

Letter to Albert Richard (April 1, 1870)

Mikhail Bakunin

April 1, 1870

April 1, 1870. Geneva.

Dear friend. I still find myself here and every day await news of the arrival of the relation that you know, in order to go to meet them.

Complete reaction in the International of Geneva.—The factory [*fabrique*] has triumphed on all fronts in my absence, and no one has been found to halt that triumph. *L'Egalité* has become a reactionary paper. Here is the program: Cooperation and the local politics of bourgeois radicalism. From now on the International of Geneva will no longer be anything but a stepping-stone to bring the Perrets and Grosselins to power. Old Becker, become weak from age, has fallen in with the reaction.—He also takes part in local politics.

But the soul and chief schemer of that reactionary conspiracy is a sort of compatriot of mine, the little Russian Jew, Outine, the same one that you saw at Basel.—He is a petty, ambitious type of the worst sort. Jealous of the fame that I have gained, he has taken advantage of my absence to slander me here in the most vile manner, spreading the most absurd murmurs and making the filthiest insinuations against me. He has no intelligence; he is incapable of forming a thought, but he does not lack a certain skill at scheming. He is flattering, ingratiating and tireless when it comes to intrigue. First, he courted Perron; now he doesn't even greet him. He is the friend of Perret, Grosselin, Duplex and Crosset, of the whole dirty, reactionary shop, and they help one another to grow.—Thanks to them, he is sent as the delegate of three sections to the Congress of the Suisse Romande [Federation Romande]—which will open April 4 at La Chaux-de-Fonds—and he is also named as delegate by the *reactionary committee of l'Egalité*.

This Congress will be very important for the future of the International in the *Suisse romande*. There will be a great battle. It will be given principally on the question of *the abstention or participation of the workers in local politics*. We all, [in] the sections from the Mountains, are for abstention. The strictly Genevan workers, the factory [workers], for participation. At this moment, Outine is their representative, their champion.

It is more or less resolved, that either our friends of the Mountain will triumph, and then the Federal Council and the editorial board of *l'Egalité* will be transferred to them—or if our friends yield, that the sections of the Mountains, and with them perhaps those of Lausanne, Vevey, Neuchâtel and Bienne, will separate from Geneva to form a separate Federation. From its side, the factory of Geneva has declared loudly that if Congress rejects participation in local politics, it will separate from the Mountain sections. Outine is the author of the Genovese project

and he will be its principal defender. If Geneva carries the day, and if *l'Egalité* remains with it, Outine will be its editor.

He will naturally take advantage of it in order to put himself in contact with French socialism. My dear friend, I ask you then energetically, imperiously, in the name of our *Intimacy*, to warn all our friends in France and above all Mme D. T., Mme D. Z., Mr E. A., Mr D. U., without forgetting Mr D. Z., of that filthy and reactionary intrigue. Outine must be banished from our circle, as a pernicious being, and all the good, all those who march with us, either directly or indirectly, must guard against him like a plague. For his intrigue is insidious, perfidious, subversive—so warn all those who find themselves under your influence or under that of our friends.

If our party yields, the separation and independent organization of the sections of the mountains will take place—and then we will have as an organ not *l'Egalité*, but *le Progrès* of Locle, which will probably move then to Neuchâtel, under the direction of Guillaume. It will then be *le Progrès* that we should support with our correspondence and obtain many subscriptions for it.

Apart from its local importance, the battle that will be engaged at La chaux de Fonds will have an immense universal interest. It will be the forerunner and precursor of the one that we must give at the next General Congress of the International:

Do we want the grand politics of universal socialism or the petty politics of the bourgeois radicals, revised and corrected from the point of view of the bourgeois workers?

Do we want the abolition of the bourgeois homelands and political States, and the coming of the universal State, socialist and unique?

Do we want the complete emancipation of the workers or only the improvement of their lot?

Do we want to create a new world or plaster over the old?

Such are the questions that we must study and prepare for the next Congress. You [in the] Lyonesse Section, propose it at London.—On our side will be: the Spaniards, the Belgians, the Italians, the sections of the Swiss Mountains and, I hope, the majority of the French. And we will have against us not the workers' instincts, but the ambitions and vanities of the party leaders of the Socialist Democracy, and under the influence of these same German chiefs, in large part Jews, exploiter and bourgeois by instinct, including the school of Marx, we will also have against us the English and American delegates.

So let us close our ranks and prepare ourselves for combat. For on this depends the triumph of the International and of the Revolution.

Mr. Liebknecht continues to act in a treacherous manner with me, and in general with all the Russian revolutionaries. He has republished, it is true, my *Appel aux jeunes Russes* and the letter of Nechayev, but at the same time he has published an article against us, both stupid and vile, written by a joker named Borkheim, a little Jew, instrument of Marx. Note that all our enemies, all these who bay against us are Jews: Marx, Hess, Borkheim, Liebknecht, Jacobi, Weis, Kohn, Outine and many others, are Jews; all belong to that restless, scheming, exploitative nationality, bourgeois by tradition, by instinct—Marx, the most distinguished among them, possesses a great intelligence—all the others are nothing but traders in the details of his ideas.—Marx has rendered great services to socialism. But it is necessary to acknowledge at the same time that that he is a very rough customer, a detestable character, vain, irascible, jealous, touchy; sly, perfidious and capable of great villainies—and as scheming as possible, as are all the Jews.

I have begun a series of letters in response to these baying Jews and Germans.—I want to be done with them.—The first letter, already finished, is translated into German and will be sent to the *Volksstaat*, newspaper of the Socialist Democracy of the German workers, edited by Liebknecht—after that, I will make them appear in French in the *Marseillaise* and in the *Progrès* of Locle—Please call these letters to the attention of friends.

Have you [yourself] carefully read and read to our principal friends *all* of the letter that I have recently sent to you through Schwitzguébel—especially the second part, the conclusion? I am very keen to receive your very specific response to that conclusion.

You always say to me: “We are in agreement on the principal points.”—Alas! My friend, I fear very much that we are in perfect disagreement on those points. According to your last letters and the latest news I have heard from you, I must think that you remain more than ever a partisan of centralization, of the revolutionary State. While I am more than ever its adversary, and see salvation only in Revolutionary Anarchy, directed at all points by an invisible collective force—the only dictatorship that I will accept, because it alone is compatible with the candor and full energy of the revolutionary movement.—

Your revolutionary plan *is summarized in these words*: As soon as the Revolution breaks out in Paris—Paris organizes temporarily the revolutionary commune—Lyon, Marseille, Rouen and other great cities rise up simultaneously and immediately send to Paris their revolutionary delegates, who together form a sort of National Convention or Committee of Public Safety for all of France. This Committee decrees the Revolution, decrees the abolition of the old State, the social liquidation, collective property—organizes the Revolutionary State with a strength sufficient to repress the internal and external reaction.

Is that not your idea?

Our idea, our plan is completely opposed. First, it is not at all proven that the revolutionary movement must absolutely begin in Paris. It is not at all impossible that it will commence in the provinces. But let us suppose that in accordance with the tradition, it is Paris that begins. Paris, we believe, has only an entirely negative, which is to say frankly revolutionary initiative to take: that of the destruction and liquidation, not that of organization.—If Paris rises up and triumphs, it will have the right and duty to proclaim the complete liquidation of the political, juridical, financial and administrative State—public and private bankruptcy, the dissolution of all the powers, all the services, all the functions and all the forces of the State, the fire or bonfire of all the papers, private and public deeds. Paris will naturally hurry to organize for itself, somehow, in a revolutionary manner, after the laborers gathered in associations have helped themselves to all the instruments of labor, capital of all sorts and buildings. Remaining armed and organized by streets and neighborhoods [quartiers], they will form the revolutionary federation of all the neighborhoods, the federative commune.—And that commune will certainly have the right to declare that it does not assume the right of governing or organizing France, but that it calls the people and all the towns [communes], either of France, or of what we have called until this our the foreign countries, to follow its example, to each make in their own place a revolution as radical and as destructive for the State, for legal right and for privileged property, and after having done it, to come and join in federation with it, either in Paris, or in such other places as they please, so that all the revolutionary communes, French and foreign, send their delegates

for a common organization of services and of necessary relations of production and exchange, for the establishment of the charter of Equality, basis of all liberty, a charter absolutely negative in its character, clarifying much more what must be abolished forever, than the positive forms of local life, which can only be created by the living practice of each locality—and in order to form a common defense against the enemies of the revolution, as well as propaganda, weapon of the revolution, and practical revolutionary solidarity with friends from all countries against the enemies from all countries.

The provinces, at least the principal points, such as Lyon, Marseille, St Etienne, Rouen and others, must not await the decrees of Paris to rise up and organize themselves in a revolutionary manner.—They must rise up simultaneously with Paris, and do what Paris must do, the negative revolution and the first organization by a spontaneous movement—so that the federal revolutionary assembly of the delegates of the Provinces and communes do not have to organize France, but be the expression of a spontaneous organization made at each point—I mean the revolutionary points, not those that still find themselves in a state of reaction.—In a word, the revolution must be and must remain everywhere independently of the central point, which must be its expression, the product and not the source, the direction and the cause.

It is necessary that the anarchy, the uprising of all the local passions, the spontaneous awakening of life at all points, be very great in order that the Revolution should be, and remain, real and powerful.—The political revolutionaries, the partisans of ostensible dictatorship, once the revolution has obtained a first triumph, recommend the calming of the passions, order, confidence and submission to the established revolutionary powers—and in this way, they reestablish the State.

We, on the contrary, we must foment, awaken, unleash all the passions—we must produce anarchy—and, invisible pilots in the midst of the popular storm, we must direct it, not by any ostensible power, but by the collective dictatorship of all the Allies—dictatorship without *écharpe*, without title, without official right, and that much more powerful, because it will have none of the appearances of power.— This is the only dictatorship that I accept. But in order for it to act, it is necessary that it exist, and for that it is necessary to prepare for and organize it in advance; for it will not make itself all alone—neither by discussions, nor by expositions and discussions of principles, nor by popular assemblies.

Few allies but the good, but good, but energetic, but discreet, but faithful, but above all free of vanity and personal ambition, strong men, serious enough, having mind and heart highly placed enough to prefer the reality of strength to these vain appearances. If you form this *collective* and *invisible* dictatorship, you will triumph, the well directed revolution will triumph. If not, no. If you amuse yourself playing at Committees of Public Safety and official dictatorship, you will be devoured by the reaction but you have your selves created.

Dear friend, I admire the generous instincts and the so lively intelligence of the French workers. But I greatly fear their tendency to effects, to grand dramatic scenes, heroic and brilliant.—Many of our friends—among whom I place you—prepare themselves to play a great role in the coming revolution—that of statesman of the revolution. They promise themselves to become the Dantons, Robespierres and St. Justs of revolutionary socialism—and they already prepare the fine speeches and grand gestures that must astonish the world. They will naturally make the popular masses a stepping stone—a pedestal for their democratic ambitions, for their glory! For the salvation of all they will make dictatorship, government, the State—a ridiculous and deplorable illusion. They will make only vanity and only serve the reaction. They will be the reaction themselves.

Remember this well, my friend and brother, the present socialist movement, completely opposed in that to the political movement that tends only to the domination and exultation of individuals, the movement for popular emancipation does not entail the triumph and dictatorship of individuals.—If individuals triumph, that will no longer be socialism, but politics, the business of the bourgeois, and socialism will perish. If it does not perish, it will be the vain, ambitious and glory-seeking individuals, the budding dictators, will make a terrible fiasco.

There is no longer but a single power, a single dictatorship whose organization is salutary and possible: it is that collective and invisible dictatorship of the allies, in the name of our principle—and that dictatorship will be that much more salutary and powerful, as it will not be cloaked by any official power, nor any ostensible character.

But in order to form it we must have really strong men, elevated by their intelligence and by their heart above vulgar ambitions, who are seriously ambitious enough to only want the triumph of their idea and not of their person and to prefer real power to the appearances of strength—in order to comprehend finally that our century is that of the collective forces, not individual forces, and that the collectivity will crush all the individuals who wish to impose themselves upon it.

Your intelligence is too great to not understand all that.—But will your heart and your character be as elevated as your intelligence. This is the question. What's will carry the day in you: the love of justice and equality or the delirium of seeing yourself reflected in a historic pose? Have you the strength to vanquishing yourself that is Italian charlatanism, but you consider an excellent means of magnetizing the masses, that mania for posing and that thirst for glory that still torments you today?

You see, I speak to you with the ease of a friend and brother who believes they have the right to say all, because they feel in their heart an immense love for you, and who, while recognizing a large dose of individualism in you, count on your intelligence and your heart, which are still greater than your faults, and who, in short, has faith in your friendship. If you keep it for me after having read this letter, I will congratulate myself for having written it.

One more word. In one of your letters, you have said to me that I could become the Garibaldi of the social movement. You truly have too good an opinion of me, dear friend. Be certain but I know myself well and that I find myself in either any of the qualities nor any of the faults necessary to make a hero; and besides, I do not care in the least to make a historical name for myself.

Do you know to what all ambition is reduced? It is great, but it does not aim for glory or noise: It is to help you to form that invisible collective force that alone can save and direct the revolution.

Respond to me right away, please, at the address of Perron.

Your devoted M.B.

Soon, I hope, we will see one another and I would not come with a full mouth and empty hands.

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