

Bakunin

Hippolyte Havel

1914

Contents

THE LIFE OF BAKUNIN	3
A Synopsis of Bakunin's Teaching	10

No man can emancipate himself, except by emancipating with him all the men around him. My liberty is the liberty of everyone, for I am not truly free, free not only in thought but in deed, except when my liberty and my rights find their confirmation, their sanction, in the liberty and the rights of all men, my equals.—BAKUNIN.

THE LIFE OF BAKUNIN

MIKHAIL ALEXANDROVITCH BAKUNIN was descended from an old aristocratic family, which according to tradition had emigrated to Russia from Transylvania. He was born on his father's estate at Pryamukhino, district of Torshok, in the province of Tver, on the 8th of May in year 1814. Bakunin's father was a former diplomat who at the age of forty-five married a young girl of the poor but aristocratic family of Muraviev. One of her uncles was the infamous General Muraviev, who drowned the Polish Revolution in blood and gained the name "the hangman, of Warsaw." Bakunin was the oldest of eleven children. In a fragmentary autobiography, "La Histoire de ma vie," Bakunin describes his father as a man of intellect and culture, a true philanthropist, possessed of a broad mind and generous sympathies. He belonged to a revolutionary society which tried to undermine the autocratic despotism which oppressed Russia, but changed his mind after the unsuccessful conspiracy of the Decabrists in 1825. From then on he tried with all his might to make of his children true servants and good subjects of the Czar.

Bakunin's father was very rich. He was the owner of a thousand "souls." Including women and children he was the unrestricted ruler of three thousand human beings.

Bakunin spent his early youth at Pryamukhino, where he received instruction in languages, history and arithmetic from his father and one of his uncles. Religious instruction was almost entirely overlooked, as the father was a free-thinker. His moral education suffered through the knowledge that his entire material and intellectual existence was founded on injustice, on the system of serfdom. The youth possessed an instinctive feeling of hatred for all injustice: the sense for truth and right was strongly developed in him.

At the age of 14 Bakunin entered the Artillery School at St. Petersburg. He graduated in 1832 and was sent as an officer to a regiment in the province of Minsk. Here he spent two years, witnessing the oppression of the Polish inhabitants after the suppression of the insurrection of 1830. The vocation of a soldier soon became repulsive to him and he quit the army in 1834, in his twentieth year. The next six years he spent either in Moscow or St. Petersburg with friends or with his family at his father's estate.

During these years he devoted himself passionately to the study of philosophy, and came in contact with the most progressive and sympathetic representatives of the universities of Moscow and St. Petersburg. This generation lived in a purely intellectual atmosphere and had little interest in the practical aspects of life. The German philosopher Hegel had nowhere such enthusiastic disciples as in Russia; his philosophic system played regular havoc among the Russian intellectuals of that period. Bakunin, who had already studied the French encyclopedists and had in 1836 translated Fichte's "Einige Vorlesungen ueber die Bestimmung des Gelehrten," became in 1837 a thorough Hegelian. He wrote a preface to a translation of Hegel's lectures, and published shortly after an article "On Philosophy."

In the fall of 1839 Bakunin and his friends Stankevitch and Bjelinski became acquainted with Alexander Herzen and his followers, who had returned from their exile in the provinces to Moscow. Fierce discussions were the result. The Moscow Hegelians represented the most reactionary standpoint, while the circle of Herzen propagated the ideas of Western republicanism and French socialism.

In 1840 Bakunin went to Berlin and entered the University. Soon he developed from a conservative to a revolutionary Hegelian. Ludwig Feuerbach, the great critic of Christianity, was the cause of this transformation. In a pamphlet entitled "Schelling and the Book of Revelations" Bakunin for the first time shows his revolutionary view of life. From 1840 till 1843 Bakunin spent his time in Germany, first in Berlin, where for a time he lived with Turgenjev, and later in Dresden. He was in close contact with the most progressive Germans; with Arnold Ruge and his friends; with Adolph Reichel, who proved to be a true friend through his whole life; with Georg Herwegh, and other free spirits of that time.

Bakunin's next literary work, an essay called "The Reaction in Germany; a fragment by a Frenchman," published in Ruge's "Deutsche Jahrbuecher" under the pseudonym Jules Elysard, was an attack upon all compromise in the revolutionary ranks. This work, known principally because of the last sentence, "The zeal for destruction is at the same time a producing zeal," called the attention of the police to Bakunin's activity. The result was that he no longer felt secure in Saxony. He left Leipzig with Herwegh in January, 1843, and they travelled to Zurich by way of Strassburg. In Zurich Bakunin became acquainted with the German radicals Julius Froebel, August Follen, and their friends; later he came to know the Communist Wilhelm Weitling and his followers. He published several articles on Communism in Froebel's "Schweizerischer Republikaner." Weitling was presently arrested and among his papers the police found Bakunin's name. The Russian ambassador asked for information concerning him, and Bakunin was obliged to leave Zurich as quickly as possible. He went to Geneva and later to Berne. Here in February, 1844, the Russian ambassador informed him that his government insisted upon his immediate return to Russia. Bakunin decided otherwise; he went to Brussels, where he met Lelewel, the Polish historian and revolutionist, and many other Polish and Russian exiles. From Brussels he went to Paris, where he met and became friendly with the Anarchist philosopher Pierre Joseph Proudhon, the novelist George Sand, and many prominent Frenchmen. Herzen, Reichel, Bjelinski, and the naturalist Karl Vogt, all personal friends of Bakunin, lived at this time in France.

In December, 1844, Bakunin got information from Russia that on account of his revolutionary activity and his refusal to return to Russia he had been sentenced to exile in Siberia for life and that his entire fortune had been confiscated by the government of the Czar. In March, 1846, Bakunin wrote in the "Constitutional" on the Russian horror in Poland; in November, 1847, he spoke on the same theme in a Polish meeting. The result was that at the request of the Russian ambassador he was expelled by the French government from French territory. He went to Brussels, but only for a short time. In Paris the Revolution broke out, and soon the whole of Europe was aflame. The long awaited Revolution had arrived!

Bakunin saw clearly that the success of the Revolution of 1848 could only be assured if the democratic parties of all the countries of Europe should unite. This the Reaction tried by all the means in its power to prevent. Bakunin took upon himself the mission of agitation among the Slavs; no man could have been better fitted for the work than he. He planned to join the Polish revolutionists with the intention of spreading the movement to Russia. From Paris he journeyed to Cologne, Leipzig and Breslau, and in each city he met the revolutionary leaders and

participated in all important discussions. From Breslau he went to the Slavic Congress at Prague, hoping to be able to convert the delegates to the Revolutionary cause. While Bakunin was in Prague the Revolution broke out in that city. He was in the thick of the fight; and it was only after the Revolution had been suppressed that he left for Breslau.

Thence he went to Berlin, where he became acquainted with Max Stirner, the author of "The Ego and his own." In October he was expelled from Prussia; three days later from Saxony. He found a place of comparative security in the small liberal state of Anhalt. In Koethen and Dessau he revealed a feverish activity, mostly of conspirative character. He was preparing for a general uprising in the spring of 1849. In the eyes of the reactionary powers he became the most feared and most hated personality in the ranks of the Revolutionists.

From January till March Bakunin lived in secret in Leipzig, whence he conspired with Bohemian revolutionists. In May the Revolution broke out in Dresden. Bakunin was one of the leaders, fighting on the barricades, in close contact with the provisory government. Active day and night, he became terror incarnate in the eyes of the Saxon philistines. After the suppression of the Revolution he marched with Richard Wagner and other rebels to Freiberg, where the last attempt at an invasion of Bohemia was made. Then Bakunin and some friends marched to Chemnitz, where they hoped to find refuge. They were received hospitably, but in the night the good citizens attacked Bakunin and his followers in bed, arrested them and turned them over to the Prussian soldiers in Altenburg. Here begins Bakunin's prison life.

Bakunin and his comrades Heubner and Roeckel were brought in irons to the fortress of Konigstein. Heubner and Roeckel were sentenced to death, but the sentence was later commuted to a life term in the penitentiary. Bakunin was kept in the fortress until June, 1850; on the 13th of June he was extradited to Austria. He was first kept in Prague, and later transferred to the horrible prison in Olmutz, where he was inhumanly treated. On the 15th of May, 1851, he was sentenced to death, but the sentence was changed to life imprisonment. Shortly after Bakunin was extradited to Russia; a welcome change, as nowhere had he been so maltreated as in the Austrian prisons.

In St. Petersburg he was first incarcerated in the fortress of Peter and Paul; at the beginning of the Crimean War he was transferred to the fortress of Schlüsselburg. He suffered from scurvy and lost his teeth. Deep melancholy took hold of him, and he would have ended his life by suicide if his family had not succeeded in March, 1857, in having his sentence changed to exile in Siberia. In Tomsk in Western Siberia and later in the eastern part of the country he enjoyed comparative freedom, although he was constantly under police surveillance; he came in close contact with many exiles, and lost no opportunity for the propaganda of revolutionary ideas. He even gained a great deal of influence over his relative Muraviev-Amurski, who was then acting as Governor of Eastern Siberia. Bakunin tried to convert him to the idea of a United States of Siberia. Muraviev-Amurski tried to get an amnesty for Bakunin, but did not succeed; later he was recalled to European Russia, and Bakunin made preparations for escape. He succeeded in outwitting the authorities and left Irkutsk on the 5th of June, 1861. He traveled down the Amur to Nikolajevsk, and from there to Japan. On the 17th of September he landed in San Francisco, having sailed from Yokohama. The news of the escape and safe landing of the great revolutionist caused an intense international sensation. In San Francisco and later in New York Bakunin found many old friends and former co workers. But he did not stay long in the United States. On the 15th of November he embarked for Liverpool, and on the 27th of September he was received with open arms by his old friends Herzen and Ogarjev in London. During his exile in Tomsk (in 1858V

Bakunin had married the daughter of a Polish revolutionist, but it was not until two years after his arrival in London that, he was able to rejoin his wife at Stockholm.

After his escape from Siberia Bakunin threw himself with his old energy into the revolutionary propaganda. He had the confidence of the revolutionary elements of all countries. At this time he still hoped for a general European uprising; Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily and Naples produced great enthusiasm, and the exiles in London, among them the Frenchmen Louis Blanc and Talandier, the Italians Mazzini and Saffi, the Russians Herzen and Ogarjev, the radical Englishmen Linton and Holyoake, and especially the Polish leaders had great hopes for an international revolt. Bakunin attempted to establish a closer connection between the Russian and the Polish revolutionists. He issued several appeals, among them "To the Russian, Polish and all Slavic friends," and "The People's Cause: Romanov, Pugatchev or Pestel," urging all rebels to a concerted action; but unfortunately his efforts did not meet with success. The aristocratic element in the Polish movement made a friendly co-operation with the Russian revolutionist impossible. When the Polish Revolution of 1863 broke out Bakunin himself went to Helsingfors with a Polish expedition on the steamer "Ward Jackson," and thence to Sweden, where he tried to influence the Swedish radicals to an action against Russia.

The breakdown of the Polish Revolution showed that the era of national uprisings was over. A new epoch had begun. The movement of the proletariat now became the dominant factor. Bakunin, who was the true incarnation of the revolutionary spirit, felt this; from now on he entered the international workingmen's movement, to display here the same indomitable energy he had used in the national uprisings before the prison doors had closed upon him. His ideas were now clarified; he had developed to a true conception of the philosophy of Anarchism. All former inconsistencies disappeared; destruction of the State, of every authority based upon force, of every superstition, even if it should mask itself under the name of Socialism, now became his goal. The most interesting and significant part of his life had begun.

After his return from London Bakunin settled down in Italy. His revolutionary efforts were now directed toward organizing a secret society of the most intelligent, honest, and energetic men from all libertarian movements for the purpose of spreading atheistic-anarchistic ideas and of influencing the next uprisings in a social revolutionary direction. This society, whose members were mainly his personal friends and co-workers, was called the "Fraternite internationale." It was the real basis of the libertarian International in Italy, Spain, Southern France, and the Latin part of Switzerland. The International Workingmen's Association was founded in September, 1864, in London. Bakunin had in the beginning no direct connection with that organization. He and his friends worked in their own way among the revolutionary elements of all countries. They participated in the Peace Congress held at Geneva in September, 1867. Bakunin and his intimate comrades Joukovski, Mroczkovski, Naguet, and others made great efforts to win the Congress to their side. Bakunin was elected a member of the Central Committee at Berne. The majority of the League, however, consisted of bourgeois republicans who had no sympathy with the workingmen's movement. The next Congress voted down the proposal of Bakunin to recognize the social question as the supreme question; Bakunin, Elisee Reclus, Aristide Rey, Joukovski, Mroczkovski, Fanelli, and others (18 members in all) left the organization and founded the "Alliance internationale de la democratic socialiste." Bakunin proposed that they should join the International Workingmen's Association, and he and his friends became members of the Jura Section of the International. The General Council of the International, which was under the influence of Karl Marx, refused membership to the "Alliance," and the latter organization dissolved. But Marx and

his faction accused Bakunin and his friends of keeping a secret organization among themselves to work against the General Council.

It would take volumes to describe the great historic struggle between Marx and Bakunin in the International. There was concerned not only personal antagonism, but at the same time a struggle between two diametrically opposite conceptions—that of the authoritarian Socialism of Marx, and that of the libertarian Anarchistic Socialism of Bakunin. The Jura Federation was the stronghold of those in the International whose tendency was against the state and toward direct economic revolutionary action. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the leading spirits of the General Council in London, were working to divert the International from the direct economic struggle and make of it a parliamentary fighting machine. Bakunin opposed this movement with all his power. He declared that every political movement which has not for its immediate and direct object the final and complete economic emancipation of the workers, which has not inscribed upon its banner quite definitely and clearly, the principle of “economic equality,” that is, the integral restitution of capital to labor, or else social liquidation—every such movement is a bourgeois one, and as such must be excluded from the International.

“Without mercy the policy of the democratic bourgeois, or bourgeois-Socialists, must be excluded, which, when these declare that political freedom is a necessary condition of economic emancipation, can only mean this: political reforms, or political revolutions must precede economic reforms or economic revolutions; the workers must therefore join hands with the more or less Radical bourgeois, in order to carry out the former together with them, then, being free, to turn the latter into a reality against them. We protest loudly against this unfortunate theory, which, so far as the workers are concerned, can only result in their again letting themselves be used as tools against themselves, and handing them over once more to bourgeois exploitation.”

Bakunin, the fearless fighter for the social and economic emancipation of the working class, presents a direct antithesis to the social democratic spirit and petty bourgeois cowardice of political life. In Karl Marx he found a mean antagonist. Even in the midst of the revolutionary struggles of 1848, Marx published in his “New Rhenish Gazette” articles accusing Bakunin of being a secret agent of Czar Nicholas and the Pan-slavists. Marx and his friends were at that time forced to stammer their apologies. Whilst Bakunin suffered imprisonment at Olmutz and in other Austrian jails, Horzen, the great Russian political writer, and Mazzini, forced Marx to take back his calumnies. But, Marx was not the man to forgive them this humiliation. Many years later, after Bakunin had suffered imprisonment in the subterranean cells of the Schlüsselberg and exile to Siberia, Marx and his satellites started the despicable game anew. Anonymous denunciations appeared in Social Democratic papers, under the editorship of Liebknecht, Hess and others. But at the congress of the International at Basle in 1869 the slanderers were forced to compromise themselves and to declare the entire baselessness of their charge. No wonder Marx flew into a rage, and resolved to kill Bakunin morally.

At the Hague Congress of the International, in 1872, Marx succeeded, with the aid of a fictitious majority, in having the Jura Federation and its leading spirits, Bakunin and James Guillaume, excluded from the International, whereupon the Jura, the Spanish, the Italian, and the East Belgian (Vesdre) Federations broke entirely with the General Council, which was transferred next year to New York, where it died; while the Federations just mentioned, concluding a federative alliance among themselves, and abolishing all central authority, continued the work of the International Workingmen’s Association on federalist principles, and up to 1878 held regular yearly congresses, until this became impossible, owing to Government prosecutions.

In the history of the revolutionary movement there is no personality who has been so much slandered and maligned as was Bakunin by his antagonists. His enemies stooped to the lowest depths to besmirch the character of the man who represented the true revolutionary spirit of his time. In his essay on Bakunin's influence Peter Kropotkin says truly: "Those who gathered around him were men who stood on a high moral plane. I never knew him personally, but I made the acquaintance of most of those who worked with him in the International, and were pursued with the most bitter hatred of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. And in the face of those who hated and slandered them, I assert that every one of Bakunin's comrades represented a moral personality of the highest value. I am convinced that history will confirm my assertion. Posterity will no doubt recognize that his personal enemies, though gifted with intelligence, entertained a less moral outlook on life than those who called themselves Bakunin's friends."

After October, 1868, Bakunin lived in Geneva, later in Locarno. He edited the "Egalite," the organ of the Jura Federation, and busied himself with general propaganda in the Federation. He took a prominent part in the Congress of the International held at Basle in September, 1869. He kept up a correspondence with comrades in Russia, Italy, Spain, and other countries.

The war between Germany and France called Bakunin again to action. He saw clearly the terrible result the triumph of German militarism would have on the revolutionary movement. Unlike many others, who spent their time preparing peace manifestos, he immediately began to prepare for insurrections. He himself went to Lyons where he made ready for an uprising. The city was taken by the revolutionists on September 28th, 1870, but as there was a lack of solidarity and logical co-operation the attempt to proclaim a Commune failed. Bakunin was for a short time in danger; he was incarcerated and brutally mistreated. Comrades succeeded in freeing him from prison, but he had to leave the city the next day. He went to Marseilles, then to Genoa, and then back to Locarno. When the Parisians proclaimed the Commune Bakunin was on his way to Florence. The defeat of the Commune and the slaughter of 35,000 workers threw Bakunin into a mood of deepest pessimism. He retired from public action for a short time to make a resume of his ideas. The result was two brilliant works: "God and the State," and "The Knouto-German Empire."

Bakunin's activities during the years 1871-72-73 were concentrated upon Russia, Italy, and Spain. In 1871 commenced his great polemic with Mazzini. As a result we have his forceful "Risposta" to Mazzini; also the "Risposta All' Unita Italiana" and the pamphlet "La Theologie politique de Mazzini, et l'Internationale." Mazzini died in 1872, but his followers continued the discussion with bitter animosity.

Bakunin found staunch friends and comrades in Cafiero, Malatesta, and other Italians. In Spain he was in correspondence with Lorenzo, Pellicer, Morago, Vinas, and others; A Slavic section of the International was founded in Zurich. Karl Marx and his faction had succeeded in excluding Bakunin and his followers from the International, but they did not succeed in capturing the spirit of the organization. The Italian, Spanish, French, and the Jura Sections met at St. Imier in the Jura on the 15th and 16th of September, 1872, and reorganized the International on a federalistic basis with a collectivist-anarchist program. In April, 1873, appeared the "Memoire de la Federation Jurassienne" in which Bakunin impartially gives the history of the International, and of the split in the organization. The Marxians also published a pamphlet full of lies and attacks upon Bakunin. It appeared in July, 1873, under the title "L'Alliance de la democratic socialists et l'association international des travailleurs." Bakunin answered in a letter published in the "Journal de Geneve" on September 25th, 1873.

After the reorganization of the libertarian International Bakunin announced in the Bulletin of the Jura Federation (October 12, 1873) his resignation from the International and his retirement from political to private life. This announcement was made for the special purpose of hoodwinking the authorities. A revolutionary movement to great strength had developed in Spain, and the Spanish members of the International had invited Bakunin to that country. Unfortunately, material circumstances and the arrest of certain comrades made the journey impossible. The uprisings were crushed, and in 1874 the International was proscribed in Spain, although it continued to exist in secret organizations for seven years.

From "Baronata," the estate on the Lake of Maggiore which Cafiero had purchased as a refuge for revolutionists, Bakunin and Cafiero, together with other members of the International, particularly with A. Costa, organized an insurrection in Italy. Bakunin left Switzerland in July, 1874 and travelled by way of Brescia, Bergamo, and Verona to Bologna, where he met Costa and other conspirators. Unfortunately Costa was arrested on the 5th of August, and the uprisings, in Bologna and other Italian cities ended in failure. Bakunin left the country dressed in the garb of a priest, and returned to Locarno, disappointed, in very poor health, and in a bad pecuniary situation. He now retired entirely from the revolutionary movement, and lived with his family in Locarno until his death on the 1st of July, 1876, at a private hospital at Berne. His old friends Professor Adolph Vogt and the Reichel family were near him when he ended his phenomenal journey on this planet.

Quoting the great French revolutionist, Auguste Blanqui, Kropotkin says that it is easier to measure accurately the influence of events by their indirect consequences rather than their direct results, for the former are always more important than the latter. We must likewise estimate Bakunin's influence, not so much by what he personally attained, but by the influence he exerted upon the thoughts and actions of his immediate disciples. For his literary legacy is small. "Communism and the State," "The Historical Development of the International Worker's Association," "God and the State"—these are the three books he wrote. These originated in the same way as his other pamphlets, which were written in order to answer questions of the day, or addressed as letters to friends, but reached the length of pamphlets owing to their author's discursive style of writing. In this way arose "The Knouto-German Empire," "Report of a Frenchman on the Present Crisis," "The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International," "The Bears of Berne," and other works.

As a rule, Bakunin sat down to write a letter dealing with some question of the moment. But the letter quickly grew to the size of a pamphlet, and the pamphlet, to that of a book. For the author wrote so fluently, had so thorough a conception of the philosophy of history, such a vast store of knowledge relating to the events of the time, that the pages soon filled themselves. If we only consider what he and his friends—Herzen, Ogarjev, Mazzini, and Ledru-Rollin amongst others—the best men of action in that revolutionary period of the forties—thought about the questions of the day; what they felt during the hopeful years which preceded the red year, 1871–2, and the despair which followed it: if we call this to mind we will understand readily how the thoughts, conceptions, facts and arguments borrowed from real life must have invaded Bakunin's spirit. We learn to understand also how his generalization of historical philosophy, so richly adorned with facts and brilliant thoughts, could only be taken from contemporary reality.

Every pamphlet of Bakunin signifies a crisis in the history of revolutionary thought in Europe. His speeches at the congress of the "Peace and Liberty" League were so many challenges to all the radicals of Europe. In them Bakunin declared that the radicalism of 1848 had had its day, that

the new era, the epoch of Socialism and Labor, had dawned. Another question besides political liberty, that of economic independence, had raised its head. This question would become the dominating factor in European history.

The pamphlet addressed to Mazzini announces the end of conspiracy for the purpose of waging wars of national independence, and the advent of the social revolution. Bakunin proclaimed the end of sentimental Christian Socialism and the dawn of atheistic realistic communism. And his famous letter to Herzen concerning the International had the same significance for Russia as the other had for Italy.

In "The Bears of Berne" Bakunin bids farewell to the philistine Swiss democracy, while his "Letters to a Frenchman," written during the Franco German War of 1870–1 were a dirge to Gambetta's radicalism, and an enthusiastic appeal for the new epoch, which found its expression soon after in the Paris Commune, a movement which overthrew the old State-Socialist ideas of Louis Blanc and proclaimed the new idea of Communism, the Commune taking up arms for the defense of its territory to inaugurate the social revolution within their own walls—this was Bakunin's advice, in order to repel the German invasion.

His "Knouto-German Empire and the Social Revolution" were the prophetic vision of an old revolutionist. Then already, in 1871, Bakunin foresaw that, resulting from the triumph of Bismarck's military state, a forty to fifty years' reaction would descend upon Europe. Likewise Bakunin prophesied the rise of German State Socialism, to which Bismarck also stood sponsor. At the same time, Bakunin aimed at winning the Latin countries for Stateless Communism or Anarchism.

Finally we have "Communism and the State," "The Historical Development of the International," and "God and the State." These contain, for the thinking reader, in spite of their fighting tendency, attributable to the fact that they were written on the spur of the moment, more profound political thought, a higher philosophic conception of history, than whole volumes of university or Socialist treatises, which distinguish themselves as a rule, by the fact that they try to conceal the lack of deep thought and ideas in a mist of dialectic.

Bakunin's writings contain no ready-made recipe for a political cookshop. Those who expect to find the solution of all their doubts in one book, without exercising their thinking capacity, will get no satisfaction out of his works. But should the reader be accustomed to independent thinking and used to looking upon books as material over which he must reflect individually—as if in conversation with an intelligent man who awakens his intellect—the sometimes unarranged, but always brilliant generalizations of Bakunin will be more useful than all the works of the authoritarian Socialists.

The ideas which Bakunin spread in the middle of the last century form today the social philosophy of the most advanced part of the international proletariat. Those ideas, which went through the crucible to hostile criticism shine today in greater clarity than ever, and form the basis on which free humanity will build its social structure.

A Synopsis of Bakunin's Teaching¹

To escape its wretched lot the populace has three ways, two imaginary and one real. The two first are the rum-shop and the church, the third is the social revolution. A cure is possible only

¹ From Eltzbacher's "Anarchism."

through the social revolution—that is, through the destruction of all institutions of inequality, and the establishment of economic and social equality. The revolution will not be made by anybody. Revolutions are never made, neither by individuals nor yet by secret societies. They come about automatically, in a measure; the power of things, the current of events and facts, produces them. They are long preparing in the depth of the obscure consciousness of the masses—then they break out suddenly, not seldom on apparently slight occasion. The revolution is already at hand to-day; everybody feels its approach.

By the revolution we understand the unchaining of everything that is to-day called “evil passions,” and the destruction of everything that in the same language is called “public order.”

The revolution will rage not against men, but against relations and things. Bloody revolutions are often necessary, thanks to human stupidity; yet they are always an evil, a monstrous evil, and a great disaster, not only with regard to the victims, but also for the sake of the purity and perfection of the purpose in whose name they take place. One must not wonder if in the first moment, of their uprising the people kill many oppressors and exploiters—this misfortune, which is of no more importance anyhow than the damage done by a thunderstorm, can perhaps not be avoided. But this natural fact will be neither moral nor even useful. Political massacres have never killed parties; particularly have they always shown themselves impotent against the privileged classes; for authority is vested far less in men than in the position which the privileged acquire by any institutions, particularly by the State and private property. If one would make, a thorough revolution, therefore, one must attack things and relationship, destroy property and the State: then there is no need of destroying men and exposing one’s self to the inevitable reaction which the slaughtering of men always has provoked and always will provoke in every society. But, in order to have the right to deal humanely with men without danger to the revolution, one must be inexorable toward things and relationship, destroy everything, and first and foremost property and its inevitable consequence the State. This is the whole secret of the revolution.

The revolution, as the power of things to-day necessarily presents it before us, will not be national, but international,—that is, universal. In view of the threatened league of all privileged interests and all reactionary powers, in view of the terrible instrumentalities that a shrewd organization puts at their disposal, in view of the deep chasm that to-day yawns between the bourgeoisie and the laborers everywhere, no revolution can count on success if it does not speedily extend itself beyond the individual nation to all other nations.

The revolution, as we understand it, must on its very first day completely and fundamentally destroy the State and all State institutions. This destruction will have the following natural and necessary effects, (a) The bankruptcy of the State, (b) The cessation of State collection of private debts, whose payment is thenceforth left to the debtor’s pleasure, (c) The cessation of the payment of taxes, and of the levying of direct or indirect imposts, (d) The dissolution of the army, the courts, the corps of office-holders, the police, and the clergy, (e) The stoppage of the official administration of justice, the abolition of all that is called juristic law and of its exercise. Hence, the valuelessness, and the consignment to an “auto-da-fe,” of all titles to property, testamentary dispositions, bills of sale, deeds of gift, judgments of courts—in short, of the whole mass of papers relating to private law.

Everywhere, and in regard to everything, the revolutionary fact in place of the law created and guaranteed by the State, (f) The confiscation of all productive capital and instruments of labor in favor of the associations of laborers, which will use them for collective production, (g) The confiscation of all Church and State property, as well as of the bullion in private hands, for

the benefit of the commune formed by the league of the associations of laborers. In return for the confiscated goods, those who are affected by the confiscation receive from the commune their absolute necessities; they are free to acquire more afterward by their labor.

The destruction will be followed by the reshaping. Hence, (h) The organization of the commune by the permanent association of the barricades and by its organ, the council of the revolutionary commune, to which every barricade, every street, every quarter, sends one or two responsible and revocable representatives with binding instructions. The council of the commune can appoint executive committees out of its membership for the various branches of the revolutionary administration, (i) The declaration of the capital insurgent and organized as a commune, that, after the righteous destruction of the State of authority and guardianship, it renounces the right (or rather the usurpation) of governing the provinces and setting a standard for them, (k) The summons to all provinces, communities, and associations, to follow the example given by the capital, first to organize themselves in revolutionary form, then to send to a specified meeting-place responsible and revocable representatives with binding instructions, and so to constitute the league of the insurgent associations, communities, and provinces, and to organize a revolutionary power capable of defeating the reaction. The sending, not of official commissioners of the revolution with some sort of badges, but of agitators for the revolution, to all the provinces and communities—especially to the peasants, who cannot be revolutionized by scientific principles nor yet the edicts of any dictatorship, but only by the revolutionary fact itself: that is, by the inevitable effects of the complete cessation of official State activity in all the communities. The abolition of the national State, not only in other senses, but in this,—that all foreign countries, provinces, communities, associations, nay, all individuals who have risen in the name of the same principles, without regard to the present State boundaries, are accepted as part of the new political system and nationality; and that, on the other hand, it shall exclude from membership those provinces, communities, associations, or personages, of the same country, who take the side of the reaction. Thus must the universal revolution, by the very fact of its binding the insurgent countries together for joint defence, march on unchecked over the abolished boundaries and the ruins of the formerly existing States to its triumph.

To serve, to organize, and to hasten the revolution, which must be everywhere the work of the people—this alone is the task of those who foresee the course of evolution. We have to perform “midwife’s services” for the new time, to help on the birth of the revolution.

To this end we must, first, spread among the masses thoughts that correspond to the instincts of the masses. What keeps the salvation-bringing thought from going through the laboring masses with a rush? Their ignorance; and particularly the political and religious prejudices which, thanks to the exertions of the ruling classes, to this day obscure the laborer’s natural thought and healthy feelings.

Hence the aim must consist in making him completely conscious of what he wants, evoking in him the thought that corresponds to his impulses. If once the thoughts of the laboring masses have mounted to the level of their impulses, then they will be soon determined and their power irresistible.

Furthermore, we must form, not indeed the army of the revolution,—the army can never be anything but the people,—but yet a sort of staff for the revolutionary army. These must be devoted, energetic, talented men, who, above all, love the people without ambition and vanity, and who have the faculty of mediating between the revolutionary thought and the instincts of the people. No very great number of such men is requisite. A hundred revolutionists firmly and seriously

bound together are enough for international organization. Two or three hundred revolutionists are enough for the organization of the largest country.

Here, especially, is the field for the activity of secret societies. In order to serve, organize and hasten the general revolution Bakunin founded the "Alliance internationale de la démocratie socialiste." It was to pursue a double purpose: (a) The spreading of correct views about politics, economics, and philosophical questions of every kind, among the masses in all countries; an active propaganda by newspapers, pamphlets, and books, as well as by the founding of public associations. (b) The winning of all wise, energetic, silent, well-disposed men who are sincerely devoted to the idea; the covering of Europe, and America too as far as possible, with a network of self-sacrificing revolutionists, strong by unity.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Hippolyte Havel
Bakunin
1914

Retrieved on August 8, 2022 from <https://archive.org>.
The Centenary Commemoration Committee, 63 East 107 Street, New York, 1914.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net