Second Address to the Second Congress of Peace and Freedom

Mikhail Bakunin

September 23, 1868

Gentlemen, I do not want to respond to all the *pleasantries* that have been hurled at me from the height of this rostrum. I would have too much to do if I wanted to unravel the truth through the mass of confused ideas and contradictory sentiments that have been raised against me. Several orators have employed, in order to combat me, some arguments so far from serious I would well have the right to put their good faith in doubt.–I would not do it, Gentlemen. I have only asked to speak a second time in order to place again on its true terrain a question that some have had an obvious interest in shifting.

They respond to us as if we had proposed to this assembly to accept a defined system of socialism, while on the contrary I have taken a great deal of care to declare from this tribune that we abstain from proposing to it any system platform; that we only ask them to recognize, by a formal vote, economic and social equality as an aim, without deciding in any way today on the question of ways and means. The whole question, I have said, is to know. Do you want that equality, yes or no?

To that, doubtless to avoid giving us a frank response, which with a single blow have unveiled to the working masses the nature of the sentiments with which one is animated for their cause, we have not responded by an eloquent, and, I will say the word, a passionately *bourgeois* critique, of my presumed question, which I have not even had the honor of explaining from this podium, and which are not at all in question.

Do not believe, Gentlemen, that I recoil before the frank explanation of my socialist ideas. I could ask nothing better than to defend them here. But I do not think that the regulatory fifteen minutes would suffice for this debate. However there is one point, one accusation hurled against me that I cannot leave without a response.

Because I demand the economic and social equalization of classes and individuals, because with the Congress of laborers at Brussels, I have declared myself a partisan of collective property, I have been reproached for being a communist. What difference, they have said to me, do you intend between communism and collectivity? I am astonished, truly, that Mr. Chaudey does not understand that difference, he, the testamentary executor of Proudhon! I detest communism, because it is the negation of liberty and because I can conceive nothing human without liberty. I am not a communist because communism concentrates and causes all the power of society

to be concentrated in the State, because it leads necessarily to the centralization of property in the hands of the State, while I want the abolition of the State,—the radical extirpation of that principle of authority and of the guardianship of the State, which under the pretext of moralizing and civilizing men, have thus far enslaved, oppressed, exploited and depraved them, I want the organization of society and of collective or social property from bottom to top, by the way of free association, and not from top to bottom by means of any sort of authority. Wishing the abolition of the State, I want the abolition of individually hereditary property, which is only an institution of the State, nothing but a consequence of the very principle of the State. That is the sense in which, Gentlemen, I am collectivist and not at all communist.

I have asked, I ask the economic and social equalization of classes and individuals. I not want to say what I mean by these words.

I want the suppression of the classes as much in the economic and social relations as political. Let Mr. Chaudey and Mr. Fribourg, who seem today to be united bythe same feeling of aversion for that poor equality, allow me to say to them that equality, proclaimed in 1793, has been one of the greatest conquests of the French Revolution. Despite all the reactions which have arrived since, that great principle has triumphed in the political economy of Europe. In the most advanced countries, it is called the equality of politic rights; in the other countries, civil equality—equality before the law. No country in Europe would dare to openly proclaim today the principle of political inequality.

But the history of the revolution itself and that of the seventy-five years that have passed since, we prove that political equality without economic equality is a lie. You would proclaim in vain the equality of political rights, as long as society remains split by its economic organization into socially different layers—that equality will be nothing but a fiction. For it to become a reality, the economic causes of that class difference would have to disappear—it would require the abolition of the right of inheritance, which is the permanent source of all social inequalities. It would be necessary that society, no longer being divided into different classes, presents a homogenous whole—an organization created by liberty according to justice, and in which there would no longer be the shadow of that fatal separation of men into two principal classes: that which is called the intelligent class and the class of workers;—the one representing domination and the right of command, and the other eternal submission. All men must be at the same time intelligent and hard-working, so that no one can live any longer on the labor of another and that all can and must also live as much from the labor of their heads as from that of their arms. Then, Gentlemen, but only then, equality and political liberty will become a truth.

Here then is what we understand by these words: "the equalization of the classes." It would perhaps have been better to say suppression of the classes, the unification of society by the abolition of economic and social inequality. But we have also demanded the *equalization of the individuals*, and it is there especially that we attract all the thunderbolts of outraged eloquence from our adversaries. One has made use of that part of our proposition to prove in a conclusive manner that we are nothing but communists. And in order to prove the absurdity of our system, one has had recourse to arguments as witty as new. One orator, doubtless carried away by the energy of his indignation, has even wanted to compare his stature to mine.

Allow me, Gentlemen, to pose this question I a more serious manner. Do I need to tell you that it is not a question at first of the natural, physiological, ethnographic difference that exists between individuals, but of the social difference, that is produced by the economic organization of society? Give to all the children, from their birth, the same means of maintenance, education,

and instruction; give then to all the men thus raised the same social milieu, the same means of earning their living by their own labor, and you will see then that many of these differences, that we believe to be natural differences, will disappear because they are nothing but the effect of an unequal division of the conditions of intellectual and physical development—of the conditions of life

Man, Gentlemen, like everything that lives and breathes in the world, is not a creation of his own will, good or bad, for that same will, as well as his intelligence, is nothing but products—a result created by the cooperation of many natural and social causes. Correct nature by society, equalize as much as possible the conditions of development and labor for all, and you would have destroyed much nonsense, many crimes, many evils. When all have received roughly the same education and the same instruction, when all will be obliged by the very of things to associate in order to work and to work in order to live; when labor, recognized as the true foundation of all social organization, will become the object of public respect, the men of ill will, the parasites, and the fools diminish noticeably and will end by being considered and treated as sick. It is not just me, *monsieur*Chaudey, it is your master Proudhon who has said it.

Finally, Gentlemen, I repeat it once more: it is not a question at this moment of debating the very basis of the social question, we must only decided if we want equality, yes or no? That is what I had to point out to you.

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