

conscious, systematic, implacable and bloody executioners of the people.

But how, all the same, can we reconcile two things which are apparently so incompatible: deceivers and deceived, liars and believers? Logically, this seems difficult; however, in fact – that is to say in practical life – these qualities occur together very often.

In the great majority of cases people live in contradiction with themselves, and under perpetual misapprehensions; they generally do not notice it, that is until some extraordinary event brings them back from their habitual sleep and compels them to take a look at themselves and around themselves.

In politics as in religion, men are only machines in the hands of the exploiters. But robbers and robbed, oppressors and oppressed, all live one alongside the other, governed by a handful of individuals whom it is convenient to consider as the true exploiters. These are the same people, free of all prejudices, political and religious, who consciously maltreat and oppress. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, until the explosion of the Great French Revolution, as in our own day, they ruled in Europe and did pretty well as they pleased. We must believe that their domination will not prolong itself much further.

While the principal leaders deceive and lead the people astray quite consciously, their servants, or the minions of the church and state, apply themselves with zeal to uphold the sanctity and integrity of these odious institutions. If the church, according to the pronouncements of the priests and of the majority of statesmen, is necessary for the salvation of the soul, the state in its turn is also necessary for the conservation of peace, of order and of justice, and the dogmatists of all the schools must shout, ‘Without church and government there will be neither civilisation nor progress.’

We need not discuss the problem of eternal salvation because we do not believe in the immortality of the soul. We are convinced that the most harmful of things for humanity, for

Bakunin

The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State

and The Life of Mikhail Bakunin: A short biographical sketch

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decadence of the ancient world, did they become sceptics and shameless deceivers. Another reason allows us to consider the founders of states as sincere people. Man always believes easily in whatever he desires, and in what does not contradict his interests. Even if he is intelligent and informed, the same thing happens: through self-love and his desire to live with his neighbours and profit by their respect, he will always believe in whatever is pleasant and useful. I am convinced that, for example, Thiers and the Versailles government were forced at great cost to convince themselves that, in killing several thousand men, women and children in Paris, they were saving France.

But if the priests, augurers, aristocrats and middle-class citizens, of ancient and modern times, were able sincerely to believe, they nevertheless remained impostors. One cannot in fact admit that they believed in every absurdity that constituted faith and politics. I am not even speaking of the age when, according to the words of Cicero, 'two augurers could not look each other in the eye without laughing'. Afterwards, even in the time of general ignorance and superstition, it is difficult to suppose that the inventors of daily miracles were convinced of the reality of these miracles. One can say the same thing of politics, which may be summed up in the following rule: 'It is necessary to subjugate and exploit the people in such a way that they will not complain too greatly of their fate, nor forget to submit, nor have time to think of resistance and rebellion.'

How then, after this, can we imagine that people who turned politics into a profession and knew its aim – that is to say injustice, violence, lies and murder, in the mass or in isolation – might believe sincerely in the political art and the wisdom of the state as the creator of social contentment? They cannot have arrived at such a degree of stupidity despite all their cruelty. Church and state have been the great schools of vice in every age. History bears witness to their crimes; at all places and at all times the priest and the statesman have been the

We hardly have the intention of plunging into the history of religious, theological and metaphysical absurdities and still less of speaking of the successive unfolding of all the incarnations and divine visions created by centuries of barbarism. Everybody knows that superstition always gives birth to frightful sufferings and causes the flow of streams of blood and tears. Let us say only that all these sickening aberrations of poor mankind were historical events, inevitable in the normal growth and evolution of social organisms. Such aberrations engendered in society the fatal idea, dominating the imagination of men, that the universe was supposedly governed by a supernatural force and will. Centuries succeeded centuries, and societies became accustomed to this idea to such an extent that they finally destroyed within themselves every tendency towards a further progress, and every capacity they had to reach it.

First the ambition of a few individuals, then a few social classes, erected slavery and conquest into a vital principle, and implanted more than any other this terrible idea of the divinity. Since when all society was impossible without those two institutions as a base, the church and the state. These two social scourges are defended by all the dogmatists.

Scarcely had these institutions appeared in the world than all of a sudden two castes were organised: that of the priests, and the aristocracy, who without losing any time did the job of inculcating deeply into that enslaved people the indispensability, usefulness and sanctity of the church and the state.

All that had as its goal the changing of brutal slavery into legal slavery, provided for and consecrated by the will of the supreme being.

But did the priests and the aristocrats really believe sincerely in these institutions, which they sustained with all strength in their own particular interest? Were they not merely liars and deceivers? No, I believe that they were at the same time both believers and impostors.

They believed too, because they took a natural and inevitable part in the aberrations of the mass, and only later, in the age of the

Life of Bakunin

Mikhail Alexandrovitch Bakunin was born on 30th May, 1814, in the Russian province of Tvar. He was the eldest son of a retired diplomat, who was a member of the ancient Russian nobility. Mikhail passed his boyhood on the family estate, and gained an insight into the peasant mentality which is reflected in his later writings.

At fifteen he was sent to St. Petersburg to enter the Artillery School. After five years of military studies, he was posted to a regiment stationed in Poland; but the monotonous life proved unpalatable to this very sociable young aristocrat. He threw up his commission and the whole military career and adopted instead that of a student in Moscow.

Bakunin's youth was spent under the despotism of the Tsar Nicholas I, the most reactionary that Russia had ever known and the most rigidly repressive till the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin. Under this regime every type of liberalism of even the mildest kind, whether in politics, literature, or religion, was ruthlessly crushed. In philosophy alone did there seem to be any chance for discussion, and those who would in Western countries have turned to politics devoted their attention in Russia to philosophy. Bakunin was one of these and in fact at this time his interest in politics appears to have been nil. His favourite philosophers were Fichte and Hegel; from the former he learned that freedom, liberty, independence were the highest expression of the moral law; from the latter, he gained a knowledge of the dialectic, the theory that all life and history constitute a process of the reconciliation of opposites on a higher plane – or, as Hegel expressed it thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

Five years of Bakunin's life (1835–40) were spent in the study of philosophy, at Moscow, then he went to Berlin. The political and intellectual atmosphere of Germany, though reactionary compared to those of France and England, was almost progressive compared with Russia and some of the younger

adherents of Hegel began to develop radical ideas from his doctrine of the dialectic. Prominent among these was Ludwig Feuerbach, whose book *The Essence of Christianity* took a decidedly materialistic, in fact, atheistic attitude. It converted many young intellectuals to its viewpoint and among these were Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Michael Bakunin. The latter's intellectual evolution had now begun — that was to turn him from an orthodox subject of the Tsar into a materialist, a revolutionary socialist, and an anarchist.

In 1842 he went to Dresden and published an article entitled 'Reaction in Germany' which led to revolutionary conclusions and which ended with words that became celebrated: "Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of all life. The desire for destruction is also a creative desire."

In Switzerland he made the acquaintance of Wilhelm Weitling, a self-educated German Communist, who preached revolution and socialism in phrases foreshadowing the later anarchism. He said for instance: "The perfect society has no government but only an administration, no laws but only obligations, no punishments but means of correction." These sentiments greatly impressed the liberty-loving Bakunin. But they caused the gaoling of Weitling and when the Tsarist Government heard of Bakunin's connection with him, the young man was summoned back to Russia. He refused to go and was outlawed. He went for a brief period to Brussels and then, early in 1844, to Paris.

He encountered here two men whose influence on his thought was very great — Karl Marx and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Bakunin had many discussions with Marx, and though greatly impressed by his real genius, scholarship, and revolutionary zeal and energy, was repelled by his arrogance, egotism, and jealousy. These faults were ones of which Bakunin himself was entirely free, and this temperamental difference alone would have made it difficult for these two great men to get along together, even if their opinions had not been dissimilar in many respects, and if outside influences had not deliberately

to the natural and inevitable course of events. Only, the superiority of man over the other animals and the faculty of thinking brought to his development an individual characteristic — which is quite natural, let it be said in passing — in the sense that, like everything that exists, man represents the material product of the union and action of forces. This individual characteristic is the capacity for reasoning, or indeed that faculty for generalisation and abstraction, thanks to which man can project himself through thought, examining and observing himself like an alien and external object. Raising himself above his own level through the medium of ideas, just as he raises himself from the surrounding world, he arrives at the representation of perfect abstraction, absolute nothingness. And that absolute is nothing less than the faculty of abstraction, which scorns everything that exists and, arriving at complete negation, there comes to rest. It is already the final limit of the highest abstraction of thought: that absolute nothingness is God.

That is the meaning and the historic basis of every theological doctrine. Not understanding the nature and the material causes of their own thoughts, not taking account of the conditions even or of the natural laws which are peculiar to them, these first men and societies certainly could not suspect that their absolute notions were only the result of the faculty of conceiving abstract ideas. That is why they considered these ideas taken from nature as if they were real objects, before which nature itself would cease to have any reality. They took it into their heads afterwards to worship their own fictions, their impossible notions of the absolute, and to grant them all kinds of honour. But they had the need, in some fashion, to represent and to make tangible the abstract idea of nothingness or of God. To this end, they inflated the concept of divinity and endowed it into the bargain with all the qualities and powers, good and evil, which they only came across in nature and in society.

Such was the origin and historic development of all religions, beginning with fetishism and ending with Christianity.

intelligence and collective work has alone been able to force man to leave the state of savagery and brutality which constituted his original nature or indeed his starting-point for further development. We are profoundly convinced of this truth that the whole life of men – interests, trends, needs, illusions, stupidities even, just as much as the acts of violence, the injustices, and all the actions which have the appearance of being voluntary – represent only the consequence of the inevitable forces of life in society. People cannot admit the idea of interdependence, yet they cannot repudiate the reciprocal influence and the correlation between phenomena in the external world.

In nature itself that marvellous interrelationship and network of phenomena is certainly not attained without struggle. Quite the contrary, the harmony of the forces of nature only appears as the actual result of that continual struggle which is the very condition of life and movement. In nature and also in society, order without struggle is death. If order is natural and possible in the universe, it is so solely because this universe is not governed according to some system imagined in advance and imposed by a supreme will. The theological hypothesis of a divine system of laws leads to an evident absurdity and to the negation not only of all order, but of nature itself. Natural laws are not real except in so far as they are inherent in nature, that is to say they are not fixed by any authority. These laws are only simple manifestations or else continual fluctuations of the development of things and of combinations of these very varied, transient, but real facts. Together this all constitutes what we call ‘nature’. Human intelligence and its capability for science observed these facts, controlled them experimentally, then reunited them in a system and called them laws.

But nature itself knows no laws. It acts unconsciously, representing in itself the infinite variety of phenomena, appearing and repeating themselves in an inevitable way. That is why, thanks to this inevitability of action, universal order can and indeed does exist.

Such an order also appears in human society, which apparently evolves in a supposedly non-natural manner, but actually submits

poisoned their relationships at a later time. But at this period of the early eighteen forties their differences had not yet matured and Bakunin learned a good deal from Marx of the doctrine of historical materialism.

From Proudhon he learned even more. Proudhon can be considered as the father of modern anarchism, for he utterly rejected the very concept of authority, in both politics and religion. In his economic views, he advocated a scheme called mutualism, in which the most important role was played by a national bank, based on the mutual confidence of all those who were engaged in production. Bakunin did not take up this idea for he was impressed rather by the Marxian economies and advocated a system of collectivism, but he thoroughly appreciated the spirit of liberty that breathed through all Proudhon’s writings and talk, and he placed him in that respect above Marx, of whom he truly said that the spirit of liberty was lacking.

Towards the end of 1847, Bakunin was expelled from Paris for a speech advocating freedom for Poland which was so displeasing to the Tsarist government that it put pressure on the French government to take action against him. He spent a few months in Brussels, but the revolution of February, 1848, which overthrew King Louis Philippe and established the Second Republic allowed Bakunin to return to Paris and he took a prominent part in the political demonstrations of the day. In Prague he participated in a brief insurrection, and in May, 1849, in another in Dresden. This resulted in his arrest, and finally his extradition to Russia, which sentenced him to death. He passed eight horrible years in solitary confinement and it was only the death of Nicholas I and the accession of the milder Alexander II that enabled his family to secure his release. He spent four more years exiled in Siberia, where he married. Finally, in 1861, he escaped on an American vessel going to Japan and at the end of the year reached London.

There he worked with Alexander Herzen, the Russian liberal, in his publications addressed to the Russian people, arrived too late to help a Polish insurrection, then settled down in Italy.

Here he encountered the religiously-minded nationalism of Mazzini, a man whom he greatly respected personally, but whose ideas he heartily disliked. This led him to accentuate the anti-patriotic and anti-religious elements in his own ideas, which by the middle eighteen-sixties had become practically those later called “anarchism”.

In 1867 he went to Geneva to attend the inaugural Congress of the League for Peace and Freedom, a bourgeois body which he thought some use could be made for the purpose of socialist propaganda. He found that this could not be done and instead concentrated on the First International, which had been founded, largely through the instrumentality of Marx. Bakunin and his friends had formed the Alliance of Socialist Democracy and this body now applied to join the International. The application aroused the suspicions of Marx who felt a jealous possessiveness of the International and had a German-minded antipathy to anything coming from a Russian. The initial proposal was therefore turned down and the Alliance was only admitted in sections, and when, as a separate body, it had been disbanded.

In September of the same year, a Congress of the International showed itself favourable to Bakunin's view that inheritance should be abolished and rejected Marx's views on this subject. This was the beginning of a breach between Marx and his followers on the one hand and Bakunin and his followers on the other. It was fundamentally a difference on the question as to the role of the state in the socialist programme. The Marxian view was essentially that the state must be used to bring about and consolidate Socialism; the views of the Bakuninists (at this period beginning to be called ‘anarchists’) was that the state must be abolished, and that it could never be used to attain either Socialism or any form of social justice for the workers.

These differences spread throughout the International and were exacerbated in Switzerland (where Bakunin was now settled) by a Russian émigré named Utin, who by methods of character-assassination poisoned Marx's already jealous and vindictive mind still further against Bakunin. The latter rightly resented

individual sacrifices. Existing under such an abstract form, and at the same time such a violent one, it continues, as goes without saying, to obstruct individual freedom more and more in the name of that lie which is known as the ‘public good’, although it evidently only represents exclusively the interest of the ruling class. The state, in this way, appears to us as an inevitable negation and an annihilation of all freedom, all interest, individual as well as general.

We see here that in the metaphysical and theological systems everything is linked and explained self-consistently. This is why the logical defenders of these systems can and indeed must, with an easy conscience, continue to exploit the popular masses by means of church and state. Cramming their pockets and slaking all their foul desires, they can at the same time console themselves with the thought that they are taking all this trouble for the glory of God, for the victory of civilisation and for the eternal happiness of the proletariat. But we others, not believing either in God or in the immortality of the soul, nor in the individual freedom of the will, we assert that freedom must be understood in its completest and widest sense as the goal of the historic progress of mankind.

By a strange, though logical, contrast, our idealist opponents of theology and metaphysics take the principle of freedom as the foundation and basis of their theories so as to conclude quite simply with the indispensability of the enslavement of men. We others, materialist in theory, we tend in practice to create and to make durable a rational and noble idealism. Our enemies, religious and transcendental idealists, come down to a practical, bloody and vile materialism in the name of the same logic, according to which each development is the negation of the basic principle.

We are convinced that all the richness of the intellectual, moral and material development of man, just like his apparent independence – that all this is the product of life in society. Outside society, man would not only not be free, but he would not be transformed into a real man at all, that is to say, into a being who has self-consciousness, who alone thinks and speaks. The combination of

finally in a great federation, international and universal. Then alone will be realised the true and life-giving order of freedom and the common good, that order which, far from denying, on the contrary affirms and brings into harmony the interests of individuals and of society.

It is said that the harmony and universal solidarity of the interests of individuals and of society will never be capable of realisation in practice because society's interests, being contradictory, are not in a position to balance one another by themselves or even to come to some sort of understanding. To such an objection I will reply that, if up to the present day the interests have never anywhere been in mutual harmony, that was because of the state, which has sacrificed the interests of the majority to the profit of a privileged minority. That is why that notorious incompatibility and that struggle of personal interests with those of society is nothing less than a political deception and lie, born out of the theological lie which imagined the doctrine of original sin so as to dishonour man and destroy in him the sense of his own worth.

This same false idea of the conflict of interests was also sown by the dreams of metaphysics which, as is known, is a close relative of theology. Not appreciating the sociability of human nature, metaphysics regards society as a mechanical aggregate of individuals, of a purely artificial kind, suddenly brought together in the name of some contract, either formal or secret, freely entered into or else under the influence of a higher power. Before uniting themselves in society, these individuals, endowed with a kind of immortal soul, enjoyed complete freedom.

But if the metaphysicians assert that men, above all those who believe in the immortality of the soul, are free beings outside society, we arrive inevitably then at this conclusion: that men cannot unite in society except on condition that they repudiate their freedom, their natural independence, and sacrifice their interests, first personal and then local. Such a renunciation and such a sacrifice of oneself must be, on that argument, all the more pressing as society becomes more numerous and its organisation more complex. In such a case the state is the expression of all the

the campaign of calumny which was now launched against him but he was of a tolerant and generous disposition and for all his resentment against Marx's tactics (only too prophetic of later 'communist' methods) never failed to acknowledge Marx's greatness as socialist and thinker. He even began at this time a Russian translation of Marx's *Das Kapital*.

In the early part of 1870, Bakunin was occupied in trying to stir up the Russian people to insurrection in collaboration with a fanatical young revolutionary named Sergei Nechayev. The latter had committed a political murder in Russia and deceived Bakunin into condoning this act. He also published a 'Revolutionary Catechism' which has often been mistaken for a production of Bakunin's, and which preaches the most violent and amoral tactics against existing society. Internal evidence shows that it cannot be Bakunin's for he was not an advocate of such opinions; and when he finally became aware of Nechayev's unscrupulousness he broke with him.

The Franco-German war which broke out in July, 1870, led to the writing of Bakunin's most important works. He looked to social revolution on the part of peasants and workers both to overthrow the reactionary regime of Napoleon III and to repel the German invaders. With the purpose of stirring up such a movement he wrote *A Letter to a Frenchman*, and then in September after the fall of the Second Empire and the establishment of the Third Republic, went to Lyons to launch an anarchist rising. The movement failed after an initial and brief success, and he fled back to Locarno.

This fiasco deeply embittered and depressed Bakunin. He had lost all faith in the bourgeoisie since their turning on the workers in the revolutions of 1848, but now even the workers had shown themselves supine, and he became very pessimistic about their future. Arising out of these events he wrote his greatest work, *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*. The title implied an alliance between the knout of the Russian Tsar and the new German Empire of Bismarck and Wilhelm I to crush

the social revolution. It became a very voluminous work, treating in an extremely discursive way all manner of subjects, political, historical, economic, religious, philosophical, metaphysical, ethical and even astronomical. The piece known as 'God and the State' is merely a fragment of this greater work, which is indeed Bakunin's magnum opus, his testament, as he called it. He worked at it intermittently from the close of 1870 to the close of 1872 and even then never succeeded in finishing it.

The Paris Commune of March-May, 1871, interested him greatly though he no longer had any illusions about a workers' victory in any near future. He considered that the events of the Commune gave a practical justification of his theories as against those of the Marxians.

Bakunin's pamphlet, 'The Political Theology of Mazzini', had a wide circulation in Italy and a great effect on the Italian working class, which largely became imbued with anarchist ideas. In Spain also, Bakunin's ideas bore fruit and to a lesser extent, in France.

In 1872 he was occupied with the coming Congress of the International at the Hague. This meeting, which was held in September, was 'stacked' by the Marxists in a manner which later Marxist tactics have made only too familiar. The equally familiar tactics of character-assassination were also resorted to by Marx, to his everlasting discredit, and Bakunin and his closest friend James Guillaume were expelled from the International, the headquarters of which were at the same time shifted to New York to prevent it from falling into the hands of the anti-Marxists, who constituted a real majority in the International. That organisation soon withered and died in its alien home; but the Anarchists set up a new International in Switzerland and this lasted a few years more, surviving Bakunin himself.

It was based on Bakunin's idea of the Workers' International being a loose association of fully autonomous, national groups, devoted only to the economic struggle, in contradistinction to Marx's attempt to convert it into a highly centralised and rigidly

plain that, in exactly the same way that the religious or heavenly abstraction, God, represents in reality the very positive and very real interests of a privileged caste, the clergy (its terrestrial counterpart), so the political abstraction, the state, represents the no less real and positive interests of the class which is principally if not exclusively exploiting people today and which is moreover tending to swallow up all the others, the bourgeoisie. And just as the clergy is always divided and today is tending to divide itself all the more into a very powerful and a very rich minority and a majority which is very subordinate and rather poor, so, in the same way, the bourgeoisie and its diverse social and political organisations in industry, agriculture, banking and commerce, just as in all the administrative, financial, judicial, university, police and military functions of the state, is tending to weld itself further each day into a truly dominant oligarchy and a countless mass of creatures who are more or less vainglorious and more or less fallen, living in a perpetual illusion and pushed back inevitably more and more into the proletariat by an irresistible force, that of present-day economic development, and reduced to serving as blind instruments of this all-powerful oligarchy.

The abolition of the church and of the state must be the first and indispensable condition of the real emancipation of society; after which (and only after which) it can, and must, organise itself in a different fashion, but not from top to bottom and according to an ideal plan, dreamt up by a few wise men or scholars, or even by force of decrees put out by some dictatorial force or even by a national assembly, elected by universal suffrage. Such a system, as I have already said, would lead inevitably to the creation of a new state, and consequently to the formation of a governmental aristocracy, that is, an entire class of people having nothing in common with the mass of the people. Certainly, that class would begin again to exploit the people and subject them under the pretext of the common good or in order to save the state.

The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and

a collective dictatorship, were it formed by many hundreds of individuals endowed with superior faculties, where are those brains powerful enough and wide-ranging enough to embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of the real interests, aspirations, wishes and needs whose sum total constitutes the collective will of a people, and to invent a social organisation which can satisfy everybody? This organisation will never be anything but a Procrustean bed which the more or less obvious violence of the state will be able to force unhappy society to lie down on. That is what has always happened until now, and it is precisely this old system of organisation by force that the social revolution must put an end to, by giving back their complete freedom to the masses, groups, communes, associations, individuals even, and by destroying once and for all the historic cause of all the violent acts, the power, and the very existence, of the state. The state must carry away in its fall all the injustices of the juridical law with all the lies of the various religions, this law and these religions never having been anything but the enforced consecration (as much ideological as actual) of all the violence represented, guaranteed and licensed by the state.

It is clear that freedom will never be given to mankind, and that the real interests of society, of all the groups and local organisations as well as of all the individuals who make up society, will only be able to find real satisfaction when there are no more states. It is clear that all the so-called general interests of society, which the state is alleged to represent and which in reality are nothing but the constant and general negation of the positive interests of the regions, communes, associations and the largest number of individuals subjected to the state, constitute an abstraction, a fiction, a lie, and that the state is like one great slaughter-house, and like an immense graveyard where, in the shadow and under the pretext of this abstraction, there come all the real aspirations, all the living initiatives of a nation, to let themselves be generously and sanctimoniously sacrificed and buried.

And since no abstraction ever exists by itself or for itself, since it has neither legs to walk on, nor arms to create with, nor stomach to digest this mass of victims which it is given to devour, it is

controlled instrument of political manoeuvres — in fact what Lenin afterwards made of the Third International.

In 1873, Bakunin withdrew from political activities. His health had been permanently injured by the long years of solitary confinement in Russian prisons and, though he was a man of great size, physical strength and energy, he was now old before his time. He came out of his retirement, however, for the last time, in May, 1874, to lead an insurrection in the Italian province of Bologna; but this was a complete fiasco.

He believed in mass organisations, in solidarity, and to him individualism was a bourgeois ideology — a mere excuse for egoism. True liberty could only be achieved in and through society.

Bakunin was in other words a socialist, or as he often called himself, a Collectivist, but his socialism was of the libertarian school and expressively rejected authority and, above all, the state. In this respect he followed the doctrine of Proudhon, not of Marx.

Bakunin died at Berne on 1st July, 1876, and was buried in the cemetery there.

The message which Bakunin tried to preach was that only the workers could free the workers; in other words, he desired to stimulate the self-activity of the working-class. He was never tired of quoting the celebrated slogan of the First International: “The emancipation of the toilers must be the work of the toilers themselves,” and he expressly excluded from the concept of ‘toilers’ those ex-workers who, having gained the leadership of a working-class movement, endeavour to make themselves masters of it and lead it where they are determined that it shall go. To Bakunin that was not emancipation, it was merely a change of masters. But he wanted the triumph of humanity — a full human development of all in conditions of liberty and equality.

To him this could not be achieved by the methods envisaged by Marx. Bakunin had assumed that, in practice, the authoritarian elements in Marxism when it attained power would predominate, and this turned out to be correct. Bakunin argued that “the State has always been the patrimony of some privileged

class: a priestly class, an aristocratic class, a bourgeois class. And finally, when all the other classes have exhausted themselves, the State then becomes the patrimony of the bureaucratic class and then falls – or, if you will, rises – to the position of a machine”.

It is obvious of course that Marxism and Bakuninism despite these differences have much in common and Bakunin himself has not failed to point this out in the pages that follow. Both systems were founded on the idea of historical materialism, both accepted the class struggle, both were socialist in the sense of being opposed to private property in the means of production. They differed in that Bakuninism refused to accept the state under any circumstances, that it rejected party politics or parliamentary action, and that it was founded on the principle of liberty as against that of authority: and indeed, it is this spirit of liberty (not individualism) that distinguishes Bakunin, and in the light of which his criticisms of Marx and Marxism must be read.

Up to the present, however, the emancipation of the workers has nowhere been achieved, either by Bakunin’s methods nor by Marx’s. If the Socialist movement, in its more militant and revolutionary aspects, continues to exist throughout the world, it is possible that the political theories of Marx may give way to those of Bakunin, and that in the end he will prevail as the inspiring genius of militant and democratic Socialism.

(adapted from a text by K. J. Kenafick, Melbourne, 1950)

because they were men of good faith, they were full of mistrust in themselves when faced with the immense work they had devoted their life and their thought to: they counted for so little! They had moreover that conviction that in the social revolution – diametrically opposed in this as in everything else to the political revolution – the action of individuals counted for almost nothing and the spontaneous action of the masses should count for everything. All that individuals can do is to elaborate, clarify and propagate the ideas that correspond to the popular feeling, and, beyond this, to contribute by their ceaseless efforts to the revolutionary organisation of the natural power of the masses, but nothing beyond that. And everything else should not and could not take place except by the action of the people themselves. Otherwise one would end with political dictatorship, that is to say, the reconstruction of the state, of the privileges, injustices and all oppressions of the state, and one would arrive by a devious but logical path at the re-establishment of the political, social and economic slavery of the popular masses.

Varlin and all his friends, like all sincere socialists, and in general like all workers born and bred among the people, shared to the highest degree this perfectly legitimate prejudice against the continual intervention of the same individuals, against the domination exerted by superior personages; and since they were fair-minded above all things, they turned this foresight, this mistrust just as much against themselves as against all the other individuals.

Contrary to that authoritarian communist type of thinking – in my opinion completely erroneous – that a social revolution can be decreed and organised, whether by a dictatorship or whether by a constituent assembly resulting from some political revolution, our friends, the socialists of Paris, thought that it could not be made or brought to its full development except by the spontaneous and continuous action of the masses, the groups and the associations of the people.

Our friends in Paris were a thousand times right. For indeed, where is that head, however brilliant it may be, or if one wishes to speak of

threatened with starvation, and exposed to all the dirty tricks of the reactionary faction which had managed to set itself up and maintain itself at Versailles, with the permission and by the favour of the Prussians. They had to oppose a revolutionary government and army to the government and army of Versailles – that is, in order to combat monarchic and clerical reaction, they had to organise themselves in reactionary Jacobin fashion, forgetting or sacrificing what they themselves knew were the first conditions of revolutionary socialism.

Is it not natural that, in such circumstances, the Jacobins, who were the strongest because they constituted the majority in the Commune and who besides this possessed to an infinitely superior degree the political instinct and the tradition and practice of governmental organisation, had immense advantages over the socialists? What one must surely find astounding is that they did not take more advantage than they did, that they did not give an exclusively Jacobin character to the Paris rising, and that they allowed themselves, on the contrary, to be carried on into a social revolution.

I know that many socialists, very consistent in their theoretical ideas, reproach our Paris friends for not showing themselves sufficiently socialist in their revolutionary practice, while all the loud-mouths of the bourgeois press accuse them on the contrary of having followed their socialist programme only too faithfully. Let us leave these ignominious denunciators from that section of the press on one side for the moment; I should like to make the point to the strict theoreticians of the emancipation of the proletariat that they are unjust to our Paris friends. For between the most precise theories and putting them into practice there is an immense distance which cannot be covered in a few days. Whoever had the good fortune to know Varlin, for instance, to name only one whose death is certain, knows how much the socialist convictions in him and his friends were passionate, considered and profound. These were men whose ardent enthusiasm, devotion and good faith could never have been doubted by any of those who came across them. But precisely

The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State

I am neither a scholar nor a philosopher, nor even a writer by profession. I have written very little during my life and I have never done so, as it were, except in self-defence, and only when a passionate conviction compelled me to overcome the repugnance which I feel instinctively for parading my private self in public.

Who am I then, and what is it that compels me to publish this work at the present time? I am a passionate seeker of the truth, and none the less persistent an enemy to the harmful untruths which the law and order party (that official representative, privileged and self-seeking, of all the religious, metaphysical, political, legal, economic and social villainies, past and present) still has the arrogance to make use of today so as to brutalise and enslave the world.

I am a fanatical lover of freedom, considering it as the unique environment within which the intelligence, dignity and happiness of mankind may develop and increase. I am not speaking of that freedom which is purely formal, doled out, measured and regulated by the state, an everlasting lie which in reality never represents anything but the privilege of a few based on the enslavement of everyone else. Nor do I mean that individualistic, egotistical, malicious and illusory freedom, extolled by the school of J.-J. Rousseau, as by all the other schools of bourgeois liberalism, which considers the so-called rights of everyone, represented by the state as the limit of the rights of each individual, and which in fact leads of necessity and without exception to the reduction of the rights of the individual to zero.

No, I mean the only freedom which is truly worthy of that name, the freedom which consists in the full development of all the material, intellectual and moral powers which are found in the form of latent capabilities in every individual. I mean that freedom which recognises only those restrictions which are laid down for us by the laws of our own nature; so, properly speaking, there are no restrictions, since these laws are not

imposed by some outside legislator situated maybe beside us or maybe above us, they are immanent in us and inherent in us and constitute the very basis of all our being, as much material as intellectual and moral. Thus, instead of trying to find a limit for them, we should consider them as the real conditions of, and the real reason for, our freedom.

I mean that freedom of the individual which, far from stopping as if before a boundary in the face of the freedom of others, on the contrary finds in that freedom its own confirmation and extension to infinity; the unlimited freedom of each in the freedom of all, freedom in solidarity, freedom in equality; triumphant freedom, victorious over brute force and the principle of authority which was never anything but the idealised expression of brute force; freedom which, after overthrowing all the heavenly and earthly idols, will establish and organise a new world, that of humanity in solidarity, built on the ruin of all churches and all states.

I am a convinced supporter of economic and social equality, because I know that, outside that equality, freedom, justice, human dignity, morality, and the well-being of individuals, just as much as the prosperity of nations, will never be anything but lies. But, supporter though I may be of freedom, this first condition of humanity, I think that equality must be established in the world by the spontaneous organisation of work and of the collective ownership of producers' associations, freely organised and federated in the communes, and by the equally spontaneous federation of these communes, but not by the overriding and enslaving activity of the state.

This is the point which mainly divides the revolutionary socialists or collectivists from the authoritarian communists who are supporters of the absolute power of the state. Their goal is the same: both the one and the other faction equally desire the creation of a new social order based solely on the organisation of collective work, inevitably imposed on one and all by the very nature of things, in economic conditions which are equal for all, and upon the collective appropriation of the instruments of labour.

This was a great misfortune for the Commune and for themselves; they were paralysed by it, and they paralysed the Commune; but it is not possible to reproach them for it, as though for a fault. Men do not change from day to day, nor do they change their own natures or habits at will. These men proved their sincerity, in letting themselves be killed for the Commune. Who will dare ask more of them?

They are all the more excusable, because the people of Paris, under whose influence they thought and acted, were themselves socialist much more by instinct than by ideology or considered conviction. All their aspirations are to the highest degree and exclusively socialist; but their ideas, or rather the traditional representations of them, are still far from reaching that level. There are still many Jacobin prejudices, many dictatorial and governmental conceptions, among the proletariat of the large cities of France and even among that of Paris. The cult of authority, a fatal product of religious education, that historic source of all the evils, all the depravities and all the servility among the people, has not yet been entirely eradicated from their minds. It is equally true that even the most intelligent children of the people, the most convinced socialists, have not yet succeeded in entirely delivering themselves of it. Rummage in their conscience and you will still find there the Jacobin, the governmentalist, pushed back into some murky corner and, it is true, become very modest, but he is not entirely dead.

Furthermore, the situation of the small number of convinced socialists who formed part of the Commune was extremely difficult. Not feeling themselves sufficiently supported by the great mass of the Parisian population (the organisation of the International Association moreover being itself very imperfect, numbering scarcely a few thousand individuals), they had to keep up a daily struggle against the Jacobin majority. And in what circumstances indeed! They had to give bread and work to some hundreds of thousands of workers, organise them, arm them, and at the same time keep an eye on the reactionary manoeuvres going on in a huge city like Paris, under siege,

whom our friend Varlin naturally takes his place, formed in the Commune only a very small minority indeed; they were at the very most only some fourteen or fifteen members. The remainder was composed of Jacobins. But, let it be understood, there are Jacobins and Jacobins. There are the lawyer and doctrinaire Jacobins, like M. Gambetta, whose positivist republicanism, presumptuous, despotic and formalistic, having repudiated the old revolutionary faith and having conserved nothing from Jacobinism except the cult of unity and authority, has surrendered popular France to the Prussians, and later to indigenous forces of reaction; and there are those Jacobins who are openly revolutionary, the heroes and last sincere representatives of the democratic faith of 1793, capable of sacrificing their well-armed unity and authority to the necessities of the Revolution, rather than bow down their consciences before the insolence of reaction. These great-hearted Jacobins, at the head of whom Delescluze naturally takes his place, a great spirit and a great character, wish for the triumph of the Revolution before all things. And since there is no revolution without the popular masses, and since these masses today have pre-eminently a socialist instinct and can no longer make any other revolution but an economic and social one, the Jacobins of good faith, allowing themselves to be led on more and more by the logic of the revolutionary movement, will end by becoming socialists in spite of themselves. This was precisely the situation of the Jacobins who took part in the Paris Commune. Delescluze and many others with him signed programmes and proclamations of which the general line and promises were definitely socialist. But since, in spite of all their good faith and good intentions, they were only socialists more through external pressure than through internal conviction, and since they did not have the time or the capacity to overcome and suppress in themselves a mass of bourgeois prejudices which were in contradiction with their more recent socialist outlook, one can understand that, paralysed by this internal conflict, they could never escape from generalities, nor take one of those decisive steps which would break forever their solidarity and all their connections with the bourgeois world.

Only the communists imagine they will be able to attain this by the development and the organisation of the political power of the working classes, principally of the urban proletariat, with the help of bourgeois radicalism, while the revolutionary socialists, enemies of every tie and every alliance of an equivocal nature, think on the contrary that they will not be able to attain this goal except by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses as much in the towns as in the countryside, including all the men of good will who, breaking with their past in the upper classes, might sincerely wish to join with them and wholly accept their programme.

From this two different methods are derived. The communists believe they should organise the workers' strength to take over the political power of the states. The revolutionary socialists organise with a view to the destruction, or, if one wants a more polite word, the liquidation, of the states. The communists are supporters of the principle and practice of authority; the revolutionary socialists have no faith except in freedom. Both the one and the other, equally supporters of science which is to destroy superstition and replace belief, differ in the former wishing to impose it, and the latter striving to propagate it; so that human groups, convinced of its truth, may organise and federate spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interests, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the ignorant masses by some superior intellects.

The revolutionary socialists think that there is much more practical and intellectual common sense in the instinctive aspirations and in the real needs of the mass of the people than in the profound intelligence of all these doctors and teachers of mankind who, after so many fruitless attempts to make humanity happy, still aspire to add their own efforts. The revolutionary socialists think the opposite: that mankind has allowed itself to be governed long enough, too long, and that the origin of its unhappiness does not reside in this or that

form of government but in the very principle and fact of government, whatever kind it may be.

Finally this is the same, already historic, contradiction which exists between the scientific communism developed by the German school and accepted in part by the American and English socialists on the one hand, and the Proudhonism widely developed and pushed right to these, its final consequences, on the other, accepted by the proletariat of the Latin countries. (It is equally accepted and will be accepted yet more by the essentially non-political instinct of the Slav peoples.) Revolutionary socialism has just attempted its first demonstration, both splendid and practical, in the Paris Commune.

I am a supporter of the Paris Commune, which, because it was massacred and drowned in blood by the executioners of monarchic and clerical reaction, has therefore become all the more lively and powerful in the imagination and heart of the European proletariat. I am above all a supporter of it because it was a bold and outspoken negation of the state.

It is a tremendously significant historical fact that this negation of the state should have been manifested particularly in France, which has been until now the country par excellence of political centralisation, and that it should have been above all precisely Paris, the historic fountainhead of this great French civilisation, which should have taken the initiative. Paris, taking off its own crown and proclaiming its own downfall with enthusiasm so as to give freedom and life to France, to Europe, to the whole world! Paris, affirming once more its historic ability to take the lead, and showing to all the enslaved peoples (and which popular masses indeed are not slaves?) the unique way of emancipation and salvation! Paris, striking a mortal blow at the political traditions of bourgeois radicalism and providing a real basis for revolutionary socialism! Paris, earning once more the curses of all the reactionary gangs of France and Europe! Paris, being buried in its ruins so as to pronounce a solemn contradiction to triumphant reaction; saving by its catastrophe the honour and future of France, and proving to a comforted mankind that, if

life, intelligence and moral power have disappeared from the upper classes, they have remained energetic and full of potential in the proletariat! Paris, inaugurating the new era, that of the final and complete emancipation of the masses of the people and of their solidarity, henceforth a matter of fact, across and despite state frontiers. Paris, destroying patriotism and building on its ruins the religion of humanity! Paris, proclaiming itself humanist and atheist: and replacing the fictions of religion by the great realities of social life and faith in science, replacing the lies and injustices of religious, political and legal morality by the principles of freedom, justice, equality and fraternity, these eternal fundamentals of all human morality! Heroic Paris, rational and faithful, confirming its energetic faith in the destinies of mankind even in its glorious downfall and destruction, and leaving that faith much more energetic and lively for the generations to come! Paris, soaked in the blood of its most generous-hearted children—there indeed is mankind crucified by the international and co-ordinated reaction of all Europe, under the immediate inspiration of all the Christian churches and that high priest of iniquity, the Pope. But the next international and solidaristic revolution of the people will be the resurrection of Paris.

Such is the true meaning, and such are the immense beneficial consequences, of the two months of the existence and the fall, forever memorable, of the Paris Commune.

The Paris commune lasted for too short a time, and it was too much hindered in its internal development by the mortal struggle which it had to maintain against the Versailles reaction, for it to have been able, I do not say even to apply, but to elaborate its socialist programme in theory. Besides, it must be recognised that the majority of the members of the Commune were not strictly speaking socialists and that, if they appeared to be such, it was because they were irresistibly swept forward by the course of events, by the nature of their environment, and by the necessities of their position, and not by their own personal conviction. The socialists, at the head of