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# Marx and Bakunin

Socialism and Anarchism

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1922

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But this did not surprise me much. I knew this from my past experience - for I had known him since 1845 - that the famous German Socialist, in whose character I have always recognised, and will doubtless continue to recognise, great talents, yet in whose character I saw more a Jewish writer who corresponded with the German press than a serious and ardent advocate of humanity and justice. He has a certain disposition to be like that of a man who is not a social being. So when I arrived in London in 1862, I did not visit him, since it was obviously not desirable to renew my acquaintance. In 1864, when I passed through London, he visited me himself, and assured me that he had never shared, directly or indirectly, in any of the slander against me, which he himself called extremely suspicious. I had to believe it”.

Although Marx encouraged Bakunin to join the International that he was about to found, he refused, and in that same year organized a secret society called the Socialist Revolutionaries, the first anarchist organization in Italy. And Marx’s governmental methods reached their zenith in the International, which Bakunin later joined.

Wagner. During the night of the 9th and 10th, armed citizens captured Heubner and Bakunin and handed them over to the Prussian army. Wagner managed to escape by hiding in his sister's house. Bakunin's actions in Dresden were those of a determined warrior and a shrewd leader. And as Herzen says, "He gained such a reputation there that even his enemies could not deny it", even Marx could not help but acknowledge this. In a chapter of "Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany," serialized in the New York Daily Tribune, Marx writes, "The rebels were almost entirely workers from the nearby factory district, and in a Russian refugee named Michel Bakunin they found a talented and calm leader". Bakunin was thus sentenced to death in Germany, then in Austria, and finally handed over to the Russian government. After thirteen years of imprisonment and exile, he escaped from Siberia in June 1862, arriving in London in December.

## VII

He soon planned a Polish putsch and left London when it broke out in February 1863, but the incompetence and discord of its leaders caused complete failure, and Bakunin returned to London once more. He soon went to Florence again, and from there the following year went to Sweden, then returned to Italy via London and Paris. He met Marx in London, and Proudhon again in Paris. Bakunin himself said the following about his meeting with Marx in London: While Bakunin was in prison in Schlüsselburg, Marx and other socialists had once again rehash the familiar slander that Bakunin was a Russian spy. Marx visited Bakunin to explain himself. "According to Herzen, Karl Marx, who afterwards became one of the main founders of the International and whom I have always regarded as a man of great intellectual ability and entirely dedicated to the cause of workers' emancipation, shared in a great deal of this slander.

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## VI

To put his Pan-Slavism into practice, Bakunin formed the Slav Democratic Union together with the German democrats and personally led the defense of Dresden. The defense of Dresden was a popular uprising that broke out on May 3, 1849, when the Saxon king rejected the German Imperial Constitution passed by the Frankfurt parliament. The next day the king fled and a provisional government was formed, and the rebels were masters of Dresden for five days. In mid-April Bakunin came to Dresden from Leipzig, became one of the leaders of the rebels, and prepared the most effective defense against the Prussian attack. Bakunin's great appearance and the fact that he was a Russian revolutionary drew the attention of the people especially to him, and rumors soon spread about him, including that he alone had set fire to the defenses throughout Dresden. Someone also called him "the very soul of the whole revolution." And he was so powerful that he could "silence a crying child".

Bakunin's revolutionary instincts led him to believe that the uprising would spread even further. He played an important role, almost like a dictator, in the uprising. On May 8th, in front of the Leipzig deputies, Bakunin gave a speech about the European value of the defense of Dresden. From that day on, a young typographer named Stephan Born became the commander of the rebel army. Born was the man who had organized the first general workers' organization in Germany, the Arbeiter-Priunterng (Workers' Friends Association), the year before. On the following day, the 9th, the rebel army was attacked by a superior enemy force and retreated to Freiberg. On the way, Bakunin tried to persuade Born to start an uprising in Bohemia with the rebels who were still with him. However, Born refused and disbanded his army. Bakunin then retreated to Hemnitz together with Heubner, a member of the Provisional Government, and the musician Richard

Hotel, where Bakunin and many of the other Polish congress members were staying. It was then discovered that a secret putsch government had been set up. Bakunin and his partisans were stationed there, with a map of Prague spread out on a desk and giving orders to continue the putsch. Having finally escaped the putsch, Bakunin hid in various places in Germany, and emerged the following year, in April 1849, among Czech students in Leipzig. While preparing for the Bohemian putsch, he wrote a pamphlet called *With the Slavs*. In this pamphlet, Bakunin revealed his ideas at the time. It called for the Slav revolutionaries to combine with those of Hungary, Germany, and Italy to overthrow the three despotic monarchies of the Russian Empire, the Austrian Empire, and the Kingdom of Prussia, and thus organize a free federation of liberated Slavic nations. Marx read it and wrote a review in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, saying, "Bakunin is our friend, but that will not prevent us from criticizing his pamphlet". "There is no future for any Slav other than the Poles and Russians, and perhaps also the Slavs of Turkey, for the simple reason that all other Slavs lack the important historical, geographical, political, and industrial conditions for independence and vitality".

Regarding his disagreement with Marx on the Slavic question, Bakunin said in 1871: "In 1848 we differed, but he had more reason than I did. But I certainly had reason on this point: as a Slav, I wanted to free the Slavic people from German shackles. But Marx, as a German patriot, did not recognize, and still does not recognize, the right of the Slavs to free themselves from German shackles. He believes, and still does, that the Germans have a calling to civilize the Slavs, that is, to Germanize them whether they like it or not".

## I

In every capitalist country, socialists and anarchists are always portrayed as madmen, robbers, murderers, or spies used by the state itself. This is because the most effective method for a government is to make the people doubt the character of its enemy. However, this governmental method is also always used by socialists against their anarchist enemies. Moreover, because socialists are more governmental than capitalists, they use this method more viciously than capitalists. We have already seen this on the first page of the history of the socialist movement in Japan. When Kotoku began to preach anarchism and many young people followed him, socialists Katayama Sen and Nishikawa Mitsujiro publicly declared that Kotoku and Sakai had been "bought off". The infamous names that the Bolshevik government of Russia is now hurling at anarchists in its country are also "madmen", "robbers", "murderers", "spies", and "counter-revolutionaries". The slander against Emma Goldman, recently published by Yamakawa Kikue in the magazine *Kaizo*, is a faithful translation of the Bolshevik government's attitude towards anarchists. This method has also been vigorously applied by Japanese Bolsheviks recently to their former anarchist comrades. A united front has been formed between the white government and the future red government that will replace it, using the same governmental means to prevent the blackening of the country. Origin, cruelty and underhandedness are inherent to governmental ideology. Silencing one's enemies with iron and blood, misinterpreting their ideas to make them fools, and slandering the character of one's enemy to destroy his personal credibility are its favorite methods. And the stronger the governmental ideology, the more cruel and underhanded these methods become.

## II

In July 1845, Bakunin went to Paris for the first time after being exiled from Germany and Switzerland because of his revolutionary ideas. There he became acquainted with all the most advanced democrats of the time, and first met Proudhon and Marx. Bakunin was influenced in many ways by these friendships, but Proudhon and Marx were the most influential. In later years, he commented on these two men as follows: "Proudhon devoted himself to breaking away from the traditions of old idealism, but throughout his life he remained an incorrigible idealist. He was always a metaphysician. His great misfortune was that he had never studied natural science, and therefore did not know its methods. He had the genius to discover the true path, but was always drawn back by the bad habits of idealism, and fell back into his original errors. This is the source of Proudhon's constant contradictions. A powerful genius and a revolutionary thinker was always fighting the ghost of idealism, and yet he was never able to overcome it". "As a thinker, Marx was on the right track. He established as a principle that all political, religious, and legal evolution in history is the result, not the cause, of economic evolution. This is a great and fruitful idea, although he by no means invented it; it was an idea that had already been partially glimpsed and explained by many others. But the honor of establishing this principle and making it the basis of his entire economic theory must go to him". "But Proudhon understood and felt freedom better than he did. Proudhon had the true instinct of a revolutionary, without talking about theory or philosophy. He worshipped the devil and preached anarchy. Marx may be able to theoretically base himself on a more rational organization of freedom than Proudhon, but he has no instinct of freedom. He is an authoritarian through and through".

And Bakunin goes on to compare himself with Marx, saying: "Marx was, and still is, far more advanced than I am then.

given Bakunin an opportunity to clear up the doubts that were in fact entertained by certain circles in Paris".

The following month, Bakunin met Marx in Berlin. They made amends, at any rate. Bakunin later wrote about this: "Our mutual friends finally made us shake hands, and in the midst of some half-joking and strange talk, Marx told me that I now headed a secret society of very well-trained Communists, and that if I told one of them to kill Bakunin, he would get rid of you in an instant. After this conversation, we did not meet again until 1864". What Marx said "half-jokingly" in 1848 was to be put into serious practice 24 years later. When the opposition of the anarchists in the First International got in the way of Marx's attempt at personal rule, he tried to get rid of Bakunin through sheer spiritual assassination. But we will return to that later.

## V

According to Arnold Ruge, a senior to Marx and Bakunin, who met Bakunin in Leipzig at the time, "After much effort, Bakunin had finally obtained the funds to start an uprising in Russia, and now he was going to Breslau, near the Russian border, in order to prepare for this uprising". He also said, "Bakunin made connections with many people there. He was respected by everyone for his intelligence and lovable personality. He gathered many Russians around him for the purpose he had planned. He also made contact with the Czechs in the same way, and decided to hold a Slavic congress in Prague so that the various Slavic nations could understand each other". I have already said a little about this congress and the uprising that took place shortly thereafter. According to Jacob Murray, author of *Bohemian Politics*, when the putsch broke out and soldiers began to gather in the streets, heavy gunfire rang out from the windows of the Blue Star

Marx attacked Herweg ferociously over the putsch. Bakunin defended his friend, and as a result Bakunin and Marx broke off their friendship. Bakunin later wrote about that time, "On this issue, as I think about it now, I can honestly say that Marx and Engels were more right. They judged the general situation better than I did. But they attacked Herweg with the bluntness that is their habit of attacking. And I defended them fervently for my friend who was not there. And then our clash arose". Bakunin then went to Berlin, Breslau, and Prague, where he propagated democracy and revolution at the Slavic Congress and also took part in the putsch there, which was soon put down. Then he returned to Breslau. During Bakunin's stay in Breslau, the following article appeared in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* as a Paris report: "Someone asserts that regarding the Polish Putsch, George Sand has documents which put the exiled Russian Michel Bakunin in a very difficult position. They state that he is a newly hired Russian spy, and that he has been the driving force behind the recent capture of some unfortunate Poles. George Sand showed these documents to some of her friends". Bakunin immediately wrote a rebuttal to this slander, which was first published in a newspaper in Breslau and then reprinted in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. Bakunin also wrote a letter to George Sand, asking for an explanation for why her name had been used in this way. George Sand immediately sent a reply to the editor-in-chief of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. "What your correspondent has reported is entirely false. I have never had any proof of the rumors you wish to make against Bakunin. I appeal to your honor and conscience to have this letter published immediately in your paper". Marx published the letter in the paper. At the same time, he gave the following explanation for publishing the Paris correspondent's report: "In this way we have fulfilled the newspaper's duty to keep a close watch on public figures. And at the same time, we have

Not by a long way. He was a scholar incomparably superior to me. I knew nothing of economics, nor was I completely free from metaphysical abstractions. My socialism was merely instinctive. He was younger than I was (Marx was 26, Bakunin was 30 when they met), but he was already an atheist, a learned materialist, and a thoughtful socialist. It was during this period that he established the foundations of his theory as we know it today." "We met quite often, for I respected him for his scholarship and, although always mixed with personal vanity, for his earnest and earnest efforts for the proletariat. And I craved dialogue with him. His conversations were always informative and full of intelligence when they were not laced with vile hatred. But sadly, that hatred too often entered into them". "But there was never any natural intimacy between us; our temperaments did not permit it. He called me a sentimental idealist, and rightly so. I called him a treacherous and dangerous show-off, and rightly so too". In his "Early History of Social Democracy in Germany", Adler acknowledges Marx's attitude, quoting the Russian writer Snenkov. "He spoke with an imperative tone. He had no tolerance for the slightest contradiction in others. At the same time, he felt his mission and believed that he was born to rule and lay down laws for the people. In a word, he was the epitome of a democratic dictator". Marx also said, "He had no qualms with his opponents, and his debates were truly formidable, due to his great learning and, unfortunately, his lack of care in the way he attacked them. He was never able to debate without insults, and always stepped outside the debate, turning the white of facts into black". Bakunin also said the same thing about Engels in a letter to his French comrade Albert Richial, calling Marx "bourgeois, subversive, exploitative, by tradition and instinct". "Around 1845, Marx rose to the head of the German Communists, and shortly thereafter, together with his sworn friend Engels, founded a secret society of German Communists, or strong-arm socialists. This Engels was as learned as Marx, and though not as learned, was more

practical instead; and was as adept at political slander, lies, and intrigue as Marx”.

### III

In November 1847, Bakunin gave a famous speech at a banquet for Poles commemorating the first Polish uprising in 1830. "Peace between Poles and Russians will become a reality only through their joint revolutionary movement against the tyranny of Tsar Nicholas. And this revolution will come soon. This peace between Poles and Russians will also bring about the liberation of all Slavic nations that are under foreign bondage". Bakunin originally considered the Slavs to be the most free-spirited people. He believed that if the bondage of the autocratic government imported from Germany could be broken, a young and free nation would naturally develop and be of great help to the progress of world civilization. This is what Bakunin meant by Panslavism. And he himself said, "The Slav-Polish problem has been my fixed idea since 1846, and my specialty since 1848-1849". However, Marx held the exact opposite view, so-called Pan-Germanism, which claimed that Germany had become reactionary because of its ties with Russia, and that this influence would lead all of Europe to despotism. And it seems that Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism continued to haunt Bakunin and Marx even after they later came to advocate a purely international proletarian revolution.

Anyway, as a result of this speech, Bakunin was exiled from France at the request of the Russian ambassador, Kislev, and went to Brussels. In order to remove public sympathy for Bakunin, Kislev spread a rumor that he was a spy used by the Russian ambassador, but that he had been dismissed because his methods were a little too extreme. And the French Minister of the Interior, Count Duchâtel, gave a response to a question

in the House of Peers that supported this rumor. Marx was also in Brussels. He too had been exiled from France since 1845. Bakunin then wrote to his comrade Herweg, in which he spoke of his negotiations with Marx: "Marx and Engels - and especially Marx - are up to their usual mischief here: vanity, cunning, slander, lofty ideals and cowardice in deeds, talking about life, activity and sincerity and then having absolutely no life, activity or sincerity at all; sickening tactics against literary workers and eloquent workers; denouncing Feuerbach as bourgeois; people who are nothing but bourgeois, tirelessly repeating the word bourgeois against others. In a word, lies and fools, fools and lies. It is impossible to breathe freely among such people. And so I will not join their Communist league, nor do I want to have anything to do with them”.

### IV

In 1848, as a result of the February Revolution, the doors of France were opened to Bakunin. He hurried back to Paris. However, he soon heard of revolutionary uprisings occurring one after another in Berlin and Vienna, so in April he went to Germany first, intending to join the Polish revolutionary movement from there. At this time, rumors of "bribing" Bakunin were circulating again. It was said that Flocon, the French Minister of Labor at the time, felt that if there were 300 men like Bakunin in France, it would be impossible to govern the country, so he gave him a French travel pass and 3,000 francs, on the condition that he would start a revolution in Germany, and drove him out of France. On the way, Bakunin stopped off in Cologne, where Marx and Engels were trying to found the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. It was just after the Paris-based German Democratic League had attempted a revolt in the Grand Duchy of Baden, which ended in a disastrous defeat. Bakunin's friend Herweg was a member of this league.