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Letter to Albert Richard (February 7, 1870)

Mikhail Bakunin

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Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur

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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 organization 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 vigor. 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 individual perishes, but the legion is immortal – and each day more powerful – because it has pushed deep roots into the world of the black hands and drawn from this world a mass of recruits –

That is the organization 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 rumors 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* organization and collective action, in favor of which I am the first ready 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 program – 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 organization spread over a whole country – If we do not form that organization, 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 organization 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 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.

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 demoralizing – He is a being who will remain eternally colorless 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 demoralized by the circle of Elie Reclus and Mme André Léo, the nymph Egeria to all of them, who are demoralized 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 it 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 organization, which is in its turn impossible without the observation of the rules – They observe them and they make some amazing progress – But the way, Mr E. F. complains that you little or no [help] with 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 dew-drops 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.