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Politics and the State

Mikhail Bakunin

1871

We have repelled energetically every alliance with bourgeois politics, even of the most radical nature. It has been pretended, foolishly and slanderously, that we repudiated all such Political connivance because we were indifferent to the great question of Liberty, and considered only the economic or material side of the problem. It has been declared that, consequently, we placed ourselves in the ranks of the reaction. A German delegate at the Congress of Basle gave classic expression to this view, when he dared to state that, who ever did not recognise, with the German Socialists Democracy, “that the conquest of political rights (power) was the preliminary condition of social emancipation,” was, consciously or unconsciously an ally, of the Ceasars!

These critics greatly deceive themselves and, “consciously or unconsciously,” endeavour to deceive the public concerning us. We love liberty much more than they do. We love it to the point of wishing it complete and entire. We wish the reality and not the fiction. Hence we repel every bourgeois alliance, since we are convinced that all liberty conquered by the aid of the bourgeoisie, their political means and weapons, or by an alliance with their political dupes, will prove profitable for

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Retrieved on 8th August 2021 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu

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Messrs. the bourgeois, but never anything more than a fiction for the workers.

Messrs. the bourgeois of all parties, including the most advanced, however cosmopolitan they are, when it is a question of gaining money by a more and more extensive exploitation of the labour of the people, are all equally fervent and fanatical in their patriotic attachment to the state. Patriotism is in reality, nothing but the passion for and cult of the national State, as M. Thiers, the very illustrious assassin of the parisian proletariat, and the present saviour of France, has said recently. But whoever says "State" says domination; and whoever says "domination" says exploitation. Which proves that the popular or "folk's" State, now become and unhappily remaining today the catchword of the German Socialist Democracy, is a ridiculous contradiction, a fiction, a falsehood, unconscious on the part of those who extol it, doubtlessly, but, for the proletariat, a very dangerous trap.

The State, however popular may be the form it assumes, will always be an institution of domination and exploitation, and consequently a permanent source of poverty and enslavement for the populace. There is no other way, then, of emancipating the people economically and politically, of giving them liberty and well-being at one and the same time than by abolishing the State, all States, and, by so doing, killing, once and for all time, what, up to now, has been called "Politics," i e., precisely nothing else than the functioning or manifestation both internal and external of State action, that is to say, the practice, or art and science of dominating and exploiting the masses in favour of the privileged classes.

It is not true then to say that we treat politics abstractly. We make no abstraction of it, since we wish positively to kill it. And here is the essential point upon which we separate ourselves absolutely from politicians and radical bourgeois Socialists (now functioning as social or radical democracy which is only a facade for capitalistic democracy.). Their policy consists

in the transformation of State politics, their use and reform. Our policy, the only policy we admit, consists in the total abolition of the State, and of politics, which is its necessary manifestation.

It is only because we wish frankly to this abolition of the State that we believe that we have the right to call ourselves Internationalists and Revolutionary Socialists; for whoever wishes to deal with politics otherwise than how we do; whoever does not, like us, wish the total abolition of politics, must necessarily participate in the politics of a patriotic and bourgeois State. In other words, he renounces, by that very fact, in the name of his great or little national State, the human solidarity of all peoples, as well as the economic and social emancipation of the masses at home.