Marx and Bakunin

Introduction to Marx's Inaugural Address to the International Working Men's Association

Ervin Szabó

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Nowadays the class struggles and within these the viewpoint of some groups are alarmingly insular minded. These groups throw the experiences of the past – which have already been accumulated – away, and focus only on present times. This thing wouldn't be surprising if we could fight this struggle in unity against the ruling class and after in bed of roses we would enjoy the bearings of communism. Who would be that foolish person that time dealing with the spirit of the past... But we are living in capitalism and our class is very devided, which thing has very arborescent reasons – from the scarcity of class-solidarity to the abscence of class cosciousness. Not long ago we have sent a text to a libertarian communist activist, who after reading that text has asked why we are dealing with such an old text. (It was written in the nineteenth century.) We have answered in our letter: „What have changed between now and then connected to capitalism and proletarian struggles?" We cast everything away which rejects dialectic and throws our struggles to the space and wrest them from their historical context. We don't want to argufy but go to blazes those banzai self-advertising actionism and other craps, which make only press-material for media and enhance capital's terror which thing could go with imprisonment and liquidation of thousands of comrades. Of course, we are not against the organised or spontaneous street fightings or looting, sabotage, demonstration, strike. We just want to emphasize, that the most important thing is to do these actions in organised form and orderly in case if these have spontaneous aspects to avoid defeat.

For us there is no „past" and „present" divided into two different parts, just the whole of the struggle in its continuity. Therefore it's important to integrate „preterite struggles" as the experiences for the future. This is the reason why we publish this text.

Ervin Szabó had an especial walk of life. His writing which is published here shows great perspicacity. At first he makes a wild rush at social democracy with which he was arguing all along his life and condemns its personalities and its hatred of anarchism. On the one hand this conflict can originate to Marx and Engels. On the other hand Bakunin and the anarchists were responsible for the dividing of the revolutionary movement. He has written this article to establish the unity. It's important to point out this because at present working class is divided at many walks of bourgeois „life", despite of their common interests. Because of this, we think it's necessary for proletarians living in the West to get to know the writing of comrade Szabó.

Szabó shows in his article that the „two tendencies" agreed in most of the principles of the First International, the only difference between them was in the question of centralization/decentralization. Marx supported the centralization against Bakunin's federalism but this is only a half-truth, because Bakunin and his associates established a centralized communist organization with the forming of Alliance. Its statues had romantic elements but other parts of it compose an integral part of the communist platform. At the same time the two tendencies accused each other with authoritarianism, and personal remark empoisoned the atmosphere. This irresponsible trifling have divided the revolutionary working-class movement. Thus we have to argue and explain the basic differences between communism and bolshevism as well as anarchism and liberalism yet again.

We do not agree with some of the author's false statements – for example the partition of „scientist and fighter", the considering of social democracy as a part of socialism. After all, social democracy had never maintained the struggle of the proletariat but it had tried to inactivate it. Altogether the article is progressive for our struggle because it tries to enhance unity despite of its ambiguous parts.

Ervin Szabó was born in 1877. From 1899 he admits himself anarchist, in after years Marxist. The Russian revolutionists and the Hungarian-German social democracy had great affect on his viewpoint. With the latter he encountered soon after – because of its reformism. He was publishing regularly all along his life and was all attention to the revolutionary movement in which he was taking part, too. It's due to him that socialist pieces have become accessible in the public libraries in Hungary. Cultural orientation had a great importance his whole lifelong through. He made an important role in translating, publishing Marx-Engels' selected works and wrote divine forewords. He was forming connections with Italian and Russian anarcho-syndicalists but he has never been touched by the waves of nationalism. The experience of syndicalism hurt him, namely he become syndicalist in 1909. In the next year he wrote the manifesto of the syndicalist propaganda-group (in his syndicalism he always rejected the unions and attended to independent workers' organizations). He wrote his paper named „The struggle between Capital and Labour" in 1911 and along about the first world war he had been the determinant theoretican of the Hungarian „Zimmerwaldists" and Revolutionary Socialists, but had kept himself in the background. He had been writing internationalist pamphlets, had been giving piece of advice connected to conspiracy. Anarchists and communists had been working together inside this group, they had had no divergencies. Later the Hungarian Communist Party was formed from this movement, which had been appropriated by Kun and his associates afterwards and made an advance to bolshevism. Ervin Szabó couldn't see this because he died in 1918. He was waiting for the revolution his whole lifelong through, he saw expectantly the revolution in Russia but he avoided bolshevism because he had a flair for this and due to his non-Leninist Marxism. Truly Ervin Szabó had never been eclectic – although he tried a lot within the spectrum of the working-class movement. He was an anarcho-Marxist whom both liberalism and bolshevism tried to appropriate. We are sorry he died before the proletarian revolution of 1919 in Hungary which he was fighting actively for.

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Every nation and every generation has its favorite legendary epoch into which it projects its yearnings and ideals in the form of extremely enlarged realities-enlarged and exaggerated-because only such unconscious self-delusion can ever compensate for the misery of the present, a present upon which desires get shipwrecked, in which the most beautiful principles shrivel into commonplace facts.

What the heroic age was for warlike peoples and the era of the martyrs for the Christians, that is the era of the International for the socialists of Western Europe. That was the legendary age when the bourgeoisie and the rulers of all Europe were trembling at the sight of this international spectre, which was in high fever burning and consuming itself in the rivalry of the titans, Marx and Bakunin. The Inaugural Address was the first public docu-ment issued by the first international organization of the working class.

Today we know that the International Working Men's Association was far from being the awe-inspiring power the bourgeoisie imagined it to be, terror-stricken as it was by revolutions and counterrevolutions and as it still is in the less developed countries. The workers of any minor country today could throw larger masses and greater force into the struggle than the entire international camp that the International was able to muster. It could hardly have been otherwise: the working class was much less devel-oped in some countries, much less conscious in others. It was not its actual power that rendered the International truly great and awe-inspiring, but rather its clear under-standing of basic principles and the guidance it was able to provide the workers' movement. This guidance was precisely what was least appreciated at the time, by the working and by the ruling classes alike. The attention of contemporaries was drawn to immediate goals, to occasional tactics, and to devices meant to shock. Very few were able to recognize the essence, the great principles of liberation.

Perhaps today we are better able to appreciate the true significance of the International, the fact that it emphasized certain principles more clearly and more consciously than any of its predecessors: "that the liberation of the working class can be accomplished only by the working class itself," "that every kind of servitude is social misery," "that in consequence the economic liberation of the working-class is the major goal, and all the political movements must be subordinated to it," and "that the liberation of work is not a local or national problem, but a social one, which extends to every modernized country." All these principles are eminently up-to-date, relevant, and weighty even now. They contain everything that we recognize as the basic principles of contemporary socialist movement. In fact, many wordy party programs say no more, but take longer to say it less well.

In order correctly to evaluate the theoretical and practical significance of the International, I would like to deal with a superstition derived from its internal struggles and which still has an impact on socialist movements in certain countries. In those countries where "German Marxism" prevails, that is, mainly in the German Empire itself, in Austria, Hungary, Russia, and the Balkans, social democrats are stubbornly convinced that the International was destroyed not because it came before its time, but because of personality clashes, particularly the disruptive activity of Bakunin, in other words, that Bakunin, the true father of anarchism, was the enemy of every kind of organization and that the true objective of anarchism to this day is disorganization. Consequently, there can be no more irreconcilable contradiction than the one between anarchism and socialism; anarchists and socialists are not brothers, but enemies.

Every improvement in organizing the proletariat is a step towards its liberation, and every obstacle to its organization is a step backwards. Those friends of the proletariat who would weaken

its solidarity for its own alleged benefit are actually much more dangerous enemies than the opponents who would destroy the proletarian organizations by force. No tendency has advanced further along this line than that of Bakunin. This is why Marxists are waging a merciless war against it.

Thus wrote Karl Kautsky, the leading theoretician of so-called orthodox revolutionary Marxism, only a few years ago. The declaration of a Dutch social democrat at the 1904 international congress in Amsterdam, that "the anarchists are our greatest enemies," likewise went unchallenged. Furthermore, in the above mentioned countries, the anarchists are frequently accused of being spies for the police or agents provocateurs.

The history of the International sheds light on the origin of these arguments and accusations. The roots can be found particularly in the polemical writings with which Marx fought against the growing influence of Bakunin and which ultimately led to the latter's exclusion from the International. These writings not only distort Bakunin's theoretical statements to the point where they appear totally muddled or absurd, but also include grave accusations against his personal and political integrity. Even Kautsky admits that these charges were entirely without foundation: "It is impossible to deny," he wrote in 1902, "that in the heat of the struggle against Bakunin and his followers Marx and his friends overshot their mark and resorted to any number of baseless accusations." Nevertheless, only two years later, a German social democrat wrote a rather successful book about the International in which the followers of Bakunin were, in the words of Kautsky, "occasionally labeled liars, demagogues, and even criminal characters." Another social democrat has, in utter bad faith, distorted the teachings of Bakunin in a pamphlet that has been translated into every European language. The party newspapers and agitators make sure that the poison of libel spreads everywhere. On the other hand, certain anarchists seem to believe in the same bad faith that they can best serve their cause by raising similar charges against Marx, Engels, and social democracy in general.

Under these circumstances it seems appropriate to preface the Hungarian translation of the first document of the International so as to head off a possible attempt to embitter the already sharp actual conflicts with further myths invented in our own country. Hence I will do my best, insofar as that is possible within the framework of an introduction, to make an objective comparison of the

theories of Marx and Bakunin and to determine their relationship to each other.

Bakunin's Theories and Marxism

It cannot be claimed that Bakunin was one of the great masters of style. Predisposed to oral agitation and to action, engaged in constant and almost superhuman activity, Bakunin could not possibly have taken up the pen with the serenity and objectivity which is required for lucid writing. With few exceptions, his writings are occasional pieces about the initiation or justification of some action or polemical tracts. We know how easily a writer becomes dominated by his temperament in such cases, how he stresses certain points which might otherwise have remained in the background, and how he sharpens certain arguments to harm his adversary rather than to serve the cause of justice. All of Bakunin's writings are of this nature, written in the heat of combat. No wonder his opponents have had no difficulty culling contradictions from them or pointing out his many sloppy formulations in order to demonstrate his ignorance and confusion.

Were one to approach his works not with a view to detecting contradictions at all cost, but rather with the realization that the work of an agitator, bent to influence whole countries and generations, must be forceful and single-minded, one would discover something entirely different

in the works of Bakunin. One would discover that the father of anarchism was far from being a representative of idealistic philosophical speculations or of the fantastic individualism of the post-Hegelian period. Rather, Bakunin was, in every respect, the disciple of the nineteenth-century school of positive sociology.

So how could he possibly be cast as the theoretical opponent of Marx?

Bakunin himself claimed to be a disciple of Marx. "I am your disciple," he wrote to him in one of his letters, "and I am proud of it." He declared this to others as well. When Herzen urged him to respond in kind to Marx who had spread rumours about his being a paid agent of the Russian government, Bakunin replied:

As far as Marx is concerned, I know as well as you do that he is guilty towards us like so many others; what is more, that he is the author and instigator of the ignominies attributed to us. Why have I praised him, then? For two reasons… First, for the sake of justice. No matter how despicably he behaved towards us, I for one will not pass over his outstanding merits regarding socialism; he has been ahead of us by serving the cause for almost twenty-five years intelligently, dynamically, and faithfully… Second, for political reasons: Marx is one of the surest, most influential and most intelligent pillars of socialism in the International, and one of the most solid dams against penetration by any kind of bourgeois tendency. And I would never forgive myself were I to annihilate or diminish his un-questionably beneficial influence for the sake of the satisfaction of my personal desire for vengeance.

Bakunin had not spoken in such glowing terms of any of his predecessors or contemporaries even though, like most persons with an impulsive character, he was inclined to exaggerate the virtues and merits of others. Still, he does not mention Proudhon in such favorable colors, though Proudhon was the only truly significant theoretician of socialism next to Marx and undoubtedly shared some of Bakunin's ideas. Even less does Bakunin praise the person who is sometimes described as the true father of anarchism (although his influence was quite limited), Max Stirner, or anybody else, for that matter. Actually Bakunin felt himself closest to Marx, both in theory and in practice. Bakunin was the first to translate the Communist Manifesto into Russian, and he began to translate Capital as well, while it never occurred to him to translate the works of any other west European socialist.

Nevertheless, we cannot refer to him as simply a disciple of Marx or as a Marxist. Even if we mean no more by Marxism than Marx's method of research – historical materialism – and the concomitant principle of action – class struggle – and exclude from it everything that is not a generally valid sociological thesis but merely an observation applicable to a specific period such as capitalism, or to a specific field, such as political economy, even then we would still have to concede that the basic theories of Bakunin and Marx are not completely identical. Not because Bakunin rejected historical materialism, nor because he did not proclaim and practice class struggle, but because, in his reading of these Marxian notions, alien elements had crept in which often interfered with their consistent application.

His general views on social philosophy predisposed Bakunin to Marxism. Some of its opponents like to pretend that anarchism is an extension of bourgeois liberalism, the cult of ultimate individualism and of absolute personal freedom. This is not the place to discuss the untruth of these assertions, but I can marshal any number of quotations to demonstrate that Bakunin was not an individualist. He was far from interpreting historical progress as the work of arbitrary individual will, or from considering social existence as the death of, or even a barrier to, individual liberty. He was far from satisfied with the vapid and superficial formulations of the principle of

individual liberty which states that the only limit to the freedom of the individual is the freedom of other individuals. This was the principle upon which the most typical and most outstanding master of the liberal school of sociology, Herbert Spencer, would have based the society of the future. This definition matches almost word for word the principle of liberty enunciated by Rousseau, and that was precisely the target of Bakunin's sharpest attacks. For him social life is as much determined by implacable laws as nature is. The universal law of causality reigns in one domain just as in the other; the same unseverable connection and fateful ineluctability prevails in one sphere as in the other. It is impossible to revolt against the natural laws, because they surround us and penetrate our every movement, our every thought, regulate our every action, and even when we think we are disobeying the laws of nature we do no more than proclaim their omnipotence. With respect to these laws man can have but one freedom: to recognize them and to use them increasingly along the road to collective and individual liberation and humanization on which he is advancing.

Man has reached this road thanks to his understanding, thanks to his capacity for abstraction. But are abstractions and ideas the springs of historical development? According to the idealists, yes. They claim that certain ideas and feelings are innate in humans. Nothing can be further from the truth. What humans bring with them-selves at the moment of their birth-at various stages of their evolution and to different degrees-is nothing but the material or formal capacity to feel, think, shape, and develop ideas. These capacities are strictly formal. What gives them content? Society does.

How did the first concepts or ideas come about in history? The only thing we can say is that they were not created autonomously, in isolation, by the miraculously enlightened minds of certain inspired individuals. They were the outcome of collective effort, something that passed mostly unnoticed by sections of society and by the minds of individuals. The geniuses, the outstanding individuals of a given society, are only the most fortunate spokesmen of this collective effort. Every person of genius is like Voltaire: "He took the best wherever he found it." In other words, it was the collective mind of primitive society that created the first ideas.

Thus man is a social being, both physically and intellectually. To the idealists a la Rousseau man was free and immortal at the beginning, and became mortal and a slave only in society. He surrendered the freedom of his immortal and infinite soul in order to satisfy the needs of his finite and imperfect body. Social life, therefore, is the surrender of the infinite and of freedom.

The concept of freedom held by materialists, realists, and collectivists is precisely the opposite. Human beings become human only within society, and it is only by the collective action of all society that they attain the consciousness and realization of their humanity. Only social or collective work is able to convert the surface of the earth into an area conducive to human development and liberate men from the yoke of nature. Without this material liberation, moral and intellectual liberation would remain impossible. Nor is it possible to free oneself from the yoke of one's own inner nature; that is, one cannot subordinate the instincts and movements of one's body to the direction of a more developed intellect except by education and culture. Both processes of liberation are social manifestations par excellence. Outside of society man would have forever remained a wild animal… The isolated individual would not even have awoken to the realization of his freedom. To be free means that others, all human, recognize one as free, and deal with one accordingly. Thus freedom is not a factor of isolation, but mutual reflections; not of exclusion, but of contact. The freedom of every individual is nothing but the reflection of

his humanity and his human rights in the consciousness of others. It is only in the presence of others, and vis-á-vis others, that one can claim to be and actually be free.

The progress of society amounts to the widening of the sphere of human liberty. What does this widening mean? It means that man learns the laws of nature better and better and thereby becomes master over them. The road to civilization and to freedom is one and the same.

A thinker who regarded individual freedom and will to be thus dependent on the social environment can certainly not be accused of individualism. When Bakunin emphasizes that "liberty is not at the beginning of history, but at its end," because "the true, great, objective and final goal of history is the actual and total emancipation of every individual," then he is in concert with Engels who had stated that "Socialism is humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity into the kingdom of freedom."

We have seen that Bakunin places the origin of ideas in society and makes freedom dependent on social progress. Only one step separates this interpretation from historical materialism. And Bakunin took this final step. In the pamphlet aimed at the German school of socialism (Sophismes Historiques de l'Ecole Doctrinaire des Communistes Allemands), he once again contrasted the idealists with the materialists:

While they derive all aspects of history, including material progress and the development of various sectors of economic organization, from ideas, the German communists, on the contrary, see in all history, in the most ideal manifestations of collective and individual life, in the intellectual, moral, religious, metaphysical, scientific, artistic, political, legal, and social changes in the past and at the present, nothing but the reflections of economic factors or necessary reactions to them. While the idealists claim that ideas precede facts and even create them, the communists… on the other hand, claim that facts give birth to ideas and that the latter are nothing but the ideal expression of discrete events. The communists claim that the economic, the material world are the facts par excellence; these are the ones that create the main base, the essential foundation, while all other factors, intellectual or moral, political or social, are merely inevitable consequences.

Who is right: the idealists or the materialists? Once the question has been posed in this way, our answer cannot be hesitant. Without a doubt the idealists are mistaken, only the materialists are right. Yes, the facts do precede ideas. Yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower, its roots are the material conditions. Yes, the entire intellectual, moral, political, and social history of mankind is the reflection of its economic history. Every branch of serious and disinterested modern science can be cited to support this great, decisive truth.

We can see that Bakunin was not only able precisely to explain historical materialism, but actually accepted it in its full expanse, though he himself proceeded to limit its applicability right away. Given the gaps in his training in economics one could hardly expect that at times he should not perceive other factors as dominant; the objective view of things, the consistent derivation of the facts of mental life from the objectified outside world, was incompatible with his active fighting spirit. Thus Bakunin easily forgot what he had often argued regarding the social origin of ideas; next to the economic factor he placed two bio-psychological factors – the ability to think and the capacity and need to revolt – as complementary aspects of social evolution. He refers to these two capacities as the negative factors of progress, whereas the economic is the positive one.

Obviously Bakunin in the same breath has cited two elemental and general factors of the organic world and a specifically social factor. For the capacity to think and revolt is not an exclusively human trait, but merely the mental expression and subjective reflection of that great ele-

mental force to which all living creatures owe their life: the struggle for survival. Every struggle is a revolt, the same for the tiger, the caterpillar, the fir tree, the moss, as it is for man. Historical materialism does not deny this in the least. But the person who uses social science as a method of research has to restrict himself to social facts and seek nothing more than the specific means humanity uses in its social struggle and hence finds that the existence of humanity is shaped by the development and forms of its economic activities. In other words, the complex manifestations of society are to be reduced to the most basic social activity. That this basic social activity is founded on even more basic natural conditions is not a matter for the social scientist but pertains to the domain of the natural sciences.

We would be inordinately strict with Bakunin, however, if we were to bar him from the ranks of the adepts of historical materialism simply on the grounds that he has mixed biological and psychological factors into the basic factors accounting for social developments or because at moments he attributed greater importance to ideas. Any number of thinkers who had no greater familiarity with the genuine essence of historical materialism than Bakunin were counted as true Marxists to the end of their life. A whole school of thinkers has identified the examination of economic factors, that is, the derivation of social manifestations from the means of production, simply with economic interest; they have reduced it to a purely psychological category. Engels himself – after Marx's death – made significant allowances for the subjective tendency. Others have confused historical with philosophical materialism. The problem of historical materialism is not simple, and Bakunin is not the only Marxist who used the concept mistakenly.

It is undeniable, however, that Bakunin never fell into extremes; when examining specific social problems he perceived, along with the basic economic aspect, the concomitant intellectual, moral, religious, and other factors; nevertheless, in the critique of ideologies and the struggle against them he never neglected the social bases of ideas.

Among his most deeply rooted tendencies was his antagonism to religion and to the church. In each one of his works he ends up by discussing God and religion. Nevertheless, he writes about the propaganda activity of free thinkers:

Only social revolution, and not the propaganda of free thinkers, will be able to extirpate religion from the bosom of the people. To be sure, that propaganda is quite useful. It is even indispensable as a means of converting the more progressive individuals; but it can-not affect the masses, because religion is not simply a slip or dislocation of the mind, but rather and particularly the protest of the live and active character of the masses against the miseries of actual existence. The people go to church for the same reason as they go to the tavern-to be drugged, to forget their misery, and to think of themselves, at least for brief moments, as equal, free, and happy. Let him have a human life and he will no longer go to either pub or church. This human existence can and will be provided for him only by social revolution.

Some Marxists claim that to attribute decisive significance to human understanding in social development or to attempt the transformation of society by means of legislation is compatible with the economic perception of society. Bakunin's reply to these social scientists was completely in accord with the spirit of historical materialism.

Society is ruled by morals and customs, never by laws. Individual initiatives, rather than the thought or will of the legislator, drive it slowly along the road of progress. There are laws which govern it unconsciously, but these are natural laws, inherent to the social body, just as the physical laws are inherent to material bodies. The better part of these laws is unknown to this day, and yet they have ruled society since its beginnings, independent of the thought and will of the

persons constituting it; from which it follows that we must not confuse them with political and juridical laws.

This sounds very much like the opening sentences in Marx's famous preface to the Critique of Political Economy.

Bakunin's Practical Principles and Marx

Thus far I have endeavored to show the proximity between the general social philosophies of Bakunin and Marx. I have placed greater stress on this than I shall in the next section, in which I compare their political and tactical views, their praxis. Yet it was not about theories that they clashed in the International but rather about questions of tactics and organization. Admittedly these matters are much more important than theories. They mean action, life, actual history; at most, theories provide an account of the extent to which historical events have registered in the heads of individual persons. If I have dealt at length with theories, it was because, while the writings of Marx and of the social democrats, most of which were in German, are easily accessible, the works of Bakunin and the anarchists, mostly in French and Italian, remain largely inaccessible to Hungarian readers. The inevitable consequence of this has been that our working class has gained a totally one-sided view of the significance of both tendencies of the socialist movement and has accepted uncritically all the bona (or mala) fide errors of the German social democrats.

I believe the passages from Bakunin quoted above should make everyone more cautious in regard to the usual accusations; and it should no longer be easy to pretend that the contradiction between Bakunin and Marx is like the one between the working class and the bourgeoisie; moreover, it will not be possible to deny that Bakunin and Marx are related by close theoretical ties.

This kinship seems even closer when it comes to the politics of the working class and the socialist movement. While studying objectively the history of the International, one is bound to feel that the mutual accusations, insofar as they had some basis in reality, were either eminently premature or simply pretended, and farfetched conflicts. There was but one serious source of conflict: whether the organization of the International should be centralized or federalized; whether the General Council sitting in London should be an organization controlling the local sections, or merely a correspondence office transmitting their communications. Because of his temperament, his inclination to authoritarianism, and his personal vanity, Marx was inclined to centralism whereas Bakunin was swept towards the opposite point of view by his temperament and his unbridled desire for action.

Yet all this relates solely to the internal organization of the International. Not a word was said about applying the principles of organization of the International to either the workers' movement on the whole, or to its national, political, and economic subdivisions. After all, every section and, what is more, every single member belonged to the association not via some central national organ, but directly. However, as today, almost forty years after the Hague congress at which Bakunin was excluded from the organization, the central organ of the international social democratic movement, the Bureau Socialiste Internationale in Brussels, is simply that – a bureau, an office, rather than a higher forum – we must conclude that time has vindicated Bakunin.

As to the basic points of the program of the International, Bakunin was in total agreement with Marx. What were these points? The program specified class organization and politics of the working class in total independence from other classes and of bourgeois parties; a halt to the monopoly of the means of production as a basic condition of the liberty of the working class,

hence the subordination of the political movement to the economic struggle; finally, the assertion of the international nature of the workers' movement.

The contradictions that have arisen in these matters do not refer to the essence, but to the inconsequential details or to conclusions that were not at all relevant in that primitive stage of the working-class movement, such as parliamentarianism and participation in government or the problem of the organization of future society-all of which were entirely academic matters at the time. It is fairly obvious, however, that it was precisely the Bakuninists who stuck rigidly to the basic principles of the International, which, as we know, were formulated by Marx, whereas those who stood by Marx during the controversies (it is not possible to refer to them invariably as Marxists) were often mere politicians who made concessions to the early times and the undeveloped conditions out of political opportunism. That is, they have acted much the same way as Bakunin had been justly accused of acting in his Russian policy. The economic and social conditions in Russia were incomparably more primitive than those of Western Europe at the time, for industry and an industrial working class simply did not exist; hence the only possible politics were aristocratic or liberal. In Western Europe, on the contrary, it was not possible to do anything except pure working-class politics. This was all Marx insisted on, as was clearly stated in the program of the International. Bakunin and his disciples wanted the same; and so it happened that each time Marx opposed Bakunin, he ended up by opposing himself. Mutual recriminations are mostly what we get in these matters.

We can see this immediately in the issue of class consciousness. Bakunin was accused of being petit bourgeois; Bakunin said the same about the socialists and workers in Germany:

In Germany though the socialist paper kept insisting on awakening within the proletariat a feeling and consciousness of its necessary contradiction vis-a-vis the bourgeois (Klassenbewusstsein, Klassenkampf), the workers and peasants remain part of the network of the bourgeoisie whose culture surrounds them completely, and whose spirit permeates the masses. And these same socialist writers, who are thundering against the bourgeoisie, are themselves bourgeois from top to bottom; they are the propagandists and apostles of the bourgeoisie, and, although unwittingly for the most part, they have become the defenders of bourgeois interests against the proletariat.

Accordingly, Bakunin took the most determined stand against the bourgeoisie, as well as against the so-called bourgeois socialists or reform socialists, who are intent on purely political reform by means of charity, moral preaching, or government assistance: helping the lower classes, but only through initiatives taken by the upper class. He fought them particularly in Italy, where he had most room for practical action,but elsewhere as well. In this regard Bakunin's attitude was not a bit less determined than that of Marx. In general he claimed that the bourgeoisie, "this class which at one time was so powerful, enlightened, and flourishing and which today slowly but inevitably heads towards decline is already dead as regards its reason and morals. It no longer has faith, or ideas, or any spirit of endeavor. It does not want to and cannot turn back, yet it dares not look forward either." "The character of contemporary bourgeoisie is to appreciate the beautiful only in the past, and to adore in the present only that which is profitable and useful." Hence Bakunin kept reiterating that the working class should not count on the bourgeoisie. No one could have expressed more clearly and pointedly the contradiction separating the concept of the two classes regarding the means of progress. One of the two classes, having developed its economic forces, can increase its power only by means of political power, whereas the other can develop the forces latent in its social situation only through the struggle against this power.

The bourgeois see and understand nothing that is not part of the state or of the means regulated by the state. The maximum of their ideal, of their imagination, and of their heroism is the revolutionary exaggeration of the power and function of the state in the name of general interest. But I have already shown that the activity of the state cannot save… France… I am the absolute enemy of revolution par decrets, the consequence and application of the principle of the revolutionary state; that is, of the kind of revolution which bears only the outward appearance of revolution. I confront the system of revolutionary decrees with the system of revolutionary acts, the only truly effective, consistent, and true one.

Let no one think, however, that Bakunin naively believed it would be sufficient to make a revolution and a collective society would be ready right away. He often stressed that the bourgeois world still has more material means and organized and educated government forces at its disposal than we would wish. In the sequence of historical periods in which cannibalism was replaced by slavery, slavery by serfdom, and serfdom by wage-labor "there will come the terrible day of judgment which in turn will be followed, much, much later, by the era of brotherhood." Bakunin claimed, however, that society cannot be shaken by words and resolutions: actions are needed, but an act deserves the name of action only if it changes the world in some way. Undeniably he was inclined to overestimate the value of violent revolts and to greet every violent uprising as an action; but no one can pretend that he felt that individual action was the only possible one, or that the organization of the masses was superfluous. In some Italian cities where Bakuninism was especially strong he had thousands of adherents organized by trade, in accordance with his principle that "it is not enough to be merely conscious of the truth; it is necessary to organize the forces of the proletariat…" because "without prior organization even the most powerful forces remain impotent and nil." The first congress of Bakuninists decided in this spirit, when it proposed to all its members the establishment of trade unions and of strike funds.

In fact, this was not what separated the two nuances of the International. It was not a matter of whether organization was necessary or not, but rather whether the basis of socialist organization should be unions by trade or purely political organizations. One of Marx's most faithful disciples, Jung, in an official letter addressed to one of the leaders of the Swiss Bakuninists, James Guillaume, on behalf of the General Council of the International, wrote:

You believe that the trade unions will be the ones to obtain the liberation of the workers? You are wrong. We use trade unions as one kind of tool among many, but not as an end in themselves. The trade unions are the expression of economic struggle. They will never transform society, however; they may initiate social revolution, but could never finish it. In order to change society, in order to complete the social revolution, the workers will be obliged to seize political power.

It is also an unquestionable fact that all the social democratic parties, and especially those that consider themselves the bastions of orthodox Marxism, remained for a long time completely indifferent towards the trade union movement, crediting it with little or uncertain value. The force of reality, the tremendous growth and impact of economic organizations as compared to the political movement, was necessary to finally convince some Marxists of our day that the economic movement was at least as important as the political one in the struggle for the liberation of the working class. On the other hand, the International had proclaimed the great significance of the economic organizations some forty years ago, while still under the influence of Marx. As early as in 1864, the first congress held in Geneva stated that:

…unconsciously to themselves, the Trades' Unions were forming centres of organisation of the working class, as the mediaeval municipalities and communes did for the middle class. If the

Trades' Unions are required for the guerrilla fights between capital and labor, they are still more important as organized agencies for superseding the very system of wages labor and capital rule.

It is the International itself that describes trade unions as the organized vehicles against wage-labor and capital. Hence, when the Bakuninists were stressing the economic movement at whatever cost, surely they could not be accused of acting against the spirit of Marx. Therefore, the Bakuninists and the Marxists clashed not about matters of organization, but rather whether it was seizure of political power or economic struggle that would lead to socialism in the long run. In the early period of the workers' organizations this question was undoubtedly premature; theoretically speaking, as far as it refers to their teachings about the state, the issue did not imply any fundamental difference between Marx and Bakunin.

True, antistatism was Bakunin's most pronounced tendency. It is hardly necessary to quote him to prove the point. We can see it as a red thread running through each and every one of his writings and actions. The state, everything that is referred to as political power, must be destroyed, both in theory and in practice. As long as there is political power there will be rulers and subjects, masters and servants, exploiters and exploited. "Once political power has been destroyed, it has to be replaced by organizations of the forces of production and economic institutions." Each of his arguments was directed against the claim that the democratic state and its prerequisite, universal suffrage, could, if it only tried, change the economic and social predicament of the working class. The state is necessarily a class-state, under all circumstances, because when it is not the propertied classes which use it as their tool of exploitation, then it is those interested in the maintenance of political power: the state officials, the bureaucracy. Consequently the state is the natural enemy of every truly revolutionary act, because it trusts only itself and feels insecure in face of the free movements and spontaneous actions of the masses as they can turn against the state at any moment. But because the free collective society can emerge only from the free and spontaneous action of the masses, any participation in politics is detrimental, since it enhances the confidence in the state and contributes to its strength. The state has to be eradicated and society liberated.

But those who would resort to these tenets to construct an unbridgeable gap between Bakunin and Marx neglect the fact that while Marx made all kinds of concessions to the state and to democracy in practice, he was just as much an enemy of the state in principle and imagined the political structure of the future society in the same way as Bakunin. In a hundred places in his works Marx condemns with ruthless irony those who see in the state the organization of public interest, an impartial, unprejudiced, and ethical power above class or group interests. The state is the powerful weapon of the ruling classes by which they violently ensure their power; as long as there are classes, the state is a class-state and will remain so. Since the objective of the struggle of the working class is the elimination of classes, the state must perish along with class society. In 1847 Marx asked:

Does this mean that after the fall of the old society there will be a new class domination culminating in a new political power? No.

The condition for the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of all classes, just as the condition for the emancipation of the third estate, of the bourgeois order, was the abolition of all estates and all orders. The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society.

Thirty years later, in his critique of the German party's Gotha program, he spoke with sharp irony of state-socialistic tendencies in the program.

The German workers' party strives for "the free state". Free state – what is this? It is by no means the aim of the workers, who have got rid of the narrow mentality of humble subjects, to set the state free. In the German Empire the "state" is almost as "free" as in Russia. (…) The German workers' party (…) shows that its socialist ideas are not even skin-deep (…) it treats the state rather as an independent entity that possesses its own autonomous intellectual and ethical bases.(…) But the whole program, for all its democratic clang, is tainted through and through by the Lassallean sect's servile belief in the state, or, what is no better, by a democratic belief in miracles, or rather it is a compromise between these two kinds of belief in miracles, both equally remote from socialism.

After all this, it is not surprising that in the face of Bakunin, Marx came to the defence of anarchy itself, and gave the concept a broadly socialist interpretation.

All socialists see anarchy as the following programme: once the aim of the proletarian movement, i.e., abolition of classes is attained, the power of the State, which serves to keep the great majority of producers in bondage to a very small exploiter minority, disappears, and, the functions of government become simple administrative functions.

When compared with these quotations, which we could continue ad infinitum, the debate between the followers of Bakunin and the followers of Marx on whether the organization of future society should be collectivist or communist, pales into insignificance. How insignificant these distinctions were is clearly demonstrated by the fact that in those times it was the disciples of Bakunin who referred to themselves as collectivists and to Marx's friends as communists, whereas nowadays it is mostly the anarchists who call themselves communist, and collectivism is the ideal of the social democrats. In any case, we are still far from the day when the different principles of organization of socialist society will be on the agenda of the struggling working class.

The struggle of the working class will continue for a long time to come within the framework of the present state, and the immediate problem facing it is not the philosophy of the present or, if you prefer, of the future state, but whether the power of the state can be used in its everyday struggle. While this issue could hardly have been brought up at the time of Marx and Bakunin, because of the embryonic development and organization of the working class, today, as a result of its strong representation in parliament, this has become the most burning issue among those issues which played a role in the contest between the two leaders of the International.

It seems to be that the best guideline on this issue is to be sought in a synthesis of the views of Marx and Bakunin. Although Marx believed in parliamentary action, he was far from enthusiastic about it. He followed the activity of bourgeois as well as social democratic parliamentary parties with sarcasm and never ceased reminding the workers that truly constructive action takes place not in parliament, but in society, in the economy and in the movement of the masses. He referred to this involvement with parliaments as parliamentary cretinism, a disorder which penetrates its unfortunate victims with the solemn conviction that the whole world, its history and future, are governed and determined by a majority of votes in that particular representative body which has the honor to count them among its members, and that all and everything going on outside the walls of their house-wars, revolutions, railway-constructing, colonizing of whole new continents, Californian gold discoveries, Central American canals, Russian armies, and whatever else may have some little claim to influence upon the destinies of mankind-is nothing compared to the

incommensurable events hinging upon the important question, whatever it may be, just at that moment occupying the attention of the honorable House.

Bakunin, on the other hand, argues that even in the most democratic states such as the United States and Switzerland, while the people may appear to be omnipotent, self-government by the masses is pure fiction, and it is a minority who rules. Nevertheless, he comes down in favor of democracy.

Let no one think that when we criticize democratic government we are speaking in favor of monarchy. We are firmly convinced that the most imperfect republic is worth a thousand times more than the most enlightened monarchy, because in a republic there are at least moments when the people, although continuously exploited, are not oppressed, whereas in a monarchy the oppression is continuous too. Moreover, a republican government educates the masses little by little to gain an understanding of public affairs, which the monarchy never does. But though we prefer a republic, it must be admitted and announced that no matter what the form of government, as long as human society is divided into classes as a result of the inequality of professions and trades, of fortune, of culture, and of rights, it shall always remain in the hands of the few, and a minority will inevitably exploit the majority.

My description of the internal struggles of the International, of the battles fought with poisoned arrows, in which I attempted to stop short of evoking the insults exchanged, might be concluded at this point. I deliberately allowed the two antagonists to speak for themselves more and more and to let them stand next to each other in order to let everyone acquire a direct view of them. Nevertheless, as we well know, this view cannot be complete. My chief endeavor was to show the similarities between these two leaders, and I had to relegate into the background other traits which might have underlined the differences. Yet, in the face of so much intentional or unintentional falsification, in the face of all the malevolent and fanatical distortions obfuscating the true history of the International Working Men's Organization, I believe I am justified in emphasizing the similarities. From these everyone can see that both Bakunin and Marx served enthusiastically and unselfishly the great cause of the working class, albeit with differing temperaments, with differing estimates of the real and practical opportunities. Undoubtedly, the differences between them were profound. But my presentation should make it clear that the distinctions must be sought not so much in their teachings, but in that each represented a different type of human being. One was a thinker, the other a doer; one a scientist, the other a fighter. The conditions of the emerging and undifferentiated workers' organizations particularly demanded the unity of theory and practice. Under these circumstances two such different characters, yet equally born leaders, were bound to clash: their personalities made it impossible for them to express the needs of the parturient movement of the working class in the same terms, though they were certainly its most outstanding representatives.

From the passages quoted it should be obvious that the unbridgeable gap which certain social democrats perceive between anarchism and socialism exists only as a figment of their imagination, not in reality. Even less is this gap to be found in the writings of Marx and Bakunin, although they were cited most often by the disciples of each tendency. Anarchism is one species of socialism, as is social democracy itself. Socialism and social democracy are by no means identical. The essence of socialism is the common ownership of the means of production and the achievement of this community through the struggle of the organized forces of the working class. All the anarchist leaders agree with this, except for a few individualistic anarchists who have never found roots among the workers. And this is all that matters. Everything else is but a means to an end,

and not the end in itself. It cannot be denied that the advocates of revolutionary action have at least as much right to refer to Marx for the justification of the means of the fanatics of parliamentarianism and peaceful transformation. It is not the advocates of revolutionary action who are attempting to free them-selves from the heritage of Marx today, but rather those who advocate parliamentary action. And those whom the advocates of parliamentary action would so lightly label anarchists are increasingly sounding off the old slogan: back to Marx!

Those who continue to feel, even after the death of the two leaders, that they should fight with poisoned pens against the memory of these men as well as against their heirs and disciples, might like to read and assimilate what may have been Bakunin's last pronouncement before his death: "Try to introduce into your contacts with new people with whom you want to establish closer relationships as much justice, sincerity, and kindness as your nature allows. You must understand that it is not possible to construct anything live and solid on Jesuitic mischief, that the success of revolutionary activity must not reside in base and low passions, and that no revolution will triumph without higher ideals. It is in this direction and in this sense that I sincerely bid you success."

Ervin Szabó
Marx and Bakunin
Introduction to Marx's Inaugural Address to the International Working Men's Association
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