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The Social Revolution

Mikhail Bakunin

1910

This work, like all the writings, themselves not very numerous, that I have published thus far, is born of events. It is the natural continuation of my “*Letters to a Frenchman*” (September 1870), in which I had the simple, sad honor of foreseeing and predicting the horrible misfortunes that today strike France, and, with it, the whole civilized world; misfortunes for which there has been and now still remains only one single remedy: *The Social Revolution*. [*one paragraph omitted*]

The task I have imposed on myself is not easy, I know, and I could be accused of presumption, if I bore in this work the slightest personal ambition. But, I can assure the reader, that is not the case. I am not a scholar, nor a philosopher, nor even a writer by trade. I have written very little in my life and I have only ever done so, so to speak, when my life depended on it, and only when a passionate conviction forced me to conquer my instinctive aversion to all exhibition of my own self in public.

So who am I and what is it that urges me now to publish this work? I am a passionate seeker of truth and an equally fierce enemy of all the destructive fictions of which the *party of order*,—that official, privileged and self-interested representative of all the religious, metaphysical, political, juridical, economic

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and social turpitudes, present and past, still claims the use today in order to stupefy and enslave the world. I am a fanatical lover of liberty, considering it the only milieu in the heart of which that purely formal liberty granted, determined and regulated by the State,—an eternal lie, which in reality never represents anything but the privilege of a few founded on the slavery of everyone,—can develop and grow; not of that individualist, selfish, local, miserly and fictive liberty extolled by the school of J.J. Rousseau, and by all the other schools of bourgeois liberalism, which considers the so-called right of all, represented by the State, as the limit of the right of each, which always, necessarily leads to the reduction of the right of each to zero. No, I mean the only liberty that is truly worthy of the name, the liberty that consists of the full development of all the material, intellectual and moral powers found in the state of latent faculties in each; the liberty that recognizes no other restrictions than those drawn for us by the laws of our own nature; so that, properly speaking, there are no restrictions, since these laws are not imposed on us by some outside legislation, whether residing beside or above us; they are immanent within us, inherent, constituting the very basis of our whole being, as much material as intellectual and moral; so instead of taking them for a limit, we should consider them the real conditions and effective reason of our liberty.

I mean that liberty of each that, far from ending at the liberty of others, as if at a boundary, finds there, on the contrary, its confirmation and indefinite extension; the unlimited liberty of each through the liberty of all, liberty through solidarity, liberty in equality; liberty triumphant over brutal force and the principle of authority, which was never anything but the ideal expression of that force; that liberty that, after having toppled all the idols, celestial and terrestrial, will found and organize a new world, that of united humanity, on the ruins of all the Churches and all the States.

I am a convinced partisan of *social and economic Equality*, because I know that apart from that equality, liberty, justice, human dignity, morality and the well-being of individuals, as well as the prosperity of nations, will never be anything but so many lies. But still being a partisan of liberty, that first condition of humanity, I think that equality must be established in the world by the spontaneous organization of labor and of collective property, of productive associations freely organized and federalized in the communes, and by the equally spontaneous federation of the communes, but not by the supreme, tutelary action of the State.

This is the principal point that divides the revolutionary socialists or collectivists from the authoritarian communists, partisans of the absolute initiative of the State. Their aim is the same; both parties equally desire the creation of a new social order, founded solely on the organization of collective labor, inevitably imposed on each and all by the very force of things, with conditions economically equal for all, and on the collective appropriation of the instruments of labor. Only, the communists imagine that they can arrive there through the development and organization of the political power of the working classes, and especially of the proletariat in the towns, with the aid of bourgeois radicalism, while the revolutionary socialists, enemies of every alloy and every suspect alliance, think, on the contrary, that they could achieve this end only through the development and organization, not of the political power, but of the social, and consequently non-political power of the working masses, both in the cities and in the country *including all the men of good will of the upper classes who, breaking with their past*, honestly wish to join with them and completely accept their program.

From this, two different methods arise. The Communists believe it necessary to organize the strength of the workers in order to seize the political power of the States. The revolutionary socialists organize it in anticipation of the destruction or,

if you wish a more polite term, the liquidation of the States. The Communists are partisans of the principle and practice of authority; the revolutionary socialists have confidence only in liberty. Both being equally partisans of science, which must kill superstition and replace faith, the first would like to impose it, while the other strive to propagate it, so that the human groups, convinced, organize and federalize spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own movement and in accordance with their real interests, but never according to a plan drawn up in advance and imposed on the *ignorant masses* by a few superior intelligences.

The socialist revolutionaries think that there is much more practical reason and intellect in the instinctive and real needs of the popular masses than in the profound intelligence of all these doctors and tutors of humanity, who, having so often tried and failed to make it happy, still claim to add their efforts. The revolutionary socialists, on the contrary, think that humanity has let itself be governed for so long, too long, and that the source of its misfortunes is not to be found in this or that form of government, but in the principle, in the very fact that there is government.

This, finally, is the contradiction, already historic, that exists between the scientific communism developed by the German school and accepted in part by the authoritarian and English socialists on one side, and the Proudhonism, fully developed and pushed to its last consequences, preferred, on the other, by the proletariat of the Latin countries.¹ Revolutionary socialism just attempted a first striking, practical demonstration in the PARIS COMMUNE.

¹ It is also accepted, and will be more and more, by the essentially non-political instinct of the Slavic peoples.