

# **National Catechism**

Michail Bakunin

1866

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## Introduction

The national catechisms of different countries may differ on secondary points, but there are certain fundamental points which must be accepted by the national organizations of all countries as the basis of their respective catechisms, These points are:

1. That it is absolutely necessary for any country wishing to join the free federations of peoples to replace its centralized, bureaucratic, and military organizations by a federalist organization based only on the absolute liberty and autonomy of regions, provinces, communes, associations, and individuals. This federation will operate with elected functionaries directly responsible to the people; it will not be a nation organized from the top down, or from the center to the circumference. Rejecting the principle of imposed and regimented unity, it will be directed from the bottom up, from the circumference to the center, according to the principles of free federation. Its free individuals will form voluntary associations. its associations will form autonomous communes, its communes will form autonomous provinces, its provinces will form the regions, and the regions will freely federate into countries which, in turn. will sooner or later create the universal world federation.
2. Recognition of the absolute right of every individual, commune, association, province, and nation to secede from any body with which it is affiliated.<sup>1</sup>
3. The impossibility of political liberty without political equality. Political freedom and equality are impossible without social and economic equality.

## The Necessity of the Social Revolution

The spread and depth of this revolution will more or less differ in each country, according to the political and social situation and the level of revolutionary development. Nevertheless, there are **certain principles** which can today attract and inspire the masses to action, regardless of their nationality or the condition of their civilization. These principles are:

1. The land is the common property of society. But its fruits and use shall be open only to those who cultivate it by their labor; accordingly, ground rents must be abolished.
2. Since all social wealth is produced by labor, he who consumes without working, if able to work, is a thief.
3. Only honest people should be entitled to political rights. Such rights shall belong only to the workers...
4. Today no revolution can succeed in any country if it is not at the same time both a political and a social revolution. Every exclusively political revolution — be it in defense of national independence or for internal change, or even for the establishment of a republic — that does not aim at the immediate and real political and economic emancipation of people will be a false revolution. Its objectives will be unattainable and its consequences reactionary.

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<sup>1</sup> Bakunin believed that voluntary association, impelled by common needs, will be more durable than compulsory unity imposed from above. Voluntary unity, says Bakunin, “will then be truly strong, fecund, and indissoluble.” — Tr.

5. The Revolution must be made not *for* but by the people and can never succeed if it does not enthusiastically involve all the masses of the people, that is, in the rural countryside as well as in the cities.
6. Organized by the idea and the identity of a common program for all countries; coordinated by a secret organization which will rally not a few, but all, countries into a single plan of action; unified, furthermore, by simultaneous revolutionary uprisings in most of the rural areas and in the cities, the Revolution will from the beginning assume and retain a **local** character. And this in the sense that it will not originate with a preponderance of the revolutionary forces of a country spreading out, or focused from, a single point or center, or ever take on the character of a bourgeois quasi-revolutionary expedition in Roman imperial style.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, the Revolution will burst out from all parts of a country. It will thus be a true people's revolution involving everybody — men, women, and children — and it is this that will make the Revolution invincible.
7. At the outset (when the people, for just reasons, spontaneously turn against their tormentors) the Revolution will very likely be bloody and vindictive. But this phase will not last long and will never [degenerate into] cold, systematic terrorism... It will be a war, not against particular men, but primarily against the antisocial institutions upon which their power and privileges depend.
8. The Revolution will therefore begin by destroying, above all, all the institutions and all the organizations, churches, parliaments, tribunals, administrations, banks, universities, etc., which constitute the lifeblood of the State. The State must be entirely demolished and declared bankrupt, not only financially, but even more politically, bureaucratically, militarily (including its police force). At the same time, the people in the rural communes as well as in the cities will confiscate for the benefit of the Revolution all state property. They will also confiscate all property belonging to the reactionaries and will burn all deeds of property and debts, declaring null and void every civil, criminal, judicial, and official document and record, leaving each in the status quo possession (of property). This is the manner in which the Social Revolution will be made, and once the enemies of the Revolution are deprived of all their resources it will no longer be necessary to invoke bloody measures against them. Further, the unnecessary employment of such unfortunate measures must inevitably lead to the most horrible and formidable reaction.
9. The Revolution being localized, it will necessarily assume a **federalist character**. Thus, upon overthrowing the established government, the communes must reorganize themselves in a revolutionary manner, electing the administrators and revolutionary tribunals on the basis of universal suffrage and on the principle that all officials must be made directly and effectively responsible to the people.
10. In order to prepare for this revolution it will be necessary to conspire and to organize a strong secret association coordinated by an international nucleus.

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<sup>2</sup> i.e., sending dictatorial commissars to impose the "party line"

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