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Was Bakunin a Racist?

Answer to Zoe Baker

René Berthier

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April-June 2023

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- Letter to Engels, 25 May 1859: “I shall not forget the trick the little Jew played on me.”
- Letter to Engels, 30 July 1862: “*This negro-Jew of Lassalle...*”. “*I am now sure, as his head shape and hair prove, that he that he is descended from negroes, from those who followed Moses in the flight out of Egypt*”. Ironically, Marx himself had dark skin and frizzy hair. In his correspondence, Engels calls him “*Mohr*”, the Moor. “*Marx is said to be the descendant of Sephardic Jews who came to northern Europe after the reconquista of Spain by the Christians in 1492.*” (Black Dictionary, Christiane Passavant, Larry Portis, éditions Jacques Grancher).
- At the same time in his letters to Engels Marx, was showing of sovereign contempt for Lassalle, he was exquisitely polite and confounded himself in flattery and demonstrations of friendship in the letters he sent to the said Lassalle, asking him to find to ask him to find him work, to find him a publisher.
- When Lassalle published a book on Heraclitus, Marx wrote to him praising his insight, etc. (letter of 31 May 1858 to Lassalle) but he immediately wrote to Engels (same date): “*You must give me absolution for the praise I have had to address to Heraclitus the Obscure*”.

If Marx systematically attaches the qualifier of Jew to the name of certain individuals – always in a pejorative sense – he never mentions this qualifier when the persons designated have a positive character: thus Moses is not a Jew, he is an “Egyptian priest” (letter to Engels, 10 May 1861).

“Man, of whatever race and colour he may be, is truly indigenous to the universe.”

– Proudhon, *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (1851)

I would like to comment on a video by Zoe BAKER entitled “Bakunin was a racist”¹ and the corresponding text which can be found on the Internet.² The video is very interesting and obviously honest in its approach and shows a very good understanding of the Russian revolutionary’s thought, but it is also frustrating because although it states facts that are not in dispute, these facts are not explained.

First of all, I’d like to say a few words about Bakunin’s notion of “*race*”. According to him, the Germans played a decisive role in the constitution of feudal Europe: the unity of the “*Western world of Europe*” is to be attributed much more to the “*natural unity of the Germanic race*” than to the Catholic Church (a thesis defended by Mazzini). Bakunin’s thesis is interesting in that it provides an opportunity to understand the meaning he attributes to the term “*race*”: it is the “*identity of the natural temperament, customs, manners, sentiments, ideas, and primitive organisation*” brought by the Germanic peoples to the various countries of Europe.³ This definition could naturally apply to the Jewish “*race*”. It becomes clear that the term “*race*” does not include any ethnic characteristics but only cultural determinations.

Baker writes in the introduction of “*Bakunin was a racist*”: “*Most of the thousands of pages Bakunin wrote contain no anti-semitism. On the few occasions where he is antisemitic it is ab-*

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMOmzWneHUK>

² <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-baker-bakunin-was-a-racist>

³ Bakounine, “*La Théologie politique de Mazzini*”, *Œuvres*, Champ libre, Fragment G, édition L’Âge d’Homme, I, 133.

horrent and should be rejected by everybody. In this essay I shall explain how he was antisemitic and why it was wrong.

It is obvious that antisemitism is in any case “*abhorrent*” and must be “*rejected*” and in my opinion there is no reason to explain “*why*” it is wrong. I would qualify as an anti-Semite an author whose work is based on, or at least constantly suffused with, anti-Semitism. However, by telling us that Bakunin wrote *thousands* of pages that do not contain antisemitism and that there are only “*a few occasions where he is antisemitic*”, or that “*the racist passages [...] take up a small fraction of the thousands of pages Bakunin wrote*”, Baker raises our curiosity and we expect to find an explanation to this apparent contradiction, or at least this contrast, in a man whose activity and work was passionately devoted to the struggle for human emancipation. Unfortunately, this expectation is not fulfilled.

An interesting part of Baker’s argument lies in the five forms of antisemitism found in Bakunin:

- Firstly, on a number of occasions Bakunin unnecessarily pointed out that somebody he did not like was a Jew.
- The belief that Jewish people were united as a singular entity.
- The belief in an international Jewish conspiracy which played a key role in running the world via control of commerce, banking and the media.
- A specifically Jewish conspiracy against him.
- Stereotyping of Jews as wealthy bankers.

Let us set aside for the moment the idea of a Jewish conspiracy against him: all the other points Baker highlights are the most commonplace and absurd preconceptions of “*ordinary*” antisemitism, one might say. In other words, Bakunin does not innovate in this area. Where he *does* innovate, however, is in

- Letter to Antoinette Philips, March 24, 1861: “*This young lady, who literally overwhelmed me with her benevolence, is the ugliest creature I have ever seen in my life, an ugly Jewish head, a thin, protruding nose, an eternal smile or sneer on the lips...*”
- Letter to Engels, June 3, 1864: “*...Oppenheim, that Jew Süß from Egypt.*”
- Letter to Engels, August 19, 1865: “*The Swiss have practically no more one share in the Bank of Switzerland. It is the Jews of Berlin and Frankfurt who make the decisions.*”
- Letter to Engels, February 10, 1865: “*This Jew Horn...*”
- Letter to Engels, April 14, 1870: “*...the little Jew Leo Frankel...*”
- Letter to Engels, April 15, 1870: “*Frankelche * is the spitting Yid...*” (* pejorative diminutive in German).
- Letter to Engels, July 8, 1870: “*the little Jew Frankel...*”
- Letter to Engels, August 21, 1875: “*A Yid, sly looking, a small suitcase in his hand...*”
- Letter to Engels, August 25, 1879: “*There are many Jews and fleas here.*” etc.

Marx’s relationship with Lassalle

In his letters to Engels, Marx systematically calls him Ephraim, Itzig (a pejorative diminutive of Isaac, the symbolic name of the Jew in German). From 1862 onwards he also calls him the Itzig (der Itzig).

- Letter to Engels, 25 February 1859: “The Yid Braun” (Yid = Jüdel in German) (Braun also means brown brown, in reference to Lassalle’s very brown skin).

Herbert Rosenkranz, born in Vienna on 7 July 1924 and died on 5 September 2003 in Jerusalem, was an Austrian historian of Jewish faith.

Appendix

Here is a very brief overview of Marx's raging anti-Semitism (or judeophobia) in his correspondence, in which he systematically mentions the Jewish quality of the person he is talking about:

- Letter to Engels, March 31, 1851: "*the Jew Stibel*".
- Letter to Engels, January 21, 1853: "*That little Jew from Bamberger has not yet paid me a penny...*". Idem, letter of June 29, 1853: "...I hit the little Jew Bamberger of £2..."
- Letter to Engels, August 25, 1851: "*Tausenau [...] is gifted with the sense of trickery that little Jews have.*"
- Letter to Adolphe Cluss, March 25, 1853: "*The Jew Pulszky is over there.*"
- Letter to Engels, September 28, 1852: "*The Jew Fould is in permanent contact with the Orleans.*"
- Letter to Engels, February 16, 1857: "*The Jew Steinthal...*"
- Letter to Engels, May 25, 1859: about Max Friedländer: "*That accursed Jew from Vienna doesn't write either.*"
- Letter to Engels, February 9, 1860: "*That filthy Berlin correspondent of the Daily Telegraph is a yid by the name of Meier, relative of the owner of the business, an English yid by the name of Lévy.*"
- Letter to Engels, April 12, 1860: "*The factotum of the Jew Reuter who is not able to write in orthographic language...*"

the "*solution*" he proposes to the "*Jewish question*" – a completely unprecedented "*solution*", as we shall see, which seems to have escaped Zoe Baker's vigilance.

It seems to me, however, that before proceeding, a clarification must be made: One cannot reflect on the anti-Semitism of a 19th-century author with the evaluation criteria that were imposed after the horrors of the extermination of Jews during the Second World War.

Zoe Baker's Point of View is Frustrating

To begin with, I think it is incorrect to say bluntly that "*Bakunin was a racist*". To say that an author is a "*racist*" is to say that his thought, his work, is based on racism. Moreover Baker admits that racist allusions are rare in his writings. Secondly, while it is true that there are anti-Semitic statements in some of Bakunin's writings, to my knowledge there are no statements directed at other religious or ethnic communities or whatever, which is not the case with Marx, who targets not only the Slavs, but also the Jews and anyone else that isn't strictly speaking Germanic.⁴ So the issue here is strictly the relationship between Bakunin and the Jews. But there is more: it is the relationship between Bakunin and the Jews *during three or four years of his life*, corresponding to the period between 1869 and 1873.

This is precisely where Zoe Baker's point of view is frustrating: it is obvious that Baker is a person who has an excellent knowledge of Bakunin's work, and it is with some reason that Bakunin's antisemitism is pointed out because it is one thing

⁴ To be precise, there was no question of anti-Semitism in the time of Bakunin because the word was created by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1879, three years after the death of the Russian revolutionary. But it is obvious that the fact existed long before the invention of the word. Historically, pogroms—local riots directed against Jews, often encouraged by authorities—are among the most common manifestations of anti-Semitism.

that must be known. But to say outright that an author is anti-semitic, or more precisely racist, as is suggested in the title of Baker's article, suggests that he is structurally antisemitic or racist, if I may say so, that his work is based on antisemitism. It is another thing to say that he was antisemitic for three years, which raises the question: Why the hell three years? Baker obviously does not answer the question because the question is not asked. If one is not aware of this fact, the person who undertakes to analyse Bakunin's anti-Semitism is limited to the simple level of facts, of observation, and does not succeed in getting to the bottom of the problem.

The title of Baker's article tells us that Bakunin was a "racist", but the text itself deals exclusively with Bakunin's anti-Semitism. If we consider that *anti-Semitism* is racism specifically directed against the Jews, whereas racism has a more generic meaning, I have to say that Baker is mistaken because if Bakunin did indeed make anti-Semitic remarks for a short time, he never, to my knowledge, made racist remarks directed against other communities – which is not the case with Marx, for whom Eurocentrism, or even Germano-centrism, was a fundamental fact that excluded practically everyone else from the club of the "civilised".

Of course some people might be tempted to say: whether Bakunin was antisemitic for three years or all the time does not change the case, he was antisemitic, full stop. This attitude reminds me of an American TV film I saw about a very wealthy, perfectly Caucasian New York family who was suddenly ostracized from high society because it was discovered that one of the family's ancestors, dating back to the Civil War, was African-American. In other words, one is *irrevocably* Black. In the same way, Bakunin would be *irrevocably* racist.

Bakunin is an understatement, but to describe it as a "Jewish plot" is clearly absurd.

Conclusion: "The Substance Common to All Mankind"

Baker rightly quotes Bakunin saying that "*every people and the smallest folk-unit has its own character, its own specific mode of existence, its own way of speaking, feeling, thinking, and acting... Every people, like every person, is involuntarily that which it is and therefore has a right to be itself.*" But I'm afraid one very important point has been omitted in the quotation, drawn from *Statism and Anarchy*: Every people has the right to be itself, says Bakunin, but it does not follow that a people, an individual, has the right or the interest to make their nationality, their individuality, a matter of principle and that they must "*drag this ball and chain all their lives*":

"On the contrary, the less they think of themselves, the more they become permeated with *the substance common to all mankind*, the more the nationality of the one and the individuality of the other take on prominence and meaning."⁵⁷ [My emphasis]

This call to overcome identity-based particularisms expresses a universalism that is undoubtedly more representative of Bakunin's real thought than his anti-Semitic aberrations.

Peter Novick (July 26, 1934, Jersey City – February 17, 2012, Chicago) was an American historian who was Professor of History at the University of Chicago.

He founded the Jewish Studies program at the University of Chicago.

⁵⁷ Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*. French edition, L'Âge d'homme, IV, p. 238.

French delegates appeared in The Hague holding mandates no one knew where they came from and how they had got them. The verification of mandates was impossible. Serrailier, Secretary of the General Council for France (where the IWA was as prohibited as it was in Germany, but where, unlike Germany, there were active sections) arrived in The Hague with his pockets full of mandates. Six French delegates were only known by their pseudonyms, without indication of the city they held their mandate from. The only one who announced a city – Rouen, in Normandy – found himself soon after repudiated by the Rouen Federation because he had voted with the General Council when he had the imperative mandate to vote for the federalists.

Same thing with Bordeaux. The Internationalists of this city realized later that their delegate, who had received the imperative mandate to vote for the federalists, voted for the General Council. Two other French delegates, Swarm and Walter – pseudonyms – were arrested shortly after and went on trial; one in Toulouse, the other in Paris. It appeared soon after that Swarm, agent of the General Council in Toulouse, was a spy; concerning Walter, agent of the General Council in Paris, he repented and vowed to become a bitter opponent of the International.⁵⁶

Immediately after the Hague Congress, the English Federal Council realized that the delegate who represented it was not even a member of the International!

All these bureaucratic measures had only one aim: through the elimination of Bakunin (and James Guillaume), to eliminate the federalist current in the International which was standing in the way of Marx's plans to transform the International into a political party. To say, therefore, that there was a "plot" against

There is a very simple way to find Bakunin's anti-Semitic remarks: search the CD-Rom of his works published by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, on which all his known work is available, published or unpublished. All you have to do is to search for the word "Jew" and its variants. It is true that Bakunin wrote mainly in French, and this could be a handicap for someone who does not know this language.

In doing so, I noticed something that intrigued me a lot: before 1869 there are no antisemitic remarks in his published texts, his correspondence, his unpublished texts. I would add that the word "Jew" hardly ever appears.

It is only from 1869 onwards that one begins to find anti-Semitic allusions, i.e. after the Basle Congress of the IWA, that is when Bakunin's influence in the International was beginning to overshadow Marx: the "Marxist" current was outvoted by the "Bakuninian" current, a situation which was absolutely *intolerable* for Marx. I also noticed that his anti-Semitic remarks stopped after his exclusion from the International (1872) and the period that immediately followed. One is therefore strongly tempted to deduce that Bakunin's anti-Semitic statements are closely linked to the nature of his conflictual relationship with Marx and his bureaucratic exclusion from the International.

Zoe Baker makes a mistake in saying that Bakunin's anti-semitism is the result of the impregnation of the time and his being Russian. If this had been the case it would not have been necessary to wait until 1869 to spot antisemitic remarks in his writings. In fact, Bakunin was brought up in an atmosphere of Enlightenment far remote from the anti-Jewish ideology of Russia at the time. Bakunin's own upbringing does not support the idea that he was influenced by the rampant anti-Semitism of Russia, as his family environment was culturally very un-Russian. His father had lived in Florence, in Italy, from the age of 8 to 35, frequented liberal and freethinking circles and was in touch with "all the famous philosophers and scientists in Europe at the time". It was a milieu, says Bakunin, that was "*in com-*

⁵⁶ James Guillaume, *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs*, vol I, t. 2 p. 326.

*plete contradiction with everything that existed and breathed in his time in Russia, where only a small sect of more or less persecuted Freemasons kept and slowly fanned, in secret, the sacred fire of respect and love of humanity.”*⁵ It was precisely in this environment that the young Bakunin lived.

Marx-Bakunin: A Kind of Infernal Couple

About ten years ago, I undertook a research on Bakunin’s antisemitism, a question that nobody seems to have bothered to study. There is obviously no one in the libertarian movement who approves of Bakunin’s anti-Semitic excesses, but curiously the militants are content to condemn them and move on. There is a general consensus that these are reprehensible abuses but that they do not detract from the general meaning of his thought, which remains totally oriented towards the affirmation of human solidarity and emancipation.

However, it seems to me that it would have been necessary to study more deeply the causes of his antisemitism. One is not born an anti-Semite, one becomes one; the interesting question is precisely: how and why?

⁵ Concerning the Jews Marx wrote Engels on July 30, 1862, that “the Jewish Nigger, Lassalle,” was fortunately leaving London toward the end of the week, adding: “It is now absolutely clear to me that, as both the shape of his head and his hair texture shows — he descends from the Negroes who joined Moses’ flight from Egypt (unless his mother or grandmother on the paternal side hybridized with a nigger.) Now this combination of Germanness and Jewishness with a primarily negro substance necessarily creates a strange product. The pushiness of the fellow is also nigger-like.” Concerning the Africans: Referring to Pierre Trémaux (an openly racist author), whom he quotes approvingly, Marx writes to Engels that “on the surface formation predominant in Russia the Slav has been tartarised and mongolised; likewise (he spent a long time in Africa) he shows that the common negro type is only a degeneration of a far higher one.” (Karl Marx letter to F.Engels dated 7-Aug-1866)

[one of whom was also a member of the General Council], two Swiss delegates, a Spanish delegate. James Guillaume notes that there was one unknown without a warrant.

Bakunin commented, ironically:

“It is fair to add to this list the daughters of Karl Marx, who were allowed to sit at the last meeting of this secret conference. The chronicle does not say if the conference gave them the right to vote; it could have done so without derogation because these young ladies had as many titles to represent the International proletariat than the greatest number of delegates.”⁵⁴

The Hague Congress which took place the following year, in September 1872, was as fake as the London Conference the previous year.

Germany possessed no section of the International, but only individual members in extremely small numbers and could not therefore send regular delegates to The Hague. However, so as to strengthen the position of Marx, nine Germans were introduced as delegates of non-existent sections of the IWA. Besides, to vote at the Congress the sections had to pay their dues, which the Germans had not done. Bebel wrote in the *Volkstaat* of 16 March 1872 that the Germans had never paid contributions to London! Engels was outraged to note that he could count only 208 individual German membership cards:

“I must ask you straight out to tell us frankly how the International stands with you: roughly how many stamps have been distributed to how many places, and which places are involved? The 208 counted by Fink are surely not all there are?”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Mémoire présenté par la Fédération jurassienne*, 1 re partie, p. 204.

⁵⁵ Engels to W. Liebknecht, 22 May, 1872: Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 44, p. 376.

Germany, yet Bakunin does not have a statue erected in his honour. Marx and Engels were convinced that the German domination of Slavonic territories in Central Europe was a “*historical progress*.”⁵²

After the Commune

Marx and his friends had taken advantage of the disorganization which followed the Franco-Prussian war and the crushing of the Commune of Paris to convene a private meeting which decided without congress debate to transform in a mandatory way the International into a political party aiming to gain access to power. This was a question which had been debated in the organization but which had not led to the irreparable because the autonomy of the federations had not been called into question, that is to say the faculty for each Federation to define its own path towards emancipation – a point of view claimed by Bakunin and his friends.

The London conference in September 1871 consisted of twenty-three members, thirteen of whom – a majority – were members of the General Council and appointed by it, and had *no mandate*. Seven of these nonelected members sat as corresponding secretaries of various countries which were not represented at the Conference.⁵³ But the General Council had appointed six other of its members to represent it. Only nine persons were delegated by sections: six Belgian delegates

⁵² Just as US domination over California was a “*historical progress*”: “*And will Bakunin accuse the Americans of a ‘war of conquest’, which, although it deals a severe blow to his theory based on ‘justice and humanity’, was nevertheless waged wholly and solely in the interest of civilisation? Or is it perhaps unfortunate that splendid California has been taken away from the lazy Mexicans, who could not do anything with it?*” (Engels, “*Democratic PanSlavism*”).

⁵³ “*These thirteen members of the General Council, who had no mandate, formed by themselves the majority of the Conference, composed of twenty-three members.*” James Guillaume, *L’Internationale, documents et souvenirs*, éd. Champ libre. II, 3e partie, p. 194.

By immersing myself in the CD-Rom of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, I found myself in the situation of the guy who pulls a piece of wool sticking out of a knitting, and finally the whole knitting comes. This story ended up with a strong volume that I never tried to publish, entitled *Panslavism, Pangermanism and the Jewish Question: Bakunin and Marx*. In this study I have associated Marx and Bakunin because the two men constitute, in my eyes, a kind of infernal couple whose positions confront or agree, depending on the circumstances, and who to a large extent, define themselves in relation to each other. This is why I thought it necessary to study both Bakunin’s and Marx’s antisemitism.

What’s more, in the course of this work I discovered that Marx did not confine himself to virulent anti-Semitism, but extended his Eurocentric racism to Asia and Indian society, to Africans torn from their communities to become slaves for the greater good of progress, to “*lazy Mexicans*” from whom the United States were right to seize California, to “cattle-stealing” Montenegrins, and so on.

But that’s not the point here.⁶

In any case, Marx’s large-scale racism does not excuse Bakunin’s shortlived anti-Semitism.

On this issue, I found that there was a choice between three approaches:

- We stick strictly to Bakunin’s anti-Semitic statements, we condemn them, say that this does not constitute the core of Bakunin’s thought — which seems to be Zoe Baker’s viewpoint.
- We consider that it radically disqualifies Bakunin’s thought.
- We contextualize his anti-Semitism, which leads us to realize that there is a relationship that I would call “di-

⁶ Bakounine, *Histoire de ma vie*, 1870. See CD-Rom.

alectical” between Bakunin’s anti-Semitism and his alleged Germanophobia on the one hand, and Marx’s anti-Semitism and Slavophobia on the other.

Contextualising, I should point out, is not meant to minimise or excuse Bakunin’s remarks, but the question is whether one wants to limit oneself to noting his anti-Semitism or to understanding it. The question is: why on earth does a guy who shows no sign of anti-Semitism suddenly starts being an anti-Semite at the age of 55 and stops being one three years later?

Marx and Engels’ Slavophobia

It is hard to understand today how the accusations of “*slavophilia*” and “*panslavism*” could have affected Bakunin, as well as the anti-Russian and anti-Slav racism of which he was the victim – racism that is just as reprehensible as Bakunin’s anti-Semitism. Bakunin had always fought against Panslavism and must have felt a deep sense of injustice at the accusations made by Marx and his entourage.

Marx’s anti-Slavism goes back a long way, and the question of German-Russian relations opposed him to Bakunin as early as 1848, when he was accused of being an “*agent of the tsar*” in Marx’s *Neue Rheinische Gazette*. So there was an old dispute. In other words, the conflict between the two men predates their differences over the International Working Men’s Association.

Marx and Engels’ slavophobia must be viewed in two different ways. Firstly, it manifested itself in their writings during the 1848–1849 Revolution, when they tackled the issue “*head-on*” and indulged in extreme language – especially Engels. Then came the period of maturity in the 1870s, when slavophobia became more theorized.

by Mr Borkheim, next to which the article by Mr Maurice Hess attacking me could pass for a model of clarity and honesty.”

Bakunin was referring to the latest slander against him: the report on the Basel Congress by Hess, where, among other things, he accused Bakunin of planning to move the General Council to Geneva. Hess wrote:

“A Russian party did not yet exist at the previous congresses of the International. It is only in the course of the previous year that an attempt to change the organisation and principles of the International, and even to move the seat of the General Council from London to Geneva, was made by Bakunin, a Russian patriot whose revolutionary good faith we doubt not, but who cherishes fanciful projects no less to be condemned than the means of action he employs to achieve them.”

Bakunin was in particular accused of being a “*Slavophile*”, which was to him the supreme insult, for during the revolution of 1848–49 he never ceased to call the Slavs of Central Europe to fight against the Russian empire and to ally with the German democrats against despotism, a point of view to which Marx and Engels were radically opposed because a tactical alliance with the Slavic democrats would have challenged German national unity and would have withdrawn from Germany the control it exercised over Slavonic territories, such as Bohemia.

Bakunin’s activity in favour of democracy in Central Europe had owed him 8 years of fortress in Russia and 4 years of relegation in Siberia, after which he escaped. Few revolutionaries of the time paid as much for democracy in

“Only if one lacked any understanding of Slavic affairs and mistrusted any movement could one label [Bakunin] a Russian spy in the pay of the Petersburg government. He should not be watched any less closely for this reason [...]. The effect on our affairs is always equally damaging, and as every sane Russian is a panslavist, the older refugee Turgenieff just like the younger Bakunin [...], these gentlemen should understand for once and for all that they are suspicious to us for this reason. They should be all the more careful in their public appearances in Europe and should not butt into our party business, much less butt us out. Who do the Russian refugees represent? [...] The Russians being considered here are panslavists who are satisfied with the government or not. The loudest of the aforementioned have to wander across the border from time to time for reasons of state. Thus, all Russian refugees are instinctively enemies of our culture. They can’t help it! May the Tsar save them! Amen!”⁵¹

Bakunin was aware of the first part of Borkheim’s article, which he mentioned in his draft “*To the Citizen Editors of the Réveil*”, and which he commented on:

“I have wished, Messieurs, that one of you should have the patience to read these three or four articles that have been published in this journal under the title ‘Michael Bakunin’. As for me, I avow that I have never before read anything so confused, so odiously ridiculous and stupid, as this latest tirade

⁵¹ Quoted by Wolfgang Eckhardt, *The First Socialist Schism*, <https://usa.anarchistlibraries.net/library/wolfgang-eckhardt-the-first-socialistschism#fn176>

Early Slavophobia: 1849–1849

In 1848 Bakunin wrote an *Appeal to the Slavs*, which was just as much an appeal to the Germans, and whose content was largely determined by his analysis of the present evolution of the revolution in Germany. A little later he wrote, in his “*Confession*” (1850):

“I wanted to convince the Slavs of the necessity of a rapprochement with the German democrats, as well as with the Magyar democrats. Circumstances had changed since May: the revolution had weakened, reaction was intensifying everywhere, and only the united forces of all European democracies could hope to defeat the reactionary alliance of governments.”

Addressing the Czechs, Bakunin told them that they were right to curse “*this old German policy, the object of your legitimate hatred*”, but that they had to get over it.

This passage earned Bakunin scathing comments from Engels in an article published in the *Neue Rheinische Gazette* on February 15 and 16, 1849. What are the “*crimes*” committed by the Germans against the Slavs? Let’s skip, says Engels, the role of the Germans in the division of Poland, “*which is not at issue here*” (sic). Thus, Germany’s participation in the dismantling of Poland is not only blithely dismissed from the debate, it is justified by the fact that in Northern Europe, the Germans Germanized vast tracts of Slavic territory “in the interests of civilization”. In the South, “*German industry, German trade, and German culture by themselves served to introduce the German language into the country*”. And the Austrian Slavs want their “*so-called rights*”? But “*an independent Bohemian-Moravian state would be wedged between Silesia and Austria; Austria and Styria would be cut off by the ‘South-Slav republic’ from their natural débouché [outlet] – the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean; and*

*the eastern part of Germany would be torn to pieces like a loaf of bread that has been gnawed by rats!"; "And all that by way of thanks for the Germans having given themselves the trouble of civilizing the stubborn Czechs and Slovenes, and introducing among them trade, industry, a tolerable degree of agriculture, and culture!" All this for having "prevented these twelve million Slavs from becoming Turkish!"*⁷

Moving on to a more general overview, Engels takes stock of the actions of civilized nations who have demolished the "small, stunted and impotent little nations", who have broken up "many a tender national blossom" to create great empires capable of participating in historical development. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon are called to the rescue: had they been "moved by the same sort of appeal as that which panslavism now makes on behalf of its ruined clients, what would have become of history!" In conclusion, Engels states: "it turns out these 'crimes' of the Germans and Magyars against the said Slavs are among the best and most praiseworthy deeds which our and the Magyar people can boast in their history." Engels even goes so far as to criticize the Magyars because "they have acted too much submissively and weakly against the puffed-up Croats"...

The claim of the Croats, dominated by the Magyars, was in fact to demand their independence. On June 5, 1848, Croatian deputies, worried by the turn the Hungarian government was taking, proclaimed Croatian independence. The Hungarian government refused to recognize this independence, so the Croats declared war on Hungary on June 5, 1848. The Magyars, according to the criteria adopted by Marx and Engels for the occasion, enjoyed the status of a "historical nation" because they had participated, along with the German nation, in the domination of the Slavs.

The Slovaks of Hungary, too, voted a motion on May 10 calling for autonomy for the regions in which they lived. On

⁷ See the appendix to this article: "Anthology of Marx's anti-Semitism".

excommunicated" prophesied Marx in a letter to Engels dated 27 July 1869.⁴⁸

Engels responded on the 30 July:

"It's quite clear that fat Bakunin is behind it. If this damned Russian really thinks of intriguing his way to the top of the workers' movement, then the time has come to give him once and for all what he deserves and ask the question whether a panslavist can be a member of an international workers' association. The fellow can very easily be tackled. He should not imagine that he can play a cosmopolitan communist for the workers, and a burning national panslavist for the Russians. A few hints to Borkheim, who is just dealing with him now, would be quite in order; Borkheim will undoubtedly understand a broad hint".⁴⁹

After breaking the necks of those "Proudhonist jackasses,"⁵⁰ it was now time to excommunicate the Bakuninists.

By saying that Borkheim "is just dealing with him now", Marx is no doubt referring to a draft article he was preparing against Bakunin. On February 10, 1869, Sigismund Borkheim had asked Engels for his opinion on this article, and suggested that he pass it on to Marx. The article was finally published anonymously in four parts between July and November 1869 in the Berlin democratic newspaper *Die Zukunft* under the title "Michael Bakunin". The article ended with an anti-Russian diatribe:

⁴⁸ Marx to Engels, 27 July 1869, MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol. 43, p. 332- 333.

⁴⁹ Engels to Marx, 30 July 1869, MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol. 43, p. 335- 336.

⁵⁰ Marx to Engels, 11 September 1867. MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol. 42, p. 423.

perfectly irrelevant whether it was a “*Jewish*” plot. It is clear that Marx, Hess and Borkheim didn’t have political differences with Bakunin *because they were Jews*, but it is equally clear that Bakunin’s lack of discernment led him to this conclusion.

On the other hand, reading the correspondence between Marx, Hess, Borkheim and a few others, not necessarily Jews, shows that Marx was undeniably the highly authoritative conductor of a group of men who took it upon themselves to implement a strategy of control of the IWA, and who were determined to prevent anyone, Bakunin first, from thwarting this project at all costs. So Bakunin was not entirely wrong when he spoke of “*a very well-disciplined legion*”, although this “*legion*” had nothing to do with a “*Jewish legion*”: there actually was a concerted action against Bakunin, but this group of men were far from being all Jews.

Baker says that “*Bakunin framed these events as a Jewish conspiracy against him because he was an antisemite*”. This suggests that, *because he was primarily anti-Semitic*, he concluded that there was a Jewish plot against him, even though an examination of his entire work prior to 1869 shows that he was not.

One could look at things from another angle: “*Bakunin became an antisemite because he was convinced there was a Jewish conspiracy against him.*” This in no way reduces the questionable nature of Bakunin’s positions, but it is probably a better representation of reality.

An examination of the correspondence between Marx, Engels and those close to them does not allow us to dispute that there was concerted action directed against Bakunin, as Marx shows in a letter to Engels dated 27 July 1869: “*This Russian obviously wishes to become the dictator of the European workers’ movement. He should be careful. Otherwise he will be officially*

May 13, the Serbs took a similar step. The ensuing hardening of Hungarian attitudes did much to drive the empire’s Slavs into the arms of reaction: later, when Hungarian armies found themselves in a difficult position against Austrian forces, they had to contend at the same time with revolts in Transylvania, Banat and Vojvodina. Only when the situation became desperate did Kossuth, who commanded the Hungarian forces, pass a liberal law in an attempt to rally the non-native nationalities, but it was too late.

Curiously, during the first stage of the revolution, Engels had developed a discourse strikingly similar to that of Bakunin in his *Appeal to the Slavs*, when he took stock of the historical action of the Germans over the last seventy years: sending troops against American independence, war against the French revolution, against the freedom of Holland, interventions against freedom in Switzerland, Greece, Portugal, dismemberment of Poland, enslavement of Lombardy, Venice.⁸

But suddenly Engels reverses his position: the “*infamies committed in other countries with the help of Germany*”, for which the German people themselves were “*largely responsible*”, became civilizing acts. The Germans, whose blindness Engels had denounced six months earlier, their “*slave soul*”, their “*innate aptitude for providing lansquenets*” and “*executioners’ henchmen*”, are now becoming the instruments of progress and civilization. In July 1848, we were told that “*the peoples oppressed through Germany’s fault would long ago have reached a normal state of civilization*”; in February 1849, we hear of the “*petty national aspirations*” of the Slavs.

So what had happened?

⁸ Engels, *Democratic Panslavism*. Engels pays little heed to the relentless struggle of the Slavs of Central and Southeastern Europe – to which the Magyars must be added – against the Ottoman threat. In 1683, it was a Slav army, the Polish army led by Sobieski, that broke the Turkish siege of Vienna, probably saving Western Christendom in the process.

It's not enough to explain this reversal by Engels' simple hatred of Bakunin, nor by his fear of seeing the latter's positions gain in importance. Even if the language used in the *Appeal to the Slavs* may have irritated Engels – a language that he and Marx had been using shortly before: fraternity, outstretched hand, etc. – it is not conceivable that Engels would have been so upset by Bakunin's position. However, it is impossible to imagine that Bakunin's intention escaped him, namely the realization of unity of action between German, Hungarian and Czech democrats. Perhaps this is precisely where the problem lies. Engels understood perfectly well that, if such unity were achieved, it would necessarily lead to the constitution of a Slavic state in central Europe – roughly equivalent to present-day Czechoslovakia – and his entire argument in *Democratic Panslavism* consists of categorically rejecting this hypothesis.

On the contrary, Engels insists that the Southern Slavs are not capable of founding a state, that their national claims are unjustified, that they don't deserve to form a state, and that keeping them within the Germanic orbit is the best thing that could happen to them from the point of view of civilization. The Slavs are the “*main instruments of the counterrevolutionaries*”, they provide the troops that put down the revolutions, whose brutalities were imputed to the Germans – but Engels is careful not to say that these were Austrian armies. It's as if the French Left blamed the massacre of the Communards on the Bretons who made up the bulk of the Versailles troops. The Slavs, in short, sided with the counter-revolution, “*and for this cowardly, base betrayal of the revolution we shall at some time take a bloody revenge against the Slavs.*”⁹

⁹ *La Nouvelle Gazette rhénane*, 2 juillet 1848, op. cit. pp. 204–206. Engels ne dit là rien d'autre que ce que dit aussi Bakounine, à cette différence près que ce dernier ne changera pas d'opinion.

alone”.⁴⁷ Incidentally, Hess's article “*was not noticed by anyone and vanished without a trace*”. Herzen ends with this advice: “*leave your Jews as they are; but my advice is nevertheless to think it over carefully.*” Obviously, Herzen did not approve of Bakunin talking about the Jews: in a letter to Ogarev dated October 21, he had written about the letter to *Le Réveil*: “*I don't like it very much. Why speak of races, of Jews?*”

A “Jewish Plot”?

Baker tells us that the fourth form of anti-Semitism in Bakunin is the belief that there was “*a specifically Jewish conspiracy against him within the 1st International*”. It is customary to condemn any attitude based on a “*conspiracy theory*”, but I forget who said that this is no reason to think that conspiracies do not exist. This is why, before dismissing the idea that a “*plot*” was waged against Bakunin on the sole pretext that it was supposedly a “*Jewish plot*”, I think it necessary to examine the reality of this plot, whatever its nature.

First of all, it seems judicious to show that in the context of extreme antagonism between two currents within the International and the stress that this antagonism could provoke, a certain number of elements put together could have convinced Bakunin that there was, rightly or wrongly, a “*conspiracy*” directed against him. The indisputable fact is that among the opponents of Bakunin who launched a campaign of slander against him were Jews: this was undoubtedly enough for Bakunin to conclude that there was a “*Jewish*” plot against him.

If one defines a plot as a concerted action between several persons to harm or discredit another person, there is no doubt that there was one against Bakunin, but retrospectively, it is

⁴⁷ Quoted by James Guillaume, *Avant-propos*, Bakounine, Œuvres, tome V, p. 236, éd. Stock.

to erase or even weaken his beneficent influence with the simple aim of taking revenge on him.”⁴⁵

These remarks, made in his private correspondence, leave no doubt as to the sincerity of the Russian revolutionary.

The other reason why Bakunin spared Marx was tactical.

He thought that one day he would have to engage in a struggle against Marx, “*not for personal offence, of course, but for a question of principle, about state communism*”, of which the German and English parties were “*the most ardent supporters*”: “*Then it will be a struggle to the death. ut there is a time for everything, and the time for this struggle has not yet come.*”⁴⁶

He thought he could divide the Marxist camp by attacking the small fry, the “scum”. If he had waged “*open war against Marx himself*” from the outset, he thought, “*three quarters of the members of the International would have turned against me and I would have been at a disadvantage*”. In short, Bakunin expected Marx to declare hostilities, in which case, he said, “*I would have the best part*”. Apart from being extremely naive, Bakunin makes two mistakes here:

- He is entering an unfamiliar field, tactics, and he is taking the risk that things may turn against him;
- He seemed to be unaware that in reality it was Marx who was isolated: *Marx relied on a German federation which in reality did not exist and on English sections which were increasingly disinterested in the International.*

Herzen was not fooled: he replied to Bakunin: “*I don’t like your politics. It doesn’t suit you to play Machiavelli with your Divide (...) You don’t want to attack Marx simply so as not to put yourself at a disadvantage? Well, then, leave Hess and company*

⁴⁵ Bakunin, *Letter to Herzen*, 28 October 1869.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Until now only the Russians had been the object of German hatred,¹⁰ but:

“since the revolution, hatred of Czechs and Croats has been added, and (...) only by the most determined use of terror against these Slav peoples can we, jointly with the Poles and Magyars, safeguard the revolution (...) there will be a struggle, an ‘inexorable life-and-death struggle’ against those Slavs who betray the revolution; an annihilating¹¹ fight and ruthless terror — not in the interests of Germany, but in the interests of the revolution!”¹²

This absolutely delirious, paranoid slavophobia, which appeared in a newspaper of which Marx was editor-in-chief, never received the slightest disapproval from Marx. Of course, the “*revolution*” which Engels refers to in his writings is not the proletarian revolution but the bourgeois revolution that will achieve German national unity and confirm German domination over the Slavic territories.

Significantly, Engels’ article, which quotes large extracts from the *Appeal to the Slavs*, makes no reference to the passage where Bakunin distinguishes between German reactionaries and democrats. He seems far more concerned to emphasize what separates Germans from Slavs than what can bring them together, even though Bakunin proclaims: “*It is a sacred duty for all of us, soldiers of the Revolution, democrats of all countries, to unite our forces, to get along and to group together.*”

¹⁰ Engels, *Democratic Panslavism* <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1849/02/15.htm>

¹¹ “...hatred of Russians was and still is the primary revolutionary passion among Germans.” Engels, *Democratic Panslavism*.

¹² The German “*Vernichtung*” can be translated by “*destruction*”, “*elimination*” or “*extermination*”. “*Vernichtungskampf*” could very well mean “*war of extermination*”.

The diffusion of the *Communist Manifesto* in Germany in 1848 had been checked by Marx and Engels themselves who feared that the book should disoblige the bourgeois radicals whom the authors hoped they would subsidize the *Neue Rheinische Gazette*, a liberal bourgeois publication. Marx had appealed to Engels to put pressure to sell shares for the NRG, and Engels replied that “*he was having little success raising money and that he would have none at all if a copy of the programme of seventeen points ever found its way to Eberfeld or Barmen*”, writes William Otto Henderson.¹³

Engels’ exact words were: “*If even a single copy of our 17 points were to circulate here, all would be lost for us*”. (The 17-point program, or “*Demands of the Communist party in Germany*”, incorporated the content of the Communist Manifesto.) In the same letter, Engels informed Marx of his fear at the rise of the action of the textile workers, who were in danger of compromising everything: “*The workers are beginning to bestir themselves a little, still in a very crude way, but as a mass. They at once formed coalitions. But to us, that can only be a hindrance*”¹⁴ (sic!!!).

Marx and Engels, on the basis of their very newly discovered “*materialist*” conception of history, believed that the bourgeoisie had to exercise power before the working class could do so in its turn: social unrest therefore had to be contained so as not to handicap the chances of the bourgeoisie.

In 1848, Bakunin was not an anarchist, he was concerned with two things: promoting the national emancipation of the Slav nationalities of Central Europe and freeing them from all Russian influence. He was therefore in favour of an alliance between the German democrats fighting for national unity and

¹³ Friedrich Engels, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* No. 223, February 16, 1849, Op. cit p. 378.

¹⁴ William Otto Henderson, *The Life of Friedrich Engels*, vol 1, p. 142. See also in French: Marx-Engels, Correspondance, Éditions sociales, Paris 1971, pages 54 and 543.

“Such, my dear friends, is the pack whose persecution I have had the misfortune to incur. What have I done to deserve them? I assure you I don’t know yet. But I suppose my Russian nationality played a big part. They can’t forgive me for being Russian, a Kosak.”

However reprehensible Bakunin’s manifestations of anti-Semitism may be, it is clear that he himself felt victimized by the racism of his opponents.

Bakunin Spares Marx

Bakunin did seem to spare Marx, and he explains this in an exchange of letters with Alexandre Herzen, who had expressed his “*astonishment that Bakunin should target such little-known men as Hess and Borkheim, instead of directly attacking Marx, their leader*”.⁴⁴

Bakunin was perfectly aware that “*Marx was the instigator and leader of all this slanderous and infamous polemic which has been unleashed against us*”. He spared him first of all out of a sense of justice: despite all the “*vileness*” of which he has been guilty, we cannot ignore “*the immense services he has rendered to the cause of socialism, which he has served with intelligence, energy and sincerity for nearly twenty-five years, in which he has undoubtedly surpassed us all*”. This is an “*enormous merit*” that Bakunin will always recognise, “*whatever he has done against us*”.

“Marx is undeniably a very useful man in the International Association. Even to this day he exerts a wise influence on his party, and presents the firmest support for socialism, the strongest barrier against the invasion of bourgeois ideas and tendencies. And I would never forgive myself if I had only tried

⁴⁴ James Guillaume, Avant-propos à “*Aux citoyens rédacteurs du Réveil*” Bakounine, Œuvres, Tome V, Stock, p. 232.

ing". Among the "illustrious Jews", Bakunin also cites the Rothschilds, "the arbiters of peace and war in Europe"; Meyerbeyer, Börne and Heine, and "in our day, the respectable leader of German radicalism, Jacoby, and the eminent socialist writer, the principal promoter of the International Workingmen's Association, Charles Marx.

Bakunin ends his enumeration by saying that "*Few nations have produced so many remarkable men in such a short space of time*". These personalities "honour our century", he says, they are "deeply respected, adored and glorified. And that with full justice, because they are powerful intelligences who do honour to their race."

A very surprising speech: while he criticised the Jews' link with banking and finance, Bakunin defines the Rothschilds as "illustrious Jews" and refers to Marx as an "eminent socialist writer", in a text in which he makes unacceptable anti-Semitic remarks!

In fact, Bakunin's target in this text is what he calls "*the small fry*", the "*innumerable crowd of small Jews, bankers, usurers, industrialists, merchants, writers, journalists, politicians, socialists and speculators always*" who have "*taken over German journalism today and who swarm today like subaltern leaders in the Party of the Socialist Workers' Democracy, to the great detriment of the proletariat of Germany*". They constitute "*a very well-disciplined legion*". Bakunin names them: "*They are called the Maurice Hesses, the Borkheims,*⁴³ *the Liebknechts and so many other more or less unknown names*", they are the ones who have uttered against him "*insinuations both cowardly and perfidious, odious and stupid lies, dirty slander*".

⁴³ In the summer of 1869, Borkheim, a close associate of Marx, had reproduced the old slander in the Berlin Zukunft, that "*Bakunin was an agent of the Russian government*", and Liebknecht had repeated this assertion on several occasions.

the Slav democrats of central Europe fighting for their national independence. This project ran completely counter to the plans of Marx and Engels who absolutely did not want this alliance because it would have meant concessions and the end of German domination of the Slavic territories of Central Europe (Bohemia in particular). This was the reason why Bakunin had to be liquidated politically.

Bakunin's project had been set out in an Appeal to the Slavs which provoked a hysterical reaction from Engels, as can be seen in the text "*Democratic Panslavism*". Indeed, such a project would have involved territorial concessions by the Germans who were occupying traditionally Slavic lands, which the authors of the *Communist Manifesto* categorically refused. It was at this time that the slander campaigns against Bakunin began, and he was accused of being a Slavophile, or Pan-Slavic, and Marx's *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* published that he was responsible for the arrest of many Poles.¹⁵

The damaging rumours against Bakunin did not cease after his arrest in 1849; on the contrary, they increased, but he was not aware of them until after his escape in 1861. While the Russian revolutionary was rotting in the dreadful Peter and Paul fortress, two articles signed "*Marx*" appeared in the *Morning Advertiser* in August 1853 claiming that he had been received with open arms by the Tsar, that he was not in prison and that he was celebrating his betrayal by drinking champagne with gallant women. But for once Karl Marx had nothing to do with this slander, for the signatory was a certain "*Francis Marx*" – obviously a pseudonym.

¹⁵ Engels to Marx, 25 April 1848, MECW, vol. 38, pp. 172–173.

David Urquhart – a close associate of Marx¹⁶ –, repeated the slander in *The Free Press* in September 1856, and again in March 1862, denouncing Bakunin as an agent of the Tsar. It took many protests for Bakunin to get an apology, after threatening to reply to the author “*not with pen in hand, but with hand without pen*”. It should be remembered that Bakunin was a twometre-tall giant¹⁷ and that the identification card of the Prussian police described him as “*kolossal*”.

It is significant that at that time, Bakunin never thought of blaming the Jews. But when the slanders started again in 1869 by the same men, Bakunin must have felt that everything was going to be repeated once more.

This digression on the revolution of 1848 seemed necessary to show that the strategic divergences between Bakunin and Marx/Engels existed long before the founding of the International. After 1868, Marx and his entourage merely rephrased the accusations and calumnies they had made against Bakunin 20 years earlier.

¹⁶ A *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* article (6 July 1848) asserted that George Sand (a well-known woman writer) was in possession of evidence that Bakunin was “*an instrument of Russia or an agent newly entered into its service, and that he must be made responsible in large part for the arrest of the unfortunate Poles which has been carried out recently*”. Naturally, George Sand categorically denied, after which Marx replied that by publishing this “*information*”, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* had provided Bakunin with “*an opportunity to dispel this suspicion, which really existed in Paris in certain circles*.” But the evil was done, and this calumny paralysed the activity of Bakunin for a long time.

¹⁷ Urquhart, qualified by Herzen as an “*eccentric radical*” and half-mad, was known as a slanderer of a number of politicians, including Mazzini, Kosuth, and even Palmerston, whom he passed off as agents of the Russian government.

- “*The Jews have always been a very intelligent and very unfortunate race, inhuman, cruel and victim at the same time, persecutor and persecuted*”.

It is at this point in his account that Bakunin speaks of the “*ferocious and vindictive Jehovah*” to whom Moses “*had ordered to massacre all peoples, in order to establish his own power*”.

The Jews were spread “*throughout Asia, enslaved, despised, oppressed*”, and “*uprooted from the land which Jehovah had given them*”. They could therefore engage in no other activity than trade: “*thus the Jews became the trading people par excellence*.” “*In all countries, they found their compatriots, victims like themselves of foreign oppression, despised and persecuted like themselves, and like themselves animated by a natural and profound hatred of the conquering nations*”: this is how a “*vast commercial association of mutual aid and assistance, and of joint exploitation of all foreign nations, was formed among the Jews...*”.

“The cruel persecutions of which they were the victims, throughout the Middle Ages and in all countries, in the name of a God of justice and love, the only and very worthy son of their Jehovah, completed the determination of their eminently hostile tendency towards the Christian populations of Europe. And, as always and more than ever, they responded to stupid, cruel and iniquitous oppression with relentless exploitation.”

Thus, if the Jews today constitute a “*power*”, “*this power was created by more than twenty-five centuries of persecution*”.

The Jewish people have never lacked “*great intelligences*”, says Bakunin: to speak only of modern times, there is “*the beautiful figure of Spinoza*” – a philosopher for whom Bakunin had a particular affection – Mendelssohn, “*the noble friend of Less-*

- They are exploiters.
- They worship a homicidal and vindictive God.
- They form an “*international nation*”.
- They have a hatred of “*conquering nations*”.
- They are “*a people of parasites living on the sweat and blood of their conquerors*”.
- They are “*hostile to the Christian populations of Europe*”.
- They were “*the first to guess the omnipotence of money*” and they practise usury.
- They are not in favour of social revolution.
- They are conservatives.
- They are the pioneers of “*German discipline and the German state*”.
- “*The Jew is bourgeois, i.e. an exploiter par excellence*”.
- Jews are “*friends only with Jews*”.
- They have an “*indissoluble mutual union and solidarity*”.
- Jews are “*instinctively opposed to any real emancipation of the people*”.
- The Jew is “*authoritarian by position, tradition and nature*”.

Now let's look at the other side of the coin:

- Beyond the exposition of the positive qualifications he attributes to the Jews, there is an attempt in Bakunin to explain the causes of the Jews' situation: “*like all the other nations of the earth,*” he says, “*it is the fatal product of history.*”

Later Slavophobia: The Centre of Gravity of Reaction in Europe

The accusation of slavophilia was very serious and offending for Bakunin who was greatly affected by it. Slavophilia (or panslavism), to which he was radically opposed, was a movement which claimed that the only way for the Slavs of Central Europe to be free was to place themselves under the protection of Russia. Bakunin was absolutely opposed to the “*organisation of a separate Slavic world, hostile or even only alien to peoples of different races.*”¹⁸ This same text also affirms that the Slavic section “*will fight with equal energy all the tendencies and manifestations of panslavism, that is to say of the so-called deliverance of the Slavic peoples by the power of the Russian Empire, as well as of pangermanism...*”. So we are far from the anti-Western and Slavophile messianism that some authors see in Bakunin.

Bakunin was so un-Panslavic that, evoking the situation of the Slavic workers of the Austrian Empire, he wondered what they should do: join Slavic nationalist parties at the head of which are “*their daily exploiters and oppressors, bourgeois, manufacturers, merchants, speculators, Jesuits in cassocks and owners of immense estates...*” or join the Austrian socialdemocratic [German] party in which are “*their brothers in social condition, in the community of fate*”. Without hesitation, he indicates that if there is no other solution, the Slavic workers must choose Austrian Social Democracy: “*even if they make a mistake, they share the common fate of their brothers in work, in conviction, in existence, German or not, it doesn't matter.*” These developments, which are to be found in Statism and Anarchy, do not seem to have diverted some authors from the thesis concerning Bakunin's “*blind Germanophobia*”. In Bakunin the class criterion always dominates the criterion of national identity.

The opposition between Marx-Engels and Bakunin was based on another, broader, geopolitical question, which would

¹⁸ 6.65 feet.

come to the fore twenty years later: which was the centre of gravity of reaction in Europe – Germany or Russia?

The main, almost obsessive preoccupation of Marx had always been German unity, for it was the condition of the constitution of the German proletariat as a national political party (What is good for Germany is good for everybody else). In his view, Tsarist Russia was the principal cause of Germany's delay in establishing democracy and uniting, and was therefore the centre of reaction in Europe.

"Already during his lifetime, when only a small amount of his work was published, it was widely known that Marx was afflicted with a very outspoken form of Russophobia. To him Russia was an extremely dangerous and uncivilised power with a lust for expansion that could only be blocked by military force. Since the West in Marx's opinion did not do enough to defend itself against the Russian menace, he believed that prominent European statesmen like the British Prime minister Lord Palmerston, were paid agents of the Russians. Before 1871 he thought of the Prussian state as a slavish servant of its tsarist master. Famous Russian socialists like Alexander Herzen and Mikhail were despised and hated by Marx."¹⁹

Marx and Engels saw Russia as the number one enemy of the revolution in Europe (the democratic revolution) and as the main obstacle to the unification of Germany and the development of democracy in that country. This was a recurrent theme in their work. In 1848, they advocated war against Russia to forge national unity against an external enemy and force the King of Prussia to grant liberal reforms: a reminder of the "uprising of the masses" of 1793 during the French Revolution. Sixteen years later, the resolutions of the Geneva Congress of the IWA took up again the theme of the Russian danger.

¹⁹ Bakunin, Programme de la section slave de Zurich, Œuvres, Champ libre, p. 186.

baric countries of Eastern Europe". In countries where there was no indigenous bourgeoisie, where there was only the noble on the one hand and the peasant on the other, the Jews became the "*obligatory intermediaries*". In "*more civilised*" countries, they formed a separate stratum which tended to merge more or less with the indigenous bourgeoisie, but "*never with the people*".

It was in his letter to the Jura Internationals that Bakunin declared that the Jews constituted a "*formidable power*" and that "*this power has been created by more than twenty-five centuries of persecution; only the broadest freedom will be able to dissolve it*", which is a rather unusual solution to the "*Jewish question*".

Curiously, it is only at the end of the anti-Semitic part of his text that Bakunin quotes Marx, whom he mentions alongside "*illustrious Jews*" such as "in the musical world, the names of Meyerbeyer and Mendelssohn; in political literature and poetry, those of Börne and Heyne. Finally, in our time, the respectable leader of German radicalism, Jacoby, and the eminent socialist writer, the principal promoter of the International Workingmen's Association, Charles Marx. Marx's name appears twenty-five times in the text but is never accompanied by anti-Semitic comments.

Characterisations

Bakunin repeats all the clichés of the anti-Semitism of his time, without innovation, but what is unusual is that he proceeds to a sort of inventory of the characteristics he attributes to the Jews: "*Like all the other nations of the earth*", he says, the Jewish nation has qualities and defects, and it is advisable "*to realise what it can bring us, whether evil or useful*".

Let's look at the negative sides, according to him:

- First of all, the Jews are a "*power*" in banking and the press.

cult of national unity was forged: “*Nothing unites so much as misfortune*”, says Bakunin.

Having been torn from their land and no longer able to devote themselves to agriculture, they sought an outlet for their activity in trade: “*and this is how the Jews became the trading people par excellence*”, while harbouring “*a natural and deep-seated hatred for conquering nations*”. The Jews thus formed a “*vast trading association, of mutual aid and assistance, and of joint exploitation of all foreign nations; a people of parasites living off the sweat and blood of their conquerors*”.

Transplanted to Europe, “*the cruel persecutions of which they were the victims, throughout the Middle Ages and in all countries, in the name of a God of justice and love, the only and very worthy son of their Jehovah, completed the determination of their eminently hostile tendency towards the Christian populations of Europe*”.

By creating credit and bills of exchange, “*the Jews gave a soul to international trade, which began to develop as early as the twelfth century*”. In reality, the Jews did not invent the bill of exchange, as this procedure was already in use in ancient Rome. Bakunin also mentions the usury practised by the Jews, which developed “*to a frightening extent*”. All this means that the Jews are “*essentially conservative*”, that they are supporters of the State, that they “*abhor the unleashing of the masses, and are not anarchists at all*” (*sic*), a claim later contradicted by the many Jewish anarchist militants and organisations that emerged in central Europe and in Russia. In Russia, anarchism began to attract followers among Russian Jews in the 1870s and grew considerably in the 1880s with industrialisation and the proletarianisation of hundreds of thousands of Jewish workers.

Bakunin emphasises the link between Jews and Germans: the former had “*adopted German as their national language*” in all the countries of Eastern Europe. They had thus “*become, as it were, the representatives and pioneers of German civilisation, order, discipline and the German State in these more or less bar-*

The Congress agenda included eleven questions, the eighth of which read as follows:

“8. On the necessity of annihilating Russian influence in Europe by the application of the right of peoples to self determination and the reconstitution of Poland on democratic and social bases”.

Note that the right of peoples to self-determination did not apply to Bohemia (roughly what would later become Czechoslovakia).

In 1894, Engels took up this idea again:

“The Russian empire of the tsars represents at once the greatest bastion, the last fortified position and the reserve army of European reaction; its mere passive existence constitutes for us a threat and a danger.”²⁰

How can this backward mass, which has not passed beyond the level of pre-capitalist development, so impede the advance of capitalism and democracy in Europe?

Bakunin’s point of view was more subtle than Marx’s, much more in line with “*historical materialism*”. He considered that Prussia, Austria, and Russia were closely connected with one another because they were the three accomplices of the partition of Poland and consequently equally reactionary. Bakunin willingly admitted that Russia had indeed been for a time the driving force of reaction in Europe, but this function had gradually disappeared with the strengthening of Prussian power which led to the constitution of the German Empire. Now it was Bismarck’s Germany that had become the centre of reaction.

²⁰ Bruno Naarden, “*Marx and Russia*”, Institute for Eastern European Studies, University of Amsterdam.

In 1848, Prussia was an autocratic monarchy still dependent on Russian pressure; in 1867, after the introduction of universal suffrage, it was the leader of a confederation with liberal institutions, significant industrial and financial power and the ability to protect itself. In 1871, under Prussian leadership, Germany became a powerful empire, definitively blocking any hope of Russian advances to the North-West.

Bakunin contests that Russia is still a threat, firstly, because Russian society and the state are deeply corrupted; secondly, because Prussia has an indisputable preponderance over Russia in terms of political, administrative, legal, industrial, commercial, scientific and social development. And if the Russians never came to Germany as conquerors, neither did they come as teachers or administrators: *“from which it follows that if Germany really borrowed anything from official Russia, which I formally deny, it could only have been by inclination and taste.”*²¹

Bakunin then explains that, with no outlet to the West, Russia was forced to devote its energies to expanding eastwards, into Central Asia, which panicked Marx and Engels, who feared that Russia would have ambitions for India, a British colony; Bakunin dismissed this possibility, as the Russians could only reach India *“after having pacified the numerous the numerous warring tribes of Afghanistan”*²²... The remark takes on an ironic connotation when you consider what happened to the Soviet Union’s attempts to establish itself in this country.

It was after the publication of *Statism and Anarchy* that Marx and Engels’ approach to Russia changed: it was after Bakunin’s death that they changed their vision of the Slavic world²³ and started publishing articles on Russian politics contrasting with the hysterical russophobia of earlier years.

²¹ Engels, *“The foreign policy of Russian tsarism”*, Sozial-demokrat, déc. 1889- février 1890.

²² Bakounine, *L’Empire knouto-germanique*, VIII, 63.

²³ Bakunin, *Étatisme et Anarchie*, Champ libre, IV, 282.

“When Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the fields and in the wilderness where they had pursued them, and every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were there. Twelve thousand men and women fell that day, all the people of Ai. Joshua did not take his javelin from his hand until he had put an end to all the people of Ai.”

But this time they did not kill the beasts, but took them away:

“But Israel took the cattle and the spoil of that city for themselves, as the Lord had commanded Joshua.”

So it is not without reason that Bakunin describes Jehovah as a *“fierce and vindictive”* God.⁴²

The Jewish people had always been defeated, long before the final triumph of the Romans, and had been constantly transplanted by their Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Persian conquerors *“to the most remote parts of Asia, and spent centuries in forced emigration”*. It was in this *“forced emigration”* that the

⁴² Naturally, the mythical or real horrors attributed to the Jews some 2,500 years ago, in a particular historical context, cannot be held against them today. However, the reference to the Amalekites is still vivid today in the minds of Jewish fundamentalists. In April 1969, a certain Shraga Gafni published the following text in the magazine Mahanaim, the journal of the military chaplaincy: *“As for the Arabs, a foreign element resident in the country, but who are in essence foreign to this land, the same sentence must be applied to them as was applied to all previous foreign elements. Our wars against them are inevitable... Their one and only aim is to destroy you. There is no other remedy than to destroy them. Such was the punishment of the Amalekites.”* The Palestinians are also frequently compared to the Canaanites. (Reported by Noam Chomski, *Guerre et Paix au Proche Orient*, Belfond, Paris, 1974) (I d’ont have the original English version of Chomsky’s book).

a homicidal God, the most barbaric and at the same time the most vainly personal of all the Gods known on earth, the ferocious and vindictive Jehovah, who had made them his chosen people. Their first lawgiver, Moses, ordered them to massacre all peoples in order to establish his own power. Such was its beginning in history.”

Bakunin refers here to the numerous passages in the Bible where God asks the Israelites to exterminate a particular population. For example, in Samuel (I, 15, verse 3), God asks Samuel to exterminate the Amalekites:

“Go, attack the Amalekites and destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”

In Deuteronomy (20, 13) it is only the male population that is to be put to the sword.

“When the Lord your God has given it into your hands, you shall put every man in it to the sword.
14 As for the women, the children, the cattle and everything else in the city, you shall take them as spoil for yourselves.”

In Joshua (6:21), the population of Jericho is exterminated at God’s express request, again:

“They consecrated the city to the Lord and destroyed everything in it with the sword, men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.”

In Joshua again (8:24–26), the Israelites kill the male population of the city of Ai:

Nevertheless, the spectre of war with Russia remained present, marking German politics right up to the Second World War.²⁴

The Triggering Factor

Marx and Engels only repeated after 1869 the calumnious manoeuvres they had resorted to against Bakunin in 1848. The accusations of PanSlavism against Bakunin served Marx and Engels as arguments to bring the Russian revolutionist into disrepute with the public and to counter the political proposals he made. In 1848–1849 the project of alliance between German and Slav democrats on the question of German unity and Slav independence had to be demolished at all costs. In the International, the federalist project was again to be fought at all costs. The obsessive accusations of Pan-Slavism against Bakunin were the means that Marx and Engels used to try to discredit him politically.

It is after the Basel Congress (1869) that the aggressiveness of Marx against Bakunin showed itself openly. Indeed, the votes of the delegates on the question of the **inheritance**, which had symbolic value for Marx, so divided up:

- 63 % of the delegates voted for the “Collectivist” texts.
- 31 % for the “Marxist” texts.
- 6 % for the mutualists (proudhonians).

Naturally, such a situation was unacceptable for Marx, although it was the *democratic* expression of the delegates of the International at that time.

Eccarius is said to have muttered: “*Marx will be terribly annoyed!*”²⁵ It was after this congress that systematic and most

²⁴ See René Berthier, *Bakounine Politique: Révolution et contre-révolution en Europe centrale*, Éditions du Monde Libertaire, 1991.

²⁵ Quoted by James Guillaume, *L’internationale documents et souvenirs*, Vol. I, p. 204.

violent attacks began against Bakunin orchestrated by Marx, Engels and their followers.

It was an insulting and infamous article by Moses Hess, an acolyte of Marx, followed by many others, that triggered Bakunin's anti-Semitism, but the fact, noted by the Russian revolutionary, that Marx's entourage was largely (but not exclusively) made up of Jews (Hess, Borkheim, Outine, etc.), does not excuse Bakunin's unacceptable drifts.

Three weeks after the Basle Congress, the Paris newspaper *Le Réveil* published an article on 2 October 1869 by Moses Hess, who had attended the Congress as a delegate of the Berlin Socialists. He was, writes James Guillaume, "*a friend of Karl Marx, whose antipathies he shared against the Russian revolutionaries and especially against Bakunin*". At this congress, the proposal by Bakunin and his friends for the abolition of inheritance received 32 votes, while Marx's proposal – that of the General Council – received only 19 (with 37 votes against). Marx had been very disgruntled and it was undoubtedly he who inspired Hess's article, which cast Bakunin in a questionable light and implied that he might well be an agent of the Russian government.

Hess claimed that he wanted to inform the public about the "*secret history of the Basel Congress*", where there was, he said, "*a Russian party, led by Bakunin, and closely related to the Prussian party led by M. de Schweitzer*".²⁶ This Russian party "*worked in a Panslavist interest*", writes Hess:

"Bakunin had flattered himself that he could induce the Basle Congress to alter the principles and direction of the International; but these intrigues were foiled in the annual meeting of the delegates.

²⁶ In 1867, Schweitzer had become head of the General Association of German Workers (ADAV), founded by Ferdinand Lassalle. Marxist socialists in Germany, known as the "*Eisenach faction*", circulated the rumour that Schweitzer was an "*agent of Bismark*".

Bakunin adds that the reason for his letter to the Jurassians is that he had been insulted and slandered in his "*Russian and Slavic character*". He clearly felt that the attacks on him were racist. A reading of the correspondence between Marx and his close collaborators amply confirms this impression. He therefore wanted to

"...explain once and for all, without neglecting any of the principal aspects of the Slavo-Germanic question, the way in which I have always considered and treated this question. Secondly, I am deeply convinced that this question is not as indifferent or as alien to the past and future developments of the International Workingmen's Association as it may appear at first sight."

Beyond the calumnies of which he was the victim, Bakunin therefore intended to take stock of the question of relations between Germany and the Slavs because he thought that it could have repercussions on the existence of the International. Indeed, the last three quarters of the text are devoted to extremely interesting geopolitical reflections.

Contaminated by Anti-Semitic Remarks

Unfortunately, the first few pages of the text is contaminated by anti-Semitic remarks addressed to "*German Jews*" and to Outine, described as a "*little Russian Jew*". The Jews are said to be a "*real power*" in Germany, "*reigning as masters in banking*". They are "*a very interesting race*" who "*created international trade and that powerful economic instrument called credit*". Like all the other nations of the world, the Jews are "*the fatal product of history*": "*It would therefore be unfair to reproach them for their misdeeds*", but it is necessary to study them "*in order to realise what they can bring us, whether evil or useful*".

"The Jews have always been a very intelligent and very unfortunate race, inhuman, cruel and victimised at the same time, persecutors and persecuted. From childhood they worshipped

Commentary “*To the Companions...*”

“*To the Companions of the Federation of International Sections of Jura*” was written in February-March 1872 but not published, except for a few fragments reproduced by Max Nettlau in his biography of Bakunin. James Guillaume published part of the manuscript in 1914 under the title “*Pages inédites*” [unpublished pages]. This text is undoubtedly one of those in which Bakunin’s anti-Semitism is most evident: it occupies 6 of the 82 pages of the document. This document is also entirely consistent with Bakunin’s way of writing: he starts full speed on the subject that motivates him in the first place, then loses interest in it and engages in long digressions that have nothing more to do with it but which are often more interesting than the original subject.

The purpose of the letter to the militants of the Jura Federation was to inform his companions that, since the Congress of the International held in Basle in September 1869, he had become “*the object of the most foolish and odious calumnies, on the part of a section of the socialist press in Germany, as well as that of the organ of the Geneva Federation, l’Égalité*”. He declares that he was unaware of the causes of these attacks, stating that for his part, he had never attacked individuals, but had “*fought against ideas that [he] considered harmful and false*”.

“...if our opponents had been content to attack us for our anarchic ideas, we would certainly have nothing to reproach them with. That would have been their right, just as it is ours to defend and propagate our ideas. Unfortunately for the International and for themselves, they did not want to, they could not resign themselves to this moderation which was imposed on them as much by the care of their own dignity and by justice, as by the supreme interest of our great Association, from which they expect, as much as we do, the final deliverance of the proletariat”.

A Russian party did not yet exist at the previous Congresses of the International. It was only in the course of last year that an attempt to change the organisation and principles of the International, as well as to transfer the seat of the General Council from London to Geneva, was made by Bakunin, a Russian patriot whose revolutionary bona fides we do not suspect, but who cherishes fanciful projects no less to be condemned than the means of action he employs to realise them. It is conceivable that a Russian patriot, even if he had no hidden ulterior motive, such as is supposed to be the case with the leader of the Prussian communists [M. de Schweitzer], would prefer summary procedures inevitably leading to a social war that would allow the barbarians of the North to rejuvenate modern civilisation.”²⁷

According to Hess, between the “*collectivists of the International*” and the “*Russian communists*” there was “*all the difference that exists between civilisation and barbarism, between freedom and despotism, between citizens condemning all kinds of violence and slaves accustomed to the actions of brute force*”.

James Guillaume commented: “*When Bakunin had read the extraordinary elucubration that the Réveil had greeted with such surprising lightness, he got angry – and there was good reason for it – and took up his good pen to write, in his best ink, a reply addressed ‘To the citizen editors of the Réveil’*”²⁸

²⁷ Quoted by James Guillaume, *L’internationale documents et souvenirs, tome I, Deuxième partie*, ch. XII, p. 216 sq.

²⁸ Bakounine, *Œuvres V*, éditions Stock, “*Aux citoyens rédacteurs du Réveil*”, Avant-propos de James Guillaume.

Marx is Targeted

Actually, behind Bakunin's anti-Semitism, which unimaginatively repeats all the clichés of the time, it is Marx who is in fact targeted, but strangely, it is rarely explicitly named. I am surprised that Zoe Baker makes no reference (unless I am mistaken) to Bakunin's alleged "*Germanophobia*", which would have supported the thesis that Bakunin was a "*racist*". But although Bakunin is accused of being "*racist*", maybe it is only his antisemitism that interests Baker. This "*Germanophobia*" has been somewhat pigeonholed by some English-speaking anarchists who, like Baker with anti-Semitism, wanted to emphasise Bakunin's "*anti-German racism*". In my opinion, these activists make the mistake of not contextualising the problem and, above all, of not having really read Bakunin. It is true that Bakunin makes anti-German remarks, but unfortunately the authors who point this out fail to mention that Bakunin is very careful to specify that he is attacking the bourgeois and state civilisation of Germany, not the proletariat, for which he has always shown the greatest respect.

So much so that he thinks that the Slavic peoples will have difficulty in finding the road to emancipation on their own:

"They must be helped to find it; and no one could do it better than the proletariat of Germany, which, far more enlightened and more advanced in every respect than the Slavic proletariat, seems called upon by its very geographical position, as well as by its whole history, to show its brethren in the Slavic countries the way to deliverance, as the German bourgeoisie, in its time, had shown them the way to slavery."²⁹

²⁹ Bakounine, "*Aux compagnons de la fédération des sections internationales du Jura*", février-mars 1871, éd. Cham libre, III, p. 44.

We were well aware that if Marx was a Jew, his alter ego, Engels, far less intelligent and far more hateful than he, was not; and we did not spare the expression of our admiration and sympathy for Jews like Henri Heine and Ferdinand Lassalle. We counted among our ranks, among our most devoted comrades, Israelites, men and women; and today are there not groups of Russian Jewish anarchists where the memory of Bakunin is the object of a real cult?"³⁸

Bakunin's antisemitism did not leave his closest supporters indifferent. Thus, the Spanish militant Anselmo Lorenzo wrote that Bakunin's use of the argument that Marx was a Jew "*had a disastrous effect on me*": "*This was opposed to our principles of fraternity without differences of race and creed*".³⁹ Wolfgang Eckhardt writes that "*Lorenzo later regretted that his reply to Bakunin's letter had been so harsh*". A few years later Lorenzo reread his reply to Bakunin: he had himself been "*victim of the hostilities and hatred that conflicts produce*" and understood the solitude which Bakunin had experienced.⁴⁰

However, Baker is wrong to say that Bakunin was "*not aware*" of the nature of his remarks about the Jews. In discussing the Jews, he perfectly knew that he was treading on delicate ground: "*I am well aware that in stating with this frankness my innermost thoughts about the Jews, I expose myself to enormous dangers*."⁴¹

³⁸ James Guillaume, *The International Documents and Memories, Volume One*, Part Three, Ch. X, pp. 157–158.

³⁹ Anselmo Lorenzo, *El proletariado militante*, Barcelona, p. 323.

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Eckhardt, *The First Socialist Schism, Bakunin vs. Marx in the International Working Men's Association*, chapter 11.

⁴¹ Bakounine, "*Lettre aux citoyens du Réveil*". Œuvres, Stock, Tome V, p. 244.

from political oppression, economic exploitation and religious alienation.³⁶

Perhaps this is the most rational attitude to adopt towards Bakunin's antisemitic excesses: they are circumstantial, they do not question the core of his thought, and the Jewish anarchists simply didn't make a fuss about it, as some people do. Nevertheless, they remain absolutely unacceptable. In other words, between the 40 or so anti-Semitic pages of Bakunin's entire work and the 2400 pages³⁷ devoted to the struggle against oppression, exploitation and for human emancipation, they have shown that they have a sense of proportion. The conclusion to be drawn from this affair is that any person at some point can slip and show his or her dark side, and that permanent vigilance is necessary.

Baker writes that "*I have been unable to find a place where Guillaume acknowledges Bakunin's racism*". It is not entirely true: Here are some lines from James Guillaume, where Bakunin is not explicitly mentioned, but which somewhat echo the conclusion of Baker's video; when Guillaume says "we", he means Bakunin Guillaume himself and their followers:

"Calumniated and vilified by a sequel of intriguers, we had indeed been obliged to note that some of the most relentless against us were German and Russian Jews, who seemed to support each other out of esprit de corps, – and we thought we should say so. But we never had any animosity against any of the races that make up humanity.

³⁶ The same goes for Marx, whose raging antisemitic statements in his correspondence cannot classify him as an "*antisemitic thinker*". But to Marx's raging antisemitism should be added his anti-Slavic racism.

³⁷ Figure corresponding to the six volumes of the Stock edition.

The Slavs – the Slavic *proletarians*, it is true – have to look to their German comrades for help. Here we have a strange "*Germanophobia*". It is significant that this is precisely what the Bolshevik leaders expected from the German proletariat in 1917, and we know that their hopes were disappointed.

Zoe Baker could have mentioned another fact, which is not an illustration of Bakunin's antisemitism but reveals his approach to the "*Jewish question*", which is not limited to his antisemitism. In *various texts*,³⁰ Bakunin draws up a sort of demographic statistic of the different regions of Central Europe: several times he lists the different nationalities that make up these regions (Poles, Slovenes, Ruthenians, Czechs, Moravians, etc.), and then he speaks of "*Germans and Jews*", without distinction. This puzzled me at first, but then I realised that he was equating the two nationalities because the Jews had been, in his view, one of the actors in the Germanization of the Slavic territories occupied by Prussia and Austria – a fact which Engels himself confirms. (Prussia itself was a former Slavic territory.) What he saw in the Jews was in fact their *historical function* and nothing else.

The assimilation of Jews and Germans into the same demographic – and undoubtedly cultural – category seems to be self-evident for Bakunin, who evokes the population statistics of the Austrian Empire in *Statism and Anarchy*:

"Out of 36 million inhabitants, these races are distributed as follows: about 16,500,000 Slavs (5 million Poles and Ruthenians; 7,250,000 other North Slavs: Czechs, Moravians, Slovaks; and 4,250,000 South Slavs); about 5,500,000 Magyars, 2,900,000 Romanians, 6,000,000 Italians; 9,000,000 Germans

³⁰ "*To the companion editors of the Bulletin of the Jura Federation*", 6 June 1872, The Knuto-German Empire, "*To the companions of the federation of international sections of the Jura*".

and Jews and about 1,500,000 of other origins.” [My emphasis]

It thus appears that the “*sub-category*” constituted by the Jews does not even benefit from a particular quantification. Among these 9 million Germans, we will not know how many Jews there are: for Bakunin this does not seem important. This indistinctness is again apparent when Bakunin reproaches the Austrian Germans for wanting political supremacy in the empire, “*although together with the Jews they form only a quarter of the population*”. The kingdom of Hungary, we learn, in addition to Magyars barely outnumbering Slavs, has Romanians and “1,800,000 *Jews and Germans*”. Engels does not contradict Bakunin’s approach to this question: he writes of Central Europe that the Jews, “*insofar as they belong to any nationality, are in these countries certainly rather German than Slavic*.”³¹

Denationalisation of the Slavs

The process of German denationalisation of the Slavs is described in strikingly similar terms by Bakunin and Engels, with the notable difference that Bakunin did not approve of this process, whereas Engels considered Germanization to be the best thing that had happened to the Slavs: The Germans, he says, saved the South Slavs from becoming Turks, “*a service which is not too dear even at the price of exchanging their nationality for German or Magyar*.” “*German culture developed, and intellectually too the Slavs became subordinate to the Germans, even as far as Croatia*.” All in his exposition of the vast historical perspectives of the European nations, Engels adds:

³¹ Engels, *Révolution et contre-révolution en Allemagne*, *Œuvres choisies* I, p. 351.

In any case, it contrasts with Marx, for whom “the emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of mankind from Judaism” (The Jewish question).

Bakunin “Self-Contradictory”?

Baker says that Bakunin is “*self-contradictory*” because on the one hand he would be “*anti-Semitic*”, and on the other hand he “*advocated universal human emancipation on several occasions*”. “*Several occasions*”??? But all his work as an anarchist is turned towards human emancipation, starting with that of the proletariat.

I would say that an author is “*self-contradictory*” when considering the bulk of his work one would find systematically contradictory positions. Here Baker contrasts Bakunin’s anti-semitism, which was circumscribed to a limited period of his life, with his overall work, which was passionately devoted, in word *and deed*, to human emancipation from oppression and exploitation. On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that if he made antisemitic statements (some of which were not published), he never converted these statements into practice.

Baker is surprised that the Jewish anarchists did not react against Bakunin’s antisemitism: “*I have been unable to find any mention of Bakunin’s antisemitism in the writings of anarchists from Jewish backgrounds which are available in English, such as Berkman, Goldman and Gustav Landauer*”. I think they simply did not take his antisemitism seriously, and moreover they understood perfectly well that antisemitism was not the core of his doctrine. An anti-Semitic author is someone whose work has antisemitism as its centre of gravity. The centre of gravity of Bakunin’s thought is the emancipation of the working class

making statistics is not in itself objectionable. Bakunin is therefore not to be condemned for pointing out the role of the Jews in banking and the press, but for doing so with polemical intent. So it is not absolutely false to say that the Jews represented a “power”, or at least that they controlled a substantial part of the activity in certain areas, including banking and the press, but it all depends on what is meant by this word. The economic vitality of this community was real, but to attribute to it a “power” in the political sense of the word is false. Sociological studies carried out in the contemporary period show, for example, that the “Jewish vote” in France (and there is no reason to think it is different anywhere else) is a fiction and that the voting intentions of the Jewish community are distributed more or less like those of the rest of the population. The alleged homogeneity of this community is also a fiction.

The real or supposed “power” attributed to Jews is one of the main arguments of antisemitic propaganda. When one designates an entity as a “formidable power,” as Bakunin does, one also designates it as a potential threat. This is what anti-Semites generally do. And their anti-Semitism has its completion in the measures they propose to reduce this threat, the height of which was reached in Nazi Germany.

Bakunin’s proposed “solution” to the “Jewish question” and the “power” they represent is perhaps the most astonishing in the long and unfortunate history of anti-Semitism:

“This power was created by more than twenty-five centuries of persecution, the broadest freedom alone will be able to dissolve it.”³⁵

This remark, which should not be irrelevant in the analysis of Bakunin’s antisemitism, seems to have escaped Zoe Baker’s vigilance.

³⁵ Bakunin, “To the fellow editors of the *Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne*”, 6 June 1872.

“There is no country in Europe which does not have in some corner or other one or several ruined fragments of peoples, the remnant of a former population that was suppressed and held in bondage by the nation which later became the main vehicle of historical development. These relics of a nation mercilessly trampled under foot in the course of history, as Hegel says, these residual fragments of peoples always become fanatical standard-bearers of counter-revolution and remain so until their complete extirpation or loss of their national character, just as their whole existence in general is itself a protest against a great historical revolution.”

Engels then mentions the Welsh, the Bretons and the Basques. Thus, “*The next world war will result in the disappearance from the face of the earth not only of reactionary classes and dynasties, but also of entire reactionary peoples. And that, too, is a step forward.*” We can see that Engels invents two extremely disturbing concepts which constitute racist excesses: “reactionary peoples” and “residual fragments of peoples”.³²

It should be noted that Marx never questioned his friend’s statements.

Bakunin’s Tendentious Arguments

Bakunin never mentions the condition of the Jews in the Germanic countries, Germany or Austria. This question does not seem to have interested him. According to Yuri Steklov, a Bolshevik historian, Bakunin’s experience of the Jews in the

³² Engels, “*The Magyar Struggle*”, Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 8, p. 227;

western part of Russia during his military career contributed to his anti-Semitism. This thesis is implausible. Indeed, his correspondence at that time shows he strictly didn't care about the Jews. If he had then been even slightly attentive to the question, he would not have failed to notice that the Jews of these regions were on the whole extremely poor. It is difficult to see, therefore, how he could have developed the thesis of the Jews as a financial and exploitative power on the basis of this element alone. His view of the Jews was formed later, and encompasses both Western and Central Europe. The Jews were the creators of the first bills of exchange and banknotes, which were "*as is well known, issued by Jews from Italy*," he says.

The supposed or actual control of Jews over the press, found also in Bakunin, is one of the basic arguments of anti-Semitism, but the observation is sometimes made by Jews themselves: "*We are not just the 'people of the Book', writes Peter Novick, but the people of the Hollywood film and the television miniseries, of the magazine article and the newspaper column, of the comic book and the academic symposium*".³³ One has to wonder: if Bakunin is anti-Semitic when he points out the role of the Jews in the press, can we say that Novick is too?

When he speaks of the Jews in general, Bakunin grants them the status of a somehow transnational "*nation*". Among the rubbish he conveys about the Jews is the idea that they constitute a "*power*", one of the favourite themes of antisemitism.

The political emancipation of the Jews in Austria was to significantly modify the statistical data of the country on the socio-professional level. In 1857 Jews represented 1.6% of the population of Vienna; in 1890 they represented 12%. Anti-Semitism became a real problem and it was precisely at this time that the social democrats asked Engels, until

³³ Peter Novick, *L'Holocauste dans la vie américaine*, Gallimard, p. 20. I translated the passage into English from the French edition of the book. (*The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston-New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999).

then rather anti-Semitic, to intervene in their fight against anti-Semitism. At that time, Jews represented one third of the students at the University of Vienna. The municipality of this city was in the hands of Karl Lüger, elected on an explicitly anti-Semitic platform.

According to Herbert Rozenkranz,³⁴ the Jews occupied a preponderant share in the following sectors from the 1930s onwards:

- Metal recovery: 100%.
- Self-service restaurants: 94%.
- Advertising: 90%.
- Furniture: 85%.
- Press: 80%.
- Banking: 75%.
- Textiles: 73.3%.
- Insurance: 70%.
- Livestock trade: 70%.
- Lumber trade: 70%.

Here again, one has to wonder: if Bakunin is anti-Semitic when he points out the role of Jews in banking, can we say that Rozenkranz is too?

In fact, what makes the difference between a racist and a sociological approach in determining the proportion of Jews (or any other community) in any sector of activity is the intention: the intention can be polemical or scientific. But the very fact of

³⁴ Herbert Rozenkranz, *The Anschluss and the Tragedy of Austrian Jewry, 1934- 1945*, cf. Joseph Fraenkel éd., *The Jews of Austria*, p. 480.