

Two Speeches to the Congress of the IWA at Basle

Mikhail Bakunin

1869

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I.

Between the collectivists who think that after having voted for collective property, it becomes useless to vote for the abolition of the right of inheritance, and the collectivists who, like us, think that it is useful and even necessary to vote for it, there is only a simple difference in point of view.

They place themselves fully in the future, and taking collective property as their point of departure, find that there is no more place to speak of the right of inheritance.

We, on the contrary, begin from the present, we find ourselves under the regime of triumphant individual property, and marching towards collective property, we encounter an obstacle: the right of inheritance.

We think that we must overthrow it, abolish it.

The report of the General Council says that the legal fact never being anything but the consequence of economic facts, it is sufficient to transform the latter to destroy the former.

It is incontestable that everything that we call legal or political right has never been anything in history by the expression or product of a *fait accompli*. But it is also incontestable that after having been an effect of acts or facts previously carried out, the right becomes in its turn the cause of subsequent facts, becomes itself a very real, very powerful fact, that must be overthrown if we want to arrive at a different order of things than the one that exists.

So the right of inheritance, after having been the natural consequence of the violent appropriation of natural and social wealth, later becomes the basis of the political State and legal family, which guarantee and sanction individual property.

So we must vote to abolish the right of inheritance.

One after speaks to us of practice. Well, it is in the name of practice that I urge you to vote the abolition of the right of inheritance.

It has been said today that the transformation of individual property into collective property will encounter serious obstacles among the peasants, small proprietors of land.

And, in fact, if after having proclaimed the social liquidation, we attempted to dispossess by decree these millions of small farmers, we would necessarily cast them into the reaction, and to subject them to the revolution, we would have to use force against them, that is to say reaction.

So it is necessary to leave them as possessors in fact of those parcels of which they are today the proprietors. But if you do not abolish the right of inheritance, what will happen?

They will transmit these parcels to their children, with the sanction of the State, by title of property.

You will preserve, you will perpetuate the individual property of which you have voted for the necessary abolition, and its transformation into collective property.

If, on the contrary, at the same time that you make the social liquidation, you proclaim the political and legal liquidation of the State, if you abolish the right of inheritance, what will remain to the peasants?

Nothing but possession in fact, and that possession, deprived of all legal sanction, no longer being sheltered under the powerful protection of the State, will easily let itself be transformed under the pressure of events and revolutionary forces.

II.

The absence of the representative of agriculture is not a reason to contest at the Congress the right to decide the question of property. The Congress is only a minority, but there has been in every era a minority that represents the interests of all of humanity. In 89, the bourgeois minority represented the interests of France and the world; it led to the coming of the bourgeoisie. A protest was heard in the name of the proletariat, that of Baboeuf; we are his heirs, our little minority will soon be a majority.

Contrary to what has been said, it is the collectivity that is the basis for the individual; it is society that makes the man; isolated, he would not even manage to learn, speak and think. Let no one cite the men of genius and their discoveries, Arago, Galileo, etc.; they would have invented nothing without the labor of previous generations; there is someone who has a greater mind than Voltaire, and it is everyone. The greatest genius, if he lived from the age of five on a deserted island, would produce nothing; the individual is nothing without the collectivity. Individual property has only been, and is only the exploitation of collective labor; we can only destroy that exploitation by establishing collective property.

[...]

I vote for collectivity, in particular of the soil, and in general of all the social wealth in the sense of the social liquidation.

I mean by the social liquidation the expropriation *by right* of all the existing proprietors, by the *abolition of the political and legal State*, which is the sanction and sole guarantee of existing property and of everything that is called political right; and the expropriation *in fact*, everywhere and as much as possible, by the force of events and things themselves.

As for the later organization, consider that all productive labor is necessarily a collective labor, and that the labor that we improperly call individual is still a collective labor, since it only becomes possible thanks to the collective labor of past and present generations.

I conclude in favor of the *solidarization of the communes* proposed by the majority of the commission, that much more willingly as that solidarization implies the organization from the bottom up, while the plan of the minority speaks to us of the State.

I am a resolute antagonist of the State and of every bourgeois state policy.

I demand the destruction of all the national and territorial States and, on their ruins, the founding of the international State of the workers.

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