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Mikhail Bakunin

Fragment on pan-Slavism and anarchism

1867

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Although the manuscript is undated, the text is clearly a variant
of a response to Herzen from August, 1867.

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...and which has consequently rendered impossible at present the constitution of a centralist, bureaucratic and military Slavic State... In the end that fine Slavic brotherhood, which could no longer exist from the moment that the Slavs, sacrificing Abel to Cain, received the latter, as their elder brother, into their midst... in a word all the precious elements that the Slavs have guarded, in the midst of the terrible vicissitudes that they have experienced for centuries, which, rendered fertile by a new spirit—that of great justice, great liberty and universal fraternity—could well become one day those of a new and great civilization.

There is one other point that profoundly separates me from our pan-Slavists. They are still partisans of unity, always preferring discipline, the yoke of authority, majestic and monotonous uniformity and public order, to liberty. Me, I am an anarchist; I am a partisan of the life from below against all laws imposed in an authoritarian and doctrinaire manner from on high and I always and everywhere prefer liberty to order...

Another enormous difference separates me from our Panslavists. They are for unity at any price, always preferring public order to liberty, while I am an anarchist and prefer liberty to public order, or rather, in order not to find in favor of my enemies over so small a thing, I am a federalist from head to toe. I adore fraternity and union and I expect that humanity will tend irresistible to unite in liberty, in order to form, though I do not know when, the great worldwide brotherhood. But I detest centralist unity, the one sold cheap today in the great markets where the salvation of nations is traded: in St. Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, today perhaps even in... and always in Rome. It is a question of an opinion eminently autocratic, Catholic, religious, divine, superhuman and consequently Mazzinian. It is common to the National Convention, to Robespierre, St. Just and Napoleon, to the fanatical Panslavists of the Greco-Muscovite orthodoxy and especially to the pope, that grand heretic for us other schismatics! So I loathe that unity, true tomb of the mind and of liberty, in what concerns not only the internal organization of the nations, but also that of the races. I can thus only detest Panslavism, but at the same time Pangermanism, Panlatinism and all the pan-isms on earth, convinced that each of these notions conceal a negation of humanity and a terrible danger for universal liberty. It is true that this sometimes permits the conquest, and even the momentary conservation, of a formidable material power, always gained, incidentally, by sacrifices of spirit, but never leading to an intellectual and moral grandeur and not even to a durable prosperity. That can bring calamities to humanity, but never good.