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Russian anarchism and the Bolshevization of Bakunin in the early Soviet period

James Frank Goodwin

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The rise of anarchism, in its many different currents and doctrinal manifestations, became one of the distinctive characteristics of the Russian Revolution. Although recent research has shed new light on the fate of the anarchists under Soviet rule, the nature and extent of anarchist activity after 1921, as well as the Bolsheviks' struggle against it, remains beyond the scope of most studies.¹ Despite systematic repression by the state and its security organs, anarchist

¹ A number of detailed and well-researched studies from the post-Stalin years argue unconvincingly, for example, that anarchism's "collapse" followed not from its systematic repression by the state but solely from the movement's own ideological bankruptcy: S. N. Kanev, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i krakh anarkhizma* (Moscow: Mysl', 1974), 374, 401. Evidence tends to support the claims of a more recent study that the continued persecution of suspected anarchists long after the Kronstadt mutiny of 1921 more closely resembles a "violent uprooting of the tree of Russian anarchism" from Soviet soil, rather than unavoidable measures taken by a besieged state against a counterrevolutionary doctrine: V. D. Ermakov, *Anarkhistskoe dvizhenie v Rossii: Istoriia i sovremennost'* (St. Petersburg: Akademiia kul'tury, 1997),

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thought and propaganda continued to survive during the first decade of Soviet power in the pamphlets of the Voice of Labor (Golos truda) Publishing House as well as within legal institutions, principally the Kropotkin Museum. It saw its boldest expression in the anarchists' defense of their most legendary representative, Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76).

Notwithstanding its fierce opposition to Marxian state socialism, the ideological legacy of Bakunin survived in the early Soviet period thanks not only to the anarchists but also to the need within early Soviet culture to elevate the Revolution's romantic, promethean impulse. Thus, at the same time that Bakunin inspired the anarchists with passionate rhetoric against authoritarianism, his words and deeds also provided official Soviet culture with an exemplary model of unrelenting libertarian struggle. In their efforts to appropriate Bakunin's legacy throughout the early 1920s, however, Bolshevik publicists had to seek strategies to commemorate Bakunin without implicitly challenging the notion of proletarian dictatorship. As I seek to demonstrate here, the publications and events surrounding Bakunin's 50-year jubilee in 1926, in particular, laid bare the contradiction inherent in the Bolsheviks' celebration of an anarchist legacy within an ever-strengthening state.

Early Soviet interest in Bakunin reflected the resumption rather than the beginning of controversy over his image.

159. For analysis and documents of repressive measures by the Cheka and the GPU against anarchists, see D. B. Pavlov, *Bol'shevistskaia diktatura protiv sotsialistov i anarkhistov, 1917–seredina 1950-kh godov* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1999), 68–70, 105. For an informative analysis of the departure of leading anarchists (Ol'ga Taratuta, Andrei Andreev, and others) from the All-Union Society of Former Political Prisoners between 1921 and 1935, see Sergei Bykovskii, "Anarkhisty–chleny Vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev," *Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev: Obrazovanie, razvitie, likvidatsiia, 1921–1935. Byvshie chleny obshchestva vo vremia Bol'shogo terrora: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii (26–28 oktiabria 2001)*, ed. Iaroslav Leont'ev and Mark Lunge [Junge] (Moscow: Memorial and Zven'ia, 2004), 83–108.

Before 1917, the formation of the Bakuninist legacy evolved consistently along two diverging trajectories. The first, positive dimension of Bakunin's profile emerged during his own lifetime, when he won the respect of younger Russian populists through his many acts of revolutionary valor.² Alongside the heroic moments, Bakunin's reputation preserved highly inauspicious moments as well, thanks mainly to his brief but direct collaboration with Sergei Nechaev, his suspected co-authorship of pamphlets advocating methods of terror, and his formation within the International workingmen's Association of a secret, conspiratorial alliance explicitly opposed to the leadership of Marx, all of which severely damaged the credibility of Bakunin's theory and practice of revolution.³ By the turn of the century, violent manifestations of Bakuninist revolt made their reappearance in the "motiveless terror,"

² See, for example, the testimony of Bakunin's contemporaries Alexander Herzen, Petr Kropotkin, Mikhail Sazhin, and Lev Deich: A. I. Gertsen, "M. A. Bakunin," in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1954–65), 16: 18; Gertsen, "Mikhail Bakunin i pol'skoe delo," in *ibid.*, 11: 353, 359; P. A. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1899), 288–89; M. P. Sazhin, "Vospominaniia o P. L. Lavrove," in his *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1925), 34; and L. G. Deich, *Russkaia revoliutsionnaia emigratsiia 70kh godov* (Petrograd: Gosizdat, 1920), 60.

³ Widely known, for example, were the attacks on Bakunin's Alliance by Marx and Engels themselves, who alleged that the anarchist principles of Bakunin fostered the criminal acts and assassination carried out by Nechaev. Marx and his allies formally denounced Bakunin's activity and justified his expulsion from the International in the 1873 pamphlet: "The Alliance of Socialist Democracy and the International working Men's Association," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, 50 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1975–2004), 23: 454–580. The sinister image of Bakunin was also popularized by observers like Gustav Jaeckh, whose history of the First International became an authoritative text for Russian social democracy after 1908. With the "gloomy, crafty eyes of a predatory beast" and his "politically criminal nature," Jaeckh wrote, it was to Bakunin, "that demon of destruction," that the First International owed its collapse: G. Iekk [Gustav Jaeckh], *Internatsional*, trans. I. Bronshtein, intro. Iu. Steklov, 2nd ed. (Moscow and Leningrad: GIZ, 1926), 124–25, 129, 241.

armed expropriations, and other acts of “propaganda by the deed” carried out by the more militant factions of newly formed anarcho-communist groups in Russia. Responding to the growth of anarchist moods throughout the 1905 period, Georgii Plekhanov frequently reminded fellow Marxists of the harm and demoralization Bakunin caused to the proletarian movement through his preference for spontaneous social upheavals and his contempt for organized political struggle.⁴

The opposition between the heroic and the villainous aspects of the Bakuninist heritage naturally grew with the Bolsheviks’ seizure and consolidation of power between 1917 and 1922. From the standpoint of many social democrats and other advocates of political gradualism, the dissolution of the Provisional Government and the Constituent Assembly in the name of an immediate proletarian dictatorship suggested the triumph of a purely regressive doctrine. In 1917, they undoubtedly found further confirmation of a growing Bakuninist threat in the resurgence of anarchist groups that in effect provided at least indirect support to the Bolshevik cause through their agitation for the instant transfer of all political and economic authority to the laborers themselves. Echoing Plekhanov, who until his death identified “the pseudo-revolutionary tactics of Lenin” with “the pseudo-revolutionary tactics of Bakunin,”⁵ the writer Georgii Chulkov declared that not the “prudence of Marx” but rather the “madness of Bakunin” sought an immediate socialist revolution in Russia.⁶ The Menshevik Lev Martov,

⁴ See, for example, Plekhanov’s article on the “International Association of workers” (1904): G. V. Plekhanov, “Mezhdunarodnoe tovarishchestvo rabochikh,” *Sochineniia*, 2nd ed., ed. D. B. Riazanov, 24 vols. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1923–27), 16: 304–5. This article was first printed in *Iskra*, no. 75 (1904). Plekhanov repeatedly identified Lenin with Bakunin in the pages of the newspaper *Edinstvo* throughout the summer of 1917.

⁵ G. V. Plekhanov, *God na rodine: Polnoe sobranie statei i rechei*, 1917–1918, 2 vols. (Paris: J. Povolozky, 1921), 1: 191.

⁶ G. I. Chulkov, *Mikhail Bakunin i buntari 1917 g.* (Moscow: Moskovskaia prosvetitel’naia komissiiia, 1917), 5, 18–19, 29.

became almost exclusively negative. The second edition of *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* in 1950 called Bakunin a “traitor” and failed to cite a single moment of revolutionary heroism in his biography.⁸⁴

The departure of the anarchists from the public sphere, whether by forced liquidation or from their own doctrinal and organizational weakness, represented a loss not only for anarchism itself but for official Soviet culture as well. With the final marginalization of the anarchists after 1926, Marxist interpretations of Bakuninism in Russia lost much of their polemical edge. As the short-lived success of early Soviet “Bakuniana” demonstrates, the anarchists’ celebration of the libertarian, anti-statist dimension of Bakunin’s thought clearly compelled Bolshevik publicists to examine the heritage of their most colorful revolutionary forerunner more thoroughly and critically. Without the anarchist perspective, presented freely and directly by the anarchists themselves, the aspiration of Polonskii and other Marxists to convey a convincing degree of “full scholarly impartiality” in their writings on Bakunin could not easily succeed. Nor could the interpretation of Bakunin as more Jacobin than anarchist retain its cogency in a state that by 1926, if not before, had become suspended in a long-term bureaucratic dictatorial phase, the incarnation of everything against which Bakuninism, both in theory and practice, had waged an uncompromising war.

⁸⁴ “Bakunin Mikhail Aleksandrovich,” *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 2nd ed., 51 vols. (Moscow: Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1949–58), 4: 95–98.

rift between more traditional anarchists like Borovoi and the “mystical anarchists” in the Kropotkin Museum in 1928,⁸⁰ and, finally, the arrest and subsequent exile from Moscow of Borovoi and most other remaining anarchists in 1929,⁸¹ all further marginalized the anarchists for the rest of the Stalin period. While Soviet “Bakuniana” continued into the 1930s, when the long-anticipated scholarly edition of Bakunin’s collected works finally began to appear,⁸² within a decade Stalinist discourse revived the “criminal” reputation of Bakunin as a first step toward purging his revolutionary heroism from popular memory. In Emel’ian Iaroslavskii’s *Anarkhizm v Rossii* (Anarchism in Russia), Bakunin was little more than a reckless adventurer who “saw a prepared revolutionist in any criminal.”⁸³ Following the death of Polonskii in 1932 and the arrests of Steklov and Gorev in 1937, the legacy of Bakunin

⁸⁰ “Zaiavlenie v Iсполnitel’noe biuro Komiteta po uvekovecheniiu pamiati P. A. Kropotkina chlena komiteta A. A. Borovogo,” *Delo truda*, no. 44–45 (1929): 28–29. On the activity of the “mystical anarchists” within the Kropotkin Museum, see “Nezapechatlennyi trud: Iz arkhiva V. N. Figner. Publikatsiia Ia. V. Leont’eva i K. S. Iur’eva,” *Zven’ia: Istoricheskii al’manakh*, no. 2 (Moscow and St. Petersburg: Feniks and Atheneum, 1992), 473–88; and A. L. Nikitin, “Zakliuchitel’nyi etap razvitiia anarkhistskoi mysli v Rossii,” *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 8 (1991): 89–101.

⁸¹ “Massovye aresty anarkhistov v SSSR,” *Delo truda*, no. 50–51 (1929): 1–4; “Arest i ssylka tovarishcha A. A. Borovogo,” *Delo truda*, no. 52–53 (1929): 1–2.

⁸² Four of the projected 12 volumes were printed as M. A. Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem, 1828–1876*, ed. Iu. M. Steklov, 4 vols. (Moscow: Obshchestvo politkatorzhan, 1934–35). The remaining eight volumes are announced and described briefly in the final catalogue of the Society of Former Political Prisoners: *Izdatel’stvo politkatorzhan, Katalog izdani, 1931–34* (Moscow: Obshchestvo politkatorzhan, 1935), 57. In his preface to the first volume (1: 6), Steklov wrote that he had completed the “general” work for this project, as assigned by a party commission, in time for Bakunin’s jubilee of 1926 but that a “series of technical, financial, and other reasons” prevented the project from moving ahead.

⁸³ E. M. Iaroslavskii, *Anarkhizm v Rossii: Kak istoriia razreshila spor mezhdru anarkhistami i kommunistami v russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1939), 13–14, 20.

upon hearing Lenin’s vow to bypass the bourgeois-democratic revolution and proceed directly to socialism, announced to his readers that Lenin had merely “rehashed the old ideas of Bakunin” and returned Russian revolutionary thought, after its difficult evolution from Bakunin to Marx, “back to Bakunin” again.⁷ From exile a number of Lenin’s opponents renewed their campaign to discredit Bolshevism through analogies with Bakuninism. In 1919, Pavel Aksel’rod criticized observers in the west who “extol Bolshevism as the most revolutionary, consistent form of Marxism and acclaim the Bolshevik tyranny as a Communist dictatorship of the proletariat,” when in fact, he believed, Bolshevism represents “a savage and pernicious throwback to Bakuninism.”⁸ In an essay on “The Russian Forebears of Bolshevism,” the literary scholar and former Socialist Revolutionary Marc Slonim wrote that the Bolsheviks found a “spiritual kinsman” in Bakunin, whose “anarchist statelessness” and destruction through popular instinct they fulfilled “from the moment they came to power.”⁹ As late as 1924, alienated Mensheviks continued to dissociate Leninism from Marxism. Paraphrasing emigre press reports of a “scandal” at Lenin’s funeral, one memoirist claims that a delegation of Mensheviks placed a funeral wreath on Lenin’s coffin with the inscription, “From the Central Committee of

⁷ L. Martov, “Ot Bakunina k Marksu i obratno,” *Novyi luch*, no. 9/33 (13 January 1918): 1. Martov referred to Lenin’s remarks before the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets in early January 1918, only days following the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly.

⁸ Pavel Aksel’rod, “Speech at the International Socialist Conference at Bern,” in *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution*, ed. Abraham Ascher, trans. Paul Stevenson (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 128.

⁹ M. L. Slonim, *Russkie predtechki bol’shevizma* (Berlin: Russkoe universal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1923), 21.

the Social Democratic Party of Mensheviks to V. I. Lenin, the most outstanding Bakunist among Marxists.”¹⁰

Regardless of their other differences, anarcho-communists, anarcho-syndicalists, and other nominally anarchist affiliates all perceived in the spontaneous, anti-authoritarian upheavals of the Revolution the potential for a complete, unmitigated revolution “from below.” The Bolshevik commitment to demolishing the old state machinery, spelled out so emphatically in Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, initially earned the support of some anarchists, many of whom continued to support or even joined the Bolsheviks as they established a new, more authoritarian transitional state.¹¹ In direct contrast to social democrats, from the anarchist perspective the Revolution remained progressive insofar as it followed the radical vision of Bakunin. As the anarchist publicist Anatolii Gorelik later recalled, it was anarchist sentiment among the masses in 1917 that had compelled Lenin and the Bolsheviks “to throw the greater part of their Marxist, even Leninist, baggage overboard and to begin to speak of ‘Bakuninism,’ of federalism, of the negation of state power ... even of anarchism.”¹² Undoubtedly, many anarchists also found encouragement in Lenin’s decision in 1918 to include Bakunin in his plan for monumental propaganda, a multimedia project designed

¹⁰ “V. I. Leninu, samomu krupnomu bakunistu sredi marksistov, ot TsK russkoi sotsial-demokraticeskoi partii men’shevikov,” in N. P. Poletika, *Vidnoe i perezhitoe* (Jerusalem: Biblioteka Aliia, 1982), 270.

¹¹ As late as 1937, even Lev Trotskii recalled how “in the heroic epoch of the revolution the Bolsheviks went hand in hand with the genuinely revolutionary anarchists,” and how he, together with Lenin, “more than once” considered “the possibility of allotting to the anarchists certain territories where, with the consent of the local population, they would carry out their stateless experiment”: Lev Trotskii, “Stalinism and Bolshevism,” in *The Basic Writings of Trotsky*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1963), 368–69.

¹² A. Gorelik, *Anarkhisty v rossiiskoi revoliutsii* (Buenos Aires: Izdatel’stvo Rabochei izdatel’skoi gruppy v Respublike Argentine, 1922), 8, 12.

In the final weeks of 1926, the Museum of the Revolution concluded the official commemoration with a special exhibition on “Bakunin and His Time,” where visitors found an entire hall of the museum filled with displays and rare artifacts pertaining to Bakunin’s life, as well as writings, documents, and iconography.⁷⁶ The following year saw the last publications and reviews of the jubilee, including the final volume of Steklov’s massive four-volume biography of Bakunin.⁷⁷ Both the exhibition and the new Marxist studies clearly represented a triumph for Bakunin-the-revolutionist over Bakunin-the-anarchist. Although it appears that Borovoi and other anarchist admirers of Bakunin continued to search for opportunities to honor the “other”—anti-statist—Bakunin after 1926, their efforts brought no major results. In November 1927, the anarchists organized an alternative and more modest exhibition on Bakunin at the Kropotkin Museum. Criticizing its curators for failing to gather more original artifacts and documents—undoubtedly a difficult task for a fringe institution like the Kropotkin Museum—a reviewer in *Vecherniaia Moskva* described the event as “colorless and hardly justified.”⁷⁸ Borovoi may even have read a lecture on Bakunin at the Central Institute of Polytechnical Knowledge (formerly the Polytechnical Museum) in Moscow as late as December 1927, but it likely drew less attention than the anarchist jubilee evening the previous year.⁷⁹ The Party’s growing intolerance of any opposition to its policies, the final

⁷⁶ “Khronika Muzeia revoliutsii soiuzna SSR,” *Muzei revoliutsii soiuzna SSR: Sbornik* (Moscow: Muzei revoliutsii, 1927), 61.

⁷⁷ Iu. M. Steklov, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin: Ego zhizn’ i deiatel’nost’*, 4 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1920–27), 4. The second volume of Polonskii’s own large biography of Bakunin was advertised widely as “forthcoming,” but never appeared.

⁷⁸ A. Kut, “Na vystavke M. A. Bakunina,” *Vecherniaia Moskva*, no. 265 (21 November 1927).

⁷⁹ RGALI f. 1023, op. 1, ed. 889, l. 8. “1927” is inscribed by hand on the back of the poster that advertised the lecture.

articles on Bakunin. Aleksandr Martynov (Piker) recalled on the pages of *Kommunisticheskii internatsional* how events in 1917 “drew together” Communists and anarchists and thereby invited a “certain reevaluation of Bakunin’s historical role” by the former. Once the proletariat had managed to subdue the anarchists and subjugate them to its leadership, Martynov explained, it became possible for Communists and anarchists to form a united front in which they could jointly oppose the “parliamentary cretinism” that Bakunin had been so correct to attack. Had Marx been present during the October Revolution, Martynov decided, he would have attacked the social democrats, and Bakunin “would not have wished to destroy the Communist International.”⁷³ According to Iosif Genkin, a former anarchist and self-described “non-party Communist,” the “pupils of M. A. Bakunin” in 1917 proved to be correct on many questions and “foresaw better than Plekhanov the subsequent evolution of the German social democrats and the entire Second International.”⁷⁴ Employing organic metaphors, Genkin argued that the anarchist “successors” of Bakunin acted as constructive “fermenting agents” in 1917 by preventing proletarians from settling into a “condition of orthodox inertia” and forcing them to search for an “antidote to the toxins [of opportunism] produced by the developing ‘organism’ of October.”⁷⁵ But moments of nostalgia like these in the Soviet press ultimately failed to demonstrate the necessity for more Bakuninism in the contemporary, post-Lenin period, as the anarchists wished.

Moscow, had been returned to its office in Paris with a stamp forbidding its further entry into the USSR by order of a censorship committee.

⁷³ A. S. Martynov, “Mikhail Bakunin v svete marksovoi i leninskoi epokh,” *Kommunisticheskii internatsional*, no. 8/57 (1926): 82–84, 86.

⁷⁴ For Genkin’s self-identification, see “Genkin Iosif Isaevich,” *Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii: Biobibliograficheskii slovar’* 5, no. 2 (Moscow: VOPKSP, 1933), 1201.

⁷⁵ I. I. Genkin, “Sredi preemnikov Bakunina (Zametki po istorii rossiiskogo anarkhizma),” *Krasnaia letopis’*, no. 1 (1927): 176.

to memorialize selected heroes of world culture and social thought in sculpture and other graphic forms.¹³ Whereas the Cubo-Futurist statue by Boris Korolev presented the most original tribute to Bakunin,¹⁴ most exemplary of Bakunin’s newly confirmed place in revolutionary history was the obelisk erected and unveiled in central Moscow during the first anniversary celebration of the October Revolution. One of only five Russians among the 19 revolutionists and thinkers on the obelisk’s columnar face, Bakunin’s name received solid recognition through its unlikely contiguity with the name of Marx.¹⁵ The obelisk reinforced the primacy of the common goal that Marxism and anarchism shared in the past and thereby strengthened Bakunin’s association with the ultimate triumph of proletarian revolution. Popular Marxist biographies of Bakunin during the Civil war years, together

¹³ On the details and evolution of Lenin’s plan for monumental propaganda, see V. V. Shleev, “O Leninskom plane monumental’noi propagandy,” *Revoliutsiia i izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo: Ocherki, stat’i, issledovaniia* (Moscow: Izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo, 1987), 267–84.

¹⁴ Korolev’s monument to Bakunin, erected in September 1919 at the Miasnitskii Gates in central Moscow, also demonstrated the most artistically successful attempt to embody the dynamism of Bakunin’s image. As John Bowlt has pointed out, Korolev’s monument exhibited a sculptural radicalism that was substantially closer in spirit to Bakunin’s political vision than a traditionally “realistic” representation. Korolev’s monument was removed after only several months of display, ostensibly because of negative public reaction to it; see John E. Bowlt, “A Monument to Bakunin: Korolev’s Cubo-Futurist Statue of 1919,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 10, 4 (1976): 577–90.

¹⁵ *Moskovskii Kreml’: Putevoditel’* (Leningrad: Avrora, 1987), 122–23; *Istoriorevoliutsionnye pamiatniki SSSR: Kratkii spravochnik* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1972), 15–16. Conceived on the basis of an earlier monument to Russian tsars, the obelisk was erected in the Alexander Gardens outside the Moscow Kremlin. In the *spravochnik* the monument is described as “a memorial obelisk to the outstanding thinkers and activists in the struggle for the liberation of toilers.” At least one source cites the obelisk as a monument “to human thought”: *Agitatsionnomassovoe iskusstvo: Oformlenie prazdnestv*, 2 vols., ed. and intro. V. P. Tolstoi, ed. I. M. Bibikov and N. I. Levchenko (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), 1: 74.

with a dramatization of Bakunin in Dresden, helped reinforce his heroic reputation.¹⁶

Despite the apparent intentions of Lenin's plan, however, the official vindication of Bakunin's legacy could not proceed logically with the growth of statism and centralization. Thus, at the same moment that some anarchists assisted in the defense of the "transitional" period, others reinvigorated the militant component of Bakuninism by taking up arms against the dictatorship. Violent anti-Bolshevik rhetoric—followed by robberies, expropriations of residences, and even murders by underground "anarchists," or "criminal elements that conceal themselves" within nominally anarchist associations, according to one official report—compelled the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) in the spring of 1918 "to liquidate criminal recklessness [avantiura] and disarm all the anarchist groups."¹⁷ Clashes between the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counterrevolution and Sabotage (Cheka) and armed anarchists led to dozens of deaths on both sides, the imprisonment of hundreds of anarchists, and the closing of several anarchist newspapers. Another wave of repression followed a bomb attack carried out by anarchists on a plenary meeting of the Communist Party's Moscow Committee in September 1919, a deed that killed 12 and wounded 55 others, including leading party officials like Nikolai Bukharin, as well as one of Bakunin's foremost biographers, Iurii Steklov.¹⁸ Arrests and executions

¹⁶ Konstantin Fedin wrote his "Bakunin in Dresden" for a popular series of historical scenes organized by Maksim Gor'kii. The script appeared in the first issue of the almanac *Nashi dni* of 1922. See also the commentary in "Bakunin v Drezdene," in Fedin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 9 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959–62), 1: 412–13.

¹⁷ V. V. Kriven'kii, ed., *Anarkhisty: Dokumenty i materialy, 1883–1935* g., 2 vols. (Moscow: Rosspen, 1999), 2: 1917–1935 gg., 224, 233.

¹⁸ N. P. Miliutin, ed., *25-e sentiabria 1919 goda: Pamiati pogibshikh pri vzryve v Leont'evskom pereulke* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1925), 201–3. According to official versions, the attack was carried out by underground

in the world social revolution." The discovery of Bakunin's plan for a grand, secret alliance, along with several letters to close associates during his conflict with the General Council, allowed Polonskii to reconfirm the original allegations that Bakunin wished to hijack the International. At the same time, Polonskii emphasized that Bakunin's dictatorial aspirations did not diminish his greatness as a revolutionary figure; in fact, they proved to be his salvation in the eyes of posterity, for they reflected his correct "intuition" that victory in a real revolutionary struggle demanded dictatorship. In this manner, Polonskii deprived the anarchists' principal forerunner of his anti-authoritarian essence while at the same time rescuing him for Soviet culture.⁷⁰

The commemorative evenings at the Communist Academy and at Moscow State University, where Anatolii Lunacharskii and others spoke on Bakunin to an "overfilled hall," seem to have been purely Marxist affairs. If Borovoi or any other anarchists received the opportunity to respond to Polonskii and the other Marxists, in accordance with the commission's original plan, no trace of their remarks entered the reports by *Vecherniaia Moskva* and *Pravda*.⁷¹ Polonskii's recommendation for a partial release of the anarchist commemorative book must have gone unheeded, moreover, for the October issue of *Delo truda* confirmed that the book had been forbidden by order of the GPU.⁷² Fleeting recollections of the anarchists' progressive role in 1917 reappeared in at least two other commemorative

⁷⁰ Viacheslav Polonskii, "Bakunin-iakobinets," *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoi akademii*, no. 18 (1926): 49–51, 55, 57, 59–60.

⁷¹ A positive review of the evening at the Communist Academy, at which Steklov and Pokrovskii also spoke, appeared in *Tar*, "Mikhail Bakunin: Na vechere v Kommunisticheskoi akademii (50 let so dnia smerti)," *Vecherniaia Moskva* (25 November 1926). The review fails to mention any appearance by Bukharin. For a brief notice of the events at MGU, see "Piatidesiatiletie so dnia smerti M. A. Bakunina," *Pravda*, no. 247 (24 October 1926): 4.

⁷² "Svoboda pressy," *Delo truda*, no. 17 (October 1926): 10. The article also reported that its own journal, dispatched to the Kropotkin Museum in

The pending revival of an anarchist perspective may well have affected Polonskii's own strategy for the jubilee, for throughout 1926 Polonskii became increasingly critical of Bakunin's anarchism: whereas he had always rejected Bakuninism as a theoretical guide to revolutionary success, now he also began to dispute the long-accepted notion of anarchism's centrality and prominence in Bakunin's thought. Polonskii's articles and commentary on recently discovered Bakuninist documents, followed by his own speech for the Bakunin jubilee, questioned the consistency with which Bakunin himself had applied the principles of anarchism. In his address at the commemorative meeting organized for the Communist Academy and the Society of Marxist Historians in late November, Polonskii challenged the "common perception of Bakunin's anarchism" with extensive references to Bakunin's draft project for a "secret brotherhood" of 1866. In discussing the "organizational" component of that plan, first published in full in German by Nettlau in 1924 but otherwise unknown to Russian readers before 1926, Polonskii called attention to Bakunin's insistence on the strict and complete subordination of a rank-and-file member's personal freedom and interests to the will of a collective leadership, comprising select individuals in a secret, tightly organized clique.⁶⁹ By means of a network of hidden alliances, all guided and directed by an "invisible dictatorship," Bakunin described an organization that contradicted in practice virtually all his anarchist principles. Thus, while "rejecting authoritarianism," Polonskii argued, in his organizational doctrine Bakunin "became authoritarian," not unlike the Jesuits, Jacobins, and Blanquists; in theory an "opponent and enemy of dictatorship," in practice "Bakunin strove toward invisible dictatorship

⁶⁹ Polonskii quoted from Bakunin's plan at length in his article "Tainyi internatsional Bakunina," *Katorga i ssylka*, no. 5/26 (1926): 67–92. The same issue of *Katorga i ssylka* included Boris Nikolaevskii's review of the German edition (264–65).

of suspected perpetrators only provoked calls for more bomb attacks in the name of "freedom and equality" by the underground anarchists.¹⁹ Anarchist militancy reached its peak in the campaigns of the independent partisan army led by the anarcho-communist peasant Nestor Makhno, whose forces managed to liberate a number of Ukrainian villages from all political authority for the first half of 1919. Their refusal to subordinate themselves to the Red Army led to mutual recriminations and eventually to the violent repression of the movement and its supporters.²⁰

Armed opposition from anarchists inevitably compromised the value of Bakuninism for post-Civil war Russia. One immediate consequence was the revival of traditional Marxist attacks on anarchist criminality and its doctrinal origins. A widely publicized critique of the anarchists' role in the Revolution by Iakov Iakovlev, a Red Army political administrator in Ukraine during the Civil war, characterized their militants as "disciples of Bakunin who try to fit into Bakuninist trousers." By supporting "Bakuninist dreamers," he emphasized, ostensibly "ideological anarchist" groups remained vulnerable to infiltration by "any thief, any counterrevolutionary and robber" who borrowed the anarchist label, and as a result the anarchist federations consisted of "more thieves and robbers than anarchists." He criticized the

anarchists but organized by the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, who in turn were suspected of conspiring with other counterrevolutionary elements.

¹⁹ *Anarkhisty: Dokumenty i materialy, 1883–1935 gg.*, 2: 370–72.

²⁰ Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 213–18; Voline [V. M. Eikhnenbaum], *The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921* (New York: Free Life, 1974): 570–71, 652, 673–76. An eyewitness to much of the Makhnovist movement, Voline estimates (albeit without documentation) that Soviet authorities killed or injured more than 20,000 Ukrainian workers and peasants in 1920. For more on the Cheka's war with anarchists and other opponents of the Bolshevik dictatorship during the Civil war, see George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

ideological anarchists for “refusing to fight off the bandits who cling to them” and dismissed the Moscow anarchist federation’s attempts to dissociate itself from banditry after it failed “to expel a single crook.” Iakovlev also recalled how the NABAT (Alarm) Confederation of Anarchist Groups in Ukraine disregarded incidents of “drunken revelry, banditry, theft, and pogroms” involving Makhno’s army and willingly formed an alliance with it, whereupon Makhno “began to describe every one of his acts with quotes from Proudhon and Bakunin.”²¹ The notion of Makhno’s link to Bakunin found additional support from some anarchists themselves. As one of Makhno’s followers later recalled, a number of anarchists who became influential in the movement surrounded Makhno and flattered him with the titles the “great anarchist” and the “second Bakunin.”²² After Makhno’s final defeat in Russia, one anarchist in emigration ardently defended the legitimacy of the “viciously slandered” insurgency as an authentically Bakuninist popular revolt. Recalling Bakunin’s admiration for the 17th-century rebel Stepan Razin, the writer Santil’ian insisted that Makhno was, in fact, “a contemporary Stenka Razin,” only “more conscious of his goals” and “inspired with the anarchist spirit.” If Bakunin endorsed Razin’s revolt, it followed that he would have defended Makhno’s insurgency, which Santil’ian encouraged anarchists to revive as the fulfillment of “theoretical Bakuninism.”²³

Together with the publicity campaign against Makhno, several additional factors threatened Bakunin’s future in the Soviet pantheon of heroic forerunners. Beginning in April 1921, the systematic repression of anarchists, spelled out in a directive from the Communist Party’s Central Committee and

²¹ Ia. A. Iakovlev, *Russkii anarkhizm v velikoi russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1921), 9–10, 23, 49, 74.

²² Quoted in Kanev, *Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia i krakh anarkhizma*, 328.

²³ D. Santil’ian, “Bakunism i Makhnovshchina,” *Anarkhicheskii vestnik*, no. 3–4 (1923): 24–25.

review of the collection in Polonskii’s archive it appears that Polonskii may have been asked to examine the book and forward his recommendation to the appropriate offices for further consideration.

Polonskii’s confidential remarks on the anarchists’ commemorative collection offers additional evidence of the contradiction that persisted in the Bolsheviks’ policy toward the anarchists as late as 1926. Expressing his great “disappointment” in the collection, Polonskii characterized the work as “glaring proof of the fall and degeneration of anarchist thought,” which resorted to “pitiful and ... endless moldy repetitions of old anarchist literature.” The articles offer “nothing new” for the study and understanding of Bakunin, he decided, and, instead of honoring, in fact only “dishonor” his memory. Polonskii also distinguished between articles of clear relevance to Bakunin and those that obviously concerned only the history of anarchism itself or, worse yet, that invited contemporary anarchist groups to draw “organizational conclusions.” Yet from Polonskii’s sharp criticism of the book there emerged a partial compromise: despite its lack of novelty, harmful “organizing” potential, scattered “attacks on Marx and Marxism,” and other flaws, Polonskii recommended that the book be published in part—that is, the 11 contributions that had some bearing on Bakunin—so as “not to give cause for a clamor over what are in essence utter trifles.” Circumstances required selective censorship of the anarchist voice but not its complete suppression, for as Polonskii admitted, “there is no theoretical or historical anarchist material that could help consolidate, or even begin to consolidate, the disconnected anarchist forces” in the country.⁶⁸ Polonskii still preferred to secure Bakunin’s legacy by means of research and propaganda rather than by decree.

⁶⁸ RGALI f. 1328, op. 2, ed. 23, ll. 2–3. This typewritten copy of the document is classified as “secret.”

letopis' of 16 July.⁶⁵ According to a report by the Anarchist Red Cross, however, notwithstanding the book's approval by the censor, the State Political Directorate (GPU) confiscated the book "on the day of its appearance." Soon thereafter, the Voice of Labor staff member Ukhin was arrested on the charge of "distributing illegal literature," which consisted of a single copy of the book, and was exiled to Tashkent for three years.⁶⁶ Just how many of the book's projected 3,000 copies actually emerged and circulated remains uncertain, but its confiscation soon intruded into the agenda of the Bakunin Committee. At the committee's final organizing session in September, where it awaited final confirmation of the plans for the fall celebrations at the Communist Academy and other institutions, Sazhin announced his and Figner's resignation from the committee as a sign of protest against "the confiscation of the collection published by the anarchists." At that time Polonskii (chair), Steklov, Gorev, and other members of the committee declined to accept the resignations but instead resolved, first, to "take the matter under consideration" and, second, to ask the Presidium of the Communist Academy to investigate the book's fate.⁶⁷ While the results of the committee's investigation are not clear from the protocols, from an unpublished

⁶⁵ Knizhnaia letopis', no. 28 (16 July 1926): 1973 [entry number 14073]. For some reason, the title also reappears in the following issue (no. 29 [23 July 1926]: 2033) with a reference to the preceding issue.

⁶⁶ Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work*, 560. The report continues: "Upon inquiry, several high Bolshevik officials declared that the action was undoubtedly due to some misunderstanding. The GPU, however, as the final authority in these matters, categorically replied: 'If it was confiscated, then it should have been confiscated.'" The book remains a bibliographic rarity to this day, as demonstrated by its removal to a special fond in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg.

⁶⁷ RGALI f. 1023, op. 1, ed. 1042, l. 1. The fact of the book's confiscation is not consistent with the assertion of one scholar that the collection appeared "with the sanction of the Bolshevik leadership," which, in my view, requires further investigation. See V. D. Ermakov, *Rossiiskii anarkhizm i anarkhisty (vtoraia polovina XIX-konets XX vekov)* (St. Petersburg: Nestor, 1996), 68.

approved by the Politburo, led to the arrests of many affiliated anarchists and the forced emigration of others, such as the publicists Grigorii Maksimov (Lapot'), Volin (Vsevolod Eikhenbaum) and Petr Arshinov.²⁴ The persecution of well-known anarchists (among other critics of Bolshevism) throughout 1921 and 1922 in turn strengthened anti-Bolshevik sentiments among many international syndicalists, who eventually broke decisively with the communist-led Profintern in the fall of 1922 and convened an alternative, "revolutionary syndicalist" congress in Berlin. Its most outspoken critics of Soviet Russia's path included leading Russian anarcho-syndicalists like Maksimov, whose outlook and writings rested largely on the "scientific anarchism" of Bakunin, and Aleksandr Shapiro, who pointed out the connection between the syndicalist International and the anarchist wing of the first International led by Bakunin.²⁵ The appearance of a rival international demanded greater vigilance from Bolshevik publicists toward those who might overstate the Revolution's debt to Bakunin. When, on the occasion of Lenin's death, the former anarchist German Sandomirskii praised Lenin for having "Bakuninized Marx" (a bakouninise Marx) and for having "moved backward"—although according to the anarchists, Sandomirskii added, Lenin in fact "moved forward"—one Bolshevik historian rebuked the attempt of anarchist "epigones" to "take revenge on Marxism" by applying Bakuninist characteristics to Lenin-

²⁴ Pavlov, *Bol'shevistskaia diktatura protiv sotsialistov i anarkhistov*, 67. Two veteran anarchists, Lev Chernyi and Fania Baron, were shot in the fall of 1921.

²⁵ On the evolution of the anarcho-syndicalist International, see the recent study: Vadim Dam'e, *Zabytyi internatsional: Mezhdunarodnoe anarkhosindikalistskoe dvizhenie mezhdvu dvumia mirovymi voynami, 1: Ot revoliutsionnogo sindikalizma k anarkhosindikalizmu, 1918–1930* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006), 241–57. As D'Agostino explained in his engaging analysis of Russian anarchist thought, Maksimov nonetheless rejected Bakunin's faith in "vanguardism": Anthony D'Agostino, *Marxism and the Russian Anarchists* (San Francisco: Germinal Press, 1977), 185, 190.

ism.²⁶ Finally, Bakunin's revolutionary credibility suffered an unexpected blow with the discovery and publication of his letter of "confession" to Nicholas I and self-disparaging letters to Alexander II, which shattered his mythical, "promethean" image in the eyes of many admirers. As its commentators have since noted, the 1851 letter to Nicholas was a complex document whose sincerity still remains an issue of controversy among Bakunin's biographers. In Bakunin's refusal to betray fellow revolutionists, his criticism of the Russian state, and his praise of Parisian workers for their heroism and sacrifice in 1848, readers can identify the uncompromising revolutionist of later years. Bakunin's expression of remorse for revolutionary activity, however, along with his nationalistic remarks and his appeals to Nicholas as a "spiritual father," all revealed an inconceivable voice of demoralization and defeat.²⁷ For the respected populist veteran Vera Figner, who had always recalled the "image of a powerful revolutionary monolith ... illuminated by a singular idea of 'liberty'" and "indignation against despotism," Bakunin's penitent letters to Nicholas and Alexander created an "enormous fracture in the standard image of this giant of a rebel." In light of Bakunin's desperate circumstances at the time, one can "understand" the "Confession," Figner wrote (her italics), but she admitted

²⁶ German Sandomirskii, "Leninisme et Bakounisme," *L'Humanite* [Paris] (6 March 1924), n. pag. Sandomirskii founded a Union for the Ideological Propaganda of Anarchism in 1918; G. S. Zaidel', "Oproverzhenie 'mifa' ili anarkhistskaia 'ikonografiia'?" (*K voprosu o sotsial'noi prirode bakunizma*), *Pod znamenem marksizma*, no. 4 (1925): 185.

²⁷ Bakunin's infamous letter to Nicholas of late July-early August 1851 did not bear a title; moreover, the title "Confession" under which it appeared in its first full publication in 1921 was not conceived arbitrarily but rather on the basis of Bakunin's own use of the term in his letter to Herzen of 8 December 1860, cited earlier. There, Bakunin explained that after sitting in the Peter and Paul Fortress for over two months, he finally received Nicholas's demand for a "confession of sorts" (*rod ispovedi*), which he worked on for at least a month and then submitted to the tsar in early August 1851.

writer Piro, who asserted that for "the multitude of anarchists, syndicalists," and other international followers of Bakunin, just as for Bakunin himself, the "failures and shortcomings" of their revolutionary movement merely served as a "new stimulus ... to realize an anti-authoritarian society and culture." The triumph of Bakuninism, in its steady march toward the "complete mental, socioeconomic and political liberation of the people," Piro declared, was inevitable.⁶³ while a discussion of the remaining articles lies beyond the scope of this study, the authors' collective testament to anti-authoritarian circles, ideas, and activities throughout virtually all phases of the revolutionary movement, from the Petrashevists and early populists to the 1905 and 1917 movements, projects a broad picture of anarchist currents in the Russian Revolution. As Borovoi said of the collection, it marked "the first attempt at a systematic exposition of the fate of the anarchist movement in Russia." It would also be the last such attempt for several decades.

Most of the major studies of Russian anarchist thought (Avrich, D'Agostino, Ermakov, and Kanev, cited earlier) mention or cite the anarchist collection Mikhailu Bakuninu, but none, to my knowledge, has discussed its reception. After completing it no earlier than late March of that year, Borovoi and his co-editors rushed the book to press in time for their commemorative evening.⁶⁴ Although it may not have materialized by 1 July, the book managed somehow to pass through the main literary censor, Glavlit, and emerge from the presses of the Communist Academy in time to be registered in the State Book Chamber and entered into the weekly *Knizhnaia*

⁶³ T. Piro, "Bakunizm i reaktsiia," in Mikhailu Bakuninu, 1876–1926, 220.

⁶⁴ In addition to Borovoi's remarks in the preface, cited earlier, evidence of the editors' hurried effort include mistakes in the pagination of the table of contents as well as in the notes to Nettlau's article. Handwritten obituary boxes around the name of Karelin, who died on 20 March, suggest an April-May date for the finished proofs.

supplant the International with his own conspiratorial party, which in fact was “nothing more than a certain organizational link among activists.” As for his alleged involvement with Nechaev, Bakunin had simply become the victim of his own “excessive kindness and enthusiasm.”⁵⁹ Nettlau’s version found support in the eyewitness testimony of Sazhin, who asserted that throughout the period in question, when Sazhin had collaborated closely with Bakunin and his other associates, there was “no secret society or conspiracy,” “no ‘oaths with knives,’ no guidelines, no ceremonies of acceptance” within their informal alliance.⁶⁰ At least three authors in the book seized the opportunity for some forthright anarchist agitation. Nettlau transgressed the limits of purely commemorative space with his reference to “the correctness of our [anarchist] path to the future, whose precise contours will become gradually distinct through ... free activity,” and not through a “party program or some other dogma.”⁶¹ In his analysis of anarchist aspirations in Russian sectarianism, the Kropotkin Museum researcher A. S. Pastukhov admitted that “we anarchists” had realized the mistake of losing touch with the masses during the 1905 Revolution, when terrorism began to “splinter their ranks,” and vowed not to repeat it. Proclaiming social construction a “great task,” he advised his anarchist readers to “study and learn the intrinsic, organizational forces of the masses, stimulate them to independent work, encourage their quests and constructive ideas,” so that the “appropriate ‘building’” would arise by itself.⁶² Most outspoken, perhaps, was the

⁵⁹ M. Nettlau, “Bakunin,” in *Mikhailu Bakuninu, 1876–1926*, 58, 103, 109, 117. Nettlau’s contribution, dated 1922, is the earliest in the collection.

⁶⁰ M. P. Sazhin, “Vospominaniia o M. A. Bakunine,” in *ibid.*, 175, 180.

⁶¹ Nettlau, “Bakunin,” 58.

⁶² P. A. [A. S. Pastukhov], “Anarkhicheskie ustremleniia v russkom sektantstve XVIII–XIX vv.,” in *Mikhailu Bakuninu, 1876–1926*, 27. Pastukhov’s identity and his affiliation with the Kropotkin Museum as of December 1925 (the date of the article) are apparent in the galley proofs of the book, which have survived (see RGALI f. 1023, op. 1, ed. 122, l. 17).

that “both the admirers and detractors of Bakunin” saw their illusion “torn apart” by Bakunin’s letters.²⁸

Despite the many circumstances that discouraged it, a number of anarchist literary succeeded in offering an unofficial tribute to Bakunin through works published by Voice of Labor, the organ of the “Union of Anarcho-Syndicalists.” Arguably the greatest achievement in the anarchists’ compulsory transition from anti-Soviet agitation to more subtle propaganda, the Voice of Labor became the most significant and enduring producer of anarchist literature in the 1920s, publishing over 60 titles between 1919 and 1926.²⁹ One of its first and most important achievements was a five-volume publication, from 1919 to 1922, of Bakunin’s works that featured some of Bakunin’s most outspoken attacks on Marx and Marxism, most of which were not printed in Russia again before the perestroika period some 65 years later. The appearance of Bakunin’s writings in Russian, though far from complete, represented the largest Russian-language collection of his writings and provided anarchist readers there with a

²⁸ Vera Figner, “‘Ispoved’ M. A. Bakunina,” in her *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 6 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politkatorzhan, 1932), 5: 365–67. In his commentary on the “Confession,” Steklov provided a revealing survey and analysis of responses to the document in early Soviet Russia: Mikhail Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem, 1828–1876*, 4 vols., ed. Iu. M. Steklov (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl’noposelentsev, 1934–35), 4: V tiur’makh i ssylke, 1849–61, 415–32. For a shorter review in English, see also the commentary of Lawrence Orton in *The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin, with the Marginal Comments of Tsar Nicholas I*, trans. R. C. Howes, intro. and notes by L. D. Orton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 20–23.

²⁹ A complete list through 1924 is included in: *Knigoizdatel’stvo “Golos truda.” Sistematicheskii katalog izdaniia* (Moscow: Golos truda, 1925). Advertisements within publications of 1925 list more titles. For the official statutes of the Voice of Labor cooperative in 1924, see *Anarkhisty: Dokumenty i materialy, 1883–1935 gg.*, 2: 319–22.

fundamental corpus of anti-authoritarian pronouncements.³⁰ The resurrection of Bakuninist texts also proved consistent with the desires of Lenin himself, who reportedly approved of an attempt by Sazhin to travel abroad to gather rare Bakunin materials for publication in Russia.³¹ Equally significant were its Russian-language editions of a biography of Bakunin by the Austrian anarchist scholar Max Nettlau and an anarchist history of the First International by the well-known Swiss anarchist James Guillaume. Both works offered Soviet readers an alternative version of Bakunin's activity in the International as well as sharp criticism of Marx. Bakunin's defenders did not deny that his aims contradicted those of Marx and Marx's supporters, insofar as he clearly propagated ideas contrary to those of the General Council and wished to strengthen the International's left wing; rather, they rejected the idea that Bakunin aimed to split and destroy an international organization in which, they believed, Bakunin enjoyed mass support among rank-and-file workers and delegates. In Nettlau's characterization, Marx wished to create a centralized, "aristocratic apparatus of management" in order to govern the member

³⁰ M. A. Bakunin, *Izbrannye sochineniia* (Petrograd and Moscow: Golos truda, 1919–1922). Prior to this edition, the only prerevolutionary attempt to publish a large edition of Bakunin's works in Russia produced just two volumes before the censors terminated it. According to Polonskii, the two volumes in question (Bakunin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. A. I. Bakunin, 2 vols. [St. Petersburg: Balashov, 1906–7]) were "confiscated and destroyed in part" so that only an "insignificant" number of copies survived and circulated by hand. See Viacheslav Polonskii, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, 1814–1876* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1920), 3.

³¹ L. S. Cherniavskaia, "K istorii izdaniia sochinenii M. A. Bakunina [Pis'mo M. P. Sazhina M. N. Pokrovskomu, 1923]," *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, no. 1 (1992): 110–11. Although Sazhin's collection never appeared, by 1923 Steklov received an official assignment to prepare a complete edition of Bakunin's writings and letters; however, the first volume did not emerge until 1934. Steklov referred to the appointment in a letter to Viacheslav Polonskii of 19 March 1924. See *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva* (RGALI) f. 1328, op. 1, ed. 22, l. 1.

that destruction became viable "only when accompanied by construction [sozidanie]," which is "where the accent falls in the aphorism." On the assumption of the Bakuninist revolution's ultimately "creative" aspirations, Borovoi arrived back at the fundamental principles common to any truly anarchist doctrine: that social revolution demands "the unmediated creativity of the popular masses," that it can be organized only "from the bottom up," and that the "liberation of the workers must be the cause of the workers themselves."⁵⁸

Apart from Borovoi, the collection featured a number of other well-known anarchists, chief among them Nettlau, who contributed a long exposition on Bakunin; Apollon Karelin, the populist veteran and anarcho-communist biographer of Bakunin who had died the previous March; Sazhin, who offered memoirs of Bakunin; Solonovich and Otverzhenyi, who had accompanied Borovoi at the anarchist meeting of 1 July; the "Soviet" anarcho-syndicalist Daniil Novomirskii, and others. Together with the memoirs by Sazhin, Nettlau's long biographical sketch of Bakunin complemented Borovoi's enthusiastic interpretation of Bakuninism, chiefly by exonerating Bakunin of his alleged infringements in the International. Originally prepared for the Voice of Labor's series of books on "Paths to Anarchism," or the history of anarchist thought, Nettlau's essay extended the polemics that had entered his short biography of 1920, referred to earlier. Insisting that Marx had mistakenly "taken seriously" the four different Bakuninist organizations that may have coexisted at one time (the International, the Open Alliance, the Secret Alliance, and the International Brotherhood), Nettlau continued to dispute the General Council's charge that Bakunin had wished to

⁵⁸ A. A. Borovoi, *Bakunin* (Moscow: KUB), 1–2, 4, 8, 9, 20, 26, 30, 37, 42. I refer here to the separate reprint of Borovoi's article (the only one from the 1926 collection) that appeared in the early 1990s, complete but unfortunately without additional commentary about the publication. In the original collection, *Mikhailu Bakuninu, 1876–1926* (1926), the article occupies 131–69.

of its individual authors, thereby justifying any inconsistencies in outlook, as stated, as well as any serious ideological errors, as implied.⁵⁷ Borovoi's contribution, entitled simply "Bakunin," was clearly a principal text in the collection and the longest by any Russian contributor. Like his speech at the Polytechnical Museum, Borovoi's essay on Bakunin sought to illuminate the revolutionary nature of Bakunist doctrine from the standpoint of the 1917 Revolution while understating Bakunin's widely publicized political errors, which Borovoi considered of little significance. He reiterated that "contemporary" anarchism, "particularly Russian anarchism," derived its fundamental ideas from Bakunin and again identified Bakunin with the "experience of the October Revolution," which "gave decisive proof of his ingenious prophetic insight." At the risk of betraying a certain idealism, Borovoi also elaborated on the centrality of "revolt" and "rebellion" in the Bakunist worldview, both as a distinguishing, ontological characteristic of humanity, the basic element in man's evolutionary development, and as the key element "by which a decrepit order is overthrown, without which life itself would be a stagnant swamp." But even though revolt against "any power, divine and human, collective and individual," forms the essential "negating" moment in Bakunin's concept of freedom, Borovoi explained, Bakunin's overtures to destruction should not be construed as "negation for negation's sake." In an attempt to dispel the most notorious aspect of Bakunist theory and practice, Borovoi maintained that "theoretical negation" in thought, and "practical negation" in revolt, performed mainly a progressive function when, for example, "the victories of revolution enter an automated phase of existence." with regard to Bakunin's most famous pronouncement—that "the passion for destruction is also a creative passion"—Borovoi contended

⁵⁷ Aleksei Borovoi, ed., *Mikhailu Bakuninu, 1876–1926: Ocherki istorii anarkhicheskogo dvizheniia v Rossii* (Moscow: Golos truda, 1926), 1, 3.

sections; Bakunin, by contrast, sought the destruction of all authority and central power in the International along with the full autonomy of sections and federations. The collapse of the International, it followed, stemmed not from Bakunin's splitting activity, as the General Council "falsely" alleged, but from Marx's refusal to recognize the anti-authoritarian demands of the "living masses of the International." As for Bakunin's full responsibility for the criminal activity of Nechaev, Nettlau categorically denied it. Guillaume's version generally corroborated Nettlau's and he, too, rebuked Marx for falsely attributing a number of "Nechaev's proclamations" to Bakunin.³²

The same political circumstances that fostered persecution of anarchists, but somehow allowed for anarchist publications by and about Bakunin, posed a different dilemma for those Bolshevik publicists who, in the spirit of Lenin's plan, wished to preserve and even celebrate Bakunin's career from a Marxist perspective. From the Bolshevik standpoint, the potential resurgence of anarchist sentiment under communist rule demanded the neutralization of Bakunin's volatile, anti-statist appeal. At the same time, Bakunin's radicalism and unwavering pursuit of revolutionary goals served as an outstanding formula of resistance to forces of compromise, conciliation, and demoralization. Soviet guardians of Bakunin's legacy needed to empty it of reactionary content without disposing of its revolutionary spirit. Enthusiastic studies of Bakunin by Viacheslav Polonskii—a highly productive Bolshevik journalist, editor, and literary critic—perhaps best exemplify the post-October attempt to preserve and disseminate an inspiring portrait of Bakunin, one that would neither idolize nor

³² M. Nettlau, *Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Mikhaila Bakunina* (Petrograd and Moscow: Golos truda, 1920), 81, 82, 85, 87; Dzh. Gil'om [James Guillaume], *Internatsional (Vospominaniia i materialy, 1864–1878 gg.): S biograficheskimi zametkami o Gil'ome P. Kropotkina i F. Brupbakhera*, 2 vols. (Petrograd and Moscow: Golos truda, 1922), 130.

incriminate him. In his short popular biography of Bakunin in 1920, Polonskii for the most part propagated a traditional social-democratic assessment of Bakunin. Like his fellow Marxists Iurii Steklov, Boris Gorev, and David Riazanov, who also published studies of Bakunin in the 1920s, Polonskii associated Bakunin's anarchist thought with the more primitive "utopian" stage of the revolutionary movement by virtue of its negation of statism, proletarian dictatorship, and political struggle. Acknowledging the central place of destruction in the Bakuninist vision, Polonskii reiterated that Bakunin was not a really a "revolutionist," but rather a "rebel" (*buntar'*) in search of a spontaneous, elemental popular explosion, "regardless of the conditions under which that explosion should occur." Yet in pronouncing his defeat by Marxism, Polonskii's assessment still offered a certain defense of Bakunin. Regardless of its appropriation by Nechaev, Polonskii argued, Bakunin's justification of "brigandage" expressed only that aspect of Bakunin's temperament that "pushed him to the very limit." Marx was incorrect, Polonskii felt, in suspecting Bakunin of directing Nechaev and conspiring to undermine the International. Gustav Jaekkh's book on the International—which had just appeared again in Russian the year before—therefore served as "an eloquent expression of that suspicious, hateful attitude of many German Marxists toward Bakunin" which, in Polonskii's view, was unjustified.³³ Unlike the anarchists, Polonskii would not concede that Bakunin had fallen victim to the "evil will" of his Marxist opponents in the International, but he still defended the "positive role that [Bakunin's] destructive activity played in the history of the Revolution." If Bakunin had been an enemy of Marx and a menacing specter for Plekhanov, then before the Soviet reader he found redemption through achievements of revolutionary character:

³³ For more information on Jaekkh's book, see n. 3.

bourgeois state machinery, Borovoi remarked on the two "different paths" that opened before Marxism and anarchism in the wake of October. From the October Revolution, he asserted, had emerged the "crystal clear" lesson that its "most difficult and most essential" requirement was a "new worldview," or the need for Bakuninism. Emphasizing that "freedom demands realization," Borovoi added that its realization, in turn, demanded "rebellion" of a degree that allowed for "no oaths, either to gospels or to Marx's Capital." Thus with Bakuninism, Borovoi proclaimed, a "new turning point" in the development of humanity begins.⁵⁶

If the anarchists' subtle but obvious strategy of self-vindication found brief but memorable fulfillment in Borovoi's commemorative speech, it was deployed most extensively in a collection of anarchist writings edited by Borovoi and published that summer by the Voice of Labor in honor of Bakunin. Consisting of 18 articles by 14 authors, the collection represented by far the largest and most diverse compilation of anarchist texts to emerge throughout the Soviet period. Its packaging reflected the need to subordinate its principal aim of outlining a history of anarchism, as acknowledged in the preface, to the purpose of commemoration. Its title, *Ocherki istorii anarkhicheskogo dvizheniia v Rossii* (Sketches on the History of the Anarchist Movement in Russia), therefore included the dedication *Mikhailu Bakuninu, 1876–1926* (To Mikhail Bakunin, 1876–1926), and a preliminary page featured a separate dedication "from the anarchists [in bold caps] to Bakunin, the ingenious thinker and fighter, the great founder of the anarchist worldview." At the same time, the author of the preface (presumably Borovoi) answered only for the "quality of the factual material," but not for the "assessments"

⁵⁶ RGALI f. 1023, op. 1, ed. 120, ll. 1–4, 6–7, 11, 17–17 ob. For lack of protocols of the 1 July commemorative evening, the extent to which Borovoi's speech actually followed his manuscript, of course, can only be surmised.

ond review in the emigre press concluded from the interruption of Kropotkina's speech that "the chekisty simply wrecked it," and it called attention to Vecherniaia Moskva's refusal to identify the objects of the anarchists' alleged "attacks."⁵⁴

A manuscript of Borovoi's remarks that evening on the "worldwide-Historical Significance of Bakuninism," in conjunction with another article he published at approximately the same time, reflects the provocative nature of his approach to Bakunin throughout 1926. While Borovoi was not the only anarchist propagandist among the speakers at the meeting on 1 July, in several respects he was the most visible at the time of the jubilee and arguably the most outspoken with respect to Bakunin.⁵⁵ In the draft notes for his speech, Borovoi described "Bakuninism" as nothing less than the "perfect incarnation" of the anarchist worldview. Its most important aspect he defined as the "elemental" (*stikhiinyi*), or that characteristic which generates and fosters the human being's innate need to revolt. The "Bakunist" element manifests itself most purely in humanity's struggle for freedom, and therefore represents the "fullest expression of [Bakunin's] worldview." Transcending the historical circumstances of Bakunin's own time, Borovoi extended the context of his anarchist doctrine to the October Revolution, whose elemental nature and "pathos of destruction," he insisted, were "primarily Bakunist." with reference to a series of familiar passages from *Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiia* (State and Revolution), in which Lenin acknowledged the Bolsheviks' and anarchists' common goal of eradicating the

⁵⁴ "Vecher pamiati Bakunina," *Dni*, no. 1058 (20 July 1926): 2.

⁵⁵ At an evening in honor of Sazhin the previous November, for example, Borovoi reportedly created a "tense moment" by shouting "Long live the Russian anarchist!" at the conclusion of his speech. See S. Volodin, "Zhivaia legenda (Chestvovanie tovarishcha Sazhina)," *Pravda* (3 November 1925): 5. Together with Otverzhennyi, Borovoi also produced a small collection of three essays in defense of Bakunin's reputation: A. Borovoi and N. Otverzhennyi, *Mif o Bakunine* (Moscow: Golos truda, 1925).

defeated in battle, Bakunin as a personality, as an individual, forever will remain a giant of history, in spite of his contradictions, mistakes, and delusions. All that was temporary, personal, "human, all too human," in Bakunin will be forgotten... His heroism, courage, indomitable rebelliousness, ecstatic love of freedom and demonic hatred for the old order, his unquenchable thirst for destruction—all this will forever secure for him a highly visible place in the Pantheon of revolutionary struggle.³⁴

Even with the discovery of Bakunin's "Confession," Polonskii's analysis of Bakunin continued to argue for a critical conception that allowed for doctrinal obsolescence while promoting the values of pathos and instinct. In his article on Bakunin for the first edition of the *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (Great Soviet Encyclopedia) in 1926, Polonskii reaffirmed the superiority of Marxism to the ideology of the "peasant revolt" as Bakunin envisioned it, but he denied that Bakunin was a "disorganizer with a politically criminal nature." Despite his "lack of deep, systematic knowledge," Polonskii insisted, Bakunin's writings served as "brilliant monuments, filled with passion," while his criticism of the state remained "rich with ideas, brilliant and true, dictated by revolutionary intuition."³⁵

Although works on Bakunin appeared with regularity throughout the early 1920s, the approach of Bakunin's jubilee in 1926 offered both Bolsheviks and anarchists their best opportunity to reassert and publicize their views on a broad scale. As early as March, more than three months before the anniversary of Bakunin's death on 1 July, Polonskii began to

³⁴ Polonskii, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin*, 67–68, 71–74, 104–7, 114, 142–43.

³⁵ Viacheslav Polonskii, "Bakunin Mikhail Aleksandrovich," *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (hereafter BSE), 65 vols. (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1926–47), 4: 449–51.

organize events for the occasion. His proposal to Museum of the Revolution Director S. I. Mitskevich to arrange a special room there for a Bakunin display met with approval and was followed by the appointment of an official jubilee committee—consisting of Mitskevich, Marx-Engels Institute Director Riazanov, Steklov, Sazhin, and several researchers from the Kropotkin Museum, with Polonskii as chair. The committee’s first meeting on 1 April resolved to commission a new sculpture and gather all extant portraits of Bakunin, originals of key documents like Bakunin’s letter of “confession,” and photographs of other documents, including some of Nettlau’s unique materials from abroad. For the latter task the committee agreed to seek contact with Nettlau through the Voice of Labor Publishing House, thereby showing no principled objection to the involvement of anarchists in their enterprise, and invited the Voice of Labor’s leading activist, the anarchist Aleksei Borovoi, to attend their next meeting.³⁶ Both the museum and the Communist Academy also approved Polonskii’s more general plan to observe the events in the “Soviet and party” press; to re-erect Korolev’s monument to Bakunin on Miasnitskii Street in Moscow; to organize a new, broader Commission for the Commemoration of Bakunin with representatives from the Committee on Party History (Istpart), the Communist Academy, the Marx-Engels Institute, the Society of Marxist Historians, and the Museum of the Revolution; and to empower the commission, first, to work out “the character” of the jubilee and, second, to prepare and politically “guide” literature for the jubilee in central and provincial newspapers and journals.³⁷ Expressing fear of “discord [raznobo], ideological contradictions, and incorrect assessments of Bakunin” in the anticipated meetings and publications, Polonskii then appealed to the head of the Central

³⁶ RGALI f. 1328, op. 2, ed. 5, ll. 1, 5–7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, op. 3, ed. 240, ll. 6–9.

Reports in the Bolshevik and emigre press offer two different interpretations of the events that transpired on the evening of 1 July. The review in *Vecherniaia Moskva* the following day described the evening as a virtual farce, in which nothing went according to the anarchists’ plan. Sazhin and Kropotkina failed to finish their speeches, the author wrote, the former for lack of strength and the latter for lack of time and the “loss of patience” on the part of the audience. It described Solonovich’s speech on Bakunin as “almost laughable,” with its factual errors and references to religious figures; it reported that Borovoi’s “overdramatic” speech and the “polemical attacks” in Kharkhardin’s speech both provoked protests; and it concluded that the “escapades” and “childish assertions” of the anarchists eventually exhausted the auditorium. Without any reference to the actual content of the talks by Borovoi, Kharkhardin, and Otverzhenyi, the report described briefly only the well-received statements of Vera Figner, who spoke of Bakunin’s significance for the 1870s and testified to the authority that he had enjoyed. The author mentioned the reading of a telegram from Malatesta, but noted in conclusion that the anarchists had refused to stay long enough for the audience to respond to the “anti-Marxist speeches.”⁵² The Parisian periodical *Delo truda*, by contrast, contended that the anarchists had defied all expectations by overfilling the auditorium with their event, which opponents “did everything to wreck.” Quoting the eyewitness account of a different observer that evening, the article noted that in fact a “thunder of applause and a storm of whistles” had interrupted the speech by Kropotkina, who “dared to say that we have no freedom of the press nor freedom of speech.”⁵³ Likewise, a sec-

Bakuninism” (Borovoi); “Proletariat and Peasantry in Bakunin’s worldview” (Kharkhardin); and “Bakunin’s Critics” (Otvverzhenyi).

⁵² N. N., “Anarkhisty–Bakuninu,” *Vecherniaia Moskva*, no. 149 (2 July 1926): 3.

⁵³ “Chestvovanie pamiati Bakunina v Moskve,” *Delo truda*, no. 15 (August 1926): 5–6.

perhaps, as a backup or future successor to the Voice of Labor enterprise, whose forced closure had been expected since 1924, according to one report, following the arrests of two active staff members.⁵⁰ Whether or not its plans would have proved viable in the long term, the anarchist committee did succeed in organizing a ceremonial meeting in Bakunin's honor on 1 July, well in advance of the Marxists' meeting. Held in the Large Auditorium of the Polytechnical Museum in central Moscow, the evening promised no fewer than six official speakers, including Borovoi, N. G. Otverzhenyi (Bulychev), I. V. Kharkhardin, and A. A. Solonovich, all anarchists, as well as the veteran Bakunist Sazhin and Kropotkin's widow, Sofiia Grigor'evna Kropotkina. As an alternative to the official poster advertising the event, which listed only the speakers and their themes, a second poster, apparently designed by the anarchist committee itself, advertised the event more boldly as an evening of tribute from "anarchists" to the "great rebel" Bakunin.⁵¹

tion of the Kropotkin Museum, see E. V. Starostin, "Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi memorial'nyi muzei P. A. Kropotkina," *Velikii Oktiabr' i neproletarskie partii: Materialy konferentsii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 197–98; "Nezapechatlennyi trud: Iz arkhiva V. N. Figner. Publikatsiia Ia. V. Leont'eva i K. S. Iur'eva," *Zven'ia: Istoricheskii al'manakh*, no. 2 (Moscow and St. Petersburg: Feniks and Atheneum, 1992), 476–80; A. L. Nikitin, *Mistiki, rozenkreitsery i tamplery v Sovetskoi Rossii: Issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow: Intergraf servis, 1998), 39–51.

⁵⁰ G. P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: Twenty Years of Terror in Russia* (Data and Documents). Translated from the Russian (Chicago: Alexander Berkman Fund, 1940), 535. The two individuals are identified as Tat'iana Polosova and Efrem Borisovich Rubinchik-Meier. The latter was described as the publishing house "manager." The report came from the first Bulletin of the Anarchist Red Cross of 1924.

⁵¹ RGALI f. 1023, op. 1, ed. 889, ll. 10, 12. Both posters were printed from the presses of the Communist Academy, the official version in 1,000 copies and the anarchist version in 500. Tickets for the event were sold not only at the museum box office but also at the Voice of Labor's bookshop. The titles of the four anarchist speeches were advertised as "Bakunin in the History of Anarchism" (Solonovich); "The worldwide-Historical Significance of

Committee's Press Department, S. I. Gusev, with a request for a "decree of some kind" in order "to impart an organizational character to all the responses." Polonskii introduced his request with a preamble that reiterated Bakunin's great "significance" as the greatest forerunner of the Russian Revolution, in spite of his political errors and inferiority to Marx, and as the greatest revolutionist of Russia's pre-capitalist epoch, compared to whom even Herzen seemed "incomparably inferior." with that epoch's retreat into the past, he added, the struggle against "Bakuninism" no longer impeded a full, "calm" tribute to the great anarchist. Bearing in mind the negative responses to Bakunin's letter to Nicholas, Polonskii reminded the Press Department that the "Confession" was merely "[Bakunin's] risky but conscious attempt to gain his freedom at the cost of an ostensible repentance." As a precaution against objections to the Korolev statue, moreover, Polonskii reasoned that Moscow's existing monuments to Herzen, Ogarev, and Kropotkin left no logical grounds for opposing a commemorative monument to Bakunin.³⁸ Apparently meeting no resistance from the Press Department, the Presidium of the Communist Academy, led by Mikhail Pokrovskii, called for the participating institutions to enlist members in the new Bakunin Commission and to decide on concrete procedures for the commemoration.³⁹ At its first official meeting in early June, the newly formed Bakunin Commission—consisting of Polonskii (chair), Steklov, Mitskevich, and others—added several more specific proposals to Polonskii's general plan, including the "essential" recommendations to provide the press with articles on Bakunin "from the Marxist point of view" and to arrange for public meetings in the fall at the Communist Academy and other leading institutions. It also resolved to expand its constituency by adding Anatolii Lu-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 7–8; op. 4, ed. 60, ll. 1–3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, op. 2, ed. 5, l. 8.

nacharskii, Pokrovskii, Riazanov, Gorev, Sazhin, Vera Figner, the literary scholar Pavel Sakulin, Kropotkin Museum Secretary N. K. Lebedev, the anarchist Borovoi, and the former anarchist-turned-Communist Iuda Grossman-Roshchin.⁴⁰ At its next two sessions, the commission designated Polonskii and Steklov to serve as the lecturers at the grand ceremonial meeting and asked Polonskii to invite Nikolai Bukharin to deliver the “political” lecture.⁴¹

The many articles devoted to Bakunin in the Soviet press on or near the day of his jubilee, while different in terms of emphasis, together illustrate an essentially consistent strategy for initiating Bakunin effectively into the world of permanent Soviet commemoration. All demonstrated the errors of Bakuninist doctrine on the basis of the many political failures of both Bakunin and his anarchist heirs. All, however, agreed that the heroic elements of his character, vision, and aims warranted recognition and respect, particularly his revolutionary “intuition,” which in practice led him to accept the necessity of a well-organized dictatorship. That is, they tended to extricate Bakunin-the-fighter from Bakunin-the-thinker and Bakunin-the-criminal-conspirator in light of anarchism’s conclusive defeat in the Revolution. In an assessment of Bakunin for *Pravda*, Pokrovskii wrote that Bakunin’s passionate defense of oppressed social elements, historically enshrined in his promotion of the “enserfed peasant revolt,” preserved his relevance in Russia until the October Revolution “rendered his ideas obsolete.” In another tribute on the same day, Karl Radek pronounced Bakunin worthy of memory thanks to his lifelong commitment to the cause of popular liberation. His many misconceptions about capitalist development and his misguided struggles against Marx, together with the “small, insignificant” role of Bakuninism in the revolutionary movement, permitted

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 10–11.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, op. 4, ed. 60, ll. 4–6.

whom the committee had already elected as members at its first meeting. The draft letter in Russian requested the individual’s agreement to join a committee which had also elected such notable international anarchists as Nettlau, Errico Malatesta, Jean Grave, Rudolf Rocker, Luigi Fabbri, and Christian Cornelissen, among others.⁴⁸

Borovoi’s elaborate plans for the Bakunin Committee, however utopian they seem in retrospect, nonetheless reflect the great hopes and ambition that the Bakunin jubilee inspired in the minds of some surviving anarchists. With its provisions for a Bakunin museum, permanent commissions, and regular publishing activity, it is likely that Borovoi envisioned the Bakunin Committee as a genuine institution within Soviet culture, one that provided a more purely “anarchist” alternative to the Kropotkin Museum, from which the original anarchist contingent had become all but completely estranged by 1926.⁴⁹ The Bakunin Committee would also have served,

⁴⁸ RGALI f. 1023, op. 1, ed. 891, ll. 1–6. The committee’s originally stated goal of “circulating the ideas of Bakuninism” (my italics) is struck out in the draft. To my knowledge, Borovoi’s fond at RGALI unfortunately contains no protocols of any anarchist committee meetings.

⁴⁹ While it undoubtedly began as the most conspicuous Soviet institution of anarchist thought and activity after 1921, by the summer of 1925 the All-Russian Public Committee for the Commemoration of P. A. Kropotkin and its principal institution, the Kropotkin Museum, saw the departure of its entire “anarchist” section. Led by the late Kropotkin’s friend, Dr. Aleksandr Atabekian, anarchist section members German Sandomirskii, N. Pavlov, and I. V. Kharkhardin quit the Kropotkin Committee in protest over the increasing influence of non-anarchists in the committee’s Executive Bureau as well as the latter’s refusal to allow the anarchist section to hold weekly political meetings within the museum. Although the more conciliatory Borovoi remained on the committee and attempted over the next three years to bring the departed anarchists back to the committee via its Scholarly Section (the original anarchist section having since been taken over by the less politically motivated “mystical anarchist” Aleksei Solonovich), by the end of 1925, when the plan for a Bakunin Committee began to take shape, the Kropotkin Museum was no longer a viable institutional option for those anarchists who sought to continue their propaganda work. On the fate of the Anarchist Sec-

anarchists' own numerical and theoretical inferiority. In any case, the committee's decision in June signaled the entrance of two anarchist sympathizers into formal commemorative activities.

Even before the Bolsheviks' commission resolved to invite him to the October meeting, Borovoi had already initiated arrangements in Moscow for an alternative, anarchist Committee for the Commemoration of Bakunin's Memory. Judging by the extant drafts of the committee's formal statutes, whose ambitious plan was worthy of Bakunin himself, one can see that Borovoi and his supporters perceived within such a committee both a temporary organizational function and, above all, the embryo of a more permanent institution. In addition to immediate commemorative tasks such as the erection of a monument to Bakunin, the committee aspired to a "comprehensive study of Bakunin's activity and teaching" as well as the "study of Bakuninism and its influence on social development." Like the Bolshevik commission, the anarchist committee intended to organize readings, lectures, and publications about Bakunin, but it also called for a periodic organ "that illuminates the committee's activity and all issues within its purview." Its membership requirements favored "anarchists who share Bakunin's basic social views" and whose final acceptance required unanimous confirmation by a General Conference of the Committee. The plan for the committee's activity called for a Secretariat to organize separate editorial, publishing, museum, financial, and other commissions that would act within guidelines established by the General Conference and submit to verification by an elected Auditing Commission. As if anticipating possible infiltration by ideological enemies, the statutes also allowed for an external "Society for Assistance to the Committee," whose members could be free of anarchist affiliation but would still be subject to the committee's provisions. Some time before 1 July, Borovoi drafted at least two letters, one in Russian and a second, international letter in French, to those individuals

no change of attitude toward Bakunin's doctrine, but there remained the image of the Bakunin who, though mistaken and misguided, "wished, like us, to destroy capitalism." Gorev's contribution to the jubilee literature stated that Bakunin had risen above his own theory by advocating dictatorial, "Jacobin" methods in concrete revolutionary situations. In that sense he had stood superior to his Bakunist heirs of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, who had tried so unsuccessfully to preserve and develop the anarchist aspect of his doctrine. Similarly, Steklov's assessment confirmed that as a theorist and father of anarchism, Bakunin had played a negative role in the revolutionary movement, but in his enviable role as "eternal fighter," agitator, and recruiter—especially in his "unsurpassed ability" to infect others with the "sacred sense of revolt"—Bakunin had preserved his "greatness" and his capacity to invite succeeding generations to imitate him.⁴² Polonskii sided with Bakunin, as in earlier essays, against hostile social democrats like Wilhelm Blos who "frighten their young with the name of the terrible Russian [Bakunin]" and seek to appropriate Marx while "giving Bakunin to us." Though acknowledging Bakunin's doctrinal inferiority to Marx, Polonskii nonetheless effected a retroactive union between the adversaries on the basis of their mutual war on the "rotten capitalist system of exploitation, violence, and poverty." By virtue of a "common passion, ... without which there is no genuine revolution," Polonskii explained, Bakunin, like Marx, remained close to the "Leninist generation." Thus, although the Bakunist

⁴² M. N. Pokrovskii, "Bakunin v russkoi revoliutsii (K piatidesiatiletiiu so dnia ego smerti)," *Pravda*, no. 148 (1 July 1926): 2; K. Radek, "Bakunin," *Krasnaia gazeta*, no. 147 (30 June 1926): 2; B. Gorev, "Dialektika russkogo Bakunizma (k 50-letiiu smerti Bakunina)," *Pechat' i revoliutsiia*, no. 5 (1926): 9–13; Iu. Steklov, "M. A. Bakunin (1814–1876)," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, no. 147 (30 June 1926): 2. A useful review of these and other works for the jubilee may be found in E. Morokhovets, "Iubileinaia literatura o Bakunine," *Istoriokmarksist*, no. 4 (1927): 219–23.

“theory of revolution” had suffered an enormous blow from the Bolshevik victory, which demonstrated the fatal necessity of seizing power, Polonskii declared that the “name of the man who gave everything to the great idea of liberation should receive its historical recognition.”⁴³

As the scholar Volodymyr Varlamov once noted in his informative discussion of Bakunin, Jacobinism, and Blanquism in early Soviet historiography, Steklov and Polonskii (among others) ultimately differed in the extent to which they sought to “rehabilitate” non-Marxist figures like Bakunin for their readers. In Varlamov’s model, Steklov in particular expressed a more extreme “modernizing” tendency that tended to “transfer features of the present to the past,” that is, to “Bolshevize” a pre-Bolshevik phenomenon.⁴⁴ An additional tendency of Bakunin’s biographers becomes apparent, I believe, in the context of their experience with anarchism. In light of the unanimous official admiration for the Bakunist revolutionary spirit, it seems clear that Soviet culture needed Bakunin’s legacy not only for a consistent line of development from populism to Bolshevism, as Varlamov explained, but also as a genuine, unsurpassed Russian embodiment of revolutionary heroism. The persistence of an opposing anarchist interpretation, however, frustrated Soviet efforts to remove its non-Marxist exterior. Pokrovskii seemed to acknowledge the

⁴³ Viacheslav Polonskii, “Mikhail Bakunin (K piatidesiatiletiiu so dnia smerti),” *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (1926): 129. In 1920, Blos wrote a preface to a new edition of the 1873 anti-Alliance pamphlet under the title *Marx oder Bakunin? Demokratie oder Diktatur?* (Stuttgart: Volksverlag für wirtschaft und Verkehr, 1920).

⁴⁴ Volodymyr Varlamov, “Bakunin and the Russian Jacobins and Blanquists,” in *Rewriting Russian History: Soviet Interpretations of the Past*, ed. Cyril E. Black (New York: Praeger, 1957), 307, 323. In my view, the author incorrectly identified Polonskii as a “right opportunist” in the Party. In fact, Polonskii stood close to the left opposition, received an official reprimand for demonstrating sympathy for it, and was often attacked in the press for perpetuating the “Trotsky-Voronskii” line in literature.

problem when he remarked that “anarchist vows to Bakunin” posed a significant hindrance to Bakunin’s confirmation as a “great revolutionist.”⁴⁵ As Polonskii pointed out as early as 1922 in his expanded study of Bakunin, the “apostle of worldwide destruction” had at last secured the right to “full scholarly impartiality” and therefore deserved the most objective approach possible, free of “personal and party biases,” but a dispassionate approach also implied leniency toward anarchist thinkers who made an indisputable contribution to studies of Bakunin. A subtle but clear reflection of Polonskii’s own readiness to tolerate the existence of anarchist ideas can be found in the bibliography that accompanied his entry on Bakunin for *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, cited above. Amid the roughly 20 books and articles pertaining to Bakunin, Polonskii listed no less than 7 works by anarchists, including studies by Guillaume and Varlaam Cherkezov, two of the most outspoken opponents of Marxism.⁴⁶ A concession of sorts was also suggested—at least in appearance—by the decision of the official Bakunin Commission in June to allow the anarchist Borovoi and the Kropokin specialist Lebedev to read papers alongside the Marxists at the commemorative meeting in the fall.⁴⁷ while the protocols cited here fail to reveal the commission’s motivation for seeking the anarchists’ participation, the desire to neutralize the appeal of the anarchist voice undoubtedly played a certain role. By accepting that voice in an official setting, the Marxists would be able to demonstrate publicly their lack of fear of anarchist propaganda as well as the

⁴⁵ Pokrovskii, “Bakunin v russkoi revoliutsii,” 2.

⁴⁶ Polonskii, “Bakunin Mikhail Aleksandrovich,” BSE, 4: 451. Another valuable survey and bibliography of literature on Marx and Bakunin included 13 titles under a separate rubric of “anarcho-syndicalist literature”: Ia. Rozanov, “K. Marks i M. Bakunin,” *Pod znamenem marksizma*, no. 9–10 (1926): 202–10.

⁴⁷ RGALI f. 1328, op. 4, ed. 60, l. 5. Borovoi’s and Lebedev’s formal affiliation with the Kropotkin Museum must have helped legitimize their participation. On the Kropotkin Museum, see n. 49.