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Letter to Elisée Reclus

Mikhail Bakunin

February 15, 1875

February 15, 1875 – Lugano

My very dear friend, I thank you so much for your kind words. I have never doubted your friendship. That feeling has always been mutual and I judge yours by my own.

Yes, you are right. For the moment, the revolution has gone back to bed, and we fall once again into a period of evolutions, one of subterranean, invisible and often even insensible revolutions. The evolution that takes place today is very dangerous, if not for humanity, at least for certain nations. – it is the last incarnation of a used-up class, enjoying its last game, under the protection of the military-Mac-Mahono-Bonapartist dictatorship in France, the Bismarckian in the remainder of Europe.

I agree with you in saying that the hour of revolution has passed, not because of the frightful disasters we have witnessed or the terrible defeats of which we have been the more or less guilty victims, but because, to my great despair, I have observed, and I observe each day anew, that thought, hope and the revolutionary passion are absolutely not to be found among the masses, and when those are absent, we will strive in vain. We will accomplish nothing. – I admire the patience and the heroic perseverance of the Jurassians

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and the Belgians—these last Mohicans of the International—who despite all the difficulties, adversities and despite all the obstacles, in the midst of general indifference, opposing their stubborn front to the absolutely opposite course of things, continuing to calmly do what they did before the catastrophes, when the general movement was ascending and the least effort created a force. – It is a labor that much more praiseworthy, as they do not collect the fruits of it, but they can be certain that the labor will not be wasted, – nothing is wasted in the world – and though the drops of water are invisibles, they nonetheless form the ocean. –

As for me, my friend, I had become too old, too sick, too weary, and, need I say it, in many ways too disillusioned, to feel the desire and strength to participate in that work. – I am truly retired from the struggle and I will pass the rest of my days in a contemplation—not idle, but on the contrary very active intellectually—that I hope will not fail produce something useful. –

One of the passions that dominates within me at this time is an immense curiosity. – Once I was obliged to recognize that evil has triumphed and that I cannot prevent it, I set myself to studying the evolutions and developments with a quasi-scientific, entirely objective, passion. –

What actors and what scenery! – At the back and dominating all the situation in Europe, the Emperor Wilhelm and Bismarck at the head of a great nation of lackeys. – Against them, the Pope with his Jesuits, all the Catholic and Roman Church, riches of billions, dominate a great portion of the world through women, through the ignorance of the masses, through the incomparable skill of their numberless affiliates, having their eyes and hands everywhere. – Third actor – French civilization embodied in Mac-Mahon, Dupanloup and Broglie attaching the chains of a great fallen people. – Then around all that, Spain, Italy, Austria, and Russia each painting their faces according to the occasion – and far off England not being able to decide to become something again, and still father

away the model Republic of the United State of American already flirting with military dictatorship.

Poor humanity!

It is obvious that it could only escape from this cesspool by means of an immense social revolution. – But how would it make that revolution? The international reaction of Europe has never been so formidably armed against every popular movement. – It has made repression into a new science that is taught systematically in the military schools to the lieutenants of all the nations. – And what do we have to attack that impregnable fortress? – The disorganized masses. But how to organize them, when they are not even sufficiently interested in their own salvation, when they do not know what they should want and when they do not want the only thing that can save them? –

There remains propaganda, such as is done by the Jurassians and Belgians. – That is doubtless something, but a very small thing, some drops of water in the ocean; and if there were no other means of salvation, humanity would have the time to rot ten times before being saved. –

Another hope remains: universal war. – These immense military States must well destroy and devour one another sooner or later. – But what perspective [end of manuscript]