Mikhail Bakunin
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emancipated all the peoples of Europe and accomplished the social emancipation of the proletariat.

Michel Bakunin

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Now, what is my definitive conclusion?

It is sufficiently clear from what I have said, and I also started by giving it to you in my first letter. I say that in the danger that France ran, a greater danger than any she ran for centuries, there is only one means of salvation: the general and revolutionary uprising of people.

If the people rise, I have no doubt of their triumph.I only fear one thing,that the danger does not seem pressing enough, great enough, threatening enough to give it the courage of despair it needs. At this moment there is no shortage of French citizens who regard the taking of Paris, the destruction and enslavement of France by the Prussians, as an absolutely impossible thing, impossible to the point of being ridiculous. And leave the enemy to advance peacefully, confident in the star of France, but imagining that it is enough to have said: "It is impossible," to prevent the thing from happening.

It is imperative to wake from this dream, Citizens of France, if some of you still let yourself be lulled by these fatal illusions.No, I tell you, this terrible misfortune, of which you will not even admit the thought, is not impossible; instead it is so *certain*, that if you do not rise up *today* as a mass, to exterminate the German soldiers who have invaded the soil of France, it will be reality *tomorrow*. Several centuries of national dominance you have so accustomed your to regard yourself as the first and most powerful people in the world that you have not even noticed the seriousness of your situation. That situation is this:

France as a State is lost. It can no longer save itself by ordinary, administrative means. It is up to the natural France, to the France of the people to enter now onto the stage of history, to save its liberty and that of all of Europe, by an immense, spontaneous, and entirely popular uprising, apart from any official organization, and all governmental centralization. And France, by sweeping the armies of the king of Prussia from its territory, will have with the same blow

sion of Commissioners of 1848 was the sad Constituent Assembly that you know.

After June, it was something else. The sincere bourgeois revolutionaries, those who went into the socialist camp, under the influence of the great catastrophe that killed in one blow the revolutionary actors of February, became serious men and made serious efforts to revolutionize France. They even succeeded in large part. But it was too late; the reaction on its side reorganized with a formidable power, and thanks to the terrible means given by the centralization of the state, it eventually overcome completely, more even than it would have liked, in the days of December.

Well, the commissioners that Gambetta could send in the departments would be even more unfortunate that the commissioners in 1848. Enemies of socialist workers, as well as of the administration and the Bonapartist peasants, on whom could they rely? Their instructions will obviously command them to enchain the revolutionary socialist movement in the cities, and in the countryside the reactionary Bonapartist movement,—but with whose help? In a disorganized administration, that itself remained half or three-quarters Bonapartist, and a few hundred pale Republicans, as uncertain and disoriented as themselves, remaining outside of the mass of the people and exercising no influence on anyone; and some Orléanists, only good, like all the rich people, to exploit and turn a movement in favor of the reaction, but incapable themselves of a resolution and energetic action. And note that the Orléanists will be much the stronger of the two, for besides some substantial financial means at their disposal, they still have the advantage of knowing what they want; while Republicans combine, with their extreme scarcity, the misfortune of not knowing where they are going and remaining strangers at all the real interests, whether privileged or popular. As a result, whether the commissioners do something or do nothing, they will only do it with the support of Orléanists, and then they will only work, in reality, for the restoration of the Orleans.

Letter I

My dear friend,

The latest events have placed France in such a position, that it can no longer be saved from a long and terrible slavery, from ruin, poverty, and annihilation, except by a rising en masse of the armed people.

Your principal army being destroyed, — and that is no longer in doubt today, — there remains to France only two outcomes: either to submit sheepishly, shamefully, to the insolent yoke of the Prussians, to bow beneath the staff of Bismarck and all his Pomeranian lieutenants; abandon Alsace and Lorraine, who do not want to be Germans, to the military despotism of the future emperor of Germany Alsace and Lorraine; to pay billions in damages, without counting the billions that this disastrous ware will have cost you; to accept from the hands of Bismarck a government, a crushing and ruinous public order, with the dynasty of the Orléans or the Bourbons, returning once more to France behind the foreign armies; to see itself, for a dozen or for twenty years, reduced to the miserable state of modern Italy, oppressed and contained by a viceroy who would administer France under the iron rule of Prussia, as Italy has thus far been administered under the iron rule of France; to accept, as a necessary consequence, the ruin of national commerce and industry, sacrificed to the commerce and industry of Germany; to see, in the end, the completion of the intellectual and moral decline of the whole nation…

Well, to avoid that ruin, that distraction, give the French people the means to save itself.

Well, my friend, I do not doubt that all the titled and well-heeled men of France, almost without exception, that the vast majority of the *haute* and *moyenne* bourgeoisie consent to this cowardly abandonment of France, rather than accept its salvation by a popular uprising. In fact, the popular uprising is the social revolution, it is the fall of privileged France. The fear of that revolution has cast

them, for twenty years, under the dictatorship of Napoléon III, today it will cast them under the saber of Bismarck and under the constitutional and parliamentary rod of the Orléans. The liberty of the people causes them such a dreadful fear, that in order to avoid it they will accept any shame, consent to any cowardice, — even should this cowardice ruin them later, provided that they serve them now.

Yes, all official France, all bourgeois and privileged France conspire for the Orléans, and consequently conspire against the people. The generals of the empire, the commander of Paris, the left, agree in this treason. And the European powers see the thing approvingly. Why? Because knows well that if France tries to save itself by a formidable popular uprising, that would be the signal for the outburst of revolution in all of Europe.

Why then is the restoration of the Orléans still not an accomplished fact? Because the collective and obviously reactionary dictatorship of Paris finds itself at this moment inevitably powerless. Napoléon III and the empire have already fallen, but the whole imperial machine, legislative corps, senate, prefects, etc, continues to function; and they dare not change anything, because to change all that is to proclaim the revolution, and to proclaim the revolution is to provoke precisely what they wanted to avoid.

Letter II

Behold—the emperor a prisoner and the republic proclaimed at Paris, with a provisional government.

Has the internal situation of France been changed by that? I do not think so; and the reflections that I was about to communicate to you on the powerlessness of the empire have lost none of

the brotherhood of nations, a peace equally honorable for the two nations."

Ledru-Rollin and Louis Blanc had been, as we known, the two great revolutionaries of 1848, before the days of June: the one a bourgeois lawyer, a rhetorician puffed up with Dantonesque looks and ambitions; the other, a Robespierre-Baboeuf reduced to the most paltry proportions. Neither has known how to think, to will, nor above all to dare. Besides, the Bishop Lamourette of that time, Lamartine, had impressed on all the acts and all the men of that era, except Proudhon and Blanqui, his false note and his false character of conciliation, – that conciliation that means, in reality, the sacrifice of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie, which led to the June days.

The extraordinary commissioners therefore left for the provinces, carrying in their pockets the instructions of these great men,—rather the recommendations of a very real reactionary character, that were made to them by the moderate republicans of the *National*, Marrast, the Bastide, Jules Favre, etc.

Is it any wonder that these unfortunate commissioners did nothing in the departments, if not to stimulate everyone's discontent, by the dictator's tone and manner that it pleased them to put on. We laughed at them, and they exerted no influence. Instead of turning to the people, and only to the people, like their predecessors of 1793, they were only concerned with seeking to convert the privileged classes to the republic. Instead of organizing popular power everywhere by unleashing the revolutionary passions, they preached moderation, peace, patience to the proletariat, with blind faith in the generous intentions of the provisional government. The revolutionary circles of the provinces, intimidated at first by that revolution that had fallen so unexpectedly on their head and by the arrival of the Paris commissioners, took courage again when they saw that these gentlemen did not know anything but the phrases and were themselves afraid of people; and the outcome of the mis-

no longer there. Where deeds were required had only been able to make some empty phrases, some grimaces. When they found themselves in the midst of the proletariat, they felt ill at ease, like otherwise honest people who feel the need to deceive. They strove and strove to find a living word or fruitful thought, but they found nothing.

In all of this revolutionary phantasmagoria of 1848, there have only been two really serious men, though absolutely dissimilar from one another; they were Proudhon and Blanqui. All the rest were only bad actors who played at Revolution, as the guilds of the Middle Ages played the Passion, until the moment when Louis Bonaparte came to bring down the curtain.

The instructions that the commissioners of 1848 received from Ledru-Rollin were as inconsistent and vague as the thoughts themselves of that revolutionary. They were all the great words of 1793, without any of the great things or goals, nor especially the energetic resolutions of that era. Ledru-Rollin, like the rich 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 the cooperative societies, but it does not feel strong enough to go further.

Louis Blanc, that Robespierre in miniature, that worshiper of the intelligent and virtuous citizen, is the type of the State communist, the doctrinaire and authoritarian socialist. He wrote in his youth a whole little book on "The Organization of Labor," and even today, in the presence of the immense labors and phenomenal development of the International, he still remains there. Not a breath of his speech, not a glimmer from his brain has given life to anyone. His intelligence is sterile, as his whole personality is dry. Today still, in a letter recently addressed to the *Daily News,* in the presence of the horrible and fratricidal butchery to which the two most civilized nations in the world have been delivered, he has not found anything in his head and heart, besides this advice that he addresses to the French republicans, "to propose to the Germans, in the name of

their truth and their topicality, in applying them to the government which was just established by the fusion republican and Orleanist lefts.

I suppose the members of this government, animated with the very sincere desire to save the homeland: it is not by trying to take advantage of the *power of action of the administrative mechanism*, before which the incorrigible Thiers is still so very enthralled in the session of August 26, it is not, I say, by following the old governmental routine that they can do something good; that whole administrative machine, if they seriously wanted to seek the salvation of France in the people, they would be obliged to break it, and in conformity with the propositions of Esquiros, Jouvencel, and General Cluseret, give the initiative of action to all the revolutionary communes of France, delivered from every centralizing government and from all guardianship, and consequently called to form a new organization by federating among themselves for defense.

I will explain in a few words my supporting evidence.

The provisional government cannot, even in the circumstances most favorable to it:

Neither constitutional reform the system of the present administration;

Nor change completely, or even in a noticeable manner, its personnel.

The constitutional reforms can only be made by some Constituent Assembly, and it is not necessary to demonstrate that the convening of a Constituent Assembly is an impossible thing in this moment when there is not a week, not a day to lose. As for the personnel changes, in order to perform it in a serious way, we should be able to find in a few days one hundred thousand new functionaries, with the certainty that these new functionaries will be more intelligent, more energetic and more honest than the current officials. It is enough to state this demand to see that its realization is impossible.

So there remain to the provisional government only two alternatives: either resign itself to make use of that essentially Bonapartist administration, that will be in its hands a weapon poisoned against itself and against France; or else to break that governmental machine, without even trying to replace it with another, and to render the most complete freedom of initiative to all the provinces, to all the communes of France, which would be equivalent to the dissolution of the present State.

But by destroying the administrative machine, the men of the left deprive themselves of the only means they had of governing France. Paris having lost in this way the official command, the initiative by decrees, would no longer preserve anything but the initiative of the example that it could give by putting itself at the head of this national movement.

Is Paris capable, by the energy of its resolutions, of playing this role? No; Paris is too absorbed by the interest of its own defense to be able to direct and organize the national movement of France. Besieged Paris will be transformed into an immense camp; its whole population will no longer form anything but an army, disciplined by the sense of danger: but an army does not reason, does not act as a directing and organizing force,—it fights.

The best and only thing that Paris can do in the interest of its own salvation and that of the whole of France, it is to proclaim and bring about the absolute independence and the spontaneity of the provincial movements,—and if Paris forgets and neglects to do so, for any reason whatsoever,patriotism commands the provinces to rise up and organize itself spontaneously and independently of Paris.

Is this uprising of the provinces still possible? Yes, if the workers of the large provincial cities, Lyon, Marseille, St Etienne, Rouen, and many others, have blood in their veins, energy in their hearts, and strength in their arms, if they are living men, revolutionary socialists and not doctrinaire socialists.

directly to the sans-culottes, the popular rabble, and it was on them that he relied to execute, against the bigwigs and the genuine revolutionaries, the decrees of the Convention. What they did was not, strictly speaking, either centralization or administration, but provocation. They did not come to a region to impose the control of the National Convention in a dictatorial manner. They did this in very rare occasions, when they came into a region 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 soldier to support them, seeking their strength in the masses whose instincts were always in conformity with the thoughts of the Convention. Far from restricting the freedom of the popular movements, for fear of anarchy, they encouraged them in every way. The first thing they were accustomed to do was to form a popular club, where they did not no find them in existence. Ernest revolutionaries, they soon recognized in the masses the true revolutionaries, and allied with them to prompt the revolution, the anarchy, and to *organize that popular revolutionary anarchy.* That was the only revolutionary organization administration and the only executive power which is to be served proconsuls 1793. That revolutionary organization was the only administration and the only executive force used by the proconsuls of 1793.

Such was the true secret of the power of those giants, that Jacobin-pygmies of our days admire, but that they are powerless to imitate.

The commissioners of 1848 were men of an entirely different stuff, who came out of a completely different environment.With their leaders, the members of the provisional government, they belonged to a bourgeoisie that had become doctrinaire and had inevitably, from that time, become separated from the people. The heroes of the great revolution were to them what the tragedies of Corneille and Racine had been to literature—conventional models. They wanted to copy them, but the life, passion, the sacred fire was

consuls to also rely everywhere and always on that same popular rabble. The commissioners sent by Ledru-Rollin in 1848, and those that Gambetta could send today, made and necessarily will make a complete fiasco, for the opposite reason, and the latter more than the former, because that opposite reason will act more powerfully still on them than on their predecessors of 1848. That reason is that both have been and will be, to a greater or lesser degree, radical bourgeois, delegates of bourgeois republicanism and as such enemies of socialism, enemies of the truly popular revolution.

That antagonism between the bourgeois revolution and the popular revolution still did not exist, in 1793, in the consciousness of the people, or even in that of the bourgeoisie. We had not yet unraveled this truth from historical experience, that the liberty of the whole privileged class—and consequently that of the bourgeoisie—was based principally on the economic slavery of the proletariat. As fact, as real experience, that truth had always existed, but it was so tangled with other facts and masked by so many different interests and historical tendencies, especially of a religious and national, character that it had not yet emerged in its great simplicity and present clarity, either for bourgeoisie, sponsor of labor, or for the proletariat, employed, which is to say, exploited, by it. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat were from then natural enemies, but without knowing it; as a result of this ignorance, they attributed, the one its fears, and the other his troubles, to fictitious reasons, not their real antagonism; and believing themselves united by interests, they marched together against the monarchy, nobility and priests.

That was the great strength of the revolutionary bourgeois of 1793. Not only they did not fear the explosion of popular passions, but they provoked it with all their might, as the only means of salvation for the country and for themselves against both internal and external reaction. When a special commissioner, delegated by the Convention, arrived in a province, he never addressed the bigwigs of the country, nor the kid-gloved revolutionaries; he spoke

We must not rely on the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois see and understand nothing outside the State and the regular means of the state. The maximum of their ideal, their imagination and their heroism is the revolutionary exaggeration 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.

Do you perhaps believe that an alliance is possible between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, in the name of national salvation? That is the program that Gambetta stated in its letter to the *Progrès* of Lyon, and I think I would do well to tell you my opinion on that famous letter.

I have never thought much of Gambetta, but I admit that this letter has shown him even more insignificant and paler than I had imagined. He took his role as a moderate, wise, and reasonable republican very seriously, and in a terrible moment like this, when France collapses and dies, and when it could only be saved if all the French really have the devil in them, Mr. Gambetta finds the time and inspiration to write a letter in which he begins by declaring that he intends "to hold with dignity the role of *democratic governmental opposition*." He speaks of the "*program at once republican and conservative* that he has marked out since 1869," the one of "making the politics drawn from universal suffrage prevail" (but then this is that of the plebiscite of Napoleon III), of "proving that in the present circumstances, the republic is henceforth the very condition of salvation for France and European equilibrium;—that there is no longer security,peace, progress except in republican institutions wisely practiced" (as in Switzerland probably!);—that *France cannot be governed against the middle classes*, and it can not be *directed* without maintaining a *generous alliance with the proletariat*" (generous on the part of whom? the bourgeoisie, no doubt.) "Te republican form alone permits a harmonious conciliation between the *just* aspirations of the laborers and the *respect for the sacred rights of property*. The happy medium is an outdated

politics. Caesarism is the most ruinous, the most bankrupting of the solutions. Divine right is definitively abolished. *Jacobinism is henceforth a ridiculous and noxious word.* Only the *rational positivist democracy* (listen to the quack!) can reconcile everything, organize everything, fertilize everything. (Let us see how?) 1789 laid down the principles (not all, far from it; the principles of bourgeois freedom, yes; but the principle of equality, of the liberty of the proletariat, no); in 1792 made them triumph (and this is probably why France is so free!); 1848 gave them the sanction of universal suffrage (in June, no doubt). It is the present generation that is suited to realize the republican form (as in Switzerland), and reconcile, on the basis of justice (legal justice obviously) and the elective principle, the rights of the citizens and functions of the state, in a progressive and free society. To achieve this goal, two things are required: remove the fear of some and calm the mistrust of others; lead the bourgeoisie to the love of democracy, and the people to trust in their older brothers." (Why not, then, confidence in the nobility, which is even older than the bourgeoisie?)

No, the hopes of Mr. Gambetta are illusions. By what right would the bourgeoisie ask the people to have confidence in it? It is the bourgeois who have unleashed war on France, by their cowardly deference to power,and the people, who understand them,also understand that it is up to them now to take the affairs of the country in hand.

Doubtless there will be found among the bourgeois class a rather considerable number of young people who, driven by the despair of patriotism, will enter heartily into the popular movement that must save France; but it would not be possible to carry with them the entire bourgeoisie, and to give it that boldness, that energy, that knowledge of the situation that it absolutely lacks.

I think that at this hour in France, there are only two classes that would be capable of this supreme movement that the salvations of the homeland demands: these are the *workers* and the *peasants*.

That same impossibility will prevent the government from touching, in a manner even a little bit radical, the staff of the imperial administration. It would be necessary to create a legion of new men. All it could do, all it has done so far, is to replace the prefects and sub-prefects with others who are usually not worth much more.

These few changes of persons necessarily still demoralize the current administration. It will produce endless wrangling and a muted, protracted war, which would make it a hundred times more incapable of action than it is today, so that the republican government would have at its service an administrative machinery that is not even worth the one that performed the orders of the imperial minister as well as possible.

To obviate this evil, the provisional government will doubtless send in the proconsuls to the departments, some extraordinary commissioners. This will be the height of disorganization.

Indeed, it is not enough to be equipped with extraordinary powers, to take extraordinary measures for public safety, in order to have the power to create new forces, in order to inspire momentum, energy, and beneficial activity in a corrupt administration and in populations systematically discouraged from any initiative.To do this, you must also have what the bourgeoisie of 1792 and 1793 had to such a high degree, and what is absolutely lacking in the current bourgeoisie, even among the republicans—you must have intelligence,will, and revolutionary audacity. And how could we imagine that the commissars of the provisional government, the subordinates of Gambetta and Co.,possess these qualities, since their superiors, the members of government, the prime movers of the republican party, have not found them in their own hearts.

Apart from these personal qualities that gave the men of 1793 a truly heroic character, if the special commissioners were as successful as the Jacobins of the National Convention, it was because that Convention was truly revolutionary, and that, basing itself in Paris and on the support of the people, of the *vile multitude*, to the exclusion of the liberal bourgeoisie, it had ordered all its pro-

tance and action. – And then, if the State born from the movement of 1789, still very young, and thoroughly imbued with the life and passions of the people, showed itself capable of saving the homeland, it must be said that since them it has grown old and very corrupted. Revised and corrected, and worn down to its mainsprings by Napoleon I; restored after a fashion by the Bourbons, corrupted and weakened by the July Monarchy, it arrive under the Second Empire at the last degree of corruption and impotence; and now the only thing we can expect from it is its complete disappearance,with all the police, administrative, legal and financial institutions that sustain it, to make room for natural society, for the people who retake their rights natural and rise up.

But, you say, the provisional government summoned all the voters for the first half of October, for the purpose of appointing a constituent assembly; that could be to radically reform the administrative system, as did that of 1789, and thus give new life to the political State that falls into ruin.

That objection is not serious. Suppose that according to the decision of the provisional government, which looks to me to be a bravado cast at the Prussians resolution rather than a resolute reflection, – suppose, I say, that the elections are conducted lawfully, and that there emerges an Assembly whose majority will be prepared to assist all intentions of the Republican government. I say that that Assembly can not make real and profound reforms at this time. That would be to want to execute a flanking movement in the presence of a powerful enemy, like the movement attempted by Bazaine before the Prussians that went so badly for him. Is it at the moment when the government will most need the energetic and regular services of the administrative machine, that it will try to renew and transform it? For this, it would be necessary to completely paralyze it for a few weeks. And during this time what would the government be, deprived of the apparatus necessary to govern the country?

Do not be surprised that I speak of the peasants. The peasants only sin through ignorance, not from lack of temperament. Having not abused or even used life, not having undergone the deleterious action of bourgeois civilization, which could only barely touch them on the surface, they have preserved all the energetic temperament, all nature of the people. Property, love and the enjoyment, not of pleasures but of *gain*, have made them considerably selfish, it's true, but have not diminished their instinctive hatred against those who enjoy the fruits of the earth without producing them by the work of their arms.Moreover, the peasant is fundamentally patriotic, national, because he has a worship of the earth, a real passion for the earth, and he will make a war to the death to foreign invaders that will chase him from his field.

But, to win over the peasant, it would be necessary to use a great deal of caution. It is true that the peasant hates the invader of the soil, that he also hates the *fine gentlemen* who dupe him; unfortunately, he does not hate the workers in the cities any less.

This is the great misfortune, the great obstacle to the revolution. The worker despises the peasant, the peasant returns his contempt as hatred. Yet between these two great halves of the people there is really no contrary interest, there is only a huge and fatal misunderstanding,which must be eliminated at all costs.

The most civilized, more enlightened, and hence, as it were, the most bourgeois and most doctrinaire socialism of the cities,misjudges and despises the primitive, natural, and much savage socialism of the country. The farmer on his side considers the worker as the lackey or soldier of the bourgeois, and he detests him as such, to the point of becoming himself the servant and the blind soldier of the reaction.

Since the fatal antagonism is based on a misunderstanding, it is necessary that one of the two parties takes the initiative of explanation and reconciliation. The initiative naturally belongs to the most enlightened part, that is to say the urban workers.

I will examine, in my next letter, what the complaints of the workers are against the peasants, complaints which it is important that the workers account for to themselves, if they want to work seriously at a conciliation.

Letter III. *September 6*

The principal grievances of the workers against the peasants can be reduced to three:

The *first* is that the peasants are ignorant, superstitious and sanctimonious, and that they let themselves be guided by the priests;

The *second* is that they are devoted to the emperor;

The *third* is that they are enthusiastic partisans of individual property.

It is true that the French peasants are perfectly ignorant; but is it their fault? Have we ever tried to educate them? Is it right to scorn and mistreat them? But in this case the bourgeois, who are unquestionably more learned than the workers, would have the right to scorn and mistreat them, and we know many bourgeois who say it, who base their right to domination on that superior education and deduce for workers a duty of subordination. What makes the greatness of the workers with regard to the bourgeois is not their education, which is small, but their instinct of justice, which is undoubtedly great. Bit is this instinct for justice lacking in the peasants? Look well: under some probably different forms, you will find a it there entirely. You will find in them, besides their ignorance, a profound good sense, an admirable delicacy, and that energy for labor that constitutes the honor and the salvation of the proletariat.

ment would have no legitimate title to command France. If it remained Paris, sustained by the workers of Paris, it could then impose itself on France, at least in the cities, and perhaps even in the countryside, despite the very pronounced hostility of the peasants against the men who compose it. For, we must admit it, Paris exerts such a great historical glamour over all French imaginations, that whether they like it or not, they always end up obeying it.

But one the government left Paris, that powerful would no longer exist. Let us even suppose that the large provincial city where it transported its residence, cheered and ratified by that acclamation of the representatives of the population of Paris; that adherence of a province will not carry along the rest of France, and the countryside would not believe itself obliged to obey it.

And what means, what instrument will it use to obtain obedience? The administrative machine? Supposing it could still function, isn't it all Bonapartist, and won't it just serve, with the support of the priests, to stir up the countryside against the republican government? It would then have to contain the rebellious countryside, and for that, it would have to employ a part of the regular troops that should stand up to the Prussians. And as the superior officers are nearly all Bonapartists, the government, which would need devoted and faithful men, would be obliged to demote them and seek others; it would be necessary to reorganize the army from top to bottom to make it an instrument capable of defending the republic against the reactionary insurrection. During this time, the Prussians would take Paris, and the countryside would destroy the republic; and that is the only thing that could lead to an attempt at official, governmental defense, by regular, administrative means.

Woe to France, if it expects from the present government a renewal of the wonders of 1793. Those wonders were not produced by the power of the State, of the government, alone, but also and especially by the revolutionary enthusiasm of the entire French people, who, taking their own affairs in hand with the energy of despair, organized in each city, in each commune, a center of resis-

Letter VI. *September 15*

Having said what I think of the possible union of the workers and peasants to save France, I want to return again to the essential point of my thesis, namely the absolute impossibility for any government, republican or not, and especially of the government of Gambetta and Co., to prevent the catastrophe that is brewing and that can be averted only by the direct and almighty action of the people themselves.

If it return, in the course of my demonstration, to some arguments that I have already used, it is because there are some things we cannot repeat too often: for the salvation of the French people depends on the knowledge of these things.

So let us see what the current government could attempt to do to organize the national defense.

This is the first difficulty that comes to mind. That organization, even in the most favorable circumstance, and much more in the present crisis, con only succeed on one condition: the organizing power must remain in immediate, regular, constant relations with the country that it proposes to organize. But it is beyond doubt that in just a few days, when Paris is surrounded by the German armies, the communications of the government with the country will be cut. In those conditions, no organization is possible. And moreover, at that final moment, the government of Paris will be so absorbed by the defense of Paris itself and by the internal difficulties that it will encounter, that, if it was composed of the most intelligent and energetic men, it would be impossible to think of anything else

It is true that the government could relocate itself outside Paris, in some large provincial city, at Lyon, for example. But then it would no longer exercise any authority over France, because, in the eyes of the people, and especially in the eyes of the peasants, as it finds itself composed not of the elected representatives of all of France, but of the representatives of Paris—of some men unknown, and some others detested in the countryside—that govern-

The peasants, you say, are superstitious and sanctimonious, and that they let themselves be guided by the priests. Their superstition is the product of their ignorance, artificially and systematically maintained by all the bourgeois governments. And besides, they are not nearly as superstitious and sanctimonious as you want to say; it is their women who are. But are all women of the workers really free of the superstitions and doctrines of the Roman Catholic religion? As for the influence and direction of the priests, they only submit to them in appearance only, as far as their inner demands, and as long as they do not contradict their interests.That superstition has not prevented them, after 1789, from purchasing the lands of the Church, confiscated by the State, despite the curse that had been launched by the Church against the buyers and the sellers. So it follows that to definitively kill the influence of the priests in the country, the revolution has only to do one thing: it is to put the interests of farmers in contradiction with those of the Church.

I have heard with pain, not only of the revolutionary Jacobins, but of the socialists who have been indirectly influenced by this school, advance this completely *anti-revolutionary* idea that the future republic will have to abolish by decree all the public cults and also order by decree the violent expulsion of all priests. First, I am the absolute enemy of the *revolution by decrees*, which is a consequence and an application of the idea of the *revolutionary* State—the reaction, that is, hiding behind the appearances of the revolution. To the system of revolutionary decrees, I oppose that of *revolutionary acts*, the only effective, consistent and true system,without the intervention of any official and authoritarian violence.

Thus, in this example, if by some misfortune we wanted to order by decree the abolition of the cults and the expulsion of priests, you can be sure that the least religious peasants will take the part of the cults and the priests, if only in the spirit of contradiction, and because a legitimate, natural feeling, basis of liberty, rebels in every man against every imposed measure, even if it has liberty

for a goal. So we can be certain that if cities committed the folly of *decreeing* the abolition of religion and the expulsion of priests, the countryside, siding with the priests, would revolt against the cities and become a terrible instrument in the hands of the reaction. So must we leave the priests and their power standing? Not at all. We must fight then in the most energetic manner,—not as ministers of the Roman Catholic religion, but because they were the most effective support of this deplorable imperial regime that has summoned the calamities of war on France; because by persuading the people to vote for the emperor, and by promising them that they would have peace and security on this condition, they deceived the people, and therefore they are schemers and traitors.

The principal reason why all the revolutionary authorities of the world have always made so little revolution is that they have always wanted to do it by themselves, by their own authority and their own power, which has never failed to achieve two results. First, it shrinks the revolutionary action inordinately, because it is impossible for even the smartest, strongest, most honest revolutionary authority to embrace many questions and interests at the same time, any dictatorship, whether individual or collective, as formed by one or more official figures, being necessarily very limited, very blind, and incapable of penetrating the depths or embracing the breadth of the life of the people—it is impossible for the most powerful vessel to measure the depth and breadth of the ocean; and then, to raise resistance, because every act of authority and official power, legally imposed, necessarily awakens in the masses a sense of rebellion and reaction.

So what must the revolutionary authorities do? — and let us try to make it as little as possible — what should they do to expand and organize the revolution? They should not do it themselves by decrees, not impose in on the masses, but provoke it in the masses. They should not impose any organization, but by provoking their self-organization from the bottom up, work with the aid of individual influence on the most intelligent men in each locality, so that

into good Catholic language, and you would have the empire of by Louis XIV. Their conquests, of which they are presently so proud, would push them back two centuries! – So all that this is of honest and truly liberal intelligence in Germany – to say nothing of the Social Democrats – begins to worry about the consequences of the national victories. A few more weeks of sacrifices like those that has Germany had to make to date, half by strength, half by enthusiasm, and the fever will begin to fall; the German people will count their losses in men and money, they will compare them to the benefits obtained, and then the King William and Bismarck will have to behave themselves. And that is why they feel the absolute need to return victorious and with hands full.

The other reason for the unheard of power presently being developed by the Germans is the excellence of their administrative machine,—not excellence from the point of view of freedom and well-being, but from the point of view of wealth and the exclusive power of the State. The administrative machine, however perfect it may be, is never the life of the people, it is, on the contrary, its absolute and direct negation. So the strength that it produces is never a natural, organic, popular strength. On the contrary, it is an entirely artificial and mechanical strength. Once broken, it is not renewed by itself, and its reconstruction becomes exceedingly difficult. That is why we must be careful not to force its results. Well, that is what Bismark and his king have one; they have forced the machine. Germany has mobilized a million and a half soldiers, and God knows how many hundreds of millions it has spent. Let Paris resist, and let all of France rise behind it, and the German machine will explode.

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defeated by the armies of Germany, and shows itself demoralized to the point that we must fear for its life.

You could undoubtedly cite the example of Prussia and Germany today, which are not torn by any civil war, which show themselves on the contrary strangely resigned and submissive to the tyranny of their sovereign, and nevertheless developing a formidable power today. But this exceptional fact is explained by two specific reasons, none of which can be applied to modern France. The first is the unitary passion that for fifty-five years has been growing at the expense of all other passions and all the other ideas in that unfortunate German nation. The second is the expert perfection of its administrative system.

As far as the unitary passion, this inhuman and draconian ambition to become a *great nation*, the first nation in the world,—France has also felt it in its time. This passion, like those raging fevers that give the patient a superhuman strength momentarily, only to totally exhaust them and throw them into a complete prostration, this passion, after having grown in France for a very short space of time, lead it to a catastrophe from which it has recovered so little, even today, fifty-five years after the defeat of Waterloo, that its present misfortunes are nothing, in my opinion, but a relapse, a second fit of apoplexy that this time will certainly take the patient, that is to say, the political, legal and military State.

Well, Germany is now worked by precisely that same fever, that same passion for national greatness, that France has felt and experienced in all its phases at the beginning of this century and that, for that very reason, has now become unable to move and electrify it. The Germans, who today believe they are the the first nation in the world, are at least half a century behind France; What am I saying? We must go back much farther to find the equivalent of the phase that they are going through today. The *Official Gazette* of Berlin shows them in the near future, as a reward for their heroic dedication, "the establishment of a great Teutonic empire, based on the fear of God and true morality." Translate this

this organization is as consistent as possible with the true principles. — That is the entire secret of success.

That this work faces immense difficulties, who can doubt it? But do you think the revolution is child's play, and we can do it without overcoming countless difficulties?Revolutionary socialists today have little or nothing to imitate from all the proceedings of the revolutionary Jacobins of 1793. Revolutionary routine would doom them. They must work from scratch, and create everything.

I return to the peasants.

The alleged Bonapartist sympathies of French peasants, which constitutes another grievance of the workers against them, do not worry me at all. This is a superficial symptom of socialist instinct, warped by ignorance and exploited by malice, a skin disease that can not withstand the heroic remedies of revolutionary socialism, it is a negative expression of their hatred for the *fine gentlemen* and for the bourgeois of the city. The peasants will not give their lands, or their money, or their lives for Napoleon III, but they willingly give him the lives and the goods of others, because they hate the others, and because they have been shown, in Napoleon emperor of the peasants, the enemy of the bourgeoisie. And note that in that deplorable affair, when the farmers of a commune in Dordogne slaughtered and burned a young and noble proprietor, the dispute began with these words spoken by a peasant: "Ah! There you are, fine sir; you yourself remain quietly at home, because you are rich, and you send the poor people to war. Well, we're going to your home. Let them seek us there." In these words we can see the vivid expression of the hereditary resentment of the peasant against the rich proprietor, but not the fanatical desire to sacrifice himself and go to die for the Emperor; on the contrary, the entirely natural desire to avoid military service.

Moreover, in the villages where the love of the emperor has passed to the state of worship and passionate custom, – if it is found, – there is not even a need to speak of the emperor. It is necessary to ruin the Bonapartist superstition *in fact,* by ruining the

administrative machine, by ruining the influence of the men who maintain the imperial fanaticism, – but without saying anything against the emperor himself. It is the true means of succeeding, the means that I have already recommended against the priests.

The last and principal argument of the workers of the cities against the peasants is their cupidity, their crude selfishness and their passionate attachment to individual property in land.

Workers who reproach them for all hat should firs ask themselves: Who is not selfish? Who in today's society is not greedy in the sense that they cling furiously to the few goods they can amass, goods that guarantee them, in the current economic anarchy and in this society that has no mercy for those who are starving, their existence and the existence of their own? – The peasants are not communists, it is true; they fear, they hate the *partageux* because they have something to preserve, at least in imagination, and imagination is a great power of which generally we do not take enough account in the society. – The workers, of whom the vast majority do not own anything, have infinitely more propensity to communism than the peasants. Nothing is more natural: the communism of some is as natural as the individualism of the others – there is no reason there to brag, or to despise others – both being other, with all their ideas and all their passions, products of the different backgrounds that have given them birth. And yet, are the workers themselves all communists?

It is therefore not a question of blaming the peasants, nor of denigrating them, it is a question of establishing a line of revolutionary conduct that turns the difficulty that not only prevents the individualism of the peasants from driving them into the camp of the reaction, but that, on the contrary, will be used to ensure the triumph of revolution.

Apart from the means I propose, there exists only one: the terrorism of the cities against the countryside. Now, I have said, and I cannot repeat it too often: those who use a similar means will kill the revolution instead of making it triumph; it is imperative to

tablished by a common accord will replace the artificial unity of the States. There will be a new life and a new world.

Letter V. *September 8*

I expect that you will make an objection to all that I have written to you about farmers, their organizations and their reconciliation with the workers.

You say to me: But won't that revolutionary agitation, that internal struggle that must necessarily arise from the destruction of the political and legal institutions, be paralyzed by the national defense, instead of pushing back the Prussians, wouldn't we on the contrary have delivered France to the invasion ?

Not at all. History shows that nations never show themselves as strong outwardly, as when they feel deeply troubled and disturbed inwardly, and that on the contrary they never are never as weak as when they appear united under some authority and in some order. In the end, nothing is more natural: struggle is life, and life is strength. To convince yourself, compare some eras in your own history. Place France, emerging from the Fronde, in the youth of Louis XIV, opposite France in his old age, with the monarchy solidly established, unified, pacified by the great king; the first all resplendent with victories, the second marching from defeat to defeat, and finally to ruin. The compare the France of 1792 with France today. If ever France was torn by civil war, it was in 1792 and 1793; the movement, the struggle, the struggle for life and death, occurred in all parts of the republic; and yet the France victoriously repelled the invasion of almost all of Europe in coalition against it. In 1870, the united and pacified France of the Empire is

the strongest, the richest will exercise a controlling influence. The wealth of the rich will no longer be guaranteed by legal institutions, so it will cease to be a power. The rich peasants are only powerful today because they are protected and courted by officials of the State and the State itself. This support coming to be lacking, their power will disappear at the same time. As for the craftier, and the stronger, they will be offset by the collective power of the masses, the large number of small and very small peasants, as well as the proletarians of the countryside, a mass enslaved today, reduced to silent suffering, but that the revolutionary movement will arm an irresistible power.

I do not pretend, note it well, that the countryside that is reorganized in this way, from the bottom up, will create an ideal organization at the first blow, conforming on all points to the one we dream of.

What I am convinced of is that it will be a living organization, a thousand times superior to the one that exists now, and that incidentally, open on the one hand to the 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 of the law, will progress freely and could develop and perfect itself in an manner that is indefinite, but always living and free, never decreed or legalized, until it arrive finally at a point as reasonable as we can hope in our times.

As life and spontaneous action, suspended for centuries by the absorbent action of the State, will be returned to the communes, it is natural that each commune will take for the point of departure for its new development, not the intellectual and moral state in which the official fiction supposes it, but the real state of civilization; and as the degree of real civilization is very different between the communes of France, as well as between those of Europe in general, it will necessary result in a great difference of development; but the mutual agreement, the harmony, the equilibrium es-

give this old weapon of terror, of violence organized by the State, a weapon borrowed from the arsenal of Jacobinism; it would only lead to pushing ten million French peasants back into the camp of reaction.

Fortunately – I say fortunately – the defeats of France do not allow them to think for a moment of the terrorism, 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 try to impose their program by force. They would have, for example, convened a Convention composed of deputies from the cities: that Convention would have wished to impose collectivism by decree in the countryside; the countryside would be raised, and to put it down,it would have been necessary to resort to a huge military force. That army, necessarily subject to military discipline, would have had some generals, probably ambitious;—and that is the whole machine of the State rebuilding itself piece by piece. The machine reconstituted, they would soon have the machinist, the dictator, the emperor. All that they would infallibly occur, because it is the logic of things.

Fortunately, today, events themselves will force many workers to open their eyes and renounce this fatal system.They must be crazy to want, under present circumstances, to make terrorism in the countryside. If the countryside rose now against the cities, the cities and France with them would be lost. The workers feel it,and this is part of what explains the apathy, the incredible inertia of the working population of most of the major cities in France.

In fact, the workers are at this moment completely defeated and stunned by the novelty of the situation. So far, there has been little but their suffering that they knew from personal experience; all the rest, their ideals, their hopes, their political and social imaginations, their plans and practical projects, dreamed rather than contemplated for a near future,—all that they have taken much more from books, from current theories and constantly discussed, than from a reflection based on the experience of life. From their existence

and their daily experience, they have continually disregarded, and they are not accustomed to draw it from their inspirations, their thinking. Their thought is nourished by a certain theory accepted by tradition, without criticism, but with full confidence, and this theory is nothing other than the political system of the Jacobins, more or less modified to the use of the socialists. Now, this theory of revolution is bankrupt, its principal base, the State, the power of the State, having crumbled. In the current circumstances, the application of the terrorist method, of which the Jacobins are so fond, obviously becomes impossible. And the workers of France, who did not know others, are routed. They say to themselves with good reason that it is impossible to make terrorism official, regular and legal, nor employ coercive means against the peasants, that it is impossible to establish a revolutionary State, a central committee of public safety for the whole of France, at a time when foreign invasion is not only at the border as in 1792, but at the heart of France, two steps from Paris. They saw the whole official organization crumble, they despair with reason of the power to create another, and do not understand safety, these revolutionaries, apart from public order, only understood, these men of the people, the power and life that there was in the official tribe of all colors, from the fleur-de-lis to the deep red, called *anarchy*, they cross their arms and say: we are lost, France is lost.

Oh no, my friends, it is not lost, if you do not want to doom yourself,if you are men, if you want to save it. For that, you know what you have to do: the administration, the government, the entire machinery of the State collapses on all sides; refrain from distressing yourself, and seek to raise these ruins. Freed from all that official architecture, appealed to the life of the people, to liberty, and you will save the people.

I return one more time to the peasants. I have never thought that, even in the most favorable circumstances, the workers could ever have the power to impose their collectivity on them; and I have never desired it, because I have a horror of any imposed system,

find themselves more hostiles than ever to the socialist workers of the cities?

Not at all, for the legal and political consecration 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 state of a simple fact.

But then that will be civil war, you say. Individual property no longer being guaranteed by any higher authority, and no longer being defended except by the energy of the proprietor alone, each wanting to take possession of the goods of the other, the strongest will plunder the weakest.

It is certain that, from the first, things will not happen in an absolutely peaceful manner: there will be struggles, public order will be troubled, and the first acts that will result from such a state of things could constitute what it is appropriate to call a civil war. But would you rather deliver France to the Prussians? Do you think the Prussians will respect public order, and not kill and plunder anyone? Would you prefer, to a momentary agitation that must save the country, would you prefer slavery, shame and utter poverty, inevitable fruits of the victory of the Prussians that your hesitation and your scruples would have rendered certain?

No, not childish fears about the disadvantages of peasant uprisings. Don't you think that, despite some excesses that can occur here and there, the peasants, no longer being contained by the authority of the State, would devour each other? If they try to do in the beginning, they will soon be convinced of the physical impossibility of continuing in this direction, and then they will try to agree, to compromise and to organize themselves. The need to feed themselves and their children,and consequently the need to continue the work of the countryside, the necessity of securing their homes, their families and their own lives against unforeseen attacks, all that will undoubtedly soon force them to enter mutual arrangements.

And do not believe either that in these arrangements brought in without any official supervision, by the force of things alone,

people, and to legitimate their violent, forced germanization? It is, they say, the conquest of civilization over barbarism. Beware; the Germans begin to realize also that Germanic, protestant civilization is superior to the catholic civilization of the peoples of the Latin race in general, and to French civilization in particular. Take care that they do not soon imagine that they have the mission to civilize you and make you happy, as you imagine that you have the mission of civilizing and emancipating your compatriots, your brothers, the peasants of France. For me, both pretentions are equally odious and I declare to you that, as much in international rapports as in the relations of one class to another, I will always be on the side of the that someone wants to civilize by that procedure. I will revolt with them against all this arrogant civilizers, whether they call themselves the workers, or the Germans, and by rebelling against them, I would serve the revolution against the reaction.

But, if it is thus, one says, must we abandon the ignorant and superstitious peasants to all the influences and all the intrigues of the reaction? Not at all. We must crush the reaction in the countryside as well as in the cities; but for that we must achieve it in the facts, and not merely to make war by decrees. I have already said, we uproot nothing with decrees. On the contrary, decrees and all the acts of authority consolidate what they would destroy.

Instead of wanting to take from the peasants the lands that they possess today, leave them to follow their natural instinct, and do you know what will happen that way? The peasant wants to have *all the land* as his own; he regards the great lord and the rich bourgeois, whose vast domains diminish his fields, as a foreigner and usurper. The revolution of 1789 gave the peasants the lands of the Church; they want to profit from another revolution by gaining the lands of the bourgeoisie.

But if that happened, if the peasants got their hands on the whole portion of the soil that does not yet belong to them, wouldn't we have allowed in this way the reinforcement, in an unfortunate manner, of the principle of individual property, and won't the peasants

because I sincerely and passionately love freedom. That false idea and that liberticidal hope constitutes the fundamental aberration of authoritarian communism, which because it needs regularly organized violence, needs the State and because it needs the State, necessarily leads to the reconstitution of the principle of authority and of a privileged class of State functionaries. We can only impose the collectivity on slaves,—and then the collectivity becomes the very negation of humanity. Among a free people, the collectivity could only be produced by the force of things; not by imposition from above, but by the spontaneous movement from below, freely and necessarily at once, while conditions privileged individualism, political and legal institutions of the State, would have disappeared themselves.

Letter IV. *September 7*

After having spoken of the grievances of the workers against the peasants, we must consider in their turn grievances of the peasants, the source of their hatred against the cities.

I will list them as follows:

1. The peasants feel scorned by the villages, and the scorn of which one is the object is quickly perceived, even by children, and is not forgiven.

2. The peasants imagine – and not without good reason, not without many proofs and historical experiences to support that opinion – that the cities want to dominate them, govern them, exploit them and always impose on them a political order that they do not care about.

3. Besides, the peasants consider the workers of the city as *partageux*, and fear that the socialists come to confiscate their land, which they love above all things.

So what should the workers do to overcome that mistrust and animosity of the peasant against them? First stop demonstrating their contempt; stop scorning them. This is necessary for the salvation of the revolution and of themselves, for hatred of the peasants is a huge danger. If there were not this distrust and hatred, the revolution would have been accomplished long ago, because the animosity that unfortunately exists in the countryside against the cities is in all countries is the basis and the driving force of the reaction.So in the interest of the revolution that must emancipate them, the workers must cease as soon as possible showing this contempt for peasants; justice also demands it, because they really have no reason to despise or detest them. The peasants are not lazy, they are hard workers like themselves, only they work in different conditions. That is all. In the presence of bourgeois exploiter, the worker must feel that he is the brother of the peasant.

The peasants will march with the workers of the cities for the salvation o the homeland as soon as they are convinced that the workers of the cities do not claim to impose their will on them, or any political and social order invented by the cities for the greatest happiness of the countryside; as soon as they are assure that the workers have no intention of taking their land.

Well, it is absolutely necessary today that the workers really renounce this claim and this intention, and that they renounce them in a manner that the peasants will know it all and remain convinced of it. Workers must renounce them, because even as such claims would be feasible, they would be supremely *unjust* and *reactionary*, and now that their realization has become absolutely impossible, they would constitute a criminal folly.

By what right would the workers impose any form of government or economic organization on the peasants? By the right of

revolution, one says. But revolution is not longer revolution when it acts as a despot, and when instead of prompting liberty in the masses, it prompts reaction among them. The means and condition if not the principal aim 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 legal State, because the State, younger brother of the Church is, as Proudhon has well demonstrate, the historical consecration of all the despotisms and all the privileges, the political reasons of all the economic and social enslavements, the very essence and the center of all reaction. When in the name of the revolution, we want to make **of** the State, even if it is only a provisional State, we make reaction and we work for despotism, not for liberty; for the institution of privilege against equality.

This is clear as day. But the socialist workers of France, raised with 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 has this pretension come from—a pretension as ridiculous as it is arrogant, as unjust as deadly—of imposing their political and social ideal on ten million peasants who do not want it? It is obviously still a bourgeois inheritance, a political bequest of bourgeois revolutionism. What is the foundation, the explanation and the theory of that pretension? It is the real or imagined superiority of the intelligence, of the instruction, in a word of the civilization of the workers, over the civilization of the countryside. But do you know that with such a principle we can legitimate all conquests, all oppressions? The bourgeois have never had any other principle to prove their mission and their right to *govern,* or what means the same thing, to exploit the workers. From nation to nation, as well as from one class to another, this fatal principle fatal, which is none other than that of authority, explains and posits a right to all invasions and all conquests. Haven't the Germans always used it to execute all their attacks on liberty and against the independence of the Slavic