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Speech of the citizen Bakunin to a public assembly of foreign socialists

Mikhail Bakunin

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charlatan or a fortunate criminal. It will soon break, I hope, the power of the chassepots, bayonets and sabre.—But it will break them, not for the middle class, but for itself.

Second speech.

Citizens, we come to render a unanimous homage to the memory of a hero of liberty—to the memory of Baudin, murdered by the drunken, salaried heroes of December. Allow me now to fulfill another duty. I am Russian, and as such I must recall to you another Baudin, a great collective Baudin, Poland.

Murdered a hundred years ago by three crowned brigands—the monarchs of the Russian Empire, the kingdom of Prussia and the Austrian Empire—this immortal Baudin, Poland, is constantly reborn, and always with a broader and more popular program. It is not dead; it always returns to life at the moment when it is thought to be buried—and it will triumph.

An assembly of the people is not permitted to disperse, before shouting: “Long live Poland, and death and shame to its enemies.”

La Liberté, December 5, 1868, Geneva

Contents

<i>First speech.</i>	5
<i>Second speech.</i>	10

They were rightly against that reactionary assembly that Napoleon, by his *coup d'état*, had dissolved. For we must not always speak of the victims of December,—let us also speak of those of June.

Here especially, in the midst of this entirely popular assembly, we should not forget those victims of the people's cause—those thousands of braves who were massacred by the bourgeois national guards, because they had demanded the right of the people—the means of life and popular liberty.—The bourgeois ferocity of June prepared the praetorian ferocity of December. Cavaignac was the precursor of Napoléon.

Well, that national assembly that was then called the constituent assembly,—after the massacres of June, it had greeted General Cavaignac as the savior of civilization, that is, of the bourgeoisie—as its savior; it has cursed and slandered the victims and crowned the executioner with laurels. Since all its measures, all the law that it promulgated, had only a single aim: that of destroying one by one all the liberties that the people had won in February.—That is why the workers in their turn were right, a thousand times right, do not rise up for the preservation of that reactionary and bourgeois assembly as well as the entirely reactionary and bourgeois republic created by that assembly.

But if the workers were right in relation to it, they were a thousand times wrong with relation to themselves. They must rise up against the tyrant, not in the name of the bourgeois republic, but in the name of the democratic and social republic,—in the name of the life, bread and liberty of the people. For there is no more monstrous illusion, nor any more monstrous alliance than that of the working people with dictatorship, whatever it may be—but especially with military dictatorship.

Seventeen years of oppression and degradation have demonstrated that elementary truth to the people.—They will no longer seek their salvation in the power of a crowned

By proclaiming the solidarity of the laborers of all countries, it has smashed the borders and began the destruction of the States.—It has killed patriotism, that passion—that self-interested virtue of the bourgeois.

By the very fact of its organization and its existence, it has abolished, denied the existence of all these numberless homelands that, from the point of view of the aristocratic and bourgeois politics still divides Europe and the world today—so that for all the workers there now remains nothing more than two foreign countries in the world, two homelands that, divided by their principles, aspirations and interests, will soon make war to the death

One is called capital, individual property, monopoly, exploitation, and oppression—in a word, it is the reaction.

The other, labor, human right, liberty for all, equality for all, justice and fraternity—the Revolution.

Isn't that, citizens, what we call the social question? Isn't that the principle that must insure the triumph of the democratic and social republic.

That is, after the condemnation of all bourgeois politics, the true, unique politics of the International Workingman's Association.

Thus, while declaring itself foreign to our politics, this great association has accomplished the greatest political act and fact of our days.—It has inaugurated the policy of the people: that of the negation of individually hereditary property and of the destruction of the States.

I return to Baudin.—He was a brave citizen.—He died as only heroes die, without hope of triumph, but faithful to the last moment to his faith.—He went to seek death, after vainly trying to raise the people against the butchers of December.

The workers did not want to follow him Were they wrong or right? Well, citizens, I think that they were right and wrong at the same time.

First speech.

November 23, 1868

[After saying that the Assembly had not only gathered to pay homage to the memory of the brave republican Baudin, murdered by the brigands of December, but also to express its devotion to the principles of the *democratic and social Republic*, the citizen *Bakunin* expressed himself in these terms:]

We are socialists, [he said,] that is to say that we all want:

Equality of political, economic and social conditions for all;

Equality of the means of support, education, and instruction for all children of both sexes—and equality of the means of labor for all grown individuals, including women.

We want social justice and real liberty for each human being through the solidarity of all;

We want the Fraternity of all the human beings on the earth, without distinction of nations, color and race. We want peace to reign on the earth, based on reason illuminated by science, founded on humane justice, that is on liberty in equality on a universal brotherhood.

But if we desire the ends, we must desire the means. We must then desire the abolition of all political borders created by the violence of the States. We want the suppression of the State,—their disappearance in the free and universal organization of human society.

Whoever speaks of the State, speaks of fortresses—speaks of the violent separation of one portion of humanity from all the other portions, equally imprisoned in other State, they speak of the rivalry, competition and perpetual war of the States; they speak of conquest, dispossession and patriotic and glorious massacre, both within and without: legalized and regulate oppression and exploitation of the labor of the people, for the profit of a dominant minority.

The passion corresponding to this double manifestation of the States is called patriotism. We want no more patriotism, because we want justice, human rights and human fraternity.

Whoever speaks of the State, speaks of privilege. The privilege par excellence, which serves as the foundation of all the political and social injustices, is *individually hereditary property*.

The elements of this property are, first, its point of departure, its historical and actual basis: conquest, a bloody and brutal fact, a crime against humanity and justice—any theft or massacre, and most often both at once; then, the consecration of the violent act accomplished by religion—the divinity always having taken the side of the ablest and strongest; from this consecration has resulted the *legal right*, injustice petrified, systematized and legalized.—The ensemble of all that is called—the political State.

So we want the abolition of that State, because it has no other mission than to protect individual property; and we want the abolition of individual property, because as long as it exists, there will necessarily be inequality. Society will remain divided into two portions, one of which—the dominant and exploiting minority—will be composed of all the fortunate of the earth, born into ease, thanks to that law of inheritance, and receiving from society education, instruction, and all the material and intellectual, political and social means of continuing that work of exploitation. The other portion encompasses the masses of the people, all those millions of laborers who only inherit the poverty and forced ignorance of their fathers and who will be eternally condemned to an excessive labor that, giving them barely enough to live, will increase the well-being, luxury and civilization of the bourgeois.

In the place of individual property, we desire *collective property*, and in the place of States, we desire the more and more universal organization of human society, by the free federation of the productive, industrial and agricultural associations. In

the place of a social organization founded on privilege and on the politics of the States, we desire one that will have no other basis than labor, than the fair and fraternal division of all the products of labor.

[The citizen Bakunin spoke then of the *International Workingmen's Association*.] That Association, [he said,] born, only four years ago, has already become a great power, recognized as such by all the political men of Europe. In forming this, it had deliberately eliminated from its program all political questions, leaving politics—that manifestation of the life of the States, of the privileged of the States—to the bourgeois. As or itself, it at first only posited a single aim: *The emancipation of the laborers of all countries from the yoke of capital*.

A long and harsh experience had demonstrated to the founders of the Association that this aim could only be achieved by the combined efforts, by the alliance and by the solidarity of the workers of all countries; economic science come from its side to confirm it in that conviction, by demonstrating to it the *universality* of the social question, that no country, as advanced and extended as it might be, will be able to resolve it alone, because as long as the competition between States exists, there will be a necessary and permanent competition between classes and individuals; but that competition is war, is exploitation and mutual oppression.

The International Association, deliberately and voluntarily foreign to all politics, thus only takes a single step, accomplished a single act, in view of the great question of the emancipation of all the workers in the world. But this act and that step are immense; they contain the whole revolution.

By proclaiming the right of the workers to the joint use of all the capital produced by the combined labor of past generations, it has proclaimed the fall not of capital, but of the monopolization of capital—the fall of individual property, of the right of inheritance—the hereditary right to the exploitation of the work of others. It has proclaimed *collective property*.