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Letter to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

Mikhail Bakunin

December 12, 1848

Köthen, December 12, 1848

Citizen,

I do not know if you will remember me; as for me, in my long peregrinations across Germany and in the Slavic countries, I have often thought of you. You are not one of those that one forgets. I don't know how to express to you the feeling of joy that I felt when I saw you, after the fatal days of June, mount to the podium to defend the interests and rights of those noble and unfortunate workers of Paris, whom all, all except you, had abandoned. The address that you delivered then was more than a speech, it was an act. You dared to tell the truth to the bourgeois gathered in your national assembly, in a moment when everyone had become a hypocrite; they have insulted you, they have tried to mock you, but that laughter was forced and the bourgeois have trembled despite themselves. – The German bourgeoisie is almost worse than the French bourgeoisie; the one is frankly cynical, while the other is sentimental, with pretensions of honesty in its cowardice and selfishness. Both

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Working Translation by Shawn P. Wilbur

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are worthless and both should be sent to the devil. – The revolution is not finished in Germany; we have had the end of the bourgeois revolution, in the springtime according to all appearances we would have the beginning of the popular revolution. – The people of the countryside, who are more revolutionary in Germany than they are in France because they are still subject to feudal rights and because they have a powerful hatred against all the employees, – the people of the countryside are already agitated, amuse themselves by burning the chateaux and taking the lords. On the other hand, the bankruptcy advances with a speed that is terrifying (for the bourgeois, it is understood) – it will engulf everything; bankruptcy of states and bankruptcy of individuals. Imagine that the upkeep of the army alone costs 2 millions crowns in Prussia today, plus 7 millions francs per week. – Commerce does not go at all, and the good bourgeois of Berlin are all astonished that the bayonets having restored order and public tranquility, have not restored credit. – And you know that bankruptcy is the guillotine for the bourgeoisie. – I send you my manifesto to the Slavs, but unfortunately I can only send it to you in German, the original French still not being printed; someone will translate it for you. – You will see that we pursue a very simple idea: the destruction of the great states. It is my private conviction that the great states and despotism are inseparable. – You have many admirers and partisans in Germany; – I have found here some true men, not a great number, doubtless, but those at least are good. Nothing is as difficult now as it is to be true; it is the century of hypocrisy and hypocrites: aristocratic hypocrites, liberal hypocrites, democratic hypocrites, hypocrites everywhere, and very few men who have the courage to admit to themselves the ultimate consequences of their own ideas. – The revolution is immense, the events gigantic, but the men are infinitely small. That is the character of our times. – The bearer of this letter is one of my best friends, a democrat from Berlin, a very sincere, very honest, well-educated German, who could

give you the most interesting and most detailed information about his country. – as for me, I remain here another month, after which I got to Paris to remain there one or two months, in order to return anew to my Slavs. – I have been expelled from the Prussian states at the repeated demand of the Russian government and I have taken refuge at Köthen from where I can easily maintain my relations with the Russians, the Poles and other Slavs.

Answer me with a few words if you have the time; this is my address:

Monsieur Charles

Köthen – Principality of Anhalt

And on the inside envelope: for Mr. Jules.

Farewell – take care of yourself and may the revolution be with you.

M. Bakunin