judicial and police apparatuses and their standing armies — have no other mission but to consecrate and protect such practices. In the presence of these powerful and respectable authorities I cannot even permit myself to ask whether this mode of life is legitimate from the point of view of human justice, liberty, human equality, and fraternity. I simply ask myself: Under such conditions, are fraternity and equality possible between the exploiter and the exploited, are justice and freedom possible for the exploited?

Let us even suppose, as it is being maintained by the bourgeois economists and with them all the lawyers, all the worshippers and believers in the juridical right, all the priests of the civil and criminal code — let us suppose that this economic relationship between the exploiter and the exploited is altogether legitimate, that it is the inevitable consequence, the product of an eternal, indestructible social law, yet still it will always be true that exploitation precludes brotherhood and equality.

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It goes without saying that it precludes economic equality. Suppose I am your worker and you are my employer. If I offer my labour at the lowest price, if I consent to have you live off my labour, it is certainly not because of devotion or brotherly love for you. And no bourgeois economist would dare to say that it was, however idyllic and naive their reasoning becomes when they begin to speak about reciprocal affections and mutual relations which *should* exist between employers and employees. No, I do it because my family and I would starve to death if I did not work for an employer. Thus I am forced to sell you my labour at the lowest possible price, and I am forced to do it by the threat of hunger.

I do it because my family and I would starve to death if I did not work for an employer. Thus I am forced to sell you my labour at the lowest possible price, and I am forced to do it by the threat of hunger.

But – the economists tell us – the property owners, the capitalists, the employers, are *likewise* forced to seek out and purchase the labour of the proletariat. Yes, it is true, they are forced to do it, but not *in the same measure*. Had there been equality between those who offer their labour and those who purchase it, between the necessity of selling one's labour and the necessity of buying it, the slavery and misery of the proletariat would not exist. But then there would be neither capitalists, nor property owners, nor the proletariat, nor rich, nor poor: there would only be workers. It is precisely because such equality does not exist that we have and are bound to have exploiters.

This equality does not exist because in modern society where wealth is produced by the intervention of capital paying wages to labour, the growth of the population outstrips the growth of production, which results in the supply of labour necessarily surpassing the demand and leading to a *relative* sinking of the level of wages. Production thus constituted, monopolised, exploited by bourgeois capital, is pushed on the one hand by the mutual competition of the capitalists to concentrate evermore in the hands of an ever diminishing number of powerful capitalists, or in the hands of joint-stock companies which, owing to the merging of their capital, are more powerful than the biggest isolated capitalists. (And the small and medium-sized capitalists, not being able to produce at the same price as the big capitalists, naturally succumb in the deadly struggle.) On the other hand, all enterprises are forced by the same competition to sell their products at the lowest possible price. It [capitalist monopoly] can attain this two-fold result only by forcing out an ever-growing number of small or medium-sized capitalists, speculators, merchants, or industrialists, from the world of exploiters into the world of the exploited proletariat, and at the same time squeezing out ever greater savings from the wages of the same proletariat.

On the other hand, the mass of the proletariat, growing as a result of the general increase of the population – which, as we know, not even poverty can stop effectively – and through the increasing proletarianisation of the petty-bourgeoisie, ex-owners, capitalists, merchants, and industrialists – growing, as I have said, at a much more rapid rate than the productive capacities of an economy that is exploited by bourgeois capital – this growing mass of the proletariat is placed in a condition wherein the workers are forced into disastrous competition against one another. For since they possess no other means of existence but their own manual labour, they are driven, by the fear of seeing themselves replaced by others, to sell it at the lowest price. This tendency of the workers, or rather the necessity to which they are condemned by their own poverty, combined with the tendency of the employers to sell the products of *their* workers, and

consequently buy their labour, at the lowest price, constantly reproduces and consolidates the poverty of the proletariat. Since he finds himself in a state of poverty, the worker is compelled to sell his labour for almost nothing, and because he sells that product for almost nothing, he sinks into ever greater poverty.

Yes, greater misery, indeed! For in this galley-slave labour the productive force of the workers, abused, ruthlessly exploited, excessively wasted and underfed, is rapidly used up. And once used up, what can be its value on the market, of what worth is this sole commodity which he possesses and upon the daily sale of which he depends for a livelihood? Nothing! And then? Then nothing is left for the worker but to die.

What, in a given country, is the lowest possible wage? It is the price of that which is considered by the proletarians of that country as *absolutely necessary* to keep oneself alive. All the bourgeois economists are in agreement on this point.

Turgot, who saw fit to call himself the 'virtuous minister' of Louis XVI, and really was an honest man, said:

> "The simple worker who owns nothing more than his hands, has nothing else to sell than his labour. He sells it more or less expensively; but its price whether high or low, does not depend on him alone: it depends on an agreement with whoever will pay for his labour. The employer pays as little as possible; when given the choice between a great number of workers, the employer prefers the one who works cheap. The workers are, then, forced to lower their price in competition each against the other. In all types of labour, it necessarily follows that the salary of the worker is limited to what is necessary for survival." (*Reflexions sur la formation et la distribution des richesses*)

J.B. Say, the true father of bourgeois economists in France also said:

> "Wages are much higher when more demand exists for labour and less if offered, and are lowered accordingly when more labour is offered and less demanded. It is the relation between supply and demand which regulates the price of this merchandise called the workers' labour, as are regulated all other public services. When wages rise a little higher than the price necessary for the workers' families to maintain themselves, their children multiply and a larger supply soon develops in proportion with the greater demand. When, on the contrary, the demand for workers is less than the quantity of people offering to work, their gains decline back to the price necessary for the class to maintain itself at the same number. The families more burdened with children disappear; from them forward the supply of labour declines, and with less labour being offered, the price rises... In such a way it is difficult for the wages of the labourer to rise above or fall below the price necessary to maintain the class (the workers, the proletariat) in the number required." (*Cours complet d' economie politique*)

After citing Turgot and J.B. Say, Proudhon cries:

> "The price, as compared to the value (in real social economy) is something essentially mobile, consequently, essentially variable, and that in its variations, it is not regulated more than by the concurrence, concurrence, let us not forget, that as Turgot and Say agree, has the necessary effect not to give to wages to the worker more than enough to barely prevent death by starvation, and maintain the class in the numbers needed."[1]

The current price of primary necessities constitutes the prevailing constant level above which workers' wages can never rise for a very long time, but beneath which they drop very often, which constantly results in inanition, sickness, and death, until a sufficient number of workers disappear to equalise again the supply of and demand for labour.

What the economists call equalised supply and demand does not constitute real equality between those who offer their labour for sale and those who purchase it. Suppose that I, a manufacturer, need a hundred workers and that exactly a hundred workers present themselves in the market — only one hundred, for if more came, the supply would exceed demand, resulting in lowered wages. But since only one hundred appear, and since I, the manufacturer, need only that

[1] Not having to hand the works mentioned, I took these quotes from la *Histoire de la Revolution de 1848*, by Louis Blanc. Mr. Blanc continues with these words: "We have been well alerted. Now we know, without room for doubt, that according to all the doctrines of the old political economy, wages cannot have any other basis than the regulation between supply and demand, although the result is that the remuneration of labour is reduced to what is strictly necessary to not perish by starvation. Very well, and let us do no more than repeat the words inadvertently spoken in sincerity by Adam Smith, the head of this school: It is small consolation for individuals who have no other means for existence than their labour."

number — neither more nor less — it would seem at first that complete equality was established; that supply and demand being equal in number, they should likewise be equal in other respects. Does it follow that the workers can demand from me a wage and conditions of work assuring them of a truly free, dignified, and human existence? Not at all! If I grant them those conditions and those wages, I, the capitalist, shall not gain thereby any more than they will. But then, why should I have to plague myself and become ruined by offering them the profits of my capital? If I want to work myself as workers do, I will invest my capital somewhere else, wherever I can get the highest interest, and will offer my labour for sale to some capitalist just as my workers do.

If, profiting by the powerful initiative afforded me by my capital, I ask those hundred workers to fertilise that capital with their labour, it is not because of my sympathy for their sufferings, nor because of a spirit of justice, nor because of love for humanity. The capitalists are by no means philanthropists; they would be ruined if they practiced philanthropy. It is because I hope to draw from the labour of the workers sufficient profit to be able to live comfortably, even richly, while at the same time increasing my capital — and all that without having to work myself. Of course I shall work too, but my work will be of an altogether different kind and I will be remunerated at a much higher rate than the workers. It will not be the work of production but that of administration and exploitation.

But isn't administrative work also productive work? No doubt it is, for lacking a good and an intelligent administration, manual labour will not produce anything or it will produce very little and very badly. But from the point of view of justice and the needs of production itself, it is not at all necessary that this work should be monopolised in my hands, nor, above all, that I should be compensated at a rate so much higher than manual labour. The co-operative associations already have proven that workers are quite capable of administering industrial enterprises, that it can be done by workers elected from their midst and who receive the same wage. Therefore if I concentrate in my hands the administrative power, it is not because the interests of production demand it, but in order to serve my own ends, the ends of exploitation. As the absolute boss of my establishment I get for my labour ten or twenty times more than my workers get for theirs, and this is true despite the fact that my labour is incomparably less painful than theirs.

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But the capitalist, the business owner, runs risks, they say, while the worker risks nothing. This is not true, because when seen from his side, all the disadvantages are on the part of the worker. The business owner can conduct his affairs poorly, he can be wiped out in a bad deal, or be a victim of a commercial crisis, or by an unforeseen catastrophe; in a word he can ruin himself. This is true. But does ruin mean from the bourgeois point of view to be reduced to the same level of misery as those who die of hunger, or to be forced among the ranks of the common labourers? This so rarely happens, that we might as well say never. Afterwards it is rare that the capitalist does not retain something, despite the appearance of ruin. Nowadays all bankruptcies are more or less fraudulent. But if absolutely nothing is saved, there are always family ties, and social relations, who, with help from the business skills learned which they pass to their children, permit them to get positions for themselves and their children in the higher ranks of labour, in management; to be a state functionary, to be an executive in a commercial or industrial business, to end up, although dependent, with an income superior to what they paid their former workers.

The risks of the worker are infinitely greater. After all, if the establishment in which he is employed goes bankrupt, he must go several days and sometimes several weeks without work, and for him it is more than ruin, it is death; because he eats everyday what he earns. The savings of workers are fairy tales invented by bourgeois economists to lull their weak sentiment of justice, the remorse that is awakened by chance in the bosom of their class. This ridiculous and hateful myth will never soothe the anguish of the worker. He knows the expense of satisfying the daily needs of his large family. If he had savings, he would not send his poor children, from the age of six, to wither away, to grow weak, to be murdered physically and morally in the factories, where they are forced to

work night and day, a working day of twelve and fourteen hours.

If it happens sometimes that the worker makes a small savings, it is quickly consumed by the inevitable periods of unemployment which often cruelly interrupt his work, as well as by the unforeseen accidents and illnesses which befall his family. The accidents and illnesses that can overtake him constitute a risk that makes all the risks of the employer nothing in comparison: because for the worker debilitating illness can destroy his productive ability, his labour power. Over all, prolonged illness is the most terrible bankruptcy, a bankruptcy that means for him and his children, hunger and death.

I know full well that under these conditions that if I were a capitalist, who needs a hundred workers to fertilise my capital, that on employing these workers, all the advantages are for me, all the disadvantages for them. I propose nothing more nor less than to exploit them, and if you wish me to be sincere about it, and promise to guard me well, I will tell them:

"Look, my children, I have some capital which by itself cannot produce anything, because a dead thing cannot produce anything. I have nothing productive without labour. As it goes, I cannot benefit from consuming it unproductively, since having consumed it, I would be left with nothing. But thanks to the social and political institutions which rule over us and are all in my favour, in the existing economy my capital is supposed to be a producer as well: it earns me interest. From whom this interest must be taken — and it must be from someone, since in reality by itself it produces absolutely nothing — this does not concern you. It is enough for you to know that it renders interest. Alone this interest is insufficient to cover my expenses. I am not an ordinary man as you. I cannot be, nor do I want to be, content with little. I want to live, to inhabit a beautiful house, to eat and drink well, to ride in a carriage, to maintain a good appearance, in short, to have all the good things in life. I also want to give a good education to my children, to make them into gentlemen, and send them away to study, and afterwards, having become much more educated than you, they can dominate you one day as I dominate you today. And as education alone is not enough, I want to give them a grand inheritance, so that divided between them they will be left almost as rich as I. Consequently, besides all the good things in life I want to give myself, I also want to increase my capital. How will I achieve this goal? Armed with this capital I propose to exploit you, and I propose that you permit me to exploit you. You will work and I will collect and appropriate and sell for my own behalf the product of your labour, without giving you more than a portion which is absolutely necessary to keep you from dying of hunger today, so that at the end of tomorrow you will still work for me in the same conditions; and when you have been exhausted, I will throw you out, and replace you with others. Know it well, I will pay you a salary as small, and impose on you a working day as long, working conditions as severe, as despotic, as harsh as possible; not from wickedness — not from a motive of hatred towards you, nor an intent to do you harm — but from the love of wealth and to get rich quick; because the less I pay you and the more you work, the more I will gain."

This is what is said implicitly by every capitalist, every industrialist, every business owner, every employer who demands the labour power of the workers they hire.

But since supply and demand are equal, why do the workers accept the conditions laid down by the employer? If the capitalist stands in just as great a need of employing the workers as the one hundred workers do of being employed by him, does it not follow that both sides are in an equal position? Do not both meet at the market as two equal merchants — from the *juridical* point of view at least — one bringing a commodity called a *daily wage*, to be exchanged for the *daily labour* of the worker on the basis of so many hours per day; and the other bringing his own labour as his commodity to be exchanged for the wage offered by the capitalist? Since, in our supposition, the demand is for a hundred workers and the supply is likewise that of a hundred persons, it may seem that both sides are in an equal position.

Of course nothing of the kind is true. What is it that brings the capitalist to the market? It is the urge to get rich, to increase his capital, to gratify his ambitions and social vanities, to be able to indulge in all conceivable pleasures. And what brings the worker to the market? Hunger, the necessity of eating today and tomorrow. Thus, while being equal from the point of juridical fiction, the capitalist and the worker are anything but equal from the point of view of the economic situation, which is the real situation. The capitalist is not threatened with hunger when he comes to the market; he knows very well that if he does not find today the workers for whom he is looking, he will still have enough to eat for quite a long time, owing to the capital of which he is the happy possessor. If the workers whom he meets in the market present demands which seem excessive to him, because, far from enabling him to increase his wealth and improve even more his economic position, those proposals and conditions might, I do not say equalise, but bring the economic position of the workers somewhat close to his own – what does he do in that case? He turns down

those proposals and waits. After all, he was not impelled by an urgent necessity, but by a desire to improve his position, which, compared to that of the workers, is already quite comfortable, and so he can wait. And he will wait, for his business experience has taught him that the resistance of workers who, possessing neither capital, nor comfort, nor any savings to speak of, are pressed by a relentless necessity, by hunger, that this resistance cannot last very long, and that finally he will be able to find the hundred workers for whom he is looking – for they will be *forced to accept the conditions which he finds it profitable to impose upon them*. If they refuse, others will come who will be only too happy to accept such conditions. That is how things are done daily with the knowledge and in full view of everyone.

If, as a consequence of the particular circumstances that constantly influence the market, the branch of industry in which he planned at first to employ his capital does not offer all the advantages that he had hoped, then he will shift his capital elsewhere; thus the bourgeois capitalist is not tied by nature to any specific industry, but tends to invest (as it is called by the economists — exploit is what we say) indifferently in all possible industries. Let's suppose, finally, that learning of some industrial incapacity or misfortune, he decides not to invest in any industry; well, he will buy stocks and annuities; and if the interest and dividends seem insufficient, then he will engage in some occupation, or shall we say, sell his labour for a time, but in conditions much more lucrative than he had offered to his own workers.

The capitalist then comes to the market in the capacity, if not of an absolutely free agent, at least that of an infinitely freer agent than the worker. What happens in the market is a meeting between a drive for lucre and starvation, between master and slave. Juridically they are both equal; but economically the worker is the serf of the capitalist, *even before the market transaction has been concluded* whereby the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time. The worker is in the position of a serf *because this terrible threat of starvation which daily hangs over his head and over his family, will force him to accept any conditions imposed by the gainful calculations of the capitalist, the industrialist, the employer*.

Concluded for a term only and reserving to the worker the right to quit his employer, this contract constitutes a sort of voluntary and transitory serfdom. Yes, transitory and voluntary from the juridical point of view, but nowise from the point of view of economic possibility

And once the contract has been negotiated, the serfdom of the workers is doubly increased; or to put it better, before the contract has been negotiated, goaded by hunger, he is only potentially a serf; after it is negotiated he becomes a serf in fact. Because what merchandise has he sold to his employer? It is his labour, his personal services, the productive forces of his body, mind, and spirit that are found in him and are inseparable from his person — it is therefore himself. From then on, the employer will watch over him, either directly or by means of overseers; everyday during working hours and under controlled conditions, the employer will be the owner of his actions and movements. When he is told: "Do this," the worker is obligated to do it; or he is told: "Go there," he must go. Is this not what is called a serf?

M. Karl Marx, the illustrious leader of German Communism, justly observed in his magnificent work *Das Kapital*[1] that if the contract freely entered into by the vendors of money – in the form of wages – and the vendors of their own labour – that is, between the employer and the workers – were concluded not for a definite and limited term only, but for one's whole life, it would constitute real slavery. Concluded for a term only and reserving to the worker the right to quit his

[1] *Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, by Karl Marx; Erster Band. This work will need to be translated into French, because nothing, that I know of, contains an analysis so profound, so luminous, so scientific, so decisive, and if I can express it thus, so merciless an expose of the formation of bourgeois capital and the systematic and cruel exploitation that capital continues exercising over the work of the proletariat. The only defect of this work... positivist in direction, based on a profound study of economic works, without admitting any logic other than the logic of the facts — the only defect, say, is that it has been written, in part, but only in part, in a style excessively metaphysical and abstract... which makes it difficult to explain and nearly unapproachable for the majority of workers, and it is principally the workers who must read it nevertheless. The bourgeois will never read it or, if they read it, they will never want to comprehend it, and if they comprehend it they will never say anything about it; this work being nothing other than a sentence of death, scientifically motivated and irrevocably pronounced, not against them as individuals, but against their class.

employer, this contract constitutes a sort of voluntary and transitory serfdom. Yes, transitory and voluntary from the juridical point of view, but nowise from the point of view of economic possibility. The worker always has the right to leave his employer, but has he the means to do so? And if he does quit him, is it in order to lead a free existence, in which he will have no master but himself? No, he does it in order to sell himself to another employer. He is driven to it by the same hunger which forced him to sell himself to the first employer. Thus the worker's liberty, so much exalted by the economists, jurists, and bourgeois republicans, is only a theoretical freedom, lacking any means for its possible realisation, and consequently it is only a fictitious liberty, an utter falsehood. The truth is that the whole life of the worker is simply a continuous and dismaying succession of terms of serfdom — voluntary from the juridical point of view but compulsory in the economic sense — broken up by momentarily brief interludes of freedom accompanied by starvation; in other words, it is real slavery.

And if he does quit him, is it in order to lead a free existence, in which he will have no master but himself? No, he does it in order to sell himself to another employer. He is driven to it by the same hunger which forced him to sell himself to the first employer

This slavery manifests itself daily in all kinds of ways. Apart from the vexations and oppressive conditions of the contract which turn the worker into a subordinate, a passive and obedient servant, and the employer into a nearly absolute master — apart from all that, it is well known that there is hardly an industrial enterprise wherein the owner, impelled on the one hand by the two-fold instinct of an unappeasable lust for profits and absolute power, and on the other hand, profiting by the economic dependence of the worker, does not set aside the terms stipulated in the contract and wring some additional concessions in his own favour. Now he will demand more hours of work, that is, over and above those stipulated in the contract; now he will cut down wages on some pretext; now he will impose arbitrary fines, or he will treat the workers harshly, rudely, and insolently. But, one may say, in that case the worker can quit. Easier said than done. At times the worker receives part of his wages in advance, or his wife or children may be sick, or perhaps his work is poorly paid throughout this particular industry. Other employers may be paying even less than his own employer, and after quitting this job he may not even be able to find another one. And to remain without a job spells death for him and his family. In addition, there is an understanding among all employers, and all of them resemble one another. All are almost equally irritating, unjust, and harsh.

Is this calumny? No, it is in the nature of things, and in the logical necessity of the relationship existing between the employers and their workers.

Whatever human question we may desire to consider, we always find this same essential contradiction between the two schools. Thus, as I have already observed, materialism starts from animality to establish humanity; idealism starts from divinity to establish slavery and condemn the masses to an endless animality. Materialism denies free will and ends in the establishment of liberty; idealism, in the name of human dignity, proclaims free will, and on the ruins of every liberty founds authority. Materialism rejects the principle of authority, because it rightly considers it as the corollary of animality, and because, on the contrary, the triumph of humanity, the object and chief significance of history, can be realised only through liberty. In a word, you will always find the idealists in the very act of practical materialism, while you will see the materialists pursuing and realising the most grandly ideal aspirations and thoughts.

– Bakunin, *God and the State*

The International

As becomes clear from these (and other) texts, Bakunin within the International was advocating what would later be called a syndicalist approach. This can be seen from his arguments that the struggle must take place on the economic terrain, rejecting electioneering, and that the unions fighting capitalism must replace it.

We start with Bakunin's letter to Marx upon his joining the International and explaining the phrase "equalisation of classes" in the programme of the Alliance of Socialist Democracy. This is only of note due to its later use by Marx in his attempts to discredit Bakunin – at the time, Marx (rightly) dismissed it as "a mere slip of the pen".

Two texts follow which were written for the journal *Égalité*, the first on libertarian education and the second on the policy the International should follow in its day-to-day activities. The latter is noteworthy for being a precursor to revolutionary syndicalism as well as its prediction that electioneering would produce reformism, not revolution. This position is reiterated in the next work, a letter to Albert Richard

Then comes "The Protest of the Alliance", split into three parts. The first discusses the work of the Alliance within the Swiss labour movement. It covers themes relevant today, not least the struggle against union bureaucracy. We are sure union activists will appreciate both the analysis of the problem and the suggested solution. The next selection, "The Organisation of the International", was published in a slightly edited version in French Socialist journal *L'Almanach du Peuple pour 1872* (we have included the few passages removed from the manuscript). This discusses the importance of self-management within the labour movement. The last selection indicates that the collectivists of the Federalist International, like the later syndicalists, saw unions as the means of both fighting *and* replacing capitalism.

This is followed by extracts from Bakunin's unsent letter to the Belgium journal *La Liberté*. This contains his thoughts on Marx written after The Hague Congress which saw Marx fabricate a majority to expel Bakunin – and, eventually, the majority of the membership! – from the International. He stresses that while political positions may divide, all workers have a class interest in economic solidarity and struggle. This meant no official political programme for the International imposed upon all but rather free discussion of ideas and diversity of tactics.

We end with Bakunin's letter of resignation from the International, written to his comrades of the Jura Federation. In it he reiterates his syndicalist ideas, urging the organisation and struggle of the proletariat upon the economic terrain.

Later anarchists followed this lead. Kropotkin used the term *Direct Struggle Against Capital* and took up "Bakuninist" ideas on anarchist participation in the labour movement between 1879 and 1883 (his arrest ending that period) as well as 1889 onwards, when the London Dock Strike showed to all the power of organised labour and its revolutionary potential. Syndicalism , then, was a new name for an old strategy.

To Karl Marx

Micheal Bakunin

22 December 1868[1]

My old friend – Serno has shared with me the part of your letter that concerned me. You asked him if I continue to be your friend. – Yes, more than ever, dear Marx, because I understand better than ever how right you are in following, and in inviting us all to march on the wide road of economic revolution, and in denigrating those among us who would lose themselves on the paths of either national or exclusively political enterprises. I now do what you yourself commenced to do more than twenty years ago. – Since the solemn and public farewells that I addressed to the bourgeois at the Berne Congress, I have known no other society, no other milieu than the world of the workers. – My homeland now is the International of which you are one of the principal founders. – So you see, dear friend, that I am your disciple – and I am proud to be it. – This is all that was needed to explain my relationships and my personal feelings. – Let us pass on to other questions.

The radical suppression of the economic causes of the existence of the different classes, and the economic, social and political equalisation of the environment and the conditions of existence and development for all individuals without difference of sex, nation and race

I read in your letter to Serno that we have posed the question falsely at Berne, by speaking of the equalisation of classes and individuals. – That observation is perfectly fair with regard to the terms, with regard to the formula that we have made use of. – But that formula has been, as it were, imposed on us by the stupidity and final impenitence of our bourgeois audience. – They have been stupid enough to yield to us, without a fight, as it were, the terrain of equality – and our triumph has consisted precisely in the fact that we have been able to observe that they reject all the conditions of a real and serious equality. – That is what has made them, and still makes them, furious. – What is more, I admit wholeheartedly that we could have better expressed ourselves otherwise, if, for example, we had said: The radical suppression of the economic causes of the existence of the different classes, and the economic, social and political equalisation of the environment and the conditions of existence and development for all individuals without difference of sex, nation and race. – I have send you in a bundle all the speeches, except one, that I gave at Berne – Herzen having asked me for permission to print them in the last Mohican, that is in the last issue of his Journal, which has ceased to appear for lack of public and readers, I had no reason to refuse him. – But I beg you to believe that there is absolutely no solidarity between him and me. – Since 1863 especially, all our political relations, and now even our private relations, have broken off. – He asked permission to modify in his own way the speech that I made at Berne regarding Russia, in response to the speech of my friend Mroczkowski, which you will find in Kolokol – I proposed, like all my friends of the Russian socialist democracy, of which I have also sent the programme, incidentally written by me, as the first condition for real, which is to say economic, social and political emancipation of the Russian and non-Russian peoples confined within the Russian Empire – the radical destruction of that Empire – That is too much for Herzen and we have fallen out. – I also send you the Programme of the Alliance that we have founded with Becker and many Italian, Polish and French friends. – On this subject we will have much to say to one another. – I will soon send you a copy of a long letter, – almost a pamphlet – that I wrote on the subject to my friend César de Paepe – Now a few words on what is happening here. At Basle there is a considerable strike – which will probably have the result of adding 5000 members more to the International. – Geneva appears perfect. – We have had a great popular assembly, which has appointed a permanent Commission of Correspondence with Basle – I am on it. – Becker as well. – I have truly found here, among the workers, some magnificent men. – Give my regards to Engels, if he is not dead a second time. – You know that he has been buried once – and I beg you to give him a copy of my speech, and Eckarius and Jung as well.

Your devoted M. Bakunin

[1] https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/bakunin-to-karl-marx-december-22-1868/ (revised)

Integral Education

Michael Bakunin

"L'éducation intégrale", *L'Égalité*, 31 July 1869 to 21 August 1869[1]

I

The first topic for consideration today is this - will it be feasible for the working masses to-know complete emancipation as long as the education available to those masses continues to be inferior to that bestowed upon the bourgeois, or, in more general terms, as long as there exists any class, be it numerous or otherwise, which, by virtue of birth, is entitled to a superior education and a more complete instruction? Does not the question answer itself? Is it not self-evident that of any two persons endowed by nature with roughly equivalent intelligence, one will have the edge - the one whose mind will have been broadened by learning and who, having the better grasped the inter-relationships of natural and social phenomena (what we might term the laws of nature and of society) will the more readily and more fully grasp the nature of his surroundings? And that this one will feel, let us say, a greater liberty and, in practical terms, show a greater aptitude and capability than his fellow? It is natural that he who knows more will dominate him who knows less. And were this disparity of education and education and learning the only one to exist between two classes, would not all the others swiftly follow until the world of men itself in its present circumstances, that is, until it was again divided into a mass of slaves and a tiny number of rulers, the former labouring away as they do today, to the advantage of the latter?

the greatest reproach which we can level against science and the arts is precisely that they do not distribute their favours and do not exercise their influence, except upon a tiny fragment of society, to the exclusion and, thus, to the detriment of the vast majority

Now we see why the bourgeois socialists demand only a little education for the people, a soupcon more than they Currently receive; whereas we socialist democrats demand, on the people's behalf, complete and integral education, an education as full as the power of intellect today permits, so that, henceforth, there may not be any class over the workers by virtue of superior education and therefore able to dominate and exploit them. The bourgeois socialists want to see the retention of the class system, each class, they contend, fulfilling a specific social function; one specialising, say, in learning, and the other in manual labour. We, on the other hand, seek the final and the utter abolition of classes; we seek a unification of society and equality of social and economic provisions for every individual on this earth. The bourgeois socialists, whilst retaining the historic bases of the society of today, would like to see them become less stark, less harsh and more prettified. Whereas we should like to see their destruction. From which it follows that there can be no truce or compromise, let alone any coalition between the bourgeois socialists and us socialist democrats.

But, I have heard it said - and this is the argument most frequently raised against us and an argument which the dogmatists of every shade regard as irrefutable — it is impossible that the whole of mankind should devote itself to learning, for we should all die of starvation. Consequently, while some study others must labour so that they can produce what we need to live - not just producing for their own needs, but also for those men who devote themselves exclusively to intellectual pursuits; aside from expanding the horizons of human knowledge, the discoveries of these intellectuals improve the condition of all human beings, without exception, when applied to industry, agriculture and, generally, to political and

[1] *The Anarchist Encyclopaedia*, Folio 2, March 1986.

social life; agreed? And do not their artistic creations enhance the lives of every one of us?

No, not at all. And the greatest reproach which we can level against science and the arts is precisely that they do not distribute their favours and do not exercise their influence, except upon a tiny fragment of society, to the exclusion and, thus, to the detriment of the vast majority. Today one might say of the advances of science and of the arts, just what has already and so properly been said of the prodigious progress of industry, trade, credit, and, in a word, of the wealth of society in the most civilised countries of the modern world. That wealth is quite exclusive, and the tendency is for it to become more so each day, as it becomes concentrated into an ever shrinking number of hands, shunning the lower echelons of the middle class and the petite bourgeoisie, depressing them into_ the proletariat, so that the growth of this wealth is the direct cause behind the growing misery of the labouring masses. Thus the outcome is that the gulf which yawns between the privileged, contented minority and millions of workers who earn their keep by the strength of their arms, yawns ever wider and that the happier the contented - who exploit the people's labour become, the more unhappy the workers become. One has only to look at the fabulous opulence of the aristocratic, financier, commercial and industrial clique in England and compare it with the miserable condition of the workers of the same country; one has only to re—read the so naive and heartrending letter lately penned by an intelligent and upright goldsmith of London, one Walter Dugan, who has just voluntarily taken poison along with his wife and their six children, simply as a means of escape from the degradations of poverty and the torments of hunger[1] - and one will find oneself obliged to concede that the much vaunted civilisation means, in material terms, to the people, only oppression and ruination.

And the same holds true for the modern advances of science and the arts. Huge strides, indeed, it is true! But the greater the advances, the more they foster intellectual servitude and thus, in material terms, foster misery and inferiority as the lot of the people; ‘for these advances merely widen the gulf which already separates the people's level of understanding from the levels of the privileged classes. From the point of view of natural capacity, the intelligence of the former is, today, obviously less stunted, less exercised, less sophisticated and less corrupted by the need to defend unjust interests, and is, consequently, naturally of greater potency than the brain power of the bourgeoisie: but, then again, the brain power of the bourgeois does have at its disposal the complete arsenal of science filled with weapons that are indeed formidable. It is very often the case that a highly intelligent worker is obliged to hold his tongue when confronted by a learned fool who defeats him, not by dint of intellect (of which he has none) but by dint of his education, an education denied the workingman but granted the fool because, while the fool was able to develop his foolishness scientifically in schools, the working man's labours were clothing, housing, feeding him and supplying his every need, his teachers and his books, everything necessary to his education.

Even within the bourgeois class, as we know only too well, the degree of learning imparted to each individual is not the same. There, too, there is a scale which is determined, not by the potential of the individual but by the amount of wealth of the social stratum to which he belongs by birth; for example, the instruction made available to the children of the lower petite bourgeoisie, whilst itself scarcely superior to that which workers manage to obtain for themselves, is next to nothing by comparison with the education that society makes readily available to the upper and middle bourgeoisie. What, then, do we find? The petite bourgeoisie, whose only attachment to the middle class is through a ridiculous vanity on the one hand, and its dependence upon the big capitalists on the other, finds itself most often in circumstances even more miserable and even more humiliating than those which afflict the proletariat. So when we talk of privileged classes, we never have in mind this poor petite bourgeoisie which, if it did but have a little more spirit and gumption, would not delay in joining forces with us to combat the big and medium bourgeoisie who crush it today no less than they crush the proletariat. And should society's current economic trends continue in the same direction for a further ten years (which we do, however, regard as impossible) we may yet see the bulk of the medium bourgeoisie tumble first of all into the current circumstances of the petite bourgeoisie only to slip a little later into the proletariat - as a result, of course, of this inevitable concentration of ownership into an ever smaller number of hands - the ineluctable consequences of which would be to partition society once and for all into a tiny, overwhelmingly opulent, educated, ruling minority and a vast majority of impoverished, ignorant, enslaved proletarians.

There is one fact which should make an impression upon every person of conscience, upon all who have at

[1] The letter in question had been printed in the preceding issue of *Egalite*. (Translator)

heart a concern for human dignity and justice; that is, for the liberty of each individual amid and through a setting of equality for all. That is the fact that all of the contrivances of the intelligentsia, all of the great applications of science to the purpose of industry, trade and to the life of society in general have thus far profited no one, save the privileged classes and the power of the State, that timeless champion of all political and social iniquity. Never, not once, have they brought any benefit to the masses of the people. We need only list the machines and every workingman and honest advocate of the emancipation of labour would accept the justice of what we say. By what power do the privileged classes maintain themselves today, with all their insolent smugness and iniquitous pleasures, in defiance of the all too legitimate outrage felt by the masses of the people? Is it by some power inherent in their persons? No - it is solely through the power of the State, in whose apparatus today their offspring hold, always, every key position (and even very lower and middle range position) excepting that of soldier and worker. And in this day and age what is it that constitutes the principle underlying the power of the State? Why, it is science.

Who, then, will deny that, without exception, all of the advances made by science have thus far brought nothing, save a boosting of the wealth of the privileged classes and of the power of the State, to the detriment of the well-being and liberty of the masses of the people, of the proletariat?

Yes, science - Science of government, science of administration and financial science; the science of fleecing the flocks of the people without their bleating too loudly and, when they start to bleat, the science of urging silence, patience and obedience upon them by means of a scientifically organised force: the science of deceiving and dividing the masses of the people and keeping them always in a salutary ignorance lest they ever become able, by helping one another and pooling their efforts, to conjure up a power capable of overturning States; and, above all, military science with all its tried and tested weaponry, these formidable instruments of destruction which 'work wonders'[1]: and lastly, the science of genius which has conjured up steamships, railways and telegraphy which, by turning every government into a hundred armed, a thousand armed Briareos[2], giving it the power to be, act and arrest everywhere at once - has brought about the most formidable political centralisation the world has ever witnessed.

Who, then, will deny that, without exception, all of the advances made by science have thus far brought nothing, save a boosting of the wealth of the privileged classes and of the power of the State, to the detriment of the well-being and liberty of the masses of the people, of the proletariat? But, we will hear the objection, do not the masses of the people profit by this also? Are they not much more civilised in this society of ours than they were in the societies of bygone centuries?

We shall reply to that with an observation borrowed from the noted German socialist, Lassalle. In measuring the progress made by the working masses, in terms of their political and social emancipation, one should not compare their intellectual state in this century with what it may have been in centuries gone by. Instead, one ought to consider whether, by comparison with some given time, the gap which then existed between the working masses and the privileged classes having been noted, the masses have progressed to the same extent as these privileged classes. For, if the progress made by both has been roughly equivalent, the intellectual gap which separates the masses from the privileged in today's world will be the same as it ever was; but if the proletariat has progressed further and more rapidly than the privileged, then the gap must necessarily have narrowed; but if, on the other hand, the worker's rate of progress has been slower and, consequently, less than that of a representative of the ruling classes over the same period, then that gap will have grown. The gulf which separates them will have increased and the man of privilege grown more powerful and the worker's circumstances more abject, more slave like than at the date one chose as the point of departure. If the two of us set off from two different points at the same time and you have a lead of one hundred paces over me and you move at a rate of sixty paces per minute, and I at only thirty paces per minute, then

[1] A reference to the statement by General De Failly on the day after the battle of Mentana (3 November 1867): "The chassepots have worked wonders", a quote which appears in all of the memoirs. (Translator)

[2] Briareus. In classic legend a huge monster with 100 arms and 50 heads. (Translator)

after one hour the distance which separates un will not be just over one hundred paces, but just over one thousand nine hundred paces.

That example gives a roughly accurate notion of the respective advances made by the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Thus far the bourgeoisie has raced along the track of civilisation at a quicker rate than the proletariat, not because they are intellectually more powerful than the latter - indeed one might properly argue the contrary case - but because the political and economic organisation of society has been such that, hitherto, the bourgeoisie alone have enjoyed access to learning and science has existed only for them, and the proletariat has found itself doomed to a forced ignorance, so that if the proletariat has, nevertheless, made progress (and there is no denying it has) then that progress was made not thanks to society, but rather in spite of it.

To sum up. In society as presently constituted, the advances of science have been at the root of the relative ignorance of the proletariat, just as the progress of industry and commerce have been at the root of its relative impoverishment. Thus, intellectual progress and material progress have contributed in equal measure towards the exacerbation of the slavery of the proletariat. Meaning what? Meaning that we have a duty to reject and resist that bourgeois science, just as we have a duty to reject and resist bourgeois wealth. And reject and resist them .in this sense — that in destroying the social order which turns it into the preserve of one or of several classes, we must lay claim to it as the common inheritance of all the world.

Egalite, 31 July 1869

II

We have shown how, as long as there are two or more degrees of instruction for the various strata of society, there must, of necessity, be classes, that is, economic and political privilege for a small number of the contented and slavery and misery for the lot of the generality of men.

As members of the International Working Men's Association (IWMA/AIT), we seek equality and, because we seek it, we must also seek integral education, the same education for everyone.

But if everyone is schooled who will want to work? we hear someone ask. Our answer to that is a simple one: everyone must work and everyone must receive education. To this, it is very often objected that this mixing of industrial with intellectual labour cannot be, except one or the other suffer by it. The manual workers will make poor scholars, and the scholars will never be more than quite pathetic workers. True, in the society of today where manual labour and intellectual labour are equally distorted by the quite artificial isolation in which both are kept! But we are quite persuaded that in the rounded human being, each of these pursuits, the muscular and the nervous, must be developed in equal measure and that far from being inimical each must lean upon, enhance and reinforce the other. The science of the sage will become more fruitful, more useful and more expansive when the sage is no longer a stranger to manual labour, and the labours of the workmen, when he is educated, will, be more intelligent and thus more productive than those of an ignorant workman.

From which it follows that, for work's sake as much as for the sake of science, there must no longer be this division into workers and scholars and henceforth there must be only men.

The result of this is that those men who are today, on account of their superior intellects, caught up in the ivory towers of science and who, once they have established themselves in this world, yield to the need for a thoroughly bourgeois position and bend their every invention to the exclusive use of the privileged class to which they themselves belong. These men, I say, once they become truly the fellows of everyone, fellows not just in their imagination nor just in their speech but in fact, in their work, will just as necessarily convert their inventions and applications of their learning to the benefit of all, and especially apply themselves to the task of making work (the basis, the only real and rightful basis of human society) lighter and more dignified.

It is quite possible and, indeed, likely that during the period of fairly lengthy transition which will, naturally, succeed the great crisis of society, the loftiest sciences will fall considerably below their current levels. Equally, it is not to be doubted that luxury and everything constituting the refinements of life will have to disappear from the social scene for quite a long time and will not be able to reappear as the exclusive amusements of a few, but will have to return as ways of dignifying life for everybody, and then only once society has conquered need in all of us. But would this temporary eclipse of the lofty sciences be such a misfortune? Whatever science may lose in terms of

sublime elevation, will it not win through the extension of its base? Doubtless there will be fewer illustrious sages, but at the same time there will be fewer ignoramuses too. There will be no more of these men who can touch the skies, but, on the other hand, millions of men who may be degraded and crushed today will be able to tread the earth as human beings: no demigods, but no slaves either. Both the slave and the demigods will achieve human-ness, the one by rising a lot, the other by stooping a little. Thus no longer will there be a place for deification, nor for contumely. Everyone will shake hands with his neighbour and, once reunited, we shall all march with a new spring in our steps, onwards to new conquests, in the realm of science as in the realm of life itself.

So, far from having any misgivings about that eclipse of science - which will be in any case only a fleeting one — we ought to call for it with all our powers since its effect will be to humanise both scholar and manual labourer and to reconcile science and life. And we are convinced that, once we have achieved this new foundation, the progress of mankind, in the realm of science as elsewhere in life, will very quickly outstrip everything that we have seen and everything we might conjure up in our imaginations today.

But here another question crops up: will every individual have an equal capacity for absorbing education to the same degree? Let us imagine a society organised along the most egalitarian lines, a society in which children will, from birth onwards, start out with the same circumstances economically, socially and politically, which is to say the same upkeep, the same education, the same instruction: among these thousands of tiny individuals will there not be an infinite variety of enthusiasms, natural inclinations and aptitudes?

Such is the big argument advanced by our adversaries, the bourgeois pure and simple, and the bourgeois socialists as well. They imagine it to be unanswerable. So let us try to prove the opposite. Well, to begin with, by what right do they make their stand for the principle of individual capabilities? Is there room for the development of capabilities in society as at present constituted? Can there be room for that development in a society which continues to have the right of inheritance as its foundation? Self-evidently not; for, from the moment that the right of inheritance applies, the career of children will never be determined by their individual gifts and application: it will be determined primarily by their economic circumstances, by the wealth or poverty of their families. Wealthy but emptyheaded heirs will receive a superior education; the most intelligent children of the proletariat will receive ignorance as their inheritance, just as happens at present. So, is it not hypocritical, when speaking not only of society as it is today but even of a reformed society which would still have as its fundaments private property ownership and the right of inheritance — is it not sordid sophistry to talk about individual rights based on individual capabilities?

Individual liberty - not privileged liberty but human liberty, and the real potential of individuals - will only be able to enjoy full expansion in a regime of complete equality… That requires that private property rights and the rights of inheritance must go, and equality must triumph economically, politically and socially

There is such a lot of talk today of individual liberty, yet what prevails is not the individual person, nor the individual in general, but the individual upon whom privilege is conferred by his social position. Thus what counts is position and class. Just let one intelligent individual from the ranks of the bourgeoisie dare to take a stand against the economic privileges of that respectable class and you will see how much these good bourgeois, forever prattling about individual liberty today, respect his liberty as an individual! Don't talk to us about individual abilities! Is it not an everyday thing for us to see the greatest abilities of working men and bourgeois forced to give way and even to kowtow before the crass stupidity of the heirs to the golden calf? Individual liberty - not privileged liberty but human liberty, and the real potential of individuals - will only be able to enjoy full expansion in a regime of complete equality. When there exists an equality of origins for all men on this earth then, and only then (with safeguards, of course, for the superior calls of fellowship or solidarity, which is and ever shall remain the greatest producer of all

social phenomena, from human intelligence to material wealth) only then will one be able to say, with more reason than one can today, that every individual is a self-made man. Hence our conclusion is that, if individual talents are to prosper and no longer be thwarted in bringing forth their full fruits, the first precondition is that all individual privileges, economic as well as political, must disappear, which is to say that all class distinctions must be abolished. That requires that private property rights and the rights of inheritance must go, and equality must triumph economically, politically and socially.

But once equality has triumphed and is well established, will there be no longer any difference in the talents and degree of application of the various individuals? There will be a difference, not so many as exist today, perhaps, but there will always be differences. Of that there can be no doubt. This is a proverbial truth which will probably never cease to be true — that no tree ever brings forth two leaves that are exactly identical. How much more will this be true of men, men being much more complicated creatures than leaves. But such diversity, far from constituting an affliction is, as the German philosopher Feuerbach has forcefully noted, one of the assets of mankind. Thanks to it, the human race is a collective whole wherein each human being complements the rest and has need of them; so that this infinite variation in human beings is the very cause and chief basis of their solidarity — an important argument in favour of equality.

Basically, even in today's society, if one excepts two categories of men - men of genius and idiots — and provided one abstracts differences conjured up artificially through the influence of a thousand social factors such as education, instruction, economic and political status which create differences not merely within each social stratum, but in almost every family unit, one will concede that from the point of view of intellectual gifts and moral energy the vast majority of men are very much alike or, at least, are worth about the same - weakness in one regard being almost always counterbalanced by an equivalent strength in another, so that it becomes impossible to say whether one man chosen from this mass is much the superior or the inferior of his neighbour. The vast majority of men are not identical but equivalent and thus equal. Which means that the line of argument pursued by our adversaries is left with nothing but the geniuses and the idiots.

As we know, idiocy is a psychological and social affliction. Thus, it should be treated not in the schools but in the hospitals and one is entitled to expect that a more rational system of social hygiene - above all, one that cares more for the physical and moral well-being of the individual than the current system - will some day be introduced and that together with a new society organised along egalitarian lines it will eventually eradicate from the surface of the earth this affliction of idiocy, such a humiliation to the human race. As for the men of genius, one should note first of all that, happily or unhappily, according to one‘s main point of view, such men have not featured in the history of mankind except as the extremely rare exceptions to all of the rules known to us and one cannot organise to cater for exceptions. Even so, it is our hope that the society of the future will be able to discover, through a truly practical popular organisation of its collective assets the means by which to render such geniuses less necessary, less intimidating and more truly the benefactors of us all. For we must never lose sight of Voltaire's great dictum: ‘There is someone with more wit than the greatest geniuses, and that is everyone‘. So it is merely a question of organising this everyone for the sake of the fullest liberty rooted in the most complete economic, political and social equality, and one need no longer fear the dictatorial ambitions and despotic inclinations of the men of genius.

As for turning out such men of genius through education, one ought to banish the thought from one‘s mind. Moreover, of all the men of genius we have known thus far, none or almost none ever displayed their genius while yet in their childhood, nor in their adolescence nor yet in their early youth. Only in their mature years did they ever reveal themselves geniuses and several were not recognised as such until after their death whereas many supposedly great men having had their praises sung while youths by better men have finished their careers in the most absolute obscurity. So it is never in the childhood years, nor even in the adolescent years that one can discern and determine the comparative excellences and shortcomings of men, nor the extent of their talents, nor their inborn aptitudes. All of these things only become obvious and are governed by the development of the individual person and, just as there are some natures precocious and some very slow - although the latter are by no means inferior and, indeed, are often superior — so no schoolmaster will ever be in a position to specify in advance the career or nature of the occupations which his charges will choose once

they attain the age when they have the freedom to choose.

From which it follows that society, disregarding any real or imagined differences in aptitudes or abilities and possessed of no means of determining these in any event and of no right to allot the suture career of children owes them all, without a single exception, an absolutely equal education and instruction.

Egalite, 14 August 1869

III

At every level there must be equal instruction for all; consequently that instruction must be integrated, which is to say that it should prepare each child, of whichever sex, as much for a life of brainwork as for a life of labour so that each of them may, in equal measure, become rounded human beings. Positive philosophy[1], having dethroned religious fable and the reveries of metaphysics from their Lordship over the mind, allows us an insight into what scientific instruction must be in the time to come. It will have as its basis the knowledge of nature and its crowning glory will be sociology. The ideal, ceasing to be the lord, the ravisher of life as it is in every metaphysical and religious system, will henceforth be nothing other than the ultimate and most beautiful expression of the real world. Ceasing to be a dream, it will itself become a reality.

In a system of integrated education, scientific and theoretical instruction must necessarily go hand in hand with industrial or practical training, only thus will the rounded human being be arrived at; a rounded human being who understand and knows.

Since no mind, however powerful, is capable of encompassing all of the specialisations of all of the sciences and since a general familiarity with all of the sciences is absolutely vital to a thorough development of the mind, teaching will naturally be divided into two parts: the general part which will impart the basic principles of all of the sciences without exception as well as a familiarity — real rather than superficial - with the sciences as a whole; and the specialised part, which will, of necessity, be divided into several groups of faculties, each one specialising in a certain number of the branches of learning which are by their very nature reciprocally complementary in a special way.

The first, or general part will be compulsory for all children: it will,; if we may use the expression, constitute the humane education of their spirit, taking over entirely from metaphysics and theology whilst at the same time placing the children at a sufficiently advanced point so that once they reach adolescence they will be in a position to select knowledgeably the specialisation which best suits their individual dispositions and tastes.

It will no doubt come to pass that in selecting their specialised area of study adolescents, influenced by some Secondary consideration, internal or external, will occasionally make mistakes and that they may at first opt for a speciality and for a career which may well not be those best matched to their aptitudes. But, since we are all unhypocritical and honest advocates of the freedom of the individual and since, in the name of that freedom we abhor with all our hearts the principle of authority as well as all possible manifestations of that divine and anti-human principle; and since we despise and condemn, from the very depths of love we bear freedom, the authority of the father as well as of the schoolmaster - finding the one every whit as depraving and degrading in that our everyday experience proves that the paterfamilias and the schoolmaster, despite their obligatory and proverbial wisdom - and indeed because of it — err regarding the abilities of their children even more so than the children themselves, and in view of the thoroughly human, irrefutable and inescapable law which says that every man in a position of power never lets slip the chance to abuse his power; and since, in determining arbitrarily (these paterfamilias and schoolmasters) what their children's future is to be, they give greater credence to their own inclinations than to any natural aptitudes on the part of their charges. In short, since mistakes made by despots are always more noxious and harder to repair than

[1] In referring to “positive philosophy” Bakunin was not thinking of Positivism or Comtism, the flaws of which he thoroughly exposed in the Appendix' published in Volume III of Guillaume‘s *Oeuvres* (*Considerations philosophigues sur le fantome divin, sur le monde real et sur l'homme*). he has in mind scientific philosophy generally which relies upon observation and experience. (Translator)

those made by free men, we hold unflinchingly and without question, despite all official, officious, paternal and pedantic overseers in the world, that the children must be free to select and determine their own careers.

Should they make a mistake, the very mistake which they will have made will prove an effective education for them in subsequent times, and the broad-based education which they will already have received will have enlightened them, so that they will find it easy to redirect along lines dictated by their own natures.

Like full grown men, children too learn only from personal experience and never by the mistakes of others.

In a system of integrated education, scientific and theoretical instruction must necessarily go hand in hand with industrial or practical training, only thus will the rounded human being be arrived at; a rounded human being who understand and knows.

Parallel with scientific training, this industrial training will be divided into two stages; a broad-based training, which should give children a broad sample and introductory practical experience of all manner of industries, excepting none, as well as an overall notion of what underpins civilisation materially and of the range of human labour; and, the second phase, the specialised, when the students are split up into more specialised inter-related groups. The broad-based training should equip adolescents to make free choice of the specialised area of industry and, within this the specific industry which they feel most attracted to. Once they have moved on to the second phase of industrial training they can begin their first serious apprenticeship experiences under the supervision of their instructors.

Side by side with such training in the sciences and industries there will also be a need for practical training, or rather a succession of experiences of a morality which is not divine but human. Divine morality is founded upon two immoral principles — respect for authority and contempt for mankind. By contrast, human morality is rooted only in the contempt for authority and respect for freedom and humanity. Divine morality deems work a degradation, a punishment; human morality sees in work the supreme condition of human happiness and human dignity. Of necessity, divine morality culminates in a politics which recognises rights only for those who, by virtue of their economic, their privileged economic circumstances, can live without having to work. Human morality concedes rights only to those who live by working: it recognises the fact that it is through work that man becomes human. The education of children which is founded upon authority must henceforth yield to education based on the fullest freedom. Positively speaking, what we mean by freedom is the full development of all of the faculties of which man is possessed and, in a negative sense, the complete independence of the will of the individual *vis a vis* his fellows.

Divine morality is founded upon two immoral principles — respect for authority and contempt for mankind. By contrast, human morality is rooted only in the contempt for authority and respect for freedom and humanity

Man is not and never shall be free of the laws of nature *vis a vis* the laws of society: laws, which for the purposes of science are thus divided into two types, belong in reality to only one and the same type for they are all equally nature's laws, inescapable laws which represent the foundation and condition of all life, so much see -- so that one could only defy them by taking one‘s own life.

But it is important to distinguish between these natural laws and the authoritarian, arbitrary, political, religious, criminal and civil laws which privileged classes throughout history have laid down - always in the interests in their exploitation of the labouring masses, their sole aim having been to restrict the freedom of these masses. Such laws, behind the pretext of an alleged morality, have always been the sirens of the most thorough-going immorality. Thus, we advocate, reluctant but ineluctable obedience to all the laws which constitute, independently of any man's will, the very lifeblood of nature and of society: but the most absolute independence possible for each individual with regard to all pretentions to command on the part of all human wills, collective or individual, who would foist upon others not any natural influence but their ordinance, their despotism.

As for the natural influence which men wield over one another, this is yet another of those features of life in a society against which all revolt would be as futile as it would be impossible. Such influence is the very material, intellectual and moral foundation of human

solidarity. The individual human being, a product of solidarity, which is to say a product of a society, while he is unable to evade thraldom to nature's laws, can, under the influence of feelings emanating from outside himself, especially from others‘ company, react against it to a degree but will not be able to escape them without moving immediately to a different solidaristic milieu and exposing himself to new influences. For, where man is concerned, life removed from all society and every human influence (in other words absolute isolation) mean death intellectually, morally and materially also. Solidarity is not the product but the sire of individuality and the human personality cannot be conceived and cannot develop except in a society of human beings.

The sum of prevailing social influences as expressed by the solidaristic or overall consciousness of a human group of whatever size, we call public opinion. And which of us does not know the all powerful effects of public opinion upon every individual? The impact of even the most draconian restrictive legislation is as nothing beside it. So, it is public opinion which is, *par excellence*, the educator of men; from which it follows that if one is to inject morality into individuals one has to inject it first of all into society itself - one has to humanise its public opinion, its public conscience.

Egalite, 14 August 1869

IV

To make men moral, we said, one has to make their social context moral. Socialism, which has as its foundation positive science, rejects out of hand the doctrine of free will and holds that what, in men, we may call vice or virtue, is wholly the result of the combined influences of nature and society. Nature, in the form of ethnographic, physiological and pathological factors, conjures up the faculties and dispositions which we term natural, and the manner in which society's organised can either develop these, arrest their development or distort it. Every individual, without exception, is, at every instant of his life what nature and society, between them, have made of him.

Nature, in the form of ethnographic, physiological and pathological factors, conjures up the faculties and dispositions which we term natural, and the manner in which society's organised can either develop these, arrest their development or distort it.

It is only because of this natural ineluctability (and social ineluctability, too) that statistical science is possible. Statistical science is not content merely to note and enumerate social phenomena; it also seeks to discover their bearing upon and correlation with the manner in which society is organised. Criminal statistics, for instance, record that in a single country or a single town over a period of 10, 20, or 30 years (and sometimes longer, unless some political or social crisis intervenes to alter the tenor of the society), the very same crimes or offences will reappear year after year after year on roughly the same scale. And - this is even more remarkable - the manner in which they are committed will be repeated almost as often in one year as in another. For instance, the number of deaths by poison, knife or firearm, as well as the number of suicides by this method or that, are almost constant.

Which leads the renowned Belgian statistician Quetelet to make this memorable pronouncement: ‘Society fosters crimes; individuals merely carry them out’.

This regular repetition of the same social phenomena would not take place if men's intellectual and moral dispositions as well as their acts of will were founded upon free choice. To put it another way, all this talk of free will is nonsense. Either that or it means that the individual determines his own course spontaneously and by himself, removed from all outside influences, be they natural or social. But if such were the case with all men suiting themselves, the world would be over-run by the most unmitigated anarchy: .all solidarity between man and man would become impossible, and all these millions of wills, thoroughly independent one from another, some running counter to others, would naturally tend to destroy one another and might even end by doing just that, unless there was, above them, the despotic will of divine Providence who ‘shows them the way whilst they seethe‘ and who, by obliterating them all at once, foists divine order upon their human confusion.

We also find all the partisans of the principle of free will inevitably driven by the force of logic into granting the existence and impact of a divine Providence. This underpins every theological and metaphysical doctrine, a magnificent system which has long held human conscience in thrall and one which, seen from a distance in abstract meditation or in the light of a

religious and poetic imagination, does indeed seem to be resplendent in harmony and grandeur. It is just fortunate that the historic reality which has corresponded to this system has always been horrific and that the system itself cannot stand up to scientific criticism.

Indeed, we know that for as long as divine law has held sway on earth the vast majority of men have been brutally and pitilessly exploited, and tormented, and oppressed and decimated: we know that even today the name of theological or metaphysical divinity is still cited by those who seek to maintain the masses in their slavish condition: and it could not be otherwise, for the instant it is admitted that a divine will holds sway in the world and governs nature and society, one effectively makes a nonsense of man's freedom. Of necessity, man's wishes avail nothing against the divine will. What does that imply? It implies that in attempting to defend the abstract, metaphysical or fictitious freedom of man and free will, one is forced to deny his real freedom. Against a background of divine omnipotence and divine omnipresence, man is but a slave. The freedom of everyman having been dispelled by divine providence, all that remains is privilege, which is to say, special entitlements awarded by the grace of God to this or that individual, this or that hierarchy[1], this or that dynasty, this or that class.

Similarly, divine providence makes all science impossible, which means that divine providence is, quite simply, the negation of human reason, or rather, before one can acknowledge divine providence one has to abdicate one's common sense. The moment one accepts that the world is governed by divine will, one need no longer look for any natural interrelationship between phenomena, but look instead for a series of displays of that supreme will whose decrees are and forever must remain, as Holy Scripture says, inaccessible to human reason lest they lose their divine nature. Divine providence is not just the negation of all human logic, it is a negation of logic as such, for all logic holds implicit a natural necessity, and this necessity would be contrary to divine liberty: so it is, from the human point of view, the triumph of nonsense. So, those who would be believers must renounce both liberty and science and allow themselves to be exploited and lashed by those upon whom God has bestowed privilege: and one has to say with Tertullian - I believe because of its absurdity, adding this (which is as logical as the foregoing) And I desire iniquity.

In view of the tardiness of the men of privilege in allowing themselves to be made moral or (and it amounts to the same thing), to be made equal, we very much fear that justice will see no triumph lest it be by means of social revolution

For ourselves, who freely renounce all the joys of the next world and demand the complete triumph of mankind upon this earth, we humbly admit that we understand nothing of divine logic and that we shall content ourselves with human logic, founded as it is upon experience and knowledge of interrelationships of natural as well as of social phenomena.

The accumulated, correlated and considered experience which we know as science, shows us that sovereign will is an impossible invention which flies in the face of the very nature of things; what is called the will is merely the product of the exercise of a nervous faculty, just as physical strength is only the product of the exercise of our muscles; consequently both are in equal measure the product of social and natural life, i.e., of the physical and social conditions into which each individual is born and against which background they develop. And let us say it again - every man, at every instant of his life, is the product of the combined impact of nature and society, from which it clearly follows that what we stated in our preceding article is quite true: to make men moral first make their surroundings moral.

And there is only one way to make those surroundings moral - to effect the triumph of justice, i.e., the fullest liberty[2] for each in the context of the most flawless equality for all. Inequality of circumstances and rights (and by the absence of liberty for each which is its necessary by-product) - THAT is the vast collective

[1] Bakunin seems to be employing the word hierarchy in its etymological sense of "priestly government". (Translator)

[2] We stated earlier that we understand liberty to be, on the one hand, the fullest possible development of all the natural faculties of each individual and, on the other, his independence vis-a-vis, not the laws of nature and society, but all the laws imposed by other human wills be they collective or individual.

iniquity which gives rise to all individual iniquities. Do but establish the one and all the others will vanish.

In view of the tardiness of the men of privilege in allowing themselves to be made moral or (and it amounts to the same thing), to be made equal, we very much fear that justice will see no triumph lest it be by means of social revolution. This is outside our brief today, but we shall assume the task of annunciating this truth, which is, moreover, all too obvious - that until such time as his social environment becomes moral, morality in the individual will be impossible.

Three things are necessary if men are to be made moral, which is to say, are to be complete men in the fullest sense of the word — a healthy birth, a rational and integrated education accompanied by an upbringing based on respect for work, reason, equality and liberty; and a social environment wherein each individual in enjoying complete liberty Will really be the equal of all others both by right and in fact.

Does such an environment exist? No. Consequently, its foundations must be laid. If, in the environment which does not exist one were to manage to find schools which would offer their pupils instruction and education so perfect as to defy our imagination to conceive of better, would those schools succeed in creating men who were just, free and moral? Again no, because when they left the school they would enter into a social environment governed by altogether contrary principles, and since society is always stronger than individuals, it would soon overwhelm and demoralise them. Furthermore, the very foundation of such schools is impossible in today's circumstances. For social life embraces everything and permeates the schools as well as family life and the lives of all the individuals who compose the society.

Teachers, tutors and parents are all members of the same society and are all more or less brutalised or demoralised by it. How could they impart to their charges that which they are lacking in themselves? The proper way, the only proper way to teach morality is by example and since socialist morality is the very opposite of current morality, the teachers, who are more or less in the grip of the latter, would practice before their pupils the very opposite of what they would be preaching. So, socialist education is impossible through the schools just as it is impossible through the family of today.

But integrated education is similarly impossible: the bourgeois cannot understand that their children should become workers, and the workers are bereft of the wherewithal that would give their children a scientific education.

I am amused by those fine bourgeois Socialists who are always telling us: 'Let us first educate the people, then we shall emancipate them'. Instead, we say: Let the people emancipate themselves first, and then they will look after their own education. Who is to educate the people? You, perhaps? But you do not teach them, you just poison them by attempting to inculcate them with all the religious, historical, political, juridical and economic prejudices which guarantee your existence, but which at the same time destroy their intelligence and emasculate their righteous indignation and drain them of all resolve. You let the people be crushed by their daily work and by their misery and then you say to them: 'Educate yourselves!' We should like to see you and your children educate yourselves after thirteen, fourteen or sixteen hours of brutalising toil with misery and an uncertain tomorrow as your only reward.

No, gentlemen, for all our reverence for the lofty issue of integral education, we declare that at this moment it is not the most important issue for the people. The primary issue is that of economic emancipation, which necessarily brings with it an immediate concomitant political emancipation - and only following that comes the intellectual and moral emancipation of the people. This being so, we fully subscribe to the resolution adopted by the Brussels Congress of 1867:

"Recognising that for the moment it is not possible to organise a rational system of education, the Congress urges its various sections to organise study courses which would follow a programme of scientific, professional, and industrial education, that is a programme of integral education, in order to redress, as far as is possible, the inadequacy of present-day education among workers. It is, of course, understood that a reduction in working hours is to be considered an indispensable prerequisite."

Yes. Of course the workers will do all within their power to provide themselves with the education in the present situation. But, without letting themselves be led astray by the siren songs of the y bourgeois and bourgeois Socialists, they should above all concentrate their efforts upon the solving of the great problem of economic emancipation which must be the mother of all other emancipations.

Egalite, 21 August 1869

We should like to see you and your children educate yourselves after thirteen, fourteen or sixteen hours of brutalising toil with misery and an uncertain tomorrow as your only reward.

Policy of the International

Michael Bakunin

"Politique de l'Internationale", *L'Égalité*, 7 to 28 August 1869

I

"We have believed until now," says *La Montagne*, "that political and religious opinions were independent of membership of the International; and, as for us, it is on this terrain that we place ourselves."

You might believe, at first glance, that Mr. Coullery is right. For, indeed, when accepting a new member into its midst, the International does not ask him whether he is religious or an atheist, whether he belongs to such-and-such political party or if he belongs to none. It simply asks him: Are you a worker, or, if you are not, do you feel the need and do you feel the strength to frankly, fully embrace the cause of the workers, to identify with it to the exclusion of all other causes that may be opposed to it?

Do you realise that the workers, who produce all of the world's wealth, who are the creators of civilisation, and who have conquered all liberties for the bourgeoisie, are today condemned to poverty, ignorance and slavery? Do you understand that the principal cause of all the evils that the worker endures is poverty, and that this poverty, which is the lot of all the workers in the world, is a necessary consequence of the current economic organisation of society, and particularly the subjugation of labour, that is to say of the proletariat, under the yoke of capital, that is to say to the bourgeoisie?

Do you understand that there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, because it is the necessary consequence of their respective positions? That the prosperity of the bourgeois class is incompatible with the well-being and freedom of the workers, because this exclusive prosperity is and can be founded only upon the exploitation and subjugation of their labour, and that, for the same reason, the prosperity and human dignity of the working masses absolutely requires the abolition of the bourgeoisie as a separate class? That consequently the war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is inevitable and can only end with the destruction of the latter?

Do you understand that no worker, however intelligent and energetic, can fight alone against the well-organised power of the bourgeoisie, a power principally represented and supported by the organisation of the State, of every State? That in order to become strong you must associate not with the bourgeois, which would be a stupidity or a crime on your part because all the bourgeois as bourgeois are our irreconcilable enemies, nor with treacherous workers who would be cowardly enough to go beg for the smiles and benevolence of the bourgeois, but with honest and energetic workers who frankly want what you want?

to henceforth subordinate your personal interests, even those of your family, as well as your political and religious convictions and expressions, to the supreme interest of our association: the struggle of labour against capital, of the workers against the bourgeoisie on the economic terrain

Do you understand that, in view of the formidable coalition of all the privileged classes, all the capitalist proprietors and all the States in the world, an isolated workers' association, local or national, even one belonging to one of the largest countries of Europe, can never triumph, and that to stand up to this coalition and obtain that victory, nothing less than the union of all local and national workers' associations into a single universal association is needed, it needs the great *International Association of the Workers of all countries*?

If you feel, if you understand and if you truly want all this, come to us, whatever your political and religious beliefs. But for us to accept you, you must promise us: 1) to henceforth subordinate your personal interests, even those of your family, as well as your political and religious convictions and expressions, to the supreme interest of our association: the struggle of labour against capital, of the workers against the bourgeoisie on the economic terrain; 2) never compromise with the

bourgeoisie for personal gain; 3) to never seek to raise yourself individually, only for yourself, above the working mass, which would immediately make you a bourgeois, an enemy and exploiter of the proletariat; as all the difference between the bourgeois and the worker is this, that the first always seeks his good outside the collectivity, and the second only seeks it and intends to conquer it only in solidarity with all those who work and who are exploited by bourgeois capital; 4) you will always remain faithful to worker solidarity, for the slightest betrayal of that solidarity is considered by the International as the greatest crime and the greatest infamy that a worker can commit. In short, you must frankly, fully accept our general statutes, and you will make a solemn commitment to henceforth abide by them in your actions and your life.

We think that the founders of the International [Workers'] Association acted with a very great wisdom by first eliminating all political and religious questions from the programme of this association. Doubtless, they did not themselves lack either political opinions or very pronounced anti-religious opinions; but they refrained from expressing them in this programme, because their principal aim was above all to unite the working masses of the civilised world in a common action. They necessarily had to seek a common basis, a series of simple principles on which all workers, whatever their political and religious aberrations, are and should be in agreement, provided they are serious workers, that is to say harshly exploited and suffering men.

If they had raised the flag of a political or anti-religious system, far from uniting the workers of Europe they would have divided them still further; because, the ignorance of the workers assisting, the self-serving and utmost corrupting propaganda of priests, governments and all bourgeois political parties, including the most red, has spread a host of false ideas amongst the working masses, and that these blind masses are unfortunately still too often enthralled by lies, which have no other purpose than to make them voluntarily and stupidly serve, to the detriment of their own interests, those of the privileged classes.

Besides, there still exists too great a difference in the degrees of industrial, political, intellectual and moral development of the working masses in different countries for it to be possible for them to unite today under one and the same political and anti-religious programme. To pose such a programme as that to the International, to make it an absolute condition for entry into that Association, would be to try to organise a sect, not a global association, it would kill the International.

There was yet another reason for eliminating at first, in appearance at least, *and only in appearance*, all political tendencies from the programme of the International.

Up until now, since the beginning of history, there has not yet been a politics of the people, and by this word we mean the lower classes, the *worker rabble* who feed the world with their labour; there was only the politics of the privileged classes; these classes have used the muscular power of the people to depose one another, and to put themselves in the place of others. The people for its part has never sided with one against the others except in the vague hope that at least one of these political revolutions, of which none could have been made without it but none was made for it, would bring some relief to its age-old poverty and slavery. It has always been deceived. Even the great French Revolution betrayed it. It killed the aristocratic nobility and put the bourgeoisie in its place. The people are no longer called slaves or serfs, they are proclaimed freeborn by law, but in fact their slavery and poverty remain the same.

And they will always remain the same as long as the popular masses continue to serve as an instrument for bourgeois politics, whether that politics is called conservative, liberal, progressive, radical, and even when it gives itself the most revolutionary appearance in the world. For every bourgeois politics, whatever its colour and name, can have at bottom only one aim: *the preservation of bourgeois domination, and bourgeois domination is the slavery of the proletariat.*

What then was the International to do? It first had to separate the working masses from all bourgeois politics, it had to eliminate from its programme all bourgeois political programmes. But, at the time of its founding, there was no other politics in the world than that of the Church or the monarchy, or of the aristocracy, or the bourgeoisie; the last, especially that of the radical bourgeoisie, was undeniably more liberal and more humane than the others, but all equally based on the exploitation of the working masses and having in reality no other aim than to quarrel over the monopolisation of this exploitation. The International therefore had to begin by clearing the ground, and as all politics, from the point of view of the emancipation of labour, was then tainted with reactionary elements, it first had to reject from its midst all known political systems, in order to be able to raise, on these ruins of the bourgeois world, the true politics of the workers, the policy of the International [Workers'] Association.

Égalité, 7 August 1869

II

The founders of the International Workers' Association acted with much wisdom by refraining from making political and philosophical principles the basis of this association, and giving it at first as its sole basis the exclusively economic struggle of labour against capital, that they were certain that from the moment that a worker put his foot on this terrain, from the moment that, taking confidence both in his right and in his numerical strength, he engages with his fellow workers in a united struggle against bourgeois exploitation, he will necessarily be brought, by the very force of things and by the development of this struggle, to soon recognise all the political, socialist and philosophical principles of the International, principles that are, after all, nothing but the true exposition of its starting point, of its purpose.

We have outlined these principles in our recent issues.[1] From a political and social point of view, they have as a necessary consequence the abolition of classes, and consequently that of the bourgeoisie, which is the dominant class today; the abolition of all territorial States, that of all political homelands, and, on their downfall, the establishment of the great international federation of all productive groups, national and local. From the philosophical point of view, as they tend to nothing less than the realisation of the human ideal, of human happiness, equality, justice and liberty on earth, that because they tend to render completely useless all the celestial complements and all hopes of a [heavenly] better world, they will likewise result in the abolition of cults and all religious systems.

To begin by declaring these two goals to ignorant workers, crushed by labour every day and demoralised, imprisoned so to speak, knowingly by the perverse doctrines that governments, in concert with all the privileged castes, priests, nobility, bourgeoisie, dispense to them with both hands, and you will scare them; they may snub you, without suspecting that all these ideas are nothing but the most faithful expression of their own interests, that these goals carry within them the realisation of their most cherished wishes; and that, on the contrary, the religious and political prejudices in whose name they may reject them, are the direct cause of the prolongation of their slavery and their poverty.

From a political and social point of view, they have as a necessary consequence the abolition of classes, and consequently that of the bourgeoisie, which is the dominant class today; the abolition of all territorial States, that of all political homelands, and, on their downfall, the establishment of the great international federation of all productive groups, national and local

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between the prejudices of the popular masses and those of the privileged class. The prejudices of the masses, as we have just said, are based only on their ignorance and are entirely contrary to their interests, while those of the bourgeoisie are based precisely on the interests of that class, and are only maintained, against the dissolving action of bourgeois science itself, thanks to the collective selfishness of the bourgeoisie. The people want, but they do not know; the bourgeoisie know, but they do not want. Which of the two is incurable? The bourgeoisie, without a doubt.

A general rule: You can only convert those who feel the need to be, only those who already carry in their instincts or in the miseries of their position, whether external or internal, all that you want to give them; you will never convert those who do not feel the need of any change, even those who, while desiring to escape from a position which they are disgruntled with, are driven by the nature of their moral, intellectual and social habits to seek it in a world that is not of your ideas.

Convert to socialism, I ask you, a nobleman who covets wealth, a bourgeois who would like to become a noble, or even a worker who strains with all the strength of his soul to become a bourgeois! Convert even a real or imaginary aristocrat of the intellect, a scholar, a half-scholar, a fourth, tenth, or hundredth part of a scholar who, full of scientific ostentation, and often because

[1] See, for example, "La Montage and Mr. Coullery," *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869-1871* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Promethus Books, 1994), Robert M. Cutler (trans. and ed.). (*Black Flag*)

they have only had the good fortune to have somehow understood, after a fashion, a few books, are full of arrogant contempt for the illiterate masses and imagine that they are called to form between themselves a new dominant, that is to say exploiting, caste.

No reasoning or propaganda will ever be able to convert these wretches. There is only one way to convince them: it is the deed, the destruction of the very possibility of privileged circumstances, of all domination and all exploitation; it is the social revolution, which, by sweeping away all that creates inequality in the world, will moralise them by forcing them to seek their happiness in equality and in solidarity.

The situation is different with serious workers. By serious workers we mean those who are really crushed by the weight of work; all those whose position is so precarious and so miserable that none, except in quite extraordinary circumstances, can think of conquering just for *himself*, and only for himself, in the present economic conditions and social environment, a better position; to become in their turn, for example, a boss or a State Councillor. Without doubt, we also include in this category the rare and generous workers who, while having the opportunity to rise individually above the working class, do not want to benefit by this, preferring to suffer for some time still exploitation by the bourgeoisie, in solidarity with their comrades in poverty, than become exploiters in their turn. These do not need to be converted; they are pure socialists.

We speak of the great mass of workers who, exhausted by their daily labour, are ignorant and miserable. These, whatever the political and religious prejudices that they [the ruling class] have tried and even in part succeeded to encourage in their conscience, is *socialist without knowing it*; it is deep in their instinct, and by the very force of their position, more seriously, more truly socialist than all the scientific and bourgeois socialists combined. They are so by all the conditions of their material existence, by all the needs of their being, whereas these others are only so by the needs of their thought; and, in real life, the needs of the being always exert a much stronger power than those of thought, thought being here, as it is everywhere and always, the expression of being, the reflection of its successive developments, but never its principle.

What workers lack is not the reality, the real necessity of socialist aspirations, it is only socialist thought. What every worker demands in the depths of his heart – a fully human existence in the form of material well-being and intellectual development, based on justice, that is to say on equality and liberty for each and all in labour – this instinctive ideal of each who lives only by their own labour, can obviously not be realised in the present political and social world, which is based on the cynical exploitation of the labour of the working masses. Therefore, every serious worker is necessarily a socialist revolutionary, since his emancipation can only take place by the overthrow of all that now exists. Either this organisation of injustice, with its whole array of iniquitous laws and privileged institutions, must perish, or the working masses will remain condemned to an eternal slavery.

Here is the socialist thought whose seeds will be found in the instinct of every serious worker. The aim then is to render him fully conscious of what he wants, to nurture in him a thought that corresponds to his instinct, for as soon as the thought of the working masses has risen to the height of their instinct, their will becomes resolute and their power becomes irresistible.

Yet what prevents the speedier development of this salutary thought within the working masses? Their ignorance, without doubt, and to a great extent the political and religious prejudices by which the interested classes are still striving today to obfuscate their conscience and their natural intelligence. How to dispel this ignorance, how to destroy these harmful prejudices? – By education and propaganda?

These are undoubtedly great and beautiful means. But, in the present state of the working masses, they are insufficient. The isolated worker is too crushed by his work and by his daily worries to have a lot of time to devote to his education. And, besides, who will make this propaganda? Will it be the few sincere socialists, children of the bourgeoisie, who are full of generous intent, no doubt, but who are for one thing far too few in number to give their propaganda all the necessary breadth, and who, moreover, belonging by their position to a different world, do not have all the grasp of the workers' world that is needed and who arouse in them more or less legitimate distrust.

"The emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves," says the preamble of our general statutes. And it is a thousand times right to say it. It is the principal basis of our great Association. But the workers' world is generally ignorant, it still entirely lacks theory. So there remains to it only a single path, that *of its emancipation through practice*. What can and should that practice be?

There is only one. It is that of the struggle of the workers in solidarity against the bosses. It is *trades unions, organisation and the federation of resistance funds*.

Égalité, 14 August 1869

III

If the International at first showed itself indulgent toward the subversive and reactionary ideas, whether in politics or religion, that workers may have when joining it, it was not at all out of indifference for these ideas. It cannot be accused of indifference since it detests them and rejects them with all the strength of its being, every reactionary idea being the overturning of the very principle of the International, as we have already shown in our previous articles.

This indulgence, we repeat again, is inspired by a high wisdom. Knowing full well that every serious worker is a socialist by all the necessities inherent in his miserable position, and that any reactionary ideas he has are only the effect of his ignorance, it counts on the collective experience that he cannot fail to acquire in the midst of the International, and above all on the development of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses, to deliver him [from them].

Bakunin speaking at the Basel Congress 1869

And indeed, from the moment that a worker, taking faith in the possibility of a future radical transformation of the economic situation, combines with his comrades, begins to struggle seriously for the reduction of his hours of labour and the increase of his wages; from the moment that he begins to take an active interest in this entirely material struggle, we can be certain that he will soon abandon all his heavenly preoccupations, and that becoming accustomed to rely ever more on the collective strength of the workers, he will willingly renounce help from heaven. Socialism takes the place of religion in his mind.

It will be the same with his reactionary politics. It will lose its principal support as the conscience of the worker is freed from religious oppression. On the other hand, the economic struggle, by developing and extending ever wider, will make him increasingly know, in a practical manner and by a collective experience that is necessarily always more instructive and broader than isolated experience, his true enemies, which are the privileged classes, including the clergy, the bourgeoisie, the nobility and the State; this last only existing to safeguard all the privileges of these classes, and inevitably always taking their side against the proletariat.

The worker, thus engaged in the struggle, will inevitably come to understand the irreconcilable antagonism that exists between these henchmen of reaction and his most cherished human interests, and having reached this point he will not fail to recognise himself, and bluntly present himself as, a revolutionary socialist.

It is not so with the bourgeoisie. All their interests are opposed to the economic transformation of society; and if their ideas are also opposed to it, if these ideas are reactionary, or as they are politely called today, moderate; [if] their heart and mind reject this great act of justice and emancipation that we call the social revolution; if they have a horror of real social equality, that is to say of simultaneous political, social and economic equality; if, in the depths of their souls, they want to keep for themselves, for their class or for their children, a single privilege, is only of understanding, as many bourgeois socialists do today; if they do not detest, not only with all the logic of their mind, but also with all the power of their passion, the present order of things, then we can be certain that they will remain all their life reactionaries, enemies of the cause of the workers. We must keep them far from the International.

They must be kept far from it, for they would only enter it to demoralise it and divert it from its path. There is, moreover, an infallible sign by which the workers can recognise whether a bourgeois, who asks to be admitted into their ranks, comes to them frankly, without the shadow of hypocrisy and without the least subversive ulterior motive. That sign is the relationships that he preserves with the bourgeois world.

The antagonism that exists between the world of the worker and the bourgeois world takes on a more and more pronounced character. Every man who thinks seriously and whose feelings and imagination are not altered by the often unconscious influence of self-interested sophisms must understand that today no

reconciliation is possible between them. The workers want equality, and the bourgeois want to maintain inequality. Obviously one destroys the other. Also the vast majority of the capitalist and landlord bourgeois, those who have the courage to admit what they want, they likewise express with the same frankness the horror that the current movement of the working class inspires in them. They are enemies as resolute as they are sincere, we know them, and that is good.

But there is another category of bourgeois who have neither the same candour nor the same courage. Enemies of social liquidation, which we call, with all the power of our souls, a great act of justice, as the necessary starting point and indispensable basis of an egalitarian and rational organisation of society, they want, like all other bourgeois, to preserve economic inequality, that eternal source of all the other inequalities; and at the same time they pretend to want, like us, the complete emancipation of the worker and of work. They uphold against us, with a passion worthy of the most reactionary bourgeois, the very cause of proletariat's slavery, the separation of labour and landed or capitalist property, represented today by two different classes; and they nonetheless pose as the apostles of the deliverance of the working class from the yoke of property and capital!

This is an infallible sign by which workers can recognise a false socialist, a bourgeois socialist: if, when speaking to them of revolution or, if you like, of social transformation, he tells them that political transformation *must precede* economic transformation

Are they mistaken or do they deceive? Some are mistaken in good faith, many deceive; the greater number are mistaken and deceive at the same time. They all belong to that category of bourgeois radicals and bourgeois socialists who founded the *League of Peace and Freedom*.

Is this League socialist? At its founding and during the first year of its existence, as we have already had occasion to tell, it rejected socialism with horror. Last year, at its Congress in Berne, it triumphantly rejected the principle of economic equality. Today, feeling itself dying and wishing to live a little longer, and finally understanding that no political existence is henceforth possible without the social question, it calls itself socialist, it has become bourgeois socialist: which means that it wants to solve all social questions on the basis of economic inequality. It wants, it must preserve interest on capital and rent on land, and it professes to emancipate the workers with these. It strives to give a body to nonsense.

Why does it do this? What is it that makes it undertake a work as incongruous as [it is] sterile? It is not difficult to understand.

A great part of the bourgeoisie is tired of the reign of *Caesarism* and *militarism* that it itself established in 1848, for fear of the proletariat. Just recall the June days, precursors of the December days; recall that National Assembly which, after the June days, cursed and insulted, unanimous bar one voice, the illustrious and we can say heroic socialist Proudhon who alone had the courage to hurl the challenge of socialism at this rabid herd of bourgeois conservatives, liberals and radicals.[1] And we must not forget that amongst those insulting Proudhon a number of citizens still living, and today more militant than ever, and who, baptised by the persecutions of December, have since become martyrs of liberty.

So, there is no doubt that the entire bourgeoisie, including the radical bourgeoisie, was itself the creator of the caesarean and military despotism whose effects it deplores today. After having served them against the proletariat, they now want to be free of it. Nothing is more natural; this regime humiliates and ruins them. But how can they be delivered from it? Formerly, they were brave and powerful, they had the power for conquests. Today they are cowardly and feeble, they are afflicted with the impotence of the old. They recognise only too well their weakness, and sense that they alone can do nothing. So they must have help. This help can only be the proletariat; so they must win over the proletariat.

But how to win them over? By promises of freedom and political equality? These are words that no longer move workers. They have learned at their cost, they understand by hard experience, that these words mean nothing for them but the maintenance of their economic slavery, often even harder than before. So if

[1] Extracts from this famous speech – in which he proclaimed "When I used those pronouns *you* and *we*, it was self-evident that at that point I was identifying *myself* with the proletariat and identifying *you* with the bourgeois class" – are included in *Property is Theft!* (*Black Flag*)

you want to touch the hearts of these miserable millions of slaves to labour, speak to them of their economic emancipation. There is no longer a worker who does not know now that this is for him the only serious and real basis for all the other emancipations. So it is necessary to speak to them about economic reforms for society.

Well, said the members of the League for Peace and Freedom, let us speak of it, let us say we are socialists too. Let us promise them some economic and social reforms, on the condition though that they take care to respect the basis of civilisation and bourgeois omnipotence: individual and hereditary property, interest on capital and rent on land. Let us persuade them that under these conditions alone, which moreover assure us domination and the workers slavery, can the worker be emancipated.

Let us even persuade them that, to realise all these social reforms, we must first make a good political revolution, exclusively political, as red as they please from the political point of view, with a great chopping of heads if that becomes necessary, but with the greatest respect for holy property; a wholly Jacobin revolution, in a word, that would make us the masters of the situation; and once masters, we could give the workers… what we can and what we want.

This is an infallible sign by which workers can recognise a false socialist, a bourgeois socialist: if, when speaking to them of revolution or, if you like, of social transformation, he tells them that political transformation *must precede* economic transformation; if he denies that they must both be made at once, or even [denies] that the political revolution must be nothing but the immediate and direct putting into action of the full and entire social liquidation; then [let them] turn their backs on him, for either he is nothing but a fool, or else a hypocritical exploiter.

Égalité, 21 August 1869

IV

The International Workers' Association, to remain faithful to its principle and to not deviate from the only path that can lead it to success, must above all guard itself against the influences of two kinds of bourgeois socialists: *the partisans of bourgeois politics*, *including even bourgeois revolutionaries*, and those of *bourgeois co-operation*, or so-called *practical men*.

Let us first consider the former.[1]

Economic emancipation, as we said in our previous issue, is the basis of all other emancipations. We have summarised by those words the entire politics of the International.

Indeed we read in the preamble of our general statutes the following statement:

"*That the subjection of labour to capital is the source of all political, moral and material servitude*, and that for this reason the emancipation of the workers is the great aim to which every political movement must be subordinated."

It is well understood that any political movement which does not have as an immediate and direct objective the *definitive and complete* economic emancipation of the workers, and which has not inscribed on its flag, in a very definite and clear manner, the principle of *economic equality*, which means the *full restitution of capital to labour*, or *social liquidation* – that every such political movement is bourgeois, and, as such, must be excluded from the International.

Consequently, the politics of the bourgeois democrats or bourgeois socialists must be ruthlessly excluded, which, by declaring "that political liberty is the *preliminary* condition for economic emancipation," can only understand by these words nothing but this: political reforms or revolution must *precede* economic reforms or revolution; the workers must therefore ally themselves with the more or less radical bourgeois to first carry out the former with them, afterwards barring the making of the latter against them.

We protest strongly against this disastrous theory, which could only result in making the workers serve once again as an instrument against themselves and deliver them again to the exploitation of the bourgeoisie.

To conquer political liberty *first* cannot mean anything other than conquering it *first* by itself, leaving, at least for the first days, economic and social relationships as they are, that is to say, [leaving] the landlords and capitalists with their insolent wealth, and the workers with their poverty.

But, they say, once this freedom is won, it will serve the workers as an instrument to later conquer *equality or economic justice*.

[1] Bakunin discussed the second issue in a subsequent article in *L'Égalité* entitled "On Co-operation" which is also included in *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869-1871*. (*Black Flag*)

Freedom is indeed a magnificent and powerful instrument. The question is whether the workers will really be able to use it, if it will really be in their possession, or if, as it has always been hitherto, their *political freedom* is only a deceptive visage, a fiction.

Could not a worker to whom you would speak of political freedom, in his present economic situation, respond with the refrain of a well-known song:

Do not speak of liberty.

Poverty is slavery!

And, indeed, you would have to be in love with illusions to imagine that a worker, in the economic and social conditions in which he currently finds himself, can take full advantage, make real, serious use of his political liberty. He lacks two things for this: leisure and material resources.

Besides, have we not seen it in France, the day after the revolution of 1848, the most radical revolution that can be desired from a political point of view?

The French workers were certainly neither indifferent nor unintelligent, and, in spite of the widest universal suffrage, they had to let the bourgeois do as they pleased. Why? because they lacked the material means that are necessary for political freedom to become a reality, because they remained the slaves of a labour forced by hunger, while the bourgeois radicals, liberals, and even conservatives, some republicans the day before, others converts the day after, came and went, conspired freely, some thanks to their unearned income or their lucrative bourgeois position, others thanks to the State budget which they have naturally preserved and had even made greater than ever.

We know what happened: first, the June days; later, as a necessary consequence, the December days.

But, it will be said, workers, becoming wiser by their very experience, will no longer send bourgeois to constituent or legislative assemblies, they will send simple workers. Poor as they are, they will be able to provide the necessary support for their deputies. Do you know what will be the result of this? The worker deputies, transferred into bourgeois surroundings and an atmosphere of entirely bourgeois political ideas, ceasing in fact to be workers by becoming Statesmen, will become bourgeois, and perhaps even more bourgeois than the bourgeois themselves. For men do not make situations, on the contrary it is situations that make men. And we know by experience that *bourgeois workers* are often no less selfish than bourgeois exploiters, nor less dire to the [International Workers'] Association than bourgeois socialists, nor less vain and ridiculous than ennobled bourgeois.[1]

But, it will be said, workers… will no longer send bourgeois to constituent or legislative assemblies, they will send simple workers… Do you know what will be the result of this? The worker deputies, transferred into bourgeois surroundings and an atmosphere of entirely bourgeois political ideas, ceasing in fact to be workers by becoming Statesmen, will become bourgeois

No matter what they do and no matter what they may say, as long as the worker remains immersed in his present state, there will be no freedom possible for him, and those who advise him to win political liberties without first touching on the burning questions of socialism, without uttering that phrase that makes the bourgeois turn pale – *social liquidation* – simply tell him: First win this freedom for us, so that later we can use it against you.

But, it will be said, these radical bourgeois are well intentioned and sincere. There are no good intentions and sincerity that stand against the influences of position, and since we have said that even workers who put themselves in this position would inevitably become bourgeois, with even greater reason the bourgeois who remain in that position will remain bourgeois.

[1] This analysis has, of course, been proven correct time and time again (not least, with Marxist Social Democracy). It has been repeated by many libertarian thinkers including Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman (*Socialism: Caught in the Political Trap*) and Rudolf Rocker (*Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*). Of note is Chapter XIII ("Socialism") of Alexander Berkman's *What Is Communist Anarchism?* (1929). (*Black Flag*)

If a bourgeois, inspired by a great passion for justice, equality and humanity, wants to work seriously for the emancipation of the proletariat, he first begins by breaking all the political and social ties, all the relationships of interest as well as spirit, of vanity and heart, with the bourgeoisie. Let him first understand that no reconciliation is possible between the proletariat and that class, which, living only on the exploitation of others, is the natural enemy of the proletariat.

After having turned his back on the bourgeois world for good, let him then line up beneath the flag of the workers, on which are inscribed these words: "Justice, Equality and Freedom for all. Abolition of classes by the economic equalisation of all. Social liquidation." He will be welcome.

As for the bourgeois socialists along with bourgeois workers who will come to talk to us of conciliation between bourgeois politics and the socialism of the workers, we have only one piece of advice to give to the latter: you must turn your backs on them.

Since bourgeois socialists seek to organise today, *with socialism as bait*, a formidable workers' agitation in order to win political freedom, a liberty that, as we have just seen, would benefit only the bourgeoisie; since the working masses, having reached an understanding of their position, enlightened and guided by the principle of the International, are in fact organising themselves and begin to form a real power, not [just] national but international; not to do the business of the bourgeois, but their own affairs; and since, to realise that ideal of the bourgeois of a complete political freedom with republication institutions still requires a revolution, and since no revolution can triumph except by the power of the people, it is necessary that this power must, ceasing to pull chestnuts from the fire for the gentlemen of the bourgeoisie, henceforth only serve to make the cause of the people triumph, the cause of all those who labour against all those who exploit labour.

The International Workers' Association, faithful to its principle, will never extend its hand to a political agitation which did not have as its immediate and direct aim the *complete economic emancipation of the worker*, that is to say the abolition of the bourgeoisie as a class economically separate from the mass of the population, nor to any revolution that, from the first day, from the first hour, will not inscribe *social liquidation* on its flag.

But revolutions are not improvised. They are not made arbitrarily, either by individuals or by even the most powerful associations. Independently of all will and of all conspiracy, they are always brought about by the force of events. They can be foreseen, their approach can sometimes be sensed, but the explosion can never be accelerated.

Convinced of this truth, we pose this question: What is the policy that the International must pursue during this more or less extended period of time that separates us from this terrible social revolution which everyone today anticipates?

Setting aside, as required by its statutes, all local and national politics, it will give workers' agitation in all countries an essentially economic character, with the aim of reducing the hours of labour and increasing wages; the *organisation of the working masses* and the establishment of *resistance funds* as means.

It will propagandise its principles, for these principles are the purest expression of the collective interests of the workers of the whole world, are the soul and constitute all the life force of the Association. It will spread this propaganda widely, without regard for bourgeois sensitivities, so that every worker, emerging from the intellectual and moral torpor in which they strive to keep him, understands his situation, knows well what he must do and under what conditions he can conquer his human rights.

It will propagandise all the more energetically and sincerely for we often encounter influences, even in the International, which, affecting disdain for these principles, would like to portray them as a useless theory and strive to bring the workers back to the political, economic and religious catechism of the bourgeoisie.

Finally, it will expand and organise itself strongly across the borders of all lands, so that when the revolution, brought about by the force of events, breaks out, it is a real force, knowing what it must do, and hence capable of taking it in its hands and giving it a truly beneficial direction for the people; a serious international organisation of workers' associations of all countries, capable of replacing this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie.

We conclude this faithful exposition of the politics of the International by reproducing the final paragraph of the preamble to our general statutes:

"The movement that is taking place amongst the workers of the most industrious countries of Europe, by giving rise to new hopes, gives a solemn warning not to fall back into old errors."

Égalité, 28 August 1869

To Albert Richard

Michael Bakunin

12 March 1870[1]

Dear friend and brother,

Circumstances beyond my control prevent me from coming to take part in your great Assembly of 13th March. But I would not want to let it pass without expressing my thoughts and wishes to my brothers in France.

If I could attend that impressive gathering, here is what I would say to the French workers, with all the *barbaric* frankness that characterises the Russian socialist democrats.

Workers, no longer count on anyone but yourselves. Do not demoralise and paralyse your rising power in foolish alliances with bourgeois radicalism. The bourgeoisie no longer has anything to give you. Politically and morally, it is dead, and of all its historical magnificence, it has only preserved a single power, that of a wealth founded on the exploitation of your labour. Formerly, it was great, it was bold, it was powerful in thought and will. It had a world to overturn and a new world to create, the world of modern civilisation.

Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The basis of that organisation is entirely given: It is the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of resistance funds, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally.

It overturned the feudal world with the strength of your arms, and it has built its new world on your shoulders. It naturally hopes that you will never cease to serve as caryatids for that world. It wants its preservation, and you want, you must want its overthrow and destruction. What does it have in common with you?

Will you push naïveté to the point of believing that the bourgeoisie would ever consent to willingly strip itself of that which constitutes its prosperity, its liberty and its very existence, as a class economically separated from the economically enslaved mass of the proletariat? Doubtless not. You know that no dominant class has ever done justice against itself, that it has always been necessary to help it. Was not that famous night of 4th August, for which we have granted too much honour to the French nobility, the inevitable consequence of the general uprising of the peasants who burned the parchments of the nobility, and with those parchments the castles?

You know very well that rather than concede to you the conditions of a serious economic equality, the only conditions you could accept, they will reject it a thousand times under the protection of a parliamentary lie, and if necessary under that of a new military dictatorship.

So then what could you expect from bourgeois republicanism? What would you gain by allying yourself with it? Nothing – and you would lose everything, for you could not ally yourself with it without abandoning the holy cause, the only great cause today: that of the complete emancipation of the proletariat.

It is time for you to proclaim a complete rupture. Your salvation is only at this price.

Does this mean that you should reject all individuals born and raised in the bourgeois class, but who, convinced of the justice of your cause, come to you to serve and to help you triumph? Not at all. Receive them as friends, as equals, as brothers, provided that their will is sincere and that they have given you both theoretical and practical guarantees of the sincerity of their convictions. In theory, they should proclaim loudly and without any hesitation all the principles, conditions and consequences of a serious social and economic equality for all individuals. In practice, they must have firmly and permanently severed their relationship of interest, feeling and vanity with the bourgeois world, which is condemned to die.

You bear within you today all the elements of the power that must renew the world. But the elements of power are still not power.

To constitute a real force, they must be organised; and in order for that organisation to be consistent in its basis and purpose, it must receive within it no foreign

[1] https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/letter-from-bakunin-to-albert-richard-march-12-1870/

elements. So you must keep away from everything that belongs to civilisation, to the legal, political and social organisation of the bourgeoisie. Even when bourgeois politics is red as blood and burning like hot iron, if it does not accept as it direct and immediate aim the destruction of legal property and the political State – the two forts on which all bourgeois domination rests – its triumph could only be fatal to the cause of the proletariat.

Moreover, the bourgeoisie, which has come to the last degree of intellectual and moral impotence, is today incapable of making a revolution by itself. The people alone want it, and have the power to do it. So what is desired by this advance party of the bourgeoisie, represented by the liberals or exclusively political democrats? It wants to seize the direction of the popular movement to once again turn it to its advantage – or as they say themselves, to save the bases of what they call civilisation, the very foundations of bourgeois domination.

Do the workers want to play the roles of dupes one more time? No. But in order not to be dupes what should they do? Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The basis of that organisation is entirely given: It is the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of resistance funds, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally. The creation of chambers of labour [*chambres de travail*] as in Belgium.

And when the hour of the revolution sounds, the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society, including all legal relations. Anarchy, that it to say the true, the open popular revolution: legal and political anarchy, and economic organisation, from top to bottom and from the circumference to the centre, of the triumphant world of the workers.

And in order to save the revolution, to lead it to a good end, even in the midst of that anarchy, the action of a collective, invisible dictatorship, not invested with any power, but [with something] that much more effective and powerful – the natural action of all energetic and sincere socialist revolutionaries, spread over the surface of the country, of all countries, but powerfully united by a common thought and will.[1]

That, my dear friend, is, in my opinion, the only programme which by its bold application will lead not to new deceptions, but to the final triumph of the proletariat.

M. Bakunin

Protest of the Alliance

Michael Bakunin

4 to 24 July 1871

[The leaders have convinced themselves that what they] think and what they want is thought and wanted by their sections, so that they do not even need to consult them to know what they should decide and do on their behalf.

This illusion, this fiction, is unfortunate in every respect. It is particularly unfortunate, first and foremost, with regard to the social morality of the leaders themselves, in that it accustoms them to seeing themselves as absolute masters of a certain mass of men, as permanent leaders whose power is legitimised both by the services they have rendered and by the very duration of that power. Even the best men are easily corrupted, especially when the environment itself fosters corruption through a lack of serious control and constant opposition. In the International, venal corruption is out of the question, because the association is still too poor to provide an income or even fair compensation to any of its leaders. Unlike in the bourgeois world, self-serving calculations and malfeasance are therefore very rare and appear only as exceptions. But there is another kind of corruption to which, unfortunately, the International [Workers'] Association is not unfamiliar: that of vanity and ambition.

In all men there is a natural instinct for command which has its primary source in this fundamental law of life: that no individual can secure their existence or assert their rights except through struggle. This struggle amongst men began with cannibalism; then, continuing through the centuries under different religious banners, it has passed successively – becoming very slowly, little by little, and even sometime seeming to relapse into its primitive

[1] Bakunin here uses the unfortunate term "invisible dictatorship." As can be seen from the context in which it is used here (and elsewhere), he did not mean that militants would seize power over the masses but rather used it to describe the influence of anarchist militants within mass movements, arguing their ideas to win others over to them. For more discussion, see section J.3.7 of *An Anarchist FAQ* volume 2. (*Black Flag*)

barbarity – through all forms of slavery and serfdom. Today it occurs in the dual guise of the exploitation of wage-labour by capital, and of the political, legal, civil, military, police oppression of the State and the official Churches of States, continuing to awaken in all individuals born into society the desire, the need, sometimes the necessity, to command and exploit others.

We see that the instinct for command, in its primitive essence, is a carnivorous instinct, entirely bestial, entirely savage. Under the influence of the intellectual development of men, it becomes, in a sense, idealised and ennobles its forms, presenting itself as the organ of intelligence and the devoted servant of that abstraction or political fiction called the public good; but fundamentally, it remains just as malevolent, even becoming more so, as it expands and intensifies its influence through the applications of science. If there is a devil in all of human history, it is this principle of command. It alone, with the stupidity and ignorance of the masses, on which it always relies and without which it could not exist, it alone has produced all the miseries, all the crimes, and all the ignominies of history.

And inevitably, this cursed principle is found as a natural instinct in every man, without excepting the best. Everyone carries the seed of it within themselves, and every seed, as we know, by a fundamental law of life, must necessarily develop and grow, provided it finds in its environment favourable conditions for its development. These conditions, in human society, are the stupidity, the ignorance, the apathetic indifference, and the servile habits amongst the masses; so it can rightly be said that the masses themselves produce these exploiters, these oppressors, these despots, these executioners of humanity of whom they are the victims. When they are quiescent and when they patiently endure their abjection and their enslavement, the best men born within them, the most intelligent, the most energetic, those who in a different environment could render immense services to humanity, inevitably become despots. They often become so by deluding themselves and believing they are working for the good of those they oppress.

Conversely, in an intelligent, enlightened society, protective of its freedom and willing to defend its rights, even the most selfish, most malevolent individuals inevitably become good. Such is the power of society, a thousand times greater than that of the strongest individuals.

So it is clear that the absence of continuous opposition and control inevitably becomes a source of depravity for all individuals who find themselves invested with any social power; and that those amongst them who are concerned with saving their personal morality should take care not to retain this power for too long, first of all, and then, as long as they hold it, to provoke against themselves this salutary opposition and control.

With the growing authority of the committees, indifference and ignorance amongst the sections have naturally developed… This is a natural consequence of the intellectual and moral apathy of the sections, and this apathy in turn is the equally necessary result of the automatic subordination to which the authoritarianism of the committees has reduced the sections

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This is what the members of the Geneva committees, undoubtedly through ignorance of the dangers they faced from the point of view of their social morality, generally neglected to do. By dint of sacrificing and devoting themselves, they grew accustomed to command and, in a kind of natural and almost inevitable delusion common to those who hold power too long, they came to imagine they were indispensable. This is how, imperceptibly, a kind of governmental aristocracy was formed within the so plainly popular sections of the building workers. We will show shortly what the disastrous consequences were for the organisation of the International Workers' Association in Geneva.

Need it be said how detrimental this state of affairs is to the sections themselves? It more and more reduces them to nothingness or the status of purely fictitious entities that exist only on paper. With the growing authority of the committees, indifference and ignorance amongst the sections have naturally developed in all matters other than strikes and the payment of dues, a payment that, moreover, is carried out with increasing difficultly and in a very irregular manner. This is a natural consequence of the intellectual and moral apathy of the sections, and this apathy in turn is the equally necessary result of the

automatic subordination to which the authoritarianism of the committees has reduced the sections.

Apart from strikes and dues, the building workers' sections have essentially renounced all judgment, deliberation, intervention on all other matters; they simply defer to the decisions of their committees. "We have elected our committee; it is up to them to decide." This is what the building workers often reply to those who try to ascertain their opinion on any issue. They have reached the point where they no longer have any opinion at all, like blank sheets of paper on which their committees can write whatever they want. Provided that their committees do not ask them for too much money and do not press them too hard to pay what they owe, these committees can, without consulting them, decide and do in their name whatever seems good to them with impunity.

This is very convenient for the committees, but it is no way favourable for the social, intellectual and moral development of the section, nor for the real development of the collective power of the International [Workers'] Association. Because in this way, in the end, all that effectively remains are the committees, which, through a kind of fiction common to all governments, give their own will and their own thought for those of their respective sections, while in reality the latter no longer have, in most of the issues debated, either will or thought. But the committees, representing only themselves and having behind them only ignorant and indifferent masses, are now capable of forming only a fictitious power, not a real one. This fictitious power, a detestable and inevitable consequence of authoritarianism once introduced in the organisation of the International's sections, is extremely favourable to the development of all kinds of intrigues, vanities, ambitions and vested interests; it is even excellent at inspiring a puerile self-satisfaction and a [sense of] security as ridiculous as it is fatal to the proletariat; excellent also at frightening the imagination of the bourgeoisie. But it will serve no purpose in the life-or-death struggle that the proletariat of all European countries must now wage against the still all-too-real power of the bourgeois world.

This indifference to general issues, increasingly evident amongst the building workers; this mental laziness that leads them to rely upon the decisions of their committees for all issues; and the resulting habit of automatic and blind subordination, mean that within the committees themselves, the majority of members end up becoming the unthinking instruments of the thoughts and wills of three, two, or sometimes even just one of their comrades, more intelligent, more energetic, more persevering, and more active than the others. As a result, most sections now only consist of masses governed at will either by oligarchies or even by purely individual dictatorships that mask their absolute power under the most democratic forms in the world.

In this situation, there was only one thing to do to seize control of the entire International Workers' Association in Geneva and particularly the group of building workers: to win over, by any means possible, the few most influential leaders of the sections, twenty or thirty individuals at most. Once these were won over and duly subservient, all the building sections were in your hands. This is precisely the method used with great success by the skilful leaders of the Geneva Fabrica.

The apex of the organisation in Geneva proper is the Central Committee of Genva. Each section sends two delegates, so that it should gather at its meetings, now that the number of sections of the International in Geneva has risen to....[1], counting two delegates for each, ... members. It is very rare for the number of delegates actually present at the regular meetings of the Central Committee to reach a third [of that].

The Central Committee is unquestionably the supreme authority in the Geneva International. Thanks to the powers vested in it, and thanks to its direct relations with all the sections, of which it is supposed to be the immediate expression, the constitutional representation and in a way the permanent Parliament, the Central Committee is certainly more powerful in Geneva than the Federal Committee itself. The latter is the exclusive and supreme representative of the interests, of the aspirations, of the thoughts and the collective will of all the sections of French-speaking Switzerland, both with regard to the General Council of the International Workers' Association and to the national organisations of this Association in all other countries. In this respect, it is subordinate, firstly, only to the General Council – against whose decisions, moreover, it can always appeal to the General Congresses – and secondly and even more immediately to the Federal Congresses of the sections of French-speaking Switzerland, which not only have the right to control it and impose their definitive resolutions on it, but also to dissolve it and replace it with another Federal Committee.

[1] Bakunin left the number blank and added in the margin: "The Genevan friends should put in the current figures, which I do not know. In any cases there are more than thirty sections, and consequently more than sixty delegates to the Central Committee." (*Black Flag*)

The Federal Committee also holds supreme control of the newspaper. While the editorial staff is indeed appointed by the Congress of French-speaking Switzerland, the Federal Committee exercises its ultimate oversight, and possesses the undeniable right to impose its own spirit upon it. Provided it knows how to wield this instrument effectively, it wields considerable power, for the newspaper, addressing itself directly to all members of the International, can significantly contribute to instilling within them the same collective direction.

These are the main prerogatives of the Federal Committee. To these must be added the very serious right and duty to take charge of the direction of strikes, as long as the latter, exceeding the limits of a locality, call for the active co-operation or even the material and moral assistance of all the sections of the French-speaking Federation, as well as the sections of other countries.

Apart from these rights, which are so considerable, it has no other rights than those of oversight, arbitration, regulation, and, if necessary, reminder of the fundamental and constitutive principles of the International [Workers'] Association, as formulated by the General Congresses, nor any other duty than that of regular intermediary between the General Council and local organisations. In places where there is a Central Committee, that is to say a local assembly of the sections, the Federal Committee does not have the right to address the latter directly; it can only do so through the Central Committee, which is the natural guardian of freedom and local autonomy against encroachments of power. The Federal Committee cannot therefore exert direct influence and immediate action upon the sections: this power is exclusively reserved for the Central Committee, to which it gives a local power far greater than that of the Federal Committee.

The power of the Central Committee, undoubtedly subordinate to the more formal than real oversight of the Federal Committee, and even more seriously to the criticism of the newspaper – if the Federal Committee even has the courage to use it against it as needed – has no other real limits, in the administration of the locality's internal affairs, then those it may encounter in the autonomy of the sections and in the general assemblies, a kind of local Congress, not representative but truly popular, in the sense that all present members of the International are part of it, and which, in accordance with the statutes adopted by the first French-speaking Swiss Congress held in January 1869 in Geneva, have the right to overturn all the resolutions of the General Committee and even to impose their will upon it, subject to an appeal by the Central Committee to the Federal Committee and to the French-speaking Swiss Congress, an appeal which can only be made in cases where the resolutions taken by a general assembly would be contrary to the fundamental principles of the International [Workers'] Association.

The limits imposed by the autonomy of the sections on the arbitrary power of the Central Committee are very serious where the autonomy of the sections actually exists. Therefore, the Central Committee in Geneva has always respectively deferred to the rights of the sections of the Fabrica, whose solid organisation, as we have observed, is not only prior to the existence of the International [Workers'] Association, but even, in many respects, foreign to, if not entirely contrary to, the spirit and the most positive principles of that Association.

So there remained, for the defence of the independence and the rights of the building workers, only one means: *general assemblies*. Also, it must be said, nothing was more antipathetical to the Central Committee than these truly popular assemblies

This was not the case for the building workers sections, whose organisation, very imperfect and often, as we have already seen, concentrated exclusively in their committees, did not command the same respect from the Central Committee. It was enough for the latter to share its opinion with the committee of the resistant section to break this resistance, of which, moreover, there has almost never been an example.

So there remained, for the defence of the independence and the rights of the building workers, only one means: *general assemblies*. Also, it must be said, nothing was more antipathetical to the Central Committee than these truly popular assemblies, which it always tried to replace with the *assemblies of the committees of all the sections*, that is to say, those of the governmental aristocracy.

We will return to this important point. Now, we must explain the interest that the Central Committee – which, ostensibly, represents not a clique, but all sections – could have in replacing the popular assemblies with these governmental assemblies. Is not the Central Committee itself a kind of popular Parliament elected by universal suffrage in all the sections? Yes, in theory, no in practice. Fictitiously, it represents everyone, but in reality, after a struggle lasting a few months, it ended up representing only Genevan domination.

We will now therefore indicate, as briefly as possible, the main phases of this struggle, which will show us how the Central Committee, after having been a purely popular and democratic institution, gradually became a governmental, [purely] Genevan, and aristocratic institution.

In the International [Workers'] Association of Geneva, the number of building workers sections, together with that of intermediate sections (typographers, tailors, shoemakers, etc.) being greater than the number of sections of the Fabrica, and each section, whatever the number of its members, being represented on the Central Committee by only two delegates, it should have ensued that in this Committee the non-Genevan members would have been in the majority and the Genevans in the minority. It has not always been this way, for the simple reason that several intermediate sections, and even sections of the building workers, although mostly composed of foreigners, had from the beginning the habit of sending Genevan comrades as delegates to the Central Committee, who, obeying their patriotic inspirations, almost always vote with the Fabrica.

But, even though they constituted a numerical minority within the Central Committee, the delegates from Geneva proper had a dominant voice from the outset, and for many reasons. The first is that Geneva's workers, taken as a whole, are much more educated, have much more political experience, and are infinitely more skilled in speaking than the building workers. The second is that the sections of the Fabrica have always delegated to the Central Committee their most intelligent and distinguished members, often even their principal leaders, in whom they had full confidence, and who, in accordance with the duty imposed by the statues on all delegates towards their respective sections, regularly came to report to their constituents on everything they had proposed and voted upon in the Central Committee and to ask them for instructions for their subsequent conduct, so that the Fabrica sections could and can say that they were truly represented in the Central Committee; whereas, most of the time, the representation of the building workers' sections in the Central Committee is nothing but a pure fiction.

The strength of the building workers, as we have already said, lies not in the scientific or political development of their intelligence, but in the accuracy and depth of their instinct, as well as their natural common sense which almost always allows them to sense the right path, when they do not let themselves be led astray by the sophisms of some rhetorician and by the lies of some wicked schemers, which unfortunately happens to them too often. They have amongst them few educated men, accustomed to public speaking and experienced in organisation and administration. They reserve their most capable comrades for their section committees, and they often send the least capable and least zealous as delegates to the Central Committee. These delegates, understanding little or nothing of the importance of their mission, often miss the meetings of this committee, and are almost never in the habit of coming to their sections to report on the resolutions and votes, in which, even when they are present, they usually only take part in a mechanical and passive way.

It is understandable that facing such a majority, even when there is a majority, the purely Genevan minority must exert a considerable influence. Well, this influence, which was constantly growing, was restrained for a time by a single man, by comrade *Brosset*, a locksmith.

We do not need to say who Brosset is. Combining genuine kindness and great simplicity of manners with an energetic, ardent and proud character; intelligent, talented, and witty, and able to grasp through his intellect what he lacked the time or resources to understand and assimilate through science; passionately devoted to the cause of the proletariat, and fiercely protective of popular rights; as such, a relentless enemy of all authoritarian pretensions and tendencies, he was a true tribune of the people. Highly esteemed and loved by all building workers, he became, in a sense, their natural leader, and, as such, he alone or almost alone, both in the Central Committee and in the governmental assemblies of the committees, as well as in the popular assemblies, stood up to the Fabrica.

For several months, and particularly from the end of the great strike of April 1868 until his election as president of the Federal Committee of French-speaking Switzerland by the first French-speaking Congress in January 1869, he remained at the forefront. This as the heroic period of his activity within the International

Workers' Association. In the Central Committee as well as in the committee assemblies, he was truly alone in his fight, and, very often, despite the powerful Geneva coalition, supported by all the reactionary elements within these committees, he achieved victory. You can imagine how much he was hated by the leaders of the Fabrica.

The main subject of the discussion was this: Will the International [Workers'] Association in Geneva organise itself according to the true and fully international principles of this institution, or, while keeping its great name of International, will it become an exclusively, narrowly Genevan institution? – a goal towards which the workers of Geneva themselves naturally tend with all their efforts, the masses no doubt without realising it themselves, but the leaders with full knowledge of the facts, knowing very well that, in this latter case, the International would not fail to soon become, in their hands, a very powerful means of triumphant intervention in the local politics of the canton of Geneva, for the benefit not of socialism but of the radical party.

any *prerequisite* politics, that is to say which precedes socialism and which is consequently made apart from it, which means against it, can only be exclusively bourgeois

That was the beginning, in the Geneva International, of the eternal debate between bourgeois radicalism and the revolutionary socialism of the proletariat; a debate which, being then only in its infancy, was naturally still shrouded in uncertainty, conducted by the two opposing parties under the influence of instinctive aspirations rather than with a reasoned knowledge of their goals, and which was only brought into full clarity later, in 1869, under the combined influence of the newspaper *Égalité* and the propaganda of the Alliance section.

It is not to you, comrades, that we will need to explain how right those who defended the party of revolutionary socialism were, and how wrong were those who wanted to make the International an instrument of bourgeois radicalism, how wrong the latter were in doing so, unknowingly and unwillingly no doubt, working towards the total ruin of the spirit, the coherence and even the future of the International [Workers'] Association.

You are well aware that this same debate arose at the last General Congress of the Association, held in Basel in September 1869, and that, whatever our political opponents may say, the party of bourgeois radicalism, or rather that of the equivocal reconciliation of working-class socialism with the policies of the radical bourgeoise, was tacitly condemned by the majority of that Congress. It was in vain that the majority of the delegates from German-speaking Switzerland, joined with the two delegates from the Geneva Fabrica and united with almost all the German delegates, wanted this Congress to discuss the well-known question of the *referendum* or the direct legislation by the people. Relegated to the last item on the agenda, it was eliminated for lack of time, and because it was clear that the majority of the Congress was against it.

For you as for us, it is clear that that the revolutionary socialist portion of the proletariat cannot ally itself with any fraction, even the most advanced, of bourgeois politics without immediately becoming, against itself, the instrument of that politics; and that the programme of the *Social Democratic Party* in Germany, voted by the Congress of this party in August 1869 – a programme which, fortunately, the very force of circumstances imposes upon it the necessity of radically modifying today, and which, having declared that *the conquest of political rights was the* **perquisite condition** *for the emancipation of the proletariat*, thereby placed itself in flagrant contradiction with the fundamental principle of the International [Workers'] Association, by making bourgeois politics the basis of socialism (for any *prerequisite* politics, that is to say which precedes socialism and which is consequently made apart from it, which means against it, can only be exclusively bourgeois) – that this programme, we say, could only lead to putting the socialist movement of the proletariat in tow of bourgeois radicalism.

[…]

Because we have vigorously rejected any collusion or alliance with even the most radical bourgeois politics, it has been foolishly or slanderously claimed that, by considering only the economic or material aspects of the social question, we were indifferent to the great question of liberty, and that by this very fact we were placing ourselves in the ranks of reaction. […]

These gentlemen are greatly mistaken – and, "knowingly or unknowingly", they are trying to deceive the public – about us. We love freedom much more

than they do; we love it to the point of wanting it complete and total; we want its reality and not its fiction; and it is for this very reason that we absolutely reject any bourgeois alliance, being convinced that any freedom won with the help of bourgeois politics, by the means and the weapons of the bourgeoisie, or by a duplicitous alliance with it, may be very real and very profitable for the bourgeois gentlemen, but for the people will never by anything but a fiction.

Gentlemen of the bourgeoisie, from all parties and even the most progressive, however cosmopolitan they may be, when it comes to making money through the ever-expanding exploitation of the people's labour, in politics they are all fervent and fanatical patriots of the State, patriotism being in reality, as the illustrious assassin of the Parisian proletariat and current saviour of France, M. Thiers, has just so aptly stated, nothing but the passion and the cult of the national State. But whoever says State says domination, and whoever says domination says exploitation, which proves that this term *People's State* (*Volksstaat*), which has unfortunately become and still remains today the slogan of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, is a ridiculous contradiction, a fiction, a lie, undoubtedly unconscious on the part of those who advocate it, and for the proletariat a very dangerous trap. The State, however popular it may appear in its forms, will always be an institution of domination and exploitation, and consequently a permanent source of slavery and misery for the masses. Therefore, there is no other way to emancipate peoples economically and politically, to give them both well-being and freedom, than to abolish the State, all States, and thereby kill, once and for all, what has hitherto been called *politics*; politics being precisely nothing other than the functioning, the manifestation both internal and external, of the action of the State, that is to say, the practice, the art and the science of dominating and exploiting the masses for the benefit of the privileged classes.

It is therefore not true to say that we disregard politics. We do not disregard it, since we positively want to destroy it. And this is the essential point on which we absolutely separate ourselves from the radical bourgeois politicians and socialists. Their politics consist in the use, reform and the transformation of politics and the State; whereas our politics, the only one we admit, is the total *abolition* of the State, and of politics which is its necessary manifestation.

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And it is only because we sincerely want this abolition that we believe that we have the right to call ourselves internationalists and revolutionary socialists; for whoever wants to conduct politics differently than we do, whoever does not want the abolition of politics with us, will necessarily will have to do the politics of the State, patriotic and bourgeois, that is to say, deny in fact, in the name of his great or small national State, the human solidarity of the peoples outwith it, as well as the economic and social emancipation of the masses within it.

[...]

All these questions were discussed, with the secrecy befitting governmental deliberations, within the Central Committee in Geneva, and the common people, the mass of the International [Workers'] Association, were never more than very imperfectly informed of the struggles that took place in this Upper House of senators. Yet they were repeated, undoubtedly not in the full, unvarnished form, but incidentally and more or less disguised, both in the *general assemblies* and in the monthly meetings of the *Central Section*. In both cases, the ardent defender of the true principles of the International, of the independence and dignity of the building workers and of the sovereign rights of the "popular rabble" obviously threatened by the growing ambition and the encroachments of the power of the senators of the committees, Comrade Brosset was powerfully supported by Comrades Serno-Soloviévitch, Perron, Ph. Becker, Guétat, Monchal, Lindegger, and several others, amongst whom we must not forget M. Henri Perret, the perpetual secretary of the Geneva International, who, with the tact proper to Statesmen, in all public discussions, whatever his private opinions may be, always manages to appear to share the opinion of the majority.

In the great *public assemblies*, it was naturally the broadest ideas, the most generous opinions, that

always prevailed. Most of the time, when the minds of the masses have not been distorted for a long time by a self-serving and skilful propagation of slanders and lies, a kind of collective instinct arises in popular gatherings which irresistibly pushes them towards what is just, toward what is true, and which is so powerful that even the most recalcitrant individuals are swept along by it. The schemers, the cunning, all-powerful in the more or less secretive meetings of the committees, usually lose much of their confidence before these large assemblies where common sense, supported by this instinct, exposes their sophisms. There generally manifests such a contagion of justice and truth that it has very often happened that in the general assemblies of all the sections, even a large number of Fabrica workers – the common people of the Genevan sections themselves – carried away by the common enthusiasm, voted for resolutions contrary to the ideas and measures proposed by their leaders.

Moreover, as we have already noted, these general assemblies were never favoured by the latter, who always preferred the *assemblies of the committees of all the sections*. These governmental and hidden assemblies, almost always held behind closed doors, are inaccessible to the membership of the International. Only the members, more or less permanent and unchanging, of the committees of the sections have the right to take part. Gathered in a private and closed assembly, they together constitute the true governmental aristocracy of the Association. It is a truth often observed it is enough for a man, even the most liberal and widely popular, to be part of any government for him to change his nature; unless he is frequently immersed back into the popular element, unless he is bound by permanent transparency and publicity, unless he is subjected to the beneficial, continuous regime of popular control and criticism which must always remind him that he is not the master, nor even the guardian of the masses, but only their agent or their elected and at any moment revocable official, he inevitably risks corrupting himself through exclusive dealings with aristocrats like himself, and of becoming a pretentious and vain fool, all puffed up with the feeling of his ridiculous importance.

This was the fate of the members of the Geneva committees of the International had condemned themselves by refusing the membership access to their meetings. The spirit that presided over these meetings was necessarily opposed to that which reigned in the popular assemblies: as generous and broad as the latter were, the former had to be narrow. It could no longer be the instinct for great ideas and great thoughts [that prevailed]; it was necessarily that of a false wisdom, of miserable calculations and shabby slyness. In short, it was an authoritarian and governmental spirit: not that of the principal representatives of the great mass of the International, but that of the leaders of the Geneva Fabrica.

It is understandable that these Gentlemen are very fond of these committee meetings. They provide fertile ground for the full display of their Genevan skills; they reign supreme there, and they have made ample use of them to indoctrinate, to discipline according to their own views and, if we may put it this way, to “Genevise” all the principal members of the foreigner section committees, gradually instilling in their minds and hearts the governmental and bourgeois instincts that have always driven them. Indeed, these assemblies of the section committees offered them the advantage of being able to personally know the most prominent and influential members of these sections, and it was enough for them to convert these members to their policies to become the absolute master of all the sections.

We have also seen that before January 1869, when the new statutes adopted by the first Congress of French-speaking Switzerland came into effect, it was not the general assemblies, but the assemblies of the committees that were considered by the party of Genevan reaction as the supreme legal authority of the Geneva International. Moreover, the general assemblies were neither regular nor frequent. They were only convened for extraordinary cases, and then their agenda, determined in advance, was always so full that very little time remained for the discussion of questions of principle.

But there was another terrain on which these questions could be debated with much more freedom: it was the monthly and sometimes even extraordinary meetings of the *Central Section*.

The Central Section, as we have said, was the seed, the first established body of the International Workers’ Association in Geneva; it should have remained its soul, its inspiration, and its permanent propagandist. It is in this sense, no doubt, that it has often been called the “Section of Initiative”. It had created the International in Geneva; it was to preserve and develop its spirit. Since all the other sections are trade sections, the workers are brought together and organised not by the idea, but by fact and by the very necessities of their identical work. This economic fact, that of specialised industry and the particular conditions of its exploitation by capital, the close and very specific solidarity of interests, needs, sufferings and aspirations that exist amongst all the workers who are part of the same trade section, forms the real basis of their association. The idea comes later, as the explanation or as the

equivalent expression of the development and the conscious, reflective awareness of this fact.

A worker needs no great intellectual preparation to become a member of the trade section that represents his profession. He is already a member before he even knows it, quite naturally. What he needs to know is, first of all, that he toils and exhausts himself working, and that this work which kills him, barely enough to feed his family and to poorly replenish his drained strength, enriches his boss, and that consequently the latter is his ruthless exploiter, his tireless oppressor, his enemy, his master, to who he owes nothing but the hatred and revolt of the slave, except to grant him later, once he has defeated him, the justice and fraternity of the free man.

He must also know, something which is not difficult to understand, that alone he is powerless against his master, and that, in order not to be crushed by him, he must first of all associate with his workshop comrades, remaining loyal to them in all the struggles which arise in the workshop against this master.

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He must also understand that the union of the workers in the same workshop is not enough; that all workers of the same trade, working in the same locality, must be united. Once he understand this – and, unless he is exceptionally foolish, daily experience should soon teach him this – he consciously becomes a devoted member of his trade section. The latter is already constituted as a fact, but it does not yet have international consciousness; it is still merely a local fact. The same experience, this time collective, soon shatters the narrow confines of this exclusively local solidarity in the mind of even the least intelligent worker. A crisis arises, a strike. Workers of the same trade, in a particular place, unite and demand from their employers either a wage increase or a reduction in working hours. The bosses refuse to grant these demands; and since they cannot do without workers, they bring them in either from other towns or provinces of the same country, or even from foreign countries. But in these countries, workers toil harder for less pay; the bosses can therefore sell their products more cheaply, and by doing so, competing with the products of the country where workers earn more with less effort, they force the bosses of that country to reduce wages and increase the workload of their workers; hence, in the long run, the relatively bearable situation of workers in one country can only be maintained if it is equally bearable in all other countries. All these phenomena are repeated too often for them to escape the observation of even the simplest workers. They eventually understand that to protect themselves against the exploitative and ever-increasing oppression of the bosses, it is not enough to organise local solidarity; they must bring into this solidarity all workers of the same trade, not only those working in the same province or country, but in all countries, and especially those more closely linked by trade and industry. Then is formed organisation that is neither local nor even merely national, but truly *international* for the same trade.

But this is not yet the organisation of workers in general, it is still only the international organisation of a single trade. For the uneducated worker to recognise the real solidarity that necessarily exists between all these trades, in every country of the world, other workers, whose understanding is more developed and who possess some notions of economic science, must came to his aid. Not that he lacks daily experience on this point, but because the economic phenomena through which this undeniable solidarity manifests itself are infinitely more complicated, so that their true meaning can escape and indeed often does escape less educated workers.

Assuming that international solidarity is perfectly established in one trade and not in others, it will necessarily follow that in that industry the wages of workers will be higher and the working hours will be shorter than in all other industries. And since it has been proven that, as a consequence of the competition that capitalists and bosses have amongst themselves, the real profit of both has no other source than the relative meagreness of wages and the greatest possible number of working hours, it is clear that, in the industry in which the workers are internationally united, the capitalists and bosses will earn less than in all the others; as a result, little by little, capitalists will move their capital and bosses their credit and exploitative activity to industries that are less organised or not organised at all. But this will

necessarily lead to a decrease in demand for workers in internationally organised industry, and this will naturally worsen the situation of these workers, who will be forced, in order not to starve, to work more and be content with lower wages. Hence it follows that working conditions can neither worsen nor improve in any industry without workers in all other industries soon feeling the effects, and that all trades in all countries of the world are truly and indissolubly linked.

This interdependence is demonstrated by science as much as by experience, science being, moreover, nothing but universal experience highlighted, compared, systematised, and duly explained. But it also manifests in the workers' world by the mutual, profound, and passionate sympathy which grows and intensifies in the heart of the entire proletariat as economic realities develop and their political and social consequences, even more bitter for workers of all trades, are felt more and more. The workers of every trade and every country, informed, on the one hand, by the material and moral support they find in times of struggle from workers of all other trades and all other countries, and, on the other hand, by the disapproval and systematic and hateful opposition they encounter not only from their own bosses, but also from the bosses of industries far distant from their own, from the bourgeoise as a whole, come to a full understanding of their situation and the fundamental conditions for their liberation. They see that the social world is truly divided into three main categories: 1) the countless millions of exploited proletariats; 2) a few hundred thousand exploiters of the second and even third order; and 3) a few thousand, or at most a few tens of thousands, of larger predators or well-fed capitalists who, by directly exploiting the second category and indirectly, through it, the first, put into their huge pockets at least half of the profits from the collective labour of all humanity.

From the moment when a worker becomes aware of this particular and constant fact, however developed his intelligence may be, he cannot fail to soon understand that, if there is a means of salvation for him, this means can only be the establishment and organisation of the closest practical solidarity between the proletarians of the whole world, without distinction of industries and countries, in the struggle against the exploiting bourgeoisie.

Here then is the ready-made basis of the great *International Workers' Association*. It was given to us not by a theory from the head of one or a few profound thinkers, but rather by the real development of economic facts, by the very hard trials these facts impose upon the working masses, and by the reflections and thoughts that they naturally bring forth within them. For the Association to have been founded, all the necessary elements that constitute it – economic facts, experiences, aspirations and thoughts of the proletariat – had to have already developed to a degree intense enough to form a solid foundation. Within the proletariat itself, scattered throughout all countries, there had to be groups or associations of workers advanced enough to take the initiative in this great movement for the liberation of the proletariat. After this undoubtedly comes the personal initiative of a few intelligent individuals devoted to the people's cause.

[…]

The Central Sections do not represent any specific industry, since the most advanced workers from every conceivable industry are gathered there. What, then, do they represent? The very idea of the International. What is their mission? The development and propagation of this idea. And what is this idea? It is the emancipation not only of the workers of this industry or that country, but of all possible industries and of all countries of the world; it is the general emancipation of all those in the world who, eking out their miserable daily existence by some kind of productive work, are economically exploited and politically oppressed by capital, or rather by the owners and privileged intermediaries of capital. Such is the negative, belligerent or revolutionary strength of the idea. And the positive strength? It is the foundation of a new social world, based solely on emancipated labour, and creating itself, upon the ruins of the old world, through the organisation and free federation of workers' associations, freed from the yoke, both economic and political, of the privileged classes.

These two sides of the same question, one negative and the other positive are inseparable. No one can want to destroy without having at least a remote conception, true or false, of the order of things which, according to him, should succeed the one which presently exists; and the more vivid this conception is in him, the more powerful his destructive force becomes; and the closer it comes to the truth, that is, the more it confirms to the necessary development of the actual social world, the more the effects of its destructive action become beneficial and useful. For destructive action is always determined, not only in its essence and the degree of its intensity, but also in its methods, in its ways, and the means it employs, by the positive ideal that constitutes its primary inspiration, its soul.

What is exceedingly remarkable, and what has been observed and noted many times by a great number of writers of very diverse tendencies, is that today only

the proletariat possesses a positive idea towards which it strives with all the passion, still almost untouched, of its being; it sees before it a star, a sun which illuminates it, which already warms it, at least in its imagination, in its faith, and which shows it with certain clarity the path it must follow, while at the same time all the privileged and so-called enlightened classes find themselves plunged into a dismal, frightening darkness. They see nothing before them, believe in and aspire to nothing, and want nothing but the eternal preservation of the *status quo*, all the whole acknowledging that the *status quo* is worthless. Nothing proves better that these classes are doomed to die and that the future belongs to the proletariat. It is the "barbarians" (the proletarians) who today represent faith in human destiny and the future of civilisation, while the "civilised" find their salvation only in barbarism: the massacre of the Communards and a return to the Pope. These are the last two words of privileged civilisation.

The central sections are the active and vibrant centres where the new faith is maintained, developed and explained. No one enters them as a particular worker of this or that trade, with a view to the particular organisation of that trade; all enter only as workers in general, with a view to the general emancipation and organisation of labour and the new social world founded upon labour, in all countries. The workers who are part of it, leaving their status as particular or "real" workers at the threshold, in the sense of specialisation, present themselves there as workers "in general". Workers of what? Workers of the idea, of propaganda and of the organisation of the economic and militant power of the International: workers of the Social Revolution.

We see that the central sections exhibit a completely different character from that of the trade sections, and are even diametrically opposed. While the latter, following the path of natural development, begin with the fact to arrive at the idea, the central sections, following on the contrary that of ideal or abstract development, begin with the idea to arrive at the fact. It is evident that, in contrast to the thoroughly realistic or positive method of the trade sections, the method of the central sections appears artificial and abstract. This way of proceeding from idea to fact is precisely the one eternally employed by idealists of all schools, theologians and metaphysicians, and whose ultimate impotence lies in the absolute impossibility, starting from the abstract idea, of arriving at the real and concrete fact.

If there had only been central sections in the International Workers' Association, there is no doubt that it would not have attained even a hundredth of the considerable power of which it now boasts. The central sections would have been nothing more than workers' academies where all social questions, including of course that of the organisation of labour, would have been eternally debated, but without the slightest serious attempt or even any possibility of realisation; and this is for the very simple reason that labour "in general" is merely an abstract ideas that finds its "reality" only in an immense diversity of specialised industries, each with its own nature and specific conditions, which cannot be guessed, much less determined, by abstract thought, but which, manifesting themselves only through their actual development, can alone determine their particular balance, their relationships, and their place in the general organisation of labour – an organisation which, like all general things, must be the result constantly produced anew by the living and real combination of all particular industries, and not their abstract principle, violently and doctrinally imposed, as the German communists, partisans of the *People's State*, would have it.

If there had been only central sections in the International, they would probably still have succeeded in forming popular conspiracies to overthrow the current order of things – conspiracies of intention, but too powerless to achieve their goal, because they could never have drawn in and received into their ranks more than a very small number of workers, the most intelligent, the most energetic, the most convinced, and the most devoted. The vast majority, the millions of proletarians, would have remained outside, and, in order to overthrow and destroy the political and social order that crushes us today, the support of these millions is necessary.

Only individuals, and only a very small number of individuals, allow themselves to be guided by the abstract and pure "idea". The millions, the masses, not only in the proletariat, but also in the enlightened and privileged classes, are never swayed except by the power and logic of "facts", most of the time understanding and considering only their immediate interests or their passions of the moment, always more or less blindly. Therefore, in order to interest and draw the entire proletariat into the work of the international, it was necessary and it still is necessary to approach them not with general and abstract ideas, but with a real and living understanding of their real ills; and their daily ills, although presenting a general character to the thinker, and although being in reality particular effects of general and enduring causes, are infinitely diverse, take on a multitude of different aspects, produced by a multitude of passing and partial causes. Such is the daily reality of these evils. But the

mass of the proletariat, which is forced to live from day to day, and which hardly finds a moment of leisure to think about tomorrow, grasps the evils from which it suffers, and of which it is eternally the victim, precisely and exclusively in this reality, and never or almost never in their generality.

Therefore, to touch the heart and win the trust, approval, support, cooperation of the uneducated proletariat – and unfortunately, the vast majority of the proletariat still falls into this category – we must begin by speaking to him not about the general ills of the entire international proletariat, nor about the general causes that give rise to them, but about his particular, daily, entirely personal ills. We need to talk to him about his own job and the conditions of his work specifically in the locality where he lives; about the hardship and excessive extent of his daily work, the inadequacy of his wages, the wickedness of his boss, the high cost of food and the impossibility for him to feed and raise his family properly.

this double solidarity of workers of the same trade initially, then of workers of all trades or of all trades organised into different sections, is not limited to the locality, but, extending far beyond all borders, encompasses the whole world of workers, the proletariat of all countries, powerfully organised for defence, for the war against the bourgeoisie's exploitation

And in offering him ways to combat his ills and to improve his position, we must not initially speak to him of those general and revolutionary means which now constitute the programme of the International Workers' Association, such as the abolition of hereditary individual property and the establishment of collective property; the abolition of juridical right and of the State, and their replacement by the organisation and free federation of productive associations; he would probably understand nothing of all these means, and it was even possible that, under the influence of the religious, political and social ideas that governments and priests had tried to instil in him, he would reject with distrust and anger the imprudent propagandist who tried to convert him with such arguments. No, he should only be initially offered means whose usefulness his natural common sense and daily experience could neither fail to recognise nor reject. These initial means are, as we have already said, the establishment of a complete solidarity of defence and resistance, with all his workshop comrades, against their common boss or master; and, then, the extension of this solidarity to all the workers against all the bosses of the same trade, in the same locality, that is to say his formal entry as a full and active member in the section of his trade, a section affiliated with the International Workers' Association.

After joining the section, the new worker learns a great many things. It is explained that the same solidarity which exists between all members of the same section is also established between all the different sections or between all the trades of the same locality; that the organisation of this broader solidarity, which embraces equally the workers of all trades, has become necessary because the bosses of all trades agree amongst themselves to reduce all men forced to earn their living through work to increasingly miserable conditions. It is then explained that this double solidarity of workers of the same trade initially, then of workers of all trades or of all trades organised into different sections, is not limited to the locality, but, extending far beyond all borders, encompasses the whole world of workers, the proletariat of all countries, powerfully organised for defence, for the war against the bourgeoisie's exploitation.

From the moment he became a member of a section of the International, better than through the verbal explanations he received from his comrades, he soon recognised all these things through his personal experience, now inseparable from and united with that of all the other members of the section. His trade, driven to the brink by the greed and harshness of the bosses, goes on strike. But every strike, for workers who live solely on their wages, is an excruciatingly painful ordeal. They earn nothing, yet their families, they children, and their own stomachs continue to demand their daily bread, and they have nothing in reserve. The strike fund they have painstakingly managed to raise is insufficient to support everyone for days, and sometimes even weeks. They would starve to death or be forced to submit to the harshest conditions imposed upon them by the greed and insolence of their bosses, if they did not receive outside help. But who will provide this aid? Certainly not the bourgeoisie, who are all in league against the workers; it can only be the workers of other trades and other countries. And indeed, this aid arrives, brought or sent by other sections of the International, both locally and from foreign countries. Such an experience, repeated many

times, demonstrates, better than any words, the beneficent power of international solidarity within the world of labour.

The worker who joins a section to share in the benefits of this solidarity is not asked about his political or religious principles. He is asked only one thing: Does he want to accept, along with the benefits of the association, all its consequences, sometimes painful, and all its duties? Does he still want to remain loyal to the section through all the twists and turns of this struggle, initially purely economic, and henceforth align all his actions with the resolutions of the majority, insofar as these resolutions have a direct or indirect connection to this same struggle against the bosses? In short, the only solidarity offered to him as a benefit and imposed upon him at the same time as a duty is, in the broadest sense of the word, *economic solidarity*. But once this solidarity is seriously accepted and well established, it produces everything else – all the most sublime and subversive principles of the International, the most destructive to religion, to judicial law and to the State, to authority both divine and human, the most revolutionary in a word, from a socialist point of view, being nothing but the natural, necessary developments of this economic solidarity. And the immense practical advantage of the trade sections over the central sections consists precisely in this, that these developments, these principles are demonstrated to the workers not by theoretical reasoning, but by the living and tragic experience of a struggle which becomes every day wider, deeper, more terrible: so that the least educated, least prepared, most gentle worker, drawn ever further by the very consequences of this struggle, ends up recognising himself as a revolutionary, an anarchist and an atheist, without often himself knowing how he became so.

It is clear that only the trade sections can give this practical education to their members, and that only they can consequently draw the mass of the proletariat into the organisation of the International, this mass, we have said, without whose powerful support the triumph of the social revolution will never be possible.

If there had only been central section in the International, it would have been nothing but souls without bodies, magnificent dreams but without any possibility of realisation.

Fortunately, the central sections, offshoots of the main centre that had been formed in London, had been founded not by bourgeois, not by professional scholars, nor by politicians, but by socialist workers. Workers, and this is their immense advantage over the bourgeoisie, thanks for their economic situation, and also because they have thus far been spared the doctrinaire, classical, idealist and metaphysical education that poisons bourgeoise youth, possess an eminently practical and positive mindset. They are not satisfied with ideas; they need facts, and they only believe in ideas insofar as they are supported by facts. This fortunate disposition enabled them to avoid the two pitfalls against which all revolutionary attempts by the bourgeoisie fail: the academy, and the Platonic conspiracy. Moreover, the programme of the International Workers' Association, drafted in London and definitely accepted by the Congress of Geneva (1866), by proclaiming that the *economic emancipation of the working classes is the great goal to which every political movement must be subordinated as a mere means*, and that *all efforts made thus far have failed for lack of solidarity between the workers of the various professions in each country and of a fraternal union between workers of the various countries*, clearly indicated to them the only path they could, that they should, follow.

Above all, they had to address the masses in the name of their economic emancipation, not political revolution; in the name of their material interests first, to arrive later at their moral interests, the latter, as collective interests, always being only the expression and logical consequence of the former. They could not wait for the masses to come to them; they had to go and find them where they were, in their daily reality, and that reality was daily work, specialised and divided into trades, already organised to varying degrees by the necessities of collective work in each particular industry, to make them adhere to the economic goal, to the common action of the great Association of workers of all countries, to affiliate them, in short, to [the general organisation of] the International, while leaving them their autonomy and their particular organisation. Which is to say that the first thing they had to do, and did indeed do, was to organise, around each central section, as many trade sections as there were different industries.

It was in this way that the central sections, which in each country represented the soul or spirit of the International, took shape and became real and powerful organisations. Many believe that once this mission was accomplished, the central sections should dissolve, leaving only the trade sections. In our view, this is a grave error. For if the central sections alone, unsupported by…[1]

[1] The next page is missing presumably lost at the printers when the section published as "The Organisation of the International" was typeset for inclusion in *L'Almanach du Peuple*. (*Black Flag*)

The Organisation of the International

Michael Bakunin

L'Almanach du Peuple pour 1872[1]

The immense task that the International Workers' Association has set for itself, that of the definite and complete emancipation of the workers and the people's labour from the yoke of all exploiters of this labour, from the bosses, from the owners of raw materials and of the instruments of production, in short from all the representatives of capital, is not only an economic or simply material undertaking, it is at the same time and to the same degree a social, philosophical and moral undertaking; it is also, if you will, an eminently political work, but only in the sense of the destruction of all politics, by the abolition of States.

We do not believe it necessary to demonstrate that in the current political, legal and social organisation of the most civilised countries, the economic emancipation of the workers is impossible and that consequently to achieve it and to realise it fully, it will be necessary to destroy all current institutions: State, Church, Law Court, Bank, University, Officialdom, Army and Police, which are in fact only so many fortresses erected by privilege against the proletariat; and it is not enough to overthrow them in one country, they must be overthrown in all countries, because since the foundation of modern States in the 17th and 18th centuries, there has existed between all these institutions, across the borders of all countries, an ever-increasing solidarity and a very strong international alliance.

The task that the International Workers' Association has set itself is therefore nothing less than the complete liquidation of the political, religious, legal and social world currently existing, and its replacement by a new economic, philosophical and social world. But such a gigantic undertaking could never be accomplished if it did not have at its disposal two equally powerful, equally gigantic levers, and each complementing the other; the first is the ever-growing intensity of the needs, sufferings and economic demands of the masses; the second is the new social philosophy, an eminently realistic and popular philosophy, theoretically inspired only by real science, that is to say experimental and rational at the same time, and admitting no other bases than human principles, an expression of the eternal needs of the masses, those of equality, liberty and universal solidarity.

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Driven by these needs, it is in the name of these principles that the people must prevail. These principles are neither foreign nor even new to it, in the sense that, as we have just said, it has always *instinctively* carried it within itself. It has always aspired to its emancipation from all the yokes that have enslaved it, and since it is the worker, the provider of society, the creator of civilisation and all wealth – the last slave, the most enslaved of all slaves; and as it cannot emancipate itself without emancipating everyone else with it, it has always aspired to the emancipation of everyone, that is to say, to universal freedom. It has always passionately dreamt of equality, which is the supreme condition of freedom; and unhappy, eternally crushed in the individual existence of each of its children, it has always sought its salvation in solidarity. Up to now, solidaric well-being having been unknown or at least little known, and living contentedly has meant living selfishly at the expense of others through exploitation and subjugation, only the unfortunate, and consequently the masses, have felt and realised fraternity.

[1] This article was included with some additions and minor changes in "Protestation de l'Alliance" written between 4 and 24 July 1871 and included in volume VI of Michel Bakounine, *Œuvres* (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1913). We have added significant additions from this text enclosed by curly brackets ({}). The "Protestation de l'Alliance" version is included by Robert M. Cutler (trans. and ed.) in *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869-1871* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Promethus Books, 1994). (*Black Flag*)

Therefore, social science, as a moral doctrine, does nothing more than develop and formulate popular instincts. But between these instincts and this science, there is nevertheless an abyss that must be bridged. For if just instincts had sufficed for the liberation of peoples, they would have been liberated long ago. These instincts did not prevent the masses from accepting, in the so melancholic, so tragic course of their history, all the religious, political, economic and social absurdities of which they have been eternally the victims.

It is true that the cruel experiences through which they were condemned to pass were not all lost on the masses. These experiences created within them a kind of historical consciousness and a traditional, practical knowledge, which very often serves as their substitute for theoretical knowledge. For example, we can be certain that today no people of Western Europe will again allow itself to be led astray by a new religious or messianic charlatan or by any duplicitous politician. We can also say that the need for an economic and social revolution is keenly felt today amongst the popular masses of Europe; for if the collective instinct of the masses had not so clearly, so deeply, so resolutely expressed itself in this direction, there would be no socialists in the world, even if they were men of the greatest genius, who would have been able to rouse them.

The people are ready; they are suffering greatly, and, what is more, they are beginning to understand that they are not at all obliged to suffer, and, tired of foolishly directing their aspirations towards heaven, they are no longer willing to show much patience on earth. The masses, in short, independently even from any propaganda, have sincerely become socialists. The universal and profound sympathy that the Paris Commune has found amongst the proletariat of all countries is proof of this.

But the masses are might, at least the essential element of all might; what do they lack to overthrow an order of things that they detest? They lack two things: organisation and science, precisely the two things that today constitute and have always constituted the power of all governments.

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So, organisation, first of all, which, moreover, cannot be established without the assistance of science.

Thanks to military organisation, a battalion of a thousand armed men can, and indeed do, hold in check a million people who are also armed, but disorganised. Thanks to bureaucratic organisation, the State, with a few hundred thousand employees, can subjugate vast countries. Therefore, to create a popular power capable of crushing the military and civil power of the State, it is necessary to organise the proletariat.

This is precisely what the International Workers' Association is doing, and the day that it has admitted and organised within its ranks half, a third, a quarter, or even just a tenth of the proletariat of Europe, the State, States, will have ceased to exist. Since the organisation of the International has as its aim not the creation of new States or despotisms, but the root-and-branch destruction of all specific forms of domination, it must have an essentially different character from the organisation of States. Just as the former is authoritarian, artificial and violent, foreign and hostile to the natural development of popular interests and instincts, the organisation of the International must be free, natural, and entirely in accordance with these interests and instincts. But what is the natural organisation of the masses? It is that which is based on the different conditions of their real, daily life, by different kinds of work, it is organisation by trades. Once all industries are represented in the International, including the different uses of land, its organisation, the organisation of the popular masses will be accomplished.

{For it is indeed enough that one worker in ten *earnestly* and *with full awareness* join the Association for the remaining nine-tenths outside the organisation to nevertheless be subject to its invisible influence, and in critical moments, without suspecting it themselves, follow its guidance, as much as this is necessary for the salvation of the proletariat.}

It might be objected that this method of organising the International's influence on the masses seems to seek to establish, on the ruins of the old authorities and existing governments, a new system of authority and a new government. But this would be a profound error. The organised action of the International on the masses will always be distinguished from all government and from the action of all States by this essential characteristic of being only the natural, unofficial action of a simple opinion, excluding any authority.[1] Between the power of the State and that of

[1] In "Protestation de l'Alliance" the sentence after "profound error" is expanded upon: {The government of the International, if government there is, or rather its organised action on the masses, will always be distinguished from all governments and from the action of all states by this essential property, of never being anything but the organisation of the action – unofficial and not vested with any authority or political force whatsoever, but entirely natural – of a more or less numerous group of individuals inspired by the same thought and tending towards the same

the International is the same difference that exists between the official action of the State and the natural action of a club. The International has and will never have anything but a great power of opinion and will never be anything but the organisation of the natural action of individuals upon the mases, whereas the State and all the institutions of the State – Church, university, law court, bureaucracy, treasury, police and army – demand their passive obedience, doubtless within the always very flexible limits recognised and determined by laws, doubtless without neglecting to corrupt as much as they can the opinion and will of the subjects of the State, yet apart from this opinion and this will, and most often against them.

The State is the organised authority, domination and power of the propertied and so-called enlightened classes over the masses; the International is the deliverance of the masses. Since the State never wants and can never want anything but the enslavement of the masses, it calls for their submission. The International, wanting nothing else than their complete freedom, calls for their revolt. But in order to make this revolt in turn powerful and capable of overthrowing the domination of the State and of the privileged classes solely represented by the State, the International must organise itself. To achieve this goal, it employs only two means which, even if they are not always legal – legality being, in most countries, nothing more than the legal consecration of privilege, that is to say, of injustice – are, from the point of view of human rights, equally legitimate. These two means, as we have said, are first the propagation of its ideas, and, second, the organisation of the natural effect of its members on the masses.

To anyone who would claim that such organised action is yet another attack on the freedom of the mases, an attempt to create a new authoritarian power, we would reply that they are either a sophist or a fool. So much the worse for those who ignore the natural and social law of human interdependence, to the point of imaging that the absolute independence of individuals and masses is possible, or even desirable. To desire that is to desire the very annihilation of society, for all social life is nothing other than this incessant mutual dependence of individuals and the masses. Every individual, even the most intelligent, the most strong, and especially the intelligent and the strong, are at every moment of their lives both its producers and its products. The very freedom of each individual is the ever-renewed result of this mass of material, intellectual and moral influences that all the individuals around him, that the society in which he is born, develops and dies, exerts upon him. To want to escape this influence, in the name of a transcendent, divine absolutely selfish and self-sufficient freedom, is the tendency towards non-being; to want to renounce exercising it upon others is to renounce all social action, the very expression of your thoughts and feelings, is again leading to non-being; this independence so extolled by idealists and metaphysicians, and the individual freedom conceived in this sense – is therefore nothingness.

The State is the organised authority, domination and power of the propertied and so-called enlightened classes over the masses; the International is the deliverance of the masses… The International, wanting nothing else than their complete freedom, calls for their revolt

In nature as in human society, which is nothing more than this same nature, everything that lives only lives on the supreme condition of intervening in the most positive way, and as powerfully as its nature allows, in the lives of others. The abolition of this mutual influence would therefore be death. And when we demand the freedom of the masses, we do not in any way intend to abolish any natural influences, nor those of any individual or group of individuals who exert their influence upon them; what we want is the abolition of artificial, legal, official influences. If the Church and the State could be private institutions, we would undoubtedly oppose them, but we would not protest their right to exist. But we object to them because, while undoubtedly private institutions in the sense that they exist solely for the particular interests of the

goal, first on the opinion of the masses, and only then, through this opinion more or less modified by the propaganda of the International, on their will, on their actions. While governments, armed with authority, power and material force, which some claim to derive from God, others from their superior intelligence, and still others from the popular will itself, expressed and ascertained by means of that sleight of hand called universal suffrage, violently impose themselves on the masses, forcing them to obey them, to execute their decrees, without even, most of the time, giving the appearance of consulting their feelings, their needs and their will.} (*Black Flag*)

privileged classes, they nonetheless use the collective force of the masses organised for this purpose to impose themselves in an authoritarian, official, violent manner upon the masses. If the International were to organise itself into a State, we, its convinced and passionate supporters, would become its most implacable enemies.

Yet it is precisely that it cannot organise as a State; it cannot, first of all, because, as its name clearly indicates, it abolishes all borders; and there is no State without borders, the realisation of the universal State, dreamt of by conquering peoples and the greatest despots of the world, having proven impossible historically. Whoever says State, therefore, necessarily implies several States, inwardly oppressors and exploiters, more or less hostile conquerors outwardly – says negation of humanity. The universal State, or the people's State spoken of by the German communists, can therefore only mean one thing: *the abolition of the State*.

The International Workers' Association would be meaningless if it did not strive irresistibly for the abolition of the State. It organises the masses only for the purpose of this destruction. And how does it organise them? Not from top down, by imposing on the social diversity produced by the diversity of work within the masses, or by imposing on the natural life of the masses, a false unity and order, as States do; but, on the contrary, from the bottom up, taking as a starting point the social existence of the masses, their real aspirations, and rousing them, helping them to group together, to harmonise and balance themselves in accordance with this natural diversity of occupations and circumstances. {Such is the specific purpose of the organisation of the trade sections.

{We have said that in order to organise the masses, to establish in a robust manner the benevolent effect of the International Workers' Association on them, it would suffice, strictly speaking, for only one worker out of ten of the same trade to be part of the respective Section. This is easily understood. In times of great political or economic crisis, when the instinct of the masses, heated to a red-hot state, opens itself to all favourable influences, when these herds of enslaved men, bent, crushed, but never resigned, finally revolt against their yoke, yet feel disorientated and powerless because they are completely disorganised, ten, twenty or thirty men who understand each other and are well organised amongst themselves, and who know where they are going and what they want, will easily lead one hundred, two hundred, three hundred or even more.

{We saw this recently in the Paris Commune. The serious organisation, barely begun during the siege, was neither thoroughly perfect nor very strong; and yet it was sufficient to create a formidable power of resistance.

But for the international, thus organised from the bottom up, to become a real force, a serious power, each member in each section must be far more deeply imbued with the principles of the International than they are today

{What will it be like when the International [Workers'] Association is better organised; when it has within it a much larger number of sections, especially many agricultural sections, and, in each section, double and triple the number of members it now contains? What will it be like especially when each of its members knows, better than they do now, the ultimate goal and true principles of the International, as well as the means to achieve its triumph? The International will become an irresistible power.}

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But for the international, thus organised from the bottom up, to become a real force, a serious power, each member in each section must be far more deeply imbued with the principles of the International than they are today. Only under this condition will it be able, in time of peace and clam, to effectively fulfil the mission of propagandist and apostle, and in times of struggle, that of a true revolutionary. When we speak of the principles of the International, we mean none other than those contained in the preamble to our general statues adopted by the Geneva Congress. They are so few that we ask permission to summarise them here:

1. The emancipation of labour must be the work of the workers themselves;

2. The efforts of the workers to achieve their emancipation must not aim to create new privileges, but to establish equal rights and duties for all (men living on earth), and to abolish all class domination;

3. The economic subjugation of the workers to the monopolist of raw materials and means of production

is the source of servitude in all its forms: social misery, mental degradation, political submission;

4. For this reason, the economic emancipation of the working class is the great goal to which every political movement must be subordinated as a simple means;

5. The emancipation of the workers is not merely a local or national problem; on the contrary, this problem concerns all civilised nations, its solution necessarily being contingent upon their theoretical and practical cooperation.

6. The Association, as well as all its members, recognise that TRUTH, JUSTICE, MORALITY must be the basis of their conduct towards all people, without distinction of colour, belief or nationality;

7. Finally, they consider it a duty to demand the rights of man and of the citizen, not only for members of the Association, but also for anyone fulfilling their duties. – "No duties without rights, no rights without duties."

We all know that this programme, so simple, so just and which expresses in such an unpretentious and unoffensive manner the most legitimate and most humane demands of the proletariat, contains within itself, precisely because it is an exclusively human programme, all the seeds of an immense social revolution: the overthrow of everything that is and the creation of a new world.

This is what must now be explained and made perfectly understandable and clear to all members of the International. This programme brings with it a new science, a new social philosophy that must replace all the old religions, and an entirely new politics, international politics, which, as such, we hasten to add, can have no other aim than the abolition of States. For all members of the International to conscientiously fulfil their dual duty as propagandists and revolutionaries, each of them must be imbued as much as possible with this science, this philosophy and this politics. It is not enough for them to know and say that they want the economic emancipation of the workers, the full enjoyment of their product for every individual, the abolition of classes and political subjugation, the realisation of the fullness of human rights and the perfect equivalence of duties and rights for every individual – the achievement of human fraternity, in short. All this is without doubt very good and very right, but if the workers of the International are introduced to these great truths without delving into their conditions, consequences and spirit, and if they are content to repeat them over and over in this general form, they run the risk of soon turning them into empty and sterile words, into misunderstood commonplaces.

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But, it will be said, not all workers, even if they are members of the International, can be learned; and is it not enough that within this Association there is a group of men who possess, as completely as is possible in our day, the science, philosophy and politics of socialism, so that the majority, the people of the International, by obeying faithfully their direction and their *fraternal command* ([in the] style of M. Gambetta, the Jacobin-dictator par excellence), cannot deviate from the path which must lead them to the definitive emancipation of the proletariat?

This is the reasoning that we have heard quite often, not openly expressed – they are neither sincere enough nor courageous enough for that – but developed covertly, with all sorts of more or less skilful reservations and demagogic compliments addressed to the supreme wisdom and omnipotence of the sovereign people, by the authoritarian party within the International. We have always passionately fought against this, because we are convinced that as soon as the International [Workers'] Association were to split into two groups: one comprising the vast majority and made up of members whose only learning would be a blind faith in the theoretical and practical wisdom of their leaders; and the other made up of only a few dozen individual-directors – this institution which is supposed to emancipate Humanity would transform itself into a kind of *oligarchic State*, the worst of all States; and what is more, that this clear-sighted, learned and skilful minority which would assume, with all the responsibilities, all the rights of government, all the more absolute, as its despotism is carefully hidden under the appearance of an obsequious respect for the will and for the resolutions of the sovereign people, resolutions always prompted by itself to this so-called popular will; – that this minority, we say, obeying the necessities and circumstances of its privileged position and suffering the fate of all governments, would soon become increasingly despotic, malevolent and reactionary. {This is precisely what happened today in the Geneva International.}

The International [Workers'] Association will only be able to become an instrument of emancipation for humanity when it has first emancipated itself, and it will only do so when, creasing to be divided into two groups – the majority of blind tools and the minority of skilful manipulators – it has instilled in the reflective consciousness of each of its members the science, philosophy and politics of socialism.

Protest of the Alliance (continued)

Michael Bakunin

4 to 24 July 1871

[…]

1) As long as the economic organisation of the current society lasts, that is to say as long as capital, or raw materials and the instruments of work, necessary for production, remain monopolised in the hands of this bourgeois oligarchy, and the proletariat forced by hunger and inevitably competing to escape hunger, sell their labour, the true, the only producer, as a commodity at the lowest price, always more or less determined by the price of what is absolutely necessary so as not to allow its productive force to die of starvation, the increase in the misery and suffering of the proletariat will always be a direct reason for the increase of wealth or what is called the development of material interests and the economic prosperity of nations.

2) That the more this prosperity grows, the more wealth or capital will be monopolised by an ever smaller number of bourgeois oligarchs; what will have and what already has the necessary consequence of pushing the middle bourgeoisie into the petty [bourgeoisie] and the petty bourgeoisie into the proletariat.

3) That this deplorable state of affairs, whose duration threatens to plunge the human world into a new barbarism, will only end when the capital, the raw materials, the instruments of labour necessary for production, including without doubt the earth, ceasing to be appropriated by individuals, will become collective property.

[…]

It [the International Workers Association] was based on intellectual inspiration and *social science* derived from historical study and the critique of economic facts. Is this science accessible to the proletariat, in the state of ignorance in which it now finds itself? Without doubt, yes, and more than any other. This science, as well as all other positive sciences, is based on experience, on an exact knowledge, and on the analysis of facts. But are not the facts that serve as their focus precisely the situation, the misery, the sufferings of the proletariat? so that a worker needs only to consider and explore his own situation, to find the effects and causes, which all renew themselves for him, nor can he eventually escape, to become a perfect economist, much more truthful and serious than a host of well-known bourgeois economists, but who study this science about the sufferings of others and which they have every interest to reduce the importance of.

To be placed right in the middle of economic and social science, the worker therefore has only one thing to do: that is to make his own fate an object of constant reflection, as much in relation to the severity and duration of his own work, of his wages, of the price of things necessary for the upkeep of him as well as his family, than by the earnings and leisure that his work provides to the boss who employs him. Let him then compare his position with that of his comrades in the workshop, then with that of the workers of his trade in the same locality, and again with that of the workers of the same trade in foreign countries; finally with those of workers of other trades in all lands. Going step by step in this entirely experimental way, comparing the facts and deducing general implications, he will arrive by himself to the perfect knowledge of the principles which constitute the basis of social science.

It was only in this way and not by attending courses on political economy, that many English workers have been able to acquire knowledge so right, so vast, and at the same time comprehensive in social economy, that the commissions of inquiry which the English Parliament usually appoint during great crises to ascertain the situation of an industry in distress, have often been astonished listening to simple workers give them not only the most accurate information about the situation, but also on the general causes which produced it.

In general, we cannot sufficiently recommend to workers the study of economic science, which, we repeat it again, is precisely that which is most accessible to them, and not to begin this study with the reading of economic books, whose more or less abstract terminology could frighten them. Not that they begin it in the wholly experimental manner we have just indicated, initially by making an exact account of their own situation and of their own economic and social relations, and then extending their investigations to the relations and the situation of the workers first of a single profession and later of all trades.

Nothing is as favourable to this study as the organisation of the *sections of a trade*. What is their purpose? It is the struggle in common to obtain from the bosses of their trades the most favourable conditions from the point of view of wages and

working hours. This is such a completely determined struggle, the conditions of which can only be established by the exact knowledge of all the economic facts which have a relation to developments, the prosperity or decline of such-and-such an industry, first of all in the locality, then necessarily in many other countries that compete with local production. While thereby discussing amongst themselves their own problems, their deepest and most cherished interests and amongst others that of their daily bread, workers are forced at the same time to discuss the most abstract principles of social science. What will this be then, when, following the impulse given to them in Belgium by a group of young socialist revolutionaries as intelligent as they are devoted, the workers of all trades, or rather the different trade sections, will reach agreement with each other in every country to establish a *trades council* [*chambre de travail*], or the delegates of every section or of every trade, bringing with them their *workbooks*, discuss "all the issues that are dealt with in the bourgeois political parliaments," from the point of view of the workers in general, as well as the workers of each industry considered specifically!

This completely practical, completely vital study of social science undertaken and constantly pursued by the workers themselves, both in their respective trade sections and in these trades councils, will necessarily lead and has already led to a large extent to produce in them this unanimous and fully considered conviction, demonstrable both in theory and in practice, that the *serious, final, complete emancipation of the workers is possible only on one condition, and that this condition is the appropriation of capital, that is to say the raw materials and all the instruments of labour, including land, by the workers collectively*.

We insist on the necessity of these studies, both practical and theoretical, for every member of the International, first because they constitute, strictly and by themselves, the main object, the daily interest, the great issue of every trade section, whose immediate aim is to safeguard the economic interests as well as the freedom and dignity of its members; and secondly, because we have this conviction that science or economic knowledge, considered initially from its narrowest point of view as embracing only the collective interests of a section or of all the workers of the same trade in the same locality, then extending consecutively, not by way of abstraction, of self-annihilation or of an impossible fusion, but by way of federation, first to the workers sections of the same trade throughout the civilised world, and then to the workers sections of all trades, both locally and in other countries, and thereby achieving, by the stringent analysis of all the workers' situations and the economic causes of which they are the effects, to embrace and formulate the general conditions of the emancipation for all the workers of the world – because we are convinced that this, or this collective consciousness, must henceforth constitute the material basis, the sole basis of all aspirations, commitments and actions of workers in any line of thought or whatever the events. The economic question considered in this extent and embracing both all conditions of labour as well as those of the just distribution of the products of labour, is the real terrain that the worker must never abandon. As soon as he abandons it, he loses himself in metaphysical, juridical, political, theological abstractions, and disorientated, deprived of his two faithful guides, his common sense and the awareness or instinct of his real interests, he always finds himself once again, to his great surprise, the slave and exploited of the bourgeois. While remaining on the economic terrain, the worker will be all powerful. No siren voice from the bourgeois world can shake his real understanding, his common sense, and no sophism can prevail against this simple question: "The fine things you propose to us will change our economic condition to equal that of the privileged classes. Do you want to work as we work, and share all the enjoyments as well as all the duties of life, according to justice, equally with us? Do you want Capital to stop oppressing us and exploiting us, that is to say, do you want it to cease being a private property and become the collective property of the federated workers associations? If not, leave. We will not give up this sole question whereby we see clearly, to let ourselves be led astray by you, [give up] this terrain which is solely ours, and the leaving of which we become once again your dupes, your tools, your slaves."

The organisation of trade sections, their federation in the International [Workers'] Association and their representation by trade councils [*Chambres de travail*] not only creates a great Academy where all the workers of the International, uniting practice with theory, can and must study economic science, they even carry the living seeds of the *new social order* that is to replace the bourgeois world. They create not only the ideas but the very facts of the future.

[…]

The organisation of trade sections, their federation in the International [Workers'] Association and their representation by trade councils… carry the living seeds of the *new social order* that is to replace the bourgeois world. They create not only the ideas but the very facts of the future.

To the Editors of *La Liberté*

Micheal Bakunin

5 October 1872

Dear Editors,

Having published the sentence of excommunication that the Marxist Congress in The Hague has just pronounced against me, you will find it just, will you not, to publish my response. Here it is.

The triumph of M. Marx and his followers was complete. Certain of a majority which they had long prepared and organised with great skill and care, if not with great respect for those principles of *Morality*, of *Truth* and of *Justice* which are so often found in their speeches and so rarely in their actions, the Marxists lifted the mask, and, as befits men in love with power, always in the name of that sovereignty of the people which, henceforth, will serve as a stepping stone for all pretenders to the government of the masses, they have boldly decreed the enslavement of the people of the International.

There is only one law that is truly binding for all members, individuals, sections and federations of the International… THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY OF WORKERS OF ALL TRADES AND ALL COUNTRIES IN THEIR ECONOMIC STRUGGLE AGAINST THE EXPLOITERS OF LABOUR

If the International were less vibrant, if it were founded, as they imagine, solely on the organisation of directing centres, and not on the real solidarity of the interests and the actual aspirations of the proletariat in all countries of the civilised world, on the spontaneous and free federation of the workers' sections and federations, independently of any governmental tutelage, the decrees of that harmful Congress of The Hague, an all too complacent and faithful embodiment of Marxist theories and practices, would have been enough to kill it. They would have rendered this magnificence association, in whose foundation, I am pleased to note, M. Marx had played such an intelligent and energetic part, both ridiculous and odious.

A State, a government, a universal dictatorship! The dream of Gregory VII, Boniface VIII, Charles V, and Napoleon, reproduced in new forms, but always with the same pretensions, in the camp of socialist democracy! Can you imagine anything more ludicrous, but also more appalling?

To claim that a group of individuals, even the most intelligent and well-intentioned, will be capable of becoming the thought, the soul, the directing and unifying will of the revolutionary movement and the economic organisation of the proletariat of all countries, is such a heresy against common sense and against historical experience that you wonder with astonishment how a man as intelligent as M. Marx could have conceived it?

The popes at least had the excuse of absolute truth, which they claimed to hold in their hands by the Grace of the Holy Spirit and in which they were expected to believe. M. Marx does not have this excuse, and I will not insult him by suggesting that he imagines he has scientifically invented something approaching absolute truth. But since the absolute does not exist, there can be no infallible dogma for the International, nor consequently any official political or economic theory, and our congresses must never claim the role of ecumenical councils proclaiming principles binding upon all adherents and believers.

There is only one law that is truly binding for all members, individuals, sections and federations of the International, and this law constitutes its true, only basis. It is, in its entirety, in all its consequences and applications, THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY OF WORKERS OF ALL TRADES AND ALL COUNTRIES IN THEIR ECONOMIC STRUGGLE AGAINST THE EXPLOITERS OF LABOUR. It is in the actual organisation of this solidarity, by the spontaneous action of the working masses and by absolutely free federation, which will be all the more powerful as it is free, of the working masses of all languages and all nations, not in their unification by decrees and under the rod of any government, that the real and living unity of the international solely resides.

Who can doubt that the political struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie must indeed emerge from this ever-expanding organisation of the militant solidarity of the proletariat against bourgeois exploitation? The Marxists and us are unanimous on this point. But immediately the question arises that separates us so deeply from the Marxists.

We think that the necessarily revolutionary politics of the proletariat must have as its immediate and sole objective the destruction of States. We do not understand how you can speak of international solidarity when you want to preserve States – unless you dream of the universal State, that is to say universal slavery, like the great emperors and popes – the State by it very nature being a rupture of this solidarity and consequently a permanent cause of war. Nor do we conceive of speaking of the freedom of the proletariat or of the real liberation of the masses in and by the State. State means domination, and all domination presupposes the subjugation of the masses and consequently their exploitation for the benefit of some ruling minority.

We do not accept, even as a revolutionary transition, National Conventions, Constituent Assemblies, provisional governments, or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is sincere, honest and real only among the masses, and that when it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction. This is our belief; this is not the time to elaborate upon it.

The Marxists profess completely contrary ideas. As befits good Germans, they are worshippers of the power of the State, and necessarily also prophets of political and social discipline, champions of order established from top to bottom, always in the name of universal suffrage and the sovereignty of the masses, to whom is reserved the happiness and honour of obeying their leaders, elected masters. The Marxists admit no emancipation other than that which they expect from their so-called People's State (*Volksstaat*). They are so little enemies of patriotism that their own International too often bears the colours of Pan-Germanism. There is undoubtedly a very significant difference between Bismarckian and Marxist politics, but there is an abyss between the Marxists and us. They are governmentalists, we are anarchists regardless.

These are the two main tendencies that today divide the International into two camps. On the one side, there is strictly speaking only Germany; on the other, there are, to varying degrees, Italy, Spain, the Swiss Jura, a large part of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and, in the very near future, the Slavic peoples. These two tendencies clashed at the Congress of The Hague, and, thanks to the great skill of M. Marx, thanks to the entirely artificial organisation of its last Congress, the Germanic tendency prevailed.

[…]

But what to do today? Since the solution and reconciliation on the political field are impossible today, we must tolerate each other and allow each country the undeniable right to follow the political trends that it prefers or that seem best suited to its particular situation. Consequently rejecting all political issues from the obligatory programme of the International, the unity of this great association must be sought solely on the terrain of economic solidarity. This solidarity unites us, while political questions inevitably divide us.

It is certain that neither the Italians, nor the Spanish, nor the Jurassians, nor the French, nor the Belgians, nor the Dutch, nor the Slavic peoples, these historical enemies of Pan-Germanism, nor even the proletariat of England and America, will ever submit to the political tendencies that the ambition of its leaders is imposing upon the proletariat of Germany today. But even supposing that, as a result of this disobedience, the new General Council imposes a ban on all these countries and that a new ecumenical council of Marxists excommunicates them and declares them rejected from the midst of the International, will the economic solidarity which necessarily, naturally and actually exists between the proletariat of all these countries and that of Germany be diminished? Whether the workers of Germany go on strike, whether they revolt against the economic tyranny of their bosses, or whether they revolt against the political tyranny of a government that is the natural protector of capitalists and other exploiters of the people's labour, will the proletariat of all these countries excommunicated by the Marxists remain with its arms folded, an indifferent spectator of that struggle? No, it will give them all its meagre money and, what is more, it will give all its blood to its brothers in Germany, without first asking them what political system they believe it should seek its deliverance from.

This, then, is where the true unity of the International lies: in the common aspirations and spontaneous movement of the popular masses in all countries, and not in any government whatsoever, nor in a uniform political theory imposed on these masses by a General Congress. It is so obvious that you would have to be truly blinded by the passion for power not to understand it.

I can conceive, at a stretch, that crowned or uncrowned despots might have dreamt of world domination; but what to say of a friend of the proletariat, a revolutionary who claims to seriously want the emancipation of the masses and who, by posing as supreme director and arbiter of all revolutionary movements that may erupt in different countries, dares to dream of the subjugation of the proletariat of all these countries to a single thought, hatched in his own brain!

I think that M. Marx is a very serious revolutionary, if not always very sincere, that he really wants the uprising of the masses; and I wonder how he fails to see that the establishment of a universal dictatorship, collective or individual, a dictatorship that would somehow do the work of a chief engineer of the world revolution, regulating and directing the insurrectionary movement of the masses of all countries as one operates a machine – that the establishment of such a dictatorship would by itself be enough to destroy the revolution, to paralyse and distort all popular movements? What man, what group of individuals, however great their genius, would dare to flatter themselves that they could even grasp and understand the infinite multitude of interests, tendencies and activities so diverse in each country, in each province, in each locality, in each trade, and whose immense whole, united but not uniformised by a great common aspiration and by a few fundamental principles which have now passed into the consciousness of the masses, will constitute the future social revolution?

What man, what group of individuals, however great their genius, would dare to flatter themselves that they could even grasp and understand the infinite multitude of interests, tendencies and activities so diverse in each country, in each province, in each locality, in each trade

[…]

This Marxist thought is explicitly developed in the famous Manifesto of the German Communists, written and published in 1848 by Marx and Engels. It is the theory of the emancipation of the proletariat and the organisation of labour by the State. It seems that at The Hague Congress, Engels, alarmed by the deplorable impression made by reading a few pages of this Manifesto, hastened to declare that it was an outdated document, a theory abandoned by them. If he said that, he was being disingenuous; for on the very eve of this Congress, the Marxists had tried to disseminate this document in all countries. Moreover, it is literally reproduced, with all its main features, in the programme of the German Social Democratic Workers Party. The principal point, which is also found in the manifesto drafted in 1864 on behalf of the provisional General Council, and which was removed from the programme of the International by the Geneva Congress of 1866, is the CONQUEST OF POLITICAL POWER BY THE WORKING CLASS.

It is understandable that men as indispensable as Messrs. Marx and Engels would support a programme which, by enshrining and advocating political power, opens the door to all ambitions. Since there will be political power, there will necessarily be subjects, disguised as citizens in a republican manner, it is true, but who will nonetheless be subjects, and who as such will be forced to obey, because without obedience there is no power possible. It will be objected that they will not be obeying men, but laws that they themselves have made. To this I will reply that everyone knows how, in the most democratic, the most free, but politically governed countries, the people make the laws, and what their obedience to these laws means. Anyone who is not inclined to mistake fictions for realities will have to recognise that, even in these countries, the people obey not laws that they actually make themselves, but laws that are made in their name, and that obeying these laws never has any other meaning for them than to submit to the arbitrary rule of some tutelary and governing minority, or, which means the same thing, to be freely enslaved.

There is another expression in this programme that is deeply repugnant to us revolutionary anarchists who frankly want the complete emancipation of the people: it is the proletariat, the world of workers presented as a *class*, not as a *mass*. Do you know what this means? No more and no less than a new aristocracy, that of the factory and city workers, to the exclusion of the millions who constitute the rural proletariat and who, according to the predictions of the Social Democrats of Germany, will entirely become subjects in their grand so-called People's State. *Class*, *power*, *State* are three inseparable terms, each of which presupposed the

other two, and which together are definitively summed up by these words: *The political subjugation and economic exploitation of the masses*.

[…]

It is always the same German temperament and the same logic that leads them directly, inevitably, into what we call *bourgeois socialism*, and to the conclusion of a new political pact between the radical bourgeoisie or those forced to become such, and the *intelligent*, respectable minority, that is to say duly *embourgeoisified*, of the urban proletariat, to the exclusion and to the detriment of the mass of the proletariat, not only in the countryside, but in the cities.

This is the true meaning of the workers' candidacies for the parliaments of existing States, and of the conquest of political power by the working class. For even from the point of view of the urban proletariat alone, for whose exclusive benefit political power is to be seized, is it not clear that the popular nature of this power will never be anything but a fiction? It will obviously be impossible for a few hundred, or even a few tens of thousands, should I say, just a few thousands of men, to actually wield this power. They will necessarily have to exercise it by proxy, that is to say entrust it to a group of men elected by themselves to represent them and govern them, which will inevitably lead them back into all the lies and all the servitudes of the representative or bourgeois regime. After a brief moment of freedom or revolutionary frenzy, citizens of a new State, they will awaken to be slaves, playthings and victims of new ambitious men.

You can understand how and why skilled politicians become passionately attached to a programme that opens such a wide horizon to their ambition; but that serious workers, who carry in their hearts like a living flame the feeling of solidarity with their comrades in slavery and misery across the world, and who want to emancipate themselves not at the expense of all, but by the emancipation of all, so that they themselves may be free with all and not become tyrants in their turn; that workers of good faith could become enamoured with such a programme, that is what is much more difficult to understand.

So I firmly believe that in a few years the workers of Germany themselves, recognising the fatal consequences of a theory that can only favour the ambition of their bourgeois leaders, or of the few rare workers who seek to climb onto their shoulders to become in their turn domineering and exploitative bourgeois, will reject it with disdain and anger, and that they will embrace with as much passion as the workers of the great southern countries, France, Spain, Italy, as well as the Dutch and Belgian workers, do today, the true programme of workers' emancipation, that of the destruction of States.

In the meantime, we fully recognise their right to follow the path they deem best, provided they grant us the same freedom. We even acknowledge that it is quite possible that, given their history, their particular nature, the state of their civilisation and their current situation, they may be forced to follow this path. Let German, American and English workers strive to seize political power, since that pleases them. But let them allow workers in other countries to march with the same energy toward the destruction of all political powers. Freedom for all and mutual respect for that freedom, I have said, are the essential conditions of international solidarity.

[…]

The social revolution, as envisioned, desired and hoped for by Latin and Slavic workers, is infinitely broader than that promised by the German or Marxist programme. For them, it is not a question of the sparingly measured emancipation of the working class, achievable only in the very long term, but of the complete and real emancipation of the entire proletariat, not just of some countries, but of all nations, civilised and uncivilised, the new civilisation, frankly popular, having to begin with this act of universal emancipation. And the first word of this emancipation can only be freedom, not that political, bourgeois freedom, so much advocated and recommended as an object of a preliminary conquest by M. Marx and his followers, but the great human freedom which, destroying all the dogmatic, metaphysical, political and legal chains with which everyone is burdened today, will restore to everyone, collectives as much as individuals, full autonomy in their activities and development, freed once and for all from all inspectors, directors and guardians.

The second word of this emancipation is *solidarity*; not the Marxist solidarity, organised from the top down by some government and imposed either by cunning or by force on the masses; not that solidarity of all which is the negation of the freedom on each, and which thereby becomes a lie, a fiction, having slavery as its actual counterpart; but solidarity, which is on the contrary the confirmation and realisation of every freedom, taking its source not in any political law, but in the very collective nature of man, by virtue of which no man is free if all the men who surround him and who exert the slightest influence whether direct or indirect on his life are not equally free. This truth is beautifully expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of

Man drafted by Robespierre, which proclaims that *the slavery of the least of men is the slavery of all*.

The solidarity we seek, far from being the result of any artificial or authoritarian organisation, can only be the spontaneous product of social life, both economic and moral; the result of the free federation of common interests, aspirations and tendencies. It has for its essential foundations *equality*, *collective work*, becoming obligatory for each person not by the force of laws, but by the force of circumstances, and *collective property*; its guiding light is *experience*, that is to say the practice of collective life, and *science*; and its final goal is the *constitution of humanity*, and consequently the ruin of all States.

This is the ideal, not divine, not metaphysical, but human and *practical* that alone corresponds to the modern aspirations of the Latin and Slavic peoples. They want complete freedom, complete solidarity, complete equality; in short, they want nothing less than humanity, and they will not be satisfied, even provisionally and temporarily, with anything less. The Marxists will condemn their aspirations as folly; it has not deterred them from their goal, and they will never exchange the magnificence of this goal for the utterly bourgeois poverty of Marxist socialism.

The communalist uprising of Paris has inaugurated the social revolution. The significance of this revolution lies not so much in the rather weak experiments it had the opportunity and time to make, but in the ideas it stirred, the bright light it case on the true nature and purpose of the revolution, the hopes it awakened everywhere, and thereby the powerful upheaval it produced amongst the popular masses of all countries, but especially in Italy, where the popular awakening dates from this insurrection, the main feature of which was the revolt of the Commune and workers' associations against the State. By this insurrection France suddenly rose to its former standing, and the capital of the world revolution, Paris, regained its glorious initiative right under the very noses and cannon of the Bismarckianised Germans.

The effect was so universally impressive that even the Marxists themselves, whose ideas had been completely overturned by this insurrection, felt themselves obliged to take their hats off to it. They went further: contrary to the simplest logic and their true feelings, they proclaimed that its programme and its goal were theirs. It was a truly farcical, but forced, disguise. They had to do it, under pain of being surpassed and abandoned by all, so powerful had been the passion that this revolution had provoked in everyone.

[…]

To the comrades of the Jura Federation

Micheal Bakunin

Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne, 12 October 1873

Dear comrades,

I cannot and must not leave public life without giving you a final word of gratitude and appreciation.

For the past four and a half years or so that we known each other, despite all the machinations of our common enemies and the vile calumnies they have heaped upon me, you have maintained your esteem, your friendship and your trust. You were not even intimidated by the label of "Bakuninists" that they threw in your face, preferring to maintain the appearance of having been lackeys [*hommes dépendants*] rather than the certainty of having been unjust.

And besides, you have always had, to such a high degree, an awareness of the independence and perfect spontaneity of your opinions, of your tendencies, of your actions, and, on the other hand, the perfidious intention of our adversaries was so transparent that you could only treat their slanderous and hurtful insinuations with the deepest contempt.

You did it, and it is precisely because you had the courage and the perseverance to do it that you have just achieved today, against the ambitious scheming of the Marxists, and for the benefit of the freedom of the proletariat and the entire future of the International, such a complete victory.

Powerfully aided by your brothers from Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Holland, England and America, you have put the great International Workers' Association back on the path from which M. Marx's dictatorial attempts had failed to divert it.

The two Congresses that have just taken place in Geneva were a triumphant, decisive demonstration of justice and at the same time also of the power of your cause.

Your Congress, that of freedom, brought together delegates from all the main federations of Europe, except Germany; and it loudly proclaimed and widely established, or rather confirmed, the autonomy and fraternal solidarity of the workers of all countries. The

authoritarian or Marxist Congress, composed solely of Germans and Swiss workers, who seem to have developed a distaste for freedom, has tried in vain to patch up the broken and now ridiculed dictatorship of M. Marx.

After hurling insults left and right, as if to emphasise their Genevan and German majority, they ended up with a hybrid product that is no longer the absolute authority dreamt of by M. Marx, but even less freedom, and they parted ways deeply discouraged and dissatisfied with themselves and others. This Congress was a funeral.

So your victory, the victory of freedom and the International against authoritarian intrigue, is complete. Yesterday, when it might still have seemed uncertain – though, for my part, I never doubted it – yesterday, I say, no one was permitted to abandon your ranks. But today, now that this victory has become an accomplished fact, the freedom to act according to your personal preferences is restored to everyone.

And I take this opportunity, dear comrades, to ask you to kindly accept my resignation as a member of the Jura Federation and as a member of the International.

I have many reasons for acting this way. Do not believe that it is mainly because of the personal attacks that I have been subjected to over the past few years. I am not saying I am completely immune to it; yet I would still feel strong enough to resist it if I believed that my continued participation in your work, in your struggles, could be of any use to the triumph of the proletariat's cause. But I do not think so.

By my birth and by my personal position, without doubt not by my sympathies or inclinations, I am merely a bourgeois, and as such, I can do nothing amongst you but engage in propaganda. Well, I am convinced that the time for grand theoretical speeches, whether printed or spoken, is over. In the last nine years, more ideas have been developed within the International than would be needed to save the world, if ideas alone could save it, and I defy anyone to invent a new one.

The time for ideas is over; now is the time for facts and actions. What matters most today is the organisation of the forces of the proletariat. But this organisation must be the work of the proletariat itself. If I were young, I would immerse myself in a working-class milieu, and, sharing in the arduous life of my brothers, I would also have participated with them in the great work of this necessary organisation.

But neither my age or my health allows me to do so. On the contrary, they demand solitude and rest. Every effort, every trip more of less, becomes a very serious matter for me. Mentally, I still feel quite strong, but physically I tire immediately; I no longer feel I have the strength for the struggle. I can therefore only be a burden, not an asset, to the camp of the proletariat.

You can clearly see, dear comrades, that everything compels me to resign. Living far from you and far from everyone else, what use could I possibly be to the International in general and to the Jura Federation in particular? Your great and fine Association, now entirely activist and entirely practical, must not tolerate sinecures or honorary positions within its ranks.

I therefore withdraw, dear comrades, filled with gratitude for you and sympathy for your great and holy cause – the cause of humanity. I will continue to follow your every step with brotherly concern, and I will happily salute each of your new triumphs.

Until death, I will be yours.

But before we part, allow me to offer you one last piece of fraternal advice. My friends, the international reaction, whose centre today is not in this poor France, so absurdly devoted to the Sacré-Cœur, but in Germany, in Berlin, and which is represented just as much by the socialism of M. Marx as by the diplomacy of M. Bismarck; this reaction, which sets as its ultimate goal the pan-Germanisation of Europe, threatens at this moment to engulf and pervert everything. It has declared a war to the death on the International, represented today only by the autonomous and free Federations. Like the proletarians of all other countries, even though you belong to a still free republic, you are forced to fight it, because it has come between you and your ultimate goal, the emancipation of the whole world.

The struggle you will face will be terrible. But do not be discouraged and know that, despite the immense material strength of your adversaries, final victory is assured, provided you faithfully observe these two conditions:

1. Hold fast to this principle of great and broad popular freedom, without which equality and solidarity themselves would be nothing but lies;

2. Organise even more the practical, militant, international solidarity amongst workers of all trades and of all countries, and remember that, infinitely weak as isolated individuals, localities, or countries, you will find immense and irresistible strength in this universal collectivity.

Farewell. Your brother,

Micheal Bakunin

The Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune

A significant event in Bakunin's life was the Franco-Prussian War which was followed by the Paris Commune.

We start with a letter written before the outbreak of the war in which Bakunin sketches his views on how a social revolution would proceed. This is included as many aspects of it were applied within the Paris Commune. Obviously, we are not suggesting a direct influence by a private letter, but we are suggesting that Bakunin's ideas were proven to be correct by the fact they were applied to a large degree during an actual revolution. Needless to say, Bakunin's debt to Proudhon played a role in this as many Communards and Internationalists were deeply influenced by Proudhon's mutualist ideas. This letter also indicates Bakunin's belief on the need for a specific anarchist organisation to secure the revolution's triumph (although he uses the unfortunate – and much cherry-picked – term "invisible dictatorship" to describe its role).

Next comes "Letters to a Frenchman on the current crisis", published anonymously by James Guillaume from a much longer manuscript by Bakunin. This focuses upon turning the inter-State conflict between the French Empire and Prussia into a social revolution. In the pamphlet, Bakunin discusses how the urban workers can win the peasantry over to the revolution, rightly recognising that a revolution limited to the towns and imposed upon the countryside would fail.

Bakunin tried to put the ideas of this pamphlet into practice by means of an insurrection in Lyon. We include the poster calling for rebellion. This was one of many attempts at communal revolts made during 1870 and 1871, all of which failed for while the French State was unable to oppose the Prussian invasion, it proved able to crush internal threats.

The most famous of these revolts was that of Paris. From March 18th to May 28th, the Paris Commune proclaimed its autonomy and a vision of a federated social and democratic Republic. This inspired socialists across Europe, including Bakunin and Marx. Unlike Marx whose politics were up ended by the Commune, Bakunin saw his ideas confirmed to a large degree by events. Yet will recognising the libertarian aspects of the revolt, he was not shy in noting its errors and limitations – not least its failure to replace the town council with a federation of workers' councils and its lack of significant economic transformation.

Like so many of his writings, his thoughts on the Paris Commune remained unfinished, in part undoubtedly due to the pressing need to refute Mazzini's attack on the Commune. It was first published, in part, by Elisée Reclus in the last issue of *Le Travailleur* (April/May 1878) before appearing complete in 1892. The same year saw Kropotkin write a preface to a Russian edition (included in the anthology *Direct Struggle Against Capital*). Kropotkin, it should be noted, returned repeatedly to the Commune and its lessons, building upon Bakunin's analysis to argue that it failed because it was not anarchist and communist enough.

To Albert Richard

Michael Bakunin

1 April 1870

Dear friend. I still find myself here and every day I await news of the arrival of the relative that you know, so that I can go and meet them.

Complete reaction in the International of Geneva. – The fabrica [*fabrique*] has triumphed on all fronts in my absence, and no one was found to halt that triumph. *Egalité* has become a reactionary paper. Here is the programme: Cooperation and the local politics of bourgeois radicalism. From now on the Geneva International will nothing more than a stepping-stone to bring the Perrets and Grosselins to power. Old Becker, weakened by age, has gotten in tow with the reaction – he also takes the side of [participation in] local politics.

[…]

This [up-coming] Congress will be very important for the future of the International in French-speaking Switzerland. There will be a great battle. It will be mainly about the question of *the abstention or participation of the workers in local politics*. We all, the sections from the Mountains, are for abstention. The strictly Genevan workers, the fabrica, [are] for participation. […]

[…]

If our party succumbs, the separation and independent organisation of the sections of the Mountains will take place – and then we will have as an organ not *Egalité*, but *Progrès* of Locle, which will probably then move to Neufchâtel, under the direction of Guillaume. It will then be *Progrès* that we should support with our correspondence and by securing many subscriptions for it.

Besides its local importance, the battle that will take place at La chaux de Fonds will have an immense universal significance. It will be the forerunner and precursor of the one that we will have to wage at the next General Congress of the International:

Do we want the grand politics of universal socialism or the petty politics of the bourgeois radicals revised and corrected from the point of view of the bourgeois workers?

Do we want the abolition of the bourgeois homelands and political States and the advent of the universal State, socialist and unique?

Do we want the complete emancipation of the workers or merely the improvement of their lot?

Do we want to create a new world or patch-up the old?

[…]

So let us close our ranks and prepare ourselves for battle. For the triumph of the International and of the Revolution is at stake.

[…]

Have you carefully read and have our principal friends read the *entire* letter that I have recently sent to you via Schwitzguébel – especially the second part, the conclusion? I am very keen to receive your very precise response to that conclusion.

You always say to me: “We are in agreement on the principal points” – Alas! My friend, I greatly fear that we are in complete disagreement on those points. From your last letters and the latest news I have received from you, I must believe that you remain more than ever a partisan of centralisation, of the revolutionary State. Whereas I am more than ever its opponent, and see salvation only in Revolutionary Anarchy, directed at all points by an invisible collective force – the only dictatorship that I admit, because it alone is compatible with the frankness and full energy of the revolutionary movement –

Your revolutionary plan can be *summarised in these words:* As soon as the Revolution breaks out in Paris – Paris organises provisionally the revolutionary commune – Lyon, Marseille, Rouen and other major cities rise up simultaneously and immediately send their revolutionary delegates to Paris, who together form a sort of National Convention or Committee of Public Safety for all of France. This Committee decrees the Revolution, decrees the abolition of the old State, social liquidation, collective property – organises the Revolutionary State with sufficient strength to suppress internal and external reaction –

Is that not your idea?

Our idea, our plan is entirely opposed. First, it is by no means proven that the revolutionary movement must absolutely begin in Paris. It is not at all impossible that it will begin in the provinces. But let us suppose that in accordance with tradition, it is Paris that begins. Paris, according to our view, has only an entirely negative, that is to say frankly revolutionary initiative to take: that of destruction and liquidation, not that of organisation – If Paris rises and triumphs, it will have the duty and right to proclaim the complete liquidation of the political, juridical, financial and administrative State – public and private bankruptcy, dissolution of all the powers, all the services, all the functions and all the forces of the State, the burning or bonfire of all private and public documents, deeds. Paris will naturally hasten to organise for itself, as best it can, in a revolutionary manner, after the workers united in associations have seized all the instruments of labour, capital of all kinds and buildings. Remaining armed and organised by streets and neighbourhoods [*quartiers*], they will form the revolutionary federation of all the neighbourhoods, the federative commune – And this commune will certainly have the right to declare that it does not claim the right to govern or organise France, but that it calls upon the people and all the towns [*communes*], whether of France or of what was hitherto called Foreign, to follow its example, to each make amongst themselves a revolution as radical and as destructive for the State, for legal right and for privileged property, and after having done so, to federate with it, either in Paris, or in any other place as they wish, so that all the revolutionary communes, French and foreign, send their delegates for a common organisation of services and of necessary relations of production and exchange, for the establishment of the Charter of Equality, basis of all freedom, a charter absolutely negative in its character, specifying much more what must be abolished forever, than the positive forms of local life which can only be created by the living practice of each locality – and to organise a common defence against the enemies of the revolution, as well as propaganda, weapon of the revolution, and practical revolutionary solidarity with friends of all countries against the enemies of all countries.

Paris will naturally hasten to organise for itself, as best it can, in a revolutionary manner, after the workers united in associations have seized all the instruments of labour, capital of all kinds and buildings. Remaining armed and organised by streets and neighbourhoods, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the neighbourhoods, the federative commune

The provinces, at least the main centres, such as Lyon, Marseille, S[t.]Etienne, Rouen and others, must not await the decrees of Paris to rise and organise themselves in a revolutionary manner – they must rise simultaneously with Paris, and do what Paris must do, the negative revolution and the initial organisation by a spontaneous movement – so that the federal revolutionary assembly of the delegates of the Provinces and communes would not have to organise France, but would be the expression of an organisation spontaneously created by each place – I mean the revolutionary places, not those that still find themselves in a state of reaction – In short, the revolution must be and must remain everywhere independent of the central point, which must be the expression, the product and not the source, the direction and the cause –

It is necessary that anarchy, the uprising of all the local passions, the awakening of spontaneous life everywhere, be very great in order for the Revolution to be and remain alive, real, powerful – Political revolutionaries, partisans of overt dictatorship, once the revolution has obtained an initial triumph, recommend the calming of passions, order, confidence and submission to the established revolutionary powers – in this way, they re-establish the State.

– We, on the contrary, we must foment, awaken, unleash all passions – we must produce anarchy – and, invisible pilots in the midst of the popular storm, we must direct it, not by any overt power, but by the collective dictatorship of all the Allies – dictatorship without insignia [*écharpe*], without title, without official right, and all the more powerful for having none of the appearances of power – This is the only dictatorship that I accept. But in order for it to act, it must exist, and for that it must be prepared and organised in advance; for it will not happen on its own – neither by discussions, nor by expositions and debates of principles, nor by popular assemblies.

Few but good allies, but good, but energetic, but discreet, but faithful, but above all free of vanity and personal ambition, strong men, serious enough, having mind and heart high enough to prefer the reality of strength to these vain appearances. If you form this *collective* and *invisible* dictatorship, you will triumph, the well directed revolution will triumph. Otherwise, no. If you amuse yourself playing at Committees of Public Safety and official, overt, dictatorship, you will be devoured by the reaction that you yourselves have created.

Dear friend, I admire the generous instincts and the keen intelligence of the French workers. But I greatly fear their tendency toward appearances, toward a grand dramatic, heroic and noisy scene – Many of our friends – amongst whom I place you – prepare themselves to play a great role in the coming revolution – that of Statesman of the Revolution. They vow to become the Dantons, Robespierres and St. Justs of revolutionary socialism – and they are already preparing the fine speeches and grand gestures meant to astonish the world. They will naturally turn the popular masses into a stepping stone – a pedestal for their democratic ambitions, for their glory! For the salvation of all they will create dictatorship, government, the State – a ridiculous and deplorable illusion. They will create only hollowness and will only serve the reaction. They themselves will be the reaction.

Remember this well, my friend and brother, the present socialist movement, entirely opposed in this to the political movement that tends only to the domination and exultation of individuals, the movement for popular emancipation does not entail the triumph and dictatorship of individuals – If individuals triumph, that will no longer be socialism, but politics, the business of the bourgeois, and the socialist movement will perish. If it does not perish, it will be the vain, ambitious and glory-seeking individuals, the budding dictators, who will cause a terrible fiasco.

There is now only one power, one dictatorship whose organisation is beneficial and possible: It is this collective and invisible dictatorship of the allies, in the name of our principle – and this dictatorship will be all the more beneficial and powerful, as it will not be vested with any official power, nor any overt character.

But to form it takes truly strong men, elevated by their intelligence and by their heart above vulgar ambitions and who are seriously ambitious enough to only want the triumph of their idea and not of their person and to prefer real power to the appearances of strength – to understand finally that our century is that of collective forces, not individual forces, and that the collectivity will crush all individuals who wish to impose themselves upon it –

Your intelligence is too great not to understand all this – But will your heart and your character be as elevated as your intelligence. That is the question. What will prevail within you: the love of justice and equality or the delirium of admiring yourself in a historic pose? Will you have the strength to overcome within yourself this Italian charlatanism, which you consider an excellent way to magnetise the masses, this mania for posing and this thirst for glory that still torments you today?

You see, I speak to you with the ease of a friend and brother who believes he has the right to say everything, because he feels an immense love for you in his heart, and who, while recognising a great deal of individualism in you, counts on your intelligence and your heart, which are even greater than your faults, and who, in short, has faith in your friendship. If you keep it for me after having read this letter, I will congratulate myself for having written it.

One more word. In one of your letters, you told me that I could become the Garibaldi of the social movement. You truly have too high an opinion of me, dear friend. Be certain that I know myself well and that I find in myself neither the qualities nor the faults necessary to make a hero; and besides, I do not care in the least about making a historical name for myself.

Do you know what all my ambition comes down to? It is great, but it aims neither for glory nor fanfare:

It is to help you to form this invisible collective force that alone can save and direct the revolution.

Respond to me right away, please, at Perron's address.

Your devoted M.B.

Soon, I hope, we will see each other and I will not come with my mouth full and my hands empty.

all the revolutionary communes… send their delegates for a common organisation of services and of necessary relations of production and exchange, for the establishment of the Charter of Equality, basis of all freedom, a charter absolutely negative in its character, specifying much more what must be abolished forever, than the positive forms of local life which can only be created by the living practice of each locality – and to organise a common defence against the enemies of the revolution

Letters to a Frenchman on the current crisis

Michael Bakunin

September 1870

Letter I

1 September 1870

My dear friend,

Recent events have placed France in such a position that it can no longer be saved from a long and terrible enslavement, from ruin, from misery, from annihilation, except by a mass uprising of the armed people.

With your main army destroyed – and this is no longer in doubt today – France has only two options left:

Either submit shamefully, cowardly, to the insolent yoke of the Prussians, bow under the rod of Bismarck and all his Pomeranian lieutenants; abandon Alsace and Lorraine, which do not want to be German, to the military despotism of the future Emperor of Germany; pay three billion in reparations, not counting the billions that this disastrous war will have cost you; accept from the hand of Bismark a government, a crushing and ruinous public order, with the Orleans or Bourbon dynasty, returning once again to France in the wake of foreign armies; to see itself for ten or twenty years reduced to the miserable state of present-day Italy, oppressed and constrained by a viceroy who will administer France under the rule of Prussia, as Italy has hitherto been administered under the rule of France; to accept, as a necessary consequence, the ruin of national commerce and industry, sacrificed to German commerce and industry; to witness, finally, the intellectual and moral decline of the entire nation;

Or else, to avoid this ruin, to give the French people the means to save themselves.

LETTRES

A UN FRANÇAIS

SUR

LA CRISE ACTUELLE

(par M. Bakounine)

SEPTEMBRE 1870.

Well, my friend, I have no doubt that all the titled and well-off men of France, with very few exceptions, that the vast majority of the upper and middle bourgeoisie, would consent to this cowardly abandonment of France rather than accept its salvation by popular uprising. Indeed, a popular uprising is a social revolution, the fall of privileged France. The fear of this revolution drove them, twenty years ago, under the dictatorship of Napoleon III; it will drive them today under the sword of Bismarck and under the constitutional and parliamentary rod of the Orleans. Popular freedom causes them such a terrible fear that, to avoid it, they will easily accept all shames, consent to all cowardices – even if these cowardices ruin them later, provided that they serve them now.

Yes, all of official France, all of bourgeois and privileged France, conspires for the Orleans, consequently conspires against the people. And the European powers see this as a good thing. Why? Because everyone knows that if France tries to save itself through a formidable popular uprising, it will be the signal for the unleashing of revolution throughout Europe.

Why then is the restoration of the Orleans dynasty not yet an accomplished fact? Because the collective and obviously reactionary dictatorship of Paris is currently powerless. Napoleon III and the empire have already fallen, but the entire imperial machine continues to function; and they dare not change anything, because changing all of this would mean proclaiming the revolution, and proclaiming the revolution is precisely what they want to avoid.

Letter II

5 September

Behold the emperor taken prisoner and the republic proclaimed in Paris, with a provisional government.

Has the internal situation of France changed because of this? I do not think so; and the reflections that I was about to share with you on the impotence of the empire have lost none of their truth and their relevance when applied to the government that has just been formed through the fusion of the republican left and the Orleanist left.

I suppose that the members of this government are animated by the very sincere desire to save the homeland; it is not by trying to use the *power of action of the administrative mechanism*, before which the incorrigible Thiers was still amazed in the session of August 26, it is not, I say, by following the old governmental routine that they will be able to do anything good; if they seriously want to seek the salvation of France in the people, they will be forced to break all this administrative machine, and, in accordance with the proposals of Esquiros, Jouvencel, and General Cluseret, to return the initiative of action to all the revolutionary communes of France, freed from all centralising government and all tutelage, and consequently called upon to form a new organisation by federating amongst themselves for defence.[1]

if they seriously want to seek the salvation of France in the people, they will be forced to break all this administrative machine… to return the initiative of action to all the revolutionary communes of France, freed from all centralising government and all tutelage, and consequently called upon to form a new organisation by federating amongst themselves for defence

I will briefly present my supporting evidence.

The provisional government, even under the most favourable circumstances, can:

Neither constitutionally reform the current administrative system;

Nor completely, or even significantly, change its personnel.

Constitution reforms can only be done by some Constituent Assembly, and it is not necessary to demonstrate that convening a Constituent Assembly is impossible at this time when there is not a week, not a day to lose. As for the changing of personnel, to carry it out in a serious manner it would be necessary to find one hundred thousand new functionaries in just a few days, with the certainty that these new functionaries would be more intelligent, more energetic, and more honest than the current ones. Simply stating this requirement makes it clear that its realisation is impossible.

There are therefore only two alternatives for the provisional government: either resign itself to using this essentially Bonapartist administration, which will be in its hands be a poisoned weapon against itself and against France; or break this governmental machine, without even trying to replace it with another, and to give the most complete freedom of initiative to all the provinces, to all the communes of France, which amounts to the dissolution of the current State.

But by destroying the administrative machine, the men of the left will deprive themselves of the only means they had of governing France. Paris, having thus lost official command and the power to initiate by decree, will retain only the initiative of the example it can set by placing itself at the head of this national movement.

Is Paris capable, through the energy of its resolutions, of playing this role? No; Paris is too absorbed with concern for its own defence to be able to direct and organise the national movement of France. Besieged Paris will turn into a vast camp; its entire population will form a single army, disciplined by the sense of danger: but an army does not reason, does not act as a leading and organising force – it fights.

The only and best thing that Paris can do in the interest of its own salvation and that of the whole of France is to proclaim and provoke the absolute independence

[1] So much for Engels' assertion that "federalism… consisted precisely in the fact that each town acted on its own, declaring that the important thing was not co-operation with other towns but separation from them, this precluding any possibility of a combined attack" for Bakunin "[a]s early as September 1870 (in his *Lettres à un français*)... had declared that the only way to drive the Prussians out of France by a revolutionary struggle was to do away with all forms of centralised leadership and leave each town, each village, each parish to wage war on its own". ("The Bakuninists at work", *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 23: 592). (*Black Flag*)

and spontaneity of the provincial movements – and if Paris forgets and neglects to do so, for whatever reason, patriotism commands the provinces to rise up and organise themselves spontaneously and independently of Paris.

Is this uprising of the provinces still possible? Yes, if the workers of the great provincial cities, Lyon, Marseille, Saint-Étienne, Rouen, and many others, have blood in their veins, energy in their hearts and strength in their arms, if they are living men and not socialist doctrinaires.

We cannot rely upon the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois see and understand nothing outside of the State and the regular methods of the State. The maximum of their ideal, their imagination and their heroism is the revolutionary aggrandisement of the power and action of the State in the name of public safety. But I have already demonstrated that the action of the State, at this time and in the present circumstances, far from saving France, can only kill it.

there are only two classes capable of this supreme movement required for the salvation of the homeland: the workers and the peasants.

Do you perhaps believe in an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, in the name of national salvation? This is the programme that Gambetta outlines in his letter to *Le Progrès* of Lyon, and I think it is right to tell you my opinion of this famous letter.

I never thought much of Gambetta, but I confess that this letter showed him to be even more insignificant and dim than I had imagined. He took his role as a moderate, wise, reasonable republican quite seriously, and at a time when France is crumbing and perishing and can only be saved if all French people are truly driven by the devil, M. Gambetta finds the time and inspiration necessary to write a letter in which he begins by declaring that he intends "to uphold with dignity the role of *governmental democratic opposition*." He speaks of the "*programme that is both republican and conservative* that he has set out since 1869," that of "making policy derived from universal suffrage predominate," (but then it is the plebiscite of Napoleon III) "to prove that in the current circumstances, the republic is now the very condition of salvation for France and of the European equilibrium; – that there is no longer security, peace, progress except in *wisely* practiced republican institutions" (as in Switzerland probably!); – "*that France cannot be governed against the middle classes*, and that it cannot be *led* without maintaining a generous *alliance with the proletariat*" (generous on whose part? Undoubtedly the bourgeoisie's.) "Only the republican form allows for a harmonious reconciliation between the *just* aspirations of the workers and *respect for the sacred rights of property*. The just-milieu is an outdated policy. Caesarism is the most ruinous, the most bankrupt of solutions. Divine right is definitively abolished. *Jacobinism is now a ridiculous and unhealthy concept. Only rational and positivist democracy* (do you hear the charlatan!) can reconcile everything, organise everything, fertilise everything (let us see how?). 1789 laid down the principles (not all of them, far from it; the principles of bourgeois freedom, yes; but those of equality, those of proletarian freedom, no); 1792 made them triumph (and that is no doubt why France is so free!); 1848 gave them the sanction of universal suffrage (in June, no doubt[1]). It is up to the current generation to realise the republican form (as in Switzerland), and to reconcile, on the basis of justice (legal justice obviously) and the elective principles, the rights of the citizen and the functions of the State, in a progressive and free society. *To achieve this goal two things are necessary: to eliminate the fear of some and calm the distrust of others; to bring the bourgeoisie to a love of democracy, and the people to trust their elder brothers*." (Why not trust the nobility, which is even older than the bourgeoisie?)

No, M. Gambetta's hopes are illusions. By what right would the bourgeoisie ask the people to trust it? It is the bourgeoisie that unleashed war upon France through its cowardly subservience to power; and the people, who understand this, also understand that it is now up to them to take the affairs of the homeland into their own hands.

There will undoubtedly be, in the bourgeois class, a considerable number of young people who, driven by the despair of patriotism, will wholeheartedly enter into the popular movement that must save France; but it will not be possible for them to bring the entire

[1] The June days (*les journées de Juin*) of the 1848 Revolution was an uprising by French workers which took place between 22 and 26 June 1848 in response to plans to close the National Workshops, created by the Second Republic to provide work for the unemployed. The National Guard crushed the revolt, with over 1,500 either killed or injured and 4,000 deported to French Algeria. It marked the end of the hopes of a "democratic and social republic" (*république démocratique et sociale*). (*Black Flag*)

bourgeoisie along with them, and to give it the audacity, the energy, the understanding of the situation that it lacks.

I think that at this time, in France, there are only two classes capable of this supreme movement required for the salvation of the homeland: the workers and the peasants.

Do not be surprised that I speak of the peasants. Peasants only sin through ignorance, not through lack of character. Not having too much, even worn-out by life, not having suffered the deleterious action of bourgeois civilisation, which only slightly touched them, they have retained all the energetic temperament, all the nature of the people. Property, love and the enjoyment not of pleasure but of *gain* have indeed made them considerably selfish, but have not diminished their instinctive hatred for those who enjoy the fruits of the earth without producing them through their own labour. Moreover, the peasant is fundamentally patriotic, nationalistic, because he worships the land, has a true passion for it, and will wage war to the death against any foreign invaders who come to drive him from his fields.

But to win over the peasant, great caution must be exercised. If it is true that the peasant hates the invader of the land, and that he also hates the *fine Gentlemen* who cheat him, he hates no less, unfortunately, the urban workers.

This is the great misfortune, this is the great obstacle to the revolution. The worker despises the peasant, the peasant returns his contempt with hatred. And yet, between these two great halves of the people, there is in reality no conflicting interest; there is only a vast and fatal misunderstanding, which must be eliminated at all costs.

The more enlightened, more civilised, and therefore somewhat more bourgeois and doctrinaire socialism of the cities misunderstands and despises the primitive, natural and much more savage socialism of the countryside. The peasant, for his part, considers the worker to be the servant or soldier of the bourgeois, and he hates him as such, to the point of becoming himself the servant and soldier of reaction.

Since this fatal antagonism is based solely upon a misunderstanding, one of the two parties must take the initiative in explanation and reconciliation. This initiative naturally belongs to the more enlightened party, namely the urban workers.

In my next letter, I will examine the grievances of the workers against the peasants, grievances which it is important for the workers to be fully aware of themselves if they want to work seriously towards a reconciliation.

Letter IIII

6 September

The main grievances of the workers against the peasants can be reduced to three:

First, that the peasants are ignorant, superstitious and bigoted, and that allow themselves to be led by priests;

Second, that they are devoted to the emperor;

Third, that they are fanatical supporters of private property.

It is true that the French peasants are completely ignorant; but is that their fault? Has anyone ever thought of educating them? Is that a reason to despise and mistreat them? But by that logic, the bourgeois, who are undeniably more learned than the workers, would have the right to despise and mistreat the latter; and we know many bourgeois who say so, who base their right to domination on this superiority of education and who deduce from it the duty of subordination for the workers. What makes the workers great compared to the bourgeoise is not their education, which is limited, but their instinct for justice, which is undeniably strong. But do the peasants lack this instinct for justice? Look at them closely; in undoubtedly different forms, you will find it there in its entirety. In them, alongside their ignorance, you will find a profound common sense, an admirable subtlety, and that energy for work which constitutes the honour and salvation of the proletariat.

You say the peasants are superstitious and bigoted, and they let themselves be led by priests. – Their superstition is the product of their ignorance, artificially and systematically fostered by all bourgeois governments. And besides, they are not nearly as superstitious and bigoted as you claim: it is their wives who are. But are all the wives of the workers truly free from the superstitions and doctrines of the Roman Catholic religion? As for the influence and direction of the priests, they only superficially submit to them, to the extent that internal peace requires and as long as it does not contradict their interests. This superstition did not prevent them, after 1789, from buying Church lands confiscated by the State, despite the malediction the Church had placed on both the buyers and sellers. It follows, therefore, that to definitely eliminate the influence of priests in the countryside, the revolution

only has to do one thing: to put the interests of the peasants in conflict with those of the Church.

I have heard with sorrow not only revolutionary Jacobins, but also socialists who have been indirectly influenced by this school, put forward this completely *anti-revolutionary* idea that the future republic will have to abolish by decree all public worship and also decree the violent expulsion of all priests. First, I am the absolute enemy of *revolution by decree*, which is a consequence and application of the idea of the *revolutionary State*, that is to say of reaction hiding behind the appearance of revolution. To this system of revolutionary decrees, I oppose that of *revolutionary acts*, the only effective, consistent and true one, outside of the intervention of any official and authoritarian violence.

To this system of revolutionary decrees, I oppose that of *revolutionary acts*, the only effective, consistent and true one, outside of the intervention of any official and authoritarian violence

Thus, in this example, if by misfortune they wanted to decree the abolition of religious services and the expulsion of priests, you can be sure that the least religious peasants would side with the church and the priests, if only out of a sprit of contradiction, and because a legitimate, natural feeling, the basis of freedom, rebels in every man against any imposed measure, even if it had freedom as its goal. We can therefore be certain that if the cities were foolish enough to *decree* the abolition of the church and the expulsion of the priests, the countryside, siding with the priests, would revolt against the cities and become a terrible instrument in the hands of reaction. But should we then allow the priests and their power to remain standing? Not at all. They must be fought in the most energetic way – not as ministers of the Roman Catholic religion, but because they have been the most effective supporters of this deplorable imperial regime which has brough the calamities of war upon France; because by persuading people to vote for the emperor, and by promising them that they would have peace and security on this condition, they have deceived the people, and they are therefore schemers and traitors.

The main reason why all revolutionary authorities throughout the world have always produced so little revolution is that they have always wanted to make it by themselves, by their own authority and power, which has invariably led to two results: first, an excessive narrowing of revolutionary action, because it is impossible for even the most intelligent, most energetic, most frank revolutionary authority to grasp many issues and interests at once, every dictatorship, whether individual or collective, insofar as it is formed of one or more official figures, is necessarily very limited, very blind, and incapable of penetrating the depths or embracing the full breadth of popular life – just as it is impossible for the most powerful vessel to measure the depth and breadth of the ocean; and then, to overcome resistance, because every act of authority and official power, legally imposed, inevitably awakens in the masses a feeling of revolt, reaction.

What then should revolutionary authorities do – and let us try to ensure that there are as few as possible – what should they do to extend and organise the revolution? They should not make it themselves by decrees, not impose it on the masses, but provoke it within the masses. They must not impose any organisation upon them, but by encouraging their autonomous organisation from the bottom up, work using individual influence over the most intelligent men in each locality, so that this organisation conforms as closely as possible to true principles. That is the whole secret to success.

Who can doubt that this work encounters immense difficulties? Do you think that a revolution is child's play, and that it be accomplished without overcoming innumerable difficulties? Today's socialist revolutionaries have little or nothing to imitate from the revolutionary methods of the Jacobins of 1793. Revolutionary routine would be their downfall. They have to work in the thick of things, they have to create everything.

I return to the peasants.

The supposed Bonapartist sympathies of the French peasants, which constitute another grievance of the workers against them, do not worry me at all. It is a superficial symptom of the socialist instinct, distorted by ignorance and exploited by malice, a skin condition that cannot resist the heroic remedies of revolutionary socialism; it is a negative expression of their hatred for the *fine Gentlemen* and for the bourgeois of the cities. The peasants will give neither their land, nor their money, nor their lives for Napoleon IIII, but they will gladly give him the lives and property of the others, because they hate the others, and because they have been led to see in Napoleon the emperor of the peasants, the enemy of the bourgeoisie. And note that

in that deplorable affair where the peasants of a commune in the Dordogne slaughtered and burned a young and noble landowner, the dispute began with these words spoken by a peasant: “Ah! There you are, fine Gentleman; you yourself stay comfortably at home because you are rich, and you send the poor people to war. Well, we are going home, let them come and get us there.” In these words, you can see the vivid expression of the peasant’s hereditary resentment against the rich landowner, but by no means the fanatical desire to sacrifice himself and go and be killed for the emperor; on the contrary, [you see] the perfectly natural desire to escape military service.

Moreover, in the villages where love for the emperor has become a cult and a passionate habit – if such villages exist – there is no need to even speak of the emperor. The Bonapartist superstition must be destroyed *in practice*, by dismantling the administrative machine, by undermining the influence of those who fostered imperial fanaticism, but without saying a word against the emperor himself. This is the true way to succeed, the method I have already recommended to you regarding the priests.

The last and main argument of the city workers against the peasants is the latter’s greed, their crude selfishness and their passionate attachment to the individual ownership of land.

The workers who criticise them for all this should first ask themselves: who is not selfish? Who in today’s society is not greedy, in the sense that they cling furiously to the little wealth they have been able to accumulate, which guarantees, in the current economic anarchy and in this society that is merciless to those who are starving, their own existence and the existence of their loved ones? The peasants are not communists, it is true; they fear and hate those who advocate redistribution because they have something to preserve, at least in their imagination, and imagination is a great power that is generally underestimated in society. The workers, the vast majority of whom own nothing, are infinitely more inclined towards communism than the peasants; nothing could be more natural: the communism of the one is as natural as the individualism of the other – there is nothing to boast about, nor to despite in others – both being, with all their ideals and passions, the products of the different environments that produced them. And besides, are all the workers themselves communists?

It is therefore not a question of blaming the peasants, nor of denigrating them*, it is a question of establishing a revolutionary course of action which turns the difficultly into an advantage, which would not only prevent the individualism of the peasants from pushing them into the party of reaction, but which, on the contrary, would use it to make the revolution triumph.*

Apart from the method I propose, there is only one other: the terrorism of the cities against the countryside. Now, as I have said, and I cannot repeat it too often: those who use such a method will kill the revolution instead of making it triumph; we must absolutely renounce this old weapon of terror, of violence organised by the State, a weapon borrowed from the arsenal of Jacobinism; it would only succeed in pushing the ten million French peasants into the camp of reaction.

Fortunately – I say fortunately – France’s defeats do not allow it to think for a single moment about terrorism or the despotism of the revolutionary State. And without that, it is more than likely that many socialists, imbued with Jacobin prejudices, would have wanted to use force to impose their programme. They would have, for example, convened a Convention composed of deputies from the cities: this Convention would have wanted to impose collectivism upon the countryside by decree; the countryside would have risen up, and to subdue them, it would have been necessary to resort to an immense armed force. This army, necessarily subject to military discipline, would have had generals, probably ambitious ones; – and there you have it, the entire machine of the State reconstituting itself piece by piece. Once the machine was reconstituted, they would soon have had the operator, the dictator, the emperor. All of this would inevitably have happened to them, because that is the very logic of things.

Fortunately, today, events themselves will force the workers to open their eyes and renounce this fatal system. They would have to be mad to want to engage in terrorism in the countryside under current circumstances. If the countryside were to rise up against the cities now, the cities, and France with them, would be lost. The workers sense this, and this is partly what explains to me the apathy, the incredible inertia of the working-class populations in most of France’s major cities.

Indeed, the workers are at this moment completely bewildered and stunned by the novelty of the situation. Until now, they have known little more than their sufferings through personal experience; everything else, their ideals, their hopes, their political and social imaginings, their practical plans and projects, dreamt rather than contemplated for the near future – all this they took much more from books, from current and constantly discussed theories, than from reflection based upon life experience. They have continually

ignored their daily lives and experiences, and are not accustomed to drawing inspiration or thought from them. Their thinking has been nourished by a certain theory accepted by tradition, without criticism, but with complete confidence, and this theory is nothing other than the political systems of the Jacobins, modified more of less for the use of socialists. Now, this theory of revolution has gone bankrupt, its main foundation, the State, the power of the State, having crumbled. In the current circumstances, the application of the terrorist method, so beloved by the Jacobins, has obviously become impossible. And the workers of France, who know no other, are bewildered. They tell themselves, quite rightly, that it is impossible to carry out official, regular and legal terrorism, or to use coercive means against the peasants, that it is impossible to establish a revolutionary State, a central Committee of Public Safety for all of France, at a time when the foreign invasion is not only at the border as in 1792, but in the heart of France, a stone's throw from Paris. They see the whole official organisation crumbing, they despair with good reason of being able to create another, and do not understand, these revolutionaries, any salvation outside of public order, do not understand, these men of the people, the power and life that is in what the official people of all colours, from the white [*la fleur de lys*] to the darkest red, call *anarchy*; they fold their arms and say to themselves: We are doomed, France is lost.

No, my friends, it is not lost, if you do not wish to doom yourselves, if you are men, if you wish to save it. For that, you know what you must do: the administration, the government, the entire machine of the State is crumbling on all sides; do not despair of this, and do not try to rebuild these ruins. Freed from all this official architecture, appeal to popular life, to freedom, and you will save the people.

Collectivism can only be imposed upon slaves – and then collectivism becomes the very negation of humanity. Amongst a free people, collectivism can only arise naturally; not through imposition from above, but through spontaneous movement from below, freely and necessarily at the same time

I return once again to the peasants. I have never believed that, even in the most favourable circumstances, the workers could every have the power to impose collectivism [*collectivité*] upon them; and I have never desired it, because I abhor any imposed system, because I sincerely and passionately love freedom. This false idea and this freedom-killing hope constitute the fundamental aberration of authoritarian communism, which, because it needs regularly organised violence, needs the State, and which, because it needs the State, necessarily leads to the reconstitution of the principle of authority and a privileged class of State functionaries. Collectivism can only be imposed upon slaves – and then collectivism becomes the very negation of humanity. Amongst a free people, collectivism can only arise naturally; not through imposition from above, but through spontaneous movement from below, freely and necessarily at the same time, when the conditions of privileged individualism, the political and legal institutions of the State, have themselves disappeared.

Letter IV

7 September

Having discussed the grievances of the workers against the peasants, we must now consider the grievances of the peasants, the source of their hatred for the towns.

I will list them as follows:

1. The peasants feel despised by the cities, and the contempt shown to them is quickly sensed, even by children, and is not forgiven.

2. The peasants think – and not without good reason, not without a lot of evidence and historical experience to support this belief – that the cities want to dominate them, govern them, often exploit them, and always impose upon them a political order they do not care for.

3. The peasants also consider the urban workers as *redistributors*, and fear that the socialists will come and confiscate their land which they love above all else.

What, then, must the workers do to overcome this distrust and animosity of the peasants towards them? First, they must cease showing them contempt, cease despising them. This is necessary for the salvation of the revolution and themselves, for the hatred of the

peasants constitutes an immense danger. If it were not for this distrust and hatred, the revolution would have happened long ago, because the animosity that unfortunately exists in the countryside against the cities constitutes, in every country, the basis and main force of reaction. Therefore, in the interest of the revolution that must emancipate them, the workers must stop showing this contempt toward the peasants as soon as possible. They also owe it out of justice, for truly they have no reason to despise them or to hate them. Peasants are not lazy; they are hard workers just like themselves, only they work under different conditions. That is all. In the presence of the bourgeois exploiter, the worker must feel like the brother of the peasant.

The peasants will march with the workers of the city for the salvation of the homeland as soon as they are convinced that the city workers do not intend to impose their will on them, nor any political and social order invented by the cities for the greater happiness of the countryside; as soon as they have been given the assurance that the workers have no intention whatsoever of taking their land.

Well, it is absolutely necessary today that the workers truly renounce this claim and this intention, and that they renounce it in such a way that the peasants know it and remain completely convinced of it. The workers must renounce it, for even if such claims were feasible, they would be supremely *unjust* and *reactionary*; and now that their realisation has become utterly impossible, they would only constitute a criminal folly.

By what right would the workers impose any form of government or economic organisation on the peasants? By the right of revolution, they say. But a revolution ceases to be a revolution when it acts despotically, and when, instead of bringing freedom to the masses, it provokes reaction within them. The method and the condition, if not the main goal of the revolution, is the annihilation of the principle of authority in all its possible manifestations, it is the complete abolition of the political and juridical State, because the State, younger brother of the Church, as Proudhon has very well demonstrated, is the historical consecration of all despotisms, of all privileges, the political rationale for all economic and social enslavements, the very essence and centre of all reaction. When, in the name of the revolution, one wants to create a State, even if only a provisional State, one is therefore creating reaction and working for despotism, not for freedom; for the institution of privilege against equality.

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It is as clear as day. But the socialist workers of France, raised in the political traditions of the Jacobins, have never wanted to understand it. Now they will be forced to understand it, fortunately for the revolution and for themselves. Where did this pretension come from, as ridiculous as it is arrogant, as unjust as it is disastrous, to impose their political and social ideal on ten million peasants who do not want it? This is evidently yet another bourgeois legacy, a political inheritance of bourgeois revolutionary thought. What is the foundation, the explanation, the theory of this pretension? It is the supposed or real superiority of intelligence, education, in short of working-class civilisation, over the civilisation of the countryside. But do you realise that such a principle can legitimise all conquests and consecrate all oppressions? The bourgeoise have never had any other way to prove their mission and their right to *govern*, or, which means the same thing, to exploit the working world. From nation to nation, as well as from one class to another, this fatal principle, which is none other than that of authority, explains and establishes a right to all invasions and all conquests. Have not the Germans always used this to excuse all their attacks against the freedom and independence of Slavic peoples and to legitimise their violent and forced Germanisation? It is, they say, the conquest of civilisation over barbarism.[1] Beware, the Germans are also beginning to realise that Germanic, Protestant civilisation is far superior to the Catholic civilisation of Latin peoples in general, and to French civilisation in particular. Beware lest they soon imagine that they

[1] It should be noted that in reply to Bakunin's Pan-Slavism, Engels asserted that the Slavs have been "*forced* to attain the first stage of civilisation only by means of a foreign yoke, are not viable and will never be able to achieve any kind of independence" and that the conquered should give "thanks for the Germans for having given themselves the trouble of civilising the stubborn Czechs and Slovenes, and introducing among them trade, industry, a tolerable degree of agriculture, and culture!" ("Democratic Pan-Slavism", *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 8: 367, 369). (*Black Flag*)

have the mission to civilise you and make you happy, just as you imagine that you have the mission to civilise and emancipate your compatriots, your brothers, the peasants of France. For me, both claims are equally odious, and I declare to you that both in international relations and in relations between classes, I will always side with those whom people seek to civilise by this method. I will rebel with them against all these arrogant civilisers, whether they call themselves workers or Germans and, in rebelling against them, I will serve revolution against reaction.

But if that is the case, some will ask, should we abandon the ignorant and superstitious peasants to all the influences and intrigues of reaction? Not at all. Reaction must be crushed in the countryside as well as in the towns; but to do so, we must confront it in practice, and not limit ourselves to waging war against it with decrees. As I have already said, nothing can be eradicated with decrees. On the contrary, decrees and all acts of authority only strength what they seek to destroy.

I declare to you that both in international relations and in relations between classes, I will always side with those whom people seek to civilise… I will rebel with them against all these arrogant civilisers… and, in rebelling against them, I will serve revolution against reaction

Instead of trying to take the land the peasants possess today, let them follow their natural instincts, and do you know what will happen them? The peasant will want all the land for himself; he will see the grand lord and rich bourgeois, whose vast estates diminish his field, as an outsider and a usurper. The Revolution of 1789 gave the peasants the Church's lands; he will want to take advantage of another revolution to gain the bourgeoisie's lands.

But if that were to happen, if the peasants were to take possession of all the land that does not yet belong to them, would this not have reinforced the principle of private property in an unfortunate way, and would the peasants not find themselves more hostile than ever to the socialist workers in the cities?

Not at all, because the legal and political recognition of the State, the guarantee of property, will be lacking for the peasant. Property will no longer be a right; it will be reduced to the status of a mere fact.

So it will be civil war, you will say. Private property no longer being guaranteed by any higher authority, and being defended only by the energy of the owner alone, everyone will want to seize the property of others, the strongest will plunder the weakest.

It is certain that, at first, things will not proceed in a completely peaceful manner: there will be struggles, public order will be disturbed, and the initial consequences of such a situation could constitute what is commonly called a civil war. But would you rather hand France over to the Prussians? Do you think the Prussians will respect public order and not kill or plunder anyone? Do you prefer slavery, shame and utter misery, the inevitable fruits of a Prussian victory that your hesitations and scruples will have made certain, to a momentary upheaval that must save the country?

No, let us not have childish fears about the drawbacks of a peasant uprising. Do you not think that, despite the few excesses that might occur here and there, the peasants, no longer restrained by the authority of the State, will devour one another? If they try to do so at the beginning, they will soon convince themselves of the material impossibility of continuing on this path, and then they will try to reach an agreement, compromise and organise themselves. The need to feed themselves and their children, and consequently the need to continue the work of the countryside, the need to secure their homes, their families and their own lives against unforeseen attacks, all this will undoubtedly soon force them to enter the path of mutual arrangements.

And do not believe that in these arrangements, brought about outside of any official tutelage, by mere force of circumstances, the strongest and richest yield a predominant influence. The wealth of the rich will no longer be guaranteed by legal institutions, and therefore will cease to be a power. Wealthy peasants are powerful today only because they are protected and courted by State functionaries and the State itself. If this support is lacking, their power will disappear at the same time. As for the shrewder, the strongest, they will be nullified by the collective power of the masses, of the great number of small and very small peasants, as well as the rural proletariat, a mass today enslaved, reduced to mute suffering, but which the revolutionary movement will arm with an irresistible power.

I do not claim, note it well, that the countryside reorganised in this way, from the bottom up, will immediately create an ideal organisation, conforming in all respects to the one we dream of. What I am convinced of is that it will be a living organisation, a thousand times superior to the one that now exists, and which, moreover, being on the one hand open to active propaganda of the cities, and on the other never being able to be fixed and, so to speak, petrified by the protection of the State and the law, will progress freely and will be able to develop and improve itself in an indefinite, but always living and free way, never decreed or legalised, until finally it reaches a point as reasonable as can be hoped for in our time.

Since life and spontaneous action, suspended for centuries by the absorbing action of the State, will be returned to the communes, it is natural that each commune will take as the starting point for its new development, not the intellectual and moral state in which the official fiction supposes it, but the actual state of civilisation; and since the degree of actual civilisation varies greatly between the communes of France, as well as between those of Europe in general, a great difference in development will necessarily result; but mutual understanding, harmony and an equilibrium established by common agreement will replace the artificial unity of States. There will be new life and a new world.

Letter V

8 September.

I foresee you will object to everything I have written to you about the peasants, their organisation, and their reconciliation with the workers.

You will tell me: "But will not this revolutionary agitation, this internal struggle that must necessarily arise from the destruction of political and legal institutions, paralyse nation defence? Instead of repelling the Prussians, will not France on the contrary be delivered to the invasion?"

Not at all. History proves that nations never appeared so powerful externally as when they felt deeply agitated and troubled internally, and conversely they were never so weak as when they appeared united under some authority and within some kind of order. Ultimately, nothing could be more natural: struggle is life, and life is strength. To convince yourself of this, compare a few periods in your own history. Contrast France emerging from the Fronde[1], in the youth of Louis XIV, with France in his old age, the monarchy firmly established, unified, pacified by the great king; the former resplendent with victories, the latter marching from defeat to defeat toward ruin. Likewise compare France of 1792 with the France of today. If France was ever torn apart by civil war, it was certainly in 1792 and 1793; the movement, the struggle, the life-or-death struggle, was taking place throughout the republic; and yet France victoriously repelled the invasion of almost all of Europe allied against it. In 1870, the united and pacified France of the empire was defeated by the armies of Germany and appears so demoralised that you must fear for its existence.

You could without doubt cite the example of present-day Prussia and Germany, which are not torn apart by any civil war, which on the contrary show themselves to be singularly resigned and submissive to the despotism of their sovereign, and which nevertheless today develop a formidable power. But this exceptional fact can be explained by two particular reasons, neither of which can be applied to present-day France. The first is the unitary passion that for fifty-five years has only grown at the expense of all other passions and ideas in the unfortunate Germanic nation. The second is the sophisticated perfection of its administrative system.

As for the unitary passion, this inhuman and freedom-destroying ambition to become a *great nation*, the foremost nation in the world – France also experienced it in its time. This passion, like those furious fevers that momentarily give the sick person superhuman strength, only to then completely exhaust them afterward and plunge them into utter prostration – this passion, after having grown in France for a very short period of time, led to a catastrophe from which it has hardly recovered, even today, fifty-five years after the defeat at Waterloo, that its present misfortunates are nothing, in my opinion, but a relapse, a second stroke of apoplexy which this time will certainly cause the patient, that is to say the military, political and juridical State, to succumb.

Well, Germany is now gripped by precisely the same fever, the same passion for national greatness, which France experienced and underwent in all its phases at the beginning of this century and which, for that very reason, has now become incapable of stirring and electrifying it. The Germans, who today consider themselves the foremost people in the world, are at least half a century behind France; what am I saying?

[1] The Fronde was a series of civil wars in the Kingdom of France between 1648 and 1653 in which the young King Louis XIV confronted the combined opposition of the princes, the nobility, the noble regional court assemblies (*parlements*), as well as much of the French population, and managed to subdue them all. (*Black Flag*)

you have to go back much further to find the equivalent of the phase they are going through today. The Berlin *Official Gazette* foretells that in the near future, as a reward for their heroic devotion, they will have "the establishment of a great Teutonic empire, founded upon the fear of God and true morality." Translate this into good Catholic language, and you have the empire dreamt of by Louis XIV. Their conquests, of which they are now so proud, would set them back two centuries! Therefore, all that there is of honest and truly liberal intelligence in Germany – without even mentioning the social-democrats – is beginning to worry about the consequences of national victories. A few more weeks of sacrifices like those Germany has had to make thus far, half by force, half by exaltation, and the fever will begin to subside; the German people will count their losses in men and money, compare them to the gains made, and then King Wilhelm and Bismarck will have good reason to be on their guard. And that is why they feel the absolute necessity of returning victorious and with hands full.

The other reason for the extraordinary power currently developed by the Germans is the excellence of their administrative machine, excellence not from the point of view of the freedom and well-being of the people, but from the point of view of the exclusive wealth and power of the State. The administrative machine, however perfect it may be, is never the life of the people, on the contrary, it is its absolute and direct negation. Therefore the force it produces is never a natural, organic, popular force, instead it is an entirely mechanical and artificial force. Once broken, it does not renew itself, and its reconstruction becomes exceedingly difficult. That is why one must be careful not force the results. Yet, that is precisely what Bismarck and his king have done; they have already forced the machine. Germany has mobilised one and a half million soldiers, and God knows the hundreds of millions it has spent. Let Paris resist, let all of France rise up behind it, and the German machine will collapse.

Letter VI

15 September 1870.

After telling you what I think about the possible union of workers and peasants to save France, I want to return once against to the central point of my thesis, namely the absolute impotence of any republican or other government, and especially of the Gambetta and Co. government, to prevent the catastrophe that is being prepared and which can only be averted by the direct and all-powerful action of the people themselves.

If I bring back into the course of my argument a few points I have already presented, it is because there are things that cannot be repeated too often: for the salvation of the French people depends on understanding these things.

Let us therefore see what the current government might try to do to organise national defence.

the marvels of 1793… were not produced solely by the power of the State, of the government, but also and above all by the revolutionary enthusiasm of the entire French people, who, taking their affairs into their own hands with the energy of despair, organised a centre of resistance and action in every city, in every commune

The first difficulty that comes to mind is this. This organisation, even in the most favourable circumstances, and even more so in the present crisis, can only succeed on one condition: that the organising power remains in immediate, regular, incessant contact with the country it proposes to organise. But there is no doubt that within days, when Paris is occupied by the German armies, the government's communications with the rest of the country will be completely cut off. Under those circumstances, no organisation is possible. Moreover, at that crucial moment, the government of Paris will be absorbed by the defence of Paris itself and by the internal difficulties it will encounter that, even if it were composed of the most intelligent and energetic men, it would be impossible for it to think of anything else.

It is true that the government could relocate outside of Paris, to some large provincial city, Lyon, for example. But then it would no longer exercise any authority over France, because in the eyes of the people, especially in the eyes of the peasants, since it is composed not of elected representatives of all of France, but of the elected representatives of Paris, that

is to say, of men some unknown, others hated by the countryside – this government would have no legitimate right to rule over France. If it remained in Paris, supported by the workers of Paris, it would still impose itself upon France, at least on the cities, and perhaps even upon the countryside, despite the pronounced hostility of the peasants towards the men who comprise it. For, it must be admitted, Paris exerts such great historical prestige on all French imaginations that, whether they like it or not, they will always end up obeying it.

But once the government leaves Paris, this powerful reason will no longer exist. Let us even suppose that the large provincial city where it has moved its residence acclaims it, and ratifies by this acclamation the elected representative of the people of Paris: this support of a provincial city will not sway the rest of France, and the countryside will not feel any more bound to obey it.

And what means, what instrument will it use, to obtain obedience? The administrative machine? Assuming that it can still function, is it not entirely Bonapartist, and will it not precisely serve, with the support of the priests, to incite the countryside against the republican government? It will therefore be necessary to contain the rebellious countryside, and, for that, part of the regular troops who were supposed to face the Prussians will have to be used. And since the senior officers are almost all Bonapartists, the government, which will need devoted and loyal men, will be forced to dismiss them and look for others: the army will have to be completely reorganised to make it an instrument capable of defending the republic against reactionary insurrection. Meanwhile, the Prussians will take Paris, and the countryside will destroy the republic: and that is the only thing that an official, governmental, attempt at defence, by regular, administrative means can lead to.

Woe to France if it were to expect from the current government the renewal of the marvels of 1793. These marvels were not produced solely by the power of the State, of the government, but also and above all by the revolutionary enthusiasm of the entire French people, who, taking their affairs into their own hands with the energy of despair, organised a centre of resistance and action in every city, in every commune. – And then, if the State born from the movement of 1789, still so young, so imbued with popular life and passions, was able to show itself capable of saving the homeland, it must be said that since then it has aged considerably and become thoroughly corrupt. Overhauled and amended, and worn down to its very foundations by Napoleon I; restored as best as possible by the Bourbons, corrupted and weakened by the July Monarchy, it reached under the Second Empire the ultimate degree of corruption and impotence; and now, the only thing that can be expected of it is its complete disappearance along with all the police, administrative, juridical and financial institutions that supported it – to make way for natural society, for the people who reclaim their natural rights and who rise up.

But, you will say, the provisional government has summoned all the electors for the first half of October, in order to appoint a Constituent Assembly; this will be able to radically reform the administrative system, as did that of 1789, and thus give new life to the political State, which is falling into ruins.

This objection is not serious. Let us suppose that, in accordance with the decision of the provisional government – which seems to me to be a defiant gesture thrown at the Prussians rather than a considered resolution – let us suppose, I say, that the elections take place regularly, and that an Assembly emerges whose majority will be willing to support all the intentions of the republican government. I maintain that this Assembly will not be able to carry out real and profound reforms at this time. That would be tantamount to attempting a flanking manoeuvre in the face of a powerful enemy, like the manoeuvre Bazaine attempted against the Prussians, which ended so badly for him. Is it really at the very moment when the government most needs the energetic and regular services of the administrative machine that it should try to renew and transform it? This would require paralysing it completely for a few weeks; and what would the government do during that time, deprived of the machinery it needs to govern the country?

This same impossibility will prevent the government from making any radical changes to the personnel of the imperial administration itself. It would have to create a legion of new men. All it can do, all it has done so far, is to replace the prefects and sub-prefects with others who are in general not much better.

These few personnel changes will inevitably further demoralise the current administration. Endless infighting and a muted internal war will ensue, rendering it a hundred times more incapable of action that it is today; so that the republican government will have at its disposal an administrative machine that will not even be as good as the one that, however badly, carried out the orders of the imperial ministry.

To remedy this problem, the provisional government will undoubtedly send into the departments pro-consuls, extraordinary commissioners. This would then be the height of disorganisation.

Indeed, it is not enough to be endowed with extraordinary powers, to take extraordinary measures of public safety, to have the power to create new forces, to be able to provoke in a corrupt administration, and in populations systematically unaccustomed to all initiative, a salutary impetus, an energy, an activity. For this, you must still possess what the bourgeoisie of 1792 and 1793 had to such a high degree, and what the current bourgeoisie, even the republicans, absolutely lacks – you must possess revolutionary intelligence, will, audacity. And how can you imagine that the commissioners of the provisional government, the subordinates of Gambetta and Co., will possess these qualities, since their superiors, the members of the government, the leaders of the republican party, have not found them in their own hearts?

Apart from these personal qualities which gave the men of 1793 a truly heroic character, if the extraordinary commissioners with the Jacobins of the National Convention were so successful, it was because this Convention was genuinely revolutionary, and, relying in Paris on the popular masses, on the vile *multitude*, to the exclusion of the liberal bourgeoisie, it had ordered all its proconsuls to likewise rely everywhere and always on that same popular rabble [*canaille populaire*]. The commissioners sent by Ledru-Rollin in 1848, and those that Gambetta may send today, have made and will necessarily make a complete fiasco, for the opposite reason, and the latter even more than the former, because this opposite reason will act even more powerfully on them than on their predecessors of 1848. This reason is that both have been and will be, to a more or less noticeable degree, radical bourgeois, delegates of bourgeois republicanism, and as such enemies of socialism, enemies of a truly popular revolution.

This antagonism between bourgeois revolution and popular revolution did not exist in 1793, neither in the consciousness of the people nor even in that of the bourgeoisie. The truth that the freedom of any privileged class – and consequently that of the bourgeoisie – was essentially founded upon the economic enslavement of the proletariat had not yet been disentangled from historical experience. As a fact, as a real effect, this truth had always existed; but it had been so confused with other facts and masked by so many different historical interests and tendencies, especially religious and national ones, that it had not yet emerged in its great simplicity and in its present clarity, neither for the bourgeoisie, the employer of labour, nor for the proletariat, the wage-earner, that is to say exploited by it. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat were indeed henceforth natural enemies but without knowing it; as a result of this ignorance, each attributed its fears or its woes to imaginary causes, not to their real antagonism; and believing themselves united in interests, they marched together against the monarchy, the nobility and the priests.

incite revolution and anarchy… *organise this popular anarchy in a revolutionary manner*. This revolutionary organisation was the only administration and the only executive force used by the proconsuls of 1793

This is what constituted the great strength of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of 1793. Not only did they not fear the unleashing of popular passions, but they provoked it with all their might, as the only means of salvation for the homeland and for themselves against internal and external reaction. When an extraordinary commissioner, delegated by the Convention, arrived in a province, he never addressed himself to the local bigwigs, nor to the well-gloved revolutionaries; he addressed himself directly to the sans-culottes, the popular rabble, and it was upon them that he relied to execute the decrees of the Convention against the big-wigs and the respectable revolutionaries. What they were doing therefore was not strictly speaking centralisation or administration, but provocation. They did not come to a place to dictatorially impose the will of the National Convention. They did this only on very rare occasions, and where they came to an area that was decidedly and unanimously hostile and reactionary. Then they arrived accompanied by troops who added the argument of the bayonet to their civic eloquence. But usually they came alone, without a single solider to support them, seeking their strength only from the masses, whose instincts were always in line with the thoughts of the Convention. Far from restricting the freedom of popular movements, for fear of anarchy, they provoked them in every way. The first thing they usually did was form a popular club where none already existed. Revolutionaries through and through, they quickly recognised the true revolutionaries amongst the masses and allied themselves with them to incite revolution and anarchy, and to *organise this popular anarchy in a revolutionary manner*. This revolutionary organisation was the only

administration and the only executive force used by the proconsuls of 1793.

Such was the true secret of the power of these giants, whom the pygmy Jacobins of our day admire, but whom they are powerless to imitate.

The commissioners of 1848 were men of a completely different calibre, from a completely different background. They and their leaders, the members of the provisional government, belonged to the bourgeoisie, which had become doctrinaire and was now fatally separated from the people. The heroes of the great revolution were to them what the tragedies of Corneille and Recine had been in literature – classic examples. They wanted to copy them, but life, passion, the sacred fire were gone. Where action was needed, they could only produce empty phrases, pretences. When they found themselves amongst the proletariat, they felt ill at ease, like otherwise honest people who are forced to deceived. They racked their brains to find a living word, a fruitful thought: they found nothing.

In all the revolutionary phantasmagoria of 1848, there were only two truly serious men, though quite unlike each other: Proudhon and Blanqui. All the rest were nothing but bad actors, who performed the Revolution as the medieval brotherhoods performed the Passion – until the moment when Louis Bonaparte came to draw the curtain.

The instructions that the commissioners of 1848 received from Ledru-Rollin were as incoherent and vague as the thoughts of this self-same revolutionary. They were all the grand words of 1793, without any of the grand things, the grand goals, or especially the energetic resolution of that era. Ledru-Rollin, like the wealthy bourgeois and rhetorician that he is, has always been the natural and instinctive enemy of socialism. Today, after great effort, he has finally managed to understand cooperative societies; but he does not feel he has the strength to go any further.

Louis Blanc, that Robespierre in miniature, this worshipper of the intelligent and virtuous citizen, this epitome of the State communist, of the doctrinaire and authoritarian socialist. In his youth, he wrote a very small pamphlet on "The Organisation of Labour", and even today, in the face of the immense work and the prodigious development of the International, he still remains at that point. Not a murmur of his words, not a spark of his brain, has given life to anyone. His intelligence is sterile, just as his entire personally is barren. Even today, in a letter recently addressed to the *Daily News*, in the face of the horrible and fratricidal slaughter being carried out by the two most civilised nations in the world, he could find nothing else in his head and in his heart but this advice, which he addresses to the French republicans, "to propose to the Germans, in the name of the brotherhood of peoples, a peace equally honourable for both nations."

Ledru-Rollin and Louis Blanc were, as is well known, the two great revolutionaries of 1848, before the June Days: one a bourgeois lawyer, a pompous rhetorician with Dantonesque airs and pretensions; the other, a Robespierre-Babeuf reduced to the smallest proportions. Neither of them knew how to think, will, or above all, dare. Moreover, the Bishop Lamourette of that time, Lamartine, had imprinted upon all the actions and all the men of the era, except Proudhon and Blanqui, his false note and his false character of conciliation – that conciliation which in reality meant sacrifice of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie, and which led to the June Days.

The extraordinary commissioners therefore left for the provinces, carrying in their pockets the instructions of these great men – moreover the recommendations of a very real reactionary character which were made to them by the moderate republicans of the *National*, the Marrasts, the Bastides, the Jules Favres, etc.

Is it any wonder that these unfortunate commissioners accomplished nothing in the departments except to stir up widespread discontent with the dictatorial tone and manner they chose to adopt? They were ridiculed and wielded no influence whatsoever. Instead of turning to the people, and only to the people, like their predecessors in 1793, they focused solely on trying to convert the privileged classes to the republic. Instead of organising popular power everywhere by unleashing revolutionary passions, they preached to the proletariat moderation, calm, patience, and a blind faith in the generous designs of the provisional government. The reactionary provincial circles, initially intimidated by this revolution which had so unexpectedly fallen upon their heads and by the arrival of these commissioners from Paris, regained courage when they saw that these Gentlemen only knew how to make phrases and were themselves afraid of the people; and the result of the mission of the commissioners of 1848 was the sad Constituent Assembly that you know.

After June, things were different. The bourgeois who were genuinely socialist, those who had joined the socialist camp under the influence of the great catastrophe that had killed in a single blow all the revolutionary actors of February, became serious men and made serious efforts to revolutionaries France. They even succeeded to a large extent. But it was too late; the reaction, for its part, had reorganised itself

with a formidable power, and, thanks to the terrible means provided by the centralisation of the State, it ended up triumphing completely, even more than it had intended, in the December days.

Well, the commissioners that Gambetta will be able to send to the departments will be even more wretched than the commissioners of 1848. Enemies of the socialist workers, as well as the Bonapartist administration and peasants, on whom will they rely? Their instructions will obviously commend them to suppress the socialist revolutionary movement in the cities, and the Bonapartist reactionary movement in the countryside – but with whose help? From a disorganised administration, itself remaining half or three-quarters Bonapartist – and a few hundred bloodless republicans and Orleanists: republicans as insignificant, as uncertain and as disorientated as themselves, remaining outside of the popular mass and exercising no influence on anyone; and Orleanists, good only, like all rich people, at exploiting and turning a movement to the benefit of the reaction, but themselves incapable of a resolute and energetic action. And note that the Orleanists will be by far the stronger of the two, for, besides the great financial resources at their disposal, they also have the advantage of knowing what they want, while the republicans, in addition to their extreme poverty, have the misfortunate of not knowing where they are going and remaining detached from all real interests, both privileged and popular. It will follow from this that the commissioners will either do nothing, or, if they do something, will do so only with the support of the Orleanists, and will thus have worked in reality only for the restoration of the Orleans.

Now, what is my final conclusion?

It is sufficiently clear from everything I have said, and indeed, I began by giving it to you in my first letter. I say that in the danger France faces, a danger greater than any it has faced for centuries, there is only one means of salvation: a general and revolutionary uprising of the people.

If the people rise, I have no doubt of victory. I only fear one thing: that the danger will not seem pressing enough, immense enough, threatening enough to give them the desperate courage they need. At this very moment, there is no shortage of Frenchmen who viewed the capture of Paris, the ruin and subjugation of France by the Prussians, as utterly impossible, impossible to the point of being ridiculous. And they calmly let the enemy advance, trusting in France's destiny, and imagining that merely saying "It is impossible" is enough to prevent it from happening.

It is absolutely necessary to awake from this dream, Frenchmen, if any of you still allow yourselves to be lulled by these dire illusions. No, I tell you: This terrible misfortunate, the very thought of which you refuse to admit, is not impossible. On the contrary, it is so certain that if you do not rise en masse *today* to exterminate the German soldiers who have invaded French soil, *tomorrow* it will be a reality. Several centuries of national predominance have so accustomed you to considering yourselves the premier and most powerful people in the world that you have not yet realised the gravity of your present situation. Here is this situation:

France as a State is lost. It can no longer save itself through regular and administrative means. It is now up to natural France, to the France of the people to enter the stage of history, to save its freedom and that of all Europe, by a vast, spontaneous, entirely popular uprising, outwith of any official organisation, of any governmental centralisation. And France, by sweeping the armies of the King of Prussia from its territory, will at the same time have liberated all the peoples of Europe and accomplished the social emancipation of the proletariat.

FRENCH REPUBLIC

Revolutionary Federation of COMMUNES

27 September 1870

The disastrous situation in which the Country finds itself; the impotence of the official powers and the indifference of the privileged classes have put the French nation on the brink of the abyss.

If the People organised in a revolutionary manner do not make haste to act, their future is lost, the Revolution is lost, all is lost. Inspired by the immensity of the danger and considering that the desperate action of the People cannot be delayed for a single moment, the delegates of the federated Committees for the Salvation of France, assembled by the Central Committee, propose to immediately adopt the following resolutions:

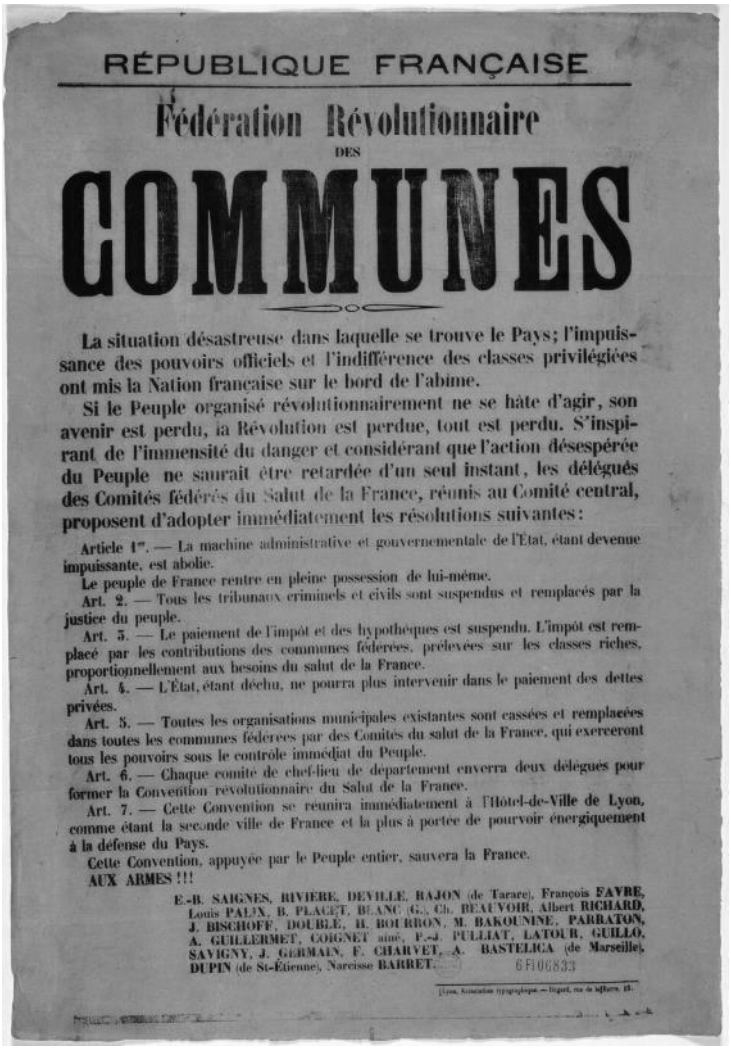
Article 1. – The administrative and governmental machine of the State, having become powerless, is abolished.

The people of France regain full control of themselves.

Art. 2. – All criminal and civil courts are suspended and replaced by the people's justice.

Art. 3. – The payment of taxes and mortgages is suspended. Taxation is replaced by contributions from the federated communes, levied on the wealthy classes, in proportion to the needs of France's salvation.

Art. 4. – The State, having been overthrown, will no longer be able to intervene in the payment of private debts.



RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Fédération Révolutionnaire DES

COMMUNES

La situation désastreuse dans laquelle se trouve le Pays; l'impuissance des pouvoirs officiels et l'indifférence des classes privilégiées ont mis la Nation française sur le bord de l'abîme.

Si le Peuple organisé révolutionnairement ne se hâte d'agir, son avenir est perdu, la Révolution est perdue, tout est perdu. S'inspirant de l'immensité du danger et considérant que l'action désespérée du Peuple ne saurait être retardée d'un seul instant, les délégués des Comités fédérés du Salut de la France, réunis au Comité central, proposent d'adopter immédiatement les résolutions suivantes:

Article 1er. — La machine administrative et gouvernementale de l'État, étant devenue impuissante, est abolie.

Le peuple de France rentre en pleine possession de lui-même.

Art. 2. — Tous les tribunaux criminels et civils sont suspendus et remplacés par la justice du peuple.

Art. 3. — Le paiement de l'impôt et des hypothèques est suspendu. L'impôt est remplacé par les contributions des communes fédérées, prélevées sur les classes riches, proportionnellement aux besoins du salut de la France.

Art. 4. — L'État, étant déchu, ne pourra plus intervenir dans le paiement des dettes privées.

Art. 5. — Toutes les organisations municipales existantes sont cassées et remplacées dans toutes les communes fédérées par des Comités du salut de la France, qui exerceront tous les pouvoirs sous le contrôle immédiat du Peuple.

Art. 6. — Chaque comité de chef-lieu de département enverra deux délégués pour former la Convention révolutionnaire du Salut de la France.

Art. 7. — Cette Convention se réunira immédiatement à l'Hôtel-de-Ville de Lyon, comme étant la seconde ville de France et la plus à portée de pourvoir énergiquement à la défense du Pays.

Cette Convention, appuyée par le Peuple entier, sauvera la France.

AUX ARMES !!!

E.-B. SAIGNES, RIVIERE, DEVILLE, RAJON (de Tarare), François FAVRE, Louis PALIX, B. PLACET, BLANC (G.), Ch. BEAUVOIR, Albert RICHARD, J. BISCHOFF, DOUBLE, H. BOURRON, M. BAKOUNINE, PARRATON, A. GUILLERMET, COIGNET aîné, P.-J. PULLIAT, LATOUR, GUILLO, SAVIGNY, J. GERMAIN, F. CHARVET, A. BASTELICA (de Marseille), DUPIN (de St-Étienne), Narcisse BARRET.

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Art. 5. – All the existing municipal organisations are smashed and replaced in all the federated communes by Committees for the Salvation of France, which will exercise all powers under the direct control of the People.

Art. 6. – Each departmental capital committee will send two delegates to form the Revolutionary Convention for the Salvation of France.

Art. 7. – This Convention will immediately gather at the Town Hall of Lyon, as the second city of France and the most capable of energetically providing for the defence of the Country.

This Convention supported by the entire People will save France.

TO ARMS!!!

E.-B. SAIGNES, RIVIERE, DEVILLE, RAJON (of Tarare), François FAVRE, Louis PALIX, B. PLACET, BLANC (G.), Ch. BEAUVOIR, Albert RICHARD, J. BISCHOFF, DOUBLE, H. BOURRON, M. BAKOUNINE, PARRATON, A. GUILLERMET, COIGNET senor, P.-J. PULLIAT, LATOUR, GUILLO, SAVIGNY, J. GERMAIN, F. CHARVET, A. BASTELICA (of Marseille), DUPIN (of St.-Etienne), Narcisse BARRET.

The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State

Michael Bakunin

5-23 June 1871[1]

This work, like all the writings which I have published until now – so far there have been few enough – is a product of events. It is the natural continuation of my *Letters to a Frenchman* (September 1870), in which I had the easy and sad privilege of foreseeing and predicting the horrible misfortunes which are today assailing France, and along with her, the whole civilised world; misfortunes against which there has been and remains only one remedy now: *the Social Revolution*.

To prove this truth – from now on indisputable – from the historical development of society and from the very events taking place before our eyes in Europe, in such a way as to make it acceptable to all men of good will, and by all sincere seekers of the truth – and then to set forth frankly without reticence or equivocation the philosophical principles as well as the practical goals which make up, so to speak, the essence of the activist spirit, the basis and the aim of what we call the Social Revolution – such is the object of the present work.

I am a convinced supporter of *economic and social equality*, because I know that, outside that equality, freedom, justice, human dignity, morality, and the well-being of individuals, just as much as the prosperity of nations, will never be anything but lies

The task which I have set for myself is not easy, I know, and I might be accused of presumption if I brought into this work the least personal conceit. But there is none of that, I can assure the reader. I am neither a scholar nor a philosopher, nor even a writer by profession. I have written very little during my life and I have never done so, as it were, except in self-defence, and only when a passionate conviction compelled me to overcome the repugnance which I feel instinctively for parading my private self in public.

Who am I then, and what is it that compels me to publish this work at the present time? I am a passionate seeker of the truth, and none the less persistent an enemy to the harmful untruths which the *law and order party* (that official representative, privileged and self-seeking, of all the religious, metaphysical, political, legal, economic and social villainies, past and present) still has the arrogance to make use of today so as to brutalise and enslave the world. I am a fanatical lover of freedom, considering it as the unique environment within which the intelligence, dignity and happiness of mankind may develop and increase. I am not speaking of that freedom which is purely formal, doled out, measured, and regulated by the State, an everlasting lie which in reality never represents anything but the privilege of a few based on the enslavement of everyone else. Nor do I mean that individualistic, egotistical, malicious, and illusory freedom, extolled by the school of J.-J. Rousseau, as by all the other schools of bourgeois liberalism, which considers the so-called rights of everyone, represented by the State as the limit of the rights of each individual, and which in fact leads of necessity and without exception to the reduction of the rights of the individual to zero. No, I mean the only freedom which is truly worthy of that name, the freedom which consists in the full development of all the material, intellectual, and moral powers which are found in the form of latent capabilities in every individual. I mean that freedom which recognises only those restrictions which are laid down for us by the laws of our own nature; so, properly speaking, there are no restrictions, since these laws are not imposed by some outside legislator situated maybe beside us or maybe above us, they are immanent in us and inherent in us and constitute the very basis of all our being, as much material as intellectual and moral. Thus, instead of trying to find a limit for them, we should consider them as the real conditions of and the real reason for our freedom.

I mean that freedom of the individual which, far from stopping as if before a boundary in face of the freedom of others, on the contrary finds in that freedom its own confirmation and extension to infinity; the unlimited freedom of each in the freedom of all, freedom in solidarity, freedom in equality; triumphant freedom, victorious over brute force and the principle of authority which was never anything but the idealised expression of brute force; freedom which, after

[1] Centre international de recherches sur l'anarchisme (CIRA), 1971.

overthrowing all the heavenly and earthly idols will establish and organise a new world, that of humanity in solidarity, built on the ruin of all Churches and all States.

I am a convinced supporter of *economic and social equality*, because I know that, outside that equality, freedom, justice, human dignity, morality, and the well-being of individuals, just as much as the prosperity of nations, will never be anything but lies. But, supporter though I may be of freedom, this first condition of humanity, I think that equality must be established in the world by the spontaneous organisation of work and of the collective ownership of producers' associations, freely organised and federated in the communes, and by the equally spontaneous federation of these communes, but not by the overriding and enslaving activity of the State.

This is the point which mainly divides the revolutionary socialists or collectivists from the authoritarian communists who are supporters of the absolute power of the State. Their goal is the same: both one and the other faction equally desire the creation of a new social order based solely on the organisation of collective work, inevitably imposed on one and all by the very nature of things, in economic conditions which are equal for all, and upon the collective appropriation of the instruments of labour.

Only the communists imagine they will be able to attain this by the development and the organisation of the political power of the working classes, principally of the urban proletariat, with the help of bourgeois radicalism, while the revolutionary socialists, enemies of every tie and every alliance of an equivocal nature, think on the contrary that they will not be able to attain this goal except by the development and organisation, not of the political, but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses as much in the towns as in the countryside, including all the men of good will who, breaking with their past in the upper classes, might sincerely wish to join with them and wholly accept their programme.

the organisation of collective work, inevitably imposed on one and all by the very nature of things, in economic conditions which are equal for all, and upon the collective appropriation of the instruments of labour… [achieved] by the development and organisation, not of the political, but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses as much in the towns as in the countryside

From this two different methods are derived. The communists believe they should organise the workers' strength to take over the political power of the states. The revolutionary socialists organised with a view to the destruction, or, if one wants a more polite word, the liquidation, of the states. The communists are supporters of the principle and practice of authority; the revolutionary socialists have no faith except in freedom. Both the one and the other, equally supporters of science which is to destroy superstition and replace belief, differ in the former wishing to impose it, and the latter striving to propagate it; so that human groups, convinced of its truth, may organise and federate spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interests, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the *ignorant masses* by some superior intellects.

The revolutionary socialists think that there is much more practical and intellectual common-sense in the instinctive aspirations and in the real needs of the mass of the people than in the profound intelligence of all these doctors and teachers of mankind who, after so many fruitless attempts to make humanity happy, still aspire to add their own efforts. The revolutionary socialists think the opposite: that mankind has allowed itself to be governed long enough, too long, and that the origin of its unhappiness does not reside in this or that form of government but in the very principle and fact of government, whatever kind it may be.

Finally this is the same, already historic, contradiction which exists between the scientific communism developed by the German school and accepted in part by the American and English socialists on the one hand, and the Proudhonism widely developed and pushed right to these, its final consequences, on the other, accepted by the proletariat of the Latin countries.[1] Revolutionary socialism has just attempted its first demonstration, both splendid and practical, in the *Paris Commune*.

I am a supporter of the Paris Commune which, because it was massacred and drowned in blood by the

[1] It is equally accepted and will be accepted yet more by the essentially non-political instinct of the Slav peoples.

executioners of monarchic and clerical reaction, has therefore become all the more lively and powerful in the imagination and heart of the European proletariat. I am above all a supporter of it because it was a bold and outspoken negation of the State.

It is a tremendously significant historical fact that this negation of the State should have been manifested particularly in France, which has been until now the country par excellence of political centralisation, and that it should have been above all precisely Paris, the historic fountainhead of this great French civilisation, which should have taken the initiative. Paris, taking off its own crown and proclaiming its own downfall with enthusiasm so as to give freedom and life to France, to Europe, to the whole world! Paris, affirming once more its historic ability to take the lead, and showing to all the enslaved peoples (and which popular masses indeed are not slaves?) the unique way of emancipation and salvation! Paris, striking a mortal blow at the political traditions of bourgeois radicalism and providing a real basis for revolutionary socialism! Paris, earning once more the curses of all the reactionary gangs of France and Europe! Paris, being buried in its ruins so as to pronounce a solemn contradiction to triumphant reaction; saving by its catastrophe the honour and future of France, and proving to a comforted mankind that, if life, intelligence and moral power have disappeared from the upper classes, they have remained energetic and full of potential in the proletariat! Paris, inaugurating the new era, that of the final and complete emancipation of the masses of the people and of their solidarity, henceforth a matter of fact, across and despite state frontiers. Paris, destroying patriotism and building on its ruins the religion of humanity! Paris, proclaiming itself humanist and atheist; and replacing the fictions of religion by the great realities of social life and faith in science, replacing the lies and injustices of religious, political, and legal morality by the principles of freedom, justice, equality, and fraternity, these eternal fundamentals of all human morality! Heroic Paris, rational and faithful, confirming its energetic faith in the destinies of mankind even in its glorious downfall and destruction, and leaving that faith much more energetic and lively for the generations to come! Paris, soaked in the blood of its most generous-hearted children – there indeed is mankind crucified by the international and co-ordinated reaction of all Europe, under the immediate inspiration of all the Christian churches and that high-priest of iniquity, the Pope. But the next international and solidarist revolution of the people will be the resurrection of Paris.

Paris, inaugurating the new era, that of the final and complete emancipation of the masses of the people and of their solidarity, henceforth a matter of fact, across and despite state frontiers. Paris, destroying patriotism and building on its ruins the religion of humanity! Paris, proclaiming itself humanist and atheist

Such is the true meaning, and such are the immense beneficial consequences, of the two months of the existence and the fall, forever memorable, of the Paris Commune.

The Paris Commune lasted for too short a time, and it was too much hindered in its internal development by the mortal struggle which it had to maintain against the Versailles reaction, for it to have been able, I do not say even to apply, but to elaborate its socialist programme in theory. Besides, it must be recognised that the majority of the members of the Commune were not strictly speaking socialists and that, if they appeared to be such, it was because they were irresistibly swept forward by the course of events, by the nature of their environment, and by the necessities of their position, and not by their own personal conviction, the socialists, at the head of whom our friend Varlin naturally takes his place, formed in the Commune only a very small minority indeed; they were at the very most only some fourteen or fifteen members. The remainder was composed of Jacobins. But, let it be understood, there are Jacobins and Jacobins. There are the lawyer and doctrinaire Jacobins, like M. Gambetta, whose *positivist* republicanism,[1] presumptuous, despotic, and formalistic, having repudiated the old revolutionary faith and having conserved nothing from Jacobinism except the cult of unity and authority, has surrendered popular France to the Prussians, and later to indigenous forces of reaction; and there are those Jacobins who are openly revolutionary, the heroes and last sincere representatives of the democratic faith of 1793, capable of sacrificing their well-armed unity and authority to the necessities of the Revolution, rather than bow down their consciences before the insolence

[1] See his letter to Littré in the *Progrès de Lyon*.

of reaction. These great-hearted Jacobins, at the head of whom Delescluze naturally takes his place, a great spirit and a great character, wish for the triumph of the Revolution before all things. And since there is no revolution without the popular masses, and since these masses today have pre-eminently a socialist instinct and can no longer make any other revolution but an economic and social one, the Jacobins of good faith, allowing themselves to be led on more and more by the logic of the revolutionary movement, will end by becoming socialists in spite of themselves.

This was precisely the situation of the Jacobins who took part in the Paris Commune. Delescluze and many others with him signed programmes and proclamations of which the general line and promises were definitely socialist. But since, in spite of all their good faith and good intentions, they were only socialists more through external pressure than through internal conviction, and since they did not have the time or the capacity to overcome and suppress in themselves a mass of bourgeois prejudices which were in contradiction with their more recent socialist outlook, one can understand that, paralysed by this internal conflict, they could never escape from generalities, nor take one of those decisive steps which would break for ever their solidarity and all their connections with the bourgeois world.

This was a great misfortune for the Commune and for themselves; they were paralysed by it, and they paralysed the Commune; but it is not possible to reproach them for it, as though for a fault. Men do not change from day to day, nor do they change their own natures or habits at will. These men proved their sincerity, in letting themselves be killed for the Commune. Who will dare ask more of them?

They are all the more excusable, because the people of Paris, under whose influence they thought and acted, were themselves socialist much more by instinct than by ideology or considered conviction. All their aspirations are to the highest degree and exclusively socialist; but their ideas, or rather the traditional representations of them, are still far from reaching that level. There are still many Jacobin prejudices, many dictatorial and governmental conceptions, among the proletariat of the large cities of France and even among that of Paris. The cult of authority, a fatal product of religious education, that historic source of all the evils, all the depravities and all the servility among the people, has not yet been entirely eradicated from their minds. It is equally true that even the most intelligent children of the people, the most convinced socialists, have not yet succeeded in entirely delivering themselves of it. Rummage in their conscience and you will still And there the Jacobin, the governmentalist, pushed back into some murky corner and, it is true, become very modest, but he is not entirely dead.

Furthermore, the situation of the small number of convinced socialists who formed part of the Commune was extremely difficult. Not feeling themselves sufficiently supported by the great mass of the Parisian population (the organisation of the International Association moreover being itself very imperfect, numbering scarcely a few thousand individuals), they had to keep up a daily struggle against the Jacobin majority. And m what circumstances indeed! They had to give bread and work to some hundreds of thousands of workers, organise them, arm them, and at the same time keep an eye on the reactionary manoeuvres going on in a huge city like Paris, under siege, threatened with starvation, and exposed to ail the dirty tricks of the reactionary faction which had managed to set itself up and maintain itself at Versailles, *with the permission and by the favour of the Prussians*. They had to oppose a revolutionary government and army to the government and army of Versailles – that is, in order to combat monarchic and clerical reaction, they had to organise themselves in reactionary Jacobin fashion, forgetting or sacrificing what they themselves knew were the first conditions of revolutionary socialism.

Is it not natural that, in such circumstances, the Jacobins, who were the strongest because they constituted the majority in the Commune and who besides this possessed to an infinitely superior degree the political instinct and the tradition and practice of governmental organization, had immense advantages over the socialists? What one must surely find astounding is that they did not take more advantage than they did, that they did not give an exclusively Jacobin character to the Paris rising, and that they allowed themselves, on the contrary, to be carried on into a social revolution.

I know that many socialists, very consistent in their theoretical ideas, reproach our Paris friends for not showing themselves sufficiently socialist in their revolutionary practice, while all the loud-mouths of the bourgeois press accuse them on the contrary of having followed their socialist programme only too faithfully. Let us leave these ignominious denunciators from that section of the press on one side for the moment; I should like to make the point to the strict theoreticians of the emancipation of the proletariat that they are unjust to our Paris friends. For, between the most precise theories and putting them into practice there is an immense distance which cannot be covered in a few days. Whoever had the good fortune to know Varlin, for instance, to name only one whose death is certain, knows how much the socialist convictions in him and his friends were passionate, considered, and profound.

These were men whose ardent enthusiasm, devotion, and good faith could never have been doubted by any of those who came across them. But precisely because they were men of good faith, they were full of mistrust in themselves when faced with the immense work they had devoted their life and their thought to: they counted for so little! They had moreover that conviction that, in the Social Revolution – diametrically opposed in this as in everything else to the Political Revolution – the action of individuals counted for almost nothing and the spontaneous action of the masses should count for everything. All that individuals can do is to elaborate, clarify, and propagate the ideas that correspond to the popular feeling, and, beyond this, to contribute by their ceaseless efforts to the revolutionary organisation of the natural power of the masses, but nothing beyond that. And everything else should not and could not take place except by the action of the people themselves. Otherwise one would end with political dictatorship, that is to say, the reconstruction of the State, of the privileges, injustices and all oppressions of the State, and one would arrive by a devious but logical path at the re-establishment of the political, social, and economic slavery of the popular masses.

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Varlin and all his friends, like all sincere socialists, and in general like all workers born and bred among the people, shared to the highest degree this perfectly legitimate prejudice against the continual intervention of the same individuals, against the domination exerted by superior personages; and since they were fair-minded above all things, they turned this foresight, this mistrust just as much against themselves as against all the other individuals.

Contrary to that authoritarian communist type of thinking – in my opinion completely erroneous – that a Social Revolution can be decreed and organised, whether by a dictatorship or whether by a constituent assembly resulting from some political revolution, our friends, the socialists of Paris, thought that it could not be made nor brought to its full development except by the spontaneous and continuous action of the masses, the groups and the associations of the people.

Our friends in Paris were a thousand times right. For indeed, where is that head, however brilliant it may be, or if one wishes to speak of a collective dictatorship, were it formed by many hundreds of individuals endowed with superior faculties, where are those brains powerful enough and wide ranging enough to embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of the real interests, aspirations, wishes, and needs whose sum total constitutes the collective will of a people, and to invent a social organisation which can satisfy everybody? This organisation will never be anything but a Procrustean bed which the more or less obvious violence of the State will be able to force unhappy society to lie down on. That is what has always happened until now, and it is precisely this old system of organisation by force that the Social Revolution must put an end to, by giving back their complete freedom to the masses, groups, communes, associations, individuals even, and by destroying once and for all the historic cause of ah the violent acts, the power, and the very existence, of the State. The State must carry away in its fall all the injustices of the juridical law with ah the lies of the various religions, this law and these religions never having been anything but the enforced consecration (as much ideological as actual) of all the violence represented, guaranteed and licensed by the State. It is clear that freedom will never be given to mankind, and that the real interests of society, of all the groups and local organisations as well as of all the individuals who make up society, will only be able to find real satisfaction when there are no more States.

It is clear that ail the so-called general interests of society, which the State is alleged to represent and which in reality are nothing but the constant and general negation of the positive interests of the regions, communes, associations and the largest number of individuals subjected to the State, constitute an abstraction, a fiction, a lie, and that the State is like one great slaughter-house, and like an immense graveyard where, in the shadow and under the pretext of this abstraction, there come all the real aspirations, all the living initiatives of a nation, to let themselves be generously and sanctimoniously sacrificed and buried. And since no abstraction ever

exists by itself or for itself, since it has neither legs to walk on, nor arms to create with, nor stomach to digest this mass of victims which it is given to devour, it is plain that, in exactly the same way that the religious or heavenly abstraction, God, represents in reality the very positive and very real interests of a privileged caste, the clergy (its terrestrial counterpart), so the political abstraction, the State, represents the no less real and positive interests of the class which is principally if not exclusively exploiting people today and which is moreover tending to swallow up all the others, the bourgeoisie. And just as the clergy is always divided and today is tending to divide itself all the more into a very powerful and a very rich minority and a majority which is very subordinate and rather poor, so, in the same way, the bourgeoisie and its diverse social and political organisations in industry, agriculture, banking and commerce, just as in all the administrative, financial, judicial, university, police and military functions of the State, is tending to weld itself further each day into a truly dominant oligarchy and a countless mass of creatures who are more or less vainglorious and more or less fallen, living in a perpetual illusion and pushed back inevitably more and more into the proletariat by an irresistible force, that of present-day economic development, and reduced to serving as blind instruments of this all-powerful oligarchy.[1]

The abolition of the Church and of the State must be the first and indispensable condition of the real emancipation of society; after which (and only after which) it can, and must, organise itself in a different fashion, but not from top to bottom and according to an ideal plan, dreamt up by a few wise men or scholars, or even by force of decrees put out by some dictatorial force or even by a national assembly, elected by universal suffrage. Such a system, as I have already said, would lead inevitably to the creation of a new State, and consequently to the formation of a governmental aristocracy, that is, an entire class of people, having nothing in common with the mass of the people. Certainly, that class would begin again to exploit the people and subject them under the pretext of the common good or in order to save the State.

The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal. Then alone will be realised the true and life-giving order of freedom and the common good, that order which, far from denying, on the contrary affirms and brings into harmony the interests of individuals and of society.

The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal

It is said that the harmony and universal solidarity of the interests of individuals and of society will never be capable of realisation in practice because society's interests, being contradictory, are not in a position to balance one another by themselves or even to come to some sort of understanding. To such an objection I will reply that, if up to the present day the interests have never anywhere been in mutual harmony, that was because of the State, which has sacrificed the interests of the majority to the profit of a privileged minority. That is why that notorious incompatibility and that struggle of personal interests with those of society is nothing less than a political deception and lie, born out of the theological lie which imagined the doctrine of original sin so as to dishonour man and destroy in him the sense of his own worth. This same false idea of the conflict of interests was also sown by the dreams of metaphysics which, as is known, is a close relative of theology. Not appreciating the sociability of human nature, metaphysics regards society as a mechanical aggregate of individuals, of a purely artificial kind, suddenly brought together in the name of some contract, either formal or secret, freely entered into or else under the influence of a higher power. Before uniting themselves in society, these individuals, endowed with a kind of immortal soul, enjoyed complete freedom.

[1] This is where the extract published in *Le Travailleur* (April/May 1878) ends. (*Black Flag*)

But if the metaphysicians assert that men, above all those who believe in the immortality of the soul, are free beings outside society, we arrive inevitably then at this conclusion: that men cannot unite in society except on condition that they repudiate their freedom, their natural independence, and sacrifice their interests, first personal and then local. Such a renunciation and such a sacrifice of oneself must be, on that argument, all the more pressing as society becomes more numerous and its organisation more complex. In such a case the State is the expression of all the individual sacrifices. Existing under such an abstract form, and at the same time such a violent one, it continues, as goes without saying, to obstruct individual freedom more and more in the name of that lie which is known as the "public good", although it evidently only represents exclusively the interest of the ruling class. The State, in this way, appears to us as an inevitable negation and an annihilation of all freedom, all interest, individual as well as general.

We see here that in the metaphysical and theological systems everything is linked and explained self-consistently. This is why the logical defenders of these systems can and indeed must, with an easy conscience, continue to exploit the popular masses by means of Church and State. Cramming their pockets and slaking all their foul desires, they can at the same time console themselves with the thought that they are taking all this trouble to the glory of God, for the victory of civilisation and for the eternal happiness of the proletariat. But we others, not believing either in God or in the immortality of the soul, nor in the individual freedom of the will, we assert that freedom must be understood in its completest and widest sense as the goal of the historic progress of mankind. By a strange, though logical, contrast, our idealist opponents of theology and metaphysics take the principle of freedom as the foundation and basis of their theories so as to conclude quite simply with the indispensability of the enslavement of men. We others, materialist in theory, we tend in practice to create and to make durable a rational and noble idealism. Our enemies, religious and transcendental idealists, come down to a practical, bloody, and vile materialism in the name of the same logic, according to which each development is the negation of the basic principle. We are convinced that all the richness of the intellectual, moral and material development of man, just like his apparent independence – that all this is the product of life in society. Outside society, man would not only not be free, but he would not be transformed into a real man at all, that is to say, into a being who has self-consciousness, who alone thinks and speaks. The combination of intelligence and collective work has alone been able to force man to leave the state of savagery and brutality which constituted his original nature or indeed his starting point for further development. We are profoundly convinced of this truth that the whole life of men – interests, trends, needs, illusions, stupidities even, just as much as the acts of violence, the injustices, and all the actions which have the appearance of being voluntary – represent only the consequence of the inevitable forces of life in society. People cannot admit the idea of interdependence, yet they cannot repudiate the reciprocal influence and the correlation between phenomena in the external world.

We are convinced that all the richness of the intellectual, moral and material development of man, just like his apparent independence – that all this is the product of life in society. Outside society, man would not only not be free, but he would not be transformed into a real man at all

In nature itself, that marvellous interrelationship and network of phenomena is certainly not attained without struggle. Quite the contrary, the harmony of the forces of nature only appears as the actual result of that continual struggle which is the very condition of life and movement. In nature and also in society, order without struggle is death. If order is natural and possible in the universe, it is so solely because this universe is not governed according to some system imagined in advance and imposed by a supreme will. The theological hypothesis of a divine system of laws leads to an evident absurdity and to the negation not only of all order, but of nature itself. Natural laws are not real except in so far as they are inherent in nature, that is to say they are not fixed by any authority. These laws are only simple manifestations or else continual fluctuations of the development of things and of combinations of these very varied, transient, but real facts. Together this all constitutes what we call "nature". Human intelligence and its capability for science observed these facts,

controlled them experimentally, then re-united them in a system and called them laws. But nature itself knows no laws. It acts unconsciously, representing in itself the infinite variety of phenomena, appearing and repeating themselves in an inevitable way. That is why, thanks to this inevitability of action, universal order can and indeed does exist.

Such an order also appears in human society which apparently evolves in a supposedly non-natural manner, but actually submits to the natural and inevitable course of events. Only, the superiority of man over the other animals and the faculty of thinking brought to his development an individual characteristic – which is quite natural, let it be said in passing – in the sense that, like everything that exists, man represents the material product of the union and action of forces. This individual characteristic is the capacity for reasoning, or indeed that faculty for generalisation and abstraction, thanks to which man can project himself through thought, examining and observing himself like an alien and external object. Raising himself above his own level through the medium of ideas, just as he raises himself from the surrounding world, he arrives at the representation of perfect abstraction, absolute nothingness. And that absolute is nothing less than the faculty of abstraction, which scorns everything that exists and, arriving at complete negation, there comes to rest. It is already the final limit of the highest abstraction of thought: that absolute nothingness is God.

That is the meaning and the historic basis of every theological doctrine. Not understanding the nature and the material causes of their own thoughts, not taking account of the conditions even or of the natural laws which are peculiar to them, these first men and societies certainly could not suspect that their absolute notions were only the result of the faculty of conceiving abstract ideas. That is why they considered these ideas taken from nature as if they were real objects, before which nature itself would cease to have any reality. They took it into their heads afterwards to worship their own fictions, their impossible notions of the absolute, and to grant them ah kinds of honour.

But they had the need, in some fashion, to represent and make tangible the abstract idea of nothingness or of God. To this end, they inflated the concept of divinity and endowed it into the bargain with all the qualities and powers, good and evil, which they only came across in nature and in society.

Such was the origin and historic development of ail religions, beginning with fetishism and ending with Christianity.

We hardly have the intention of plunging into the history of religious, theological and metaphysical absurdities and still less of speaking of the successive unfolding of all the incarnations and divine visions created by centuries of barbarism. Everybody knows that superstition always gives birth to frightful sufferings and causes the flow of streams of blood and tears. Let us say only that all these sickening aberrations of poor mankind were historical events, inevitable in the normal growth and evolution of social organisms. Such aberrations engendered in society the fatal idea, dominating the imagination of men, that the universe were supposedly governed by a supernatural force and will. Centuries succeeded centuries, and societies became accustomed to this idea to such an extent that they finally destroyed within themselves every tendency towards a further progress, and every capacity they had to reach it.

First the ambition of a few individuals, then a few social classes, erected slavery and conquest into a vital principle, and implanted more than any other this terrible idea of the divinity. Since when all society was impossible without those two institutions as a base, the Church and the State. These two social scourges are defended by all the dogmatists.

Scarcely had these institutions appeared in the world than all of a sudden two castes were organised: that of the priests and the aristocracy, who without losing any time did the job of inculcating deeply into that enslaved people the indispensabiiity, usefulness and sanctity of the Church and the State.

All that had as its goal the changing of brutal slavery into legal slavery, provided for and consecrated by the will of the Supreme Being.

But did the priests and the aristocrats really believe sincerely m these institutions, which they sustained with ail strength in their own particular interest? Were they not merely liars and deceivers? No, I believe that they were at the same time both believers and imposters.

They believed too, because they took a natural and inevitable part in the aberrations of the mass, and only later, in the age of the decadence of the ancient world, did they become sceptics and shameless deceivers. Another reason allows us to consider the founders of States as sincere people. Man always believes easily in whatever he desires, and in what does not contradict his interests. Even if he is intelligent and informed, the same thing happens: through self-love and his desire to live with his neighbours and profit by their respect, he will always believe in whatever is pleasant and useful. I am convinced that, for example, Thiers and the Versailles government were forced at great cost to convince themselves that, in killing several thousand men, women, and children in Paris, they were saving France.

But if the priests, augurers, aristocrats and middle-class citizens, of ancient and modern times, were able sincerely to believe, they nevertheless remained imposters. One cannot in fact admit that they believed in every absurdity that constituted faith and politics. 1 am not even speaking of the age when, according to the words of Cicero, “two augurers could not look each other in the eye without laughing”. Afterwards, even in the tune of general ignorance and superstition, it is difficult to suppose that the inventors of daily miracles were convinced of the reality of these miracles. One can say the same thing of politics, which may be summed up in the following rule: “It is necessary to subjugate and exploit the people in such a way that they will not complain too greatly of their fate, nor forget to submit, nor have time to think of resistance and rebellion.”

How then, after this, can we imagine that people who turned politics into a profession and knew its aim – that is to say injustice, violence, lies, and murder, in the mass or in isolation – might believe sincerely in the political art and the wisdom of the State as the creator of social contentment? They cannot have arrived at such a degree of stupidity despite all their cruelty. Church and State have been the great schools of vice in every age. History bears witness to their crimes; at all places and at all times the priest and the statesman have been the conscious, systematic, implacable and bloody executioners of the people.

But how, all the same, can we reconcile two things which are apparently so incompatible: deceivers and deceived, liars and believers? Logically, this seems difficult; however, in fact – that is to say in practical life – these qualities occur together very often.

In the great majority of cases people live in contradiction with themselves, and under perpetual misapprehensions; they generally do not notice it, that is until some extraordinary event brings them back from their habitual sleep and compels them to take a look at themselves and around themselves.

In politics as in religion, men are only machines in the hands of the exploiters. But robbers and robbed, oppressors and oppressed, all live one alongside the other, governed by a handful of individuals whom it is convenient to consider as the true exploiters. These are the same people, free of all prejudices, political and religious, who consciously maltreat and oppress. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, until the explosion of the Great Revolution, as in our own day, they ruled in Europe and did pretty well as they pleased. We must believe that their domination will not prolong itself much further.

While the principal leaders deceive and lead the people astray quite consciously, their servants, or the minions of the Church and State, apply themselves with zeal to uphold the sanctity and integrity of these odious institutions. If the Church, according to the pronouncements of the priests and of the majority of statesmen, is necessary for the salvation of the soul, the State in its turn is also necessary for the conservation of peace, of order, and of justice, and the dogmatists of all the schools must shout: “Without Church and Government there will be neither civilisation nor progress.”

We need not discuss the problem of eternal salvation because we do not believe in the immortality of the soul. We are convinced that the most harmful of things for humanity, for truth and progress, is the Church. And how could it be otherwise? It is not to the Church that the care of perverting the younger generations, above all the women, falls? Is it not the Church which through its dogmas and lies, its stupidity and shame, tends to destroy logical reasoning and science? Does the Church not attack the dignity of man, in perverting in him the notion of rights and justice? Does it not give back as a corpse that which is living, does it not lose freedom, is it not the Church which preaches slavery of the masses in perpetuity for the benefit of tyrants and exploiters? Is it not the Church, this implacable Church, which tends to perpetuate the reign of darkness, ignorance, poverty and crime?

And if the progress of our century is not a deceptive dream, it must get rid of the Church.

The Critique of Mazzini

While Bakunin's conflict and critique of Marx have been remembered and celebrated by anarchists (and forgotten, avoided or misrepresented by Marxists, for obvious reasons), his critique of Italian Nationalist Giuseppi Mazzini (1805-1872) is less well-known. Yet this played a key role in replacing radical nationalism with socialism within Italy.

When Mazzini denounced the Paris communards, Bakunin started to write a comprehensive response titled "To My Friends in Italy" on 19th of October 1871. It was sent in parts, and so loved by the Neapolitan IWA section that they translated and printed it as a 15 page pamphlet in preparation for a non-IWA congress. Cafiero sent a copy to Engels, who without knowing it was by Bakunin described it as "an excellent production" that he "would undersign in all its parts." Cafiero, in credit to his honesty, wrote back "But it is Bakunin that you should congratulate, not me." (Wolfgang Eckhardt, *The First Socialist Schism* [Oakland: PM Press, 2016], 127) Engels, completely misreading the situation, considered Bakunin as the main enemy and so concentrated his criticism on him rather than Mazzini, much to the puzzlement of Internationalists in Italy.

The reasons why Bakunin's polemics were so effective can be quickly ascertained once they are read, but sadly these have not been widely available in English translation.

We start with extracts of a letter written to Bakunin on the occasion of a workers' congress called by the followers of Mazzini in which he explains the differences between the two sets of ideas on a whole range of subjects, including nationality. This is followed by extracts of another wide-ranging letter to an Italian workers' newspaper which covers both Mazzini's ideas as well as a discussion of the ideas circulating within the International on producer and consumer co-operatives as well as its primary focus on the direct struggle against capital.

Then we include the translation by IWPA member Sarah Holmes of Bakunin's *The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International*, a seminal text in his campaign against Mazzini. This, along with Tucker's translation of *God and the State*, would have been amongst the few Bakunin texts the American anarchist movement had and it clearly showed that the IWPA followed Bakunin's syndicalist strategy. This is the first time that this work has been reprinted, as far as we are aware. It should also be noted that no "Second Part" appeared.

This section ends with extracts from another letter, this time to a fellow Internationalist. Written just after Mazzini's death, it is again a wide-ranging discussion of how to win over his followers to (libertarian) socialism which stresses that just as the goals of the two theories differ, so must their tactics. Bakunin reiterate the need of the workers' movement to win over the peasantry as any social revolution which alienates them – the majority of toilers in Italy and across Continental Europe at the time – would be doomed. Bakunin also indicates the nature of the anarchist social revolution, seeing it as both the destruction of the State *and* capitalism by means of a bottom-up socio-economic federation based on the expropriation of capital and land by workers' associations.

Circular to my Friends in Italy

On the Occasion of the Workers' Congress convened in Rome for 1 November 1871 by the Mazzinian Party

Micheal Bakunin

19-28 October 1871

My dear friends

Anyone who has read the truly perfidious letter that Mazzini has just sent to the workers' representatives at the Congress of Rome must understand, if they could have doubted it until now, that this Congress was convened in Rome, at Mazzini's instigation, to carry out an upset, a coup d'etat, not revolutionary against the system which today governs Italy, but reactionary against the new ideas and new aspirations which, since the glorious and fecund insurrection of the Paris Commune, have begun to visibly stir the proletariat and youth of Italy.

Do I need to explain to you how and why these ideas are hated by Mazzini? He has said it sufficiently himself in all the articles he has published in *Roma del Popolo*, where he knowingly slandered the Paris Commune, and our beautiful and great International Workers' Association, whose principles and actions, a spontaneous expression of the popular aspirations of the multitudes of Europe and America, are naturally contrary to the establishment in Italy of his theocratic, authoritarian and centralised Republic.

[…]

This is probably why Mazzini forbade the Workers' Congress from discussing major religious and political issues. At first glance, this second declaration proposed by Mazzini seems perfectly reasonable; but on closer inspection, a new trap is revealed. What are the major issues that he places outside the economic question, as if they are completely foreign to it, and as if they should concern other classes more than the working masses?

These are the religious question and the political question; but, resolved apart from the economic question, these two questions can only be resolved against the proletariat, as has always actually happened until now.

The International, for its parts, deals with these questions, and Mazzini cannot forgive it for such audacity; but it treats them as questions inseparable from the economic question, and as a result, it resolves them in favour of the proletariat.

The International does not reject politics in general; it will inevitably have to involve itself in it as long as it is compelled to fight against the bourgeois class. It rejects only bourgeois politics and bourgeois religion, because the former establishes the exploitative domination of the bourgeoisie and the latter sanctifies and consecrates it. The bourgeoisie is sacred. What Mazzini wants is to harness the proletariat to the chariot of bourgeois politics, and that is precisely what we do not want.

Apart from the Mazzinian system, which is that of the Republic-State, there is only one: that of the Republic-Commune, the Republic-Federation, the socialist and frankly popular Republic, that of ANARCHY. This is the politics of the social revolution

[…]

In this respect, Mazzini has rendered us an immense service. He has demonstrated that since the youth had separated itself from him in thought, it must also separate itself from him in action; he excommunicated it, and he was a thousand times right. This time, he was far more frank and loyal towards it than it had dared, or still dares, to be to itself; and he is challenging it to show itself to be serious and virile.

Yes, this youth must now have the courage to recognise and proclaim its complete and definitive separation from Mazzini's politics, conspiracy and republican endeavours, or risk being annihilated and condemned to inertia and shameful impotence. It must inaugurate its own politics!

What can these politics be? Apart from the Mazzinian system, which is that of the Republic-State, there is

only one: that of the Republic-Commune, the Republic-Federation, the socialist and frankly popular Republic, that of ANARCHY. This is the politics of the social revolution, which seeks the abolition of the Sate and the economic and fully free organisation of the people, an organisation from the bottom up by means of federation.

[…]

The International is powerful because it imposes no absolute dogma, no infallible doctrine on the people; because its programme formulates nothing other than the people's own instincts, their real aspirations. It is powerful because it does not seek at all, as you have always done, to create an infallible power outside the people; and because it does nothing other than organise the power of the people. And it can do it; because, since it does not presume to impose on the people a programme received from above, and therefore foreign and contrary to popular instincts, it has nothing to fear from the organisation of this spontaneous power of the masses' numerical strength.
[…]

[…]

Homeland represents the undeniable and sacred right of every man, of every group of men, associations, communes, regions, nations, to live, to feel, to think, to will and to act in their own way, and this way is always the undeniable result of a long historical development.

We therefore bow before tradition, before history; or rather we recognise them, not because they present themselves to us as abstract barriers, raised metaphysically, juridically and politically by learned interpreters and professors of the past, but only because they have really passed into the blood and flesh, into the real thoughts and will of current populations. We are told: This land – the canton of Ticino, for example – obviously belongs to the Italian family: language, customs, it had everything in common with the Lombard people, therefore it must be part of the great Italian unity. And we reply that this is a completely false conclusion. If there really is serious identity between Ticino and Lombardy, there is no doubt that Ticino will spontaneously unite with Lombardy. If it does not, if it does not feel the slightest desire to do so, this only proves that real history, which has continued from generation to generation in the real life of the Ticino people, and which has made them what they are, is different from the history written in books.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the real history of individuals, as of peoples, does not proceed by positive development, but very often by the negation of the past and by revolt against it; and this is the right of life, the inalienable right of present generations, the guarantee of their freedom. Provinces that have been united for a long time always have the right to separate from one another; and they may be driven to do so by various reasons, religious, political, economic. The State claims on the contrary to hold them together by force, and in this it is greatly mistaken. The State is forced marriage, and we raise against it the banner of free union.

Just as we are convinced that by abolishing religious marriage, civil and juridical marriage, we restore the life, the reality, the morality of natural marriage based solely on human respect and the freedom of the two people, man and women, who love each other; that by recognising the freedom of each of them to separate from the other whenever they wish, and without needing to ask permission from anyone; that by also denying the need for permission to unite, and generally rejecting any intervention by any authority in their union, we will make them more closely united, much more faithful and loyal to each other; similarly, we are also convinced that when the cursed power of the State is no longer there to force individuals, associations, communes, provinces, regions to live together, they will be much more closely linked, and will constitute a much more vibrant, more real, more powerful unity than the one they are forced to form today, under the equally crushing pressure of the State for all.

[…]

Mazzini and all the unitarists contradict themselves when on the one hand they speak to you of the deep, intimate fraternity that exists in this group of twenty-five million Italians united by language, traditions, customs, faith, and community of aspirations, and on the other hand they want to maintain, what am I saying?, magnify the power of the State, necessary – they say – for the maintenance of unity. But if they are indeed so indissolubly linked, forcing them into union is superfluous, a nonsense; if on the contrary you believe it necessary to compel them, it means that you are convinced that they are not well linked, and that you are lying, that you want to mislead them about themselves, when you talk to them about their union. Social union, the true result of the combination of traditions, habits, customs, ideas, current interests and common aspirations, is living, fecund, real unity. Political unity, the State, is the fiction, the abstraction of unity; and not only does it harbour discord, but it also artificially produces it where, without this intervention of the State, living unity would undoubtedly exist.

That is why socialism is federalist, and why the entire International enthusiastically welcomed the programme of the Paris Commune. Furthermore, the Commune explicitly proclaimed in its manifestos that what it wanted was by no means the dissolution of French national unity, but its resurrection, its consolidation, its revitalisation, and full and real popular freedom. It wanted the unity of the nation, of the people, of French society, not that of the State.

Mazzini pushed his hatred of the Commune to the point imbecility. He claims that the system proclaimed by the latest revolution in Paris would take us back to the Middle Ages, that is to say to the division of the entire world into a multitude of small centres foreign to each other, and ignorant of each other. He does not understand, the poor man, that between the medieval Commune and the modern Commune, there is all the difference produced not only in books, but also in customs, aspirations, ideas, interests, and the needs of the people.by five centuries of history. The Communes of Italy, in their origin, were truly isolated, each being centres of entirely independent, not interconnected, political and social existence, and necessarily having to be self-sufficient.

That is why socialism is federalist… the Paris Commune… explicitly proclaimed… that what it wanted was by no means the dissolution of French national unity, but its resurrection, its consolidation, its revitalisation, and full and real popular freedom

What a difference today! Material, intellectual, moral interests have created amongst all the members of the same nation, what I am saying, amongst the different nations themselves, a social unity so powerful and real that everything States do today to paralyse and destroy it remains powerless. Unity resists everything, and it will survive States.

When States have disappeared, the living, fecund, beneficial unity of regions and nations, and of the internationality of the entire civilised world first, then of all the people of the earth, by the means of free federation and organisation from the bottom-up, will develop in all its majesty, not divine, but human.

[…]

But it is important to distinguish between federalism and federalism.

In Italy there exists a tradition of regional federalism, which has now become a political and historical lie. Let us say it once and for all: the past never returns; and it would be a great misfortune if it did. Regional federalism could only be an aristocratic-consortiumesque institution, because, in relation to communes and workers' associations, industrial and agricultural, it would still be a top-down political organisation. Truly popular organisation begins on the contrary by an act from below, by the association and by the commune. By organising from the bottom up, federalism then becomes the political institution of socialism, the free and spontaneous organisation of popular life.

[…]

The Mazzinian and Garibaldian workers may well accept the programmes of Mazzini and Garibaldi; in their stomachs, in the emaciated pallor of their children and their comrades in misery and suffering, in their real daily slavery, there will always be something that calls for social revolution! They are all unwittingly socialists, except for a few individuals – perhaps one in a thousand – who, through skill, luck and cunning, have entered or hope to enter into the ranks of the bourgeoisie. All the others, I mean the mass of Mazzinian and Garibaldian workers, are such only by imagination, or even by habit, but in reality they can only be socialist revolutionaries.

And it is your duty today, dear friends, to organise an intelligent, honest, sympathetic, and above all, persistent propaganda to make them understand this. For that, you will need to do nothing more than explain the programme of the International to them, letting them grasp it firsthand. And if, for this purpose, you organise yourselves throughout Italy, and do so in good harmony, without recognising any other leader than your young collectivity itself, I swear to you that at the end of a year there will be no more Mazzinian or Garibaldian workers; that all will have become revolutionary socialists, patriots no doubt, but in the most humane sense of the word, that is to say patriots and internationalists at the same time. You will have thus created the unshakeable foundation for a future social revolution that will save Italy and restore to it the life, the intelligence, and all the initiative that belongs to it amidst the most humanly progressive nations of Europe.

And when you have accomplished this great deed, the workers who were formerly Mazzinians and Garibaldians will themselves become very valuable

apostles of “our religion” without God, since, by their very nature, their developed intelligence, though today distorted, and by the experience they have acquired in past struggles under the banners of Mazzini and Garibaldi, they are certainly the most energetic, most devoted and most capable of all the Italian proletariat. They are accustomed to conspiracy and organisation, and this habit will do you valuable services.

Organised, not individually, but collectively in close-knit groups, they will then become the leaders of the great mass of the proletariat, both in the cities and in the countryside. This great mass, which the political programmes of Mazzini and Garibaldi have never been able to inspire, will not know how and will not be able to resist the propaganda of our programme, which is the simplest expression of its deepest and most intimate instincts, and which can be summarised in a few words:

Peace, emancipation and happiness to all the oppressed!

War on all oppressors and exploiters!

Complete restitution to the workers: capital, factories, all the tools of production and raw materials to associations; the land to those who cultivate it with their own hands.

Freedom, justice, fraternity to all human beings born on this earth.

Equality for all.

For all without distinction, all the means of development, education and instruction, and equal opportunities to live by working.

Organisation of society by the free federation, from bottom to top, of workers associations, both industrial and agricultural, scientific as well as artistic and literary, in the commune initially; federation of communes into regions, of regions into nations, and of nations in the fraternal international.

As for the mode of organisation of social life, work and collective property, the programme of the International imposes nothing absolute. The International has neither dogmas nor uniform theories. In this respect, as in any living and free society, many different theories are circulating within it. But it accepts as the fundamental basis of its organisation the spontaneous development and organisation of all associations and all communes in complete autonomy, on the condition however that the associations and communes take as the basis of their organisation the general principles set out earlier, principles that are obligatory to all those who wish to be part of the International. As for the rest, the International relies on the salutary action of the free propaganda of ideas and on the identity and natural balance of interests.

[…]

Consequently, dear friends, what you must devote yourselves to, along with the organisation of the urban workers, are the means to be employed to break the ice that separates the urban proletariat from the people of the countryside, to unite and organise these two peoples into one. The salvation of Italy depends on this. All other classes must disappear from its soil, not as individuals, but as classes. Socialism is not cruel; it is a thousand times more humane than Jacobinism, I mean than political revolution. It bears no ill will towards individuals, not even the most wicked, knowing full well that all individuals, good or bad, are merely the inevitable product of the social position that history and society have created for them. Socialists, it is true, will certainly not be able to prevent the people, in the first surge of their fury, from making a few hundred of the most odious, most bitter and the most dangerous individuals disappear; but once this hurricane has passed, they will oppose with all their energy hypocritical, political and legal butchery, organised in cold blood.

Socialism will wage an inexorable war on “social positions”, not on men; and once these positions have been destroyed and smashed, the men who had occupied them, disarmed and deprived of all means of action, will have become harmless and much less powerful, I assure you, than the most ignorant worker; for their present power does not reside in themselves, in their intrinsic value, but in their wealth and in the support of the State.

The social revolution, therefore, will not only spare them, but, after having toppled them and deprived them of their weapons, will lift them up and say to them: “And now, dear comrades, since you have become our equals, bravely begin to work with us. In work, as in everything else, the first step is difficult, and we will help you fraternally to take it.” Those, then, who are robust and healthy do not want to earn their living by work, will have the right to starve, unless they resign themselves to living humbly and miserably on public charity, which will certainly not deny them the bare essentials.

As for their children, there is no doubt that they will become valiant workers and equal and free men. In society, there will certainly be less luxury, but unquestionably much more wealth; and, moreover, there will be a luxury unknown to all today: the luxury of humanity, the happiness of the full development and complete freedom of each individual within the equality of all.

Such is our idea.

[…]

Organise the proletariat of the cities in the name of revolutionary socialism, and, while doing so, unite it in a single preparatory organisation with the people of the countryside. The uprising of the urban proletariat is no longer sufficient; with it we would only have a political revolution, which would necessarily have against it the natural, legitimate reaction of the rural population, and this reaction, or only the indifference of the peasants, would stifle the revolution of the cities, as happened recently in France. Only a universal revolution is strong enough to overthrow and smash the organised power of the State, supported by all the resources of the wealthy classes. But a universal revolution is a social revolution, a simultaneous revolution of the rural and urban peoples. This is what must be organised – because without preparatory organisation, even the most powerful elements are impotent and ineffective.

We will talk about this organisation another time.

The International lays the foundations; expand it to all of Italy, and the rest will follow naturally.

The International does not destroy nationalities, nations; it embraces them all, without suppressing any. It cannot do otherwise, because its fundamental principle is the widest freedom. The International is not waging war on natural homelands; it is waging it only upon political homelands, on States; and it must wage this war: because, since it seriously desires the full and definitive emancipation of the proletariat, it must necessarily strive for the abolition of all classes, that is to say of all economic privileges, and States are only the organisation and guarantee of the economic privileges and the political domination of classes. In waging war on classes, it must wage it on States. […]

[…]

And now, dear friends, I have finished, Please excuse me if I have bored you: I wanted to be brief, but I was not able to be. The subject itself carried me away. But in compensation, you have my entire thought. Analyse it, take what suits you, leave what does not suit you, and tell me, with the same frankness with which I have spoken to you, what you think of it, your agreements or your objections.

Only in this way will we be able to reach an understanding and form a free union amongst ourselves.

Michael Bakunin

To the Editors of *Proletario Italiano*

Michael Bakunin

16-28 November 1871

Gentlemen,

I found in the November 12th issue of your esteemed newspaper an article, or rather a very strange letter, which seems to me to demand a reply; not that this letter is important in itself – the author is obviously far too ignorant of most of the things he talks about to be taken seriously – but because, written with a certain flair and with that assurance which inexperienced readers often take for the expression of a deep conviction, based on real science, it is addressing the editors of a workers' Journal, with the obvious and quite malicious aim of ruining the International in the opinion of the workers of your country.

[…]

To accept Mazzini's politics and socialism, but at the same time reject his theological beliefs, is to perpetuate the brutal domination of the bourgeoisie and the misery of the proletariat, without even leaving a heavenly ray that could soften the former and console the latter. To accept them, on the other hand, with all the mystical ideas that constitute their very soul, is to consolidate this same bourgeois domination and this same servitude of the people on the earth, but at least leaving the people with the hope of a heavenly socialism…

As for Mazzini's earthly socialism, it is worthless, derisory, incapable of producing the slightest serious improvement in the economic situation of the people, as I will try to prove to you, if you allow me, in a series of forthcoming articles.

The socialism of the International is not heavenly; it is absolutely real and earthly; and that is precisely what displeases not only all the Mazzinians, but also the bourgeoisie, and for good reason: the bourgeois will easily accommodate itself to a heavenly socialism; Christianity has shown it that it is an excellent socialism, and it is generous enough to relinquish all heavenly property to the proletariat , provided that, in the hope of these future goods, the proletariat consents to remain miserable and enslaved in practice.

But earthly socialism! devil! It is justice no longer in heaven, but on this earth; today not tomorrow, to work for it, for it alone, on this earth.

But earthly socialism! Devil! It is the triumph of justice on this earth; not in the distant future, but in the very near future as the proletariat of Europe is obviously uniting today under the same banner, under the banner of the International. The socialism of the International is the end of the economic privileges and the political domination of the bourgeoisie; it is the abolition of classes and all social inequalities, not only from a political and juridical point of view, but from the point of view of the material means of existence, each person having to live only by his own work. It is the disappearance of bourgeois parasitism and authoritarianism. For bourgeois democrats and politicians, it is finally the necessity of renouncing this sweet habit of commanding the blind, the credulous, of manipulating and moulding them like passive matter, and of making them a pedestal either for favourite ideas born outside these masses and consequently inevitably contrary to their real needs, or for their own person.

The socialism of the International is the end of the economic privileges and the political domination of the bourgeoisie; it is the abolition of classes and all social inequalities… each person having to live only by his own work

This is socialism, as understood by the International. Is it any wonder, then, that it is rejected with the same fervour by the Mazzinians, by the bourgeoisie and by the bourgeois democrats, including, no doubt, the author of this letter?

[…]

Note well every time they have desired to deceive the hunger, misery, suffering and real aspirations of the people; when they have tried to give them, instead of the bread that nourishes, hope and faith, ideas or rather illusions that amuse: idealism always in place of the reality of things and facts; and when, instead of that great and broad popular freedom which alone can ensure a human existence for the proletariat, they wanted to endow it with that so-called political freedom in the State, exclusively favourable to the development of the wealth and domination of the privileged classes and to that of the misery and servitude of the popular masses, they have always resorted to that great historical intermediary, to that eternal ambiguity, the good Lord. For if it were not for God, who on earth could force the masses to endure all that they endure? The rifles [*chassepots*] of public order would not suffice.

Mazzini's politics and socialism cannot do without the powerful, so useful support of the good Lord.

[…]

In Mazzini's State every command comes from above. Below, in the popular masses, only two rights remain: the illusory right to elect their masters, and the very real right, or rather duty, to obey them afterwards, and to let themselves be educated and directed by them, in accordance with the ideas they will shape, or that the God of love, the sole legislator and sovereign according to Mazzini, deems fit to suggest to them, on the *National Thought*. In short, as in the formula of Napoleon III, these masters of the republic will reign, govern and administer the people "*by the grace of God and by the will of the people*": a formula in which the *grace of God* necessarily and always annihilates the will of the people. It is impossible to imagine a more despotic and more pitiful government, above all more opposed to the emancipation of the masses.

By contrast, this system should not displease the bourgeoisie too much. For as long as the principle of authority and command, a principle essentially inherent to the State, remains standing, they can be certain of retaining this right, or rather this privilege, so lucrative and so sweet, of command in their hands, provided that their pockets are left full. Today it is the wealthy who rule; and as long as the economic world remains organised in such a way that bourgeois pockets are filled by the labour of the proletariat, which becomes all the more wretched the more it fills them, no force in the world, no new political law, not even Mazzini's religious propaganda can prevent the bourgeoisie from control over the proletariat. Provided, then, that Mazzini guarantees the bourgeoisie the integrity of their pockets, they will accept his republic if necessary, while preferring the current regime, as it is *safer*.

The integrity of bourgeois pockets does not mean only the possession of what they have, that would be too little, and if they had to be content with what they have, they would consume all their wealth in a very short period of time.

Imagine a social organisation in which the proletariat would not be forced to sell its productive power, its labour, to others; where, organised according to justice, in cooperative associations, it would work for itself, no longer needing bourgeois capital to fund, to fuel its work; and it is only under this condition will it be able to enjoy the full product of its labour, as justice demands, and as Mazzini himself says he wants. Where will it end up then? The landowner will remain with his land, the manufacturer with his industrial establishment, both without workers. But neither the land nor the factory produce on its own. The land is indeed endowed with natural productive force, but left to itself without cultivation, it is incapable of producing social values, incapable of providing wealth, or even sufficient food for a somewhat civilised person. Therefore, to avoid starving, the landowner will be forced to sell his land, and the industrialist his factory, to whom? To the collectively organised proletariat. In return, they will have money and will become what are properly called capitalists.

But capital also, as monetary value, represented by gold, platinum, silver, copper coins or by bank notes accredited or not by the State, produces nothing by itself. Gather together as many gold coins as you like; they will not multiply. Coins are precious because with them you can buy everything you need. But what you buy, you will consume, and once consumed you will have to buy it again, with a capital reduced by everything you spent on the initial purchase. In this way, you will soon end up consuming your capital.

For Capital to produce, it must be productivity employed either in agriculture, industry, or commerce, or it must speculate either on large economic enterprises or on government debt. In all these cases, even in the latter two which at first glance seem to have no connection with the labour of workers, it is this labour that pays the interest and all the other more or less acknowledged gains of capital.

[…]

Why does he pay them? Because he needs capital, and he does not have any. He needs capital for his work: to construct all the buildings, the machines, and to buy all the raw materials necessary for his industry; and then to feed himself and to support his family while he works. All of this requires considerable upfront expenditure, without which no work could be undertaken nor continued. Therefore, workers need capital, and lacking it, they must borrow it under the conditions imposed by the capitalist.

But in the social organisation we are talking about, and which Mazzini himself condescends to promise to the Italian workers, the workers will no longer need bourgeois capital to fund, to fuel their work; they will have their own capital, collective according to us, individual according to Mazzini – which implies a contradiction, because the moment workers become individual capitalists, they will no longer be workers, but exploiting bourgeois, the richest necessarily exploiting the poorest. But let us leave that question for another time. Let it suffice for us to know that, in the social order that Mazzini dreams of, every worker must enjoy the full product of his labour which can only be possible if he is at the same time the owner of all the capital he needs for his industry; which means that they will no longer need bourgeois capital.

But then, the latter, unable to extract anything from the labour of workers, will be unable to increase, or even maintain, their wealth. It will soon be consumed by its owners, the bourgeois capitalists. To maintain its position, it must be able to exploit the labour of workers, but it can only do so as long as the workers need its capital, that is to say as long as they themselves are deprived of it, as long as they remain poor.

From this it follows that guaranteeing the pockets of the bourgeoisie does not only mean guaranteeing the bourgeoisie the security of their current property, but also guaranteeing them the power to exploit the labour of the workers by means of this property, that is to say the poverty of the proletariat; its poverty and its permanent servitude, which is the necessary consequence of it.

This is what Mazzini does not understand. We should not blame him for that. You cannot become a sincere theologian and a serious economist at the same time. One excludes the other – heaven makes you disdain and misunderstand the earth. Unfortunately, or fortunately for the workers, they are bound to the earth by their suffering, their needs, they misery, their daily servitude; their chains are therefore entirely material and can only be broken by material means. All the heavenly idealism in the world is powerless against it!

[…]

Mazzini absolutely forbade workers from forming associations for collective resistance, from striking – that formidable weapon, and the only legal means workers could use today to defend themselves against the greed and arbitrary power of their bosses. Only through their internationally organised strikes were English, Belgian, German workers able to achieve the resounding victories that you know, and only through the strength, the perseverance, the international unity they displayed in this struggle were they able to command the respect of the bourgeois. Not by their

humble prayers. These barbarians have no prophet, they have not learned to pray. But while remaining within the strictest legality, they proudly upheld their rights, and they triumphed.

All of this greatly displeases Mazzini. Naturally, it also displeases the bourgeoisie, who like legal means when they serve their interests, but not when they are used against them. Mazzini dislikes it because it is a brutal, material and no way religious means, a means that could alienate the bourgeoisie.

[…]

In Mazzini's republic, the bourgeoisie will rule [*commanderont*] as they rule in the Monarchy; with this sole difference, that then they will rule the people in the name of popular sovereignty, as they do in France today, which will naturally be a great consolation for the people. But since they will rule, they will enrich themselves. For all history proves it to us, with the exception of a small number of extraordinary honest and selfless individuals, who are by that very fact a confirmation rather than an overturning of the rule, the power of both individuals and classes in society always transforms into wealth, just as wealth in turn inevitably becomes power; it is a natural social law and just as inevitable as that recently discovered law of the transformation of motion into heat and heat into motion.

For all history proves it to us… the power of both individuals and classes in society always transforms into wealth, just as wealth in turn inevitably becomes power

So the bourgeoisie will rule, and because they rule, they will become rich. From what source? Always from the same one, the only source of all wealth: the labour of the people. And the people? The people will have the precious right to elect their exploiters and masters; but in reality, they will remain what they are today: the very humble and very hungry providers and enrichers of the bourgeoisie.

[…]

But does Mazzini himself not promise the workers serious social reforms? The enjoyment of the full product of their labour, for example, which either means nothing at all, or can only mean this: that the workers will henceforth pay no interest to the Capitalist, nor leave any profit to the employers of labour, to the heads of industry, the manufacturers or bosses, because grouped into productive associations, they will collectively be their own capitalists, their own managers, they own bosses?

Without doubt he promises it, but at the same time, as we have already observed, he promises the bourgeoisie that the economic and legal foundations of the current society will remain intact, and that is enough to reassure the bourgeoisie, because, being better economists that Mazzini, they know very well that as long as these foundations are to be religiously preserved in Mazzini's republic, the spectre of economic and social justice, which terrifies them so horribly will always remain a powerless phantom, and the labour of the proletariat will continue to fill their bottomless pockets, in the future as in the past… But then, the proletariat deceived in its hope, will revolt! Not at all, Mazzini's religion, which will be taught in the People's Schools as the latest and highest expression of National Thought, will destroy, will stifle in its heart any thought of revolt. Revolt is of Satan, not of God. God commands sacrifice, devotion, the fulfilment of duties, but he repudiates the asserting of rights; for rights divide us, and only the religion of duty is capable of uniting men:

[…]

In the meantime, Mazzini advises workers to purify themselves, improve themselves, educate themselves, teach each other, and spread amongst their comrades in suffering *"l'idea dei loro futuri destini, l'idea d'una Nazione che darà loro nome"* {*"The idea of their future destiny, the idea of a Nation that will give them a name"*} (as if they do not have one today! They call themselves by the noble name of the workers, of the Proletariat, of the wretched, of the poor to whom belongs the future, the world, if only they knew how to conquer it by organising their strength, in the name of their rights and their duties which are not the principle but the consequence of their rights, in the name of humanity and not of Divinity, in short) "*che darà loro nome, educazione*" {"*what will give them a name, an education*"} (the Mazzinian Catechism, replacing the Christian catechism) "*…lavoro e retribuzione proporzionata*" ("*work and appropriate renumeration*"} (Aha! Here at least is a rather vague promise, it is true, but nevertheless positive. We will see in what manner Mazzini intends to keep this promise?) "*e coscienza e missione d'amore*" {"*a conscience and a mission of*

love"} (that is to say, of apostles of the Massinian religion).

Let us grant that all this is truly good for the future, but what will Italian workers do now to alleviate their suffering? We see that in all other countries, to alleviate their suffering not fundamentally, but momentarily, temporarily, workers have recourse to the very powerful means of the strike: in England, Belgium, Spain, and even in France, despite the public order that M. Thiers maintains there with the help of Bonapartist rifles, workers inspired and organised by the International, joining hands across borders, establish resistance funds, and by means of formidable strikes force the Heads of Industry to reduce hours and increase their wages. The victories recently won by the workers of England, Belgium and Germany prove that it is a very effective means, which also offers the immense advantage of making the alliance, the fraternal association of workers of all countries, without distinction of trade or nation, closer and more real…

the cooperative system… contains within it all the seeds of the economic emancipation of the working masses. But… it will only be able to really develop all these seeds *upon the sole basis of economic and social equality, when capital, industrial establishments, raw materials and the instruments of work, naturally including the land… will become the collective property of productive workers associations… freely organised and federated amongst themselves*

But we have also seen that Mazzini absolutely does not want strikes. For a strike is the beginning of a revolt, *quite legal*, it is true, by the workers against the bourgeois; it is the beginning of the social war, and Mazzini wants nothing to do with it. For it would fraternally unite, against the Italian bourgeoisie, the movement of the Italian proletariat with the international movement of the proletariat of Europe and America; and would thereby make impossible the exclusively national, messianically Italian alliance of the proletariat of Italy with the bourgeois of Italy, preventing it from uniting with them in a common political movement for the establishment of the great national Republic or the Mazzinian Church-State.

So what are the economic measures recommended by Mazzini to Italian workers in the present? They are associations for mutual aid and education, and, as far as possible, the establishment of *cooperative consumer societies*.

All his *socialism*, at least for now, is limited to that. This is what is called in Germany, the socialism of Schullz-Delitsch, bourgeois socialism.

[…]

The idea first arose in France before the 1848 revolution. So it originated, at most, thirty years ago in that *accursed* country which knows nothing but revolutions in the name of human rights, never for God. But the bourgeois reaction that soon followed the magnificent triumph of the Parisian proletariat prevented the practical development of this idea in Paris and in France. It was English workers, many of them Owenites, who first had the honour of putting this idea into widespread practice. The astonishing successes of the Rochdale cooperative association, founded in 1844 and primarily focused on consumption, are too well known for me to need to elaborate further here. After the English, it was the turn of the German workers, and only later that of the French workers.

In Germany, the honour of founding the bourgeois cooperative system belongs primarily to M. Schullz-Delitsch, a member of the Federal Parliament and the Progressive Party, a fanatical unitarist and, as is well known, an ardent Prussophile. Initially, he focused mainly on creating mutual credit associations, Banks of the People. By 1865, there were nearly a thousand of them in Germany. There exist today several thousand cooperative associations of all kinds, including credit, consumer and producer cooperatives. Does this solve the social question in Germany? Not al all. The misery of the proletariat remains the same; indeed, it increases daily.

Does this mean that the cooperative system is bad? Not at all. On the contrary, we are convinced that this system, widely organised and especially internationally and replacing everywhere the current system of production funded by bourgeois capital, contains within it all the seeds of the economic emancipation of the working masses. But we are also convinced that it

will only be able to really develop all these seeds *upon the sole basis of economic and social equality, when capital, industrial establishments, raw materials and the instruments of work, naturally including the land, ceasing to be the hereditary property of individuals, will become the collective property of productive workers associations, both industrial and agricultural, freely organised and federated amongst themselves*.

[…]

The same will be true of the relations between capital and labour as long as they remain separate, represented by two different classes, one belonging to a propertied minority, the other to the mass of the proletariat. The owner of capital will always command the worker and impose conditions on him that will not even be determined by the will of the capitalist, but by the competition of different capitals on the one side and, on the other, by what the workers will make or rather will be forced to make amongst themselves, in short, by what is called *supply* and *demand*.

As long as the worker is forced by poverty and hunger to sell his labour as a vile commodity, his labour will necessarily be treated as such, and will be taxed according to the real conditions of supply and demand.

[…]

I will not dwell on mutual aid societies. They are too widespread in Italy and their effects are too well known to require discussion. Mutual aid societies are valuable and necessary to workers from two points of view. First, by providing temporary and always excessively limited relief to workers – who need it, without ever being able, of course, to improve their miserable condition in any way that is consistent and serious; and above all, because they bring workers closer together, give them a beginning of association and organisation – creating as it were the first seeds of collective working-class thought, strength and action. All workers' associations, international or not, should organise themselves into mutual aid and education societies, for this is the beginning of the salutary practice of fraternity, as well as a condition for properly working-class thought. It should also be noted that most sections of the International have organised similar societies within themselves, societies which work all the better because all the rich, titled, official and non-official bourgeois are excluded from them.

[…]

To bear serious fruit and to turn entirely and effectively to the benefit of the workers, mutual credit societies, banks of the people and consumer cooperative societies should be complemented by *productive cooperative societies*. Then naturally the workers' associations, becoming their own capitalists and the full masters of their industrial establishments, would alone benefit, and this time in a very real manner, from the cheapness of credit and the objects necessary for life, produced by the people's banks and by the consumer societies.

But under current economic conditions, can workers seriously establish *cooperative productive societies*? Which is to say, can they, with their meagre savings and the credit that people's banks would offer them, raise capital capable of competing with large bourgeois capital? We have seen that in modern industry, built upon individual or patriarchal hereditary property, it is the large factories which, being able to produce more cheaply then small and medium sized industrial establishments inevitably tend to crush the latter, and not only do they tend to, but they do succeed, slowly it is true, yet in an unfailing manner, always. Large capitals, usually coming together today in joint-stock companies both for the construction of roads and communications, as well as for industry and commerce, devour medium and small capitals. As a country's wealth grows, the number of rich people, who have become infinitely richer than before, decreases, and in the same proportion the number of average and small fortunes also decreases. The great banking, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie tends to form a despotic and narrow oligarchy, which, seizing control of all the economic activity of the country, becomes economically and politically its absolute arbiter so to speak.

This is a fact that everyone can see happening in Italy today. And those who blame political institutions are quite mistaken. Political institutions can do nothing about it; they are merely the consequence and inevitable expression of a fact, an economic inevitability. It is undeniable that, produced by this inevitability, they become the armed guarantee of this evil economic order, so that to radically change the latter, it is absolutely necessary to overthrow them, destroy them. But they would be very mistaken those who would think – as all bourgeois republicans generally do – that without touching the sacred foundations of individual and hereditary property, which Mazzini defends with such ferocity, from such a laudable bourgeois point of view, currently against us, it would be enough to replace the current political institutions with new ones, with Mazzini's bourgeois-theocratic republic for example, to bring about a true emancipation of the popular masses.

[…]

Productive societies however pose a danger from the point of view of workers' emancipation: that of

creating, within the working masses themselves, a new class of exploiters of the labour of the proletariat. This sometimes happens – and this is precisely what happened in the Rochdale cooperative association – that a few dozen workers by a miracle of energy, unity, intelligence and sacrifice manage not only to found but to make a small cooperative productive establishment thrive. They thus become the collective owners of a certain more or less considerable capital which allows them to expand their business and employ a larger workforce. They recruit new workers. How do they receive them? As associates and therefore as collective co-owners of a capital they did not help to create? No, because from a bourgeois point of view, that seems unfair. So they treat them as mere wage-workers, in relation to whom they collectively represent a bourgeois exploiter.

It was precisely with a view to this danger that the second congress of the International, held n Lausanne in September 1867, while recommending the formation of credit, consumer and productive societies wherever possible, passed the following resolution:

1) *The Congress believes that the efforts attempted today by workers' associations (if these become widespread while retaining the current form) tend to constitute a fourth estate, between which lies a fifth estate more miserable than itself* (the great masses of the proletariat).

2) *To avoid this danger, the Congress believes it is necessary for the proletariat to be fully convinced of this idea: that social transformation can only be achieved in a radical and definite way by means of acting upon the whole of society and in accordance with reciprocity and justice* (that is to say by a social revolution, peaceful is possible, violent if necessary, and which must change the economic bases of society, by the transformation of individually inherited property into collective property).

3) *Nevertheless, the Congress believes that all efforts by workers' associations should be encouraged, provided that the levy of capital on labour is eliminated as far as possible from within these associations, that is to say, that the idea of mutuality is introduced into them.*

We see that the international, far from opposing the cooperative system in any of its applications, actually encourages it. Thus, within the International Workers' Association itself, many cooperative societies have been formed in England as well as in France, in Belgium as well as in Germany and Spain which support each other. Only because the International takes the emancipation of the working masses seriously, demands it in its entirety, does it harbour no illusions about the application of this system under current economic conditions. It recognises and has experienced its usefulness in two respects: first, in that of a temporary and undoubtedly very partial, but nevertheless valuable, relief of workers' suffering; but above all from the point of view of the even more valuable experience that the workers acquire there, by getting used to establishing, organising and managing their own affairs without the intervention of any bourgeois tutor, pontiff or guardian angel.

its primary concern is not to establish a establish a cooperative system now, whose full rational organisation and conformity with this justice is simply impossible under the present economic circumstances, but to organise the workers' forces and to raise the workers' spirit for this struggle. That is precisely why it is less concerned with cooperation than with strikes

But since the International knows the nature of the bourgeoisie better than Mazzini seems to – being composed of workers, it knows it through harsh experience – and since the International knows full well that the triumph of equality, justice and broad popular freedom cannot be achieved without a terrible struggle, its primary concern is not to establish a establish a cooperative system now, whose full rational organisation and conformity with this justice is simply impossible under the present economic circumstances, but to organise the workers' forces and to raise the workers' spirit for this struggle. That is precisely why it is less concerned with cooperation than with strikes.

Strikes have this advantage of clearly separating the working masses from the bourgeois class, and for the workers to triumph and not be deceived once against as they have always been until now, this separation must be realised everywhere. The worker of every country must know that the workers of all countries, by their needs, by their sufferings, by the sameness of their ideas and their aspirations, are their brothers, while the local bourgeois, their compatriot by language, even if it were the language of Gregory VII, Savonarola and Dante, is their national enemy.

[…]

The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International

Michael Bakunin

December 1871

Member of the International Association of Working-People

Translated from the French by Sarah E. Holmes[1]

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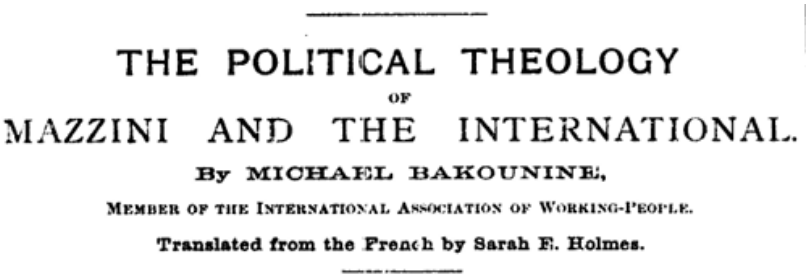
INTRODUCTION[2]

If there is a man universally respected in Europe and who, by forty years of active life wholly devoted to the service of a great cause, has really merited this respect, it is Mazzini. He is incontestably one of the noblest and purest individualities of our century – I might say even the greatest, if greatness was compatible with the stubborn worship of error.

Unfortunately, at the very foundation of the programme of the Italian patriot, there has been, from the first, an essentially false principle, which, after having paralysed and made barren his most heroic efforts and his most ingenious combinations, must drag him sooner or later into the ranks of the reaction. This principle is that of an idealism at once metaphysical and mystical, grafted upon the patriotic ambition of the statesman. It is the worship of God, the worship of divine and human authority; it is the faith in the Messianic predestination of Italy, queen of the nations, with Rome, capital of the world; it is the political passion for the grandeur and glory of the State, founded necessarily on the misery of the people. It is, in short, that religion of all dogmatic and absolute minds, the passion for uniformity which they call unity and which is the grave of liberty.


THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY
OF
MAZZINI AND THE INTERNATIONAL.
By MICHAEL BAKOUNINE,
MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WORKING-PEOPLE.
Translated from the French by Sarah E. Holmes.

Mazzini is the last high priest of religious, metaphysical, and political idealism which is disappearing.

Mazzini reproaches us with not believing in God. We reproach him, as a set-off, with believing in him, or rather, we do not even reproach him, we only deplore that he believes. We infinitely regret that by this intrusion of mystical sentiments and ideas into his conscience, his activity, his life, he has been forced to range himself against us with all the enemies of the emancipation of the popular masses.

For, in fact, we cannot longer deceive ourselves. Who are now found under the banner of God? From Napoleon Third to Bismarck; from the Empress Eugenie to Queen Isabella; and between them the pope with his mystical rose which he gallantly presents, by turns, to the one and the other. There are all the emperors, all the kings, all the official, officious, aristocratic, and otherwise privileged world of Europe, carefully enumerated in the Gotha almanac[3]; there are all the great leeches of industry, of commerce, of finance; the licensed professors and all the functionaries of the State; the high and the low police, the *gendarmes*, the jailers, the executioners; without forgetting the priests, constituting today the black police of souls for the benefit of States; there are the generals, those humane defenders of public order, and the editors of the venal

[1] *La théologie politique de Mazzini et l'Internationale* (Neuchatel: Imprimerie G. Guillaume fils, 1871). (*Black Flag*)

[2] This introduction originally appeared as "Réponse d'un international à Mazzini" in *Liberté* (Brussels), 18 and 19 August 1871. Written between 25-28 July 1871, Bakunin sent to the paper on 6 August 1871. (*Black Flag*)

[3] The *Almanach de Gotha* is a directory of Europe's royalty and higher nobility, also including the major governmental, military and diplomatic corps, as well as statistical data by country. (*Black Flag*)

press, such pure representatives of all the official virtues. Behold the army of God!

Behold the banner under which Mazzini is ranged today, doubtless in spite of himself, drawn by the logic of his ideal convictions, which force him, if not to bless all that they bless, at least to curse all that they curse.

And in the opposite camp, what is to be found there? The revolution, the audacious deniers of God, of the divine order and the principle of authority, but, on the other hand, and for that very reason, the believers in humanity, the affirmers of a human order and of human liberty.

Mazzini, in his youth, divided between two opposing currents, was at once priest and revolutionist. But the inspirations of the priest, as was to have been expected, finally stifled in him the instincts of the revolutionist; and today all that he thinks, all that he says, all that he does, breathes the purest reaction. In consequence of which there is great joy in the camp of our enemies and mourning in our own.

He says that we are materialists, atheists. To this we have nothing to answer, for we are that in truth… we glory in being such, because atheism and materialism are the truth, or rather, the real basis of all truth

But we have something else to do than to lament; all our time belongs to the battle. Mazzini has thrown down his gauntlet before us, and it is our duty to pick it up, in order that it may not be said that, through veneration for the great past services of a man, we have bent our head before untruth.

It is not with a light heart that one can decide to attack a man like Mazzini, a man whom one is forced to revere and love even in combating him, for, if there is one thing which no one dares question, it is the high disinterestedness, the intense sincerity, and the no less intense passion for good, of this man, whose incomparable purity shines with all its brightness in the midst of the corruption of the century. But veneration, however legitimate it may be, must never turn into idolatry; and there is one thing more sacred than the greatest man in the world – namely, truth, justice, the duty of defending the sacred cause of humanity.

This is not the first time that Mazzini launches his accusations and condemnations, not to say his insults and calumnies, against us. The past year, in a letter addressed to his friend, an idealist and priest like himself, the illustrious Quinet, he had bitterly censured the materialistic and atheistic tendencies of the modern youth. This was his right, the logical consequence of his misfortune in having always connected his noblest aspirations with the fictitious existence of an absolutely impossible Being, a malevolent and absurd phantom, created by the childish imagination of people just emerging from animality, which, after having been successively reviewed, corrected, and enriched by the creative fancy of poets and still later gravely defined and systematised by the abstract speculations of theologians and metaphysicians, is vanishing today, like a true phantom as it is, before the powerful breath of the popular conscience, matured by historic experience, and before the still more pitiless analysis of real science. And since the illustrious Italian patriot, from the beginning of his long career, has had the misfortune to always place his most revolutionary thoughts and acts under the protection of this imaginary being and to enchain thereto his whole life, to the extent of sacrificing to it even the real emancipation of his dear Italy, can we be surprised that he is now indignant at the new generation which, inspired with another spirit, another morality, and another love than his own, turns its back upon his God?

The bitterness and anger of Mazzini are natural. To have been for more than thirty years at the head of the revolutionary movement of Europe and to feel now that this management is escaping him; to see this movement take a road in which his petrified convictions do not permit him to lead, or even to follow; to remain alone, abandoned, not understood, and henceforth incapable of himself understanding anything of all that is going on under his eyes!' For a great soul, for a proud intelligence, for a grand ambition, like that of Mazzini, at the end of a career dedicated wholly to the service of humanity, this is a tragic and cruel position.

So, when the saintly old man, from the height of his isolated ideal, launched at us his first thunderbolts, we made no answer, or almost none. We respected this powerless but grievous wrath. Yet not from any lack of arguments by which, not only to resent his reproaches, but even to turn them against him.

He says that we are materialists, atheists. To this we have nothing to answer, for we are that in truth, and, as far as a sentiment of pride is permissible in poor

individuals who, like the waves, rise only to soon disappear in the immense ocean of the collective life of human society, we glory in being such, because atheism and materialism are the truth, or rather, the real basis of all truth, and because, without troubling ourselves with the practical consequences, we desire the truth before all and nothing but the truth. Moreover, we have this faith – that, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, notwithstanding all the timid suggestions of a political and sceptical prudence, the truth alone can effect the practical good of men.

Such is, then, the first article of our faith; and we will force you to really admit that we too have a faith, illustrious master. Only it looks never backwards, but always forwards.

You do not always content yourself, however, with establishing our atheism and our materialism, you conclude that we can have neither love for men nor respect for their dignity; that all the great things which, from time immemorial, have inspired the noblest hearts – liberty, justice, humanity, beauty, truth – must be completely unknown to us, and that, dragging through our miserable existence in a haphazard fashion, crawling rather than walking on the earth, we can know no other cares than to satisfy our sensual and gross appetites.

If any other than you said it, we should call him a shameless calumniator. To you, respected and unjust master, we say that this is on your part a deplorable error. Do you wish to know to what extent we love all the grand and beautiful things of which you deny us knowledge and love? Know, then, that we love them to this extent – that we are wearied and disgusted with seeing them eternally suspended from your heaven, which has stolen them from earth, as so many symbols and promises forever unrealisable! We content ourselves no longer with the phantom of these things; we wish the reality.

And that is the second article of our faith, illustrious master. We believe in the possibility, in the necessity, of this realisation upon earth; at the same time we are convinced that all those things which you adore as celestial hopes will necessarily lose, in becoming human and terrestrial realities, their mystical and divine character.

In calling us materialists, you believe that you have said everything. It seems to you that you have definitively condemned and overwhelmed us. And do you know whence your error arises? From the fact that what we call matter and what you call matter are two things, two conceptions, absolutely different. Your matter is to you an imaginary being, like your God, like your Satan, like your immortal soul. Your matter is the basest grossness, inert brutality, an impossible being, just as pure, immaterial, absolute mind, which likewise has never existed but in the speculative fancy of theologians and metaphysicians, those unique creators of the one and the other, is impossible. The history of philosophy has now unveiled the process – a very simple one, moreover – of this unconscious creation, the genesis of this fatal historical illusion, which, during a long series of centuries, has weighed like a horrible nightmare on the crushed spirit of human generations.

The first thinkers, who were necessarily theologians and metaphysicians, because the earthly mind is so made that it commences always with many follies, with falsehood, with error, to arrive at a particle of truth, which does not highly recommend *the holy traditions of the past* – the first thinkers, I say, took in the lump the real beings with whom they were acquainted, including, doubtless, themselves, all which appeared to them to constitute force, movement, life, intelligence, and they called this by the generic name of *mind*; then they gave to the rest, the unformed and inert residue which they supposed must remain after this abstractive operation, executed unconsciously on the real world by their own mind, the name of *matter*. After which they were astonished that this *matter*, which, like this mind, never existed but in their imagination, appeared to them so inert, so stupid, in the presence of their God, pure mind….

As for us, we admit frankly that we do not know your God, but neither do we know your matter; or, rather, we know that both are equally No-Beings created a priori by the speculative fancy of the simple thinkers of past centuries. By the words "*material* and *matter*" we understand the totality, the whole scale, of real beings, known and unknown, from the most simple organic bodies up to the constitution and operations of the brain of the greatest genius: the most beautiful sentiments, the grandest thoughts, heroic deeds, acts of devotion, duties as well as rights, sacrifice as well as egoism, all, even to the mystical and transcendental aberrations of Mazzini, like the manifestations of organic life, chemical properties and actions, electricity, light, heat, the natural attraction of bodies, constitute in our eyes so many evolutions, doubtless different, but not less strictly solidary, of this totality of real beings which we call *matter*.

And notice carefully that we do not consider this totality as a sort of absolute and eternally creative substance, as the Pantheists make it, but as an eternal *resultant*, ever produced and reproduced anew by the concurrence of an infinity of actions and reactions of all kinds or by the incessant transformation of the real beings who are born and die in its bosom.

Not to prolong this metaphysical dissertation, I will say, by way of summing up, that we call *material* all that is, all that is produced in the real world, in man as well as outside of man, and that we apply the name *ideal* exclusively to the products of man's cerebral action; but as our brain is an organisation wholly material, and as, consequently, all its functions are as material as the action of all other things united can be, it follows that what we call matter or the material world does not in the least exclude, but, on the contrary, inevitably includes, the ideal.

There is a fact which is worthy of careful consideration by our platonic adversaries: How is it that materialistic theorists generally show themselves much more largely idealists in practice than the idealists themselves? At bottom, nothing is more logical or more natural than this fact. Does not all development imply in some way negation of the point of departure? Well, the materialistic theorists set out from the conception of matter to arrive at what? At the idea. While the idealists, setting out from the pure, absolute idea and always repeating anew the old myth of original sin, which is only the symbolic expression of their melancholy destiny, are eternally falling back, as well in theory as in practice, into the matter of which they never succeed in getting clear. And such matter! Brutal, ignoble, stupid, created by their own imagination, as the *alter Ego* or as the reflection of their *ideal Me*.

[II – *Liberty*, 30 October 1886]

So the materialists, always conforming their social theories to the real developments of history, consider bestiality, cannibalism, slavery as the first points of departure in the progressive movement of society; but what are they seeking, what do they wish? The emancipation and complete humanisation of society; while the idealists, who take for the foundations of their speculations the immortal soul and free will, end inevitably in the worship of public order, like Thiers, and in that of authority, like Mazzini – that is to say, in the consecration and organisation of an eternal slavery. Whence it follows, evidently, that theoretical materialism has for a necessary consequence practical idealism, and that, on the contrary, ideal theories find their realisation possible only in the grossest practical materialism.

But yesterday, under our eyes, where were the materialists, the atheists, found? In the Paris Commune. And the idealists, the believers in God? In the National Assembly of Versailles. What did the men of Paris wish? Through the emancipation of labour, the definitive emancipation of humanity.

But yesterday, under our eyes, where were the materialists, the atheists, found? In the Paris Commune. And the idealists, the believers in God? In the National Assembly of Versailles. What did the men of Paris wish? Through the emancipation of labour, the definitive emancipation of humanity. And what does the triumphant Assembly of Versailles wish? Its final degradation under the double yoke of spiritual and temporal power. The materialists, full of faith and despising suffering, dangers, and death, wish to march forward, because they see gleaming before them the triumph of humanity; and the idealists, out of breath, seeing no longer anything but red spectres before them, wish to push it back with all their might into the mire from which it has escaped with so much trouble. Compare and judge.

Mazzini pretends and asserts, with that doctrinal and imperious tone which is peculiar to all founders of new religions, that materialists are incapable of loving and of devoting their life to great things. In saying that, he only proves that, a consistent idealist and scorner of humanity, in the name of his God, whose prophet he very seriously believes himself to be, he has never comprehended human nature nor the historical developments of society, and that, if he is not ignorant of history, he misunderstands it in a singular manner.

His reasoning is that of all the theologians. If there were no creative God, he says, the world with its admirable laws could not exist, or else would present nothing less than a horrible chaos, where all things would be governed, not by a providential and divine thought, but by frightful chance and the anarchical competition of blind forces. There would be no aim in life; everything would be only material, brutal, and fortuitous. For without God, no coordination in the physical world, and no *moral law* in human society; and without moral law, no duty, no right, no sacrifice, no love, no humanity, no country, no Rome, and no Italy; for, if Italy exists as a nation, it is only because she has a providential and worldly mission to fulfil, and she could have been charged with this mission only by God, whose paternal solicitude for this queen of nations has

gone so far as to trace, with his own divine finger, her frontiers, predicted and described by the prophetic genius of Dante.

In the course of this work, I will try to prove against Mazzini:

1. That, if there were a God, the world could never have existed.

2. That, if God had been the legislator of the natural world, which in our idea includes all the world, properly speaking, as much the physical as the human or social world, what we call natural laws, physical and social, likewise could never have existed. Like all political States subordinated and ruled from above by arbitrary legislators, the world would then present the spectacle of the most revolting anarchy. It could not exist.

3. That the *moral law*, whose existence we materialists and atheists recognise more really than idealists of any school whatever, Mazzinians or non-Mazzinians, can, is a truly moral law, a law at once logical and real, a powerful law, a law which must triumph over the conspiracies of all the idealists in the world, because it emanates from the very nature of human society, a nature of which we must seek the real foundations, not in God, but in animality.

4. That the idea of a God, far from being necessary to the establishment of this law, has been only its disturbance and depravation.

5. That all the Gods, past and present, have owed their first existence to human fantasy, hardly free from the swaddling-clothes of its primitive bestiality; that faith in a supernatural or divine world constitutes an aberration historically inevitable in the past developments of our mind; and that, to use an expression of Proudhon, men, deceived by a sort of optical illusion, have always adored in their Gods only their own image, reversed and monstrously exaggerated.

6. That divinity, once established on its celestial throne, has become the scourge of humanity, the ally of all the tyrants, of all the charlatans, of all the tormentors and exploiters of the popular masses.

7. That, finally, the disappearance of the divine phantoms, necessary condition of the triumph of humanity, will be one of the inevitable consequences of the emancipation of the proletariat.

As long as Mazzini was content to insult the youth of the schools, the only ones who, in the profoundly corrupted and degraded circles of the existing *bourgeoisie*, still evinced a little enthusiasm for great things, for truth and justice; as long as he limited his attacks to the German professors, to the Moleschotts, the Schiffs, and the others, who commit the horrible offence' of teaching true science in Italian universities; and as long as he amused himself with denouncing them to the Italian government as propagators of subversive ideas in the country of Galileo and Giordano Bruno – the silence enjoined by affection and pity was possible to us. The young people are energetic enough and the professors learned enough to defend themselves.

But today Mazzini has exceeded the limit. Still in good faith and still inspired by an idealism as fanatical as sincere, he has committed two crimes which, in our eyes, in the eyes of the entire socialistic democracy of Europe, are unpardonable.

At the very moment when the heroic population of Paris, more sublime than ever, was getting itself massacred by tens of thousands, including women and children, in defending the most humane, the most just, the most grand cause which was ever produced in history, *the cause of the emancipation of the working-people of the whole world*; at the moment when the frightful coalition of all the unclean reactions which are now celebrating their triumphal orgies at Versailles, not content with massacring and imprisoning en masse our brothers and sisters of the Commune of Paris, launches at them all the calumnies which a baseness without limits can alone concoct – Mazzini, the great, the pure democrat Mazzini, turning his back upon the cause of the proletariat and remembering only his mission of prophet and priest, likewise hurls his insults at them! He dares deny not only the justice of their cause, but even their heroic and sublime devotion, representing them, they who have sacrificed themselves for the deliverance of the whole world, as a lot of coarse creatures ignorant of all moral law and obeying only egoistic and savage impulses.

This is not the first time that Mazzini has insulted and calumniated the people of Paris. In 1848, after the memorable days of June which had inaugurated the era of the demands of the proletariat and of the really socialistic movement in Europe, Mazzini had launched a manifesto full of wrath, cursing the workingmen of Paris and socialism at the same time. Against the workingmen of 1848, devoted, heroic, sublime, like their children o± 1871, and, like them, massacred, imprisoned, and banished *en masse* by the *bourgeois* Republic, Mazzini had repeated all the slanders of which Ledru-Rollin and his other friends, self-styled red republicans of France, made use to palliate in the eyes of the world, and perhaps in their own eyes, their ridiculous and shameful incapacity.

Mazzini cursed socialism: as priest or as Messianic deputy of the master on high, he must curse it, since socialism, considered from the moral point of view, is the advent of *human respect* replacing the voluntary degradations of *divine worship*, and, considered from the scientifically practical point of view, is the proclamation of that grand principle which, from this time a part of the conscience of the people, has become the single point of departure, as well of the researches and developments of positive science, as of the revolutionary movements of the proletariat.

This principle, summed up in all its simplicity, is as follows:

"As in the world specifically called material, inorganic matter (mechanical, physical, chemical) is the determinative base of organic matter (vegetable, animal, intelligent or cerebral), so in the social world, which can be considered only as the highest known degree of the material world, the development of economic questions has always been and still continues to be the determinative base of all religious, philosophical, political, and social developments."

We see that this principle brings with it nothing less than the most audacious overturning of all the theories, scientific as well as moral, of all the religious, metaphysical, political, and judicial ideas, which together constitute the belief of all idealists, past and present. This is a revolution a thousand times more formidable than that which, starting from the Renaissance and especially from the seventeenth century, overthrew the scholastic doctrines, those ramparts of the Church, of absolute monarchy, and of feudal nobility, to replace them by the metaphysical dogmatism of so-called pure reason, so favourable to the domination of the latest privileged class and especially of the *bourgeoisie*.

If the overthrow of scholastic barbarity caused such a terrible emotion in its time, we can understand what convulsions must be caused, in our day, by the overthrow of doctrinal idealism, of this last refuge of all the oppressors and privileged exploiters of humanity.

The exploiters of ideal beliefs feel themselves menaced in their most precious interests, and the disinterested, fanatical, and sincere partisans of dying idealism, like Mazzini, see all the religion, all the illusion of their life, destroyed at a single blow.

Since he began to act, Mazzini has not ceased to repeat to the proletariat of Italy and of Europe these words, which sum up his religious and political catechism: "Be moral, adore God, accept the moral law which I bring you in his name, aid me in establishing a republic founded on the (impossible) marriage of reason and faith, of divine authority and human liberty, and you shall have glory and power, and, moreover, you shall have prosperity, liberty, and equality."

in adding his invectives to those of all the reactionists of Europe against our unfortunate brothers, the heroic defenders and martyrs of the Commune of Paris, and… against the legitimate claims and the international… Mazzini has definitively broken with the revolution, and has taken his place in the international reaction.

Socialism says to them, on the contrary, through the mouth of the International:

"That the economic subjection of the labourer to the monopolist of raw material and the instruments of labour is the source of servitude in all its forms – social misery, mental degradation, political submission – and

"That, for this reason, the economic emancipation of the labouring classes is the great end to which all political movements should be subordinated as a simple means."

Such is, in its simplicity, the fundamental thought of the *International Association of Working-People*.

One can understand that Mazzini has been obliged to curse it; and this is the second crime with which we reproach him, while recognising, however, that, in cursing it, he has obeyed his conscience as prophet and priest.

But, while rendering justice to his incontestable sincerity, we must affirm that, in adding his invectives to those of all the reactionists of Europe against our unfortunate brothers, the heroic defenders and martyrs of the Commune of Paris, and his excommunications to those of the National Assembly and of the Pope against the legitimate claims and the international organisation of the workingmen of the entire world, Mazzini has definitively broken with the revolution, and has taken his place in the international reaction.

In the course of this work, examining one by one his grievances against our admirable Association, I shall endeavour to lay bare the emptiness of the religious and political doctrines of the prophet.

[III – *Liberty*, 20 November 1886]

[FIRST PART: THE INTERNATIONAL AND MAZZINI]

Mazzini must be very disconsolate. Hardly has he had time to launch his excommunication against the International, when forthwith the archangels of public order set themselves to striking him.

We know what has just happened at Naples. The International [Workers'] Association has just been dissolved by a superior order, "as a permanent offence against the laws and the fundamental institutions of the country;" and this condemnation, pronounced without trial by the simple good pleasure of the ministry, has naturally been accompanied by minute and fruitless searches and arbitrary arrests. In a word, the public authorities have done their duty, and for the thousandth time, in this century, society has just been saved.

No one can be as much dismayed as Mazzini. For a revolutionist like him, incorrigible idealist though he be, it cannot be an agreeable thing to see a government, of which he certainly cannot be a friend, thus translate his *theoretical* maledictions into action. It is a great pity! But the principal cause must be sought in the religious and political theories of Mazzini, all the latest manifestations of which have made the entire reactionary press of Italy and Europe leap for joy.

It is more than probable that the deed which has just been done at Naples will be soon reproduced in all the other cities of Italy. All the governments of Europe are plotting today the ruin of the International, and already our adversaries in all countries are beginning to cry, making or not making the sign of the cross: "Thank God! it is dead!"

"The International is dead!" you say. Oh, no; long live the International! And it is you, dear involuntary allies, who are conducting in its favour, by your atrocious persecutions and by your infamous calumnies, a propaganda far more formidable than that which our poor means would ever permit us to carry on.

Notwithstanding the millions that the hireling press attributes with a ridiculous generosity to the General Council of the Association, sitting at London, we must say, alas! that the International is very poor. And whence should it get its millions? Is it not the Association of misery and exploited labour, and has it not all the rich against it? Admit it then, this holy poverty which is a sure guarantee of its sincerity, of its honesty, a proof of its power. For, if the International is developed and progresses notwithstanding its undeniable poverty, notwithstanding all the machinations of the mighty joined against it, it is because it constitutes evidently one of those grand historical realities, the vitality of which has its causes, not in the artificial and more or less arbitrary combinations of some tens, or hundreds, or even thousands, of interested, ambitious, or fanatical individuals, but in the fatal development of society, the irresistible tendencies and needs of the century; it is because it contains in itself the future.

We have, then, full confidence in our inevitable triumph, which does not in the least prevent us from understanding how urgent it is to propagate our principles and organise the working-people's forces. For, if we are convinced, on the one hand, that true ideas, which are such only because they are the faithful expression of the real development of humanity, must necessarily triumph, sooner or later, we know also that they will obtain this triumph only because there are always found at their disposal a certain number of individuals who are profoundly penetrated with them, who are passionately devoted to them, who propagate them, and who aid in the spontaneous creation of new associations formed in their name. Without prejudice to the fatality which presides over all historical developments, the initiative of individuals, conscious or unconscious instruments of the movement which pushes and bears them on, has been and is still necessary to impregnate the creative faculty of the masses.

So, fully assured though we are of the final triumph of the International [Workers'] Association, we are very far from ignoring the urgency of active propagandism and a social organisation of the working-people's forces. But it is precisely in the accomplishment of this duty that our poverty creates for us, alas! too often, insurmountable obstacles.

Strikes ruin us, and yet it is impossible either to anticipate or prevent them. They are never or almost never the result of a plot, of a rash action, of a caprice; they are the forced result of the entire existing economic situation. Each day more and more menaced in the last guarantees of their independence and even of their existence, the workingmen well know that to commence a strike, for them, means to condemn themselves to inconceivable sufferings. But generally they have no other means of defending their miserable morsel of bread and the shadow of liberty which the economic organisation of society allows them. One more step in this path, progressive and prosperous for the happy holders of capital, but retrogressive and disastrous for them, and they would see themselves

reduced to the condition of serfs or of negroes. White negroes! such is the name which the workingmen of the United States of America, of that democratic republic *par excellence*, are now giving themselves. On the other hand, it is evident to all those who can comprehend and see that in this same social organisation a fatal law and one which no capitalist can escape without condemning himself inevitably to ruin, forces indirectly all the money-lenders and directly all the conductors of industrial enterprises, to base all their calculations on the progressive diminution of the liberty and the bread of the workmen whom they employ. In the midst of frightful competition, in this struggle of life and death where small and medium-sized capitals are being swallowed up, little by little, in the pockets of the great bank-lords, all profits are made exclusively out of the wages of the proletariat; and if the proletariat did not defend itself with the energy of despair, it would find itself in a state of slavery worse than that of the Middle Ages.

We foresee, then, that strikes will become from day to day more universal and more formidable, until the very intensity of the evil shall produce at last the good. And we not only cannot, but we ought not to prevent them. For strikes and all the unheard-of sufferings, the keen misery, the hunger, the illnesses and often death which are the inevitable consequences of them, are the most powerful and the most terrible propagators of socialistic ideas among the masses.

We foresee, then, that strikes will become from day to day more universal and more formidable… For strikes… are the most powerful and the most terrible propagators of socialistic ideas among the masses.

Well! the Internationalists have to run to the help of their brothers of all countries, deprived of work. They have to give their last cent, and sometimes even contract debts, to prevent them from dying of hunger. This ruins them.

If it were known how much of their meagre funds they have had to expend, first to save their brothers of the Commune of Paris from the clutches of the bourgeois Republic, and then to give them hospitality! And all this was done without ostentation, without boasting, as the most natural thing in the world, not for the love of God, but by simple and irresistible human impulse. It was human brotherhood concrete and direct. Such is the practice of the International.

It is the ardent solidarity of a mass of obscure, ignorant, miserable workingmen who, again raising very high the flag of humanity which the privileged and civilised classes had let fall into the mud, are, at the same time, the strugglers, the victims of the present and the founders of the future. It is the daily exercise of real love, founded on the most complete equality and on the respect of all for the liberty and for the human dignity of each. More than all the organisations and the propaganda of principles, this love each day practised by the sections of all countries, without any exception, reassures us concerning the near triumph of the International!

It will be understood, nevertheless, that this practice must leave us very little money for propagandism and the organisation of the working-people's forces. If it were known at what cost and sacrifice we publish our pamphlets, which are, naturally, read and paid for only by workingmen! The journals of the International – and there are many already, thanks to the zeal of our companions in all countries – are supported only by the few remaining cents which the workingmen deduct from the bread of their families.

Such are our means of action. In presence of the immense task which is imposed upon us, and which we have accepted with passion, with happiness, relying less on our forces than on the justice of the cause which we serve, these means seem so ridiculously small that really there are moments when we could despair, if, precisely at these very hours of distress, our enemies and our persecutors did not come generously to our aid.

What has popularised the International in France since 1866, and especially since 1867? The persecutions of the Empire. And today, what has made, and what continues to make, the most powerful propagandism in our favour? First – and here hats off – the heroic Commune of Paris – the immense fact of this last socialistic revolution, conquered externally for a time, but morally everywhere triumphant. It has roused the popular masses, it has been unanimously greeted by the proletariat of all countries as the announcement of a near deliverance. But what has explained to the masses the true sense, the whole import of this revolution? The official and officious press of all

countries, the terror of the privileged classes, the Draconian measures of governments, and, finally, Mazzini himself.

Mazzini had doubtless entertained the hardly generous intention of morally annihilating the Commune, which the government had succeeded only in killing in a brutal manner. Has Mazzini attained his object? Not at all; he has, on the contrary, powerfully contributed to exalt the Commune in the opinion of the Italian masses. And today, always fatally bound up with the negative propagandism of the reactionary press, he has just rendered the same service to the International. He wished to destroy it, and he aids us in propagating its principles. Hardly a year ago, except at two or three points isolated and lost in space, the existence of the International in Italy was not even suspected. Now, thanks to the governmental press and thanks to Mazzini above all, no one is ignorant of it.

Mazzini is not contented, like the journals of the reaction, with frightening only the *bourgeois*. No, he and his partisans, scattered in very little groups in almost all the cities of Italy, go to the workingmen's associations to say to them: "Beware of the International! It is the Devil!" Poor things! They do not know, then, that the Devil has been in all times the being who has most interested the human race. Ah! the International is Satan in person; we must therefore make his acquaintance as soon as possible!

justice being able to exist only in equality, and equality involving necessarily the abolition of privileges and classes; that the classes actually existing – clergy, bureaucracy, plutocracy, nobility, *bourgeoisie* – dispute for power only to consolidate their own strength and to increase their profits; and that, consequently, *the proletariat must take henceforth the direction of its own affairs into its own hands.*

And thus it is that, thanks to this furious negative propagandism, in Italy, as everywhere, an immense interest in the International is being awakened today among the masses.

Our enemies have ploughed well; now is the time for us to sow.

In all the cities, and even in many of the country places, there will be found one, two, or three intelligent workmen, devoted to their brothers and who know how to read; or else, in default of such, some young people born in the *bourgeoise* class, but not penetrated with the perverse spirit which now reigns in this class – in short, to avail myself of an expression consecrated by Mazzini, some apostles inspired with a true love for the holy cause of justice and humanity, and who, the statutes of the International in their hands, will make it a duty to explain to the working-people's associations:

1. That this pretended Devil claims for each worker *the full product of his labour*: finding it wrong that there should be in society so many men who, producing nothing at all, can maintain their insolent riches only by the work of others. The International, like the apostle, Saint Paul, maintains that, "if any would not work, neither should he eat."

The International recognises the right to this noble name of labour as belonging only to *productive labour*. Some years ago, the young king of Portugal, having come to pay a visit to his august father-in-law, was presented in the working-people's association at Turin; and there, surrounded by workingmen, he said to them these memorable words: "Gentlemen, the present century is the century of labour. We all labour. I, too, labour for the good of my people." However flattering this likening of royal labour to workingmen's labour may appear, we cannot accept it. We must recognise that royal labour is a labour of absorption and not of production; capitalists, proprietors, contractors, also labour; but all their labour, having no other object than to transfer the real products of labour from their workingmen into their own pockets, cannot be considered by us as productive labour. In this sense thieves and brigands labour also, and roughly, risking every day their liberty and their life.

The International clearly recognises intellectual labour – that of men of science as well as of the application of science to industry, and that of the organisers and administrators of industrial and commercial affairs – as productive labour. But it demands for all men a participation as much in manual labour as in labours of the mind, suited, not to birth nor to social privileges which must disappear, but to the natural capacities of each, developed by equal education and instruction. Only then will disappear the gulf which today separates

the classes which are called intelligent and the working masses.

2. The International declares that, so long as the working masses shall remain plunged in misery, in economic servitude, and in this forced ignorance to which economic organisation and present society condemn them, all the political reforms and revolutions, without excepting even those which are projected and promised by the *Republican Alliance* of Mazzini, will avail them nothing.

3. That consequently, in their own interest, material as well as moral, they should subordinate all political questions to economic questions, the material means of an education and an existence really human being for the proletariat the first condition of liberty, morality, and humanity.

4. That the experience of past centuries as well as of all present facts ought to have sufficiently convinced the working masses that they can and should expect no social amelioration of their lot from the generosity nor even from the justice of the privileged classes; that there has never been and that there will never be a generous class, a just class, justice being able to exist only in equality, and equality involving necessarily the abolition of privileges and classes; that the classes actually existing – clergy, bureaucracy, plutocracy, nobility, *bourgeoisie* – dispute for power only to consolidate their own strength and to increase their profits; and that, consequently, *the proletariat must take henceforth the direction of its own affairs into its own hands.*

[IV – *Liberty*, 11 December 1886]

5. That, once clearly understanding itself and organised nationally and internationally, there will be no power in the world that can resist it.

6. That the proletariat ought to tend, not to the establishment of a new rule or of a new class for its own profit, but to the definitive abolition of all rule, of every class, by the organisation of justice, liberty, and equality for all human beings, without distinction of race, colour, nationality, or faith – all to fully exercise the same duties and enjoy the same rights.

7. That the cause of the workingmen of the entire world is solidary, across and in spite of all State frontiers. It is solidary and international, because, pushed by an inevitable law which is inherent in it, *bourgeois* capital, in its threefold employment – in industry, in commerce, and in banking speculations – has evidently been tending, since the beginning of this century, towards an organisation more and more international and solidary, enlarging each day more, and simultaneously in all countries, the abyss which already separates the working world from the *bourgeois* world; whence it results that for every workingman endowed with intelligence and heart, for every proletaire who has affection for his companions in misery and servitude, and who at the same time is conscious of his situation and of his only actual interests, the real country is henceforth the international camp of labour, opposed, across the frontiers of all countries, to the much older international camp of exploiting capital; that to every workingman truly worthy of the name, the workingmen of foreign countries, who suffer and who are oppressed like himself, are infinitely nearer and more like brothers than the *bourgeois* of his own country, who enrich themselves to his detriment.

in the interest of their own salvation and of their near deliverance, the working-people of all trades are called upon to establish, organise, and exercise the strictest practical solidarity, communal, provincial, national, and international, beginning in their workshop, and then extending it to all their trade-societies and to the federation of all the trades

8. That the oppression and exploitation of which the toiling masses are victims in all countries, being in their nature and by their present organisation internationally solidary, the deliverance of the proletariat must also be so; that the economic and social emancipation (foundation and preliminary condition of political emancipation) of the working-people of a country will be for ever impossible, if it is not effected simultaneously at least in the majority of the countries with which it finds itself bound by means of credit, industry, and commerce; and that, consequently, by the duty of fraternity as well as by enlightened self-interest, in the interest of their own salvation and of their near deliverance, the working-people of all trades are called upon to establish, organise, and exercise the strictest

practical solidarity, communal, provincial, national, and international, beginning in their workshop, and then extending it to all their trade-societies and to the federation of all the trades – a solidarity which they ought above all scrupulously to observe and practise in all the developments, in all the catastrophes, and in all the incidents of the incessant struggle of the labour of the workingman against the capital of the *bourgeois*, such as strikes, demands for decrease of the hours of work and increase of wages, and, in general, all the claims which relate to the conditions of labour and to the existence, whether material or moral, of the working-people.

Is it not true that all these affirmations and all these counsels are so simple, so natural, so legitimate, so true, and so just that a government must have deliberately determined upon brutal iniquity and the flagrant violation of all human rights, like the Russian government, for example, or like that of the present French Republic, to dare avow that the propaganda and the putting in practice of these truths are contrary to its existence, and to have the cynical courage to openly and rigorously proceed against them. Such a government, formidable as may be, or rather, as may appear, the organisation of its material power, will not be able to maintain itself long against the irresistible tendencies of the century, and the more violence it shows the sooner it will perish. Thus we see that the statesmen of Germany, who certainly will not be accused of ignorance, or of want of foresight, or of exaggerated tenderness for the popular cause, or of weakness, since they are found at the head of the most powerful State in Europe, and who have never failed to interpose in our path as many obstacles as they could – we see, I say, that they take good care, nevertheless, not to openly and violently proceed against the propaganda and legal agitation, or against the public organisation, of the Social-Democratic party. The day when, imitating the summary proceedings of the French and Russian governments, they shall have recourse to open violence, the government of Germany will betray the beginning of its downfall.

But let us leave the governments, and return to this proletariat, which contains the lightning that must exterminate all the injustices and absurdities of the present, and the fruitful elements that must constitute the future.

The labour associations most devoted to Mazzini – those which, consequently, whether through Mazzinian propaganda or through the official action which today no longer disdains to descend to the lower strata of society, will be the most obstinately prejudiced against the International – when they have heard the explanation of its programme and when they are convinced that this great association aims at absolutely nothing else than their moral and human emancipation by means of a radical amelioration of the material conditions of their labour and their existence, produced solely by the association of their own efforts, will all say, as we have often happened to hear in other countries: “What! Is that what this International of which we have heard so much evil believes and wishes? But we have been thinking, feeling, and wishing the same thing for a long time. Then we also belong to the International!” And the workingmen will be amazed that an association founded exclusively in the interest of the people has been attacked by men who call themselves the friends of the people, and they will finish by concluding, not without much reason, that these pretended friends are in reality enemies of popular emancipation.

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The great error of Mazzini and of all the other persecutors and slanderers of the International, consists in imagining it as an association more or less secret and artificial, which sprang unexpectedly, arbitrarily, with all its principles and all its organisation, from the brain, *naturally inspired by evil*, of one or a few individuals, as the *Republican Alliance* sprang from the brain, *doubtless divinely inspired*, of Mazzini.

If the International were really such, it would be a weak, insignificant sect, lost in the midst of so many other still-born sects. No one would deign to speak of it. Who disturbs himself today about the deeds and movements of the *Republican Alliance*? On the contrary, the International has become today the object of universal attention – the hope of the

oppressed, the terror of the powerful of the world. Hardly seven years old, it is already a giant.

A few individuals, however great their genius might be, could never have created an organisation, a power, so formidable. Therefore the very intelligent and very devoted men who are found among those generally called the first founders of the International have been in a way only its very fortunate, very skilful midwives. But it is the labouring masses of Europe which have given birth to the giant.

That is what Mazzini refuses to comprehend, and what, in his two-fold character of believing idealist and self-styled revolutionary statesman, he will probably never succeed in comprehending.

As an idealist, he cannot do otherwise than deny the spontaneous development of the real world and what we call true force, the logic or reason of things. And the moment he believes in God, he is forced to believe that not only ideas, but the life and movement of the material world come from God – all the more, then, the religious, political and social, and intellectual and moral evolutions of humanity.

As a statesman, he must scorn the masses. Urged by his generous heart and loving to do them the most good possible, he must consider them as absolutely incapable of guiding themselves, of governing themselves, and of producing the least good thing by themselves.

And, in reality, we know, and later we will prove, that Mazzini, pre-eminently a religious man and founder or revealer of a new religion, which he himself calls the *Religion of Association and of Progress*, affirms *the permanent and progressive revelation of God in humanity*, by means *of men of genius crowned with virtue* and *of the nations the most advanced in the realisation of the law of life*. He is deeply convinced that upon Italy today is again incumbent the high mission of interpreter or *apostle* of this divine law in the world; but that, to fulfil this mission worthily, the Italian people must first be thoroughly imbued with the Mazzinian spirit, and by means of a Constituent Assembly entirely composed of Mazzinian deputies, give itself a Mazzinian government. At this price, but only at this price, he promises her, for the third time in her history, the supremacy (moral only, and not Catholic this time, but Mazzinian), the sceptre of the world.

From the moment that the initiative of the new progress must proceed from Italy, and, what is more, from exclusively Mazzinian Italy – that is, from an excessively small minority which, by I know not what miracle, is to represent the whole nation – it is clear that the International, which is born outside of Italy and entirely outside of the Mazzinian party and Mazzinian principles, must be declared null and void by Mazzini.

We also know that Mazzini, pre-eminently a politician and dogged partisan of a unified and powerful State, proclaims that upon the State alone is incumbent the duty and the right of administering to the whole nation a *uniform education*, strictly in conformity with the dogmas of the new religion which the coining Constituent Assembly, met at Rome, again become the capital of the world, and, without doubt, divinely inspired (the Constituent Assembly, not Rome – but perhaps Rome also?), will have proclaimed as the sole national religion, in order that the nation may become one in thought, as it will be in acts. We know that, beyond the unification produced artificially, from above to below, by this so-called national education, Mazzini does not recognise in the popular masses, which he always calls multitudes (only the adjective *vile* is lacking, but it is implied), the character of a people, and refuses them, consequently, what we call the popular initiative.[1] But the International has sprung properly from the spontaneous initiative of the labouring masses, not instructed, not warped, not mutilated by the Mazzinian education; therefore it is evident that it must be rejected and disparaged by Mazzini.

There is nothing more strange than to see the unheard-of pains which Mazzini takes to persuade the public, the militant youth and, above all, the working people of Italy, that the International is nothing but a mockery, an unfortunate abortion all ready to dissolve, and that all which is related of its present power is ridiculously exaggerated.

[1] That the Mazzinians may not be able to reproach me with mispresenting Mazzini's ideas, I reproduce his own words: "But in order that a people *may be*, it must be *one*: . . . in order that universal suffrage, abandoned to the caprice of the moment and remaining without counsel and without normal morality, may not repent the sorrowful spectacle of the last half-century, voting today for tyranny, tomorrow for the republic, and the next day for the constitutional monarchy, universal suffrage must be the expression of a national inspiration. And there is no tuition except where there exists the perception of a common aim, solemnly expressed in a compact, *communicated and developed by education*." – *La Roma del Popolo*, August 31, 1871.
What is this compact? A real Procrustean bed prepared long since by Mazzini, on which to stretch, willingly or unwillingly, this poor Italian nation. In examining closely the theologico-political system of Mazzini, I shall necessarily return to this question.

Does he himself believe what he says? Out of respect for his high sincerity we must think that he does; but the respect which his intelligence inspires in us commands us to suppose the contrary. For, after all, Mazzini is not only an idealist and a theologian, the inspired revealer of a new religion – he is at the same time a consummate conspirator, a man of action, a statesman. It is true that many of his own friends (I will not give their names, not wishing, in imitation of Mazzini, to sow or increase discord in the Mazzinian camp, this being a proceeding which I leave to the theologians) – yes, many of his nearest friends have often declared to me that his religious hallucinations, projecting their fantastic and delusive light on his judgments, on his acts, have always perverted them, and that, in spite of all his great intelligence, they have always prevented him from appreciating things and facts at their true value. So it is, they have said to me, that, living in a perpetual illusion, and considering the world only through the prism of his imagination haunted by divine phantoms, he has always exaggerated the strength of his own party and the weakness of his enemies.

[V – *Liberty*, 1 January 1887]

All this is possible and even very probable. Yet Mazzini remains none the less a statesman recognised and reputed as such by all Europe.

He cannot fail to see what all the world sees today, some with joy, others with terror – the growing power of the International. This power, as an established fact which no sane person can longer deny, is imposed henceforth in a most imperative manner on the conviction of the most serious, at the same time as on the most stubborn, minds of Europe. Statesmen of almost every country are immensely preoccupied with it today, and among them, with them, against us, Mazzini himself. All his recent writings prove it, doubtless in spite of himself.

Why, then, does he deny this power? Why does he promise the youth and the Italian labourers its speedy dissolution? Can he himself believe it? I have put to myself and very seriously debated in my own mind this question. I at first hesitated, uncertain whether I ought to suspect Mazzini's intelligence or his good faith. For a long time I could not decide between these two equally distressing suppositions. And yet one of them, if not both together, must be true, since the power of the International is a fact as positive and patent as is, alas! the public negation of this power by Mazzini. This uncertainty was painful to me, for, in spite of all the religious hallucinations of the prophet, my respect for the practical intelligence and the good faith of the great Italian patriot was profound and sincere.

But the last articles which he has just published in "La Roma del Popolo" (Numbers 29, 30, and 31) have forced me to recognise that, if his great intelligence, perverted by theology, takes a considerable part in the errors which he believes it his duty to propagate, it is incontestable also that in the furious polemical crusade which he has undertaken against the International Association of Working People, he lacks sincerity and good faith. I shall prove it in analysing his articles.

No one will dare to accuse him of falsehood, but of pious larceny, yes. A great writer and consummate politician, Mazzini is a master in that manipulation of language which is very evidently calculated to instil into the minds of his numerous readers certain judgments, certain estimates of facts, conforming to his views, without positively expressing them and still less proving them. Moreover he never descends to proofs, to that real verification and comparison of things and of facts which constitutes, in our opinion, the only solid foundation of all positive knowledge and of all serious judgment. This method doubtless appears to him much too material, too brutal, and, above all, it would embarrass him considerably in the demonstration of the errors which he wishes to propagate, lie prefers the easier method of ingenious allusions and hazardous affirmations. That is what lie calls, in opposition to the critical method, the synthetic method. It is that of all theologians.

Mazzini never appeals to free thought; he takes good care not to arouse it in his audience. This would be a witness and a judge far too troublesome. His great care, on the contrary, is always to lull it to sleep, as much in himself as in others, by the poetic harmony of his language, of his mystical fantasies, and of his sentimental reasoning. His logic is not that of thought, as with pure metaphysicians, and still less that of facts, as with the materialistic or positivistic thinkers; it is not even the brutal and frank logic of the absurd, as with theologians by profession; it is a logic of sentiment, powerful in its fervour, but as uncertain and vague as the Ideal which forms its object, and masking with a remarkable skill, behind the appearances of a delusive liberalism and of a false rationalism, its fanatical worship of the absurd and of authority.

Mazzini is a great artist. He knows the generous sentiments of youth and of a part of the Italian proletariat which he has so powerfully aided in forming, and for forty years he has known how to draw from this magnificent instrument whatever sounds he wished. But in politics the name of art is prestidigitation. For forty years Mazzini has been the great prestidigitator of Italy.

Understand, there are two kinds of prestidigitators. There are the common statesmen, whose interested, personal ambition, foreign to any ideal, asks nothing bettor than to avail itself of all ideas and of all possible sentiments, to gain its ends more promptly. Such was the great Napoleon, the leader and true founder of the modern political school; such were, and are after him, naturally each in his own way, the Napoleon Thirds, the Cavours, the Bismarcks, the Thiers, the Gambettas, and, not to forget the small fry, the Jules Simons, the Jules Favres, the Trochus, the Keratrys, the Picards.... But there are also, at rare intervals, in history, political prestidigitators of a kind infinitely superior and incomparably more noble and pure: these are the sincerely religious statesmen like Mazzini. These deceive the people in deceiving themselves; they are strangers to the vulgar inspirations of interest, vanity, and personal ambition, and, if they magnetise and abuse the masses, it is never with a view to their own glory, but with a view to the triumph of an adored ideal, of their God.

There is one tiling in common between these two categories of statesmen, otherwise so different and even so completely opposite – it is that both, although actuated by quite contrary motives, equally deceive the popular masses and oppress them, when they have the power, by imposing on them tendencies which have nothing in common with their spontaneous aspirations or their real needs.

Alas, history tells us that the masses have lent themselves only too readily up to this time, never weary of playing this unhappy role of instrument at the disposition of the first artist who deigns to make use of it. It tells us also that they have always paid very dear for this generous, but blind, confidence. And we see, in truth, that, in spite of the lofty deeds of so many skilful and illustrious enchanters, in spite of all these Messiahs and all these Saviours, the real situation of the proletariat remains in the highest degree deplorable. It is not ameliorated, it has grown worse.

But here is the proletariat of Europe and of America beginning, at last, to perceive this also. Everywhere, in all countries, we see the masses awakening, stirring, agitating, and putting their heads together, defiant of all their saviours, tutors, and past leaders, and more and more resolved to take into their own hands the direction of their own affairs. And as they are collectivists as much by position as by nature, they tend to create today an immense collective force, by organising in solidarity among themselves across the political frontiers of States.

Such was the real, the sole cause of the birth of the International, and such is also the secret of its present power.

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But this the mind of Mazzini, so profoundly religious, absolutely refuses to comprehend. Idealist to the marrow of his bones, revealer, statesman, he always imagines that one can still impress today upon the hearts and imaginations of the people, as on a blank page, anything that one wishes. This false idea is the basis of all his hopes, but also the permanent cause of all his disappointments. “Multitudes, as well as individuals,” he pretends, “are essentially capable of being *educated*,” and doubtless this is why, although forty years of abortive efforts ought to have sufficiently proved to him the profound incompatibility which exists between the living and real nature of the Italian nation – the least religious of any in Europe, excepting always the people of Russia – and the mystical idealism of which he has made himself the Messiah and apostle, Mazzini does not yet despair of converting it. But this is also the reason why he dreads, more than he is willing to admit, the *disastrous* effects of the socialistic and materialistic propaganda, the more threatening as it is infinitely better suited to the national genius of the Italians than his own. This is why he has declared this war to the death against us, not recoiling even from the horrible danger of seeing himself sustained, in the furious struggle which he has excited against us, by the arbitrary and violent acts of a government which he detests, as much as an heir, more or less legitimate, can detest his rich relative who shows himself in no hurry to die.

I well know that Mazzini professes *in theory* the greatest respect for the people. In his celebrated

formula, "Dio e Popolo,"[1] he even accords them the second place after God. Mazzini respects the people as much as a theologian can respect anything outside of God; as much as an idealist in general is capable of recognising and appreciating a living reality.

Moreover, between the theologians and the idealists the difference is not great. The theologian is the idealist consistent and sincere, and the idealist is the theologian hesitating and ashamed. Both of them, moreover, agree in the worship of the absurd in theory and in that of authority or discipline, appointed from above, in practice; the absurd being the consecration of this discipline, which in its turn is the guaranty of all privileges; with this difference, as I have just said, that the theologians have the courage and the ostentation of the absurd, while the idealists vainly try to give it an appearance of rationality. Theology, then, is only the heroic and violent display of that historic disease of the mind which is called, in general, idealism; a disease which, long prepared by the Pantheistic religions of the East, as a metaphysical theory, dates from the first Greek philosophers and especially from Plato, but which Christianity alone has introduced officially, as a practical, dissolvent element of life, into the social and political organisation of nations. The essential nature of this disease is to seek and to love in the real world, in society, in men, in things, only itself – either its own interest, or its *personal* thought – not their real nature, but the reflection of a preconceived ideal, which is, in reality, nothing *but the worship of himself by the individual, who adores himself in the absolute or in God.*

Mazzini, who proscribes and who abhors *individualism*, but who, on the other hand, proclaims and adores *idealism*, does not even suspect that *idealism is the spiritual father of individualism*.

Mazzini, moreover, never says the *Absolute*: he says "God." And he is a thousand times right, for, from the moment that one is an idealist or a spiritualist, he must, under penalty of inconsistency, recognise himself a theologian, and, when one is a theologian, he must have the courage to proclaim it before the whole world. He must have the holy audacity of the absurd. The Absolute is an equivocal term invented by the metaphysicians who endeavour to establish an impossible golden mean between reason and religious faith, between scientific truth and theological fictions, between the real world and the God-phantom.

But, although actually a phantom, once taken from nothingness and placed on his throne by the belief of the faithful, God becomes a proud and jealous Master. He does not suffer himself to be denied, or even simply concealed, under any circumstances or pretexts whatsoever. So we have seen the republican Mazzini conceal at times the flag of the Republic, but never the flag of God. For love of Italian unity, necessary and sole instrument, according to him, for the propagandism and realisation of the now divine law in the world, he could consent to covenant or, at least, to treat with the Pope and the kings; but to covenant with ungodly persons – what do I say? – to merely observe a truce of tolerance toward republican, ardent, devoted, generous, but atheistical, youth, for love of the Italian Republic, that he can not, that lie will not do. Better retard a hundred years the advent of the Republic, for the Republic without God would be the triumph of the Italian people, real and living, and not that of the Mazzinian Italy, privileged throne of his God.

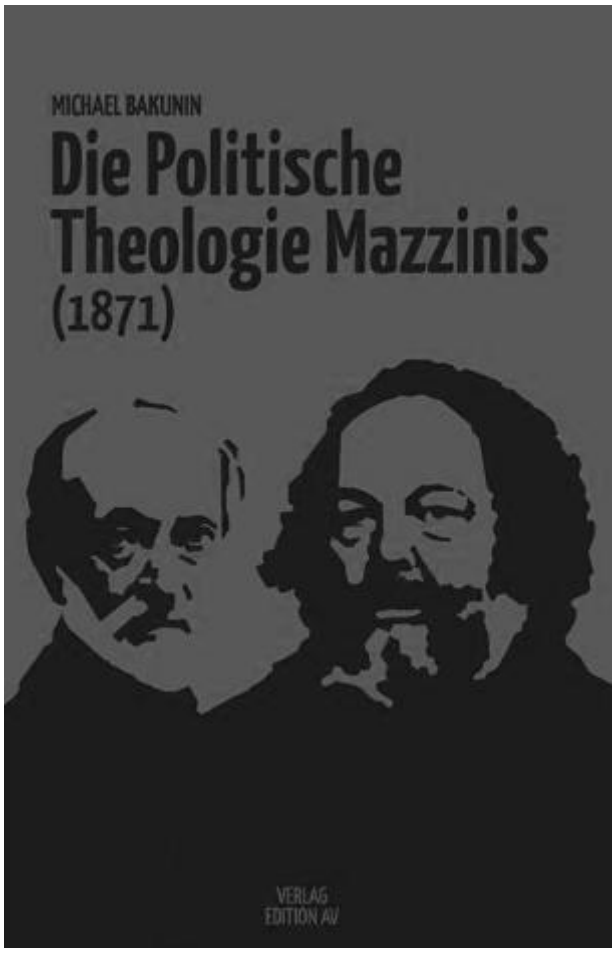
The religious hypocrites, the Tartuffes, have well said, there is no transaction or compromise with God. From the moment that his existence is proclaimed, he wishes to be everything, to invade everything, and to absorb everything. If he is, everything must disappear; he is alone, and alone he wishes to fill the heart of his subjects, whose existence even, strictly, would be already in contradiction with his being; so of all known religions Buddhism appears to me the most consistent, since its worship has no other object than the progressive annihilation of human individuals in the absolute nothing, in God. It is certain that, if God had a real existence, neither the world nor, consequently, the believers would ever have existed. He alone *would be*: the sole Being, the absolute recluse. But as he exists only in the imagination and simply through the faith of the believers, he has been forced to make them this important concession – to suffer them to exist also, by the side of him, in spite of logic – and this is one of the fundamental absurdities of theology. So he makes them pay very dear for this forced and single concession, because he immediately demands of them that, annihilating themselves continually in him, they shall seek and find their existence only in him and shall adore only him, which is to say *that they must break all human and terrestrial solidarity to adore themselves in him. God is egoism idealised; he is the human Me lifted to an infinite power.*

This refined egoism, this adoration of self in any ideal whatsoever – the adoration of God, in a word – produces effects so much the more maleficent and cruel because, in men sincerely religious, it has no consciousness of itself: they believe they are serving God in satisfying their own desires and in sacrificing all the world, including themselves, to their dearly loved fancies, to the ardent hallucinations of their own

[1] "God and People" (*Black Flag*)

minds. I speak only of sincere believers, for the hypocrites do not deceive themselves, but make use of religion as a very convenient mask to hide their infamous game, and as a pretext to sacrifice others, never themselves.

These religious hypocrites, always allied, more or less, with political hypocrites – see Versailles, see all the present governments of Europe – have doubtless done immense harm to human -society. But the harm which the sincere believers have' done and still continue to do is not less. In the first place, without these last, the power of the hypocrites, whether religious or political, would have been impossible. Hypocrites have never founded any religion; they have contented themselves with exploiting those religions which the sincere believers have founded. The ardent sincerity of the latter has always served as a passport to the criminal hypocrisy of the former. This is our prime grievance against the sincerely religious.



These men may be divided into three categories: first, the violent and furious believers; second, the loving believers; and, third, the routine, or machine, believers. This last category constitutes the immense majority of believers. Irresponsible because they are destitute of all power of reflection, believing through tradition, through ignorance, through custom, they form the flock of Panurge[1] in their respective churches, and at the same time a terrible instrument of reaction, when blood is wanted – see Saint-Bartholomew[2] – in the hands of the hypocrites and the violent and furious believers.

Above the flock, and by the side of the hypocrites, always sharing the power and the control with these last, rises the terrible group of the fanatical and furious believers. Purer because infinitely more sincere, they are at the same time more maleficent and much more ferocious than the hypocrites. Humanity is unknown to them; burning with an ardent zeal for their God, they despise it, hate it, and ask nothing better than to exterminate men by thousands, by tens and hundreds of thousands. There are such religious demoniacs in the Assembly of Versailles; not many, the majority of that Assembly being composed of hypocrites or fools, but there are some. Such were the people who in the Middle Ages and later soaked the earth in blood in the name of their so-called God of mercy and love. They established the Inquisition and the order of the Jesuits. Torquemada and Loyola were sincere Christians, but rather violent. Moreover, we find them as well in Protestant churches as in the Roman Catholic church; Luther, Melancthon, Calvin at Geneva, Knox in Scotland, were of this number. And even today the societies of the pietists in Germany, of the Momiers in Switzerland, of the holy propagators of the Bible in England, as well as the Society of Jesus, are full of them. Savonarola, that hero and, after Dante, that inspirer of Mazzini, would have become a terrible persecutor, if, instead of being burned, he had triumphed. All these men, these heroes of religion, have burned and are burning with an ardent and exclusive love for their God, and, terribly consistent, they ask nothing better than to burn and exterminate all that appears to them heretical and profane – that is, human – for the greater glory of their God: Celestial Master, "Father and Teacher," as Mazzini says.

[1] The "flock of Panurge" refers to the French idiom "les moutons de Panurge," meaning people who blindly follow the crowd. It comes from a story in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* where a character, Panurge, throws one sheep into the sea, and the entire flock, including the vendor, follow. (*Black Flag*)

[2] The Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572 was a targeted group of assassinations and a wave of Catholic mob violence directed against the Huguenots (French Calvinist Protestants) during the French Wars of Religion (1562 to 1598). It The began in the night of 23–24 August 1572, the eve of the Feast of Saint Bartholomew the Apostle, and lasted several weeks in all with the number of dead across France estimated from 5,000 to 30,000. (*Black Flag)*

Finally, there is the category of the *loving believers*. This is the least numerous, the most amiable, but not the least dangerous. Jesus Christ, the greatest among them, was, without doubt, of this class. Let us hope that Mazzini will be its last representative in the history of the religious aberrations of civilised humanity. I have said that this category of believers is not the least dangerous. And, in truth, their first wrong consists precisely in serving as passports, and almost always also as tools and bait, for the hypocrites and violent believers. When society, tired of the falsehoods of the former and the cruelty of the latter, seems on the point of disgust with a religion which produces so much misery and horror, it is pointed to some simple, good, narrow, saintly man, and his sympathetic, venerable, look disarms suspicions and hatred. These men are very rare; so the leaders of the churches appreciate them highly, and generally know how to put them to excellent use. Time it was that at the epoch when the cruel persecutions practised by the Jesuits upon the Protestants, the Vaudois, were drenching Savoy with blood, there was in this very order of the Jesuits, in Switzerland, a bishop, a saintly man, Francois de Sales, whose heart, overflowing with love, made more conversions than all the cruelties of the church.

Heart overflowing with love! That is the true, accurate definition of these men. They are, I repeat, excessively rare. But they exist, and each of us has met one at least in our lives. When they are very strong, and, what is more, very intelligent, as Jesus Christ doubtless was, they found new religions, provided the spirit of their age is at all ready for the foundation of a new religion. Or they seek to found it and are disappointed, when the tendency of the surroundings and the times is opposed to it, as is happening to Mazzini. But ordinarily, with the exception of some who are geniuses "crowned with virtue," these men, profoundly, intimately, lovingly religious, form no school; for what predominates in them is not mind, but heart; is not thought, but love. They are religious, but they are not theologians. Their faith, indefinite and not firmly settled, is only a very imperfect expression of that love which is called divine because it is excessively rare, and which really overflows their whole being. Contrary to those who enlighten without warming, they warm all those who surround them without enlightening them, exciting love, never thought.

Mazzini, by his intelligence, is infinitely superior to these obscure lovers. But he does not equal them in love. They are so full of it that, in spite of their faith, they have the power of bravely loving pagans, atheists. Mazzini is too theological for this; he detests atheists, and, like Christ, if he had the power, would take the scourge to drive them from his dear Italy, considering them as corrupters of his predestined people.

Let us leave, then, to flourish in peace those sweet religious souls, loving and obscure, who perfume with their native grace their little unknown corners, and study in Mazzini himself the ravages which theology can and must work in the greatest souls, the noblest hearts, the loftiest minds.

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Doubtless few men are capable of loving as Mazzini loves. Whoever has had the good fortune to approach him personally has felt the influence of that infinite tenderness which seems to penetrate his whole being, has felt his soul kindled by the beams of that indulgent and delicate goodness which shines in his look, at once so serious and so sweet, and in his fine and melancholy smile. Whoever approaches him, sees him, and hears him, has no difficulty in discovering, under his most simple and least affected exterior, his great intelligence, his great heart above all, and character which, by its extraordinary purity, seems to tower above all the miseries of this world. He does not overwhelm, he encourages, he provokes confidence. Few men, I believe, think as little of themselves as Mazzini. Behold the terrible revolutionist who has brought so many bad nights to most of the sovereigns and. governors of Europe!

I am now giving my personal impressions. For I also had the happiness of meeting Mazzini, very often even, during the whole of the year 1862, at London. I shall never forget the noble welcome which he gave me when I arrived in that city, escaping from Siberia where I had been exiled for life and where I had lived four years, after having passed almost eight in different fortresses of Saxony, Austria, and Russia. I am, indeed, eternally indebted to Mazzini, for even before knowing me other than by name, he generously took up my defence against the infamous calumnies which German emigrants, Jews especially, with that noble delicacy, justice, and good taste which distinguish them, had endeavoured to disseminate regarding me, not so much from personal hatred of me as from a general hatred for Russia, for the Slavs, and particularly for my compatriot, Alexander Herzen, who naturally did not fail to answer them; which I could not do, confined as I was in the Russian fortresses and later in Siberia, not even knowing that I was being attacked in this base fashion.

Herzen even told me that Citizen Karl Marx, who became later one of the principal founders of the International and whom I had always considered as a

man endowed with a great intelligence and profoundly, exclusively devoted to the grand cause of the emancipation of labour, had taken an active part in these calumnies. I was not altogether astonished, knowing by my past experience – for I had known him since 1845 – that the illustrious German Socialist, to whose great qualities I have always rendered and shall never fail to render full justice, has, nevertheless, in his character certain traits which one would be less astonished to meet in a Jewish *devotee of belles lettres*, corresponding for German newspapers, than in such a serious and ardent champion of humanity and justice. Therefore, arriving in London in 1862, I abstained from calling on him, naturally having little desire to renew acquaintance with him. But in 1864, as 1 was passing through London, he came to see me himself, and assured me that he had never taken any part, directly or indirectly, in these calumnies, which he had himself considered as infamous. I had to accept his word.

However that may be, Mazzini nobly took up my defence. Do I need to say that I was profoundly attached to this admirable individuality, certainly the purest and grandest that I have ever met in my life. I love Mazzini, and I venerate him today as much as I did nine years ago, and yet I must combat him. I must put myself by the side of Marx against him. It is a fatality from which all my convictions, my *religion*, no less profound and sincere than his own, will not grant me escape.

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Mazzini, I have said, overwhelms no one; that is true. But he is himself overwhelmed by his God, and in this overwhelming, of which he is the first victim, he makes his friends, his party, more or less participate. Such is the real cause, in my opinion, of the present isolation of this party in the midst of the Italian nation, of its sterility and of its powerlessness, more and more visible.

This distressing powerlessness and sterility is read in every line printed, every thought expressed, in the properly Mazzinian journals. Open "L'Unita Ilaliana," or even "La Roma del Popolo," which are today the two principal organs of this party, and you will at once feel an indescribable stifling atmosphere, a breath of death, like the odour of corpses or dried mummies. It is a current, once limpid, but today struck with stagnation, whose waters flourish, as old age flourishes, without motion, without communication with waters more alive. In the midst of the immense social movement which has invaded the human world, drawing it irresistibly towards the realisation of the grandest things that ever the imaginations of men have dreamed, they remain there, motionless, isolated, strangers to this development of life which is going on around them, to the aspirations, even, of this people which they pretend to govern and save, ignoring or misunderstanding the ideas as well as the facts which envelop them on all sides; and, their eyes fixed unalterably on Savonarola and Dante, they chant their old litanies, as the Jews recite the verses of the Talmud in the hope of raising again by this means the forever fallen walls of Zion.[1]

What is the cause of this stagnation, of this death? Ah! it is because God has smitten them with his favour. God is a terrible companion. He overwhelms, he absorbs, he annihilates, he devours, he distorts, he dissolves, or else he withers, all that has the misfortune to approach him from near or from far.

What is the cause of this stagnation, of this death? Ah! it is because God has smitten them with his favour. God is a terrible companion. He overwhelms, he absorbs, he annihilates, he devours, he distorts, he dissolves, or else he withers, all that has the misfortune to approach him from near or from far. Whatever has been done to humanise him a little during recent centuries, he remains always the ancient Jehovah, the egoistic, the jealous, "the cruel God of the Jews!"[2] and he has ended by reigning also over Mazzini. He has bewildered, perverted, and made barren the noblest intellect of this century. This is one more terrible grievance that we have against him.

Mazzini, by the natural impulse of his heart, loves men, and, more passionately still, he loves Italy. But this love is paralysed or at least warped by the exclusive and jealous influence of the divine phantom, *of the. ideal Me exaggerated to the Absolute, which, unconscious of itself, adores itself in the person of an imaginary God, hiding in this way from all the world as well axe from*

[1] The new-old religion of Mazzini is in reality related to Christianity, as the Judaism of the Talmud is related to the Judaism of the Old Testament.

[2] *Le cruel Dieu des Juifs l'emporte aussi sur toi! – Athalie*, one of Racine's tragedies.

himself, in the heights of a fictitious heaven, his supreme egoism. And he who serves this God must sacrifice everything to him, even his country; he who loves God cannot really love anything else in the world. He must detest the world; and if, urged by an invincible need of the heart, he wishes to love it, it still must be only for the glory of God, in order to transform the world into a stepping-stone to the divine glory.

Mazzini loves most certainly Italy; but he loves her as Abraham loved his son Isaac, ready to sacrifice him, if it must be, on the altar of his God, who, like the God of the Christians and the Jews, of which he is only the somewhat illogical continuation, measures the love of his faithful by the grandeur of their sacrifices. Sacrifice, which, according to the doctrine of Mazzini, constitutes the supreme virtue, is in truth the foundation, at once cruel and mystical, of all real religious worship; for in every religion which takes the adoration of divinity seriously, cruelty and love are but one. Has not God himself given an example, forever memorable, to men, in sacrificing his only son and causing him to be assassinated by the Jews, his chosen people, in order, he says, to gratify his pitiless vengeance, otherwise called eternal justice? Divine justice, as we see, feeds on human blood, as divine wisdom feeds on human absurdities. This justice united to this wisdom constitutes what is called divine love.

[VII – *Liberty*, 12 February 1887]

Mazzini, moreover, has done all that he could to give to his God at least the appearance of humanity. To make him accepted by the reasoning mind and by the nervous sentimentality of this century, he has put on his lips the words, at first unknown, philosophy, science, liberty, and humanity; and he has, at the same time, filed his claws and teeth, trying to give him a spiritual, amiable, and tender air; so that the priests of the good old Catholic religion refuse to recognise their old Jehovah in the portrait which the modern prophet has made of him. And in truth, in attempting to soften the traits of the celestial despot, Mazzini has excessively lessened that gloomy and terrible figure which plunged all the priests into transports and which sowed terror in the superstitious masses.

The God of Mazzini is not the God of implacable vengeance and eternal punishment. Breathing only pardon and love – the same has always been said of the God of the Christians – he repudiates hell, admitting at the most only purgatory, which consists, moreover, in the Mazzinian theology, only in a delay, more or less prolonged, of the progressive development of the guilty, individuals or nations, as the natural consequence of their faults. In general, what distinguishes the God of Mazzini from the Jewish and Christian God is his visible, but always vain, tendency to reconcile himself with human reason and to appear to conform as much to the nature of things as to the principal aspirations of modern society; and, to better reach this end, he even pushes his quite modern condescension to the point of renouncing his liberty!

"*You appeal to the inalienable divine liberty*," writes Mazzini in his protest against the last council of Rome;[1] "*we deny it. We are free because we are imperfect* [Such is Mazzini's idea of liberty; it is the sign, the consequence of our imperfection! We understand why he submits it and must always submit it to *authority*; this last being the manifestation of God, that is to say, of perfection, it is clear that it must rule over our liberty, over our imperfection. This is not more difficult than that, and we can see by this example the very ingenious method which Mazzini makes use of to re-establish, by the aid of modern words, the old divine despotism], *because we are called to rise, to merit, consequently to choose between the good and the bad, between sacrifice and egoism.*" What Mazzini calls liberty is at bottom only the absurd fiction invented by theologians and metaphysicians – that is, by the licensed consecrators of all despotism – and which they call *free will*. What we call liberty is quite another thing: it is the satanic principle and the natural fact which is called *rebellion*, the holy, the noble rebellion which, originating in animal life and united to science, this creation of a human world, urged on, moreover, both together, by the *struggle for existence*, by the necessity, as much individual as social, of developing and living, is the true, the only mother of all emancipations and all human progress. We conceive that our liberty can triumph only on the ruins of all authority. I give back the floor to Mazzini: "*Our liberty* [free will] *is unknown to God, a perfect Being, whose every act is necessarily identical with the true and the just, and who cannot, without ruining all the notions we have of him, violate his own law.*"

This last argument is magnificent, and gives the measure of Mazzini's logic. In the same way any pagan priest who would sacrifice human victims on the altar of divinity could as logically cry out: "God loves to feed upon human blood; *he could not fail to love it without ruining all the notions which we have of him!*"

It is evident, in any case, that the God of Mazzini is a tolerably constitutional God, since, better than all kings

[1] "Dal concilio a Dio" by Joseph Mazzini, 1870.

thus far known, he observes the charter which he has been pleased to grant to the world and to humanity, at least according to what is told us about it by Mazzini, who, as the last prophet, ought to know better than anybody.

But does this condescension, excessive on the part of a God, reach its object? Absolutely no. And how could he reconcile his existence with that of the world, when his very title of God, and, besides, that of *Creator, Legislator, and Educator of the natural and human world*, renders him absolutely incompatible with the real development of both! Later, I will demonstrate his incompatibility with reason, of which positive science is the only, the sole theoretically perfect expression. Now, may it not displease M. Aurelio Saffi[1], I will continue my practical demonstration, tending to prove that the new God of Mazzini exercises an influence on men quite as pernicious as the old Platonico-Judaico-Christian God, from whom he differs, moreover, only in his dress borrowed from our century, in which Mazzini believed he should be clothed, but not in the reality, which remains the same.

To be just and to show how Mazzini, individually, puts love and noble human sentiments into his religion, I believe I ought to present to the reader, in a translation – doubtless very imperfect, but faithful – a fragment, some eloquent, burning pages, of his energetic protest against the council of Rome, containing at the same time the splendid affirmation of his faith:[2]

"The world is of God, it cannot be cursed. *Life, like God himself from whom it descends, is one and continuous: it cannot be broken into fragments, divided into opposite or radically diverse periods.*" The world is not cursed, for the simple reason that there is no one who can curse it, except man, her son, her product, who launches this malediction at it from time to time, in moments of discouragement and despair, and who, so far as he has believed in God, has imagined that this curse, which was born in his own heart, has been pronounced by God himself. As for what Mazzini calls the *unity of life*, it is founded, in our opinion, on the universality, at least terrestrial, of the laws of organic life in general, and especially of man's, on the identity of the special traits which properly constitute human nature or physiology: *sociability, thought developed up to the power of abstraction, and the intelligent organisation of language*, three conditions which are found united, in a degree more or less pronounced, in all human tribes, even among cannibals. The first

[1] Hail to M. Aurelio Saffi, heretofore my friend, now my very furious adversary! Hail to Saint John, apostle of the Italian Messiah. At the very moment in which I send him my compliments, he is doubtless continuing his apocalypse in "La Roma del Popolo" ("Cenni sulle dottrine religiose e morale, politiche e sociali di G. Mazzini," No. 30, 32, etc.). I used to know him at London, when he was much less orthodox than that. But it appears that since then he has been very much converted, and as often happens to the converted, he is animated today with an atrocious zeal. In his first theological article (No. 30) it has pleased him, in speaking of my first tract, which is adjoined here as preface, to apply to it the rather unparliamentary adjective, *famigerato* (ill-famed). This insult, falling from the pen of a man as delicate, kind, and polished as my former friend, M. Aurelio Saffi, undeniably is, somewhat astonished me. I admit. But on reflection, I understood that this was not only the natural explosion of the theological passion brought to bay and excited to fury by the impossibility of defending itself, but also – and I esteem this much the more highly – that of his ardent friendship for Mazzini, a friendship carried even to adoration and which feels hurt by my attack, not upon the person of his friend and master, but upon his detestable doctrines – as far, that is, as the doctrines of a man can be separated from his person. Taking into consideration these two extenuating circumstances, and especially the last, I forgive M. Saffi his entirely gratuitous insult, and I promise him to read, with all the attention which is due him, the continuation of his apostolic-Mazzinian articles. Only, if it is permitted me to address to him a bit of advice, a prayer, let him not be content with putting into them that breadth and that doctoral gravity which, doubtless, the very well a philosopher like him, but which cannot, however, take the place of precision and clearness of thought. Let him not content himself, as his master himself too often does, with always arguing sentiments. Sentiments, metaphysical especially, are very individual, and may vary according to the circumstances and the moral and intellectual habits of each, with time and place. Thought alone can serve as a universal and solid base, in so far as it is itself the faithful expression of the real relations of facts and things; and on this ground useful discussion, if not agreement, is possible between us. Let us bury the dead and, since we are still in life, let us try to be alive; old as we both are already, let us live with the living. Let us speak of living things – of the real world, of real society, of its needs, of its sufferings, of its aspirations, of *its* thoughts, and not always of ours; not of those vague shadows. Monsieur Saffi, which phantoms born in the doubtless powerful but past imaginations of Moses, Plato, Jesus Christ, and Mazzini project upon your sensitive imagination. Up to the present time, I admit, nothing that you have written has seemed to me worthy of response, being in reality but a rather colourless paraphrase of the master's words. Your originality has manifested itself so far only in insult. This is too little. Enchained to the past by your friendships, by your tastes, a stranger to the present and all the more to the future, yon are none the less rich in intelligence and knowledge: and since you have constituted yourself the chivalric defender of a civilization which is irrevocably condemned to die, try at least to bury yourself under its ruins with a little more wit and grace.

[2] "Dal concilio a Dio"

condition, sociability, is found likewise in many other species of animals, but not this capacity of development of thought and of language; united to these last two elements equally natural, but belonging exclusively to man, the natural, primitive, and fatal sociability of men has created successively in history and still continues to create the social unity of the human race – humanity. For all this, as we see, there is no need of God; and it will be easy to prove later that a real intervention of any God whatever in the developments of human society would have rendered these developments absolutely impossible. The very fiction of divinity, a fiction historically explicable and inevitable, has sufficed to excite men against men and to inundate the earth with human blood. What would it be if, in place of a fiction, we had had a real God!

[VIII – *Liberty*, 26 February 1887]

"There is no antagonism between matter and mind: matter gives forms to thought, symbols to ideas, modes of communication between beings." Whence it would result that, if God were only pure mind, his thoughts would be eternally formless, indeterminate, void; if, on the contrary, God were mind and matter at the same time, absolute thought eternally lost and dispersed in the immensity of the material universe and eternally seeking to find itself again there, coming perceptibly, little by little, but never in a complete manner, to the consciousness of itself in the historic development of the collective consciousness of men, we should end in the purest Hegelian pantheism. But Hegel, at least, never speaks of God; he speaks of the Absolute; and no one, it must be said, has dealt this poor Absolute such rough blows as Hegel himself, for as fast as he built him up, he demolished him by his pitiless logic, so that, much more than Auguste Comte, he may be considered the real father of modern scientific atheism. Ludwig Feuerbach, the most sympathetic and the most humane of German thinkers, has seen the real executor of his will, much more truly and much more effectively than poor Chaudey was for Proudhon, whom he served, not as executor of his will, but as the real digger of his grave. Would Mazzini be such a Pantheist as Hegel, or even as Spinoza? Doubtless not, since he always speaks of God as a personal being, having consciousness of himself outside of the world, outside of this poor matter which he is supposed to have created. This is the dilemma from which Mazzini, in spite of all the artifices of his language, cannot escape: either God is identical with matter, lost in matter, reaching consciousness of himself – and always in an excessively incomplete and relative manner – only in the consciousness of living and thinking beings in the universe, and then he is an impersonal God, never succeeding in lifting himself quite up to himself, and thinking and willing nothing of himself, for to think and to will one must first be a person; or he is a complete person, having outside of matter or of the world full consciousness of himself, and then he is absolutely separated from matter and the world, and *the antagonism between matter and mind*, fundamental principle of every consistent and serious theology, exists in all its force, forever irreconcilable, whatever Mazzini may say and do. It does not suffice to affirm or deny arbitrarily; it is necessary to prove. But Mazzini never descends to proofs; he affirms what is agreeable to him, and denies what is disagreeable to him. That is his whole philosophy. It is very convenient for him who writes, but not at all satisfactory or edifying to him who reads. It is the most absolute individualism applied to dialectics, transforming the latter into rhetoric. Moreover, in saying that "matter gives modes of communication between beings," Mazzini tacitly affirms that *beings*, not only the supreme Being, God, but *imperfect beings*, human souls, exist outside of matter, and that matter forms only a means of communication, a kind of bridge, between them, *at the same time that it constitutes their prison*.

"The body, decreed by God as a limit of the individual [that is, his prison] and as a means of transmission between his own life and the external world, is not the seat of evil and temptation. When the evil and temptation exist, they exist in the Me; the body is only an instrument serving for translation of good or evil into deeds, conforming to our free choice."

Here we have one of the most original peculiarities in Mazzini's theological system. He places the origin of evil, not in the body, not in the material world, as many, though not all, theological Christians have done; and Mazzini is wrong in reproaching Christianity with not having affirmed before him that the origin of evil is in the *Me*, the exclusively spiritual and immortal being, of man. Christianity had symbolised this same idea in the myth of Satan, an incorporeal being, who, nevertheless, was the first to rebel against God, tired of seeing and hearing from morning till night the myriads of slave angels, cherubs, seraphs, and archangels chant their eternal hallelujah to eternal haughtiness, to the divine egotist.

According to the Mazzinian as well as the Christian doctrine, Evil is the Satanic revolt of man against divine authority, a revolt in which we, on the contrary, see the fruitful germ of all human emancipations. As the Fratricelli of Bohemia in the fourteenth century, the revolutionary Socialists recognise each other today by these words: *In the name of him to whom wrong has*

been done, hail! Only, the Satan, the conquered but not pacified rebel, of today, is called the *Commune of Paris*. It is easy to see why all the Christian and Mazzinian theologians, their masters, the Pope and Mazzini, at their head, should have excommunicated the rising of the heroic Commune. This was at last the audacious realisation of the Satanic myth, a revolt against God; and today as always the two opposing parties are ranged, the one under the standard of Satan or of liberty, the other under the divine banner of authority. What we call liberty, Mazzini calls egoism; what constitutes in our view the ideal sanction of all slavery, the prostration of man before God and before the authority of that *State-Church* which, if one is to believe Mazzini, is his permanent revelation on earth, he calls supreme virtue.

We also, we curse egoism; but egoism consists, in our opinion, not in the revolt of the human individual against God – such revolt, we have said, is the supreme condition of all human emancipations, and consequently of every human virtue, because there can be no virtue where slavery prevails – but in the revolt against that law of solidarity which is the natural and fundamental base of all human society; in that tendency, as well of individuals as of privileged classes, to isolate themselves in an ideal world, whether religious, or metaphysical, or political and social, apart from the mass of the people – an isolation which has never any other aim, or any other real result, than the domination over the masses and their exploitation, as much for the profit of these individuals as of these classes. The law of solidarity being a natural law, no individual, however strong he may be, can escape it. No one can live *humanly* outside of human society: good or bad, afflicted with idiocy or endowed with the greatest genius, all that he has, all that he can do, all that he is, he owes to the collectivity, to it alone. Then it is impossible to separate himself from it; but he can, when this natural and unavoidable collectivity which we call society is so stupidly sheepish as to permit it – he can oppress and exploit it to his exclusive profit and to the detriment of all; and the best means of doing it is to give to egoism the form of a religious thought and aspiration.

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When the historic world, considered especially from the standpoint of the development of economic and social realities, always accompanied moreover by a parallel development of ideas – when this world is ripe for the triumph, either of a class or of any people whatever, then God, who has always taken the part of the strongest, or who, according to a very graphic expression of Frederick the Great, is always on the side of the largest battalions – the good God, rousing from his age-long sleep, and giving a signal contradiction to the morality which has been preached in his name in the past century, intervenes again in the human world and reveals a new law to *some man of genius crowned with virtue*. The new religion is propagated and founded, doubtless not to the profit of this man or of his first followers, who almost always become its victims, but to the profit of that new class which organises a new exploitation in the shadow of this new thought, divinely inspired.

As for the revealers, the prophets, the Messiahs, they have the high compensation of contemplating and adoring their own *Me* in what they believe to be God; more than that, of imposing it, in the name of God, on the whole world. So Mazzini, who, in the name of this new religion of which he is the prophet, means to impose, on Italy first and then, by means of Italy duly *educated* – that is, muzzled and emasculated – on all other countries, a new political and social order – Mazzini does not care in the least to question the needs, tendencies, and aspirations of Italy and of other countries, in order to conform thereto this new order; this order has been revealed-to him from on high, by the very inspirations of his *Me* which contemplates itself through the false prism of divinity. From this ardent preaching he will naturally derive no profit for himself. His satisfaction, if he can triumph, will be wholly ideal and moral. But, however sublime and pure it may appear, this satisfaction will be no less the triumph of *supreme Egoism* – that of having imposed on the world *his* thought. It is, I think, the manifestation of the most transcendent *Individualism*, not satanic, but divine. God, then, is the superb isolation of the Me adoring itself; it is easy to see that

he must become the patron of the material Me imposing itself, dominating, oppressing, exploiting.

Satan is quite the contrary; he is not at all egoistical. The Biblical legend shows him to us, rebelling not only for himself, but for entire humanity; and he has really sacrificed himself, since, rather than renounce this principle of revolt which must emancipate the human world, he has allowed himself to be condemned to eternal torments, if we are to believe the Holy Scriptures. So does the Commune today, whose glorious representatives, men, women, and children, suffer themselves to be assassinated, shot, mitrailleused, transported, or tormented in infamous hulks, rather than deny the principle of deliverance and salvation. What does Mazzini wish, then? Is not this a sublime sacrifice? But Mazzini is unwilling to recognise this sacrifice. And why? Because it has not been imposed on them from on high as a duty commanded by God himself; because it was a spontaneous act, commanded or rather inspired, not by a metaphysical or abstract duty, but by a sublime passion, by the passion for liberty. And liberty, whatever Mazzini may say about it, and whatever all the idealists in the world may say with him about it – they, naturally, comprehending nothing of this word, and, when the thing is presented to them, detesting it – liberty, by its very nature, excludes egoism; it cannot be simply individual (such liberty is called privilege); the true, human liberty of a single individual implies the emancipation of all; because, thanks to the law of solidarity which is the natural basis of all human society, I cannot be, feel, and know myself really, completely free, if I am not surrounded by men as free as myself, and because the slavery of each is *my* slavery.

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Here I touch one of the fundamental points of Mazzini's theological morality. We know that he has founded his whole theory on the exclusive idea of *Duty*. On the other hand, he bitterly reproaches the French Revolution for having founded its theory on the idea of *Rights*. He attributes to the latter theory, which he considers entirely false, the numerous failures of this revolution hitherto.

Here is his reasoning:

"Certainly, there exist rights; but where the rights of one individual are found in contradiction with the rights of another, how can we hope to reconcile them, to put them in harmony, without recurring to something superior to all rights? And where the rights of one or more individuals are in opposition with the rights of a country, to what tribunal will you have recourse? If the right to well-being, to the greatest possible well-being, belongs to all men, who shall decide the question between the labourer and his employer? If the right to existence is the first and the most inviolable right of every man, who can command the sacrifice of his own existence for the amelioration of the existence of another? Will you command it in the name of Country, of society, in the name of the multitude of your brothers? But what is Country from the standpoint of the theory of which I speak, if not the place where our individual rights are best assured? What is society, if not a convention of men mutually pledged to sustain by the force of many individuals the rights of each? And you, after having taught the individual for fifty years that society is constituted to assure him the exercise of his rights, will you now demand of him that he sacrifice all his rights to society, that he submit himself, in case of need, to all privations, to fatigues, to prison, and to exile for the amelioration of this society? After having preached in every way to men that the aim of life is well-being, will you, all at once, enjoin them to lose well-being and, if need be, life itself, to free the country from a foreign yoke, to obtain better conditions of existence for a class which is not theirs? After having spoken to them so long in the name of material interests, will you pretend that, when they see before them riches and power, they are not to extend the hand to seize it, even to the detriment of their brothers?

[IX – *Liberty*, 12 March 1887]

"And who can, even in a society founded on more just bases than the present society – who can convince a man educated only in the theory of rights that he ought to keep in the common path and occupy himself with the development of the social design? Suppose he revolts; suppose that, feeling himself the stronger, he says to you: 'My tendencies, my faculties, call me elsewhere; I have the sacred, inviolable right of developing them, and I place myself at war with all.' What answer can you give him from the point of view of his own doctrine (that of rights)? What right have you, even being the majority, to impose on him obedience to laws which do not accord with his desires, with his individual aspirations? What right have you to punish him when he violates them? Rights are equal for all individuals: the social community cannot create a single one. Society has more power, but no more rights, than the individual. How, then, will you prove to the individual that he ought to blend his will with the will of his brothers in Country and in Humanity? By the executioner? By the prison? So have done all societies which have ever existed. But this is war, and we wish

peace; this is tyrannical repression, and we wish education.

“Education, we have said; and this is the grand word which includes our whole doctrine. The vital question of our century is a question of education. It is not a question of establishing a new order of things by violence; an order of things established by violence is always tyrannical, even when it is better than what it replaces; it is a question of overturning by force the brutal force which today opposes every attempt at amelioration, and then of proposing to the consent of the nation thus made free to express its will [a fiction!] the order which appears the best [to whom does it appear so? to Mazzini and to his disciples.], and finally of educating men of all kinds [the unfortunates!] so that they may become developed and act in conformity with this order.

“With the theory of rights we can revolt and overturn obstacles [this is something and even much], but not establish, in a strong and durable manner, the harmony of all the elements which compose a Nation. With the theory of happiness, comfort being assigned as the principal aim of life, we shall make egoistical men, worshippers of matter, who will bring the old passions into the new order, and corrupt it in a few months. We must, then, find a doctrine superior to the theory of rights, which guides men towards good, which teaches them constancy in sacrifice, which attaches them to their brothers without rendering them independent either of the idea of a single man or of the force of all. This principle is that of Duty. It is necessary to convince men that, children of one God, they ought to execute here below, on this earth, one and the same Law; that each of them ought to live, not for himself, but for others; that the aim of his life is not to be more or less happy, but to make himself better by making all the others better; that to combat injustice and error for the good of his brothers is not only a right, but a duty… [It is precisely this duty which I am fulfilling now with reference to Mazzini.]

“Italian labourers, my brothers! Understand me rightly. When I say that knowledge of their rights is not sufficient for men in order to accomplish an important and durable amelioration, I do not ask you to renounce these rights. I only say that they are but consequences of duties fulfilled, and that we must commence with the duties to arrive at the rights; and when I say that, in assigning happiness, well-being, material interests, as the aim of life, we run the risk of making egoists, I do not mean that you ought not to think of them; I say that material interests, sought alone, and considered not as means only, but as end, always Lead to this deplorable result… Material ameliorations are essential, and we will fight to obtain them; but not because it is of sole consequence to man that he be well fed and lodged, but because the consciousness of your dignity and your moral development will be impossible so long as your permanent duel against misery shall continue. You work ten and twelve hours a day [either Mazzini is very badly informed, or it does not enter into the economy of his propaganda to appear to know that the greater part of the Italian proletariat work from fourteen to fifteen hours a day]: how can you find time to educate yourselves? [To *let* yourselves be educated. Mazzini always speaks of moral education, never of mental instruction and development, which he disdains, and which, like all theologians, he must dread.] The most fortunate among you earn hardly enough to support their families. How could they find the means to educate themselves?” etc., etc. All that follows proves that Mazzini knows perfectly well the miserable situation of the Italian labourers; he even finishes by saying to them:

“Society treats you without a shadow of sympathy: where could you learn to sympathise with society? You need, then, a change in your material conditions to make it possible for you to develop morally; you need to work less to be able to devote a few hours of your day to the progress of your soul [Mazzini will never say to the development of your mind through science]; you need such reward for your work as will enable you to accumulate savings [in order to become individually rich – that is, to become in your turn *bourgeois* exploiters of the labour of others. The economic thought of this poor great theologian, Mazzini, goes no farther; he would like all labourers to become *bourgeois*, rich and isolated individuals; and he does not comprehend that individual fortunes, even the greatest, are consumed and melt away very quickly when they do not find the means of reproducing themselves, and even of increasing, by the exploitation of the labour of others. Individual riches, hereditary property, constitute precisely the bourgeoisie, and preserve and develop themselves only by the exploitation of the misery of the proletariat. To wish that all proletarians should become *bourgeois* is to wish that the *bourgeois* should find no longer at their disposal workingmen forced by hunger to sell them at the lowest possible price that collective work which fertilises their capital and their property; it is to wish that all the *bourgeois* should be alike ruined in a very short time; and then what would ensue? All being equally poor, each remaining isolated in misery and reduced to working for himself, entire society would be ruined, because isolated work is hardly sufficient to nourish a savage tribe. Only collective work creates civilisation and riches. This truth once comprehended and admitted – and he must be a great barbarian in

social economy who does not admit it – there remain only two possible forms of property or of exploitation of social wealth: the present *bourgeois* form – that is, the exploitation of this wealth, the product of collective labour, or rather the exploitation of collective labour, by privileged individuals, which is the only true sense of that *individual and hereditary property* which the generous and popular General Garibaldi takes the attitude of defending today; or the new form, which we sustain against the bourgeoisie and against General Garibaldi himself, because it is the sole and supreme condition of the real emancipation of the proletariat, of all the world – the *collective ownership* of the wealth produced by *collective labour*. But I restore the floor to Mazzini]:

there remain only two possible forms of property… the present *bourgeois* form – that is, the exploitation of this wealth, the product of collective labour, or rather the exploitation of collective labour, by privileged individuals… or the new form… the sole and supreme condition of the real emancipation of the proletariat, of all the world – the *collective ownership* of the wealth produced by *collective labour*.

"You need a reward which will tranquillise your soul in regard to the future and which will give you the possibility of purifying it, above all, of every sentiment of reaction, of every impulse of vengeance, of every thought of injustice towards those who have been unjust towards you. You should, then, seek this change, and you will obtain it [if they obtain it, it will be only by their own efforts, by the use of their own organised force, and not by the aid of a few dozen Mazzinians, who will be able to do nothing but paralyse or mislead their efforts]; but you should seek it as means, not as end; you should seek it from a sentiment of Duty, not alone as a Right; you should seek it to make yourselves better, not alone to make yourselves materially happy…

"To make yourselves better – that is what should constitute the aim of your life. You cannot even make yourselves, in any constant and secure way, less unhappy except by making yourselves better. Tyrants would rise by thousands among you, if you fought only in the name of material interests, or of some social organisation or other. It matters little that you change organisations, if you yourselves remain infected with the passions and egoism which reign today: organisations are like certain plants which sometimes are poisonous, sometimes remedial, according to the operations of the one who administers them. Good men make all bad organisations good, and bad men make good ones bad."

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I stop here to establish the profound and completely theological ignorance of Mazzini in everything relating to the social nature of man. Moreover, this ignorance is entirely natural and even necessary. As a theologian, Mazzini must think, and he really does think, that all morality descends on human society from on high, by the revelation of a divine law; whence it follows that society has no inherent or immanent morality – that is, that, considered apart from this divine revelation, it presents absolute immobility, a mechanical aggregation of human beings without any bond of solidarity between them, for Mazzini ignores and repels as blasphemy natural solidarity – an unorganised mass of egoists. The moralisation of this unhappy human society depends then, according to Mazzini, on the religious and moral amelioration of the individuals of which it is composed, independently of all the real conditions of their existence, and of the organisation, political as well as economic, of society. What is of most importance is that the superior men and classes who are called to govern society, a nation, should be profoundly religious and moral. Then all is saved, thinks Mazzini – for these men and these classes administer to the multitude the religious and moral education which will moralise them in their turn. This is not more difficult than that, and one can understand perfectly that, with this theory, Mazzini, notwithstanding his undeniable preference for the republican form, can say without moving a muscle, and without even suspecting the frightful and fatal sophism contained in his words, *that good men can make a bad social organisation excellent, and that, on the other hand, bad men can make the best organisation in the world frightful*, it being accepted that the goodness or the wickedness of men is entirely independent of the organisation of society and dependent solely on their individual religion.

Our opinions, our convictions are equally opposed to Mazzini's. First, we do not believe in the existence of any Divinity whatever, other than that which has been created by the historic fantasy of men. Consequently for us there can be no divine revelation from on high, all religions having been only revelations of the collective mind of men, in proportion as it has developed in history, to itself, through this false divine prism. Not believing in God, we can no more believe in the intellectual and moral existence of human individuals outside of society. Man becomes man only in the bosom of society and only because of the collective cooperation of all men, whether present or past. This is a truth which forms the basis of all our socialistic beliefs and which I shall, therefore, try to develop and prove fully in its time and place. Today I can only state the principle. And the first consequence of this truth is this – that neither religion, nor morality, nor even thought can be peculiarly and exclusively individual. The greatest men of history, the most sublime geniuses, the greatest philosophers or prophets, have always received all the contents, all the foundation of their religion, of their morality, and of their thought, from this same society of which they form a part and to which they seemed to bring it spontaneously or from on high. It is this accumulated treasure, the product of the collective labour, material, intellectual, and moral, of all past generations, elaborated anew and transformed slowly, in a manner more or less invisible and latent, by the new instincts, the aspirations, and the real and manifold new wants of the present generations, which always forms the contents of the revelations or discoveries of these men of genius, who add only the formal work of their own brains, more capable than others of seizing and classifying the details in a larger whole or in a new synthesis. So that we may say with as much reason as justice that the men of genius are precisely those to whom society always gives more than to others, and, above all, more than it receives in return. Even the misfortunes and persecutions which it has lavished upon them with great generosity hitherto have been transformed for them into benefits, because it is more than probable that, if it had accorded them gratitude, respect, riches, power, and authority during their lives, it would have made tyrants of them and transformed them into wicked and stupid privileged persons.

From the truth which I have just laid down as a principle flows another consequence as important as the first – that all religions and all systems of morality which prevail in a society are always the ideal expression of its real, material situation, that is to say, of its economic organisation first of all, but also of its political organisation, the latter being, moreover, nothing but the legal and violent consecration of the former. Christ, who was quite a different sort of socialist from Mazzini, since he has declared that it was easier for a great rope – others say for a camel – to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into his Paradise – Christ himself has said: *For where your treasure is, there is your heart also!* and he has tried to transfer human treasures into heaven, but he has not succeeded. He has succeeded so little that the Church itself, this divine institution which has no other aim, if we may believe the Christian theologians and Mazzini himself, than to assure the road to - heaven to all believers, was hardly officially established before it found nothing more pressing to do than to monopolise all the treasures of the earth, which it has justly considered as instruments of power and enjoyment. During the fifteen centuries which have passed since the miraculous conversion of the very depraved and very great Emperor Constantine down to our time, have not all the Christian churches – Roman Catholic. Byzantine-Greek, Byzantine-Russian, Protestant – displayed by turns the most fanatical fury in the preservation and increase of the holy property and riches of the Church?

Fifteen centuries of experience! Should not such a solemn and memorable failure made by the most ideal religion in the world suffice, therefore, to prove to us the inconsistency of all abstract idealism on this earth, its absolute incompatibility with the fundamental conditions of human society? What will Mazzini do, then, with his new idealism, with his eclectic medley of traditions fallen into disuse and of Platonic absurdities revived, a sort of abortion which has neither the merit of the logical rationality of the metaphysicians, nor that of the material brutality of the positive religions, and which, at the same time that it revolts thought, does not even give to the superstition of the masses and to this need of believing in miracles which yet lives in feminine souls the nourishment afforded them by spiritualism or even Mormonism – religions as new as Mazzini's and much more positive?

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Man, like everything which exists, is matter. His soul, his mind, his thoughts, his morals are products of it, and he cannot make abstractions of them with impunity. Every time that he attempts it, he falls back again, and with grievous consequences to himself. His pretended immateriality is always transformed, when it comes to action, into brutality, bestiality, negation of humanity. All that he can, all that he should do, is to *humanise* matter as much in himself as outside of

himself, and he humanises it by rendering it always more and more favourable to the complete development of his humanity by means of work, science, and the education which he gives himself under the direction of this last combined with the historical experience of life. It is well understood that, when I speak of historic man, I speak always of collective man, of society, since the individual man, considered outside of society, has never had a history, for the simple reason that as man but little developed as thinking animal, or even as capable of pronouncing a few words, he has never existed; for – I repeat it again – the animal called man becomes really man only in society and by the cooperation of all society. Individual liberty itself is a product of this collective work, material, intellectual, and moral, of all the world.

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What is Humanity? It is animality endowed with the faculty of abstraction or of generalisation, or of the highest known degree of intelligence; a faculty equally material, since it is the action of an entirely material organ called the brain, which, far from being exclusively peculiar to man, is manifested, more and more developed, in the ascending series of the animal species, from the most formless animate being up to man. But in man alone it reaches this power of abstraction which permits him to lift himself by his thought not only above all the things that surround him, but also above himself, as real, living, and sentient being. It is by virtue of this faculty that by a slow historic labour which develops his mind, man is enabled to successively grasp things as a whole and sense the general and constant laws which manifest themselves in their relations and development. And it is in applying to his life and to his social relations the natural laws which he so discovers that he succeeds in perfecting, little by little, his primitive animality and in transforming it into humanity.

Humanity is, then, animality transformed by a progressive thought and by the progressive application of this thought to life. For animal life itself is not at all as brutally material as the theologians, the consistent idealists, and Mazzini himself are induced to believe: animals whose whole existence is concentrated exclusively in the two-fold passion of digestion and reproduction belong to the most inferior species. But in the species more developed in intelligence, in those which approach man, you will find the germs of all the passions of man, without an exception; you will find in them the love of children, the religious sentiment, sacrifice, the social passion, patriotic devotion, and even a beginning of scientific curiosity. Doubtless the care for the stomach and sexual love play a dominant role, but do they not play a role, if not as dominant, at least excessively important, in the human world itself?

To sustain themselves animals, as individuals, must eat, and, as species, must propagate. That is the first, the real foundation of life, common to all species of animals from the most inferior, inclusively, up to man. All the other faculties and passions can be developed only on condition that these two primordial needs are satisfied. This is the supreme law of life from which no living being can escape.

This law, which Mazzini must attribute to his God and which we attribute to no one, because we do not believe in laws ideally predetermined and because what we call natural laws constitute, in our eyes, only general and constant resultants of an infinity of actions and reactions which real things exercise incessantly, all on each and each on all – this law transforms the animal kingdom into a perpetual tragedy, of which nature, or at least our earth, still continues to be the bloody theatre. This is the mournful struggle for life. All the animal species exist only by destruction. There are some, it is true, who are content with destroying the vegetable species. But there are at least as many others which can live only by devouring animate and living beings. These are the wild beasts, the *carnivora*, which are neither the least developed nor the least intelligent, since it is just these which, by their organisation, approach nearest to man, and since man himself, an omnivorous animal, is the most ferocious and the most destructive of all.

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Such is then in its reality the law of nature. It is an indefatigable and incessant devouring of each other: it is life which, in order to continue to be life, kills and devours life. It is an assassination without mercy and

without truce. Before this bloody fact which no one can deny, we really cannot understand how Mazzini, so jealous of the glory, wisdom, justice, and loving kindness of his God, can attribute to him the preestablishment of this law and the creation of this world! Only a Divine Tiberius, a ferocious monster endowed with supreme power, could have created it. And how inconsistent, farther, is the attempt of Christian theology to explain this fact, which becomes monstrous as soon as it is attributed to any author whatever, by a fall of all nature, which was, they pretend, the necessary consequence of original sin. The explanation is doubtless absurd, but at least proves that they have felt the contradiction that exists between the inherent cruelty of the natural world and the infinite goodness of their God. For Mazzini even this contradiction does not exist. It must be added, also, that he never deigns to observe the earth, but seeks the proofs of his God in the starry heaven which is so far, far away that it appears to him absolute and perfect.

The history of man in nothing else than the continuation and development of this animal struggle for life. There is, in the animal kingdom, which includes man, this law – that the numerical increase of a species is always determined by the question of the means of subsistence. Every species increases indefinitely till it has attained the limit when this quantity ceases to be proportional to the number of individuals who compose it; then the more feeble individuals, forced to yield their pittance to the stronger, die of hunger. What happens among individuals of the same species occurs in the same way among different species. The stronger supplant, eliminate the weaker. . . .

Is not this same fact repeated and reproduced even today in the history of human societies? There is, however, in this respect, an enormous difference between man and the other animal species. Among some of the latter intelligence reaches such a degree of development that, in anticipation of the future – of winter, for instance – they store up provisions. But no other animal species that I know has yet had the idea of making the earth yield, by artificial means, by cultivation – that is, by the application of natural laws either to labour or to the struggle for life – more than it yields naturally. Man alone has had this thought, and he could get it only through this power of abstraction, of generalisation, which has enabled him to perceive, to verify, and to know again successively the constant processes of development of real things, otherwise called the laws of nature, by means of positive science, commencing with the so simple and imperfect observations of primitive societies and continuing to the most complicated combinations of the present scientific systems.

It is in and by this that the human world began to separate itself definitively from the animal world. Alone among all the living species on this earth, the human species has a history in the sense of the progressive development of an actual society. In the rest of the animal world there is also a history, but it is manifested exclusively by the physiological and, as it were, simply material development of the species and races, by the production of new species and races, while each species considered separately, as long as it exists, hardly progresses, living today as it lived a thousand years ago.

Man alone, thanks to his two precious faculties, thought and speech, which are so far inseparable that one cannot say really which is first, each implying the other – one of which recognises nature and its laws, while the other transmits to generations to come, as an accumulated treasure, all the discoveries and all the experiences of past centuries – thanks to these two magnificent faculties, man alone has a history.

At first he lived, scattered in little societies over the earth, like a brutal and ferocious beast, living on the natural fruits of the earth, and mingling in his meals uncooked vegetables and fruits with the flesh of animals, including that of men. He recognised so little the human character of his neighbours belonging to other tribes that he ate them whenever he could. Cannibalism, we know, was the point of departure of human civilisation. The first men lived chiefly by hunting and war, war itself being only a hunt for men.

Much later we find the man-shepherd. This is already an immense step forward. He does not yet cultivate the ground; but he already cultivates different species of animals, which he has learned not only to subdue but to tame, by transforming somewhat their nature, by means of his dominant intelligence and will, and on whose flesh and milk he feeds, while their skins serve him for clothing.

Later we find him a farmer. Man becomes sedentary and begins to have a country. With this phase of his economical development are connected, among most of the peoples known to history, some facts as well religious as political, and which are not its first cause, as Mazzini claims, but, on the contrary, its result, expression, and, as it were, ideal consecration. These facts are the worship of the tombs of the fathers, the constitution of the patriarchal right and of *property* in the person of the head of the family, the patriarchal government of the ancients, *slavery*.

The hunting people had no need of slaves, knowing only the *noble* works of hunting and fighting, which a

part of our civilised society still considers as a prerogative of men *well-born*. It would even have been impossible for them to support slaves, for hunting is never excessively productive, and hunting peoples, as we see them today in the deserts of Africa and America, often find themselves reduced to death by starvation. In this first phase of human barbarism, women are the natural slaves on whom brutal and ferocious man throws all the burden of work which his miserable household requires. Consequently he does not make slaves, he kills his enemy and eats him.

[XI – *Liberty*, 9 April 1887]

Pastoral peoples likewise can make no great use of slaves, and, living almost exclusively on the milk and flesh of their flocks, they could not maintain a great number. They seek, moreover, the plains, broad spaces, the immense prairies, capable of supporting their flocks. Far from seeking other tribes, like the hunting peoples, they avoid them; war, consequently, is not frequent among them, and no war, no slaves. When one pasturage is destroyed, they go in search of another; vagabonds on the earth, they observe only the changes of temperature and climate, seeking water first of all, and have no other guides in their periodical transmigrations than the stars in the sky. They were the first founders of astronomical science and of star worship. The patriarchalism, the natural and traditional authority of the fathers of families, of the ancients, is already strongly developed in their bosom, but it is still only a matter of custom. It does not become a right, founded on land and hereditary property and consecrated by religion, as with the agricultural nations. Pastoral peoples remain peaceable so long as they find pasturage sufficient for their flocks; but at last there comes a time when many nomadic tribes encounter each other, and the plain becomes too small for all. Then, urged on always by this supreme and inevitable law of the struggle for life, they stain the plain with the blood of their battles and are transformed into warlike peoples, after which, mingling in a single mass, too numerous henceforth to find its food on the plains, they fall upon agricultural countries, which they conquer, and forcing into submission to their yoke, like slaves, peaceful populations devoted to agriculture, they found *States*.

Such was the natural and real process by which the first States in history were founded, without any intervention of legislators or divine prophets.

The brutal fact of brigandage, conquest, and slavery, the material and real base of all States, past and present, has always preceded the idealisation of this fact by some sort of religion and legislation. First the conqueror, the fortunate brigand, the hero of history, founds the new State; then, and often directly with him, come priests, prophets, and legislators at the same time, who consecrate in the name of their God, and establish as legal foundations, the very consequences of this accomplished fact.

The brutal fact of brigandage, conquest, and slavery, the material and real base of all States, past and present, has always preceded the idealisation of this fact by some sort of religion and legislation.

The following is a universal rule, demonstrated by the history of all religions:

No new religion has ever been able to interrupt the natural and inevitable development of social facts, nor even to turn it aside from the path traced for it by the combination of real forces, whether natural or social. Often religious beliefs have served as a symbol for nascent forces at the very moment when these forces were about to accomplish new facts: but they have always been the symptoms or prognostics, never the real causes, of these facts. As for these causes, we must seek them in the ascending development of economic wants and the organised and active forces of society, not ideal, but real; the ideal always being only the more or less faithful expression, the last resultant, as it were, whether positive or negative, of the struggle of these forces in society.

This idea, so true, announced and developed more than twenty years ago principally by Karl Marx, is necessarily combatted by Mazzini, who, a logical idealist, imagines that in the history of humanity, as well as in the development of the properly material world, ideas, first causes, and successive manifestations of the Divine Being, precede and create facts.

“Religions govern the world,” he says. “When the men of India believed that they were born, some of the head, others of the arms, and still others of the feet of

Brahma, their God, they regulated society, in conformity with this division, in castes, by assigning to the first, hereditarily, intellectual work, to the second a military status, and to the last servile tasks; and they condemned themselves thereby to an immobility which still continues and which will continue as long as the faith in this principle lasts."[1]

Mazzini is so much of an idealist that he does not perceive that, in citing the religion of the Brahmins as an example, he proves just the contrary of what he wished to demonstrate, unless he is willing to admit this absurd supposition, that an entire people, at first free, was able to submit itself *voluntarily* to the most grievous and abject slavery, simply because priests had come to tell them and had succeeded in convincing them that they were formed of the feet of Brahma! The establishment of castes in the East India having been, according to Mazzini, only the consequence of the revelation of this religious doctrine, must he not conclude that, before it had been revealed, there did not exist this hereditary inequality in the Indies? What follows, then? That a people comparatively free and composed of citizens living in equality has *freely* consented to descend so low, to become a people of pariahs, with no other reason for so doing than a new religious propaganda. But would not that be a miracle? I can assure Mazzini that, if he would take the pains to prove to us its historical authenticity, this miracle would alone suffice to convert us once for all to all the religious absurdities. Why does he not at least try to explain the possibility of it? That in itself would be an immense victory for his faith against this poor human reason which he maltreats horribly in all his writings.

To explain so surprising a fact, one must suppose:

Either that the people of the Indies naturally love slavery, that they seek misery, tortures, and shame, as others seek liberty, riches, joys, and honour. But such a people is simply an impossibility, for we see that everything which lives, not only men, but the lowest, the smallest animal on this earth, rebels instinctively and just as far as it can, against every attempt to deprive it of its independence – that is, of the conditions of its existence and of its natural development;

Or else that Brahma, the incarnation of Mazzini's eternal Divinity at that epoch of history and in that country, himself descended in person, invested with his overwhelming power, from his heaven, to impose this hard slavery upon the peoples of the Indies. But Mazzini, while professing a fanatical faith in and an ardent worship for his God, refuses him the pleasure and the right of revealing himself directly, of showing himself personally on the earth.

If the Brahmins had at least promised the Indian people eternal happiness in return for temporary privations, sufferings, and slavery, as the Christian priests still do today when they come to preach submission and resignation to the proletariat of Europe. But no; the Brahmins have been, in this respect at least, much more honest than our priests; they demand all and promise nothing. In their religion there is neither deliverance nor salvation for the pariahs, either in this world or the other; for them there is only eternal slavery.

There remains, therefore, only one supposition: this is that the priests of Brahma, his revealers, his prophets, had been endowed by him with such eloquence and such great powers of persuasion that, without recourse to supernatural means, to miracles – since Mazzini himself denies the possibility of this sort of miracles – without recourse even to force, that last and powerful argument of all historical religious – by the sole power of their divinely inspired propaganda, they were able to convert the masses and subject them to this eternal slavery.

They came to say to free men, who only the day before had been more or less their equals: "Wretches! prostrate yourselves! and know that, having come from the foot and perhaps from a still baser part of the body of Brahma, you must serve us eternally as slaves, because we came, some from his head, others from his arm!" And the millions of free Hindoos, suddenly converted by this divine eloquence, flung themselves on the ground, crying with one voice: "Yes, we are wretches, pariahs, and we will serve you as slaves!"

Of all the suppositions which Mazzini's singular theory imposes on us this is the least absurd, and yet it is so absurd that our good sense, sustained by all we know of the nature and habitual practice of men, revolts. We can conceive that men to whom these same revealers of the religion of Brahma had said, to some: "You must be the supreme arbiters of nature because you come from the head of Brahma," and to others: "You are free and strong, and you must command because you come from his arm," would have responded in unison: "Yes, you are a thousand times right, and may Brahma be greatly blessed! We will direct and we will command, and the vile rabble shall work for us, obey us, and serve us!" We can conceive this, because man is generally disposed to believe in what it is for his interest to accept. But to imagine that the masses, living men, in any stage whatever of civilisation, could have accepted freely, simply in consequence of an entirely moral

[1] "Doveri dell' nomo"

propaganda, a belief which, without the least hope and without the least compensation, condemns them to the state of pariahs is simply to show misunderstanding, not to say ignorance, of the most elementary bases of history and of human nature.

It is evident that this acceptation of the religion of the Brahmins by the Hindoo masses could not have been free, but that it was preceded and produced by the fact of their very real and wholly involuntary slavery, under the yoke of the conquering tribes who came down from the plateau of the Himalayas upon the Indies – a slavery of which this religion and this worship have been only the expression and later theological explanation. The hereditary castes, therefore, were not formed as a consequence of the theological vagaries of the Brahmins. They had a much more real foundation, and especially were the last resultant of a long struggle between different elements, between many social forces, which, after a long conflict, ended in a certain equilibrium that is now known as the social order of the Hindoos.

We know so little of the history of those far-away times and countries. The tribes who descended from the Himalayas to conquer the Indies had, undeniably, already had a previous history of struggles, of social relations more or less determined, of germs of political institutions, in short, a religion, or even several religions, which had been the expression of all these historical realities. All these matters are entirely unknown to us. What we can and must suppose is that the invading power was not a simple power, but, on the contrary, very complex, a combination, not fixed, but moving and living, of popular elements and of diverse social forces which were constantly being modified and transformed within it. It must have been the same with the conquered tribes. The meeting of all those elements, each of which tended naturally to absorb all the others, must have produced a terrible and long struggle – *the eternal struggle for life*, that supreme law of nature and society – and the material result of this struggle was precisely the establishment of new relations between all these different social forces, in conformity with the relative and real power or weakness of each – the at first wholly material institution of *castes* by the brutal triumph of preponderant forces.

[XII – *Liberty*, 23 April 1887]

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The definitive triumph of one assemblage of social forces over another has been and will always be a brutal fact, in this sense that the most humane, the most just, as well as the most iniquitous, the most false, idea can never triumph in the world, if it does not rest on material power. This last is indispensable; Mazzini recognised it himself, as we have just seen; it is indispensable to remove the material obstacles which prevent the realisation of the new idea, to overthrow the material power on which the existing order of things rests. Therefore the last word belongs always to force, and a party which wishes to triumph, however holy may be its cause, must create a material power capable of breaking the material power of its adversaries. But when we speak of the struggle and of the successive victories of material powers in history, we must not take this word “material” literally, in its simply mechanical, physical, chemical, or even organic sense. It refers to social forces, human forces, and man is a being, doubtless exclusively material, but organised and intelligent. His ideas, his sentiments, his passions, and, before all, his social organisation, which is penetrated and always modified by it, are integral elements of his material force. This force, belonging to man, though entirely material, is more intelligent than that of the animals of other species, and so man has become the king of the earth, in spite of the fact that, at his origin, he was physically the weakest and above all the least numerous.

It is solely the superiority of his intelligence, and of his science which is the product of it, which makes him obtain the victory over all the other animal species in this eternal fight for life which constitutes the groundwork of all natural history; it is also these principally which, in the continuation of this same fight in the midst of human society, makes some nations triumph over others; it is not numerical superiority, for it oftenest happens that the conquering masses are numerically weaker than the conquered peoples. For instance, when Alexander of Macedonia conquered a part of Asia and Africa, and when, later, the Romans conquered a great part of the world known to the ancients, their forces were very inferior in point of numbers to those of the conquered peoples.

It cannot be said, however, that it is only the superiority of intelligence and of science which assures triumph in history; nor even does the superior development of economic interests, of industry, commerce, and social wealth exclusively assure it. The Romans who conquered Greece had been infinitely less intelligent, less learned, less civilised, and less rich than the Greeks. The Poles who, at the close of the last century, succumbed under the united blows of Russia and Prussia were unquestionably more intelligent and more civilised than the Prussians and the Russians. And even today, in presence of the terrible catastrophe

which France has just endured, who will dare to say that the Prussians, the Germans, have more brains and are more civilised than the people of France! As for social wealth, that of France, even today, after the defeat, notwithstanding the depredations of the Germans who have devastated her, notwithstanding the five thousand millions which they force her to pay, notwithstanding even the "restorative" government of M. Thiers, remains infinitely superior to that of Germany.

It is doubtless undeniable that the German universities are much better organised than the French universities; that, especially with respect to natural sciences – the only sciences which are yet positive – the German professors have considerably outstripped the French professors; that the middle colleges, the gymnasiums, in Germany are really superior to corresponding institutions in France; that the mass of the German *bourgeoisie* is much more learned, better instructed, than that poor French *bourgeoisie* which is stagnating in the old routine and official rhetoric; that the proletariat and the peasants know at least how to read and write: and that, finally – an important point in the question which we have to solve – the instruction in the military schools of Germany, and especially of Prussia, is more solid, more complete, more serious, than that in the military schools of France, which makes the German officers learned brutes, while the French officers are ignorant brutes.

Nevertheless, everybody feels that it was not these advantages, undeniable though they are, which secured the definitive victory to the Germans. That the German armies, infinitely better organised, better disciplined, better armed, and better commanded than the French troops, should have beaten the latter is not at all astonishing. But, the war having taken a national character, what surprised everybody was to see a nation so powerful in all respects as France undeniably is, so proud, not to say so glorious, prostrated in so short a time by the German forces.

Statesmen, professional military men, and, generally, the interested partisans of *order*, that is, of the privileged, exploiting, official, and officious rabble, today triumphant in all countries, have arrived at a conclusion which, though very reassuring and very consoling for them, is none the less entirely false. They say, they publish, and they endeavour to spread this idea – that military art and the improvement of destructive weapons have made in our day such immense progress that the power of well-organised and well-disciplined military forces has become irresistible; that armies alone can cope with armies, and that the army of a country once prostrated and destroyed, there is nothing left for that country but submission, all popular resistance from that time having become impossible. The conclusion is naturally this: the natural and organic organisation of popular forces, outside of the State and opposed to it, being of no avail, powerless, in comparison with the artificial, mechanical, and scientific organisation of the military forces of the State, revolution itself has become impossible.

But they console themselves easily, for there is now hardly a conservative in Europe who would not prefer foreign victory and even the foreign yoke to the salvation of his own country by a popular revolution. We have just seen a memorable proof of it in France.

This idea, becoming general in the camp of the conservatives of all countries, pleases, reassures, and really consoles them very much. It is true that it leads them to this disagreeable conclusion – that the independence and that even the existence of a country depends today solely on the number, the good organisation, and the good management of its army, so that, if at any given moment it finds itself inferior in this respect alone to another country, this will be sufficient to deliver it over to the mercy of the latter, unless the political interests of neutral countries serve it in some way as security and safeguard. This is doubtless not very reassuring to their patriotism. But they console themselves easily, for there is now hardly a conservative in Europe who would not prefer foreign victory and even the foreign yoke to the salvation of his own country by a popular revolution. We have just seen a memorable proof of it in France.

Therefore the conservatives, the *honest people* of all the countries of Europe, including the *bourgeois* republicans, are today seeking their salvation in the formidable organisation of the military forces of the State, and they foolishly imagine that this power guarantees them against all possible revolutions.

These honest people are much deceived, and if the perpetual frights in which they live today did not render them incapable of all serious reflection, they would have understood that even the catastrophe which has just subjugated France proves nothing at all.

France has succumbed, not because her armies have been destroyed, but because, at the time they were destroyed, the French nation itself found itself in a state of disorganisation and demoralisation which rendered her absolutely incapable of creating spontaneously serious national defence. When Napoleon I. invaded Spain, the disproportion which existed between the quality, organisation, intelligence, and even the quantity of his troops, and those of the Spanish troops, between the intellect and knowledge of the French and the rough ignorance of the Spanish people, was even more formidable still than that to which is attributed today the prodigious success of the Germans. He also prostrated the Spanish armies and the Spanish State. But he did not succeed in putting down the national uprising which lasted five years and which ended in the expulsion of the French from Spain.

That is an example at least as memorable as that of the last defeat of the French. How is it to be explained? By the simple reason that, when Napoleon invaded Spain, that country was neither disorganised nor demoralised. It has been so, doubtless, and even to a degree which no other country has ever surpassed in rottenness, but only from the point of view of the organisation and morality of the State, not from the national point of view, not from that of the natural and spontaneous organisation of the Spanish nation, outside of the State. The State fell, but the nation remained erect; and it was the nation which, after having expelled the French, again, to its own misfortune, freely submitted to the State. It is lamenting today the fatal consequences of this mistake.

Unity makes strength, they say, and it is perfectly true. Only there are two kinds of unity. There is an artificial, mechanical unity, learned and immoral at the same time, composed entirely of fictions, falsehoods, centralisation, absorption, compression, and exploitation; this is the unity of the State. Outside of this unity, ever unhealthy and artificial, there is a moral unity of the nation, resulting from a certain accord or the more or less temporary harmony of different instincts and forces of the nation, spontaneously organised, and not yet divided, and always represented by a certain number of dominant ideas, true or false, and corresponding aspirations, good or bad. This is the real unity, fruitful and living.

These two unities are so opposite in nature that, for the greater part of the time, they are fighting each other, the first always tending to disorganise and destroy the second. A nation has never a greater enemy than its own State. Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that these two unities meet in a common accord, but it can never last long, because it is against nature. This accord, moreover, is only possible when the really social unity suffers from some great vice: either when the masses, brutalised, misled, and unconscious of their own power, seek their salvation in the protection of the State against the privileged classes, whom they necessarily always detest, ignorant of the fact that the State has really no other mission but to protect those classes against them; or when, over these masses still sleeping and passive, the privileged classes, dreading their awakening, group themselves in fear and servility about the State. Whatever may be the reason of this meeting when it takes place, the State becomes very powerful.

That is precisely what we see today in Germany. The Germans have conquered the French, because, being themselves well organised, politically and morally united, they attacked them at the very moment when not only the French State, but the French nation itself was a prey to complete dissolution and demoralisation. The principal advantage of the Germans, that which was the principal cause of their unprecedented triumph, was, therefore, *moral force*.

[XIII – *Liberty*, 7 May 1887]

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But let us clearly understand each other. When I speak of the moral force of nations in general and of the Germans in particular, I take good care not to confound it with *human*, *absolute morality*. I well know that this word *absolute*, applied to human morality, will sound badly in the ears of many of our friends, materialists, positivists, and atheists, who have declared war to the death against the absolute in whatever form it may appear, and with much reason, for the Absolute, taken in the absolute sense of the word, is absolute nonsense. So it is not of this absolute Absolute, it is not of God, that I speak. I do not know this gentleman; I am as ignorant of him as they are themselves. The absolute which I mean is *relative* only to humanity. It is that universal law of *solidarity* which is the *natural* base of all human society, and of which all historical developments have been and are only successive expressions, manifestations, and realisations.

Every real being, composite or simple, collective or individual, every intelligent, living being, organic or even inorganic, has a principle which is peculiar to it, which is not imposed on it from on high by any supreme Being whatever, but which is inherent in it, which constitutes it, and makes it remain what it is, as long as it is, and all the successive developments of which are only necessary manifestations. Without doubt, at least in my mind, this principle, which is, in

reality, nothing else than this being's manner of existence and development, is only the *resultant*, more or less prolonged and *constant*, but never eternal, of an indefinite multitude of natural actions and reactions, of a combination of causes and effects – a combination which, while always modifying itself somewhat, continues to reproduce itself, so long as it is not forced to change its direction or its nature, and transform itself into some new combination, by the action of new causes, more powerful than those which first gave it birth; then the being which is the product of this disappears with what we call its principle. Thus it is that we see many species of animals remain today what they have been for more than three thousand years. Many others have completely disappeared from the earth, and, naturally, their particular principles, which constituted their particular being, have also disappeared with them. Our planet and our solar system itself, having had a beginning in the eternal Universe, must necessarily have an end; in some millions of years .the earth will be no more, and with it, and perhaps even before it, will also disappear the human race with all its principles, with all the laws inherent in its being.

We have no occasion to be troubled. A few millions of years are the same as eternity to us. The ambitious idealists who talk of eternity, without finding, for the most part, enough depth in themselves to fill an existence of sixty years, usually imagine much less than that. In reality, a single million of years surpasses the power of our imagination. We have hardly the history of the last three thousand years, and it appears to us eternal and humanity already so old! Let us, then, fill the present with our best, prepare, as far as our means and strength allow, for the nearest future, and leave the care of far-off times to come to the men or the new beings of those times.

It suffices us to know that every real being, so long as it exists, exists only by virtue of a principle which is inherent in it and which determines its particular nature – a principle which is not imposed on it by any divine law-maker whatever, but which is the prolonged and constant resultant of a combination of natural causes and effects; and which is not enclosed in it like a soul in its body, according to the absurd imagination of the idealists, but which is in reality only the inevitable and constant mode of its real existence.

The human race, like all the other animal races, has inherent principles which are peculiar to it, and all these principles are summed up in or reducible to a single principle which we call *Solidarity*.

This principle may be formulated thus: No human individual can recognise his own humanity, or, consequently, realise it in life, except by recognising it in others and by cooperating in its realisation for others. No man can emancipate himself save by emancipating with him all the men about him. My liberty is the liberty of everybody, for I am really free, free not only in idea, but in fact, only when my liberty and my right find their confirmation, their sanction, in the liberty and right of all men, my equals.

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What all other men are is of great importance to me, because, however independent I may imagine myself or may appear by my social position, whether I am Pope, Czar, or Emperor, or even prime minister, I am always the product of the lowest among them; if they are ignorant, miserable, enslaved, my life is determined by their ignorance, misery, and slavery. I, an enlightened or intelligent man, for example – if such is the case – am foolish with their folly; I, a brave man, am the slave of their slavery; I, a rich man, tremble before their misery; I, a privileged man, turn pale before their justice. In short, wishing to be free, I can not be, because all the men around me do not yet wish to be free, and, not wishing it, they become instruments of my oppression.

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This is not imagination, it is a reality, the sad experience of which the whole world is undergoing today. Why, after so many superhuman efforts, after so many revolutions, always at first victorious, after so many painful sacrifices and so many struggles for liberty, does Europe still remain a slave? Because in all the countries of Europe there is still an immovable mass, immovable at least in appearance, which up to this time has remained inaccessible to the propaganda of ideas of emancipation, humanity, and justice – the mass of the peasants. It is this which constitutes today the power, the last support and the last refuge of all

despots, a real club in their hands to crush us, and, in so far as we shall fail to fill them with our aspirations, our passions, our ideas, we shall not cease to be slaves. We must emancipate them to emancipate ourselves.

Considering western humanity, including America, the Roman, German, and Anglo-German nations, as the most civilised and relatively the most liberal portion of the world, we find even in Europe a black point which menaces this civilisation and this liberty. This point is a whole world, the world of Slavs, which up to the present time has been almost always the victim, rarely the hero, and still less the conqueror of history, having been by turns the slave of the Huns, of the Turks, of the Tartars, and, above all, of the Germans. Today it is rising, moving, organising itself spontaneously, creating slowly a new power, and beginning to demand with a loud voice its place in the sun. What makes its demands still more menacing is that, at the eastern extremity of the European continent, there is an immense empire of more than seventy millions of inhabitants, half Slavs, half Finns, and in part Germans and Tartars, as despotic as possible, founding its enormous power as much on its inaccessible geographical position as on the mass of its innumerable peasants, and raising against the flag of *Pan-Germanism* hoisted in a manner so grievous for the liberty of the whole world, by the modern patriotism of the Germans, the no less grievous and menacing flag of *Pan-Slavism*.

The Germans, in all their present publications, laugh at this, or, rather, pretend to laugh at it. For, infatuated as they are with the easy victories which their traditional discipline and their morality of voluntary slaves have just won over the disorganisation and the merely transient demoralisation of France, they well know, and have known for a long time, that, if there is a danger which they really need to fear, it is that with which the eastern Slav threatens them.

They know it so well that there is no race which they detest more; in all Germany, except the German proletariat in so far as it is not misled by its leaders, and except the immense majority of the German peasants who do not come into immediate contact with the Slav peasants, this hatred is a universal and profound sentiment. The Germans detest this race for all the harm which they have done it, for all the hatred which by their ages of oppression they have inspired in it, and for the instinctive, irresistible terror which its awakening causes them. This intense mutual hatred, mingled with terror on the one side and a deplorable desire for vengeance on the other, disturbs the mind of the Germans and makes them commit many injustices and follies.

Their relations to the Slavs are absolutely the same as those of the English towards the Irish race. But there is an immense difference between the present policy of the English and that of the modern Germans. The English, notwithstanding the reputation for egoism and brutal narrowness which people have been ready to attribute to them, have been and are still the most humanely practical and the most really liberal people of Europe. After having treated the Irish people like a race of pariahs for almost three centuries, they have at last come to see that this policy was as iniquitous as dangerous to themselves, and they have just entered resolutely upon the broad road of reparation. They have already yielded much to Ireland; urged on by the logic of this new road, at once salutary and humane, they will doubtless finish by yielding to her the last, the greatest reparation – that autonomy which the Irish have, for centuries, demanded with a loud voice, an autonomy of which the radical transformation of all the economic relations prevailing there today will necessarily be the inevitable accompaniment and, as it were, the last word.

Why do not the Germans follow the example of England? Why do they not try to gain the sympathies of the Slavic peoples by the broadest recognition of their right to live, to arrange and organise themselves as they please, and to speak whatever language they like – in a word, by the most complete recognition of their liberty? Instead of this, what are they doing? They are themselves pushing the Slavic peoples into the arms of the Czar of all the Russias by this odious threat of forced Germanisation and the annihilation of the entire Slavic race in the grand centralisation of the Pan-Germanic State. This is at once a great wrong and a great folly.

And unfortunately it is not only the conservatives, nor even the modern liberals and progressives, of Germany, who make this threat; these, on the contrary, are paying very little attention at present to Slavic affairs, absorbed as they are in the contemplation of their patriotic triumphs. No, it is the Republicans – what do I say? – it is the workmen of the Social-Democratic party of Germany who, in imitation of their leaders, confounding Pan-Germanism with Cosmopolitanism, are pretending that the Slavic peoples of Austria should freely annihilate themselves in the grand Pan-Germanic and so-called popular State.

Let us hope that the General Council of the International Association of Workingmen, which has so well understood the Irish question, as it has recently proved by undertaking the defence of the autonomy of Ireland against the supremacy of England – let us hope that, inspired by the same principles and urged on by the same sentiment of humanitarian equity, it will give

to its friends and intimate allies, the leaders of the Social-Democratic party of Germany, the counsel to recognise as soon as possible, with all its political, economic, and social consequences, the complete liberty of all the Slavic peoples.

If it does not do this, it will prove that, led principally by the Germans, it comprehends justice and humanity only when they are not found in opposition to the immeasurably ambitious and vain designs of the Germans; that it also, like the leaders of the Social-Democratic party, with respect to the Slavic race at least, confounds Pan-Germanism with Cosmopolitanism – a deplorable confusion, absolutely contrary to the most fundamental principles of the International, and which can serve only the Reaction.

Yes, the Reaction, for, I repeat it once more, the inevitable consequence of such a policy is to throw all the Slavic peoples of Europe into the arms of the Russian Czar. And then will arise a formidable struggle between the disorganised and demoralised West of Europe and the *moralised* Eastern Slavs – that is, the Slavs united by hatred of the Germans.

That will be a real catastrophe for humanity; for, even supposing that the Germans triumph at first, which is not at all probable, they must maintain the Slavs in slavery by force, they must sacrifice everything to the formidable development of their armed forces, they must, in a word, continue to form a powerful military State – that is, they must themselves remain slaves, and a permanent menace against liberty in all the countries of Europe. This is an inevitable result and, at the same time, a triumphant demonstration of that law of solidarity which is the fundamental law of humanity.

If, on the contrary, the Slavs triumph, under the colours of the Czar of Russia, it will be all over with humanity for a long time. There will remain only a single way of salvation for the Germans and for the entire West of Europe – namely, to liberate and revolutionise the Slavic peoples, including the Empire of Russia itself, as quickly as possible. In no other way can there be any triumph except for the most pitiless, the most brutal, the most inhuman reaction. Any other path can end only in the ruin of all human civilisation, at least for many centuries.

[XIV – *Liberty*, 28 May 1887]

But consider the question from a still broader point of view. Consider all Europe, including Russia, as a grand Federative Republic founded broadly on the principles of liberty, equality, justice, and solidarity. This would doubtless be an immense triumph for humanity. If to the population of Europe should be added that of the greater part of America and Oceanica, this would form a humanitarian Federation of from three hundred and forty to three hundred and fifty millions of souls. This would be really immense. But would humanity be definitively established on its foundations? No, for outside of this Federation there would still remain an even more immense population of eight hundred and fifty millions of Asiatics, whose civilisation, or rather, whose traditional barbarism and slavery, would remain suspended like a horrible menace over all this magnificent organisation of the free and humane world.

Here I permit myself to put a question which may at first appear singular, but which will none the less serve, by a sort of elimination, to determine in a still more precise manner this grand principle of human solidarity. If, instead of these eight hundred or eight hundred and fifty millions of barbarous men, there were in Asia as many wild beasts – lions or tigers – would the danger be the same for the liberty, for the very existence of society in Europe? It is undeniable that, if they found themselves there in such great numbers, they would be forced, by the impossibility of subsisting there all at the same time, to spread out – braving the inclemencies of the climate – over Europe. This would be, no doubt, a terrible invasion, but, nevertheless, not as terrible as that with which the Asiatic populations threaten us. Why? Are lions and tigers less ferocious than men? Alas! After what we have seen done by the Germans in France and by the French of Versailles against the French of Paris, we might almost be tempted to answer this question in the affirmative. Yes, men, when they are led by a Thiers or a Bismarck, when they are inspired by the clergy, by the nobility, by the *bourgeoisie* furious at finding themselves menaced in their economic privileges, by religious fanaticism, by military discipline, by State patriotism, when they can give full scope to their impure and ferocious desires, under the pretext of serving their country, artificial morality, and public order, may become and often show themselves more merciless and more destructive than the most ferocious beasts. But this is not the principal cause; a little ferocity, more or less, does not constitute a difference so great, and the ferocity of carnivorous beasts would amply suffice to destroy and devour all.

The principal cause resides in the superior intelligence and in the progressive sociability of man – the first, as we have already said, being able to develop only in society, but, viewed in another light, constituting also, at the same time that it is itself incessantly stimulated by the growing needs of life, the active principle of all social progress. That is the secret of the power of man, and the elements of this power are found in every

human society, whatever the degree of its civilisation or barbarism. Men add to their numerical superiority the power of their progressively intelligent organisation. When they attack or when they defend themselves, they do not always follow one system, like the other species of animals, whose very nature seems to have dictated, once for all, their invariable tactics; no, they can act in concert with each other and contrive new plans, collectively devising methods more in conformity with new circumstances. In a word, they are always still farther perfecting the organisation of their collective forces; slaves themselves, they create those horrible machines of war, destruction, and enslavement called States.

The first historic States, as we know, were born in Asia. Asia was the cradle of all religions, of all despotisms; and today it is still Asia which menaces the liberty and humanity of the civilised world.

If Asia were peopled with wild beasts only, if Europe were menaced only with the invasion of some hundreds of millions of lions or tigers, such a danger would doubtless be very serious, but in no way to be compared to that with which she is really threatened today by the existence in Asia of these eight hundred to eight hundred and fifty millions of ferocious men, capable of constituting States, forming already immense despotic States, and sure to overflow, sooner or later, into Europe. If this overflow were only of wild beasts, even if their number were twice as great, European humanity, doubtless with great effort, might succeed in destroying it. But eight hundred millions of men cannot be exterminated.

Can they be enslaved? England and Russia are attempting it today. The first has established an immense empire in the Indies; the second, while drawing each day nearer the English positions in the South, is trying to establish one between the Caspian Sea and Persia on one side, and the Western frontier of the Chinese Empire on the other, waiting till it can encroach upon Persia and China, both of which it already surrounds on three different sides – that is, on the east, west, and north; inasmuch as it is exerting itself today to take possession also of Mongolia and Manchuria, on the south of the Amur river, and has already taken possession of the whole eastern part of China along the Gulf of Tartary from the mouth of that river to Korea, at the same time that it is throwing its grappling-irons on the Northern islands of Japan. In this manner, England on one side and Russia on the other seem bound to enclose, if not to stifle, the whole Asiatic East in their arms for the greatest triumph of civilisation.

Will they succeed? We can say with certainty that they will not. They will not succeed for the simple reason that, being ambitious rivals, they make incessant war upon each other in Asia, a war to the death, the one seeking to baffle the projects and to paralyse the efforts of the other, conspiring, arming, and stirring up the Asiatic populations one against the other; so that without intending it, they accustom these populations to our military tactics and to the use of European arms; and as these populations are not counted by tens, but by hundreds of millions, the most probable result of all these intrigues and of this struggle between the two powers which are disputing the dominion of Asia will be to shake up this Asiatic world which has hitherto lain motionless, and to pour it through the valley of the Amur, through Siberia, through the country of the Kirghizes, through Persia, and through Turkey, a second time, over Europe.

I am convinced, for example, that all the ephemeral triumphs which the Russian government is obtaining today in Japan will end, in the not distant future, in the entire destruction of Russian dominion over the entire valley of the Amur, under the irresistible force of a formidable Japanese invasion which the Russian government will find itself in no condition to oppose. The valley of the Amur is a magnificent country, enjoying a temperate climate and as fertile as Japan itself. Its area is almost as large as that of Italy and five-sevenths of that of Japan. And it has in all only forty thousand inhabitants, and what is worse, Russia can never people it, for between it and European Russia stretches immense Siberia over a distance of nearly four thousand miles – a country twenty-six and a half times as large as France and which has itself only a little over four million inhabitants, including the forty thousand in the valley of the Amur. If we except the country of the Kirghizes, all the southern part of Siberia along the northern frontier of China is an excessively fertile country, in spite of the severity of the winter, which lasts from six to seven months, but which does not at all frighten the Russian peasants; so that an emigration of these peasants from European Russia would find as much and more land than they would need, long before reaching the banks of the Amur. It must be centuries, therefore, before the valley of the Amur can be peopled by Russians.

Japan, which is separated from this country only by the Gulf of Tartary, is a country of thirty millions of inhabitants. The Japanese are not like the Chinese; they are not an old people. On the contrary, they are a people very new, very barbarous, full of vigour and energy, and endowed with much natural intelligence. They are a people who observe, who learn well and very quickly. At present they only imitate, like all

peoples just becoming civilised. But they have pushed this talent of imitation so far that in a short time they have learned the art of constructing steamboats, of manufacturing guns, and of casting cannon. Today young Japanese go to study in the Universities and in the Polytechnic Institutes of Europe. All the journals have been talking of one of those feudal princes who still share the power with the Tycoon and the Mikado, and who, with the aid of a Prussian sergeant, has organised in Japan one or two battalions of troops disciplined and armed like the Europeans. It was in this way that Peter the Great began. They have already commenced to build a navy, and all this goes on and is developed with an unheard-of rapidity. Look out for the Russian possessions on the Amur; I do not give them fifty years. The whole power of Russia in Siberia is only fictitious. Imagine an invasion of some tens of millions of Chinese of all sorts, pushed by hunger – what resistance could be offered them by those poor Siberian towns, the largest of which, Irkoutsk, numbers only thirty thousand souls, and which are separated one from another by hundreds, what do I say? by thousands of miles. The Chinese are a people intellectually more debased and physically more decrepit than the Japanese; but necessity imparts energy to the feeblest; the atrocious, pitiless civil wars which are today rending the interior of this immense Empire, apparently, but only apparently, immovable, will end by newly tempering the energies and characters of its people. The Europeans, by going to Pekin, have put an end to the old Empire; a new order of things must undoubtedly arise from its ruins, a formidable new movement – for a movement of five hundred millions of men can be nothing else than formidable – and then, Europe, beware!

But even though there were not this war of two rival powers in Asia; even supposing all Europe reunited and agreed upon a common action – could Europe conquer Asia and maintain dominion there? From two hundred and sixty-five to two hundred and seventy millions of Europeans, united to seventy-five millions of Americans – could these keep in subjection eight hundred millions of barbarous Asiatics? Even admitting the possibility of this fact, it is clear that they could do it only to the injury of their own liberty. For to maintain so many millions of men in slavery, they must maintain formidable standing armies, armies which in a very short time would adopt the manners, ideas, and customs of the barbarous and enslaved populations of Asia and even surpass them in savage barbarity. They would split up among themselves; they would dispute over the booty; each fortunate general would pose as a sovereign; and there, would be no result from this change in Asia except that, at the head of these brutal masses, there would be found well organised and well disciplined troops, with generals who had become dictators and sovereigns and who would lead them and the Asiatic hordes to pillage Europe.

[XV – *Liberty*, 18 June 1887]

Therefore there is but one means of saving Europe – the civilisation of Asia. Such is the inevitable consequence of this law of solidarity which unconsciously unites all humanity, and which makes the destiny of each individual dependent upon that of his whole nation, and the destiny of each nation upon that of all nations and tribes, of all human collectivities, in a word, large or small, which all together constitute humanity.

Civilise Asia! That is easy to say, but difficult to do; to civilise it in a manner to render it not only inoffensive, but useful to and in sympathy with the liberty and humanity of Europe! In official and officious regions, as well as in all circles where conservatism, doctrinarianism, and *bourgeois* authoritarianism prevail, much is said about civilisation; indeed, today they talk of nothing else. But what is called civilisation in such circles is pure barbarism, only refined and perfected in the direction of organisation and not in that of the humanisation of destructive and brutal forces. Civilisation in this sense signifies exploitation, subjection, slavery, if not extermination. Bismarck, Thiers, the three emperors of Europe, the Pope, the Sultan, all the statesmen, all the generals, of Europe, are the knights of this civilisation.

It is a long time since England especially, but Russia also, undertook this work of the civilisation of Asia. The principal means are, first, conquest, and then commerce and religious propagandism, I have just said what 1 think of conquest. Of these three means commerce is doubtless the most efficacious. It-brings Asia and Europe together by the exchange of their products, and by this means even establishes between them a commencement of real solidarity. The peaceful invasion of European merchandise must necessarily carry with it – very slowly, it is true – the successive introduction at least of some of the customs and habits of European life; but with these customs and habits are indissolubly bound up certain ideas, certain sentiments, and certain social relations, heretofore unknown in Asia; furtively, insensibly, Asia is being penetrated by at least a few drops of that *human respect* of which she is utterly ignorant and which is the true, the only foundation of all morality and civilisation.

Of reverence or of divine worship, which Mazzini preaches to us, probably to take us back to Asia, she

has had only too much. All the religions which today still afflict the human world were born in Asia, not even excepting the new religion of Mazzini, which is in reality, as I shall presently demonstrate, only a very strange eclectic collection of Chinese, Brahministic, Buddhistic, Jewish, and Christian principles – and if we should search thoroughly, we should find Mohammedanism also, the whole sprinkled with Platonic metaphysics and Catholico-Danteistic theosophy. But what has been always lacking in Asia, the complete absence of which properly constitutes Asiatic brutality, is human respect. The life of man, his dignity, his liberty, count for nothing there. All that is pitilessly crushed in blood and mire by God, by castes, by the principle of authority, by the State. Nowhere can we see more clearly that these two principles, these two pestilent historical fictions – God and the State – are the intellectual and moral source of all slavery; whence it follows that, from the point of view of intellectual and moral propagandism, what must be done first of all to emancipate Asia is to destroy in its popular masses faith in any authority, whether divine or human.

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Is the Christian propagandism exercised today on so large a scale in China, in Cochinchina, in Japan, in the East Indies, and in Tartary, by the French Jesuits, by the Protestant Biblists of England and America, and by the Russian Popes, really capable of civilising, of emancipating Asia, intellectually and morally? The question is answered decidedly in the negative by the facts. For almost three centuries already has Christianity, represented at first by the Portuguese missionaries, later by the Jesuits, and, beginning with the past century, by the English Protestants, tried to Christianise China, Japan, and the Indies. Vain efforts! At most they have succeeded in making some hundreds of thousands of men accept a few religious ceremonies, a few Christian rites; an absolutely external conversion, for not a single spark of the Christian spirit has entered into these souls. Mohammedanism, much better adapted, it seems, to these rude natures, at once contemplative and violent, idle in their daily lives, but destructive and furious when aroused under the impulse of any passion whatsoever, seems to carry on today a propagandism much more extensive and real than that of Christianity.

As for Christianity, it has made a complete failure in the East. One would say that, after having vomited it from its breast, the East wishes to hear no further mention of it. This is so true that the few primitive churches which remain, either in Syria or in Armenia or in Abyssinia, are dying of inanition...

But even supposing that either Christianity or Mohammedanism should finish by spreading throughout the East, would this be a real progress for civilisation, in the *human sense* of the word, the only one which, as we have just seen, can avert the horrible danger with which the Eastern world menaces the liberty of Europe? Have not these two religions for a fundamental principle, as well as all the other religions which have sprung from the East like themselves, the belief in divine authority and consequently in human slavery? I think I have no need to demonstrate it for Mohammedanism; but has not Christianity itself, whatever form it may take, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, or Protestant, always been contrary to liberty? I very well know that I may be pointed to the examples of a part of Switzerland, of Holland, of England, and of the United States of America – not of Germany, I hope – as proof, in opposition to what I have just stated, that Protestantism has established liberty in Europe. This is a great error. It is the economic, material emancipation of the bourgeois class on the one hand, and on the other its necessary accompaniment, the intellectual, anti-Christian, and anti-religious emancipation of this class, which, in spite of Protestantism, have created that exclusively political and *bourgeois* liberty which is today easily confounded with the grand, universal, human liberty, which only the proletariat can create, because its essential condition is the disappearance of those centres of authority called States, and the complete emancipation of labour, the real base of human society.

Moreover, is not the present state of Europe an evident proof of the absolute incapacity of Christianity to emancipate men and to organise society according to justice – what do I say? – to even inspire their political and social acts with a somewhat human character? Europe counts today nearly a dozen centuries of Christianity and three centuries of

Protestantism. What is its last official word today? The veracity of the Popes, the liberalism and humanity of the Mouraviefs, the Thiers, and the Bismarcks. Imagine all these great men, accompanied by their priests, their clerks, their generals, and their officers, not forgetting their great manufacturers, their great merchants, their bankers, reigning as sovereigns in Asia in the name of a Christian civilisation, acquiring renewed strength in the Divine sources of the old Oriental slavery! It would be then that Europe and humanity with her would be lost.

It is clear that, in the absence of a truly human and moral principle, there remains to the Europe of today, official and *bourgeois*, only one means of civilising the East – namely, commerce. The needs of the world's commerce have succeeded in overthrowing today all the walls with which the East had surrounded herself in the interest of her immobility and conservatism. Railroads are being built in the Indies, they will necessarily be built, sooner or later, in Asia Minor, in Persia, in Tartary, and in the Chinese Empire itself. Telegraph lines already bind Japan, the Indies, and Pekin itself with Europe and America. All this introduces the commodities and with them the social relations of Europe at the remotest points; all this tends to destroy the fatal stagnation of the Orient.

The Orient, these eight hundred millions of men asleep and enslaved which constitute two-thirds of humanity, will be forced to awake and put itself in motion. But in what direction and to what end? Behold the terrible question on the solution of which the whole future of humanity in Europe depends. Is commerce, as it is carried on today, capable of humanising the East? Alas! No.

It enriches many commercial houses in Europe, it increases the accumulated riches of a much more limited number of great merchants in the East, but it does nothing for the amelioration of the wretched economic situation or for the social, political, intellectual, and moral emancipation of the populations of the East. How should it, since it does not and cannot do this for those of Europe? The commerce of England is certainly superior to that of all other countries in the world. But the economic situation of the English proletariat and especially of the peasantry is miserable. In London alone there are almost a hundred thousand individuals who do not know what they will eat tomorrow, and the fact of able workmen seeking, but not finding, work has become a common and daily fact in this richest and most prosperous of all the countries in the world.

Eastern commerce cannot civilise, cannot humanise the countries of the East for this simple reason, if for no other – that it is founded principally on the misery and slavery of the people, a slavery and a misery which are the principal foundation of the cheapness of Eastern goods, the importation of which into Europe enriches exclusively the great commercial houses of Europe.

From all this does it follow that the present Europe is absolutely incapable of civilising or humanising the East? Yes, it would have to be said, if there had not recently appeared a fact of the extremest importance, which opens new prospects for the civilisation of the East. I refer to those hundreds of thousands of Chinese labourers who, pushed on by the surplus population of the Celestial Empire, are going to seek their bread today in remote countries, principally in Australia and California. They are very badly received and looked upon by the American workmen. This is very natural: accustomed to a miserable existence, they can sell their labour much cheaper and make a competition very dangerous to the labour of American workmen. On the other hand, habituated from their infancy to the hardest slavery – since that is the foundation of the religion of the East – and to bad treatment of all kinds, they are welcomed by the employers with double favour. The employers of America, as well as those of Europe and, in general, all men who are put in a position of command, are naturally more or less despots; they love the slavery of their labourers and they detest their revolts; this is in the nature of things.

The Chinese labourers are sober, patient, servile, and skilful. These are precious qualities to employers. But by these very qualities they degrade, not only with regard to wages, but morally, with regard to human dignity, the labour and consequently also the whole economic and social position of the labourers of America, from which results the growing hatred of the latter for the Chinese labourers. We know that in California monster meetings are held with a view to the expulsion of these Oriental slaves from the sacred soil of liberty.

This is not easy. Hundreds of thousands of workmen, organised in secret societies for protection against the persecutions of American workmen, are not to be driven across the ocean at a day's notice. Neither is it desirable, for this is perhaps the only way which the force of events and the necessities of international production have opened for the real civilisation of the East. The presence and the competition of these Chinese labourers is doubtless very inconvenient, today, for the labourers of America, but it is salutary for China, for these hundreds of thousands of Chinese labourers are serving today in Australia and California their apprenticeship in liberty, dignity, rights, and human respect. We have already seen that, following the example set by American workmen, they have

struck on several occasions for an increase of wages and an amelioration of the conditions of their work.

This is the first step in the path of human and real emancipation; this is the apprenticeship of humanity, of its foundation, of its aim, of its thought, of the only road to its emancipation, of its force – "the foundation of human liberty and human dignity on emancipated and solidary labour by the collective revolt of the working masses, organised, not by the efforts of directors, guardians, or any official leaders whatever, but by the spontaneous action of the labourers themselves, with a view to the emancipation of labour and of human right, and thereby constituting the solidarity of each and all in society."

The revolt of the labourers and the spontaneous organisation of human solidary labour through the free federation of the workingmen's groups! This, then, is the answer to the enigma which the Eastern Sphinx forces us today to solve, threatening to devour us if we do not solve it. The principle of justice, liberty, and equality by and in solidary labour which is agitating today the working masses of America and Europe must penetrate the East equally and completely. The salvation of Europe is to be had only at this price, for this is the true, the only constitutive principle of humanity, and no people can be completely and solidarity free in the human sense of the word, unless all humanity is free.

The revolt of the labourers and the spontaneous organisation of human solidary labour through the free federation of the workingmen's groups! This, then, is the answer… The principle of justice, liberty, and equality by and in solidary labour which is agitating today the working masses of America and Europe must penetrate the East equally and completely

To conclude:

It is not enough that the Latin, Celtic, German, and Anglo-German West of Europe should emancipate itself and form a grand Federative Republic founded on emancipated and solidarity organised labour. That this constitution may be enduring it is indispensable that the whole Slavic, Grecian, Turkish, Magyaric, Tartaric, and Finnish East of Europe should emancipate itself in the same way and form an integral part of this Federation. Nor will it suffice for humanity to triumph in Europe, America, and Australia. It must also penetrate the dark and divine East, and expel therefrom the last vestige of Divinity. Triumphant in Africa and especially in Asia, it must drive from its last refuges this cursed principle of authority, with all its religious, political, economic, and social consequences, in order that in its place human liberty, founded solely on solidary labour, scientific reason, human respect, justice, and equality, may triumph, develop, and become organised.

Such is the *final object*, such the *absolute morality*, of the humanity which Mazzini vainly seeks in his God, and which we materialists and atheists look upon as the constitutive principle, as the fundamental, natural law, of the human race.

THE END

Who are right, the idealists or the materialists? The question once stated in this way, hesitation becomes impossible. Undoubtedly the idealists are wrong and the materialists right. Yes, facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower, whose root lies in the material conditions of existence. Yes, the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social, is but a reflection of its economic history. – **Bakunin, *God and the State***

To Celso Cerretti

Michael Bakunin

13-27 March 1872

La Société nouvelle, Year 12, Volume 1, 1896

My dear friend.

At the same time your letter arrived, I received the huge, the sad news: Mazzini is dead.

Italy has just lost one of its most illustrious sons. For none of us can doubt that Mazzini, along with Garibaldi, was one of the greatest Italian figures, the second hero of the century. An eminent intelligence, a fervent heart, an indomitable will, an unwavering, sublime devotion, these are certainly qualities that no one will dare to dispute and which make great men.

And yet, at the end of his long and magnificent career, he encountered in us convinced and irreconcilable adversaries. We fought him, not with a light heart, but with sadness in our souls, and because *our duty*, *our religion*, the religion of humanity, opposed to that of divinity, had commanded us to fight.

Mazzini's theological ideas, imbued with that liberty-crushing power inherent in all divine abstractions, having finally triumphed over his revolutionary temperament and his fundamentally liberal Italian nature, transformed him, in his last days, into an implacable adversary of the revolution. He cursed it in all its greatest contemporary manifestations: in the Paris Commune, whose destructive programme of the political centralisation of States, and whose uprising as well as heroic martyrdom inaugurated a new era in history; in the International, a magnificent organisation, which emerged from the very depths of the life of the proletariat of Europe, and which has unquestionably become today the most powerful if not the only instrument of its imminent liberation; in free thought, this *alter ego*, this ideal expression, inseparable from the material emancipation of humankind; and in positive science, the human sun that rises today to replace with its certain day the equivocal light of divine suns; finally in the generous and fruitful alliance that the most vibrant and intelligent part of your youth has concluded with the Italian proletariat, on the sole basis of human justice and solidarity. Mazzini attacked us in everything we hold dear and sacred, and sought to impose upon us ideas and institutions that we detest with all our hearts and with the full force of our convictions. We would have been cowards and traitors if we had not fought him to the bitter end. The deep feeling of sympathetic respect, of piety which we have never ceased to feel for the sublime and sincere retrograde, had made this fight very painful, very distressing, but it was impossible for us to evade it without betraying our cause, the great cause of the final triumph of humanity over divinity and brutality united in a single reactionary effort – by the economic and social emancipation of the proletariat.

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[…]

Allow a friend to protect you from another danger. All of thinking and feeling Italy, gripped by immense sorrow, is united today in a feeling of adoration for Mazzini. Even if there were no other proof than this, it alone would suffice to show how Italy, amidst the general decline of Europe, has remained a great and vibrant nation. Italy honours and affirms itself in the veneration it pays to one of its greatest, one of its most passionately devoted sons and servants. What could be more natural, in this moment of supreme pain and enthusiasm, than for Mazzinians and Italian Internationalists, bourgeois revolutionaries and revolutionary socialists, forgetting for a moment all their past disagreements, to extend a fraternal hand to

one another. But, please, even in the midst of this patriotic fervour, do not forget the chasm that separates your programme from the programme of the Mazzinians. Do not let yourselves to be drawn by them – which they will certainly try to do – into a joint practical undertaking that aligns with their programme, plans and methods of action, not yours. Call upon them to unite with you on your own terrain, but do not follow them onto theirs, which you could not accept without sacrificing and betraying this great cause of the proletariat that has now become yours. Do not forget that between the bourgeois revolution they dream of and the social revolution that now demands your services, there is truly an abyss, not only in terms of the goals, which are fundamentally different, but also in terms of the means, which must necessarily conform to those goals. By accepting their plans of action, not only would you ruin all your socialist work and tear your country away from the revolutionary solidarity that unites it today with all of Europe, but you would condemn yourselves, along with those who follow you down this new and disastrous path, to certain defeat, to a bloody and complete fiasco.

[…]

Our principle is quite the opposite, is that not so[?]; apart from positive science, we recognise no other source of moral truths than the very life of the people, positive science being only the methodical and reasoned summary of the immense historical experimentation of people. Society, taken in the broadest sense of the word, the people, the *vile* multitude, the mass of workers, not only gives power and life, it also gives the elements of all modern thought, and a thought which is not drawn from its midst and is not the faithful expression of popular instincts is, in my opinion, a stillborn thought. From this I draw the conclusion that the role of devoted and educated youth is not that of revealers, of prophets, of instructors and of teachers, not that of creators, but only of midwives of the thought born from the very life of the people; that is to say, young men who want to serve the people must seek their inspirations not outside of them, but within them, to give them in a clearly expressed form what they carry in a confused way in their aspirations, as unconscious as they are powerful.

Among the people's thoughts, the one that undeniably holds the foremost place today in the aspirations of the masses of all countries is *material or economic emancipation*. The Mazzinians, from the height of their extra-popular and transcendent idealism, greatly disdain this tendency, and if they have been forced to make certain concessions to it recently, they do so only with a kind of contemptuous condescension towards the *vile brutality* of these masses incapable of forgetting their bellies and living solely in contemplation of the ideal. Their contemptuous socialism is a kind of lure for the multitude whom the beauty of this ideal does not touch. Blinded by their own theological and political ideas, ideas which in the end represent so many old and new chains for the people, they saw in this aspiration only the brutal expression of brutal appetites, and they did not understand that, in its unconscious and naïve form, it contains the highest and most emancipatory idea of the century; that which, by destroying all idealities as abstractions, as fictions or as theological, poetic, juridical and political symbols, must transform them into living popular realities: truth, justice, freedom, equality, solidarity, fraternity, humanities, all these magnificent things, as long as they remained in the state of theological, poetic, political and juridical truths, have only served to consecrate and cloak the most brutal and harsh oppression and exploitation in the real life of the people, and expressed only the condemnation of the masses to eternal misery and servitude. Has not the true basis, as well as the ultimate consequence of all these splendid abstractions, always been, since the beginning of history, the exploitation of the forced labour of the masses for the benefit of privileged minorities called classes? Has not the Catholic Church, the most ideal of all in principle, been, since the first years of its official existence, that is to say, since the Emperor Constantine the Great, the most rapacious and avaricious institution? And everything else follows suit. All the splendours of Christian civilisation, Church, State, material prosperity of nations, science, art, poetry, has not all of this rested upon the support of the slavery, the subjugation, the misery of millions of workers who constitute the true people? What, then, is the people doing by asking this terrible economic question? It attacks this entire civilisation, which has enslaved it for too long, at its very foundation. It forces eternal ideals whether theological or political to fall from the heavens to the earth of real life and transform themselves into living and fruitful realities for the people. By demanding their daily bread, the full product of their labour, the people are thus demanding for themselves science, justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, and, in a word, humanity. It follows that their materialism, which the Mazzinians so despise, is the highest expression of practical and real idealism.

[…]

What can and must save Italy from the degrading and ruinous state of prostration into which it now finds itself, what you must prepare and organise, it seems to me, is not a ridiculous uprising of heroic but blind

youth, but a *great popular revolution*. For this, it is not enough to rouse a few hundred young people to take up arms, it is not even enough to rouse the urban proletariat; the countryside, your twenty million peasants, must also rise up.

[…]

This is where the greatest danger lies. The entire future of your country depends on the side your peasants will take in the coming revolution. Until now, they have remained passive and have submitted almost without resistance to the fate and forms of government that the cities have been kind enough to impose upon them. But you know better than I that the peasants in your country, as everywhere else, and perhaps in your country more than anywhere else, do not like the cities. Since the cities have been, more or less, politically revolutionary, the peasants were necessarily reactionary, less because of the malevolent influence of priests than because of the entirely natural and, let us say, the entirely legitimate hatred they harboured against the cities, both through historical tradition and as a result of all their more recent experiences. The peasants detest the bourgeoisie.

Now that the urban proletariat is awakening and organising itself in a revolutionary manner in Italy as well as in all other European countries, the countryside, the compact mass of the peasantry, has become the only means of salvation and the only fulcrum for reaction. A fulcrum so formidable that as long as we do not wrest it from reaction, we will never be able to triumph over it; we will always be defeated by it. The entire question of revolutionary triumph thus boils down to this: *How to rouse, how to revolutionise the peasantry?*

My friends, is it not clear to you as to me that Mazzini's magical and mystical formulas, which have lost even today the power they once held over Italian youth, are insufficient to rouse not only the peasants, but even the proletariat of your cities? Both the people of the countryside and the people of the cities thirst for emancipation. But what is called political freedom in reality emancipates only the bourgeoisie; and since this sort of freedom is organised in a large centralist State, even if that State were a republic as Mazzini would have liked and as the Mazzinians still want; since [this kind of] freedom is very expensive and since all the expenses of the State ultimately fall upon the working people, it follows that this political freedom heaps a new burden upon the *camel of the people*, which is overburdened to the point of being unable to carry any more, as General Garibaldi aptly said. This so-called political freedom in the name of which the Mazzinians, despite so many cruel disappointments, still do not despair of rousing the popular masses, without whose powerful cooperation there is no possible revolution, this political freedom therefore means nothing else, for these masses, than new servitude and new misery.

The positive objective of the social revolution will be the organisation of a more or less emancipated society… As a political organisation, it is the absolutely free spontaneous federation of communes and workers' associations; as a social organisation, it is the collective appropriation of capital and land by workers' associations

Real emancipation for the people can only be achieved by the social revolution. This revolution will necessarily have, like all living and active things, two sides: the negative side and the positive side. The negative side is the destruction of what is, of all that ruins and oppresses popular life; this will be precisely the act by which the camel of the people will throw to the ground the ever-growing burden that has crushed it for centuries; and this burden itself is of a twofold nature: the purely political and fiscal burden, which hinders the spontaneous development, the free movement of the masses, on the one hand, and on the other, overburdens and ruins them with taxes and duties – this is the burden of the State. The other part of the burden is the economic exploitation of the people's labour by capital monopolised in the hands of the very lofty and very wealthy bourgeoisie. At bottom, these two parts of the burden are inseparable, because the State, necessarily hostile, conquering and rupturing human solidarity externally, has never had any other mission internally than to consecrate, legitimise and regulate the exploitation of the people's labour, for the benefit of the privileged classes.

The overthrow of the current State and financial monopoly is therefore the negative objective of the social revolution. What will be the limits of this revolution? In theory, by its very logic, it goes very far. But practice always lags behind theory, because it is subject to a multitude of social conditions, the sum of

which constitutes the actual situation of a country, and which necessarily weigh upon every truly popular revolution. The duty of leaders will not be to impose their own fantasies upon the masses, but to go as far as popular instinct and aspirations allow or dictate. The positive objective of the social revolution will be the organisation of a more or less emancipated society.

In this respect too, the ideal is very clearly defined by the theory. As a political organisation, it is the absolutely free spontaneous federation of communes and workers' associations; as a social organisation, it is the collective appropriation of capital and land by workers' associations. In practice, this will be what each section, each province, each commune and each workers' association can and wants to do, provided that it truly reflects the real will of the people and not the arbitrariness, the fancy, or the reluctance of the leaders which decide.

One of the greatest concerns of those who today are at the head of the revolutionary socialist movement in Italy should be, in my opinion, to find and fix, as far as it is possible to do today, at least the principal lines of the plan and especially the programme of the coming revolutionary uprising. Without ever losing sight of the ideal, which must guide us as the North Star once guided sailors – and by this word ideal I mean all justice, all freedom, the most complete economic and social equality, and universal solidarity and human fraternity – in order to form a practical and possible programme, it is necessary to take into account the different situations of each of your provinces, as well as the dispositions of certain classes of your society. Not all of them. For if you tried to please all classes, you would inevitably arrive at nothing; the interests of the governing and upper classes being too opposed to those of the lower classes for any reconciliation between them to be possible. I therefore believe that all classes which, either directly or indirectly, have an interest in maintaining the current State must be sacrificed without mercy: thus the entire nobility and the entire upper bourgeoisie of finance, commerce and industry, all the great owners of land and capital, and to a large part also the middle bourgeoisie: those whose children now fill the army as officers and the bureaucracy as functionaries. This middle bourgeoisie, in Italy as everywhere, is a cowardly and stupid class, the support of all corruption, all injustice, all despotism.

In Italy, there are four social strata that, in my opinion, must be taken into account. And above all, the two principal strata, the most numerous and forming the real basis of the entire nation: *the proletariat of the cities and that of the countryside*; *the workers proper and the peasants*. It is they who must set the main tone, the real trend for the next revolution. Do I need to tell you that both are necessarily, eminently, instinctively socialist?

the two principal strata, the most numerous and forming the real basis of the entire nation: *the proletariat of the cities and that of the countryside*; *the workers proper and the peasants*. It is they who must set the main tone, the real trend for the next revolution.

Your urban workers give you new proof of this every day. The eagerness with which they rally under the banner of the International wherever there are even a few individuals of goodwill capable of displaying it is irrefutable proof. The Mazzinians themselves have finally acknowledged this; thus we see them today engaging in a socialism of very poor quality and no doubt with much clumsiness. Idealists, they will never be able to do it seriously. But the socialist spirit that has seized the working masses is too powerful for them to ignore any longer. Within this mass, which I have called the urban proletariat, the entire ideal, as I have just defined it, is already the object of a very marked, very explicit tendency, so that if it were the only factor, we could go very far. The passion that animates it above all is that of absolute equality and justice. It demands that all people work equally under the same economic and social conditions, for the world to be a world of workers, and for there to be no more gentlemen, no more possibility for anyone to fatten themselves on the labour of others. It wants every worker to enjoy the *full product of their own labour*. Mazzini himself, in his later writings, acknowledged the legitimacy of this demand, which was the first inscribed in the programme of the International. But do you know what this demand means? Nothing less than the appropriation of all capital by workers' associations, accomplished in one way or another. For as long as capital remains monopolised In the hands of individuals as personal property, and by the same reason workers' associations, properly representing labour, remain

deprived of capital, nothing can prevent capitalists from appropriating for their own benefit a portion, and always the largest portion, of the products of that labour. The interest on capital and all the premiums it earns in various financial, commercial and industrial speculations amount to nothing other than this unjust appropriation. For after all, put together as much capital as you like, it will never produce offspring. The moment workers' associations are freed from the yoke of capital, which means that by possessing capital themselves they no longer need to pay for the services of outside capital, the latter will yield no more interest, and its current owners will have quickly consumed it. Emancipation of labour can therefore mean nothing other than the expropriation of the capitalists and the transformation of all capital necessary for work into the collective property of the workers' associations.

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As for the political ideal contained within the instincts of the urban proletariat, it seems to me to be divided today between two rather opposed and contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, the urban worker, even the least educated, detached by the very nature of his occupations from the local spirit imprinted by the cultivation of the land, readily understands the universal solidarity of workers of all countries, and finds his homeland more in his particular trade than in the land on which he was born. The urban worker is more or less cosmopolitan. On the other hand, undoubtedly under the influence of the bourgeois doctrines he has endured for so long, he is not very opposed to the centralisation of the State. German and English workers today dream of this centralisation of a large State, provided, they say, that this State is truly popular: *the workers' State*, which, in my opinion, constitutes a utopia, since every State and centralist government necessarily implies an aristocracy and exploitation, even if only those of the governing class. Let us never forget that the State signifies domination and that human nature is such that all domination inevitably and always results in exploitation.

[…]

Thus, the expropriation of the holders of capital and the transformation of capital into the collective property of the workers' associations, along with the organisation of universal solidarity – this is the ideal of the urban proletariat.

Complete local freedom and the appropriation of all land by the workers of the land, this is the ideal of the rural proletariat.

These two ideals can be readily reconciled by the principle of the free federation of communes and workers' associations, boldly proclaimed a year ago by the Paris Commune. And if there were only these two social strata, the programme for the social revolution would be quickly outlined.

But there are two other strata you must take into account; first, because their increasingly unfortunate situation inevitably makes them more revolutionary every day, and second, because, being very numerous, they exert a very real influence upon the people: in the cities, the *petit bourgeois*; and in the countryside, the *class of very small landowners*. These two classes have no real programme, both being completely disorientated. By their traditions and social vanity, they are somewhat akin to the privileged classes. Conversely, by their increasingly threatened and sacrificed instincts, and because of the real conditions of their existence, they are, on the other hand, increasingly drawn towards the proletariat. Yet they still retain some interests that would suffer from an overly consistent and logical application of the socialist principle, as it already emerges from the aspirations of the masses: reconciling these interests with these aspirations, *without sacrificing the latter*, is the task that falls to you today.

Federalism and socialism are the two principal elements of the coming revolution. This is the absolute opposite of Mazzini's programme. Is it not clear, then, that any reconciliation between these two parties is impossible on the Mazzinian terrain? You cannot participate in their endeavours, firstly because they are inevitably doomed to failure; and secondly and above all because your goals and methods are absolutely different. You want the complete and definitive emancipation of Italian society and its new organisation or reorganisation on the basis of work that is both free and collective, from the bottom up, by

means of federation and natural groupings. And they dream, on the contrary, of a new form of enslavement for this society under the yoke of a great unitary State. You want to prepare and organise a formidable popular uprising that will sweep away all opposition, crushing all that dares to resist it and rendering resistance itself impossible. And incapable of organising, or even dreaming of, such an uprising, the Mazzinians will continue to exhaust themselves in ridiculous endeavours.

[…]

I was therefore deeply saddened to see that the general [Garbaldi], troubled by the discord between democratic and socialist opinions in Italy, has essentially abandoned the idea of convening this congress [of the Italian Democracy] or has postponed it indefinitely, until there is more harmony in ideas. I believe that if you want to wait until then, you will wait a long time, forever, and that you will all die without having seen this absolute harmony realised. My dear friend, let me tell you, this harmony is unattainable and not even desirable. This harmony is the absence of struggle, the absence of life; it is death. In politics, it is despotism. Consider all of history and convince yourself that in every era and in every country, whenever there has been development and exuberance of life, thought, and free and creative action, there has been dissension, intellectual and social struggle, struggle of political parties, and that it is precisely in the midst of these struggles and thanks to them that nations have been the happiest and most powerful in the human sense of this word. This struggle did not or hardly existed in the great Asian monarchies: so there was a complete absence of human development. Consider, on the one hand, the Persian monarchy with its countless and disciplined troops, and on the other, free Greece, scarcely federated, continually tormented by the struggles of its peoples, its ideas, its parties. Who triumphed? Greece. What was the most fruitful period in Roman history? That was the struggle of the plebians against the patricians. And who brought greatness and glory to medieval Italy? Certainly, it was neither the papacy nor the empire. It was municipal liberties and the internal struggles of opinions and parties. Napoleon III had finally quelled these internal conflicts in France, and in doing so, he killed it. May the destiny of your beautiful homeland preserve it from a time when all minds are clam and in harmony. That would be the time of its demise.

See how different opinions can be. Many Italian democrats are alarmed by the division that have arisen within the democratic party in the last two years and see them as signs of the party's decline. I, on the contrary, see them as a sign of its resurrection and a guarantee of its fertile and vital power. The "consortium"[1] is not divided. – Is it any more alive for that? As long as it was divided into certain [illegible] it retained remnants of life. But now that a touching unity has been established within it, and that this concord has also invaded the party of the parliamentary left, which is now separated from it only by personal interests and ambitions, do you not feel that all of this official Italy is truly dead. Well! Just a few years ago, Italian democracy, slumbering in the harmonious uniformity of the same [illegible], was on the verge of death. – Socialism revived it and thereby sparked within it an immense development of diverse thoughts and tendencies, and consequently internal struggle, that great educator of the strength which creates…

I will never tire of repeating it: Uniformity is death. Diversity is life. Disciplinary unity, which can only be established in any social environment at the expense of the creative spontaneity of thought and life, kills nations. The truly powerful, living unity, the one we all desire, is that which freedom creates within the very free and diverse manifestations of life, expressed through struggle: it is the balancing and harmonisation of all living forces. – I understand that a general of a division in a regular army loves the deathly silence that discipline imposes on the crowd. – Your general, our general, the general of the people, does not need this silence of slaves: accustomed to living and commanding in the midst of storms, he is never so great as in the storm. The storm is the unleashing of popular life, the only force capable of sweeping away this world of established iniquities – and we cannot unleash this passion and this life enough.

[…]

Federalism and socialism are the two principal elements of the coming revolution. This is the absolute opposite of Mazzini's programme… You want the complete and definitive emancipation of Italian society and its new organisation or reorganisation on the basis of work that is both free and collective, from the bottom up, by means of federation and natural groupings

[1] The upper bourgeoisie and nobility. (*Black Flag*)

Revolutionary Groups

As is well-known, Bakunin liked to form secret societies. This was undoubtedly a product of his personal experiences (having no wish to be imprisoned again), the political situation in many countries (which made open organising difficult and dangerous) as well as his awareness of the corrupting nature of official power.

Undoubtedly, many of these programmes – whether for private or public groupings – were an attempt to clarify and develop ideas rather than serious attempts at forming any particular organisation. This is reflected by the changes in terminology. Initially, Bakunin seemed happy to call the new social organisation created by the revolution a "State" but that changed as his ideas developed. As Daniel Guérin suggested:

> **"In the First International the collectivists, whose spokesman was Bakunin, allowed the terms 'regenerate State,' 'new and revolutionary State,' or even 'socialist State' to be accepted as synonyms for 'social collective.' The anarchists soon saw, however, that it was rather dangerous for them to use the same word as the authoritarians while giving it a quite different meaning. They felt that a new concept called for a new word and that the use of the old term could be dangerously ambiguous; so they ceased to give the name 'State' to the social collective of the future. (*Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970], 60-1)**

The only grouping which seems to have had a significant existence was the Alliance of Socialist Democracy. This played an important role in building the International in many countries, not least Spain and Italy. As Marxist Paul Thomas notes, "the International was to prove capable of expanding its membership only at the behest of the Bakuninists": "Wherever the International was spreading, it was doing so under the mantle of Bakuninism." (*Karl Marx and the Anarchists* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985], 315, 319) Even Engels had to admit that the Spanish section was "one of finest organisations within the International" (which a handful of Spanish Marxists had to "rescue from the influence of the Alliance humbugs"). (*Collected Works* 23: 292)

What becomes clear from reading the letters sent by Bakunin is that they are appeals rather than orders, seeking to convince colleagues to pursue a particular course of action. As such, the existence of the Alliance was that of comrades communicating with each other rather than a formal organisation as such. The role of anarchists, as Bakunin's letters show, was one of convincing rather than ruling, seeking influence within the labour and other popular movements to secure popular support for a social revolution – the expropriation of capital and the destruction of the State – and for tactics which would preserve the revolutionary spirit and build the social, rather than the political, power of the working classes, by means of economic struggle and organisation.

Ultimately, Bakunin as a member of the International had the right to spread his ideas and seek to see them accepted by others within it. In this, he – like Marx and Engels – wrote letters to and worked with others of a like mind. For it was *not* "Marx's International", it was run by its members and should reflect their views not those of a single man.

Principles and Organisation of the Revolutionary International Society

Michael Bakunin

March 1866

[…]

II The National Families

[…]

67 – The *national catechisms* of different countries may therefore vary on all secondary points. – *But there are essential and fundamental points which must also be mandatory for the national organisations of all countries and which must consequently form the common basis of all national catechisms*. These points are:

a) The impossibility of the success of an isolated national revolution and consequently the necessity of an alliance and a revolutionary federation amongst all peoples who desire freedom.

b) The impossibility of such a federation or alliance without a common programme that equally satisfies the legitimate rights and needs of all nations, and that, without regard for so-called historical rights, nor for what are called the necessities or salvation of states, nor for any other vain or ambitious claim to predominance and power – all things which a people must know how to reject if it wishes to be truly free – will have as its sole principle and basis equal freedom for all and only justice.

c) Incompatibility of such a programme, incompatibility of freedom, equality, justice, cheap government, well-being, and the real emancipation of the working classes with the existence of centralised, militaristic and bureaucratic States. Absolute necessity of destroying all currently existing states in Europe, except Switzerland[1], and of radically dismantling all the political, military, administrative, judicial and financial institutions that today constitute the life and power of states.

Absolute necessity for each country wishing to be part of the free federation of peoples to replace its centralist, bureaucratic and military organisation with a federal organisation

d) Abolition of all religion, and of all state churches or state-subsidised churches, confiscation of all movable and immovable property of the Churches for the benefit of the provinces and communes – with this provision that all religions becoming henceforth absolutely free and concerning only the individual conscience of each person, each cult, whatever it may be, will be maintained solely by its believers.

e) Absolute necessity for each country wishing to be part of the free federation of peoples to replace its centralist, bureaucratic and military organisation with a federal organisation, founded solely on the absolute freedom and the autonomy of regions, provinces, communes, associations and individuals – with officials elected and responsible to the people, and with the arming of the nation [*armement national*]; an organisation which will no longer proceed as it does today, from top to bottom, and from the centre to the circumference, by the principle of unity, but from bottom to top and the circumference to the centre, by principle of free federation, starting from free individuals, who will form autonomous associations, communes; communes that will form autonomous provinces, provinces that will form regions; and regions, which by freely federating amongst themselves will form countries, which in turn will sooner or later form the universal and world federation.

f) The necessity of recognising the absolute right of secession for all countries, all regions, all provinces, all communes, all associations, as well as for all individuals

[11] Needless to say, Bakunin's perspectives on the Swiss State changed after he spent time there, seeing first hand that it was fundamentally no different than other States in spite of its federalist character. (*Black Flag*)

– with the conviction that once the right of secession is recognised – secessions in practice will become impossible, because national unities ceasing to be the produce of violence and historical falsehood, will be freely formed by the necessities and affinities inherent in each of their parts.

g) Political freedom is impossible without political equality.

Impossibility of the latter without economic and social equality.

h) *Necessity of a social revolution*.

The extent and scope of this revolution will differ to varying degrees in each country, depending upon the political and social situation and the degree of revolutionary development in each. – However, in all countries, it will be necessary to proclaim *certain principles* which alone today will be capable of engaging and rousing the popular masses regardless of the state of their civilisation. These are the following principles:

(a) The land belongs to everyone. But its use will belong only to those who cultivate it with their own hands. Abolition of the rent of land.

The land belongs to everyone. But its use will belong only to those who cultivate it with their own hands… capital and the instruments of labour will fall into the possession of those who apply them to the production of wealth by their own work… No revolution can succeed in any country today unless it is simultaneously a political and social revolution

(b) All social wealth being produced only by labour, whoever enjoys it without working is a thief.

(c) Political rights should belong only to honest people, they will belong only to workers.

(d) Without any spoliation, but solely by the economic effects and power of workers associations, capital and the instruments of labour will fall into the possession of those who apply them to the production of wealth by their own work.

(e) Every man must be the son of his deeds, and justice will only be satisfied when the organisation of society is such that everyone finds at birth the same means of support, education, instruction, and later the same external opportunities to create their own well-being by their own work.

(f) As far as possible in each country, emancipation of marriage from the tutelage of society – and equalisation of the rights of women with those of men.[1]

(i) No revolution can succeed in any country today unless it is simultaneously a political and social revolution. Any exclusively political revolution, whether national and directed solely against foreign domination, or domestic constitutional, even if its aim is the republic – consequently not having as its principal objective the immediate and real political and economic emancipation of the people – will be an illusory, deceitful, hopeless, disastrous, retrograde, and counter-revolutionary revolution.

(j) The revolution must not only be made for the people, it must be made by the people, and it can never succeed unless it involves all the masses of the countryside as well as those of the cities.

(k) Thus centralised by the idea and by the oneness of a programme common to all countries; centralised by a secret organisation which will rally not only all parts of a country, but also many if not all countries in a single plan of action; centralised again by the simultaneity of revolutionary movements in many rural and urban areas, the revolution must henceforth have to take and retain a *local character*, in the sense that it must not begin with a large concentration of all the revolutionary brothers of a country in a single place, nor ever again take on the romantic and bourgeois character of a quasi-revolutionary expedition, but, igniting at once in all parts of a country, it will take on that of a true popular revolution, in which women, the elderly, children will also take part, and which will thereby become invincible.

(l) This revolutionary may well be bloody and vindictive in its first days, during which popular justice will take place. But it will not retain this character for long, and will never assume that of systematic and cold-blooded terrorism. – It will wage war on positions and things far

[1] There is no entry “h” in the original text. (*Black Flag*)

more than on men, certain that things and the privileged and anti-social positions they create, much more powerful than individuals, constitute both the character and strength of its enemies.

(m) It will therefore begin by destroying everywhere all institutions and all establishments: churches, parliament, courts, administrations, army, banks, universities, etc., which constitute the very existence of the state. – The state must be completely demolished and declared bankrupt, not only in financial terms, but also in political, bureaucratic, military, judicial and police terms. But having gone bankrupt, having even ceased to exist, unable to pay its debts, the state will no longer be able to force anyone to pay their own – this responsibility will naturally fall upon each person's own conscience – At the same time everything that had belonged to the state will be confiscated for the benefit of the revolution in the communes and in the cities; the property of all reactionaries will also be confiscated, and all legal documents, whether related to lawsuits, property, or debts, will be burned, declaring null and void all civil, criminal, judicial or official paperwork that could not be destroyed, leaving everyone in the status quo of their possession.

In this way the social revolution will be accomplished, and once the enemies of the revolution are deprived of the means to harm it, there will be little need to resort to bloody measures against them, measures which are all the more undesirable as they invariably lead to a regrettable reaction sooner or later.

(n) At the same time as it localises itself everywhere, the revolution will necessarily take on a *federalist character*. Immediately after overthrowing the established government, the communes will have to reorganise themselves in a revolutionary manner, choosing leaders, an administration and revolutionary courts, all based on universal suffrage and the real accountability of all officials before the people. To defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. – But no commune will be able to defend itself remaining isolated. It will therefore be a necessity for each one to spread the revolution outwards by rousing all the neighbouring communes and, as they rise – to federate with them for common defence. – They will necessarily form a federal pact amongst themselves, based simultaneously on the solidarity of all and the autonomy of each. This pact will constitute the provincial charter. For the governance of common affairs, a provincial government and an assembly or parliament will necessarily be formed. The same revolutionary necessities will drive the autonomous provinces to federalise into regions, the regions into national federations, and the nations into international federations. And the order and unity destroyed as products of violence and despotism will be reborn from the very heart of freedom.

the revolution will necessarily take on a *federalist character*… the communes will have to reorganise themselves in a revolutionary manner… To defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. – But no commune will be able to defend itself remaining isolated. It will therefore be a necessity for each one to spread the revolution outwards… to federate with them for common defence

(o) Necessity of conspiracy and a strong secret organisation, converging at an international centre, to prepare this revolution.

[…]

The only grand and omnipotent authority, at once natural and rational, the only one which we may respect, will be that of the collective and public spirit of a society founded on equality and solidarity and the mutual human respect of all its members. Yes, this is an authority which is not at all divine, wholly human, but before which we shall bow willingly, certain that, far from enslaving them, it will emancipate men – Bakunin, ***God and the State***

Programme and Aim of the Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brothers

Michael Bakunin

Autumn 1868

1. The principles of this organisation are the same as those of the programme of the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy. They are even more explicitly laid out, with regard to the issues of women, the religious and juridical family and the State, in the programme of *Russian socialist democracy*.

The central bureau reserves the right to provide a more complete and practical development of these principles soon.

2. The association of international brothers wants a universal revolution, social, philosophical, economic and pollical at the same time, so that the current order of things, based on property, on exploitation, on domination and on the principle of authority, whether religious, or metaphysical and bourgeois doctrinaire, or even revolutionary Jacobin, no longer remains, not a stone upon another, first throughout all of Europe, and then in the rest of the world, to the cry of peace to the workers, freedom to all the oppressed, and death to the dominators, exploiters, and guardians of every kind, we want to destroy all states and all churches, with all their religious, political, judicial, financial, police, academic, economic and social institutions, so that all these millions of poor deceived, enslaved, tormented, exploited human beings, delivered from all their official and unofficial masters and benefactors, may at last breathe with complete freedom, [both] associations and individuals.

3. Convinced that individual and social evil resides far less in individuals than in the organisation of things and in social positions, we will be humane, as much out of a sense of justice as out of a calculation of utility, and we will mercilessly destroy positions and things so that we can spare men without any danger to the Revolution. We deny *free will* and the supposed right of society to punish. Justice itself, taken in its broadest and most humane sense, is only an idea, so to speak, negative and transitional; it merely indicates the only possible path to human emancipation, that is to say to the humanisation of society by freedom within equality; the positive solution can only be found through the increasingly rational organisation of society. This much-desired solution, our shared ideal… is freedom, morality, intelligence and the well-being of each through the solidarity of all – human fraternity.

Every human individual is the involuntary product of a natural and social environment in which they were born, developed and whose influence they continue to experience. The three main causes of all human immorality are: political, economic and social inequality; ignorance, which is its natural result; and its inevitable consequence – *slavery*.

The organisation of society being always and everywhere the sole cause of the crimes committed by men, there is obvious hypocrisy or absurdity for society to punish criminals, as all punishment presupposes guilt, and criminals are never guilty. The theory of guilt and punishment stems from theology, that is to say from the marriage of absurdity with religious hypocrisy.

The only right that can be recognised in society in its current state of transition is the natural right to *murder* the criminals it has produced in the interest of its own defence; and not the right to right to judge and condemn them. This right will not even be one in the strict sense of the word; it will rather be a natural, distressing but inevitable fact, a sign and product of the impotence and stupidity of current society; and the more society learns to avoid using it, the closer it will be to its true emancipation. All revolutionaries, the oppressed, the suffering victims of the current organisation of society, whose hearts are naturally filled with vengeance and hatred, must remember that kings, oppressors, exploiters of all kinds are just as guilty as criminals drawn from the masses: they are wrongdoers but not guilty, since they too, like ordinary criminals, are involuntary products of the current organisation of society. It should come as no surprise if, at first, the insurgent people kill many of them – this will be an inevitable misfortune perhaps, as meaningless as the devastation caused by a storm.

But this natural fact will be neither moral nor even useful. History is full of lessons in this respect: – the terrible guillotine of 1793, which cannot be accused of either laziness or slowness, did not succeed in destroying the nobility in France. The aristocracy was, if not completely destroyed, at least profoundly shaken,

not by the guillotine, but by the confiscation and sale of its property. And in general we can say that political carnage has never killed parties; it has proven powerless against the privileged classes, since power resides much less in men than in the positions that the organisation of things grants to privileged men, that is to say the *institution of the State* and its consequence as well as its natural basis, *individual property*.

To make a radical revolution, it is therefore necessary to attack positions and things, to destroy property and the State, then there will be no need to destroy men, and to condemn oneself to the unfailing and inevitable reaction that has never failed and will never fail to produce in every society the massacre of men.

But to have the right to be humane for men, without endangering the revolution, it will be necessary to be ruthless towards positions and things; everything must be destroyed, and above all, [the institution of] property, and its inevitable corollary – the *State*.[1] That is the whole secret of the revolution.

It should not be surprising if the Jacobins and the Blanquists, who became socialists more out of necessity than conviction, and for whom socialism is a means, not the goal of the Revolution, since they want dictatorship, that is to say the centralisation of the State and the State will lead them by a logical and inevitable necessity to the reconstitution of property – it is quite natural, we say, that not wanting to make a radical revolution against things, they dream of a bloody revolution against men. – But this bloody revolution, founded upon the construction of a powerfully centralised revolutionary State, would inevitably result, as we will further prove later, in a military dictatorship under a new master. Therefore, the triumph of the Jacobins or the Blanquists would be the death of the Revolution.

4. We are the natural enemies of these revolutionaries – future dictators, regulators and guardians of the revolution – who, even before the current monarchical, aristocratic and bourgeois States are destroyed, are already dreaming of the creation of new revolutionary States just as centralised and more despotic than the State that exist today, who are so accustomed to the order created by some authority from above and have such a great horror of what appears to them to be disorder and which is nothing other than the frank and natural expression of popular life, that even before a good and salutary disorder has occurred by revolution, they are already dreaming of its end and its muzzling by the action of some authority that will have nothing revolutionary about it other than the name, but which in fact will be nothing but a new reaction since it will in fact be a new condemnation of the popular masses, governed by decrees, to obedience, to immobility, to death, that is to say to slavery and exploitation by a new quasi-revolutionary aristocracy.

We do not fear anarchy, we invoke it, convinced that from this anarchy, that is to say from the full manifestation of unleashed popular life, will emerge freedom, equality, justice, the new order, and the very strength of the Revolution against the Reaction

5. We understand revolution in the sense of the unleashing of what is today called the evil passions, and the destruction of what in the same language is called “public order”.

We do not fear anarchy, we invoke it, convinced that from this anarchy, that is to say from the full manifestation of unleashed popular life, will emerge freedom, equality, justice, the new order, and the very strength of the Revolution against the Reaction. This new life – the people’s revolution – will without doubt soon organise itself, but it will create its revolutionary organisation from the bottom up and from the circumference to the centre – according to the principle of freedom, and not from the top down, nor from the centre to the circumference as is the method of all authority – for it matters little to us whether this authority is called Church, Monarchy, Constitutional State, Bourgeois Republic, or even revolutionary dictatorship. We detest and reject them all equally – as infallible sources of exploitation and despotism.

[1] Given that Bakunin later indicates that workers’ associations would seize “productive capital and the instruments of labour”, he clearly is not literally calling for the destruction of property in the sense of things but rather the abolition of private property and the authoritarian social relationships it generates by turning it into collective property. His earlier comments on destroying the current system should be understood in this sense, namely destroying institutions rather than literal destruction. (*Black Flag*)

6. The revolution as we understand it must, from its very first day, radically and completely destroy the State and all the institutions of the State. The natural and necessary consequences of this destruction will be: a) the bankruptcy of the State; b) the cessation of payment of private debts by the intervention of the State, leaving each debtor the right to pay their own if they wish; c) the cessation of all tax payments and the collection of all taxes, whether direct or indirect; d) the dissolution of the army, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the police and the priesthood; e) the abolition of official justice, the suspension of everything legally called right, and of the exercise of those rights. Consequently, the abolition and burning of all property titles, deeds of inheritance, of sale, of endowment, of all court cases – all legal and civil paperwork in short. Everywhere and in everything, the revolutionary fact takes precedence over the law created and guaranteed by the State; f) the confiscation of all productive capital and instruments of labour for the benefit of workers' associations, which will have to work them collectively; g) the confiscation of all Church and State property as well as precious metals from individuals for the benefits of the federative Alliance of all the workers' association – an Alliance which will constitute the Commune.

In return for the confiscated goods, the Commune will provide the bare necessities to all individuals thus dispossessed, who may later earn more through their own labour if they can and if they wish. h) For the organisation of the Commune, the permanent federation of the barricades and the office of a Revolutionary Commune Council by the delegation of one or two deputies from each barricade, one per street, or per neighbourhood [*quartier*], deputies invested with binding mandates [*mandats impératifs*], always accountable and always revocable.[1] The Commune Council thus organised may choose from amongst its members executive committees – distinct for each branch of the revolutionary administration of the Commune.[2] i) Declaration of the insurgent capital organised as a commune that after having destroyed the authoritarian and tutelary State, which it was within its right to do since it was its slave like all other localities, it renounced its right, or rather any claim to govern, to impose on the provinces. k) Appeal to all provinces, communes, and associations, urging all of them to follow the example set by the capital to first *reorganise* themselves a revolutionary manner, and then to delegate, at an agreed meeting place, their deputies, all equally invested with binding, responsible and revocable mandates to establish the federation of associations, communes, and insurgent provinces in the name of the same principles, and to organise a revolutionary force capable of triumphing over reaction. Sending not official revolutionary commissioners with any kind of insignia [*écharpes*], but revolutionary propagators into all provinces and communes –especially amongst the peasants who cannot be revolutionised either by the principles or by the decrees of any dictatorship, but only by the revolutionary fact itself, that is to say by the consequences which will infallibly be produced in all communes by the complete cessation of the legal, official life of the State. Abolition of the nation State also in the sense that any foreign country, province, commune, association or even an isolated individual, which had risen up in the name of the same principles, will be received into the revolutionary federation without regard for the current borders of States and although belonging to different political or national systems, and that its own provinces, communes, associations, individuals which take the side of Reaction will be excluded. It is therefore through the very act of the outpouring and organisation of the revolution for the mutual defence of the insurgent countries that the universality of the revolution founded upon the abolition of borders and the ruin of States will triumph.

7. There can no longer be a triumphant political or national revolution unless the political revolution transforms itself into a social revolution, and the national revolution, precisely by virtue of its radically socialist character and its destruction of the State, becomes the universal revolution.

8. The revolution must be made everywhere by the people, and supreme direction must and always remain with the people organised in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations – the revolutionary and new State, organised from the bottom up by way of revolutionary delegation and encompassing all insurgent countries in the name of

[1] Compare to Proudhon: "The choice of talents, the imperative mandate, and permanent revocability are the most immediate and incontestable consequences of the electoral principle. It is the inevitable program of all democracy." ("Solution to the Social Problem", *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* [Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011], 273). (*Black Flag*)

[2] Compare to Proudhon: "It is not enough to say that one is opposed to the presidency unless one also does away with ministries, the eternal focus of political ambition. It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power through its joint deliberations and votes." ("Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*", *Property is Theft!*, 378). (*Black Flag*)

the same principles, without regard for old borders or differences in nationality, will have its object the administration of public services and not the government of people. It will constitute the *new homeland*, *the Alliance of Universal Revolution* against the alliance of all reactions.

9. This organisation excludes any idea of dictatorship or tutelary ruling power. But for the establishment of this revolutionary alliance and for the triumph of the revolution over reaction, it is necessary that, amidst the popular anarchy which will constitute the very life and all the energy of the revolution, the *unity of revolutionary thought and action find an organ*. This organ must be the *secret and universal Association of International Brothers*.

10. This association is based on the conviction that revolutions are never made by individuals, nor even by secret societies. They happen as if by themselves, produced by the force of circumstances, by the movement of events and facts. They are long prepared in the depths of the instinctive consciousness of the masses – then they erupt, often seemingly provoked by trivial causes. All that a well-organised secret society can do is first help the birth of a revolution by spreading amongst the masses ideas corresponding to the instincts of the masses and to organise, not the army of revolution – the army must always be the people – but a kind of revolutionary general staff made up of devoted, energetic, intelligent individuals, and above all sincere, and not ambitious or vain, friends of the people – capable of serving as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and popular instincts.

11. The number of these individuals therefore need not be immense. For the international organisation in all of Europe, one hundred strongly and seriously allied revolutionaries are sufficient. Two or three hundred revolutionaries will suffice for the organisation of the largest country.

Programme of the Russian Socialist Democracy

Michael Bakunin

La Cause du peuple, Geneva, 1868[1]

(Originally appeared in *Narodnoe Delo* [Geneva], 1 September 1868)

Our Programme

We want the emancipation of the people, their intellectual, economic, social and political emancipation.

I. The *intellectual emancipation* of the popular masses is indispensable in order for their political and social liberty to become complete and solid. Faith in God, the belief in the immortality of the soul, and, in general, all the idealist or supernatural utopias, necessarily based on a false principle, contrary to science, have been for the peoples a constant cause of slavery and misery. On the one hand, they have always served as a justification and support to all the enslavers of humanity, to all the exploiters of the labour of the masses; on the other, they have demoralised the peoples themselves, dividing their conscience and their being between two absolutely opposing tendencies: the one celestial and the other terrestrial, and at the same time depriving them of the energy necessary to win their human rights and give themselves a happy, free existence. It follows from this that we are staunch partisans of atheism and scientific, humanitarian materialism.

II. We want the *economic, social emancipation* of the people, without which all liberty would be nothing but a vain word and a disgusting lie. The economic situation of the peoples has always been the cornerstone and real explanation of their political situation. All the political and civil organisations, past and present, have for principal bases: the brutal act of conquest; the patriarchal right of the husband and father; the right of hereditary property, and the blessing of all these historic rights by the Church in the name of some god. The ensemble of all these things hierarchically coordinated is called the State. Thus, the inevitable consequence of every State constitution will always be the enslavement of millions of workers condemned to a fatal ignorance, for the profit of a privileged, exploiting and so-called civilised minority. The State – that younger brother of the Church – in inconceivable without political, legal and civil privileges, which have as a natural basis economic privileges.

Desiring the real and definitive emancipation of the popular masses, we want:

1) The abolition of the right of hereditary property.

[1] https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/program-of-the-russian-socialist-democracy-narodnoe-delo-1868/ (revised)

2) The complete equalisation of the political and social rights of women with those of men and, as a consequence: the abolition of laws regarding the family, as well as that of religious, political and civil marriage, historical corollary of the right of inheritance.

3) The abolition of marriage, as a religious, political legal and civil institution, will immediately raise the question of the education of children; their upkeep, from the moment when the pregnancy of the mother is determined until the age of their majority; their education and instruction, equal for all at all levels, from primary school to the highest developments of science in the more advanced schools; – scientific and industrial at the same time, and preparing the man as much for muscular labour as for nervous labour, – must fall primarily to the charge of society.

We pose as the bases of economic justice the following principle:

The earth must only belong to those who cultivate it with their own arms – and as all human labour is only productive insofar as it is associated – we claim the land for the communes or rural associations; as well as capital and other instruments of labour for the industrial associations, both based on the most complete liberty and on the perfect economic and political equality of the workers

III. In the future, no political organisation should be anything but a free federation of free associations, whether agricultural or industrial.

Consequently, in the very name of the political and social emancipation of the popular masses, we desire the destruction, or if you prefer the liquidation, of the State – its radical extirpation, with all its institutions, whether ecclesiastical, political or civil, university, legal or financial, military or bureaucratic.

We want absolute liberty for all peoples, Russian and non-Russian, crushed today by the empire of all the Russias; with the absolute right of each to manage their own affairs, and to govern themselves according to their own instincts, according to their needs and will; so that, federalising from bottom to top, those among them who *desire* to become members of the Russian people, can create with it a truly free society, United federatively with other *similar* societies, who, taking for their basis the same principles, will freely organise together in Europe and in the entire world.

For us these principal foundations of our programme will be obligatory. This is why we believe it necessary to announce that we will not accept articles in our newspaper, nor people among us, that are not *entirely* in agreement with us.

The development of the programme will be the subject of a series of articles under the title: *How to Pose the Revolutionary Question*, and it, of course, will also be the content of our entire newspaper.

Programme of the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy

Michael Bakunin

17 April 1869

1. The *Alliance* declares itself atheist; it wants the abolition of religions, the substitution of science for faith and human justice for divine justice.

2. It wants above all the definitive and complete abolition of classes and the political, economic, and social equalisation of individuals of both sexes, and in order to achieve this goal, it first and foremost demands the abolition of the right of inheritance, so that in future enjoyment is equal to the production of each, and that, in conformity with the decision taken at the last workers' Congress in Brussels, the land, the instruments of labour, like all other capital, becoming the collective property of the entire society, can only be used by workers, that is to say by agricultural and industrial associations.

3. It wants for all children of both sexes, from birth onwards, equality of the means of development, that is to say, maintenance, education and training at all levels of science, industry and the arts, convinced that this equality, at first only economic and social, will result in bringing ever increasing natural equality of individuals, by eliminating all artificial inequalities, historical products of a social organisation as false as it is iniquitous.

4. Enemy of all despotism, recognising no other political form than the republican form, and completely rejecting any reactionary alliance, it also rejects any

political action which does not have as its immediate and direct aim the triumph of the cause of the workers against capital.

5. It recognises that all existing political and authoritarian states, increasingly reduced to the mere administrative functions of public services in their respective countries, will have to disappear into the universal union of free associations, both agricultural and industrial.

6. As the social question can only find its definitive and real solution on the basis of the international or universal solidarity of the workers of all countries, the *Alliance* rejects any policy based on so-called patriotism and on rivalry between nations.

7. It wants the Universal Association of all local associations through Liberty.

Black Flag Note

The first sentence of article 2 of this programme originally read: "It wants above all the political, economic, and social equalisation of classes and individuals of both sexes, commencing with abolition of the right of inheritance". This change was the result of Bakunin sending the Alliance programme to the International's General Council seeking affiliation. Marx responded by noting its "equalisation of classes" clause "literally interpreted" would mean "harmony of capital and labour" as "persistently preached by the bourgeois socialists" for it was "not the logically impossible 'equalisation of classes', but the historically necessary, superseding 'abolition of classes'" which "forms the great aim of the International Working Men's Association." He added: "Considering, however, the context in which that phrase 'equalisation of classes' occurs, it seems to be a mere slip of the pen, and the General Council feels confident that you will be anxious to remove from your program an expression which offers such a dangerous misunderstanding." (*Marx-Engels Collected Works* 21: 46) The Alliance changed its Programme and successfully affiliated. This did not stop Marx – and subsequent Marxists – from quoting the original sentence (out of context from the rest of the programme, not least the rest of article 2 which indicates the need for collective property of workplaces and land to achieve this "equalisation") to attack Bakunin as little more than a liberal. Bakunin's own explanation for the term can be found in his 22 December 1868 letter to Marx.

To Albert Richard

Michael Bakunin

7 February 1870[1]

My friend and brother – Forgive me my long silence, and you will forgive me for it I am sure when you know the cause of it. – In response to the question that you ask me, you and Mme D. Z. [André Bastelica], I respond: Yes, the affairs of Mr A. S. [Russia] are very serious and they should become still more serious in the spring. The debacle in that house is imminent, and God alone knows what will result from it! Will it be a failed, fraudulent bankruptcy? Will it be a complete and open bankruptcy? It is impossible to surmise. What is certain is that the position is very serious, and that in a month, in two months at the most, there will be a ruckus. This business has absolutely absorbed me for a month – I have not had a moment to write a letter. We have done all that it was possible to do – The bow is bent, arrow will take flight, and then we will see what will occur. – We have nothing to reproach ourselves for, for we have fulfilled our duty to the end. Ah! My dear friend, how these lads work over there! What disciplined and serious organisation and what power of collective action, where all the individualities are effaced giv[ing] up even their names, [as well as] all reputation, all conceit, all glory – taking for themselves only the risks, the dangers, the harshest privations, but with that the consciousness of being a force and of doing – You have not forgotten my young savage? Well, he has returned – He has accomplished exploits that among you no one would believe – He has suffered horribly, taken, beaten half to death, liberated and starting again with more vigour. And they are all like that – The individual has disappeared – and in the place of the individuals the legion, invisible, unknown and present everywhere – acting everywhere – dying and being reborn each day – they have been apprehended by the dozens, they rise up by the hundreds – the individuals perish, but the legion is immortal – and each day more powerful – because it

[1] https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/letter-to-albert-richard-february-7-1870/ (revised)

has pushed deep roots into the world of the black hands and drawn from this world a mass of recruits –

That is the organisation that I have dreamed, that I still dream and that I want for you – Unfortunately, you are still [attached to] individual heroism, the need for individual display – to dramatic effects and historic ostentations – This is why power escapes you and [in the realm] of action there remains to you only rumours and phrases – Do not write to me that I can become, if I desire it, the Garibaldi of Socialism – I do not much care about becoming a Garibaldi and playing any role. My dear friend, I will die and the worms will eat me – But I want our idea to triumph. I want the black hands to be really emancipated from all the authorities and all the heroes, present and to come – I want for the triumph of our idea not the more or less dramatic exhibition of my own person, not *my* power, but *our* power – the power of *our* collectivity, of *our* organisation and collective action, in favour of which I am the ready to be the first to abdicate and annul my name and my person. My dear friend, the time of brilliant historical individualities is passed, and so much the better. That is the true token of the triumph of democracy – See with what rapidity the individualities are absorbed, consumed, devoured by the collectivity, by that giant with several millions heads that is called the people – And once again, so much the better – Study well the character of our era – there is a characteristic opposition of the mass against every authority and against every individual who would like to impose themselves – The mass is right – it is in [sympathy with] our programme – No individual would have power any longer – there would no longer be order, nor public authority – And what must take its place, in order that the revolutionary anarchy does not result in reaction – The collective action of an invisible organisation spread over a whole country – If we do not form that organisation, we will never escape from the powerlessness – You who love to think, have you never reflected on the principal cause of the power and vitality of the order of the Jesuits? Do you want me to name that cause? Well, my friend, it is the absolute effacement of individuals in the will, the organisation and the action of the collective – And I ask you, for men who are really strong, passionate and serious, is this such a great sacrifice? It is the sacrifice of appearance to reality, of vainglory to a real power, of phrases to action – That is the sacrifice that I ask of all our friends and of which I am always ready to give the first example – I do not want to be *Me*, I want to be *Us*. For, I will repeat it a thousand times, it is only on this condition that we will triumph, that our idea will triumph – Well! that triumph, it is my only passion.

I want for the triumph of our idea not the more or less dramatic exhibition of my own person, not *my* power, but *our* power – the power of *our* collectivity, of *our* organisation and collective action… the time of brilliant historical individualities is passed, and so much the better.

That is, my friends a preface to my long letter, which I will send to you when affairs permit me to finish it – I await the rich cousin from day to day and I am full of hope – So be patient –

Friends urge me to make a visit to Mme P. [Paris] – Yes – after the arrival of the cousin – With regard to Mr D. U. [Benoit Malon], I have done well not to respond to you right away, since that has given you the time to change your opinion regarding him – It is not, however, necessary to reject him, but preserve him only in the external fat that covers your heart; not in the very depths – I would say the same thing with regard to Mme D. [U] [Aristide Rey], not as an individual – he is charming, but in collective relations – then he is useless and even harmful – he is demoralising – He is a being who will remain eternally colourless and whose sentimentality will always deliver him up to bourgeois socialism – My dear friend, I speak from experience – And I assure you, I love you a great deal – but I love even more our cause, to which we cannot give ourselves halfway – All or nothing – well, it will never manage to constitute a whole. It is demoralised by the circle of Elie Reclus and Mme André Léo, the nymph Egeria to all of them, who are demoralised in their turn by the millionaire socialist, Saint-Simonian Charles Le Monnier – So I ask you very seriously, dear friend, to keep Mr and Mme D. U. outside of our private circle, *without them suspecting it however*. Kept well outside, they could be useful and used on occasion. – To undertake *the great means*, it is first necessary to have *a few means*, [and] that is what I hope to find soon – with the arrival of my cousin. Mme D. T. [The League of Peace and Liberty] is an excellent and useful person, but is yet to be absolutely with us. Have you see Mr C. S. [Paul Robin] who was going to make a visit to Mme P.? He will be quite useful to us there, although he is not a strong man. He has the microscopic and not telescopic mind. – I must say that the persons with whom I am happiest

at this hour, less naturally the friends Mr A. S. – are Mr and Mme E. F. [Gaspar Sentinon and Rafael Farga i Pellicer] – they have understood that in order to constitute a power, collective action is required, but that this is impossible without serious organisation, which is in its turn impossible without the observation of the rules – They observe them and they make some amazing progress – By the way, Mr E. F. complains that you have done little or nothing for a compatriot whom he has recommended to you, and who has returned, he says, as stupid, that is to say, as rabidly political and as little a Socialist as when he left –

Adieu – respond swiftly and *be patient*. – Heaven will doubtless smile on us in the end and from the moment when the holy dewdrops begin to fall, I will direct them on your head – Long live the collectivity – long live the socialists. When you write to Mme D. Z. [Louis Palix], give him fraternal regards from me.

Burn this letter.

Your M.B.

To Paulo

Michael Bakunin

21 May 1872

To Paulo[1]

Dear Brother – I have the right to call you by this name first as one of the oldest founding brothers of the Alliance, and then as the closest friend, the true brother of the one we call Christopher, who, sent by us, came at the end of October 1861 [1868] from Geneva to Spain, and was in fact the first founder of both the International and the Alliance, first in Madrid, later in Barcelona.

[…]

Very sad news has reached us: the Alliance in Madrid as well as in Barcelona is dissolving, and in part has already dissolved. We consider this dissolution a great misfortune, from the point of view of the revolutionary solidarity amongst all countries, and those who have been the cause of this dissolution and of the publication of the secrets of the Alliance, of its very existence which must always remain secret and invisible and which none of us could betray without dishonouring ourselves and violating the highest duty that we are mutually committed to observing, are great wrongdoers.

But it is not to express useless regrets that I write you this letter, dear brother; it is to tell you that the true culprits, those who have betrayed the alliance through malice and incurable weakness, must be forever removed from it, but that the good, the energetic, the intelligent, the devoted, the zealous, the selfless, those who seek not their own glory but the triumph pf the revolution, those who are capable of sinking their individuality in collective thought and action, the passionate to the point of death and at the same time *discreet* – these must reconstitute the Alliance, by imposing upon themselves a supreme law: *that* of admitting only very serious men, both from the point of view of intelligence and revolutionary passion, but above all from the point of view of proven character.

In this regard, the dissolution that took place in some centres in Spain can be considered, in a way, fortunate, since it allows the Alliance to be reconstituted in your country on a new, much more serious basis than before. The fact that your groups could dissolve is proof that they were recruited too hastily and poorly composed. I therefore propose that you henceforth adopt and enforce a rule that has become standard practice in Alliance groups of all countries and whose beneficial effects these groups experience daily. This rule is that each group, each section of groups should henceforth only accept a new member into its midst *unanimously*, never just by a majority vote, that is to say, all members belonging to this section or group – If there are only 2 of you, you should only accept a third person when you are both in complete agreement and equally convinced of the usefulness, intelligence, dedication, energy and discretion that he will bring to you. And in this choice, you must never allow yourself to be guided by any consideration other than the full programme of the alliance, the perfect concordance of his feelings and ideas with that programme, and his actual capacity to serve it with energy, discretion, constancy and prudence, and above all his ability to forever renounce all isolated individual initiative and always subordinate his own action to the collective –

[1] The pseudonym of Tomás González Morago (unknown-1885) was a leading Spanish anarchist. Morago, who was an engraver, was also a prominent member of the International in Spain, who along with typographer Anselmo Lorenzo and shoemaker Francisco Mora, helped form the nucleus of its Madrid Federation. (*Black Flag*)

an ability that the vain and ambitious never possess, for what they seek, often without even realising it themselves – what they seek in every group, public or secret, that they encounter is a pedestal for themselves, a stepping stone for their personal glory or elevation. Therefore, we have imposed upon ourselves this rule: never to receive into our sanctus sanctorum, into our collective intimacy and fraternity, any ambitious or vain person, however much their ideas and passionate tendencies may align with our own, however intelligent and learned they may be, and however great the potential benefit their connections and influence on the world might bring us, we prefer to do without them rather than welcome them amongst us, certain as we are that their ambition or vanity would inevitably bring amongst us the seeds of division and disorganisation sooner or later. – They would like to become leaders, directors, masters, and we recognise none amongst us, and as revolutionary socialists we must not recognise them. Only he who is capable of individually immersing himself entirely in fraternal solidarity and in the collective action of allies can and should be ours – not to become a slave there, but on the contrary to reinvigorate yourself there and find yourself strong, free, intelligent, by the strength, by the freedom, by the intelligence and by the ever-active and ever-present assistance of all.

Our goal is to create a powerful but always invisible revolutionary collective; a collective that must prepare and lead the revolution, but which will never, even in the midst of the revolution, as a group or have any of its members hold any official, public or governmental position whatever it may be, since it actually has no other goal than to dismantle all governments and make them impossible forever and everywhere, leaving to the revolutionary movement of the masses its full development and to their social organisation, from the bottom up, by way of spontaneous federation, the most absolute freedom, but always ensuring that this movement and this organisation can never reconstitute authorities, governments, States, and combating all ambitions, both collective (cliques like that of Marx) and individual, through the natural, *never official*, influence of all members of our alliance, scattered throughout all countries, and powerful only through their united action and the unity of the programme and goals that must always exist between them.

You now understand that to be a worthy member of the Alliance, you must possess a strong character and a serious revolutionary passion, above all to have the devil in you, and then you must have absolutely and forever renounced all self-interest, all vanity, all ambition, all careerism and all individual glory. – Do you feel capable of this? Then give us your hand.

But the International and the Alliance… simultaneously pursue different objectives – One has the mission of uniting the working masses, the millions of workers, across differences of trade and countries, across the borders of all States, into a single immense and compact body; the other, the Alliance, has the mission of giving these masses a truly revolutionary direction.

[…]

In helping you lay the initial foundations of both A[lliance] and Y [the International] in 7896 [Spain], Christophe committed an organisational error whose effects you are now feeling. He confused the International with the Alliance and therefore provoked the 3521 [Spanish] friends to found the International with the programme of the Alliance. At first glance this may have seemed like a great triumph; in reality it is becoming a cause of confusion and disorganisation for both.

The International and the Alliance are not at all enemies as the thoroughly Marxist synagogue in London would have everyone believe. – On the contrary, the Alliance is the necessary complement to the International, a complement without which the entire International, itself transformed into a kind of monstrous international State, with a highly authoritarian government, with the dictatorship of Marx, would be transformed, as the Marxist clique is clearly tending towards today, into a compliant instrument for the realisation of ambitious projects and consequently very contrary to the real emancipation of the popular masses. – But the International and the Alliance, while tending towards the same final goal, simultaneously pursue different objectives – One has the mission of uniting the working masses, the millions of workers, across differences of trade and countries, across the borders of all States, into a single immense and compact body; the other, the Alliance, has the mission of giving these masses a truly revolutionary direction. The programmes of both,

while not in any way opposed, differ in the very degree of their respective development. That of the International, if taken seriously, contains in embryo, but only in embryo, the entire programme of the Alliance. The programme of the Alliance is the ultimate elaboration of that of the International.

If the founders of the International had given this great Association a determined and positive political, socialist, philosophical doctrine, they would have committed a great error – they would have founded a very small association, a sect, not the stronghold of the proletariat of the whole world against the ruling and exploiting classes. What socialist, political, and philosophical idea could today unite millions of proletarians from all countries under its banner? With a positive doctrine, one would only manage to gather a few thousand at most, and even that? Mazzini had said: interests divide, ideas unite. That interests divide the bourgeoisie is perfectly true. But it is not true that ideas unite them very much. – As for the proletariat, it is on the contrary interests or rather the single great interest of bread and emancipation, an interest identical in all lands and at levels of civilisation and intellectual and moral development, that alone is capable of uniting it into a compact mass. – As for ideas, as ideas, that is to say as theoretical developments, let us recognise my dear, except for those very rare moments in history when the masses swept up by the ferment of revolutionary passions, rise up to them in their daily lives, under the weight of deprivations, forced labour and their daily worries that crush them – the masses, I say, are absolutely indifferent to them, if they are not hostile to them. We should not blame them for this: they are kept in a state of abject ignorance, systematically cultivated by all governments for the benefit of the privileged classes – they are crushed by stupefying work and hunger – and I think that this profound indifference they show today to both political and philosophical ideas and their exclusive preoccupation with what bourgeois idealists, with their ever-full stomachs and their dear, pleasantly pampered bodies, call "*base material interests*" – I think that this indifference and this preoccupation today so prevalent amongst the masses, far from being something to blame them for, should on the contrary be considered as proof of their sound instinct and their great natural common sense. For indeed *material or economic Emancipation* is the great basis, the unique and primary basis of all their other emancipations.

The great merit of the founders of the International and the Geneva Congress (September 1868) was that they understood this and made it the basis of the entire programme of our great Association. If atheism and materialism had been included in this programme, millions of very serious workers, that is to very oppressed, very wretched workers, would certainly have been excluded from the International. – It is not that the people are really religious; on the contrary, I happily observe that they are becoming less so every day in all countries; what they call or believe to be their religion is, on the one hand, the product of a mechanical, routine tradition, a bad habit of their collective mind; and even more, it is an instinctive, energetic, entirely practical protest against the narrowness and miseries of their current existence. Let the social revolution open a vast horizon for him on earth and he will no longer think of heaven. The masses are therefore not truly religious, but they imagine themselves to be and explicitly formulated atheism frightens their imagination. The same is true of the reactionary political and socialist ideas that still dominate the popular imagination. The proletariat instinctively detests the authority of the State, it detests it in all its possible manifestations – but attack the Church and the State, and they will not understand you, and often they will even rise up against you – out of habit. It clings to ideas that contradict its own instincts – The people are often accustomed to the authority of either the Church of the State, an authority of which they are always the victim – yet they love it, as in many households the wife endures the blows that her husband gives her – it is a slave habit, and unfortunately the masses still retain many vestiges of this detestable habit. – To cure it, there is only one way: the social revolution, the true unleashing of the masses – Only then will the masses understand all the ideas whose seeds lie dormant in their instincts, and only then will they passionately embrace, as the faithful expression of their own aspirations, the entire programme of the Alliance. But impose the programme of the Alliance upon the International, and the International will no longer have more than 2 or 3 thousand members across Europe. These will, it is true, be valuable members, the most developed, the most energetic and the most sincere revolutionary-socialists in Europe – But what are three thousand men in the face of the combined power of the wealthy classes and the State, of all the States? An absolute powerlessness. This formidable coalition of reaction and exploitation can only be broken by the organised power of the masses, of all the millions of proletarians – and certainly these millions will not accept the socialist and philosophical programme of the Alliance today.

They will also reject the Marxist programme which, besides its scientific and abstract nature, has the terrible drawback of striving for the foundation of new People's States, that is to say, new prisons and new guardians for the people, all the more oppressive as

they will oppress them in the name of the sovereign will of the people.

[…]

So neither conciliation, because it is impossible, nor submission, because it is revolting and deadly, nor division, because the unity of the International must be preserved, a supreme condition for the triumph of the proletariat in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. What then is to be done? – We must seek their unity where it is found, and not where it cannot be found. We must seek it not in political or philosophical theories, but in the shared aspirations of the proletariat of all lands for material or economic emancipation – *On the terrain of economic struggle, daily practice of labour exploited by capital*.

I will never cease to repeat it. This is the aim, the sole purpose of the organisation, the unique programme of the International. This programme is entirely positive, so positive and simple that there is no worker, however little developed and however clouded by religious and political prejudices he may be, who cannot, who must not understand it and embrace it with the greatest passion. Every proletarian, unless he is one of those bourgeois-workers who, rightly or wrongly, hope to rise above the masses, either through his work or his politics, in order to become a dominator and exploiter in his turn – every serious worker must curse the conditions of his existence and aspire to his emancipation. He must hate his exploiters and oppressors – if he does not express this aspiration and this hatred, it is because he believes himself powerless to realise the former and satisfy the latter – Show him that by standing in solidarity with all his comrades in slavery and misery, he can give himself, organise a power, and he will throw himself with passion into this economic struggle which the International has precisely as its sole mission to organise – And, indeed, according to our general statutes, it asks no one about his religion and politics, it only asks each person this one thing: Does he want to commit to observing in all its consequences the solidarity of the economic struggle of the workers against their exploiters? If he says yes, he becomes in effect a members of the International, which, I repeat, has no other mission than to organise this struggle, by federating and uniting across the differences of trades and the borders of States resistance funds and strikes.

We must seek their unity where it is found, and not where it cannot be found. We must seek it not in political or philosophical theories, but in the shared aspirations of the proletariat of all lands for material or economic emancipation – *On the terrain of economic struggle, daily practice of labour exploited by capital*.

This is the serious, positive, the only truly obligatory aspect of the International; all the rest, all those questions of the future social and political organisation discussed in our congresses, such as integral education, the abolition of States or emancipation of the proletariat by the State, the emancipation of women, collective ownership, the abolition of the right of inheritance, atheism, materialism or deism – all these undoubtedly constitute very interesting questions, and their discussion is highly beneficial to the intellectual and moral development of the proletariat – But no congress has the possibility or the power to resolve them in an absolute manner, nor to impose its resolutions as articles of a compulsory programme either to the sections or individually to its members; they cannot, they do not desire to, because in doing so they would proclaim absolute truths, a nonsense, and they would impose by the artificial vote of a fictitious and necessarily variable majority, an official truth – a monstrosity. – The organisation of the international, the economic, practical, daily struggle of labour against capital, this, then, is the sole explicit aim, the sole obligatory, supreme law of the International. Anyone who does not want to submit themselves to all the practical consequences of solidarity in this struggle must leave or be expelled from the International. But whoever accepts and observes them – is a member by right. This solidarity is completely independent of the different political and philosophical currents followed by the working masses in different countries. If the workers of Germany, for example, go on strike, if they revolt against the bourgeois-exploiters, you will not ask them whether they believe in God or they do not believe in him, whether they are for the State or against the State? You will support them to the best of your ability because they are workers who have risen against their exploiters – Let the German worker do the same for you, without first asking you about your political or religious creed, and the unity of the International will be founded – for it is founded solely upon the economic, not political or philosophical, solidarity of the workers of all countries.

To those who will tell me that I am diminishing the character of the International by limiting its obligatory programme and its goal to the organisation of this exclusively economic struggle, I will reply that by attempting to introduce a uniform and obligatory political, socialist or philosophical directive for all, it is destroyed, it is killed. For I challenge you to formulate any explicit doctrine which could unite millions, what am I saying, just tens of thousands of workers under its banner. And unless the beliefs of one sect are imposed on all the others, the result will be the creation of a multitude of sects, that is to say the organisation of a veritable anarchy within the proletariat for the greater triumph of the exploiting classes…

And do you think it is a small thing to unite the masses in the economic struggle? – This solidarity is already producing immense results. First, it creates a chasm between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and thereby pushing the proletariat towards revolution. Second, it gives the proletariat, through the practice of collective action and struggle, feeling, thought and strength, a socialist education and instruction, not poured into them in small doses from above, but developing spontaneously, widely, within the masses themselves, illuminated by collective passion and thought… it develops within itself, through daily practice, the thought of justice, of equality and of great popular freedom, incompatible with the authority of any guardians or teachers whatsoever. – This is what our great Association is doing – it is preparing the ground for the international and social revolution.

On this vast terrain, all ideas, all doctrines must have full freedom to emerge – the authoritarian theories of Marx, as well as our anarchic theories; provided that none has the foolish and odious pretension of imposing itself as an official truth, nor that any of them undermines in the slightest this practical solidarity of the proletariat of different countries in the economic struggle. – This is what we, men of the alliance, have always demanded and what we still demand today, against the authoritarian, official, dictatorial pretensions of the General Council in London which is increasingly dominated by the Marxist clique.

On this terrain of the International, with our explicit revolutionary programme, we organise the revolution. We do not impose our programme on anyone, but we propagate it freely, certain that it is the only one that can achieve the complete economic, political and social emancipation of the proletariat. Furthermore, as we know that the organisation of popular power cannot be achieved through theoretical propaganda alone, but requires the organisation and alliance of revolutionary characters and wills, constituted in a kind of revolutionary general staff, we have formed our secret alliance within the International itself. The London Conference, prepared and directed by Marx, hurled an anathema against secret societies. This is a hypocritical anathema. The Marxists know as well as we do that the public International, the International proper, is undoubtedly excellent for agitating, for revolutionising the masses; but it is incapable by itself of organising popular power – the latter being the ultimate force in all social struggles – and for this a secret organisation is necessary. But since they follow principles and pursue goals directly opposed to ours, they want in the International a secret society entirely opposed to ours and whose direction remains solely in their hands. This society has existed since 1847 and especially since 1848 – It is that of the *German Communists* founded by Marx and Engels, which has never ceased to conduct its covert propaganda within the International. The resolutions of the London Conference had no other purpose than to deliver it, through hierarchically organised committees, the entire government of the International.

On this terrain of the International, with our explicit revolutionary programme, we organise the revolution. We do not impose our programme on anyone, but we propagate it freely, certain that it is the only one that can achieve the complete economic, political and social emancipation of the proletariat

A jealous lover of human liberty, and deeming it the absolute condition of all that we admire and respect in humanity, I reverse the phrase of Voltaire, and say that, *if God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him*..

– Bakunin, *God and the State*

Programme of the Polish Social-Revolutionary Society of Zurich

Michael Bakunin

8 June 1872

1) The order that prevails today in Poland, alongside the foreign yoke, testifies, as everywhere else, to the political and economic despotism of a privileged minority over the working masses which it continually exploits.

2) We define tyranny as the domination of man by man; likewise we strive for no other rule and recognise no other power than that of the social organisation of the people, through a free federation of free workers associations and peasant communes. For all power, even the most outwardly republican and democratic, is always aimed at the profit of a privileged minority and the enslavement of the people.

3) The conquest of true freedom for the Polish people requires as a necessary condition the abolition of the current regime on the political and economic level as well as on the juridical and religious level.

4) We can only achieve this goal by a general uprising, by social revolution.

5) The land will belong to the peasant communes as long as they are able to work it.

6) Similarly the factories, the machines, the buildings, the tools, even artisanal, will be the property of the workers' associations.

7) Opponents of all statist power, we recognise no kind of historical or political right. For us, Poland exists only where the people want to be Polish and recognise themselves as such: it will cease to exist where that same people, no longer wishing to belong to the Polish Federation, freely chooses to join another national group.

8) We extend a fraternal hand to all our brothers, to all Slavs who, like us, find themselves under the yoke of governments that, like us, they abhor, in particular the Muscovite, Turkish, and German governments. These peoples have every right to claim their national independence and blossoming.

9) Finally, we likewise extend our fraternal hands to other peoples who aspire to freedom. We are ready to use all means at our disposal to help them achieve our common goal.

Long live the social revolution!

Long live the free commune!

Long live democratic and social Poland!

To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain

Michael Bakunin

12-13 June 1872

Brothers,

I am an old and close friend, I might say the brother of Christophe, the friend and brother whom many amongst you certainly have not forgotten. With him, I was one of the first founders of the A[lliance]. And it is by this double capacity that I address myself to you, Brothers of the A[lliance].

Unfortunate dissensions arising from the struggles of pride [*amour-propre*] between brothers who seem to have sacrificed our great purpose, the triumph of the universal and social revolution, to that of their vanities and personal ambitions, have had as final result the dissolution of the Madrid A[lliance].

I do not set myself up as the judge of anyone, but in the name of our principles as well as on behalf of all our brothers, I must say that those who have contributed to this dissolution, those who have divulged the secret of the A[lliance], a secret that we have all promised on our honour to keep, are indeed guilty….

Betraying the A[lliance] is betraying the revolution, for the A[lliance] has no other purpose than to serve the revolution. We do not form a theoretical or exclusively economic institution. The A[lliance] is neither an academy nor a workshop; it is an essentially militant association, having for an objective the organisation of the power of the popular masses with a view to the destruction of all the States and all currently existing religious, political, legal, economic and social institutions, with a view to the absolute emancipation of the enslaved and exploited workers of the entire world. The goal of our organisation is to push the masses to wipe the slate clean, so that the agricultural and industrial populations can reorganise and federalise themselves, according to the of principles justice, equality, freedom and solidarity, from the bottom up, spontaneously, freely, outside of all official tutelage, whether reactionary or even so-called revolutionary.

To those who ask us what good the existence of the Alliance is when the International exists, we will answer: the International is certainly a magnificent institution; it is unquestionably the finest, the most useful, the most beneficial creation of the present century. It has created the basis for the solidarity of the workers of the entire world. It has given them a beginning of organisation across the borders of all the States and outside of the world of the exploiters and the privileged. It has done more, it already contains today the first seeds of the organisation of the unity to come, and at the same time it has given to the proletariat of the entire world the sense of its own power. Certainly these are immense services that it has rendered to the great cause of the universal and social revolution. But it is not an institution sufficient to organise and led this revolution.

All the serious revolutionaries who have taken an active part in the work of the International in any country whatsoever, since 1864, the year of its foundation, must have become convinced of this. The International prepares the elements of revolutionary organisation, but it does not accomplish it. It prepares them by organising the public and legal struggle of the workers joined in solidarity from all countries against the exploiters of labour, capitalists, proprietors and industrial entrepreneurs, but it never goes beyond that. The only thing that it does apart from this ever very useful work is the theoretical propaganda of socialist ideas amongst the working masses, a work also very useful, very necessary for the preparation of the revolution of the masses, but which is still far from the revolutionary organisation of the masses.

The International, in short, is, an immense milieu favourable and necessary for this organisation, but it is not yet that organisation. The International accepts within its ranks, completely disregarding all differences of political and religious beliefs, all honest workers, on the sole condition that they accept in all its consequences the solidarity of the struggle of the workers against bourgeois capital, the exploiter of labour. This is a positive condition, sufficient to separate the world of the workers from the world of the privileged, but insufficient to give the former a revolutionary direction. Its programme is so broad that the monarchists and Catholics themselves can join. And this breadth of programme is absolutely necessary, so that the International can embrace hundreds of thousands of workers, and it is only by relying upon hundreds of thousands of members that it becomes a true power. If the International had given itself a more explicit and determined programme in respect to political, religious and social questions, if it recognised an obligatory and so to speak an official doctrine, if for example it made the acceptance of the principles of atheism in religion, or of communalism is politics a condition for anyone to join, it would have numbered barely a few thousand members, and it would have excluded millions of workers from industry and the land, who by their entire position as well as by their instincts are revolutionaries, atheists, and socialists, but who have not yet lost the bad habit of reactionary thoughts. It would only have formed a rather mediocre party and which would barely have counted a few thousand members in all of Europe. And that party itself would necessarily have split into many different cliques. For from the moment that there is an official theory, there will inevitably be different and

The International prepares the elements of revolutionary organisation… by organising the public and legal struggle of the workers joined in solidarity from all countries against the exploiters of labour, capitalists, proprietors and industrial entrepreneurs… [and] the theoretical propaganda of socialist ideas amongst the working masses

contrary theories. There would be bourgeois socialists, peaceful socialists, cooperativists, authoritarian socialists, hoping for their emancipation from the reform of the State, and revolutionary socialists expecting it only from the destruction of the State.

All these theories, with many other shades, already exist today in the International; but as long as none of them is proclaimed as the official theory, these differences of doctrine and the peaceful struggles that ensue within the midst of the International, far from being an evil, are in my opinion a great good, in that they contribute to developing the thought and the spontaneous work of everyone's intelligence; they cannot harm solidarity, which must unite the workers of all countries, because that solidarity is not theoretical in nature, it is entirely practical. – It is, I repeat again, the solidarity of the economic struggle of labour against capital, with all the practical consequences that it entails. The workers of the Jura Federation, for example, who abhor all authoritarian organisation and who have adopted for a programme the abolition of the State, are profoundly separated in this regard from the workers of Germany, who, by a large majority it seems, accept the authoritarian theories of Marx; and yet were a strike to break out in Germany, the workers of the Jura would be the first to support it with all their means. I am not certain, but I hope that the workers of Germany would do the same thing. This, then, is the true, the only solidarity created by the International. It is entirely practical, and it persists, it remains powerful despite all the theoretical disagreements that may arise between different groups of workers.

Yet it can only maintain itself on this sole condition that no theory, whether political, whether socialist, whether philosophical, can ever become the official, obligatory theory of the International. At first, every official theory is good sense. To have the courage and the pretext to impose itself, it must proclaim itself absolute, and the time of the absolute is over, at least in the camp of the revolution – for the men of freedom and humanity, the absolute is the absurd. Then, as there has never been an example in history and as it will be forever impossible that any given theory will really be the product of the individual thought of everyone; as all theories, as explicit and finite theories, have been and always will be elaborated by a small number of individuals, the so-called absolute theory will in reality never represent anything other than the despotism exercised by the thought of a few on the thought of all – a theoretical despotism that will never fail to turn into practical despotism and exploitation.

This is precisely what we see happening today within the midst of the International. The Marxian clique, all-powerful in the General Council, taking advantage of the momentary disarray of the revolutionary socialists of France, who had stood up to it until now, but who today murdered, decimated, deported, exiled, or forced into silence, cannot make their voices heard, obviously tends to impose the political and socialist doctrine of Marx, that of the emancipation of the working classes by the power of the great centralised State, as the official doctrine of the International. Alongside this goal and as its necessary consequence, it has pursued another; that of transforming the General Council, always directed by Marx in person, as the government, the official director, as the dictator of the International. – And it works, it schemes immensely today, spreading slanders liberally, to prepare a Congress that, after having proclaimed Marx's doctrine and naturally concealed dictatorship as obligatory for all the sections of the International, will declare heretical all those who do not want to accept this doctrine, and traitors all those who do not want to bow their heads under this dictatorship.

Such is the inevitable effect of official doctrines.

Unless it betrays its mission, the International must not accept any. But then what will happen? This will happen, more and more enlightened by the struggle and by the free propaganda of different ideas, guided by their own instinct and raised more and more to revolutionary consciousness by the very practice and the inevitable consequences of the universal solidarity of the struggle of labour against capital, the masses [will elaborate], slowly it is true, but in an unerring manner, their own thoughts, theories that will emerge from bottom up, but which will no longer be imposed from top down.

I have said that this work is being done and is done slowly. Not so slowly, however, as you might think. Those who have had some experience in the development of the International know what marvellous progress the consciousness of the workers has made in a very small number of years, thanks to the absolute freedom that has reigned so far within the International, freedom in propaganda, as well as in organisation…

In my opinion, this progress is immense. However, I recognise that it is insufficient to give the elementary power of the masses a revolutionary organisation; and as long as the masses do not have this organisation, even were they more overwhelming in terms of numbers [within the International] in comparison to the privileged classes, they would always be crushed by the latter.

I gladly recognise that the privileged classes in all countries have lost much of their former strength. They

have utterly lost their moral strength; they no longer have faith in their right, they know that they are iniquitous, odious, they despise themselves. That is significant. Having lost their moral strength, they also conspicuously and necessarily lose their intellectual strength. They are much more learned than the proletariat, but that does not prevent them from becoming increasingly stupid. They have lost all intellectual and moral courage. They no longer dare to look forward and only look back. All of this unfailingly condemns them to death. The proletariat, who in their lifetime have inherited their former intellectual and moral power, is prepared to force them today into their last political and economic entrenchments.

All of this is true. But we must be under no illusions; the entrenchments are still very strong: they are called the State, the Church, the Stock Market, the police, the army, then that great international and public conspiracy, legal, admitted, that is called diplomacy.

All that is skilfully organised and powerful by organisation. And in the presence of this formidable organisation, the proletariat, even united, grouped and unified in and by the International, remains disorganised. Whatever its number! Even if the people were a million, several millions, they will be held in check by a few tens of thousands of soldiers, maintained and disciplined at their expense, against them, by bourgeois coins produced by their own labour.

Take the most numerous, most advanced and best organised section of the International. – Is it prepared for the fight? You know well that it is not. Out of a thousand workers, it is a great deal if you can gather one or at most two hundred on the day of the battle. The thing is to organise a force, it is not enough to unite interests, feelings, thoughts… We must unite wills and characters. Our enemies organise their forces by the power of money and the authority of the State. We can only organise ours by conviction, passion.

We cannot have and we want no other army than the people, the masses. But how can this entire mass – and it is only under this condition that it can prevail – rise up simultaneously? Above all, how to ensure that the masses, even electrified, risen, do not contradict and paralyse themselves by their conflicting movements?

There is only one single means; it is to secure the cooperation of all the popular leaders. I call popular leaders individuals who for the most part come from the people, living with them, sharing their life, and who, thanks to their intellectual and moral superiority, exert a great influence upon them. There are many amongst them who abuse this and make it serve their personal interests. These are very dangerous men and who must be avoided like the plague, that we must fight and destroy whenever possible. We must seek good leaders, those who seek their own interest only in the interest of all. But how to find them and recognise them, and what individual is intelligent enough, perceptive enough, and powerful enough, not to make a mistake in their initial choice and then to convince and to organise them all by himself?

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It is obvious that this cannot be the work of one man alone; that many men combined can alone undertake and successfully complete such a difficult endeavour. But for that, it is first necessary that they come to an agreement amongst themselves and that they join hands for this common work. But since this work has a practical, revolutionary purpose, the mutual understanding that is its necessary condition cannot be made in public; if it were made in public, it would attract the persecutions of the whole official and unofficial world against the initiators and they would see themselves crushed before they could do the slightest thing.

So this agreement and this association that must emerge from it can only be made in secret, that is to say it is necessary to establish a conspiracy, a secret society proper.

Such is also the thought and aim of the Alliance. It is a secret society formed in the midst of the International, to give to the latter a revolutionary organisation, to transform it, and all the popular masses that are outside of it, into a power sufficiently organised to destroy the politico-clerical-bourgeois reaction, to destroy all the economic, legal, religious and political institutions of the States.

The last Conference of London has pronounced anathema against any secret society that might be formed within the International. It is obviously a blow against us. But what the Marxian clique which directed that Conference, as it directs the General Council at this time, what it was carefully avoided from saying to the majority of the members of that Conference, and what it has only said to its closest friends or to its cronies, is that it pushed to issue this condemnation against us to clear the way for its own conspiracy, for the secret society that has existed since 1848 under the direction of Marx, founded by Marx, Engels, and the late Wolff, and which is nothing other than the almost exclusively Germanic society of the *authoritarian Communists*.

What I have said here is not a supposition, but a fact known by many people, and which has often, in different political trials, publicly emerged in Germany. So, leaving aside the odious part of personalities that has been pushed to the most ignominious fifth, by our vindictive and all too persistent adversaries, it must be recognised that the internal struggle that today erupts within the International, is nothing other than that of two secret societies as opposed by their principles, as by the system of their organisation, and of which one, that of the *authoritarian Communists*, as I have just said, [has existed] since 1848, the other that of the *Alliance of Revolutionary Socialists* dates its existence from 1864, it is true, but has only began to establish itself in the International since 1868.

Let us first begin by doing justice to our adversaries, where they deserve that justice. Marx is not an ordinary man. He is a superior intelligence, a man of very extensive knowledge, especially in economic issues, and moreover a man who, to my knowledge since 1845, the time of my first encounter with him in Paris, has always been sincerely, entirely devoted to the cause of the emancipation of the proletariat, a cause to which he has rendered undeniable services, which he has never knowingly betrayed, but which he is greatly jeopardising today by his formidable vanity, by his hateful, malicious character, and by his tendencies to dictatorship within the party of the revolutionary socialists itself. His vanity in fact has no limits, a true Jewish vanity; and it is a great pity, it is a useless luxury, for vanity is understandable in an empty being, who, being nothing, wants to appear all. Marx has very positive qualities and a very great power of thought and action, that could have spared him, it seems to me, the trouble of resorting to the miserable means of vanity. This vanity, naturally already very strong, has been considerably swollen by the adulation of his friends and disciples. Very self-centred, very jealous, very touchy, and very vindictive, like Jehovah, the God of his people, Marx would not suffer that anyone recognise any God but himself; what am I saying, that anyone merely do justice to another socialist writer or activist, in his presence. Proudhon who was never a God, but who certainly was a great revolutionary thinker and who rendered immense services to the development of socialist ideas, became for that same reason the *bête noire* of Marx. To praise Proudhon in his presence, was to commit a mortal offence, worthy of all the natural consequences of his enmity – and these consequences are: first hatred, then the filthiest slanders. Marx never shied away from lying, however odious, however false, when he believed he could use it without too great danger for himself against those who had the misfortune of incurring his wrath. – I have said that Marx is excessively self-centred. Here is one proof: he still believes in individual ownership of ideas. After the death of Lassalle, the famous agitator and founder of the Social Democratic Party in Germany, in large part a disciple of Marx, an authoritarian communist like him, who like him had preached the emancipation of the working masses by the State – after his death, I say, Marx published the first and so far only volume of his great book on “Capital”. In the preface, he bitterly accused Lassalle of having stolen his ideas and even the manner the ideas were expressed; a reproach that was already supremely unjust since Lassalle in one of his writings, directed against Schultz-Delitsch, after having developed certain ideas, added: “These ideas and the expressions that I have used, were not actually invented by me; I have borrowed them from a magnificent, still unpublished work by Marx.” That statement was not enough for Marx. Here then is Marx caught red-handed in propertarianism, and this in the sphere of ideas, which is certainly the least suitable for individual appropriation. – These friends know so well this compulsion of their master that, for example, Engels, also a very intelligent man, Marx’s closest and oldest friend, having published a rather remarkable work on the uprising of the German peasants in the 16th century, was very careful to say in the introduction that the principal ideas that had served as basis for that work were not his one, but Marx’s.

Now let us acknowledge that Marx is a very serious, very profound economic thinker. He has this immense advantage over Proudhon, of being a realist, a materialist. Proudhon, despite all his efforts to shake off the traditions of classical idealism, nevertheless remained all his life an incorrigible idealist, taking inspiration, as I told him two months before his death, sometimes from the Bible, sometimes from Roman law, and always a metaphysician to the tips of his fingers. His great misfortune is that he never studied the natural sciences, and had never adopted their

methods – He had instincts of genius which had made him glimpse the right path, but, driven by the bad or idealist habits of his mind, he always fell back into the old errors; which made Proudhon a perpetual contradiction – a vigorous genius, a revolutionary thinker always struggling against the phantoms of idealism, and never managing to overcome them.

Marx as a thinker is on the right track. He has established as a principle that all religious, political and legal evolutions in history are not the causes, but effects of the economic evolutions – It is a great and fecund thought that he did not entirely invent, it has been glimpsed, expressed in part, by many others besides him – But in the end the honour belongs to him of having firmly established it and having posited it as the basis of his entire economic system. On the other hand, Proudhon understood and felt freedom far better than him – Proudhon, when he did not engage in doctrine and metaphysics, had the true instinct of the revolutionary – he adored Satan and he proclaimed an-archy. It is quite possible that Marx could raise himself *theoretically* to an even more rational system of freedom than Proudhon – but he lacks Proudhon's instinct. As a German and a Jew, he is an authoritarian from head to toe.

Hence the two opposing systems: the anarchic system of Proudhon, expanded, developed and freed by us from all its metaphysical, idealist, doctrinaire trappings, and firmly accepting matter in science, and social economy in history as the basis of all subsequent developments. And the system of Marx, leader of the German school of authoritarian communists.

Here are the basics of this system. Like us, the authoritarian communists want the abolition of individual property. But they differ from us principally in that they want the expropriation of all individuals by the State, while we want it by the abolition of the State and of the legal right necessarily guaranteed by the State. This is why, at the Basle Congress, we proclaimed the abolition of the right of inheritance, while they opposed it, saying that this abolition would become unnecessary from the moment that the State became the sole proprietor. – The State, they say, must be the only proprietor of the land, and also the only banker. The State bank, replacing the feudal banks existing today, must alone fund the national labour; so that in practice all workers, both in industry and on the land, would become employees of the State. the English communists of that same school declared at the Basle Congress that the earth should be cultivated under the direction of State engineers.

We have rejected this system for two reasons; first, because instead of diminishing the power of the State, it increases it by concentrating all powers in its hands. It is true that they say that their State will be the State of the people, governed by Assemblies and officials directly elected by the people and subject to popular control – It is the representative, parliamentary system, that of universal suffrage, corrected by the referendum and by direct voting on all laws by the people – But we know about the sincerity of these representations. What is clear is that the Marxist system leads, like that of Mazzini, to the establishment of a very strong, so-called popular power, that is to say to the domination of an intelligent minority, alone capable of comprehending the complicated questions inseparable from centralisation, and consequently to the enslavement of the masses and to their exploitation by that intelligent minority. It is the system of *revolutionary authorities*, of freedom directed from above – that is to say a blatant lie.

The other reason that has made us reject this system is that it leads directly to the establishment of new, large, nation States, separate and necessarily rivals and hostile, to the negation of Internationalism, of humanity. For unless they claim to found a single universal State – an absurd undertaking, condemned by history – they must inevitably establish national States, or even more likely, large States in which one race, the most powerful, most intelligent, will enslave, oppress and exploit other races – so that without admitting it, the Marxists fatally end up in pan-Germanism [the manuscript ends here]

From the Anarchist Press

Until relatively recently, few of Bakunin's writings have been available in English. As with Kropotkin, his primary language in terms of anarchism was French, not Russian. This meant that a comprehensive understanding of his political ideas was difficult to come by within the English-language movement – although that has not stopped academics hostile to anarchism suggesting an awareness of certain texts (not actually written by Bakunin!) played a role in the development of anarchism, usually in relation to "propaganda by the deed". That these notions arose years after Bakunin died has not stopped such claims.

Here we re-print various (short) translations which appeared in the British anarchist press, primarily from *Freedom* and one from *Liberty* (which serialised his *God and the State*). Ironically, the American Individualist Anarchist Benjamin Tucker probably made more available in English than Bakunin's libertarian communist descendants (Tucker translated *God and the State* as well as serialising *The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International* in the Boston *Liberty*).

We start with an extract from Bakunin's polemics against Mazzini which was published in *Liberty* (London) in which he indicates how the materialism of socialism produces genuine idealism whilst philosophical idealism results in exploitation and oppression.

Next comes an extract from Bakunin's critique of universal suffrage within capitalism, indicating that as long as the inequalities associated with classes exist then it cannot be a means of emancipation. Rather, it will be little more than picking the masters who will ensure your oppression and exploitation.

An extract from the unpublished full manuscript of Bakunin's "Letters to a Frenchman on the current crisis" on German Social Democracy follows. Bakunin indicates that by focusing on the political struggle and reforms, the party transforms itself from a proletarian socialist to a bourgeois radical one. The next is on the pertinent issue of bourgeois radicals calling themselves socialists in order to gain popular support.

We end with a short piece on the importance of economic struggle. Most of this extract is from a "Fragment" which was considered as a continuation of the *L'empire Knouto-Germanique*. This fragment also includes this foreshadowing of the preamble of the I.W.W.:

> **"The International, by thus placing the proletariat outside the politics of States and the bourgeois world, constitutes a new world, the world of proletarian solidarity across all countries. This world is that of the future... it is *the organisation of international solidarity for the economic struggle of labour against capital.*"**

Other writings from Bakunin have appeared in the anarchist press. Guy Aldred, for example, was a pioneer in making Bakunin's ideas available in English (albeit in often loose translations which provided the spirit if not always the letter of the texts). The 1950s saw Maximov's collection of extracts from various texts grouped by theme while the 1970s onwards has seen various collections appear which have allowed anarchists to gain a better understanding of Bakunin's ideas beyond a few extracts.

False Idealism

Michael Bakunin

Liberty: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, June 1896

All Mazzini's work remained outside the true life of the masses. And that is why that giant work, undertaken by the greatest man of the century, and accomplished by two generations of Italian hero-martyrs, seems a dead work, resembling more a corpse in a state of putrefaction than a powerful and living being; and that is why, in spite of the transcendental idealism of the thought that inspired it, the political unity created by Mazzini, and more than half rotten to-day, has become an Eldorado of parasites and other foul beasts of prey. A. man can conceive an idea, he can also inspire hundreds of young men with it; but however great his genius may be, he cannot create life, nor the power of life; for life is never the child of abstraction, the latter on the contrary always proceeding from the former, and never being anything more than its incomplete expression. The secret and the power of life are only to be found in society, in the people. And as long as the people have not given their sanction to a so-called national work, that work will never be truly national and live. Italy created by Mazzini has fatally resulted in an Italy of Lauzas, Boughis, Covretis, Visconti-Venostas, in an Italy of Crispis, Mordinis, Nicoteras, and the rest of them. This has not been an unlucky accident but a logical and fatal necessity. No one understood this less than Mazzini. Thus you find the word "people" in all his works; it is part of his famous formula " God and the people," and Mazzini always declared that he would only consider his work as definitely complete when it had been sanctioned by the people. But the people Mazzini speaks of are not the real people—taken in their spontaneous and living reality; his people are fictitious beings, abstract, theological so to say. Popular masses, taken in their real living and natural existence, seem to be but a multitude in his eyes; and for that multitude to become a people it must first accept the law of God, the thought of God revealed by prophets—men of genius crowned by virtue. The thought that has the power to transform a multitude into a nation is therefore not the expression of that multitude's own life, it is born outside of it, and consequently is brought and imposed from without. That is the true significance of the formula " God and the people". God is the dogmatic, aristocratic thought, foreign to the people and consequently anti-popular. It must at all costs be imposed on the multitude, and the multitude must sanction it by the semblance of a spontaneous vote, and by sanctioning it become a people. Mazzini's people are an hypnotised and sacrificed multitude, easily represented in councils and parliaments, by men who will have imbibed their inspirations, not in the interests of the masses, not in the real life of the masses, but in a theologico-political abstraction absolutely foreign to them.

Our principle – is it not so? – is quite the reverse. Outside positive science we recognise no source of moral truths but the life of the people, positive science being but a methodical and reasoned summary of the great historical experience of nations. Society taken in its broadest sense, the people—the vile multitude, the mass of workers—not only gives power and life but also the elements of all modern thought; a thought not created by it and not the faithful expression of popular instincts, is according to me a still-born thought. From which I draw the conclusion that the part devoted and educated young men have to play is not that of revealers, prophets, instructors or doctors, not that of creators, but only that of expounders of thought, born of the people's life; that is to say that young men who wish to serve the people, must not seek their inspiration from above, but straight from the people, in order to give a clearly defined expression to what its unconscious but powerful aspirations contain in a confused manner.

Among popular thoughts, one that unquestionably occupies the first place in the aspirations of the masses of all countries, is material and economic emancipation. The Mazzinians from the heights of their transcendental idealism foreign to the people, disdained this tendency very much, and if they found themselves obliged to make certain concessions to it, they only did it with a sort of disdainful condescension for the vile brutality of the masses, incapable of forgetting their appetites and of living in the sole contemplation of an ideal. Their contemptuous Socialism was a sort of bait for the multitude that could not be touched by the beauty of an ideal. Blinded by their own theological and political ideas, that after all represented so many old and new chains for the people, they only saw the brutal expression of brutal appetites in such an aspiration, and they did not understand that this primitive and unconscious form contains the highest and most emancipating idea of the century; that of destroying all ideals as abstractions, as fictions or as theological, poetical, judicial and political symbols, and transforming them into popular living realties: truth, justice, liberty, equality, solidarity, fraternity, humanity, all these magnificent things, that so long as they remained theological, poetical, political, judicial truths, served but to consecrate and cover the most brutal, crushing oppression and exploitation in the true life of the people, have been but the expression of the multitude's condemnation to misery and eternal servitude. Since history exists, has not the basis as well as the consequence of all these splendid abstractions always been exploitation of the forced work of the masses for the profit of privileged minorities called classes Has not the Catholic church, the most ideal of all in principle, been since the first years of its official existence, that is to soy since the Emperor Constantine the Great, the most rapacious and grasping institution ? Has not all the splendour of Christian civilisation, Church, State, material prosperity of nations, science, art, poetry, been supported by the slavery, bondage, misery of millions of workers who constitute the real people? What do the people do in asking this terrible economical question? They attack the basis of all civilisation that has so long enslaved them. They force the eternal idealities, be they theological or political, to fall from the sky to the ground where true life exists, and to be transformed into living and fruitful realities for the people. The people in claiming their daily bread, the whole product of their work, claim science, justice, liberty, equality, solidarity, fraternity, in fact humanity. Whence it results that materialism is the highest expression of practical and true idealism

Bakunin On Universal Suffrage

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, January 1910

'But the municipality,' you say, 'you have no right to attack that; for, named after the revolution, by the direct election of the people themselves, it is the product of universal suffrage. As such it must be sacred to you.'

Candidly, I tell you, my friend, I do not at all share in the superstitious love of your Radical bourgeois or of your bourgeois Republicans for universal suffrage.

In another letter I will set forth the reasons which do not allow me to rejoice in it. Let it be sufficient for me to put here in principle a truth which seems to me irrefutable, and which it will not be difficult for me to prove later on as much by reasoning as by a great number of facts taken from the political life of all countries which possess at the present time democratic and Republican institutions, *to know that universal suffrage, so long as it will be exercised in a society where the people; the working masses, will be economically ruled by a minority possessing property and capital, however independent or free otherwise it may be, or rather it may appear, as to the political aspect, will never be able to produce anything but delusive elections, anti-democratic, and entirely opposed to the needs, the instinct, and the real will of the peoples*.

As to all the elections since the *coup d'etat* of December which have been made directly by the people of France, have they not been directly contrary to the interests of this people; and the last vote on the imperial plebiscite, has it not given seven million "Ayes" to the Emperor? It will doubtless be said that the universal suffrage was never freely exercised under the Empire, liberty of the press, of association and meetings, necessary conditions of political liberty, having been disallowed, and the people being helpless under the influence of the corrupt action of a paid press and of a shameful administration.

Possibly; but the elections of 1848 for the Constitution and for the Presidency, and that of May, 1849, for the Legislative Assembly, were, I believe, absolutely free. They took place independent of all pressure, or even official interference, in all the conditions of absolute freedom. And, however, what have/ they produced? Nothing but reaction.

"One of the first acts of the Provisory Government," said Proudhon ("Idées Révolutionnaires"), "that for which it is most praised, is the application of universal suffrage. The very day when the decree was issued, we wrote these exact words, which might then pass as a paradox:

"Universal suffrage is the counter-revolution.

"One can judge after the event if we were deceived.

"The elections of 1848 have taken place, with an immense majority for the priests, for the Legitimists, for the Royalists, for everything the most reactionary and retrograde that France contains. This could not be otherwise."

No, this could not be, and to-day still it cannot be otherwise, so long as the inequality of economic and social conditions of life continue to prevail in the organisation of society, so long as society continues to be divided into two classes, of which the one, the exploiting and privileged class, rejoices in all the advantages of fortune, education and leisure, and the other, comprising all the mass of the proletariat, has for its share only manual labour, wearisome and enforced, ignorance, and their necessary accompaniment, slavery, not by right but by might.

Yes, slavery; for however great may be the political rights that you allow to these millions of salaried proletariat, true convicts of hunger, you will never succeed in keeping them free. from the pernicious influence, from the natural domination, of the various representatives of the privileged class, from the priest to the bourgeois Republican, the most Jacobin, the most extreme ; representatives who, however divided they may appear, or may really be, among themselves as to political questions, are none the less united in a supreme and common interest – that of the exploitation of the misery, the ignorance, the political inexperience, and the good faith of the proletariat, to the profit of the economic domination of the possessing class.

How would the proletariat of the country and of the towns be able to resist the intrigues of the clerical, aristocratic, and bourgeois political parties? It has one weapon only with which to defend itself, its instinct, which almost always tends towards truth and justice, because it is itself the principal, if not the only, victim of the iniquity and of all the intrigues which hold sway in actual society; and because, oppressed by privilege, it naturally claims equality for all.

But instinct is not a sufficient weapon to safeguard the proletariat against the reactionary doings of the privileged class. Instinct left to itself, so far as it has not become a fully considered consciousness, a clearly determined thought, may be easily bewildered, frustrated, and deceived. But it is impossible to raise itself to this consciousness by itself without the help of education, of science; and science, the knowledge of things and of men, political experience, is completely wanting among the proletariat. The consequence is easy to draw: The proletariat wishes one thing ; clever men, profiting by its ignorance, are going to make it do something else without it even suspecting that it is doing quite the contrary of what it wishes; and when it finally understands, it is generally too late to repair the evil which it has done, and of which naturally, necessarily, and always it is the first and principal victim.

The State and German Social Democracy

Michael Bakunin

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, July 1914

(From" Letters to a Frenchman, on the Present Crisis," written at Locarno, September 3-9, 1870.)

Whosoever mentions the State, implies force, oppression, exploitation, injustice – all these brought together as a system are the main condition of present-day society. The State has never had, and never can have, a morality. Its only morality and justice is its own interest, its existence, and its omnipotence at any price; and before its interests, all interests of Humanity must stand in the background. The State is the negation of Humanity. It is this in two ways: the opposite of human freedom and human justice (internally), as well as the forcible disruption of the common solidarity of mankind (externally). The Universal State, repeatedly attempted, has always proved an impossibility, so that, as long as *the State* exists, *States* will exist; and since every State regards itself as absolute, and proclaims the adoration of its power as the highest law, to which all other laws must be subordinated, it therefore follows that as long as States exist wars cannot cease. Every State must conquer, or be conquered. Every State must build its power on the weakness, or, if it can do it without danger to itself, on the destruction, of other States.

To strive for international justice, liberty, and perpetual peace, and at the same time to uphold the State, is contradictory and naive. It is impossible to alter the nature of the State, because it is just this nature that

constitutes the State; And States cannot change their nature without ceasing to exist. It thus follows that there cannot be a good, just, virtuous State. All States are bad in that sense, that they, by their nature, by their principle, by their very foundation and the highest ideal of their existence, are the opponents of human liberty, morality, and justice. And in this regard there is, one may say what one likes, no great difference between the barbaric Russian Empire and the civilised States of Europe. Wherein lies the only difference? Russian Tsardom does openly what the others do under the mask of hypocrisy. Tsardom, with its undisguised political method, and its contempt for humanity, is the only goal to which all statesmen of Europe secretly but envyingly aspire. All States of Europe do the same as Russia, as far as public opinion, and especially as far as the reawakened but very powerful solidarity of the proletariat, allow them – a public opinion and solidarity which contain in themselves the germs of the destruction of States. There is no "good" State, with the possible exception of those that are powerless. And even they are quite criminal enough in their dreams.

He who wants freedom, justice, and peace, he who wants the entire (economic and political) liberation of the masses, must strive for the destruction of the States, and the establishment of a universal federation of free groups for production.

As long as the German workers strive for the establishment of a national State – however popular and free they may imagine this State (and there is a far step from imagination to realisation, especially when there is the fraternisation of two diametrically opposed principles, the State and the liberty of the people, involved) – so long will they sacrifice the liberty of the people to the might of the State, Socialism to politics, international justice and fraternity to patriotism. It is clear that their own economic liberation will remain a beautiful dream, looming in the distant future.

It is impossible to reach two opposite poles simultaneously. Socialism, the Social Revolution, presupposes the abolition of the State; it is therefore clear that he who is in favour of the State must give up Socialism, and sacrifice the economic liberation of the workers to the political power of some privileged party.

The German Social Democratic Party is forced to sacrifice the economic liberation of the proletariat, and consequently also their political liberation – or, better expressed, their liberation from politics – to the self-seeking and triumph of the bourgeois Democracy. This follows unquestionably from Articles 2 and 3 of their programme.[1] The first three paragraphs of Article 2 are quite in accord with the Socialist principles of the International, whose programme they copy nearly literally. But the fourth paragraph of the same article, which declares that political liberty is the forerunner of economic liberty, entirely destroys the practical value of the recognition of our principles. It can mean nothing else than this:

> "Proletarians, you are slaves, the victims of private property and capitalism. You want to liberate yourselves from this yoke. This is good, and your demands are quite just. But in order to realise them, you must help us to accomplish the political revolution. Afterwards we will help you to accomplish the Social Revolution. Let us, therefore, through the might of your arms establish the Democratic State, and then – and then we will create a commonweal for you, similar to the one the Swiss workers enjoy."

In order to convince oneself that this preposterous delusion expresses entirely the spirit and tendency of the German Social Democratic Party – *i.e.*, their programme, not the natural aspirations of the German workers, of whom the party consists – one need only study the third article of this programme, wherein all the initial demands, which shall be brought about by the peaceful and legal agitation of the party, are elaborated. All these demands, with the exception of the tenth, which had not even been proposed by the authors of the programme, but had been added later – during the discussion, by a member of the Eisenach Congress – all these demands are of an entirely political character. All those points which are recommended as the main object of the immediate practical activity of the party consist of nothing else but the well-known programme of bourgeois Democracy:

[1] As an explanation for students of the history of the development of the German Social Democracy, as well as for all seekers after truth, the following notes will be interesting. Bakunin's polemics are directed partly against the programme which was adopted, under the influence of Bebel, Liebknecht, etc., at the fifth Congress of the German Labour Unions (Arbeitervereinstag) at Nuremberg, 1868, and partly against the so-called Eisenach programme of August 7, 1869. The before-mentioned third article runs literally:

"Political liberty is the indispensable preliminary condition to the economical liberation of the labouring classes. The social question is, therefore, inseparable from the political question; its solution is conditioned by it, and is only possible in the Democratic State." As many assertions as there are in this third Article, as many untruths does it contain. This article is the third in the Nuremberg programme; in the Eisenach programme it is the fourth.

universal suffrage, with direct legislation by the people, abolition of all political privilege ; a citizen army ; separation of Church and State, and school and State ; free and compulsory education; liberty of the Press, assembly, and combination ; conversion of all indirect taxation into a direct, progressive, and universal income-tax.

These are the true objects, the real goal of the party! An exclusively political reform of the State, the institutions and laws of the State. Am I not, therefore, entitled to assert that this programme is in reality a purely political and bourgeois affair, which looks upon Socialism only as a dream for a far distant future? Have I not likewise a right to assert that if one would judge the Social Democratic Party of the German proletariat by their programme – of which I will beware, because I know that the real aspirations of the German working class, go infinitely further than this programme – then one would have a right to believe that the creation of this party had no other purpose than the exploitation of the mass of the proletariat as blind and sacrificed tools towards the realisation of the political plans of the German bourgeois Democracy.

Bourgeois Socialism

Michael Bakunin

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism,, February 1915

(Letter to the Press Committee of "Egalité" in Geneva.)

My dear Perron,

You ask me if I will contribute to the paper *Egalité*, which will be the organ of the Latin section of the International in Switzerland. You can depend on me, my dear friend. I consider this society as the grandest and most healthful institution of our century, which will be destined to become the greatest power in Europe to reorganise social order by replacing present-day injustice with a reign of freedom, which, whilst excluding nobody from their rights, will become really beneficial for all, because it will be built up on the equality and solidarity of all; on equality and solidarity in labour and in the distribution of the fruits of this labour; in education, in the physical, moral and intellectual, personal, political and social development of men; and likewise in all noble and human enjoyments of life, which until now have been exclusively reserved for the privileged classes.

This grand Union of the workers of Europe and America has been in existence only four years, and it already carries all the elements of that justice and general peace which the bourgeois congresses long for but never find, for this one simple reason: the bourgeoisie is a part of society which has been worn out and made sick by history; and like so many dotards, who, owing to their impotence, think of Utopias, it dreams today of the unification of opposing forces, and wants the ends without the means. The bourgeoisie's wish is nothing else than the platonic worship of Justice, but only on the condition that the inherent privileges of the historic evil shall continue to exist. They are thirsting for peace, but at the same time they want to preserve the existing political States, because these States protect them against the thousandfold just demands of the masses. Thirty centuries of history were not sufficient to prove to them that the political State means continual war without, and permanent oppression and exploitation within.

But we can leave these poor dotards to their impotent dreams and ridiculous Utopias. The present belongs to the bourgeoisie, the future is for the workers. Let us think of the great preparation for the coming day.

What is needed to bring about the final liberation of Labour? Two things, two inseparable conditions. The first is the true and practical solidarity of the workers of all countries. What power on earth can resist this gigantic combination? This must, therefore, be realised. All oppressed and exploited workers of the whole world must clasp hands across the artificial boundaries of the political States, and thus destroy these boundaries; they must unite for the common cause in the single thought of justice and solidarity of interests; all for each, and each for all. For the last time the world must split itself into two camps, into two parties; on one side, Labour to equal conditions for all, the liberty of each through the equality of all, the conquering Justice and Humanity – the revolution; on the other side, privilege, monopoly, dominion, oppression, and exploitation.

The second condition, inseparable from the first, is knowledge. Not the bourgeois knowledge, adulterated, metaphysical, legal, political, economical, pedantic and dogmatic, which is taught at your universities; but the true, human knowledge, founded on the positive perception of the facts of nature, history, and society,

and guided by nothing else but reason and sound common-sense. Knowledge is power. The workers, therefore, need solidarity and knowledge. To develop these two fundamental conditions of their victory, is not this the main object of the organ founded by the Latin sections of Switzerland? It is the duty of every one to help in this work, and I will be proud and happy to give what assistance I can.

It is especially a question the discussion of which seems to me very important. You know that these poor bourgeois, driven by the inevitable trend of conditions, and making necessity a virtue, are becoming Socialists today – i.e., they are trying to dilute Socialism, as they have diluted so many good things to their profit. For a long time they opposed the word "Socialism," and I can tell a tale of this. It took me a whole winter, nay, a whole year, to explain the word "Socialism" to the Central Committee of the bourgeois "Peace and Liberty League." Now they say they understand it. I put this miracle not to the credit of my poor eloquence, but to the eloquence of facts, which have spoken stronger than I. The strikes of Ghent and of Charleroi, the defeat of the German bourgeois democracy in the great Convention at Vienna, the Congresses at Hamburg and Nuremberg, and especially that at Brussels, have tamed their dogmatic and obstinate senses. Deaf and blind from class interest, as a result of their social position, and from heredity, today they are beginning to hear and see. They have at last grasped that the coming of Socialism is today an inevitable fact, that it is the fate of the century in which we live. And this is the reason why they have become Socialists.

But how did they become Socialists? They have invented for themselves a Socialism of their own – verily, a very cunning one, which has as its object to secure to the bourgeois class all the privileges of the present order of society, and to secure to the workers – a continuation of their misery. It would be a waste of time to speak about it, had not these new bourgeois Socialists, using the privileges of their social position and wealth (naturally much more powerful than ours), as well as the organisation of their combination and the protection of the authorities, started a crusade in order to mislead the consciousness of Labour organisations, especially in Germany.

We must fight them, and if the Committee of *Egalité* allows me, I will devote several articles to the purpose of explaining the gigantic difference which exists between true Socialism and the ridiculous Socialism of the bourgeoisie.

(*Egalité*, Dec. 19, 1868)

God or Freedom?

Michael Bakunin

Freedom, December 1920

(*A speech delivered by Michael Bakunin at the Congress of the League of Peace and Freedom, at Berne, in 1868*)

It has been asserted that we are enemies of free opinion, because we combat all religious ideas; but this assertion is in every respect unfounded. We are the systematic and principled enemies of every authority, of every governing force; we even combat the authoritarian State idea, and we will never recognise any social organisation which is not founded on the freedom of the whole of mankind.

We love freedom so much that we respect the outlook and opinions of everyone, even if they are in direct antagonism to ours. Has not one of the speakers on this platform asserted that Christianity is the foundation of all morality? We have listened to him quietly, and the same tolerance we demand also for ourselves, so as to express our deepest conviction that not only Christianity, but every other religion, whatever its name, is the direct contradiction of all human morality.

We do not combat religion just as if it were a mere caprice of ours; no, we combat it in the name of morality, justice, and humanity, and we are convinced that these principles will never be realised in society as long as mankind will be-influenced by religious Utopias and superstition.

This deep and time thought, that religion is in its whole character an enemy of all human morality, dignity, and justice, was not first proclaimed by us. The great thinkers of the past century had already developed it. This thought had already inspired the noblest spirits, the heroes and martyrs of the Renaissance, such men as Giordano Bruno, Vanini, Servetus, whom Calvin allowed to be burned alive at Geneva, and so many others who saw in the Christian darkness the light of the ancient Greek spirit, and who have unfurled the flag of Freedom and Humanity on the shattered towers of every God of all despotisms.

This morning I have found on the table of our ante-room a prospectus which requests the delegates of our Congress to subscribe for a book which was written against the Popes. The motto on this work are the words of Ulrich von Hutten: "When mankind want to be fry and happy, they must first of all destroy the chains of the Roman tyranny and free themselves of their heavy yoke, which corrupted monks and priests have placed on their shoulders." Who, then, was this Ulrich von Hutten, the hero of the Reformation? Was he a religious individual? Did he destroy the chains of the Catholic Church in order to submit to the pious Protestant tyranny of a Luther, a Calvin, or a Melanethon? No; Hutten was an atheist, a friend and scholar of the atheists in Florence, where he became acquainted with the great teachings of the Humanists.

These great heroes of Freethought, all the famous liberators of mankind, who were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, burnt, or murdered in another way by the hangman, they all fell through the cruel tyranny of Kings arid Popes, Church and State. But their ideas did not die. They were disguised under different names and forms, and advanced the gigantic work of the Humanists in the sixteenth century, and it was without doubt the learned and wise Erasmus of Rotterdam who was their most noted representative.

Whoever wants God desires also the enslavement of humanity; either God and the enslavement of mankind, or human liberty and the annihilation of every God idea! There is no third way! The decision rests with you.

In the seventeenth century the spiritual direction was power-fully strengthened through the development of natural science, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Gassendi, Bacon – the grandfather of modern Positivism – have built up the sciences on the foundation of reality, which sounded the death-knell of all metaphysical teachings, consequently also of religion. Out of the union of both these aspirations there has developed the great French philosophy of the eighteenth century.

This great eighteenth century, whose children we all are, and which inspires us even to-day with its powerful ideas, was really the most humane and atheistic century. It has acknowledged man and denied God. Their great spirits had comprehended that if there is a real desire to free mankind, break all its chains, and bring it happiness, dignity, and freedom, we must first of all destroy every religious Utopia, and all theological and metaphysical comprehensions, which have always been since the dawn of human history, a means and a justification of all tyrants to demoralise, enslave, and exploit mankind. The philosophers of the eighteenth century were luckier than the great thinkers of the Renaissance. The time was ripe, and their energetic and passionate propaganda, was the mother of the Revolution.

Shall analyse here the causes which prevented the Great Revolution from developing all its aspirations! This would take us too far. I am content to mention the sentimentally terroristical, *i.e.*, the religious teaching of Jean Jaques Rousseau, which was simply a hindrance to the general spiritual harmony of the eighteenth century, arid which was supported by the Inconsequent, brutal, and narrow-spirited Theism of Voltaire, who was of the opinion that for the people, the *canaille*, religion is absolute necessity; I am merely mentioning that this teaching had during the Revolution united the abstract culture of God with the abstract culture of the State. Both these metaphysical aspirations, which were embodied in the dark figure of Robespierre, the Calvin of the Revolution, had killed the Revolution.

After that there began the Dictatorship of the First Empire and the union with the Church, due to the principle of utility useful, it is understood, to the Despotism; then there came the Restoration with its Romanist decay and their representatives – the Chateaubriands, the Lamartines, and the Schlegels; and lastly, the speculative philosophy of the Germans, which, under the name of Eclecticism, has become a State institution in France.

These are the deep causes of the present situation, from which it is so difficult to escape. But if we really want to save ourselves, we must openly and freely unfurl the flag of the Renaissance and of the Great Revolution, on which is written "The Revolt of Man against the Yoke of the Gods."

Let us, then, have the courage to declare openly and freely that the existence of a God does not allow the union of happiness, dignity, reason, and freedom of mankind. If God exists, then is my reason, strong as it is, my will, with all its energy, as nothing compared with the Godly will and the Godly reason. My truth is to him a lie; my will becomes powerless; my liberty and

my rebellion mean sinning against him. It is he or I. If God exists, then must I disappear; and when he is so gracious as to send his prophets to make his truth known to me, which my reason cannot comprehend; when he sends priests to guide my thoughts, who are themselves incapable of differentiating between good and evil; when he sends anointed kings to govern me, then must I submit to his will with a slavish obedience. Whoever wants God desires also the enslavement of humanity; either God and the enslavement of mankind, or human liberty and the annihilation of every God idea! There is no third way! The decision rests with you.

This deep truth, which many greatly fear to proclaim openly, this truth, that the existence of a God does not allow the union of human liberty and reason with the individual and social morality of mankind, is acknowledged by many delegates of our Congress who for various reasons vote with the majority, to whom we are opposed. Has not a member of the moderate section declared plainly that the development of the positive sciences must unconditionally call for the gradual annihilation of all religious dogmas; and therefore education is the best means for the spiritual, political, moral, and social emancipation of the masses?

We, too, are supporters of a good and general education. We are also of the opinion that all the sciences with the highest and most profound phenomena must become the spiritual property of the people. But in order that the people may be aide to learn, they must first of all have the leisure and possibilities to study; they must be able to keep their children during the time of their studies. But this in itself demands the need for a radical change in the present economic organisation of society.

And this is not all. The partisans of a peaceful revolution, all these freethinking associations, who have led themselves to believe that only through instruction, the spoken and written propaganda, will they succeed in annihilating the power of religious superstition, they all make the greatest mistake. Religion is not only a spiritual obscuration of the mind, but it is also at the same time a passionate and constant protest of all human sentiments and inner aspirations against the narrowness and poverty of daily existence. The human imagination creates an artistic world, and there is planted its whole longings, all the hopes and ideals of mankind. Men have made richer the heavens because they have through that impoverished the earth. Thus was religion brought into existence, and it will be omnipotent on the earth as long as it dominates. ignorance and injustice. Let us finally create justice and give to the earth that which belongs to it, namely, happiness and brotherhood! Let us destroy all institutions of injustice and tyranny, and establish a world of brotherly love, that is, a world where the equal rights of all are founded on the equal solidarity of all, where freedom will be the product of equality, and religion will no longer find a foundation in human society.

But in order to destroy religion and all godly reflections in the human imagination, which keep us enslaved and poverty-stricken, spiritual enlightenment is not sufficient – a Social Revolution is necessary!

A scientific body to which had been confided the government of society would soon end by devoting itself no longer to science at all, but to quite another affair; and that affair, as in the case of all established powers, would be its own eternal perpetuation by rendering the society confided to its care ever more stupid and consequently more in need of its government and direction.

But that which is true of scientific academies is also true of all constituent and legislative assemblies, even those chosen by universal suffrage. In the latter case they may renew their composition, it is true, but this does not prevent the formation in a few years' time of a body of politicians, privileged in fact though not in law, who, devoting themselves exclusively to the direction of the public affairs of a country, finally form a sort of political aristocracy or oligarchy. Witness the United States of America and Switzerland.

Consequently, no external legislation and no authority — one, for that matter, being inseparable from the other, and both tending to the servitude of society and the degradation of the legislators themselves. – Bakunin, *God and the State*

Direct Action

Michael Bakunin

Why?, August-September 1942

The following excerpt from Michael Bakunin's *Works* Volume IV. makes timely reading

"The State… will always be an institution of domination and of exploitation… a permanent source of slavery and of misery." How, then, shall the State be destroyed? "First, by the organisation and the federation of strike funds and the international solidarity of strikes; secondly, by the organisation and international federation of trade unions; and, lastly, by the spontaneous and direct development of philosophical and sociological ideas in the International.

"Let us now consider these three ways in their special action, differing one from another, but, as I have just said, inseparable, and let us commence with the organisation of strike funds and strikes.

"Strike funds have for their sole object to provide the necessary money in order to make possible the costly organisation and maintenance of strikes. And the strike is the beginning of the social war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, while still within the limits of legality. Strikes are a valuable weapon in this two-fold connection; first, because they electrify the masses, give fresh impetus to their moral energy, and awaken in their hearts the profound antagonism which exists between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie, by showing them ever clearer the abyss which from this time irrevocably separates them from that class; and, second, because they contribute in large measure to provoke and to institute among the workers of all trades, of all localities, and of all countries the consciousness and the fact itself of solidarity: a double action, the one negative and the other positive, which tends to constitute directly the new world of the proletariat by opposing it, almost absolutely, to the bourgeois world."

"Once this solidarity is seriously accepted and firmly established, it brings forth all the rest – all the principles – the most sublime and the most subversive of the International, the most destructive of religion, of juridical right, and of the State, of authority divine as well as human – in a word, the most revolutionary from the socialist point of view, being nothing but the natural and necessary developments of this economic solidarity. And the immense practical advantage of the trade sections over the central sections consists precisely in this—that these developments and these principles are demonstrated to the workers not by theoretical reasoning, but by the living and tragic experience of a struggle which each day becomes larger, more profound, and more terrible. In such a way that the worker who is the least instructed, the least prepared, the most gentle, always dragged further by the very consequences of this conflict, ends by recognising himself to be a revolutionist, an anarchist, and an atheist, without often knowing himself how he has become such." [1]

Everywhere, in short, religious or philosophical idealism, the one being but the more or less free translation of the other, serves today as the flag of material, bloody, and brutal force, of shameless material exploitation; while, on the contrary, the flag of theoretical materialism, the red flag of economic equality and social justice, is raised by the practical idealism of the oppressed and famishing masses, tending to realise the greatest liberty and the human right of each in the fraternity of all men on the earth.

Who are the real idealists — the idealists not of abstraction, but of life, not of heaven, but of earth — and who are the materialists? – Bakunin, *God and the State*

[1] This final paragraph is actually from "Protestation de L'Alliance", Tome VI of Œuvres. (*Black Flag*)

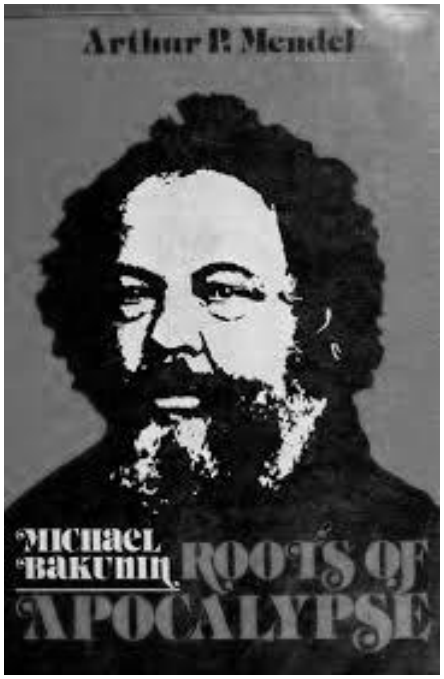
Reviews

Michael Bakunin: Roots of Apocalypse

Albert Meltzer

Black Flag, October 1982

Max Nettlau's major work on Bakunin is so huge that no publisher would dream of undertaking to publish it; in 1930 one publisher, Martin Secker, informed an interested reader that to publish it would mean bringing out an edition of £25 per copy! Mr Mendel's book is around that price; but times have changed: it is 500 pages (a tenth of the Nettlau book) and has nothing like the documentation — neither for quality nor quantity. Mr Mendel relies heavily on Bakunin's correspondence, edited by Soviet historians — he does not query whether it is all to be relied on; on the contrary, he thinks that some interpolations might be to defend Bakunin's reputation as a serious thinker! He seems to ignore Nettlau, but that at least makes a refreshing change from historians who regurgitate his material and fit it round to suit their own speculations. Mr Mendel's speculations are different yet of a pattern with many.



When Professor Carr's book first came out, the reaction of Nettlau (then still living) was hostile, and he asked, why, if Bakunin was apparently such a buffoon and oaf as Carr seems to think, Carr (or history) should bother with him at all. Numerous "historians" before and since have shot Bakunin down in flames... his reputation as a reliable financial risk remains always irrevocably shattered — some of the earlier ones couldn't get over that hurdle — he was subsequently "exposed" as a blatant "womaniser" who seduced all his friends' wives, but with the change in mores over the years has been shown as narcissistic, and sexually impotent to which Prof Mendel adds incestuousness and (but for the lack of a respondent) he and others would have added homosexual as well. A proper person, indeed, to dare stand up to Marx who never did anything but seduce the servant!

But Mr Mendel's sexual charges —and they form the mainstay of his book as he fancies himself as a psychologist and does not fail to bring in every *dernier cri* of the psychosexual industry — don't really stand up to analysis. One suspects, for instance, that sometimes lack of sexism (not unknown in the 19th century and particularly so among the Russian intelligentsia, influenced by Nihilism — which was in its way a Woman's movement, much more so than Anglo-American Suffragism) is equated by Mendel with lack of sexuality; and the (typical among its time and class) marriage of Bakunin to a girl whom he could have ruled despotically according to the law, but who lived with him freely is given as proof of his impotence. There were a great many "impotents" among the Romantic/Nihilistic school at that rate! It is strange that sexual impotence should run parallel with extreme courage and daring with such a regular pattern, among people who also held strong views about the tyranny of marriage.

But it wouldn't be strange for Mr Mendel, who states that originally he was attracted by Bakunin's defence of freedom against Marx's authoritarianism, but later realised that for Bakunin, "rejection of society" meant really rejection of sex (he doesn't say *rejection of the State* meant rejection of sex because that would reduce his argument to absurdity). Bakunin's dreams of abolition of government are slated as substitute dreams for abolition of his dominating family, his belief in fraternity just another way of getting a happier family than he had. The famous "Confession" is taken seriously and the Tsar is equated with his father. One wonders how Mr Mendel would behave in a dungeon before a barbarian victor? Ask the tyrant to lie back on the psychiatrists couch and be analysed? Was it such a bad idea to address him as another obstinate father in terms nobody could foresee would ever be revealed to the world?

It could hardly be expected that Mr Mendel would refrain, while in a psychological mood, from referring to Bakunin's "anti-semitism". This had become a favourite with Jewish academics, who cast Bakunin for the villain's role nowadays to get Marx off the hook of what subsequently happened in Russia (solely because

this is exploited by anti-Semites). Yet it is patent that Russian Leninism did follow Marx and whether he is to blame or not, Leninism quotes and revers him to this day, not only in Russia, and Bakunin — and everything he stood for — reviled and slandered, Russia's "apocalypse" hardly finds roots in him. Bakunin's "anti-semitic" remarks were made before the term "anti-semitism" was coined to describe hatred of Jews for whatever reason (irrespective of what they do or say and without any desire for them to change); if he is "anti-semitic" so too must we reckon Marx, Lassalle, Heine, Borne and all the Jewish, and non-Jewish, radicals of the period, whose remarks go far beyond Bakunin's, though unacceptable today. Now attitudes have changed, precisely because of anti-semitism. but one cannot read back into the past from the verbal conventions of the present.

Mr Mendel complains that undue prominence in Bakunin's life is given to the period of his struggle with the International, but that is claim to history's attention. He changed his convictions during his lifetime. He went from Christianity through Hegelism to universal Nationalism, and then abandoned the national struggle for socialism. His contacts with the workers made him realise that authoritarian socialism would be for them a new repression. He became the spokesperson for stateless socialism. It really doesn't matter if he was such a boor as the academics seem to think he must have been, against Marx (who was one of their own). His struggle was genuine; Marx's, after all, was artificial. He expressed the revolution is *action*, and did not spend his days in theory and intrigue.

Mr Mendel thinks indeed Bakunin was right in putting Marx down as a "bourgeois socialist" but claims that Bakunin, for his part pioneered Leninist-Maoism. He does not seem to know how Bakunin's heritage is treated in Russia and China — enough, for him, to point out that Marx can't be blamed! For it surely cannot be (he thinks) the bourgeoisie triumphant is another guise?

This is why others, in Bakunin's day put him down as 'mad'. He actually thought that even if the Tsar fell, the taking-over by Russian intellectuals which might follow would produce an even greater tyranny than Czarism, How crazy, this 'Knouto-Germanic Empire', they sniggered — all the way to the Gulag.

Thousands of ordinary workers contributed to "The Idea", and Bakunin merely happened, by a stroke of luck, to be around at the time with a personality and charisma that some academics have always denied him, to express the claims of the libertarians to the socialist heritage against the authoritarians. In this persistent desire to reach at the dead Bakunin by academics, one wonders ("physician, heal thyself") whether some psychologist might not by analysing *their* motives?

Michael Bakunin: Roots of Apocalypse
Arthur P. Mendel (Praeger/Holt Saunders £24.25)

A Critique of State Socialism

Iain McKay

In science, the validity of a theory is generally proven by its predictive abilities. A theory suggests certain outcomes and if those predictions come to be then it becomes accepted as valid. Strangely, while proclaiming itself "scientific socialism" (something, like so much else, appropriated from Proudhon), Marxists refuse to apply that criteria to the socialist movement.

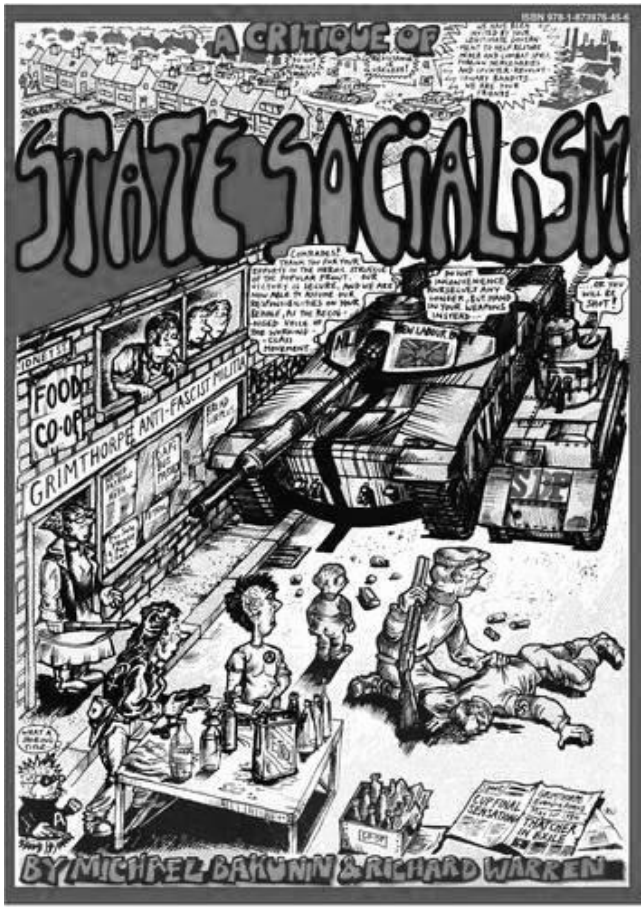
Wisely, for Marxism has simply proven Bakunin's analysis of it correct. Against Marx, he argued, firstly, that socialists standing for election would produce reformism, *not* revolution, and, secondly, that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would be simply a dictatorship *over* the proletariat. Both came to pass.

If the left were actually scientific, Marxism would be dead and those few left would be viewed like creationists or, at best, defenders of Lamarckism. Sadly, though, Marxists eschew Marx's materialism and scientific pretensions in favour of confirming his passing remark that history repeats itself, first time as tragedy and second time as farce. So we find Marxists continuing to advocate participation in elections and the so-called workers' state as if the last 150-odd years have never happened. A truly farcical situation.

So while Marxists ignore it, the awkward fact is that Bakunin was right. This makes *A Critique of State Socialism* a very welcome reprint, albeit an extremely expensive one. Originally published by Cienfuegos Press in 1981, I fondly remember getting the B Books 1986 reprint when I just became an anarchist in 1988. It combines extracts from Bakunin's critique of Marx and other state socialists with wonderfully witty illustrations by Richard Warren. Joe King provides an excellent short introduction to Bakunin's life and ideas.

Do not be put-off by the extremely dated cover (the *New Labour Party* and *SDP* being stooges of a Soviet invasion of a revolutionary Britain which Thatcher had fled in 1984!) this comic is a masterpiece of relevant political polemic. Bakunin's analysis of socialism, both

libertarian and authoritarian, is combined with wonderful cartoons by Warren Richards and appropriate actual quotes from the likes of Marx, Engels and Lenin to illustrate Bakunin's arguments. Bakunin's words, it should be noted, come from different sources – 1867's *Federalism, Socialism and Anti-Theologism* (on the history of socialism) and 1873's *Statism and Anarchy* (on Marxism). Humour is well used to underline the serious points being made.



It starts with Bakunin sketching the origins of socialism, starting with French Revolution, then moves onto the conspiracies of Baboeuf and Blanqui ("So where are the masses?" "Maybe we kept the conspiracy *too* secret…?") before passing through the (highly regulated) visions of utopians like Fourier and Saint-Simon ("Fancy sneaking out to the pub tonight?" asks one bored member of a Fourierist perfect community). This account is short and the bulk of the book, rightly, deals with Marx and Lenin.

There is such a wealth of material it is difficult to summarise. Warren's pictures (14) showing the differences between peaceful socialists ("we'll have to do it bit by bit. so you may not notice it to begin with…"), revolutionary state socialists ("of course, *we'll* have to give the orders for a while…") and anarchists ("Admittedly, it might take a long time for this to happen…') is my personal favourite. This is closely followed by his skilful summary (21) of how easy it could be for Lenin to rationalise centralisation of power from the proclaimed dictatorship of the workers and peasants, via the party, to his own (and, sadly, it *does* echo actual Bolshevik rationales). It would also be remiss not to mention Warren's contrast (23) between Lenin in 1917 and after, utilising his actual quotes (along with the suggestion that Lenin got his 1917 visions from Bakunin and Kropotkin!).

However, pointing out just one page amidst so many wonderful ones is hard – as can be seen. Ironically, given the devastating nature of this critique it could be argued that Warren gives the Trotskyists an easy time of it. He concentrates on Lenin, so there is no quoting of Trotsky's arguments for party dictatorship. Given that these span two decades and were expressed before, during *and* after the rise of Stalin this is a rich source of embarrassing quotes Warren could have utilised – and libertarians really should be aware of! Similarly, Trotsky's classic *Terrorism and Communism* is also good for quotes but is not used here.

As well as critique, the libertarian alternative is also presented. Proudhon covered in two pages (10–1) although I have to object to Proudhon's mutualism being described as having "the individual, not the collective, as the basic social unit" (Bakunin is quoted, correctly, stating that "Proudhon's socialism was based upon individual and collective freedom"). Makhno and his struggle against white and red dictatorship gets 3 pages (30–2), followed by one on Kronstadt. (33). The Spanish Revolution, plus the Communist's counter-revolutionary role, gets 3 pages (36–7 and 45) and it sums up the CNT's mistake well ("We didn't seize political power. But neither did we *destroy* it!!"). Zapata in Mexico (44), Hungary 56 and other revolts against Stalinism (46–7) rightfully get mentions.

Of course, as with any short critique, much is left out. For example, it does not mention directly that Bakunin recognised the necessity of organising a federated militia to defend a revolution but the account of the Makhnovists should indicate this to anybody with basic common sense. Similarly, while Bakunin is quoted speculating that the peasantry might be "subjected" to a "new domination" by the proletariat when it is "the ruling class" (33) it helps immensely to know that when Bakunin wrote this in 1873 the proletariat was very much the minority of the working classes in Western Europe (as it was in 1917 in Russia). So to call for, as Marx did, for a "dictatorship of the proletariat" was to argue for rule by a minority, *not* the majority.

Moreover, this quote does distract slightly from the real focus and power of Bakunin's critique, namely that even the proletariat would be ruled by a few party leaders under this statist regime – because of the nature of state structures. As Joe King summarises, "Bakunin understood that government is the means by

which a minority rules" based on "the concentration of authority in a few hands." The state has to be abolished to "place power in the hands of the masses through their own federation of voluntary organisations." As Bakunin argued, the so-called workers' state would be "a ridiculous contradiction" as the state "will always be an institution of domination and exploitation" of the many by the few. (27) When "the whole people govern" then "there can be no State" (36–7) and so anarchists urge "the free organisation of the working masses from below upwards." (46)

Needless to say, the die-hard Leninist will not let this excellent little book dent his faith. Much muttering will be voiced on how Warren ignores the "objective circumstances" facing the Bolsheviks – civil war, economic collapse, isolation and so forth. Ironically, this Leninist fixation on "objective circumstances" results in a strange irony – downplaying the importance of Leninist ideology. Logically, this determinism means that the ideas of the leading Bolsheviks (i.e., the people making the decisions) made no impact on the revolution. A strange position to take, to proclaim that you should become a Leninist while also maintaining that your ideology was irrelevant during an apparently "successful" revolution (as if Bolshevik imposition of party dictatorship and state capitalism can be considered a success by non-ideologues!). Still, such contradiction is hardly rare – they also maintain that civil war and economic disruption caused the degeneration of Leninism while Lenin himself proclaimed *both* were inevitable aspects of a revolution!

Worse, the awkward fact is that Bolshevik authoritarianism started *before* the outbreak of the civil war. The Bolsheviks were producing executives *above* the soviets, creating the Cheka, gerrymandering and disbanding soviets, imposing one-man management, repressing strikes and opposition socialists/anarchists, etc. long before revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion in late May 1918. Moreover, Bolshevik ideology and vision of socialism as centralised state-planning made the economic crisis worse *and* destroyed the socialistic tendencies that existed (by, for example, preferring Tsarist state-capitalist economic structures over the factory committees). And so on. In short, ideas matter – particularly the ideology of the ruling elite as this will impact on the decisions made and structures favoured.

The notion that Bolshevik ideology and the centralised top-down structures their ideology preferred had no impact of the development of the revolution simply cannot be maintained once you know the facts. Admittedly, all this would be hard to squeeze into comic format – it is hard enough to summarise in text form (see section H of *An Anarchist FAQ* for details). Suffice to say, this book gives you a taster to the subject matter – and does so in a memorable and extremely enjoyable manner.

Finally, this does not mean we reject everything Marx wrote – Bakunin was, after all, very complementary about Marx's critique of capitalism. It just means that Marx got more wrong than right and that libertarians, not limited by calling our ideas after a dead-guy with a beard, are in a position to appreciate this and incorporate his better ideas in our theories. Just as we do with the likes of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. We are also better placed to appreciate the contributions of others to the socialist project and see when Marx appropriated *their* ideas into his own (usually, as with Proudhon, without mentioning the source – but that is another issue).

So, all in all, a classic polemic which every anarchist should have in order to give to any new recruit to or disillusioned member of a Leninist Party – although it is so good you may not get it back again! The only negative against it is its price – £12 seems excessive for the size of the book. However, if you can afford it then please buy it (alternatively, it would make an excellent present to give or receive!) as you will not be disappointed.

A Critique of State Socialism
Michael Bakunin and Richard Warren
Christie Books
£12

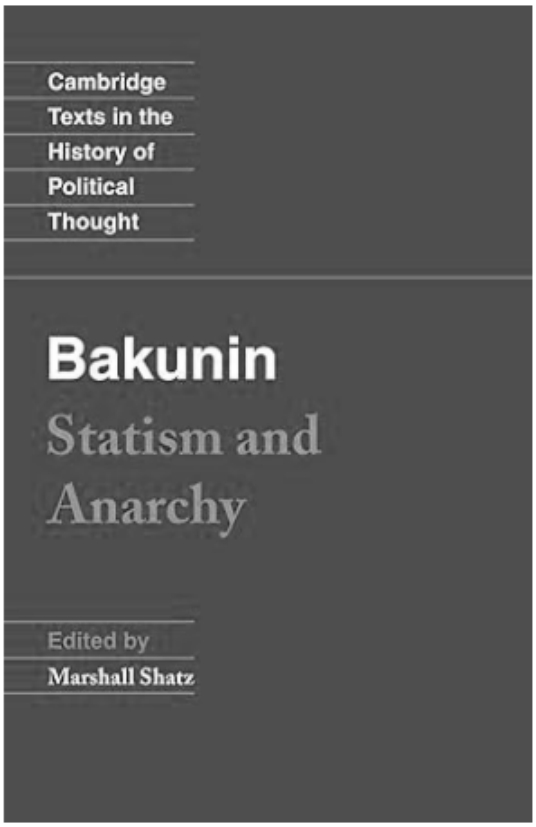
There is another reason which explains and in some sort justifies the absurd beliefs of the people — namely, the wretched situation to which they find themselves fatally condemned by the economic organisation of society… to escape… there are but three methods — two chimerical and a third real. The first two are the dram-shop and the church, debauchery of the body or debauchery of the mind; the third is social revolution

– Bakunin, *God and the State*

Statism and Anarchy

Iain McKay

Statism and Anarchy is the first complete English translation of the last work by the Russian anarchist Michael Bakunin. Given his influence, it is surprising that this 1873 work was his only book and even this is technically incomplete (referring as it does to a second part which was never written). It aimed to influence Russian populism and the "to the people" movement although most of it is an account of European history in the 19th century.



If that were all, there would be little interest in it but Bakunin also prophetically critiques Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat" as nothing more than a dictatorship *over* the proletariat. Coming after his battles with Marx in the *International Working Men's Association*, it is surprising how little this is discussed – the core of the argument is contained in a mere five pages. (176–181) It also sketches Bakunin's vision of an anarchist society and the social forces that will achieve it, both important (and much distorted) aspects of his ideas.

Marshall Shatz has provided an excellent introduction. It is marred by a failure to summarise Bakunin's anarchism and positions on key issues (such as defence of the revolution and strategy for social change). Shatz does repeat the usual stereotype that Bakunin's agent of social change was the lumpen proletariat while, in fact, Bakunin viewed *all* exploited and oppressed social classes as agents for revolution – artisans, peasants, proletarians. Bakunin's actual position on such key revolutionary issues *is* in *Statism and Anarchy*, but unfortunately these insights are often buried within discussions on other matters.

While, for example, Bakunin discussed the obvious need to defend a revolution in previous works, here he states "the sole means of opposing the reactionary forces of the state" was the "organising of the revolutionary force of the people." (156) Marxist myths notwithstanding, Bakunin's opposition to "the dictatorship of the proletariat" *never* reflected a naïve believe that a revolution did not need defending! Similarly, his syndicalist ideas are mentioned almost in passing when he argues that proletariat "must enter the International *en masse*, form factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations" for "the sake of its own liberation" (51) as it "indicated to [the proletariat] the ways and means of organising a popular force." (32)

So sketches of his programme for social revolution do come through but the introduction should have placed these in context. To be fair, this would have been recognised as important by an anarchist rather than an academic.

The key to understanding Bakunin's critique of Marxism is to understand his analysis of the state. The state "stands outside the people and above them" (136), "the government of society from above downward" (198) and resulted in the "actual subordination of the sovereign people to the intellectual minority that governs them." (13) While recognising that the modern state defended the capitalist class, Bakunin rejected Marx's reductionism and argued it could and did have interests of its own. He pointed to Turkish Serbia where economically dominant classes "do not even exist – there is only a bureaucratic class. Thus, the Serbian state will crush the Serbian people for the sole purpose of enabling Serbian bureaucrats to live a fatter life." (54) The same would occur under the so-called "workers' state" of the Marxists simply because it was a state and, consequently, was a centralised, top-down social structure.

Statism, then, was the "government of society from above downward" rather than a social organisation federated "from below upward." He recognised that a democratic government did not change this as it was simply electing rulers. Thus socialism was to be created

"not by the orders of any authority, even an elected one… but as the natural development of all the varied demands put forth by life itself." Revolutionary ideas rested in the people and so "no scholar can teach the people or even define for himself how they will and must live on the morrow of the social revolution. That will be determined first by the situation of each people, and secondly by the desires that manifest themselves and operate most strongly within them." (198–9)

All revolutionaries should do was participate in social movements, make these instinctive notions conscious by debate and argument. Unsurprisingly, he rejected those "managers of all popular movements" (136) who would "impose… an ideal social organisation… drawn from books" (135) and so create "Procrustean beds, too narrow to encompass the broad and powerful sweep of popular life." (198) A category which, he suggested, included Marxists – particularly as they wanted to seize state power. By doing this, Bakunin thought, they would *automatically* place themselves above the people. The Marxists were blind to this, the reality of state power and its basis in "government of the masses from above downward" (24) and that "power corrupts those invested with it just as much as those compelled to submit to it." (136)

Bakunin sketches the two alternatives suggested by Marxists, peaceful reform by electoral struggle and violent revolution. The former, he correctly predicted, would mean "the election to the German parliament of one or two workers" and was "not dangerous." In fact, it was "highly useful to the German state as a lightning-rod, or a safety-valve." Unlike the "political and social theory" of the anarchists, which "leads them directly and inexorably to a complete break with all governments and all forms of bourgeois politics, leaving no alternative but social revolution," Marxism "inexorably enmeshes and entangles its adherents, under the pretext of political tactics, in endless accommodation with governments and the various bourgeois political parties – that is, it thrusts them directly into reaction." (193, 179–80)

While Marxists like to assert anarchists argue that working people should ignore politics, *Statism and Anarchy* explicitly rejects this. Bakunin pointed to a group in Germany that argued workers "were supposed to disengage themselves systematically from all political and social concerns and questions about the state, property, and so forth." This "completely subordinated the proletariat to the bourgeoisie which exploits it and for which it was to remain an obedient and mindless tool." (174)

As well as predicting Social-Democracy's descent into reformism, his warnings about the realities of a Marxist regime came to be in Bolshevism. The party hierarchy *did* "concentrat[e] in their own hands all ... production ... under the direct command of state engineers, who will form a new privileged scientific and political class." (181) It *was* "the highly despotic government of the masses by a new and very small aristocracy of real or pretended scholars. The people are not learned, so they will be liberated from the cares of government and included in entirety in the governed herd." (178–9)

In this *Statism and Anarchy* was truly prophetic. Yet while it is fair to proclaim Marx "a Jacobin" Bakunin's suggestion that Marx's "favourite dream is of a political dictatorship" (182) was unwarranted. Far better to argue as he does at times that, in spite of their best intentions, Marxists would create a new class system simply because of their impoverished analysis of the state and the hierarchical social relations it creates between governed and government.

While many Marxists view their new state as a radical democracy, Bakunin disagreed. If it truly were the case that the "entire nation will rule" then "no one will be ruled. Then there will be no government, no state." However, this was not what was meant: "By popular government [Marxists] mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people." This was "a lie behind which the despotism of a ruling minority is concealed" made up "of *former* workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people." (178) Marxism in power proved the correctness of this prediction.

Another aspect of his critique which is often misunderstood is Bakunin's suggestion (177–8) that "the peasant rabble" would be the class whom the proletariat, as "ruling class," would "rule." At the time "the urban and factory proletariat" were very much a *minority* class, with the bulk of the working classes being artisans and peasants rather the wage-slaves. Simply put, a revolution which placed the proletarian into a position of power would disenfranchise the bulk of the population and never produce a free society. That Bakunin's warnings were correct here as well can be seen when the Bolsheviks skewed the soviets in favour of the proletariat and quickly alienated 90% of the population – before alienating the proletariat in whose name they ruled.

Attempts by Leninists to blame "objective circumstances" (civil war, economic collapse, etc.) for this confirmation of Bakunin's arguments are unconvincing. Space precludes any real discussion but

suffice to say Bolshevik authoritarianism *predated* the start of the Civil War while its vision of socialism *increased the revolution's economic problems*. Equally, given that Leninists mock anarchists by inaccurately suggesting we think the capitalist class will disappear without a fight after a revolution, it seems self-contradictory to blame Bolshevik tyranny on something (civil war and its resulting economic disruption) they think is inevitable!

Given this analysis of the state, Bakunin argued that revolution *must* be "an end to all masters and to domination of every kind, and the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs, not from above downward, as in the state, but from below upward, by the people themselves, dispensing with all governments and parliaments – a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations." (33) In short, a system of workers' councils.

Bakunin stressed that not all social structures were states. Thus a "federal organisation, from below upward, of workers' associations, groups, communes, districts, and ultimately, regions and nations" could not be considered as the same as "centralised states" and were "contrary to their essence." The end of "sham popular sovereignty" would create "real as opposed to fictitious freedom." (13) This would be based on a self-managed economy, with co-operation being the "just mode of future production" and "all forms of land and capital" becoming "collective property." (201) In short, "a popular federation with it based on emancipated labour and collective property." (22)

Bakunin stressed that not all social structures were states. Thus a "federal organisation, from below upward, of workers' associations, groups, communes, districts, and ultimately, regions and nations" could not be considered as the same as "centralised states" and were "contrary to their essence."

This vision of a bottom-up federal self-managed *libertarian* socialism, a socialism from below, is one that continues to be of value and can inspire current generations of radicals.

The book is marred by Bakunin's personal bigotries. He repeats anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews (and calls them "Yids") and pronounces that Germans were "statists and bureaucrats by nature." (34) The history of German/Slav relations is reflected in the latter; Bakunin recounts that they consisted "of exterminating, enslaving, and forcibly Germanising, the Slavs." (104) Interestingly, even Engels proclaimed (in the 1840s) that the "Slav barbarians" were "*forced* to attain the first stage of civilisation only by means of a foreign yoke" and they should be grateful for the Germans for "having given themselves the trouble of civilising" them! Bakunin, though, does express the hope that "social revolution reconciles" Slav and German workers. (104) Given this, Bakunin was a firm defender of national self-determination: "Every nation, like every individual, is of necessity what it is, and has an unquestionable right to be itself" (46)

The book ends with two appendices addressed to the then Russian revolutionary movement. In the first Bakunin discusses the *mir*, the Russian peasant community, and unlike many Slavic radicals he was extremely critical of the arguing that it had "three dark features" which had to be combated and any revolt against "the hated state power and bureaucratic arbitrariness ... simultaneously becomes a revolt against the despotism of the commune." The "war against patriarchalism is now being waged in virtually every village and every family." (206, 210, 214). This is obviously of historic interest while the second, his programme for the Slavic Section of the International, is of wider interest as a summation, albeit incomplete, of his revolutionary ideas.

To conclude, this is an important, if flawed, work. It is fair to say that this is a book best suited for extracts within an anthology – but what extracts they are!

Statism and Anarchy
Michael Bakunin
Marshall Shatz (Editor)
Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought

Postscript

Marxist Hal Draper, whose ability to misunderstand and twist anarchist ideas seemed unlimited, unsurprisingly completely failed to comprehend Bakunin's critique of Marx. For Draper, like most Marxists, electing rulers was the be-all and end-all of freedom. He smugly noted that Marx, "against Bakunin," had "to argue the basic idea of *representative* democracy" so showing that neither he nor Marx understood the basics of Bakunin's critique. (*Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: The 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'* [Monthly Review Press, 1986], Volume III, p. 116) If he had, then he would have been aware that Bakunin's, like Proudhon's, attacks on democracy were framed as a critique of thinking electing rulers equalled self-government and freedom.

Suffice to say, anyone who actually comprehended the anarchist critique of the state and, consequently, our critique of Marxism would recognise the ignorance and fallacy at the heart of Draper's claim that there "are always two possibilities" in attacks on democracy, the first is based on it "not being democratic enough, for not really effecting control by the people" while the second aims to discredit "democracy itself." (299) For anarchists, the question is not whether we "control" those with power over us but whether we organise to manage our own affairs *directly* and so end hierarchy in society – even elected hierarchies. As such, Bakunin stressed the need for mandated and recallable delegates to ensure that those we elect remain our delegates rather than our rulers, that we do not delegate *power* into their hands. Sadly, though, the need for the imperative mandate and recall which he mentions in previous works does not get mentioned in *Statism and Anarchy*. It is this sort of thing which would need to be covered in a comprehensive *political* introduction.

Without evidence Draper asserts (299) that "anarchism takes the second road. Bakunin continually denounces the 'Marxists' *because* they favour universal suffrage." He does, wisely, add an "In general" to avoid awkward questions when critics, aware of what Bakunin actually argued, point to the substantial evidence against his claims. After all, a glance at Bakunin's critique of Marx shows that he criticised Marxists because they, like the bourgeois liberals, saw universal suffrage as the means of electing governments. In short, that (representative) democracy was undemocratic and that Marxists did not go beyond bourgeois forms of social organisation and so keep a key form of inequality within their socialism – the inequality between the minority elected to power and the majority who no longer manage their own fates.

a glance at Bakunin's critique of Marx shows that he criticised Marxists because they, like the bourgeois liberals, saw universal suffrage as the means of electing governments. In short, that (representative) democracy was undemocratic and that Marxists did not go beyond bourgeois forms of social organisation

That Draper failed to comprehend Bakunin's critique of democracy is clear. He equates democratically electing a government with actual mass *participation* in decision making, an equation Bakunin rightly rejected. That Draper cannot comprehend this basic point shows that Bakunin was correct – Marxists, like liberals, confuse representative democracy with popular self-management.

What is bizarre about Draper's argument is that he turns Bakunin's obvious call for truly democratic social structures into "socialism from above." Perhaps this is unsurprising, for if Bakunin was recognised as advocating "socialism from below" then Draper would have to re-evaluate Marx, his own ideology and Bakunin's critique of both state and Marxism. To do so would raise the awkward conclusion that Bakunin was right…

If God is, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free; then, God does not exist.

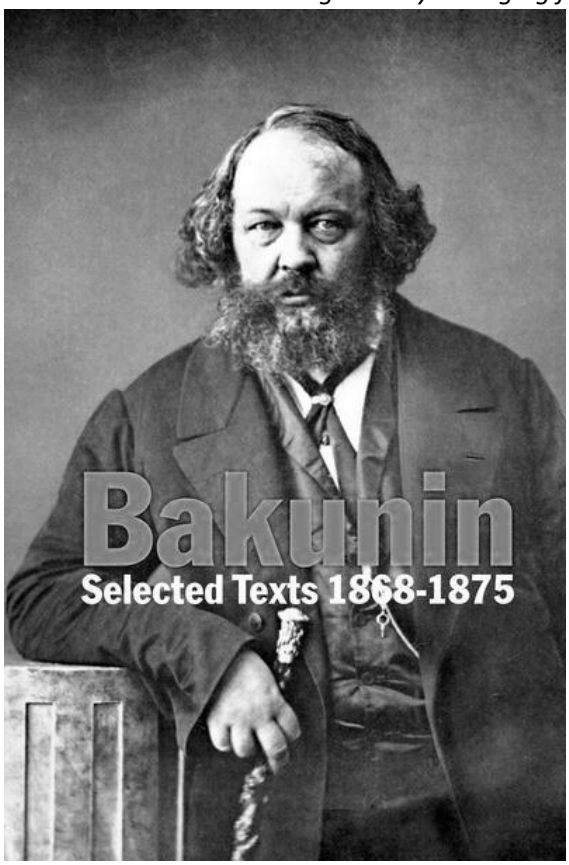
I defy anyone whomsoever to avoid this circle; now, therefore, let all choose.

– Bakunin, *God and the State*

Bakunin: Selected Texts 1868–1875

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.[1]

Mikhail Aleksandrovic Bakunin (1814–1876) is a towering figure of the revolutionary ideas and a key figure to the development and expansion of socialist thought in the world at the end of the 19th century. Recently, we commemorated the 200th anniversary of his birth, yet he remains an underappreciated revolutionary thinker and activist, best known for his polemics with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the early 1870s. There are already some great compilations in the English language of his work, to be sure. Among this, we can find Sam Dolgoff's *Bakunin on Anarchism* and G.P. Maximoff's *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*[2]. Both of them provide a splendid recollections of excerpts from some of his key writings and put them in the context of his revolutionary trajectory (Dolgoff) or in the context of the system of ideas he developed in the final decade of his activities (Maximoff). Since the quality of both compilations is of such a high standard, it is no idle question to wonder why Merlin Press has edited a new collection of essays of Bakunin, instead of bringing us a re-edition of some of the old compilations.



First of all, the need of a new edition on Bakunin is justified in the fact that his ideas have been largely ignored if not misrepresented in the English-speaking world. Apart from '*God and State*' and '*State and Anarchy*', most of Bakunin's writings are incredibly difficult to find. Most of his actual ideas, are largely ignored even by libertarian socialist activists. As a matter of fact, most of Bakunin's texts were developed in the context of a feverish revolutionary activism during most of his life time, lacking the systematic approach of other revolutionary thinkers of his time. The lack of a systematic body of text, does not equal lack of systematic thinking, however, as Maximoff already proves in this compilation. This collection includes some documents which appear in English for the first time, many of which were extremely influential for the radical movements of European countries such as Italy, Switzerland, Spain and France. This reason alone should suffice for us to welcome this new addition to the existing bibliography on Bakunin in English language.

Secondly, this new edition is in tune with the growing view of Bakunin as someone who '*helped define gradually emerging forms of revolutionary, libertarian or anarchist socialism. It was not so much that he invented new ideas, rather he helped organise and shape a new form of political thinking*' (p.2). Much of this new way of thinking was being expressed in various, sometimes contradictory forms, in the context of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), this broad coalition of workers of various languages, traditions and persuasions which was to dominate the political landscape of the progressive forces between the 1860s to the 1870s, at least in Europe. This edition is not only providing us with a selection of letters, lectures, articles and speeches –which are the ways in which most of his work is to be found-, but it also does so in the particular context of Bakunin's participation in the workers' movement in the period of 1868 to 1875. The dates chosen exclude some of the early libertarian writings of Bakunin for the period 1864–1867, a period whose importance was captured in both '*Bakunin and the Italians*' of T.R. Ravindranathan (1978) and in the first chapters of '*Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892*' of Nunzio Pernicone (1993) as being critical in the genesis of his libertarian thought. Rather, this careful selection of A.W. Zurbrugg focuses on the writings for the period when he joins formally a section of the IWA in Geneve until the time he dies. This period is witness to the full maturation of his ideas in the context of his interactions with a broader movement. It is in the context of this

[1] https://www.anarkismo.net/article/30157

[2] Another excellent compilation is Arthur Lehning's *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* [1973].

movement that anarchist socialism would eventually become articulated into a consistent thought/praxis. The image we get of Bakunin in this book is less so that of the 'Father of Anarchism', as he has often been dubbed, and more so that of an 'orchestra director', bringing together different players into a coherent force.

A third reason why this is a timely and justified edition, is the careful annotations around the texts, the prologues to each one of the documents and the fascinating introduction which puts Bakunin rightly in his context. The texts are also organised along chronological lines, to give a sense of how his thought evolved in the context of the development of a libertarian current within the IWA. He was not writing from an intemporal and ahistorical bubble. Bakunin's writings often make full sense if read in the light of the polemics and debates that he took part in, which were also part of a broader context and developments. He wrote to workers and socialists of his time, taking for granted a number of references that would escape most modern readers. Many of his expressions and ideas, taken out of this particular context (such as his supposed apoliticism), can be misguiding. Most of his ideas were not the product of any idle musings, but came about under the need to react to the pressing needs of his time, in the midst of a struggle without quarters against the system of exploitation which was consolidating under the triumphant emergence of the modern State and capitalism since the outbreak of the republican revolutions in the late 18th century.

The fourth and most powerful of reasons to publish this new edition, is that the ideas in this book represent a most useful resource to people in the struggle for a better world in the present times. Although Bakunin was an offspring of his time and a proper understanding of his ideas cannot be divorced from his context, his ideas are full of useful insights for our present and the strength of his convictions still manage to inspire us in the 21st century. In one way or another, his untamed egalitarian and libertarian outlook is now more relevant than ever, if we manage to understand the basic premises of his thought as opposed to reproducing old formulae. It is this urgency and relevance which make Bakunin's words uncannily prophetic. In 'God and State', he claimed that '*History then appears to us as the revolutionary negation, now slow, apathetic, sluggish, now passionate and powerful, of the past. It consists precisely in the progressive negation of the primitive animality of man by the development of his humanity. (…) Whence it results that the antiquity of a belief, of an idea, far from proving anything in its favour, ought, on the contrary, to lead us to suspect it. For behind us is our animality and before us our humanity; human light, the only thing (…) that can emancipate us, give us dignity, freedom, and happiness, and realise fraternity among us, is never at the beginning, but, relatively to the epoch in which we live, always at the end of history. Let us, then, never look back, let us look ever forward; (…) If it is justifiable, and even useful and necessary, to turn back to study our past, it is only in order to establish what we have been and what we must no longer be, what we have believed and thought and what we must no longer believe or think, what we have done and what we must do nevermore*' (New York: Dover, 1970, p.21).

Bakunin views are an urgent reminder of what socialism *could be*. His voice, in spite of some antiquated expressions, resonates a hundred and a half years later with the same vital energy

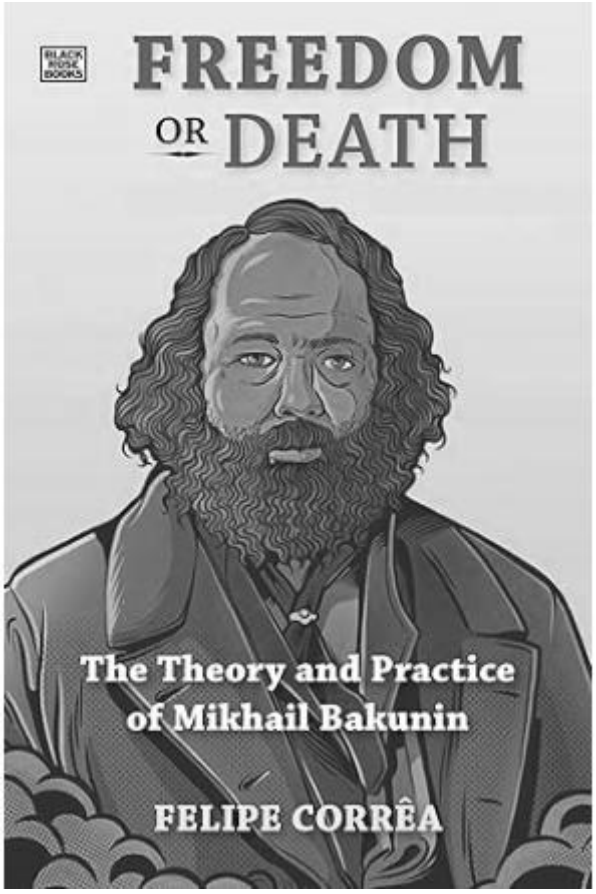
Although the 20th century may have seemingly signalled the eclipse of libertarian forms of socialist thought under the bureaucratic weight of 'real socialism', Bakunin views are an urgent reminder of what socialism *could be*. His voice, in spite of some antiquated expressions, resonates a hundred and a half years later with the same vital energy. As such, this book is not so much an attempt to better understand the ideas of a socialist thinker of the past, as it is to explore the possibilities of an alternative socialist future through the ideas developed by a broad movement of which Bakunin became a centre of gravity. Indeed, some of the new trends in progressive thinking –such as the insistence on direct democracy and the rejection of authoritarian styles of leadership- were pioneered by this broad movement over a century ago –it may be surprising for some readers, how contemporary some of the concerns and inclinations expressed in this volume sound. Given the scale of the multiple crises looming over our world, this is a book that anyone interested in a viable future for humanity, regardless if s/he identifies or not as anarchist, ought to read.

Bakunin. Selected Texts 1868–1875
(Edited and Translated by A.W. Zurbrugg)
Anarres Editions –Merlin Press, 2016

Bakunin's Anarchism Reconsidered

Wayne Price

Anarchism, like Marxism, was the outcome of European mass movements in the 19th Century: the early socialist movements (later called "utopian" socialism), the movement for political democracy (against the monarchs and aristocrats), and the movement for workers' rights. But if there is one person who may be described as the initiator of revolutionary anarchism, it would be Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76). Born into the lower-to-middle ranks of the Russian aristocracy, he was active in a range of popular movements, participated in several armed rebellions, spent a decade in Czarist prisons, and played a major role in the First International. This concluded in a sharp faction fight with Karl Marx, resulting in a split in the International.



He considered himself more a man of action than an intellectual. "I am not a philosopher, nor a system inventor like Marx." (p. 43) While a fine orator, Bakunin's writings were unsystematic, and he hardly completed a book. Yet there was a consistency to his work, as this volume demonstrates. His views inspired anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist activists throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and North and South America. His opinions remain relevant today, as we face authoritarianisms on the Right and the Left.

The author is Felipe Correa Pedro. Mark Bray calls him "among the world's foremost scholars of anarchism…" (in a front-page blurb). A Brazilian anarchist scholar and activist, Correa is internationally known, although few of his works have been translated into English. (But see, for example, Correa 2021; 2022a; 2022b.) He describes himself as an "especifist anarchist" (an organisational dualist). He follows a revolutionary, class-struggle, anarchist-socialism which has developed from the work of Mikhail Bakunin. (I am also of this school of anarchism.) While plainly an admirer of Bakunin, he attempts to be as objective as he can, excluding hagiography and including Bakunin's failures and contradictions.

Bakunin's thinking is sometimes presented as though he had one set of ideas which did not change during his lifetime. Correa demonstrates that, as he lived, Bakunin developed his ideas. He made major changes in his concepts and program, while still keeping continuity. "To cut up and rearrange Bakunin's writings without regard for the context or the period in which they were written risks the loss of a balanced presentation in favour of a purely personal interpretation." (Dolgoff 1980; p. xi) His earlier beliefs were to culminate in his anarchist-socialism (to use the term preferred by Errico Malatesta).

Correa divides Bakunin's adult life into three main periods. These were, first, his Hegelian period (1836-43)—then his period of revolutionary pan-Slavism (1844-63)—finally his evolution from socialism to anarchism (1864-76).

The Philosophy of Freedom (1836-43)

As a young man in Czarist Russia, Bakunin became fascinated with German Idealist philosophers, particularly the dialectical philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel. "Bakunin was the greatest figure of Hegelianism in Russia between 1838 and 1840…." (p. 26) Correa goes into Bakunin's philosophical development in great detail, giving separate chapters to Bakunin's Fichteian period, his "first Hegelian period," his "second Hegelian period," and his evolution out of philosophy and religion.

Bakunin's interpretation of Hegelian dialectics was very similar to that of the Left Hegelians of Germany; he was to move to Berlin and interact with this grouping—which included Marx and Engels. "In Germany, between 1840 and 1842, he rose to a prominent, if heterodox, position on the Hegelian Left." (p. 26) (It would be interesting for someone to contrast Bakunin's period of Hegelianism with Marx's early Hegelianism.)

The grouping also included “Max Stirner” (Casper Schmidt). His writings were later taken up by individualist anarchists. Contrary to the Marxists' claims, there is no evidence of any interaction between the two, nor does Bakunin’s social anarchism have much similarity to Stirner’s egotism. To Bakunin, individuals only become free with others. He declared, “Man only becomes man…through collective or social labour….To be free, for man, means to be recognised, considered, and treated as such…in the consciousness of all free men, his brothers and sisters, his equals.” (pp. 338-9)

Correa quotes Hegel, when asked by Goethe to explain dialectics, as saying it was a “spirit of organised contradiction.” (p. 118) Dialectics presents the world as process—dynamic and holistic—which moves and organises itself through contradiction, internal conflict, and negation of what-is. This applies to society as it does to nature. Societies can only be understood in terms of contradictions such as classes, as well as genders, nationalities, races, ages, and so on. It is these internal conflicts which hold societies together and which break them up in forward movement. “This dialectical method, which is concomitantly historical, permeates all Bakuninian writings from this period (cf. alienation…).” (p. 118)

Hegel’s dialectics presents the world’s processes as directional, moving toward ever greater consciousness and freedom. Just what this meant in practice varied. In Hegel’s youth, he was greatly influenced by the French Revolution and its expansion of human freedom. When older, he became reconciled to the Prussian status quo. He now saw the bureaucratic Prussian state as the historical and dialectical culmination of the World Spirit.

Personally, I think that there are streams within nature and society which may lead to greater consciousness and freedom—as one branch of evolution led to humans. But other streams do not, as evolution also produced bacteria and cockroaches. I doubt that nature as a whole has an innate progressive directionality. Marx—or at least many Marxists—believed that the dialectic of history would inevitably result in stateless, classless, communism. However, while there are forces pushing in that direction (such as the class struggle), there are also reactionary forces pushing in the other direction (such as capitalist ideology). It is not really possible to know which will (“inevitably”) win out. Choosing socialist revolution is a decision and a commitment—with no guarantee of success.

In this period, Bakunin read some socialist literature, by William Weitling and others. Politically, he regarded himself as a radical, in the tradition of French republicanism, “the foundation of which,” writes Correa, “is the notion of self-government of the people…” (p. 85)

I will not review Correa’s lengthy and detailed analysis of Bakunin’s early Hegelian dialectics. An introductory book on Hegel’s philosophy may be more useful. However, to stay on the topic of Bakunin and philosophy, I will jump ahead to his socialist and anarchist period.

By this final period, Bakunin had rejected religion and theism, along with all philosophical Idealism. Morris writes, “Bakunin’s conception of reality, like that of Marx’s, is dialectical, materialist, and deterministic.” (1993; p. 78) In Correa’s view, it was not a “dialectical materialism,” although he does not explain why he thinks this. (In any case, Marx never used the term, which was invented by Plekhanov.) Instead, Correa calls Bakunin’s views “scientific-naturalist materialism.” He saw nature and matter as one, the whole of reality.

Bakunin saw nature as self-organised and lawful. He regarded “free will” as a theological concept. But he believed that nature—including society and the individual—was creative, that new things appeared through the dialectical process. He reconciled theory and practice. Theory was necessary as a guide, but only practice would prove the reality of perception and thinking. It was only through the unified activity of theory and practice, interacting with nature and other people, that humans creatively develop their potentialities and become fully free.

Pan-Slavism and National Self-Determination (1844-63)

Like almost all progressive people, Bakunin supported the struggle for national independence of the Polish people. At the time, Poland was mostly incorporated into the Russian empire, with large chunks also being owned by Prussia and by Austria. Officially, there was no “Poland.” (Just as colonists and imperialists today claim that there is no “Palestine” or that “Ukraine” does not really exist.)

A movement developed to tie the Polish national struggle to that of all the Eastern European Slavic peoples, including those oppressed by Turkey. The goal was a federation of all the countries with Slavic-based languages. A further expansion of the idea was to include the biggest Slavic country of all, Russia, in the federation.

Left pan-Slavism advocated a democratic federation of Slavs. This could not be achieved without revolutions in several lands—especially Poland and Russia. It was believed that these uprisings would lead to democratic

rebellions throughout Europe. Conservatives did not like this. Polish nobility wanted independence, only in order to have a free hand in exploiting their own serfs. Russian pan-Slavists dreamed of an unified Slavic nation led by an enlightened Czar.

Bakunin worked within the broad pan-Slavist movement, cooperating with radical democrats but also with conservatives. While a revolutionary, he was by no means an anarchist yet. At times he veered toward a conservative, narrow nationalism. At other times he seemed to want to integrate national liberation with a social, as well as democratic, program. He called for revolutionary governments to be set up--as dictatorships. He proposed the formation of secret societies of revolutionaries, organised hierarchically, and also managed as dictatorships.

By contrast, Marx and Engels rejected pan-Slavism. They supported the fight for Polish independence. However, they saw Czarist Russia as the greatest threat to progress in Europe. They wanted it defeated in war, preferably by a revolutionary democratic Germany. Further, they had contempt for the smaller, Eastern European, Slavic, countries: Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, and Croats. These they regarded as "unhistorical." Such countries, they expected, would—and should—be taken over by larger nations, such as Germany, Poland, Italy, and Hungary.

At times, Bakunin expressed an extreme hatred of Germans, whom he blamed for the oppression of the Slavic peoples (only partly true in terms of Prussian and Austrian imperialism). His writings sometimes expressed racist-nationalist Germanophobia, a condemnation of all the German people. It ignored differences between German workers and the German ruling classes. At other times he raised opposition to Germanophobia, advocating support for all democratic struggles in German, as well as Slavic, countries. Both attitudes were to remain with him. His bigotry became particularly extreme when arguing with German Jews, such as Hess, Liebknecht, or with the German social democrats.

He especially raised such bigotry during his disputes with Marx, in his last period. Bakunin wrote, "Mr. Marx is a [German] patriot no less ardent than Bismarck…. He desires the establishment of a great Germanic state, one that will glorify the German people…. Marx… considers himself at least as Bismarck's successor…." (Bakunin 1980; pp. 314-5) And further nonsense….

Bakunin's anti-Germanism overlapped with Jew-hatred. He claimed that there was "a conspiracy of Russian and German Jews against" him. (p. 426) And "The Jews…are sworn enemies of every truly popular revolution." (p. 426) This was not a central part of his beliefs, but Correa correctly says, "His antisemitism is indefensible and contradicts his positions of the revolutionary socialist period…." (p. 427) (After Bakunin's death, Germanophobia was to be an issue when World War I broke out between two imperialist alliances. A small number of leading anarchists, including Peter Kropotkin, supported the Allied imperialists, partly out of fear and hatred of Germans.)

"Every people, weak or strong, every nation, large or small, every province, every commune has the absolute right to be free, autonomous, to live and govern themselves according to their particular interests."

Bakunin may be said to have abandoned pan-Slavism, if that is defined as a commitment to narrow nationalism, let alone a hope for a united Slavdom led by the Czar. But he continued to support the struggles for national self-determination of Poland and the other Slavic countries. "His project of national liberation of the Slav peoples was not supplanted or completely reconsidered but incorporated into his revolutionary socialism…." (p. 430) It became integrated with the goal of class liberation of the peasants and workers oppressed by their national rulers.

Bakunin came to distinguish between the "homeland" and the "state." It was natural for people to love their homeland, which meant their geography, their culture, their language, and their historical struggles for freedom. But "political patriotism" was an artificial, abstract, emotion whipped up by a ruling class in order to support the state. Bakunin opposed states but defended the right of all peoples to their homelands. "I feel, frankly and always, the patriot of all the oppressed homelands." (p. 407)

He declared, "Every people, weak or strong, every nation, large or small, every province, every commune has the absolute right to be free, autonomous, to live and govern themselves according to their particular interests." (p. 407) This is anarchism.

While participating in a movement for national liberation, anarchists fight against "nationalism," because it serves the ruling classes. Correa writes, "Nationalism is intended to be a multi-classist movement…[but] anarchist anti-imperialism supports the need for a movement concentrated on the dispossessed classes…. Anarchist anti-imperialism claims the concomitant end of both national domination and class and state domination in the struggling nation…." (p. 408)

From Socialism to Anarchism (1864-76)

After a dozen years of imprisonment by the Czarist state, Bakunin escaped in 1861 and returned to Europe. After the defeat of a Polish uprising in 1863, he turned his main attention to Western Europe. He tried to set up secret revolutionary societies and attempted to influence a middle class liberal organisation, the International League of Peace and Freedom, to little lasting effect. He was impressed by a number of big workers' strikes and by the growth of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International). "These strikes…considerably changed Bakunin's positions on the transformative capacity of workers and the centrality of their movements…." (p. 262) From then on, he called himself a "revolutionary socialist." He wrote to Marx, at the end of 1868, "My homeland is now the International." (p. 301)

Bakunin rejected any vision of socialism as being government-owned industry and centralised planning. His socialism was heavily influenced by P.J. Proudhon, the first person to identify as an "anarchist." (The movement which followed him generally called itself "mutualist" or "federalist," rather than "anarchist.") "His great inspiration is Proudhon." (p. 262) From Proudhon, Bakunin took anti-statism and anti-electoralism, workers' self-management of industry, decentralised democracy, and bottom-up federalism. However, he rejected Proudhon's gradualism and reformism, his market socialism, and his opposition to strikes and to revolution. (Bakunin also rejected Proudhon's misogyny. While the liberation of women was never at the centre of his thinking, he included it whenever presenting his program.). Bakunin developed "a radicalisation of Proudhonism." (p. 262)

He was also influenced by other militants and theorists, such as Cesar de Paepe, who had been "mediating between Proudhon and Marx." (p. 260) Correa mentions the influence of Karl Marx on Bakunin, but does not emphasise it as much as do other commentators (or as Marx and Engels did!). However, Correa notes that "at various times, [Bakunin] uses and defends Marxist ideas and even terminology." (p. 264)

Bakunin made a turn toward revolutionary socialism, beginning in 1864. But it was only in 1868, Correa argues, that he really became an anarchist—while still a socialist. Among the differences between his pre-anarchist and anarchist periods: "In 1864, the popular masses were considered [by Bakunin] incapable of liberating themselves, and it was therefore necessary for minorities from the upper classes to organise themselves to act on the peasantry and especially the urban proletariat….From 1868 onwards, it held that workers are able to emancipate themselves and that those with privileged origins, if they so desire, must…act together with peasants and proletarians in the struggle for emancipation.

"[In the earlier period] the favoured space is the secret society and therefore mass and public expressions are discarded…. In the anarchist period, Bakunin defends organisational dualism, reconciling secret and public, cadre and mass expressions. Finally, in 1864, the model of secret society proposed by Bakunin…still has hierarchical and centralist features, which from 1868 onwards will be abandoned in favour of a federalist model of cadre organisation." (p. 300)

Correa calls Bakunin's vision of a free socialism, "collectivist-federalist socialism." This included, Bakunin wrote, "the taking over by autonomous collectivities, workers' associations, agricultural or industrial, and communes of all social capital, all ownership of land, mines, dwellings, religious and public buildings, instruments of labour, raw materials, …and manufactured products." (p. 386) There is a need to end the division between mental and manual labour. Distribution of goods would be based on the amount of labour contributed by each (able-bodied) worker. (This was "collectivism." Later models of a "communist" anarchism—distribution "to each according to their need"—were developed by Kropotkin and others, as a modification of "collectivism.") The self-managed "collectivities, workers' associations, and communes" would coordinate through federations and networks (democratic planning from below).

Bakunin only occasionally described his views as "democratic," usually reserving the term for the capitalist representative "democracies," which he wanted to overthrow. He did call his anarchist association, the "Alliance of Socialist Democracy." While "democracy" is not discussed by Correa, but Morris argues, "If the term 'democracy' denoted government of the people, by the people, for the people, then this would imply no state, and Bakunin could therefore happily call himself a 'democrat.'" (Morris 1993; p. 99)

Correa gives a summary of Bakunin's analysis of how capitalism worked. Bakunin had been influenced by Proudhon and Marx, but his views, as summarised here, appear to be mostly that of Marx. Bakunin had read Marx's *Capital*, and had made an effort to translate it. Even during his bitterest exchanges with Marx, Bakunin continued to express respect for Marx's intellect and theoretical advances. (For an anarchist review of Marx's economic analysis, see Price 2013.)

From Correa's summary of Bakunin's writings on political economy, Bakunin believed that capitalism was based on the exploitation of the workers. Through collective labour they produced value by producing commodities. The capitalists, owners of the means of production and other capital, owned the total product and only gave a fraction of its value back to the workers. The rest they kept as profit. The competition among the capitalists had a tendency toward centralisation and monopolisation. In its origins and in its continuation, the state was required to build up and to maintain the capitalist system. With cause, Correa calls this "the statist capitalist system." (p.370)

Overall, with some differences, this seems consistent with Marx's critique of political economy. Bakunin claims (in Correa's summary) that the workers sell their "labour" as a commodity to the capitalists. Marx thought it better to say that the workers sell their "labour power," their ability to work, to the capitalists as commodities, when the capitalists hire them. Their labour power is then expended as labour during working hours.

More significantly, Bakunin implies that capitalism pushes workers' wages to the very bottom, to what is just necessary biologically for the workers and their families to survive and work (which was the view of the classical bourgeois economists). Bakunin writes that capitalists must pay workers "the lowest possible wages…the labour…which is forced to be sold at the lowest value… [that which is] strictly necessary for the daily maintenance of their families….The worker is forced to sell his labour for almost nothing…." (p. 369)

The view that workers' wages must be pushed toward the bottom, to "almost nothing," has been used to claim that it is pointless to strike for higher wages. This has been called "the iron law of wages," and was held by some "Marxists," such as F. Lasalle (a founder of German social democracy). While this is a real tendency, there are counter-tendencies, as Marx pointed out. These include the capitalists' need for increasingly educated and healthy workers to handle more sophisticated and complex machinery.

"At the basis of all historical, national, religious, and political problems…[is] the economic problem, the most important, the most vital of all…. The whole intellectual and moral, political and social history of humanity is a reflection of its economic history…. One of Mr. Marx's main scientific merits is to have enunciated and demonstrated this truth."

Also, the workers do not simply accept the downward pressure of the bosses. In many ways, not only including unions, they push back. A certain standard of living becomes accepted as mandatory in wealthier countries. The capitalists must accept this to some extent or face "labour unrest." Especially during boom periods, when the business cycle is on an upswing, workers can gain benefits. Marx recognised this, but noted that even the better-off workers were still exploited and oppressed.

Correa declares, "The contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat, as fundamental as it is…is not the only one and cannot be understood as the primary one…." (p. 374) He cites the class conflict between landlords and peasants (not a big factor in the U.S. but still important on a world scale). Further, he refers to "the state bureaucracy, the clergy, and the intellectuals" as also "among the upper classes" which exploit and dominate "the rural proletariat and all the poor and marginalised." (p. 374) This may be how Bakunin saw matters.

That there are non-capitalist contradictions and subsystems within capitalist society is not in question. Nor is it in doubt that the working class needs to be allied with every oppressed section of society. But it is industrial capitalism which mainly produces the goods and services by which everyone lives. This includes the surplus value which supports not only the capitalists but also the landlords, the state bureaucracy, the clergy, and the intellectuals. The powerful capital/labour dynamic pulls all subordinate conflicts into its orbit and makes them consistent with it. (That these subordinate systems, react back upon the

specific ways that capitalism functions is also not in question.) This puts the international, multi-racial, bi-gendered, multi-sexually-oriented, multi-religious, proletariat in a central ("primary" if one insists) position to make a revolution.

Bakunin rejected "economic determinism," writes Correa. However, in a footnote, Correa quotes Bakunin, as declaring (at various times), "At the basis of all historical, national, religious, and political problems…[is] the economic problem, the most important, the most vital of all…. The whole intellectual and moral, political and social history of humanity is a reflection of its economic history…. One of Mr. Marx's main scientific merits is to have enunciated and demonstrated this truth." (p. 381-2) Correa calls Bakunin's view "relative economic determination." It seems consistent with a flexible version of Marxist "historical materialism" (another term Marx never used).

The Split in the International

Bakunin and Marx shared the goal of an international revolution of the working class and all oppressed groups (peasants, women, colonised nationalities, etc.) to create a classless, stateless, free society. Yet they had deep and bitter differences.

In 1872 Marx organised the expulsion of Bakunin from the International. This was followed by a split of the majority into an alternate "Anti-Authoritarian International." Correa goes into detail about the background of this conflict, from the time Bakunin and his comrades joined the International to the final split. I will not review this history. (I have discussed the split in the International elsewhere; see Price 2017.)

What were the issues (leaving aside conflicts of personality)? Correa believes that the major issue involved party and power. After the Paris Commune, Marx made a big push to order every International branch to form a workers' political party—to run in elections and compete for state power. Bakunin and his comrades opposed this program (although he supported each national section's freedom to form a party or not). It was not merely a tactical matter of whether to vote. Marx and his comrades believed that the road to socialism was through seizing the state—either by elections or by revolutions which established new states (the "dictatorship of the proletariat").

To the anarchists, the state was an instrument of minority class rule and could not be used for any other purpose. Instead, the road forward was through independent mass action, particularly by building militant unions. (The Marxists were also for building unions—that was not in dispute.) The post-revolutionary society would be a federation of workers' councils and communal assemblies, not a state.

However, the actual attack by Marx against Bakunin was not explicitly over workers' parties and elections. Instead, Bakunin was accused of forming secret societies, with the aim of either taking over the International or destroying it from within. Marxists still charge him with that. Really it was a conflict over Bakunin's concept of organisational dualism.

Bakunin made a distinction between two types of organisation. One was a mass organisation of the working class, in this case the International. It included workers of varied views on politics and religion, united to fight for their interests, primarily economic. The other was a smaller, politically homogenous, grouping of "cadres" (Correa's term), which would act publicly or secretly, inside and outside the broader organisation. Its goal was to advance its revolutionary program among the workers, in opposition to the various authoritarian forces which existed. This was then the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy. Both types of organisations were to be federalist, not centralist, in structure.

This was hardly undemocratic. Why shouldn't Bakunin or anyone else be free to form a socialist caucus within the International? Marx himself had a network of fellow-thinkers throughout the International with whom he corresponded and collaborated, even if not a formal body, and he was allied with the Blanquists, who had their own, highly centralised, party.

However, Marx and his comrades accused Bakunin of organising to take over the International (which was what Marx had been trying to do) or to destroy it (which was nonsense). The Marxists pointed out that Bakunin had been forming (or trying to form) secret associations (secret not only from the police but also from the members of the International) under his leadership. This was partly true, at least in Bakunin's mind and imagination, if not in reality.

One of Bakunin's young followers then was the Italian Errico Malatesta. Years later (in 1897), he commented, "In the [anarchist] movement's early days there was a strong residue of Jacobinism and authoritarianism within us, a residue that I will not make so bold as to say we have destroyed utterly, but which has definitely been and still is on the wane." (Turcato 2016; p. 335)

Correa discusses some of the worst things Bakunin wrote, in private letters and elsewhere. These indicate that he wanted a secret, collective, "dictatorship" over society by the Alliance. Correa gives reasons to downplay these authoritarian statements. In my opinion, he does not sufficiently acknowledge the elements of Jacobinism which still lingered in Bakunin's

thinking. Yet he is correct in showing how Bakunin's anarchist-federalist dualism laid the basis for present-day revolutionary anarchism, which is not Jacobin or elitist but radically democratic and federalist.

In an afterward to this book, the Argentinean anarchist Rocio Soledad Lescano states that organisational dualism is among "the most important contributions proposed by Bakunin that are still valid today and are being put into practice by a portion of contemporary anarchism." (p. 436) Today this is often referred to as *especifisimo* or neo-platformism.

This is sometimes compared to the Leninist vanguard party. They have some things in common, in the organisation of revolutionaries who agree with each other and coordinate ideas and actions. But there are drastic differences, too. The Leninist party is centralised, directed from the top down ("democratic centralism"). The anarchist association is federalist, organised from the bottom up (which might be called democratic federalism). Most important of all, the Leninist party exists to win state power for itself, while the anarchist association exists to promote the self-organisation of the workers and oppressed.

Conclusion

Brian Morris wrote, "Bakunin's anarchism has not been discussed anywhere with the seriousness it deserves." (Morris 1993; pp. 73-4) This book is the serious discussion which Bakunin's anarchism deserves. It is a big book (475 pages) and covers many topics—not all of which are discussed in this review. It is somewhat academic, beginning with a bibliographic essay on the international literature about Bakunin. Also, the thorough discussion of Bakunin's philosophical development may be useful to specialists but not to most of those interested in Bakunin. Yet there is value in showing how his final, revolutionary anarchist, period carried on aspects of his earlier thinking.

Bakunin was constantly looking for ways to struggle for freedom. From Hegel he took a dynamic understanding of the world. From Proudhon he took a commitment to decentralised federalism and industrial self-management, while rejecting Proudhon's reformism. From Marx he gained an analysis of how capitalism works and other insights, while fighting against Marx's strategy of taking state power.

Bakunin had to overcome certain elitist, and even racist, aspects of his thinking, which he may never have done completely. He was not perfect. It is the conclusion of Bakunin's life, approximately his last decade, which is most important for today's anarchist-socialists. He put together the fundamental theory and practice of revolutionary anarchism.

Today we face the rise of semi-fascist and outright fascist movements, threatening to take over even the "democratic" governments. On the Left, there is the growth of authoritarian and statist versions of "socialism." This includes "democratic socialism" (that is, reformist state socialism) and various regrowths of Marxist-Leninism (Stalinist-type "revolutionary" state socialisms). The vision of Mikhail Bakunin remains of extraordinary value as a guide to freedom and socialism.

Freedom or Death: The Theory and Practice of Mikhail Bakunin
Felipe Correa
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Organisation and the General Strike

Michael Bakunin, Égalité, 3 April 1869

Workers, keep your utmost calm. If your sufferings are great, be heroic and know how to bear them still; attentively read what the newspaper *L'Internationale* tells the workers of the Charleroi basin, all of which we too should learn.

Listen, then, to the wise advice our Belgian brothers give us:

> "May our Swiss brothers be patient for a while longer! Like us they are obliged to wait until the signal of the social collapse comes from a large country, either England, France, or Germany. In the meantime, let us continue to gather all the forces of the proletariat, let us help ourselves as much as we can amidst the ills that the present state subjects us to, and above all study the solution of the great economic problems which will arise before us on the day following victory, seek how we can best proceed with the liquidation of the old society and the establishment of the new."

Be patient, be patient, "the day of justice will come"; in the meantime, close your ranks and strengthen your organisation.

* * *

The news concerning the European labour movement can be summed up in one word: strikes. In Belgium the typographers strike in several cities, the spinners strike in Ghent, the upholsterers strike in Brussels; in England the imminent strike in the manufacturing districts; in Prussia the strike of the zinc miners; in Paris the plasterer-painters strike; in Switzerland the strikes in Basle and Geneva.

As we advance, strikes multiply. What does this mean? That the struggle between labour and capital is more and more on the rise, that economic anarchy becomes deeper every day, and that we are advancing with huge steps toward the inevitable result of this anarchy: Social Revolution. Certainly, the emancipation of the proletariat could be accomplished without shocks, if the bourgeoisie wanted to hold its night of 4th of August, renouncing its privileges, the rights of capital to increase at the expense of labour; but bourgeois egoism and blindness are so ingrained that you must still be an optimist to hope to see the solution of the social problem by a common understanding between the privileged and the disinherited; so instead the new social order will emerge from the very excesses of the current anarchy.

When strikes spread, they gradually connect, they are very close to turning into a general strike; and with the ideas of emancipation that now prevail in the proletariat, a general strike can only lead to a great cataclysm which would renew society. We are not yet there, no doubt, but everything leads us there. Only, the people must be ready, it can no longer be distracted by talkers and dreamers, as in 48, and for this it must be-strongly and seriously organised.

But don't the strikes follow each other so rapidly that the fear is that the cataclysm will arrive before the proletariat is sufficiently organised? We think not, first because strikes already indicate a certain collective strength, a certain agreement amongst the workers; next, each strike becomes the point of departure for new groups. The necessities of the struggle impel workers to support each other across borders and across trades; the more active the struggle becomes, therefore, the more this federation of proletarians has to expand and strengthen. And then narrow-minded economists accuse this federation of workers, represented by the International [Workers'] Association, of fomenting strikes and creating anarchy! This is quite simply taking effect for cause: it is not the International that creates the war between the exploiter and the exploited, rather it is the necessity of this war that has created the International.