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Letter to Nikolai Bakunin

Mikhail Bakunin

February 1, 1861

February 1, 1861. Irkutsk.

Dear brother, this is probably the last time that I will write to you before receiving your response to my letters, which I want to complete by the following remarks: the best would be, obviously, that if, having had my rights restored, I should be permitted, simply and with no restrictions, to go in Russia; we must extend all our strength toward that end. But if I am considered dangerous to the point that in order to avoid my permanent stay in Russia they are ready to refuse me anything, we can say to them that I only ask a permission of six or even four months before returning to Siberia, after I have seen you, you and mother. Naturally, it is necessary that in Siberia a job and some means of existence. It seems to me that it would be good if mother addresses a direct request to the sovereign; her great age gives her the right to it. Finally, if you convince yourself of the absolute impossibility of obtaining the authorization for me to go now to Russia – but only in the case of *absolute impossibility* –, let them restore to me my rights without that of returning to Russia initially; that decision has recently been announced for the political criminal Weber for whom Murav'ev had demanded the total liberation. Thanks to that he has become, at

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least in Siberia, a free man, enjoying the same rights as all, while I am presently tied hands and feet. I anticipate all possible cases, according you full liberty to act as you judge is best. Just remember that you will never find a more propitious moment and that if you do not manage to liberate me now, you will surely never manage it. On you, your skill, your faith in success – for nothing on earth is impossible –, and on your energy depends at present the question of knowing if we will see each other or not on this earth. I would not rot in Siberia, that is certain; only having given up following the regular planetary march, I would again become a comet. But I would not desire it, and it is not easy, it would be very difficult with my wife, [although] alone I would not have hesitated. But I would not separate from her, and before attempting anything with her, I must consider it ten times. Having given the business much thought, I have decided to wait a bit more, another year doubtless, but in no case more if I see the hope of a future liberation, based on *something precise*. From you, in any case, I expect a complete sincerity and truthfulness. You would act very badly if you dared to deceive me concerning my situation. Enemies have the right to act in this way, but not you, and the least blunder, the least bad faith, the least contradiction on your part would be sufficient to incite me to the most reckless enterprises. I have become suspicious of everything and everyone and it would be difficult to mislead me, to string me along, and if that occurred, I would never forgive having been abused. I speak to you on the same basis as in the past and, so rare are the things that do not change in life, I judge you according to myself and I believe in you as I believe in myself; but if you have changed, if you are weary of me, say so frankly, I will not complain. I only demand the unconditional truth from you in all things.

I have asked you, Nikolaj, *if it is possible, without harm to my honor*, not to break off my relations with Benardaki; I have urged you to define, reinforce and regulate my financial affaires with him without modesty, without quixotism, and safeguard my interests

to the degree that it is possible. Here two possible cases present themselves: either I am given the authorization to return to Russia, or I am not given it. in the first case, he must know that I will leave in May, and he will not refuse to give me the means to go to Russia, as he does it for all the employees of his businesses. In the second case, I would desire that he entrust me with a mission on the Amur up to Nikolaevsk; I would doubtless learn all the truth about what is done and can be done and learned in that country, and the truth in business, the truth at six thousand or ten thousand *verst* is precious. In any case, I would not take less than 3000 silver rubles of salary in order to entirely provide for my needs, as those are practiced in Siberia, and I feel myself capable of being equally useful to him for 6000 r. or salary. It goes without saying that I would not consent to remain in his service if he does not entrust me with a real job and does not admit his error.

If you judge it necessary to break off my relations with Benardaki, it would not be bad for you to recommend me to another muscovite or *pétersbourgeois* capitalist. But in this regard, I count little on you, it would on the contrary be a good thing if I could dwell myself in Moscow or Saint-Petersburg. Adieu, my brothers, pardon the blunt tone of this letter, but what is there to do, my soul is dried out, but despite everything I love you ardently and I believe in your as par le passé. Mother, grant me your benediction, let us hope that we will see each other soon.

Your M. Bakunin

One more word. If I am not freed, if my relations with Benardaki are shattered and you do not find me other work, it will be necessary to sell my part of the estate, to pay off my debts and send me the balance, whatever it may be. I see no other solution. I am presently buried in debts, and what's more I must still settle a debt of 600 r. I live poorly and in need and there is little hope, however I lose neither faith nor morals. – I would fight to the end.