

To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain

[Manuscript: Lucarno, Switzerland, June 12-13, 1872]

Mikhail Bakunin

1872

Brothers,

I am an old and close friend, I can say the brother of Christophe [Giuseppe Fanelli?], the friend and brother whom many among you certainly have not forgotten. With him, I was one of the first founders of the Alliance. And it is by this double title that I address myself to you, Brothers of the Alliance.

Some unfortunate dissensions produced by struggles of pride between brothers who seem to have sacrificed our great purpose, the triumph of the universal, social revolution, to that of their vanity and their personal ambitions, have had as last result the dissolution of the Alliance in Madrid.

I set myself up as the judge of no one, but in the name of our principles as well as in that of all our brothers, I must say that those who have contributed to that dissolution, those who have divulged the secret of the Alliance, a secret that we have all promised on our honor to protect, are very culpable....

To betray the Alliance is to betray the revolution, for the Alliance has no other purpose than to serve revolution. We do not form a theoretical or exclusively economic institution. The Alliance is neither an academy, nor a workshop; it is an essentially militant association, seeking the organization the power of the popular masses in preparation for destruction of all the States and all presently existing institutions, whether religious, political, legal, economic or social, with an eye to the absolute emancipation of the enslaved and exploited laborers of the entire world. The aim of our organization is to urge the masses to make a clean slate, so that the agricultural and industrial populations can reorganize and federalize themselves, according to the principles justice, equality, liberty and solidarity, from top to bottom, spontaneously, freely, apart from all official tutelage, whether it be of a reaction or even a so-called revolutionary variety.

To those who ask us what good is the existence of the Alliance when the International exists, we would respond: the International is certainly a magnificent institution; it is unquestionably the finest, most useful, and most beneficial creation of the present century. It has created the basis for the solidarity of the laborers of the entire world. It has given them a beginning of organization across the borders of all the States and outside of the world of the exploiters and the privileged. It has done more; already today it contains the germs of the organization of the unity to come, and at the same time it has given to the proletariat of the entire world the feeling

of its own power. Certainly these are immense services that it has rendered to the great cause of the universal, social revolution. But it is not an institution sufficient to organize an direct that revolution.

All the serious revolutionaries who have taken an active part in the labors of the International in any country, since 1864, the year of its foundation, must be convinced of that. The International prepares the elements of the revolutionary organization, but it does not accomplish it. It prepares them by organizing the public, legal struggle of the laborers joined in solidarity from all countries against the exploiters of labor, capitalists, proprietors and entrepreneurs of industry, but it never goes farther. The only thing that it does beyond the very useful work, is the theoretical propoganda of socialists ideas among the working masses, a work equally useful and necessary as the preparation of the revolution of the masses, but that is still far from the revolutionary organization of the masses.

The International is, in a word, an immense milieu favorable and necessary to that organization, but it is still not that organization. The International accepts within it, absolutely setting aside all the differences of political and religious beliefs, all honest laborers, on the sole condition that they accept, in all its consequences, the solidarity of the struggle of the laborers against bourgeois capital, exploiter of labor. That is a positive condition, sufficient to separate the world of the laborers of the world from the world of the privileged, but insufficient to give a revolutionary direction to the former. Its program is so large that the monarchists and Catholics themselves can enter. And that breadth of program is absolutely necessary, so that the International can embrace hundreds of thousands of workers, and it is only by counting hundreds of thousands of members that it becomes a true power. If the International was given a more explicit and determined program with regard to political, religious and social questions, if it recognized an obligatory and, as it were, official doctrine, if, for example, it made the acceptance of the principles of atheism in religion, or communalism is politics a condition for the entry of each member, it would barely number a few thousand members, and it would exclude millions who labor in industry or on the earth, who by their whole position, as well as by their instincts, are revolutionaries, atheists, and socialists, but who have still not lost the bad habit of reactionary thoughts. It would only have formed a rather second-rate party, which would hardly have counted a few thousand members in all of Europe. And that party itself would inevitably have fractured into many different coteries. For from the moment that there is an official theory, there will be, without fail, different and contrary theories. There would be bourgeois socialists, peaceful socialists, cooperativists, authoritarian socialists, hoping for their emancipation from the reform of the State and revolutionary socialists expecting it only from the destruction de the State.

All these theories, with many other shades, already exist today in the International; but as long as none of them is proclaimed as the official theory, these differences of doctrine and the peaceful struggles that follow from them in the very heart of the International, far from being an evil, are in my opinion a great good, in that they contribute to the development of thought and the spontaneous labor of the intelligence of each; they cannot damage the solidarity, which must unite the laborers of all countries, because that solidarity is not of a theoretical nature, but is entirely practical.—It is, I repeat again, the solidarity of the economic struggle of labor against capital, with all the practical consequences that it brings. The workers of the Jura Federation, for example, who have a horror of all authoritarian organization and who have adopted for a program the abolition of the State, are profoundly separated from this point of view from the workers of Germany, the great majority of whom seem to accept the authoritarian theories of

Marx; and yet let a strike break out in Germany, the laborers of the Jura will be the first to support it with all their means. I am not certain, but I hope that the workers of Germany will do the same thing. So that is the true, the only solidarity created by the International. It is entirely practical, and it persists, it remains powerful despite all the theoretical dissidences that could be raised between different groups of workers.

It can, however, only maintain itself on the sole condition that no theory, whether political, socialist, or philosophical, can ever become the official, obligatory theory of the International. At first, each official theory is a good sense. In order to have the courage and the pretext to impose itself, it must proclaim itself absolute, and the time of the absolute has passed, at least in the camp of the revolution—for the men of liberty and humanity, the absolute is the absurd. Then, as there has never been an example of it in history and as it will always be impossible that any specific theory will really be the product of the individual thought of everyone; as all theories, insofar as they are explicit, finite theories, have been and always will be elaborated by a small number of individuals, the theory that is called *absolute* will in reality never represent anything but the despotism exerted by the thought of a few on the thought of all—a theoretical despotism that will never fail to turn into practical despotism and exploitation.

This is precisely what we see produced today in the very heart of the International. The Marxian sect, all-powerful in the General Council, profiting from the momentary disarray of the revolutionary socialists of France, who had stood up to them until now, but who today murdered, decimated, deported, exiled, or forced into silence, cannot make their voices heard, obviously tends to impose the political and socialist doctrine Marx, that of the emancipation of the working classes by the power of the great centralized State, as the official doctrine of the International. Alongside this aim and as its necessary consequence, it has pursued another; that of transforming the General Council, always directed by Marx in person, as the government, the official director, as the dictator of the International.—And it works, it schemes immensely today, spreading the slanders with both hands, in order to prepare a Congress that, after having proclaimed the doctrine and dictatorship, naturally concealed, of Marx as obligatory for all the sections of the International, will declare as heretics all those who do not have to accept that doctrine, and as traitors all those who do not want to bow their heads under that dictatorship.

Such is the fatal effect of official doctrines.

Unless it betrays its mission, the International must accept none of them. But then, what will happen? It will happen that, more and more educated by the struggle and by the free propaganda of different ideas, directed by their own instinct and increasingly raised to revolutionary consciousness by practice itself and the inevitable consequences of the universal solidarity of the struggle of labor against capital, the masses will elaborate, slowly, it is true, but infallibly, their own thoughts, theories that will emerge from bottom to top, but will no longer be imposed from top to bottom.

I have said what labor will slowly be and do. Not so slowly, however, as we might think. Those who have had some practice in the development of the International, know what marvelous progress the consciousness of the workers have made in a very small number of years, thanks to the absolute freedom that has reigned thus far in the heart of the International, liberty in propaganda, as well as in organization...

In my view, this progress is immense. However, I recognize that they are insufficient to give the elementary power of the masses a revolutionary organization, and as long as the masses

do not have this organization, should they be even more overwhelming with regard to number, compared to those of privileged classes, they will always be crushed by the latter.

I recognize with joy that the privileged classes in all countries have lost much of their past strength. They have absolutely lost their moral strength; they no longer have faith in their right; they know that they are wicked, despicable, and they despise themselves. That is a great deal. Having lost their moral strength, they conspicuously and necessarily also lose the strength of their intelligence. They are much more learned than the proletariat, but that does not prevent them from becoming more and more stupid. They have lost all intellectual and moral courage. They no longer dare to look forward and now only look behind. All of that unfailingly condemns them to death. The proletariat, who in their lifetime have inherited their former intellectual and moral power, is prepared to force them today from their last political and economic entrenchments.

All of that is true. But we must have no illusions, the entrenchments are still very strong: they are called the State, the Church, the stock market, the police, the army, then that great international and public, legal, admitted, that is called diplomacy.

All that is skillfully organized and powerful in the organization. And in the presence of this formidable organization, the proletariat, even united, grouped and put in solidarity in and by the International, remained disorganized. What do their numbers matter! Even if the people number a million, several millions, they will be held in check by a few tens of thousands of soldiers, maintained and disciplined at their cost, against them, by bourgeois coins produced by their own labor.

Take the most numerous, most advanced and best organized section of the International.—Is it prepared for the combat? You know well that it is not. Of a thousand laborers, it would be a great deal if you could gather one or at most two hundred on the day of the battle. That is because in order to organize a force, it is not enough to unite the interests, feelings, and thoughts... We must unite wills and characters. Our enemies organize their forces by the power of money and the authority of the State. We cannot organize our by conviction and passion.

We cannot and we would not have any army except the people, the masses. But in order for the masses to rise up entirely and simultaneously —and it is only on that single condition that it could win—what is to be done? Above all, how to sure the masses, even electrified and risen, do not contradict and paralyze themselves by their contrary movements?

There is only one single means; it is to insure the cooperation of all the popular leaders. I call popular leaders some individuals most often coming out from the people, living with them, in their life, who, thanks to their intellectual and moral superiority, exert a great influence on them. There are many among them who abuse that and make it serve their individual interests. They are very dangerous men, who must be avoided like the plague, that we must fight and destroy when we can. We must seek good leaders, those who seek their own interest only in the interests of everyone. But how are we to find them and recognize them, and where is the individual intelligent enough, discerning enough, and powerful enough, to not be mistaken first in their choice and then in order to convince them and in order to organize them all alone?

It is obvious that this cannot be the work of a single man; that many men associated can alone undertake and bring to a good end such a difficult enterprise. But for that, it is first necessary that they understand one another and that they join hands for this common work. But this work having a practical, revolutionary aim, the mutual understanding that is its necessary condition cannot be reached in public; if it is made in public, it will attract the persecutions of the whole

official and unofficial world against the originators and they will see themselves crushed before they have been able to do the least thing.

So that understanding and that association that must emerge from it can only be made in secret, that is to say that it is necessary to establish a conspiracy, a secret society.

Such is also the thought and aim of the Alliance. It is a secret society formed in the very heart of the International, in order to give to the latter a revolutionary organization, in order to transform it, and all the popular masses who find themselves outside of it, and a power sufficiently organized to destroy the politico-clerical-bourgeois reaction, to destroy all the economic, legal, religious and political institutions of the States.

The last Conference of London has pronounced the anathema against any secret society that could be formed in the heart of the International. It is obviously a blow against us. But what the Marxian coterie, which directed that Conference, as it directed the General Council at that time, what it has so carefully refrained from saying to the majority of the members of that Conference, and what it has only said to its very close friends or to its henchmen, is that it has been pushed to formulate that condemnation against us in order to prepare the way for its own conspiracy, for the secret society that has existed since 1848 under the direction of Marx, founded by Marx, Engels, and Wolff, and which is nothing other than the almost exclusively Germanic society of the *Authoritarian Communists*.

What I have said there is not a supposition, but a fact known by many people, and that many times, in different political trials, has publicly transpired in Germany. So, leaving aside the odious part of personalities that has been pushed to the most appalling nastiness, by our vindictive and all too relentless adversaries, we must recognize that the intestine that today strikes at the heart of the International, is nothing but that of two secret societies as opposed in their principles, as in the system of their organization, and of which one, that of the *Authoritarian Communists*, as I just said, since 1848, the other that of the *Alliance of Revolutionary Socialists* dates its existence from 1864, it is true, but has only begun to establish itself in the International since 1868.

Let us begin, first of all, by doing justice to our adversaries, where they deserve that justice. Marx is not an ordinary man. He is a superior intelligence, a man of science, especially in economic questions, and also a man who, to my knowledge since 1845, the time of my first encounter with him in Paris, has always been sincerely, completely devoted to the cause of the emancipation of the proletariat, a cause to which he has rendered some indisputable services, which he has never wittingly betrayed, but that he jeopardizes immensely today by his formidable vanity, by his hateful, malicious character, and by his tendencies to dictatorship in the very heart of the party of the revolutionary socialists. His vanity, in fact, has no limits, a truly Jewish vanity; and it is a great pity, it is a useless luxury, for the vanity is understandable in an empty being, who being nothing, wants to appear all. Marx has some qualities and a very positive, very great power of thought and action, that could have spared him, it seems to me, the trouble of resorting to the miserable means of vanity. That vanity, naturally already very strong, has been considerably fattened by the adulation of his friends and disciples. Very individual, very jealous, very sensitive, and very vindictive, like Jehovah, the God of his people, Marx would not suffer that anyone recognize any God but himself; what am I saying, that anyone even do justice to another socialist writer or personality, in his presence. Proudhon, who has never been a God, but who certainly was a great revolutionary thinker and who rendered immense services to the development of socialist ideas, has become for that same reason the *bête noire* of Marx. To praise Proudhon in his presence, was to commit a mortal offense, worthy of all the natural conse-

quences of his enmity—and those consequences are: hatred first, then the filthiest slanders. Marx never stepped back from a lie, as odious or deceitful as it might be, when he believed he could use it without too great danger for himself against those who had the misfortune of incurring his wrath.—I have said that Marx is excessively individual. Here is one proof: he still believed in individual property in his ideas. After the death of Lassalle, the famous agitator and founder of the Democratic Socialist Party in Germany, in large part a disciple of Marx, an authoritarian communist like him, who like him had preached the emancipation of the working masses by the State,—after his death, I say, Marx published the first and thus far only volume of his great book on “Capital”. In the preface, he bitterly accused Lassalle of having stolen his ideas and even the form of the ideas; a reproach that was already supremely unjust since Lassalle in one of his writings, directed against Schultz-Delitsch, after having developed certain ideas, add: “These ideas and the expressions that I have used, have not been invented by me; I have borrowed them from a magnificent, still unpublished work of Marx.” That declaration was not enough for Marx. Here then is Marx caught red-handed in proprietarianism, and that in the sphere of ideas, which is certainly the least proper for individual appropriation. — These friends know that main of their master so well that, for example, Engels, also a very intelligent man, the closest and oldest friend of Marx, having published a very remarkable work on the rising of the German peasants in the 16th century, was very careful to say in the introduction that the principal ideas that had served as basis for that work were not his one, but belonged to Marx.

Now, let us recognize that Marx is a very serious, very profound economic thinker. He has this immense advantage over Proudhon, of being a realist, a materialist. Proudhon, despite all his efforts to shake off the traditions of classical idealism, nonetheless remained all his life an incorrigible idealist, inspired, as I told him two months before his death, sometimes by the Bible, sometimes by Roman law, and always a metaphysician to the fingertips. His great misfortune is that he never studied the natural sciences, and he never adopted its methods. He had some instincts of genius that made him glimpse the right path, but, led by the bad idealist habits of his mind, he always fell back into the old errors: so that Proudhon has been a perpetual contradiction,—a vigorous genius, a revolutionary thinker always struggling against the phantoms of idealism, but never managing to vanquish them.

Marx, as a thinker, is on the right track. He has established as a principle that all the political, religious and legal evolutions in history are not causes, but effects of the economic evolutions. It is a great and productive thought, that he has not absolutely invented: it has been glimpsed, expressed in part, by many others than him; but finally, to him belongs the honor of having solidly established it and having posited it as the basis of his whole economic system. On the other hand, Proudhon understand and felt liberty much better than him—Proudhon, when he did not engage in doctrine and metaphysics, had the true instinct of the revolutionary—he adored Satan and he proclaimed an-archy. It is quite possible that Marx could raise himself *theoretically* to an even more rational system of liberty than Proudhon—but he lacks Proudhon’s instinct. As a German and a Jew, he is an authoritarian from head to toe.

From there, the two opposing systems: the anarchic system of Proudhon, expanded by us, developed and liberated from all its metaphysical, idealist, doctrinaire accoutrements, and squarely accepting matter in science, and social economy in history as the basis of all the subsequent developments. And the system of Marx, leader of the German school of authoritarian communists.

Here are the bases of that system. Like us, the authoritarian communists want the abolition of individual property. But they differ from us principally in that they want the expropriation of

all individuals by the State, while we want it by the abolition of the State and of the legal right guaranteed necessarily by the State. This is why, at the Basle Congress, we have proclaimed the abolition of the right of inheritance, while they have opposed it, saying that this abolition would become useless for the moment that the State became the sole proprietor.—The State, they say, must be the only proprietor of the land, and also the only banker. The State bank, replacing the feudal banks existing today, must alone bankroll the national labor; so that in fact all the workers, in industry as well as on the land, would become employees of the State. the English communists of that same school, have declared at the Basle Congress, that the earth should be cultivated under the direction of engineers of the State.

We have rejected this system for two reasons; first, because instead of diminishing the power of the State, it increases it by concentrating all the powers in its hand. It is true that he says that their State will be the State of the people, governed by Assemblies and officials elected directly by the people and subject to popular control.—It is the representative, parliamentary system, that of universal suffrage, corrected by the referendum and by direct voting on all the laws by the people.—But we know how much sincerity there is in these representations. What is clear is that the Marxian system leads, like that of Mazzini, to establishment of a very strong, so-called popular power, to the domination on an intelligent minority, alone capable of comprehending the complicated questions that are inseparable from centralization, and consequently to the enslavement of the masses and to their exploitation by that intelligent minority. It is the system of *revolutionary authorities*, of liberty directed from on high—it is a flagrant lie.

The other reason that has made us reject this system, is that it leads directly to the establishment of some new, large, national State, separated and necessarily competing and hostile, to the negation of Internationality, of humanity. For unless they claim to found a single, universal State—an absurd enterprise, condemned by history—it must inevitably found some national States, or else what is still more probable, some large States in which, one race, the most powerful and most intelligent, will enslave, oppress and exploit other races—so that without admitting it, the Marxians fatally lead to pan-Germanism... [the manuscript ends here]

[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Mikhail Bakunin
To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain
[Manuscript: Lucarno, Switzerland, June 12-13, 1872]
1872

Retrieved on 23/1/2021 from www.libertarian-labyrinth.org
Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur

usa.anarchistlibraries.net