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Historical Sophisms of the Doctrinaire School of the German Communists

Lost paragraphs of ‘God and the State’

Mikhail Bakunin

1871

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Translation by Shawn P. Wilbur.

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Translator’s note: It’s generally known that “God and the State” is a fragment drawn from “Historical Sophisms of the Doctrinaire School of the German Communists,” the second installment of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*, Bakunin’s great, unfinished work. But as that work is still unpublished in English, the fact is simply one more mystery regarding the famous text. There are parts of the context that are not so easy to provide: the first section is over 40,000 words in length and “Historical Sophisms” contains at least another 40,000 words, of which less than 30,000 appear in “God and the State.” And then there are pages and pages of additional sections and fragments, which were never fully incorporated into the larger work, and the lengthy appendix, “Philosophical Considerations concerning the Divine Phantom, the Real World and Man.” So there is a good deal of translation to be done before we can present

“God and the State” in its full context, but, as it happens, we can establish its place in the flow of the “Historical Sophisms” with comparative ease. Once a pages-long footnote is removed, it turns out that there are only four paragraphs at the start of the text, before the text of “God and the State.”

Here are those paragraphs:

Such is not the opinion of the Doctrinaire School of socialists, or rather of authoritarian communists, in German; a school that was founded shortly before 1848, and which renders, it must be acknowledged, some distinguished services to the cause of the proletariat, not only in Germany, but in Europe. It is to that school that principally belongs the great idea of an International Association of Workingmen, as well as the initiative in its initial realization. Today it finds itself at the head of the Parti de la Démocratie socialiste des travailleurs in Germany, with the Volksstaat as its organ.

So it is a perfectly respectable school, which does not prevent it from showing a very bad character sometimes [*], and especially from having taken as a basis for its theories a principle that is profoundly true when we consider it in its true light, from a relative point of view, but which, considered and posited in an absolute manner, as the unique foundation and first source of all the other principles, as that school does, becomes completely false.

This principle, which constitutes, by the way, the essential foundation of positive socialism, has been scientifically formulated and developed for the first time by Karl Marx, the principal leader of the school of German communists. It forms the dominant thought of the famous *Manifesto* of the communists that an international committee of French, English, Belgian and German communists, gathered in London, issued in 1848, under this title: *Proletarians of all countries, unite!* This manifesto, written, as we know, by Marx et Engels, became the basis of all the later scientific labors of the

School, and of the popular agitation stirred up later by Ferdinand Lassalle in Germany.

This principle is absolutely opposed to the principle recognized by the idealists of all the schools. While the latter derive all the facts of history, including the development of material interests and the different phases of the economic organization of society, from the development of ideas, the German communists, on the contrary, wish to see in all of human history, in the most ideal manifestations of the life, whether individual or collective, of society, of humanity, in all the intellectual and moral, religious, metaphysical, scientific, artistic, political, legal and social developments, which were produced in the past and continue to be produced in the present, nothing but reflections or necessary repercussions of the development of the economic facts. While the idealists claim that ideas dominate and produce facts, the communist, in agreement in this with scientific materialism, say on the contrary that the facts give rise to the ideas that that the latter are never anything but the ideal expression of accomplished facts; and that among all the facts, the economic or material facts, the facts par excellence, constitute the essential basis, the principal foundation, of which all the other facts, intellectual and moral, political and social, are nothing more than the inevitable derivatives.

The text of “God and the State” then begins with the question: “Who are right, the idealists or the materialists?”