

Letters to Herzen and Ogareff

Michail Bakunin

1861–1863

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1861, from San Francisco

October 3, 1861

San Francisco

My dear friends,

I was able to escape Siberia and after having traveled for a long time on the Amour and through the coasts and straits of Tartarie, in crossing Japan, I have finally arrived in San Francisco. But during this trip my savings, very modest as they were, have been completely exhausted and if I had not stumbled across a generous man who willingly loaned me 250 dollars to take the train from New York, I would have found myself in a terrible predicament. You, my friends, are too far away, and in this particular city I know no one. I hope to arrive in New York on November 6. If I have calculated correctly, this letter should reach you on the 15th, therefore I would be able to receive your response at the end of this month. I hope that you have already received money for me, which should have been rushed from Russia. In any case, please send 500 dollars to me in New York, which will give me, if I am not mistaken, 100 pounds sterling which are essential for my travel expenses to London. Then, I will be able to arrive at your place around December 10. One other request I have of you: as soon as you have received this letter, immediately inform my brothers (in Tver or in the village of Priamoukino, in the district of Tver Nicolas Alexandrovitch Bakunin), through the intermediary of your friends in Russia, that I have arrived safe and sound in San Francisco and that I will be in London in the middle of December. My wife is surely already with them, in the countryside, and will hasten to join me in London in the company of one of my brothers or another person. Another favor: please rent an inexpensive flat for me in your neighborhood, and write to me in New York letting me know where I will have to go upon arriving in London. Should my new residence be too tiny to accommodate my wife, I will look for another upon her arrival. My address in New York is: M. Bakunin, "Howard house", low Broadway road Courtland. Attach to your letter some kind of a certificate in my name specifying where the sum I will be able to withdraw and the name of the banker in New York to whom I must show the money order from the London banker.

My friends, my heart goes out to you, and once I arrive in London I will put myself to work. At your place I will serve the Slavic-Polish cause, because since 1846 this question has become a fixation in my mind; it is a specialty that I chose for myself in 1848 and 1849. My last call will be the destruction of Austria, total destruction, but to say that this will be my final act would be too ambitious. I am ready to do anything to serve this cause: I will consent to engaging myself like a drummer, pushing the rhythm until it becomes a spectacle, and if ever I manage to succeed in creating discussion about this issue, I would be elated. Because, underneath this issue lies in all its beauty the free Slavic Federation which represents the only real issue for Russia, Ukraine, and Poland and all the Slavic countries. I eagerly await tomorrow's mail to have news of Russia and Poland. For now, I have to content myself with a few vague rumors which float around. I have heard about new, bloody skirmishes in Poland between the people and troops; I was told that, even in Russia, there was a conspiracy against the czar and the whole royal family.

I am equally passionate about the struggle between the North and the Southern American states. Of course, my heart goes out to the North. But alas! It is the South who acted with the most force, wisdom, and solidarity, which makes them worthy of the triumph they have received in every encounter so far. It is true that the South has been preparing for war for three years

now, while the North has been forced to improvise. The surprising success of the ventures of the American people, for the most part happy; the banality of the material well being, where the heart is absent; and the national vanity, altogether infantile and sustained with very little cost; all seem to have helped deprave these people, and perhaps this stubborn struggle will be beneficial to them in so much as it helps the nation regain its lost soul. This is my first impression; but it could very well be that I will change my mind upon seeing things up close. The only thing is, I will not have enough time to examine really closely. I will only stay five days in San Francisco, and after having reached New York, I will head towards Boston, and from there I will go to Cambridge to see an old friend, Professor Agassiz, to ask him for a few letters of recommendation, after which I will spend a few days in Washington. In this manner, I will have the possibility to initiate myself to very little concerning this issue.

During my trip here, I was able to organize a good deal that will certainly please you. Knowing with what great avidity *La Cloche* and *l'Etoile Populaire* are read in Siberia, and how difficult it is to find these publications, I arranged for the sale of your editions to three foreign merchants; a German in Shanghai, an American in Japan, and another American in Nocolaevsk, which is situated at the mouth of the Amour. They will take them on the condition that we send everything from London, and as such all our materials will be sold to officers in the Russian Navy and to merchants in Kiakhta who, each year are more numerous in the waters of the Amour and the Pacific Ocean. We could therefore sell 100 to 300 papers, a small quantity from a business standpoint but considerable from a political view.

Alas, I must now finish my letter, as it is long past time to go to bed. My friends, I say good bye to you. Let Reichel know that I am revived and that my friendship for him is still unwavering.

Yours truly,

M. Bakunin

1861, Fragment I

... for a real and useful force of the highest degree. From this standpoint, it would therefore be a true crime to separate from you, before having used all means of reconciliation in order to find a total union; to sacrifice, if necessary, my self-esteem by renouncing certain less important beliefs. I will do this all the more willingly if we are pursuing, as it seems to me, the same goal, as it is only in the means of getting there that we differ. This would be, therefore, more than a crime on my part; it would be ineptitude. You have created a remarkable movement and it would hardly be an easy thing to create an equal one elsewhere. Besides, I do not possess the talents, taken in the widest meaning of the word, of Herzen, and I cannot pretend to equal him in literature. However, I sense in me a noble strength otherwise useless; perhaps you do not see it in me, but I am myself aware of it. And I do not want and do not have the right to sentence it to inaction. The day when I will be convinced that this strength will be able to find neither its application nor its effect in our union, I will walk alone and act independently, making the most of the means at my disposal and using the know-how I possess, with the firm conviction that I will not bring by that any hindrance to your cause, but that, being deprived of your strong support, I myself will lose considerable prestige among your public.

In this arrival in London I will retain our unity. I have a strong intention to become, whatever it may cost, your intimate friend and, however tiresome that may appear to me, to form with

you a trio; the sole condition under which this union will be possible. Otherwise, we will remain allies and friends, if you want, but in keeping our total independence from one another.

Do not precipitate to respond to me ... Nalbandoff has just arrived and I must therefore abandon this letter. I will send you the rest tonight. In waiting, I should resubmit my article. That being understood, the expenses of the first printing will be covered by the sum of money in Herzen's possession. Send me as well the printed sheets.

Yours truly,

M. Bakunin

1861, Fragment II

Dear Herzen,

In all honesty, you have as much of a talent for misunderstanding my thoughts as you do my words.

I never had the slightest doubt about the usefulness, nay the necessity, to unite with the Polish people; I leave this matter to your very own argument. The only thing here which could lead me to doubts is that you yourself have no strong faith in this alliance, and if you think you saw discontent in my reaction, it was certainly not caused by Martianoff, but rather by the fear that you could still hesitate at the last moment. I was wrong; so much the better.

About the conflict in opinion between us and Martianoff concerning this matter. I am saddened by his position, but only in sake of the cause; because, for a long time now, I have been holding an unwavering faith in its saintly justice and its necessity.

I am sending you an issue of the *Daily Telegraph*, in which you will find one article on Russia and another one about the Hyde Park riot.

I believe that you owe me 10 shillings: If so, send them to me.

I will write to Padlewski, in compliance with the order you gave me.

M. Bakounine

Project Declaration to the Polish People

Polish brethren,

You have often revolted in order to reclaim your freedom and your blessed homeland, provoked into such an unequal struggle by the worst of governments; that of Saint-Petersbourg. We, the Russian people, have always held the firm conviction that the independence of Poland and the liberty of her children is inseparable from our own Russian cause and the emancipation of our country. We loathe as much as you, no, more than you, this German imperialist petersbourgeoisie that kills Russia and Poland in delivering them to the Prussians and the Germans; we are indignant at the extremities and the hardships to which our miserable soldiers are subjected in Poland, being blinded in their intoxication and always under the command of these same Germans, their chiefs. We come to you to share your plight; to fight with you in the name of our and your saintly freedom, or die with you in trying. And if necessary, we will gladly give our lives, because in dying, we would be aware that the idea of liberty could never die with us and that soon an emancipated Poland will fraternally extend its liberating hand to Russia.

The *Cloche* and the Polish People

October 3, 1862

Herzen,

I completely disagree with you; I do not think it would be possible to reply to the letter written by the Varsovie Committee only by publishing my “Proclamation to Russian officers” in the *Cloche*. I hold a firm conviction that we must respond to this official Polish document with a document, more precisely a letter addressed to the Committee itself, in which we will summarize our principles and our hopes for Russia and Little Russia, countersigned by the three of us. It seems to me that justice and our dignity demand it. We take full responsibility for the “practical” results of this alliance with the Polish, therefore it is our duty not to hide it. After all, something we would do out of modesty could be seen as cowardice, such as the fear of not compromising. In my opinion, this letter to the Committee should not be long; it must succinctly describe our political agenda. And why not, in the same edition of the *Cloche*, insert the “Proclamation to the Russian Officers,” which would serve, in this manner, as a commentary to the first document.

I was shocked yesterday upon seeing you accept the insinuations in Mieroslawski’s paper so graciously, considering he says the *Cloche* has abstract and destructive tendencies, that it produces no plan for the future and that its goals are impractical. First of all, this is unfair. For a long time now, the *Cloche* has shown itself to be in defense of communal principles and the administrative control by the general council in all of the country; in support of the self-government of communes and of provinces, based on the electoral principal; and finally, for a free federation of all Russian provinces. Therefore, the principal itself and the goal it supports are closely related and completely suffice in satisfying the most rigorous demands of a practical agenda. God wants the Poland to be in the position to elaborate a program that, by its own practical merits, can be compared to ours. But what if it could be as such, if Mieroslawski could be correct? You know as well as I do, Herzen, that that would be absolutely shameful! I am telling you once more; our modesty will be considered cowardice if, from now on, you do not decide to act more frankly, in the most practical meaning of the word. It is true that you will not be able to avoid the reproaches for having presumptuousness and a tendency towards usurpation — for that there are enemies and those who are jealous — but you will not have the honor of a daring and frank action. You have created a force, a quite formidable one at that, and no one can contest this honor. Currently, we seek to find out how to best use this force. Today, Russia needs practical direction to guide it towards practical goals. Will the *Cloche* be this guide? If not, in about six months, or at the latest a year, it will have lost all influence and purpose for existing. So, this mammoth force you created will deteriorate with the coming of the first greenhorn, who, not knowing how to think better than you, will know how to be more daring than you. Call us therefore into action, Herzen; raise your flag! Let it glide carefully, with the wisdom and tact that only you have, but raise it with audacity. You know that we will follow you and courageously work with you.

When will we see one another again? Write back in response to this letter.

*M. Bakunin*¹

¹ Next to Bakunin’s suggestion of three signatures, Herzen wrote “I formally oppose this.”

1863

August 17, 1863

Stockholm

My dear friends,

This is the third letter I am sending you from this place. Two months ago, I had the opportunity to send you the first directly, the second by your agent in Switzerland who, on your command, was supposed to come to Stockholm, but who was likely sidetracked by unexpected occurrences and contented himself with sending me a letter through Nordstrom. I immediately responded, with an extended letter attached, pleading with him to immediately send you the letter; I would be very angry if it was not sent to you. However, I can reassure you with the utmost confidence that the loss of these two letters is not at all dangerous, considering that they contained neither names, nor addresses, nor anything else which could be incriminating.

More than once, I have tried to return to Poland. I had no luck. Currently, the feelings in Poland towards us are altogether different, such that in wishing them success, we Russians have the duty to abstain from all direct participation in their affairs, which have become very complicated because of the interests of Western Europe, always hostile to both the imperialist system and even more so to the Russian people. This is why I stayed in Sweden and I devoted myself to finding friends sympathetic to our Russian cause, who are ready to struggle with us. My efforts have been rewarded with success. From now on, Stockholm and all of Sweden will be a secure refuge for Russian revolutionary action and immigration. The Russian publicity and propaganda will find here solid footing, supporters and a wealth of resources. And with that nothing could be easier than communicating from Stockholm to St. Petersburg during summer. I learned to like the stalwart men who you can confide in and count on. Thanks to them and to the resources I have found here, I was able to spread throughout Northern Russia (the Arkhangelsk and Olonetz governments) approximately 7,000 pamphlets of different proclamations, comparable to your proclamations to the officers and soldiers. I would also be able to send some to St. Petersburg if I had the addresses. It is true that Provensoff sent some to me, but I cannot use them before he returns to St. Petersburg, and it looks like he is still abroad. Therefore, above all, I beg of you to send me a reliable address and I propose that you correspond with me through the bearer of this letter. It is a Finnish who was recommended to me by the patriots of his country as a reliable and trustworthy man; he can be the intermediary to maintain regular communications between myself and the Finnish organization, to whom I am allied; understand very well our reciprocal interests, the members of this organization are very sympathetic towards us and our cause. I hope that you will not be displeased by the thought of working with this group. If you think that my participation in common work could be useful, please let me know.

Just like my friends in London, I happily recognize the committee of Saint Petersburg, and I am ready to mobilize under his orders, only I must first know the status of your affairs and the direction that you are currently following. In the name of God, write me and send me your address, so that I can respond to you.

Is it necessary to finally believe that having explored all means of organizing a regular correspondence between us, that we are incapable of doing it?

The situation of miserable Poland is horrible, but she will not perish. Europe is to divided at the current time and the hopes of St. Petersburg are founded on this general disagreement. However,

the Polish affair is already pushed so far that for the powers of Europe it is just as dangerous to do nothing for her as to come to her in aid. I think that after a second refusal by the chancellery of Saint Petersburg, France, England and Austria will recognize Poland "as a belligerent party." I hope that the Polish will be able to hold out throughout winter for the armaments and other aid that the Galicie will bring to them. In spring, it seems, war will be imminent. Must we do nothing up until then, should we not at least approach ourselves to the action? The false addresses sent to the czar from all corners of Russia and the patriotic rage from Moscow resounding in emphatic exclamations, hardly scare me and could never disconcert me or cause me to renounce my faith. And, as always, the government, in so much as it tries to create an agitation in the people directed towards us, works to our advantage.

In the name of God, tell me what is going on in your life; give me orders for useful foreign work. Let me unite with you more harmoniously, and therefore more intimately. Our work here will only be profitable in union with you; so write me, and send addresses. I am working on an article for the *Cloche*, in the form of a letter to Herzen, in which I respond to Slavic attacks and policemen directed at me.

Perhaps, in two weeks, you will be visited by a man in secrecy who, sent by me, will bring to your home news from Browni and greetings from Magnus Bering.

Write to me using the bearer of this letter. But if you would like, send me your letters through the post. My address is Stockholm, Doctor Alinton, Stora Vattugaton.

Until we meet again.

M. Bakunin

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