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Letter to Zamfir Arbore (Zamfir Ralli)

Mikhail Bakunin

September 1873

My friend Ralli,

So you are already informed about the Congress of Geneva, the decision has been taken to remove the General Council. Three propositions have been made, all three by people who do not understand very well what is necessary for us, anarchists; some propose to organize, by replacing the suppressed General Council, [with] a common central commission, others want three commissions, and a third group proposes to delegate the powers to one of the federations for the general administration of the international. It has occurred to none of them that they all simply propose to organize once again, in the place of the abolished General Council, a General Council prepared this time with another sauce. A Central Commission, even if it had neither powers nor prerogatives, but only obligations, would not be slow to turn into the same General Council; it would have its agents, its own official propaganda, its official statistics, its personal liaisons and consequently its schemes. Sooner or later it would be without fail transformed into a sort of government. There

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would be at least three commissions. The International would thus have three governments; the transmission of the powers to a federation would make that a government. You ask me which of these three propositions I favor? Now, you obviously know my response. I intend nothing to be put in the place of the authority that we have abolished, for we have no need of anything of that sort. We have demolished the authoritarian edifice, anarchy is our program, consequently there is no place to step back. That was our first axe-blow; a part of the edifice has collapsed; we must give a second, and a third, and the whole edifice of the Marxists collapse. To your question, which is a bit roguish, à savoir that our internal organization is as centralized, I respond frankly and categorically that you are wrong. I have never denied the influence of energetic, intelligent men, seeing farther and wider, of which I have always recognized the emprise on society; but I am opposed to them having official power at their disposal, for that is dangerous, as much from the educational point of view as for the entire organization in particular. Our aim: to realize the fraternity of men to which we want to arrive by a freely consented discipline, and not by the discipline that the present society imposes on the human person, a discipline that is that of the soldier, of the lay brothers, of the monk. In order to break that discipline that depersonalizes the individual, what is necessary? Anarchy as a means. That, then, is my response to all doubts, which would sadden me if I did not know my friend Rul [Ralli?] and his and his chivalrous penchants.

And now, let us pass on to our business; task of knowing what Sokolov did at Geneva with the commission with which I was tasked. I have received his letter, but I have understood nothing clearly.

Your M.B.