Bakunin was a Racist

Zoe Baker

Oct 31, 2021

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Michael Bakunin was one of the early influential theorists of the anarchist movement and played a key role in developing and spreading its ideas. He is one of my favourite authors and I have gained a huge amount from reading him. But this does not mean that I am uncritical of Bakunin. I am against putting any anarchist, dead or alive, on a pedestal and think it is important to examine both the good and the bad aspects of what Bakunin thought. His theory contained a profound inconsistency. He advocated a society in which all systems of domination and exploitation were abolished and everybody was free. He was also an antisemite. Most of the thousands of pages Bakunin wrote contain no antisemitism. On the few occasions where he is antisemitic it is abhorrent and should be rejected by everybody. In this essay I shall explain how he was antisemitic and why it was wrong. Once I have done this, I will discuss whether or not Bakunin's critique of capitalism and the state was fundamentally racist and then explore how historical anarchists responded to his antisemitism.

Bakunin's Racism

Bakunin's antisemitism took five main forms. Firstly, on a number of occasions Bakunin unnecessarily pointed out that somebody he did not like was a Jew. One of Bakunin's main political opponents in the 1st International was a Russian Jew named Nicholas Utin, who was an ally of Marx and Engels. In August 1871 Bakunin wrote a text which was later referred to as his *Report on the Alliance*. Within the text he labelled Utin a "little Jew" who manipulated other people, especially women, on four occasions (Bakunin 1913, 197, 213, 265–6, 273. For English translations see Carr 1975, 346; Bakunin 2016, 153, 158). A year later in October 1872 Bakunin again referred to Utin as "a little Russian Jew" in his unsent letter to the editors of *La Liberté* (Bakunin 1973, 247. Also see Bakunin 1872b, 1). Bakunin made similar remarks about other individuals. Within *Statism and Anarchy,* which was published in 1873, Bakunin complained that German workers were "confused by their leaders – politicians, literati, and Jews" who "hate and fear revolution" and have as a result "directed the entire worker population" into parliamentary politics (Bakunin 1990, 193).

On other occasions Bakunin went further. He explictly connected a person's Jewishness with what he thought were their negative personality traits or incorrect political positions. In *Statism and Anarchy* Bakunin wrote that,

> By origin Marx is a Jew. One might say that he combines all of the positive qualities and all of the short comings of that capable race. A nervous man, some say to the point of cowardice, he is extremely ambitious and vain, quarrelsome, intolerant, and absolute, like Jehovah, the Lord God of his ancestors, and, like him, vengeful to the point of madness. There is no lie or calumny that he would not invent and disseminate against anyone who had the misfortune to arouse his jealousy – or his hatred, which amounts to the same thing. And there is no intrigue so sordid that he would hesitate to engage in it if in his opinion (which is for the most part mistaken) it might serve to strengthen his position and his influence or extend his power (Bakunin 1990, 141).

Bakunin later claimed that Marx was a "hopeless statist" and advocate of "state communism" because of "his threefold capacity as an Hegelian, a Jew, and a German" (Bakunin 1990, 142–3).

This point was repeated elsewhere. Bakunin remarked in his 1872 letter *To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain* that Marx "as a German and a Jew" is "an authoritarian from head to foot". Within the same letter Bakunin wrote that Marx's "vanity, in fact, has no limits, a truly Jewish vanity" (Bakunin 1872a. For the German version see Bakunin 1924, 117, 115).

Bakunin made similar remarks about the German state socialist Ferdinand Lassalle. He wrote in *Statism and Anarchy* that "Lassalle … was vain, very vain, as befits a Jew" (Bakunin 1990, 177). A few pages later he declared that "Lassalle … was too spoilt by wealth and its attendant habits of elegance and refinement to find satisfaction in the popular milieu; he was too much of a Jew to feel comfortable among the people" (Bakunin 1990, 180). Bakunin not only connected Lassalle's vanity and elitism with being Jewish but also argued, just as he had done with Marx, that Lassalle's Jewishness could be used to explain his political positions. Bakunin wrote that Lassalle advocated parliamentary politics as the means to seize state power because he was "a German, a Jew, a scholar, and a rich man" (Bakunin 1990, 175).

Bakunin's antisemitism was not limited to making negative remarks about a few Jewish individuals. Between February and March 1872 Bakunin wrote a letter titled *To the Comrades of the International Sections of the Jura Federation.* It is perhaps the most antisemitic texts he ever wrote. Within the letter he asserted that Jewish people are,

> bourgeois and exploitative from head to foot, and instinctively opposed to any real popular emancipation … Every Jew, however enlightened, retains the traditional cult of authority: it is the heritage of his race, the manifest sign of his Eastern origin … The Jew is therefore authoritarian by position, by tradition and by nature. This is a general law and one which admits of very few exceptions, and these very exceptions, when examined closely confirm the rule (Bakunin 1872b, 4).

He continues a few paragraphs later by saying that Jewish people are "driven by need on the one hand, and on the other by that ever restless activity, by that passion for transactions and instinct for speculation, as well as by that petty and vain ambition, which form the distinguishing traits of the race" (Ibid).

The second main form of Bakunin's antisemitism was the belief that Jewish people were united as a singular entity, rather than being a broad and diverse ethnic, cultural or religious group composed of distinct individual people acting independently of one another. Bakunin claimed in his March 1872 letter to the Jura Federation that "the Jews of every country are really friends only with the Jews of all countries, independently of all differences existing in social positions, degree of education, political opinions, and religious worship." He continued at length,

> Above all, they are Jews, and that establishes among all the individuals of this singular race, across all religions, political and social differences that separates them, a union of solidarity that is mutually indissoluble. It is a powerful chain, broadly cosmopolitan and narrowly national at the same time, in the racial sense, interconnecting the kings of finance, the Rothschilds, or the most scientifically exalted intelligences, with the ignorant and superstitious Jews of Lithuania, Hungary, Roumania, Africa and Asia. I do not think there exists a single Jew in the world today who does not tremble with hope and pride when he hears the sacred name of Rothschild (Quoted in Draper 1990, 297. For the original French see Bakunin 1872b, 3).

Sometime between October 1871 and February 1872 Bakunin wrote a note which he titled *Supporting Documents: Personal Relations with Marx.* He initially intended to include the text in a letter he was writing to Italians he knew, but the note was never sent. It contained some of the most antisemitic remarks Bakunin ever wrote (Bakunin 1924, 204. Bakunin did send a letter to Bologna in December 1871 but it has been lost and we do not know if it contained similar racist content). Within the unsent note Bakunin wrote,

> Himself a Jew, Marx has around him, in London and France, but especially in Germany, a multitude of more or less clever, intriguing, mobile, speculating Jews, such as Jews are everywhere: commercial or banking agents, writers, politicians, correspondents for newspapers of all shades, with one foot in the bank, the other in the socialist movement, and with their behinds sitting on the German daily press — they have taken possession of all the newspapers — and you can imagine what kind of sickening literature they produce. Now, this entire Jewish world, which forms a single profiteering sect, a people of bloodsuckers, a single gluttonous parasite, closely and intimately united not only across national borders but across all differences of political opinion — this Jewish world today stands for the most part at the disposal of Marx and at the same time at the disposal of Rothschild. I am certain that Rothschild for his part greatly values the merits of Marx, and that Marx for his part feels instinctive attraction and great respect for Rothschild (Bakunin 1924, 208–9).

The third main form of Bakunin's antisemitism was the belief in an international Jewish conspiracy which played a key role in running the world via control of commerce, banking and the media. In 1869 Bakunin was critiqued by a German Jewish state socialist called Moses Hess in an article which was published in the radical paper *Le Réveil.* Bakunin responded in October by writing a long unpublished letter titled *To the Citizen Editors of Le Réveil.* Bakunin's other title for the letter was *Study of the German Jews* (Carr 1975, 369–70; Eckhart 2016, 27; Bakunin 1911, 239). Within the letter he wrote that,

> I know that in speaking out my intimate thoughts on the Jews with such frankness I expose myself to immense dangers. Many people share these thoughts, but very few dare to express them publicly, for the Jewish sect, which is much more formidable than that of the Catholic and Protestant Jesuits, today constitutes a veritable power in Europe. It reigns despotically in commerce and banking, and it has invaded three-quarters of German journalism and a very considerable part of the journalism of other countries. Then woe to him who makes the mistake of displeasing it! (Quoted in Draper 1990, 293. For the original French see Bakunin 1911, 243–4. This view is repeated in Bakunin 1872b, 1).

Bakunin's friend Alexander Herzen reacted to this racist letter by complaining to Nicholas Ogarev, "why all this talk of race and of Jews?" (Quoted in Carr 1975, 370).

The fourth main form of Bakunin's antisemitism was intimately connected to the previous one. Bakunin not only believed that an international Jewish conspiracy played a key role in running the world. He also believed in a specifically Jewish conspiracy against him within the 1st International. The history of the 1st International is very complicated and for the purposes of this essay all you need to know is the following. In September 1872 Bakunin was expelled from

the 1st International at its Hague Congress for being a member of a secret organisation called the Alliance. Marx and Engels were mistakenly convinced that Bakunin was attempting to use the Alliance to take over the 1st International and become its dictator. Due to this false belief Marx and Engels went to great lengths to guarantee Bakunin's expulsion from the organisation, which included them creating fake delegates. Bakunin, in contrast, correctly thought that Marx, Engels and their supporters were attempting to take over the 1st International and convert the General Council, which was supposed to perform only an administrative role, into a governing body which imposed state socialist decisions and policies on the organisation's previously autonomous sections. One of the ironies of history is that, a key reason for why Marx and Engels did this is that they thought it was necessary in order to counter Bakunin's non-existent attempt to become dictator of the International and impose his anarchist programme on the organisation (Eckhart 2016. For a less in-depth history see Berthier 2015; Graham 2015).

Bakunin expressed his belief in a Jewish conspiracy against him in both public and private. In May 1872 the General Council issued a pamphlet called *Fictious Splits in the International* which had been written by Marx and Engels (Marx and Engels 1988, 83–123). The pamphlet repeated a number of inaccurate claims that had been made about Bakunin during his time in the International. This included Hess' October 1869 accusation that Bakunin attempted to transfer the location of the General Council from London, where Marx and Engels lived, to Geneva, near where Bakunin lived, and Utin's baseless September 1871 accusation that Bakunin was responsible for the harmful actions of the Russian revolutionary Sergei Nechaev (Eckhart 2016, 29–31, 91–3). Hess had been friends with Marx and Engels in the early 1840s, but their friendship seems to have ended by 1848. Utin, in contrast, was in close contact with Marx and Engels during the early 1870s and suggested various corrections and additions to the pamphlet (McLellan 1969, 145–7, 158, 160; Eckhart 2016, 47, 202–3).

In June 1872 the *Bulletin of the Jura Federation* published Bakunin's response. He wrote that Marx's pamphlet was "a collection, hodgepodge as much as systematic, of all the absurd and filthy tales that the malice (more perverse than spiritual) of the German and Russian Jews, his friends, his agents, his followers and at the same time, his henchmen, has peddled and propagated against us all, but especially against me, for almost three years" (Quoted Eckhart 2016, 212). Bakunin was correct to think that Marx was repeating claims made by Hess and Utin but their Jewishness was irrelevant. Bakunin framed these events as a Jewish conspiracy against him because he was an antisemite. Engels reacted to Bakunin's article by writing in a letter to Theodor Cuno, "Bakunin has issued a furious, but very weak, abusive letter" in which "he declares that he is the victim of a conspiracy of all the European—Jews!" (Marx and Engels 1989, 408).

Bakunin repeated his belief in a Jewish conspiracy against him in his October 1872 unsent letter to the editors of *La Liberté*. He wrote that,

> Marx … has a remarkable genius for intrigue, and unrelenting determination; he also has a sizeable number of agents at his disposal, hierarchically organized and acting in secret under his direct orders; a kind of socialist and literary freemasonry in which his compatriots, the German and other Jews, hold an important position and display zeal worthy of a better cause (Bakunin 1973, 246. Also see Bakunin 1872b, 1).

Bakunin was correct that Marx, Engels and their supporters conspired against him. Where Bakunin went wrong was to frame the actions of Marx as a specifically Jewish conspiracy. It happened to be the case that some of Bakunin's main political opponents within the International

were Jews – Marx, Utin, Hess and Sigismund Borkheim – but a larger number of his opponents belonged to other ethnicities, such as the German's Johann Philipp Becker and Georg Eccarius. Bakunin appeared to have been aware of this but thought they were operating under the commands of Marx and so a Jew. Bakunin could have viewed this situation as one political faction acting against another political faction. Due to his antisemitism, he instead framed it as people who were specifically Jewish conspiring against him. This was wrong and unjustifiable.

The fifth main form of Bakunin's antisemitism was his stereotyping of Jews as wealthy bankers (Bakunin 1872b, 1–2). In *Statism and Anarchy* he asserted that the creation of the German nation state in 1871 was,

> nothing other than the ultimate realisation of the anti-popular idea of the modern state, the sole objective of which is to organise the most intensive exploitation of the people's labour for the benefit of capital concentrated in a very small number of hands. It signifies the triumphant reign of the Yids, of a bankocracy under the powerful protection of a fiscal, bureaucratic, and police regime which relies mainly on military force and is therefore in essence despotic, but cloaks itself in the parliamentary game of pseudo-constitutionalism (Bakunin 1990, 12).

Over a hundred pages later Bakunin noted that "the rich commercial and industrial bourgeoisie and the Jewish financial world of Germany" both "required extensive state centralisation in order to flourish" (Bakunin 1990, 138). Bakunin could have made his point about the relationship between finance capital and the state with a reference to bankers in general. He was an antisemite and so instead referred specifically to Jewish bankers and equated the rule of Jewish bankers with the rule of Jews in general. This was a common form of antisemitism during the 19th century because several of the largest banks in the world were owned by Jewish families, such as Rothschild and Sons. Such racist claims ignored that other large banks at the time were not owned by Jewish families, such as Barings (Ferguson 2000, xxv, 20, 260–71, 284–8). It is furthermore the case that both today and in the 19th century the majority of Jews are not bankers or members of the ruling classes. Jewish workers do not benefit from the fact that some bankers happen to be Jewish. This is no different to the fact that workers who are Christians or atheists do not benefit from the fact that some bankers happen to be Christians or atheists.

This kind of antisemitism was not a one-off occurrence. Bakunin's most widely read work is a pamphlet called *God and the State*, which was first published in 1882 and is a long extract from his unfinished 1870–2 text *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*. Within *God and the State* Bakunin wrote that,

> the Jews, in spite of that exclusive national spirit which distinguishes them even to-day, had become in fact, long before the birth of Christ, the most international people of the world. Some of them carried away as captives, but many more even urged on by that mercantile passion which constitutes one of the principal traits of their character, they had spread through all countries, carrying everywhere the worship of their Jehovah, to whom they remained all the more faithful the more he abandoned them (Bakunin 1970, 74. This view is repeated in Bakunin 1872b, 4).

In other texts Bakunin linked his antisemitic beliefs about Jewish bankers with his critique of state socialism. Bakunin's main critique of state socialism was that social movements should

not use the means of seizing state power to achieve the ends of socialism because it would not result in the abolition of all forms of class rule. The minority of people who actually wielded state power in the name of the workers, such as politicians or bureaucrats, would instead constitute a new ruling class who dominated and exploited the working classes and focused on reproducing and expanding their power, rather than abolishing it (Bakunin 1873, 169, 237–8, 254–5, 265–70). This argument was not antisemitic and has been made by anarchists from Jewish backgrounds, including Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman (Goldman 1996, 390–404; Berkman 2003, 89–136. For their family history see Avrich and Avrich 2012, 7, 15).

Bakunin was, however, a racist and so argued that one of the groups which would benefit from the seizure of state power by socialists were Jewish bankers specifically. He thought that just as Jewish bankers benefited from state centralisation under Bismarck so too would they benefit from state centralisation under the rule of a socialist political party. Bakunin wrote in his unsent note *Personal Relations with Marx* that,

> What can there be in common between Communism and the large banks? Oh! The Communism of Marx seeks enormous centralisation in the state, and where such exists, there must inevitably be a central state bank, and where such a bank exists, the parasitic Jewish nation, which. speculates on the work of the people, will always find a way to prevail … (Bakunin 1924, 209).

This position was repeated in Bakunin's unsent 1872 letter to *La Liberté*. He wrote that Marx argued that the state should seize the means of production and land, organise the economy and establish "a single bank on the ruins of all existing banks". This would result in "a barracks regime for the proletariat, in which a standardised mass of men and women workers would wake, sleep, work and live by rote; a regime of privilege for the able and the clever; and for the Jews, lured by the large-scale speculations of the national banks, a wide field for lucrative transactions" (Bakunin 1973, 258–9). Bakunin could have made the argument that state socialist strategies would benefit a minority of people who ran the national state bank. He was an antisemite and so felt the need to refer specifically to Jewish bankers and to stereotype Jewish people in general as a parasite which exploits people. Bakunin's racism was not the main reason why he opposed state socialist strategies, but antisemitism was a component of one of the arguments he made. I have been unable to find a single example of later anarchists repeating Bakunin's antisemitic argument.

Bakunin's antisemitism was not remarkable for the 19th century. Antisemitism existed both within wider society and the socialist movement specifically. Bakunin lived in an antisemitic society and so expressed antisemitic views. Yet Bakunin was also raised in a patriarchal society but unlearnt this to a significant extent and advocated for woman's emancipation (Bakunin 1973, 83, 174, 176). Bakunin was not responsible for internalising the prejudices of his time, but he was responsible for not noticing and unlearning them. The fact that this was possible is indicated by how many socialists were not antisemitic and explictly opposed antisemitism. They did so despite the fact that they too had been raised and lived within a racist social environment. Anarchists in the Russian empire, for example, defended Jews against pogroms on several occasions by organising mobile defence units armed with pistols and bombs. A number of Russian anarchists were killed whilst doing so. The armed defence of Jews was explictly justified by Russian anarchists in 1907 on the grounds that they were "against all racial conflicts" (Antonioli 2009, 164).

Bakunin's antisemitism raises two important questions:

1. Was Bakunin's critique of capitalism and the state fundamentally racist? By 'fundamentally' I mean the primary reason or the foundational core. Something can be significant without it being fundamental.

2. Were historical anarchists aware of Bakunin's antisemitism and what did they think about it?

Bakunin's Critique of Capitalism and the State

The answer to the first question is no. Bakunin advocated the abolition of capitalism and the state because he was committed to the view that everybody should be free, equal and bonded together through relations of solidarity (Bakunin 1985, 46–8). This led Bakunin to argue that capitalism and the state should be abolished because they are social structures based on the economic ruling class – capitalists, landowners, bankers etc – and the political ruling class – monarchs, politicians, generals, high ranking bureaucrats etc – dominating and exploiting the working classes. For example, in an 1869 article for *L'Égalité* Bakunin critiqued capitalism for being based on "the servitude of labour – the proletariat – under the yoke of capital, that is to say, of the bourgeoisie". He argued at length that,

> The prosperity of the bourgeois class is incompatible with workers' freedom and well-being, because the particular wealth of the bourgeoisie exists and can be based only on the exploitation and servitude of labour … for this reason, the prosperity and the human dignity of the working masses demands the abolition of the bourgeoisie as a distinct class (Bakunin 2016, 43).

Bakunin then claimed that since the "power of the bourgeoisie" is "represented and sustained by the organisation of the state", which "is only there to preserve every class privilege", it follows that "all bourgeois politics … can have but one single purpose: to perpetuate the domination of the bourgeoisie" and the "slavery" of "the proletariat" (Bakunin 2016, 43, 49, 45). This, in turn, led Bakunin to advocate the abolition of the state. He argued in 1870 that "one should completely abolish, both in reality and in principle, everything that calls itself political power; because so long as political power exists, there will be persons who dominate and persons dominated, masters and slaves, exploiters and the exploited" (Ibid, 63). This is not an antisemitic argument. The exact same position was advocated by anarchists from Jewish backgrounds, such as Goldman and Berkman, and by anarchists who were not Jewish but opposed antisemitism and participated in the Jewish anarchist movement, such as Rudolf Rocker (Berkman 2003, 7–28, 70–3; Goldman 1996, 49–51, 64–77; Rocker 2005, 1–3, 9–18).

Bakunin was, however, a racist and so thought that a key group who engaged in domination and exploitation were Jews, especially Jewish bankers. It is important to make three points about this. Firstly, Bakunin at no point claims that Jews are the only or main group who form the ruling classes. Secondly, the two propositions Bakunin believed in are logically independent of one another. The proposition that capitalism and the state are based on the domination and exploitation of the working classes does not entail the racist proposition that Jews as a group

engage in exploitation via banking. Thirdly, Bakunin's antisemitic remarks do not demonstrate that the main reason why Bakunin advocated the abolition of capitalism and the state was his antisemitism. If this was the case then one would expect Bakunin to have referred specifically to Jews or Jewish bankers most of the time when he critiqued capitalism and the state. Yet in the vast majority of cases Bakunin does not mention Jewish people at all when critiquing these institutions. He instead refers to the ruling classes in general.

It might be argued in response that this was a tactical calculation by Bakunin. When writing public articles for papers such as *L'Égalité* he chose to hide his antisemitism and refer to the ruling classes in general but when writing in private he chose to refer specifically to Jewish people. The problem with this argument is that the majority of Bakunin's unpublished or private critiques of capitalism and the state available in English do not mention Jewish people at all (Bakunin 1973, 64–93, 166–74). Nor did Bakunin try to hide his antisemitism through the use of dog whistles. One of the main texts where Bakunin makes antisemitic claims about Jewish bankers is in his book *Statism and Anarchy* which was published by Bakunin himself. Within *Statism and Anarchy* Bakunin connected his critique of capitalism and the state with antisemitic claims about Jewish bankers on two occasions (Bakunin 1990, 12, 138). In the majority of cases when critiquing capitalism and the state he does not mention Jewish people at all and instead refers to "the ruling classes" in general with such phrases as "the bourgeoisie", "the privileged and propertied classes", "the exploiting class" and "the governing minority" (Bakunin 1990, 21, 23–4, 114, 136–7, 219). Bakunin does refer to banks and bankers in general on four occasions when critiquing capitalism and the state but in every instance this went alongside referring to other members of the ruling classes, such as landowners, industrialists and merchants (Bakunin 1990, 12–3, 24, 29, 31, 138).

Given this, antisemitism was not the main reason why Bakunin advocated the abolition of capitalism and the state. Although Bakunin critiqued banks in an antisemitic manner, his opposition to capitalism and the state cannot be reduced to this antisemitism. His antisemitic remarks about banks co-existed alongside the broader argument that capitalism and the state should be abolished because they are systems of class rule which oppress and exploit the working classes.

Bakunin Was Self-contradictory

It is furthermore the case that Bakunin's racism towards Jewish people was fundamentally inconsistent with other things that he himself wrote. Bakunin advocated universal human emancipation on several occasions. To give one example, in 1868 Bakunin insisted that the goal of a revolution should be "the liberty, morality, fellowship and welfare of all men through the solidarity of all – the brotherhood of mankind" (Bakunin 1973, 167. Also see ibid, 86; Bakunin 1985, 52, 124, 189, 200). Bakunin not only advocated universal human emancipation but thought it could only be achieved through all of humanity forming bonds of solidarity and co-operation with one another. The abolition of capitalism and the state required "the simultaneous revolutionary alliance and action of all the peoples of the civilised world". In order for this to be achieved "every popular uprising … must have a world programme, broad, deep, true, in other words human enough to embrace the interests of the world and to electrify the passions of the entire popular masses of Europe, regardless of nationality" (Bakunin 1973, 86. Also see ibid, 173).

Bakunin made a similar point in 1873. He wrote,

> since we are convinced that the existence of any sort of State is incompatible with the freedom of the proletariat, for it would not permit of an international, fraternal union of peoples, we wish to abolish all states … The Slav section, while aiming at the liberation of the Slav peoples, in no way contemplates the organisation of a special Slav world, hostile to other races through national feeling. On the contrary, it will strive to bring the Slav peoples into the common family of mankind, which the International Working Men's Association has pledged itself to form on the basis of liberty, equality and universal fraternity (Bakunin 1973, 175–6).

Bakunin thought that the achievement of liberty, equality and universal human fraternity required opposition to racism. He advocated the "recognition of humanity, of human right and of human dignity in every man of whatever race" or "colour" (Bakunin 1964, 147). This commitment to universal human emancipation in turn entailed the advocacy of the self-determination of ethnic minorities. Bakunin thought that, "every people and the smallest folk-unit has its own character, its own specific mode of existence, its own way of speaking, feeling, thinking, and acting … Every people, like every person, is involuntarily that which it is and therefore has a right to be itself" (Bakunin 1964, 325). This included groups being free to practice their religion (Bakunin 1973, 66, 176; Eckhart 2016, 27).

Bakunin, in addition to this, opposed imperialism and colonialism. He critiqued what he termed the gradual extermination of Native Americans, the exploitation of India by the British Empire and the conquest of Algeria by the French empire (Bakunin 2016, 175–6). He advocated,

> the necessity of destroying every European despotism, recognising that each people, large or small, powerful or weak, civilised or not civilised, has the right to decide for itself and to organise spontaneously, from bottom to top, using complete freedom … independently of every type of State, imposed from top to bottom by any authority at all, be it collective, or individual, be it foreign or indigenous … (Bakunin 2016, 178).

Bakunin wrote the above remarks within his March 1872 letter to the Jura Federation. The same text where he is extremely racist towards Jewish people. The fact that Bakunin did not view the two parts of the letter as inconsistent with one another makes me very depressed. He was so prejudiced that he did not realise that a commitment to universal human emancipation and the establishment of what he called "the brotherhood of mankind" entailed an opposition to his own racism against Jewish people.

Were historical anarchists aware of Bakunin's antisemitism and what did they think about it?

The extent to which historical anarchists were aware of and critiqued Bakunin's antisemitism is a complex topic. Several historical texts which were written about Bakunin do not mention his racism, such as Max Baginski and Peter Kropotkin's articles published in 1914 as part of the celebration of the 100-year anniversary of Bakunin's birth (Glassgold 2000, 69–71; Kropotkin 2014, 205–7). These two texts focus on only the positive aspects of Bakunin – his eventful life and important role as an anarchist revolutionary – but do not touch on his negative side – antisemitism. I am not sure why this is the case. One obvious explanation is that they wanted to

present Bakunin to the public in the best light possible when celebrating the 100-year anniversary of his birth. Yet if this was the case why not talk about Bakunin's antisemitism on other occasions? I have been unable to find any mention of Bakunin's antisemitism in the writings of anarchists from Jewish backgrounds which are available in English, such as Berkman, Goldman and Gustav Landauer. When they do briefly mention Bakunin it is usually only to say something positive about him, explain an idea of his, or recount the split between anarchists and state socialists within the 1st International (Berkman 2003, 184; Goldman 1996, 69, 74, 103, 138; Landauer 2010, 81, 160, 175, 208). I have asked Kenyon Zimmer, who is a historian of the Jewish anarchist movement in America, and he does not recall Bakunin's antisemitism being discussed in their paper the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*. A Jewish anarchist could have complained about the topic during a conversation but since this conversation was never written down modern people cannot learn about it.

I suspect that a significant reason for why there are so few historical sources discussing Bakunin's racism is that he largely expressed these thoughts in obscure texts. Every single antisemitic remark I have quoted in this essay comes from nine sources. These are in chronological order,

- The October 1869 unpublished letter *To the Citizen Editors of Le Réveil*. Sent to Bakunin's friends Aristide Rey and Alexander Herzen but not published by the editor of *Le Reveil*. First published in 1911 in Volume 5 of Bakunin's collected works in French (Bakunin 1911, 239–94).

- The August 1871 *Report on the Alliance*. An extract was published in 1873 within *the Mémoire Presented by the Jura Federation of the International Working Men's Association to all Federations of the International*. This version included two of the antisemitic remarks made towards Utin (Appendix of Guillaume 1873, 45–58. For the antisemitism see 51–2, 57). The full text, which included all of the antisemitism, was published in 1913 in Volume 6 of Bakunin's collected works in French (Bakunin 1913, 171–280).

- The October 1871 to February 1872 unsent note *Supporting Documents: Personal Relations with Marx*. First published in 1924 in volume 3 of Bakunin's collected works in German (Bakunin 1924, 204–16).

- The March 1872 letter *To the Comrades of the International Sections of the Jura Federation*. Nettlau claimed in 1924 that it was yet to be published (Bakunin 1924, 204). As far as I can tell it was first published in 1965 in Archives Bakounine Volume 2.

- The June 1872 article *Response of Citizen Bakunin* published in the *Bulletin of the Jura Federation*. Copies of the *Bulletin of the Jura Federation* were most likely not widely circulated after it ceased publication in 1878, let alone the specific 15th June 1872 issue which included Bakunin's text (Miller 1976, 150). It was republished in 1924 in volume 3 of Bakunin's collected works in German (Bakunin 1924, 217–220).

- The June 1872 letter *To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain*. First published in 1924 in Volume 3 of Bakunin's collected works in German (Bakunin 1924, 108–18).

- The October 1872 unsent letter to the editors of *La Liberté*. First published in 1910 in Volume 4 of Bakunin's collected works in French (Bakunin 1910, 339–90).

- *Statism and Anarchy*, which was first published in 1873 in Russian. Only 1,200 copies were printed. It was reprinted in Russian in 1906, 1919 and 1922 (Shatz in introduction to Bakunin 1990, xxxv). In 1878 extracts of the book were translated into French and published in *L'Avant-garde* under the title *Le gouvernementalisme et l'Anarchie*. This did not include the antisemitic passages. In 1929 the first Spanish edition of *Statism and Anarchy* was published (Bakunin 1986, 1). Rocker claimed in 1937 that the Spanish version of *Statism and Anarchy* was the first time the book was translated from Russian "into any other European language" (Rocker 1937, 557).

- *God and the State*, which was first published in 1882 and originally written in 1871. It is a long extract from his unfinished 1870–2 text *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*. It was translated into multiple languages and was Bakunin's most widely read work (Bakunin 1970, viii-ix; Bakunin 1973, 111).

Of the nine antisemitic texts I have found five were letters and two of them were never sent to anybody. Only three antisemitic texts were publicly available prior to Bakunin's death in 1876: two articles in French and one book in Russian. An additional antisemitic text, *God and the State,* was published in 1882 but the majority of Bakunin's antisemitic texts were only made available in the early 20th century as part of the publication of Bakunin's collected works in French, German and Spanish. I do not know how widely read these books were and I expect that they were largely read by a relatively small number of massive nerds interested in Bakunin's ideas. Even those who owned the books may only have read parts of them and so happened to not come into contact with the racist passages which take up a small fraction of the thousands of pages Bakunin wrote. Any modern person who has bought a book while late night internet shopping knows how easy it is to own books without reading them. Perhaps the most antisemitic texts Bakunin ever wrote – the March 1872 letter to the Jura Federation – was not, to my knowledge, publicly available until the 1960s.

Given the above, the only antisemitic text which was definitely widely read and available in multiple languages in the 19th and early 20th century was *God and the State*. The racism within *God and the State* consisted of one significantly antisemitic paragraph which claimed that Jewish people migrated all over the world because of their "mercantile passion which constitutes one of the principal traits of their character" (Bakunin 1970, 74). In other parts of the text Bakunin does make more general critiques of Judaism as a religion, such as describing Jehovah as a jealous God. Even though these passages were written by an antisemite I have not noticed any obvious antisemitic content within them (Ibid, 69–71, 85). Nor is it antisemitic in and of itself to critique Judaism as a religion. Anarchists from Jewish backgrounds were often themselves very critical of Judaism as a religion and instead identified as Yiddish speakers who shared a culture (Zimmer 2015, 15–6, 24–8). This can be seen in the fact that the Jewish anarchist Saul Yanovsky translated *God and the State* into Yiddish in 1901 and altered the text such that Bakunin's criticism of "Catholic and Protestant theologians" also referred to "Jewish Theologians" (Torres 2016, 2–4).

This is not to say that historical anarchists were unaware of Bakunin's antisemitism. James Guillaume was Bakunin's friend and the main editor of Bakunin's collected works in French. He was definitely familiar with Bakunin's views on Jews but does not mention them in the biographical sketch of Bakunin he wrote for Volume 2 of Bakunin's collected works in French (Guillaume in Bakunin 2001, 22–52). Guillaume appears to have deliberately altered a Bakunin quote such

that it no longer contained any anti-semitism. He quotes Bakunin's remark that Marx was authoritarian from head to foot but does not include Bakunin's explanation for this: Marx was a German Jew. This topic is made confusing by the fact that Guillaume claims he is quoting an 1870 manuscript, but the passage cited is word for word identical with Bakunin's 1872 letter. As a result, Guillaume could be referring to a different version of the text Bakunin wrote which contains no racism, but this seems unlikely (ibid, 26. For the original French see Bakunin 1907, xiv. Compare to Bakunin 1872a; Bakunin 1924, 117). I have been unable to find a place where Guillaume acknowledges Bakunin's racism, but it should be kept in mind that the vast majority of his work has never been translated into English.

Other anarchists explicitly opposed Bakunin's antisemitism. In May 1872 Bakunin sent a letter to the Spanish anarchist Anselmo Lorenzo which included antisemitism. Within his 1901 memoirs Lorenzo correctly argued that Bakunin's racism towards Jews "was contradicting our principles, principles that impose fraternity without distinction along race or religion and it had a distastefulness effect on me." Max Nettlau, who edited Bakunin's collected works in German, similarly opposed Bakunin's "anti-Jewish remarks" (Quoted Eckhart 2016, 509, notes 112 and 113. For a description of the letter see ibid, 196). There are, in addition to these critiques of Bakunin, several examples of anarchists rejecting antisemitism in general. This includes Kropotkin opposing the 1905 pogroms against Jews in Russia, the Jewish anarchist Landauer campaigning in 1913 against antisemitic conspiracy theories, and Rocker critiquing the oppression of Jews by the Nazis (Kropotkin 2014, 472–3, 481; Landauer 2010, 295–9; Rocker 1937, 249–50, 327–8). In 1938 Goldman wrote that she considered it "highly inconsistent for socialists and anarchists to discriminate in any shape or form against the Jews" (Goldman 1938).

Conclusion

Bakunin was one of the early influential theorists of the anarchist movement, but anarchism does not consist in repeating what Bakunin wrote. Anarchism was not created by one individual. It was collectively constructed by the Spanish, Italian, French, Belgian and Jurassian sections of the International. Its programme incorporated the insights of a wide variety of individuals. Some well-known, such as Errico Malatesta, and others whose names have largely been forgotten, such as Jean-Louis Pindy who was the delegate of the Paris Construction Workers' Trade Union at the 1st International's 1869 Basel Congress and a survivor of the Paris Commune of 1871. From the 1870s onwards the anarchist movement spread around the world and its theory and practice was pushed in new directions by anarchists in Europe, North America, South America, Asia, Oceania and Africa. This included a large number of anarchists from a Jewish background. Between the beginning of the 20th century and the start of WW1 in 1914 the Yiddish-speaking anarchist movement was the largest in the United States. Yiddish-speaking anarchists also played a key role in England's anarchist movement (Zimmer 2015, 4–6, 15, 20; Rocker 2005).

A significant amount of Bakunin's anarchist beliefs were not original to him but common positions within the social networks he was a part of. This included his advocacy of the collective ownership of the means of production and land, the view that trade unions should prefigure the future society, and the rejection of parliamentary politics as a means to achieve emancipation (Eckhart 2016, 12–6, 54, 106–8, 159–60; Graham 2015, 109–21). Anarchism was above all else the

creation of workers engaged in class struggle against capitalism and the state. As the group of Russian anarchists abroad explained in 1926,

> The class struggle created by the enslavement of workers and their aspirations to liberty gave birth, in the oppression, to the idea of anarchism: the idea of the total negation of a social system based on the principles of classes and the State, and its replacement by a free non-statist society of workers under self-management. So anarchism does not derive from the abstract reflections of an intellectual or a philosopher, but from the direct struggle of workers against capitalism, from the needs and necessities of the workers, from their aspirations to liberty and equality … The outstanding anarchist thinkers, Bakunin, Kropotkin and others, did not invent the idea of anarchism, but, having discovered it in the masses, simply helped by the strength of their thought and knowledge to specify and spread it.

Anarchists are not Bakuninists. We believe in the programme of anarchism which evolves and is updated over time, rather than treating what an individual man with a large beard happened to write in the late 19th century as scripture. Anarchists in the past shared this attitude. Malatesta claimed in 1876 that anarchists were not "Bakuninists" because "we do not share all the practical and theoretical ideas of Bakunin" and "follow ideas, not men … we reject the habit of incarnating a principle in a man" (Quoted in Haupt 1986, 4). Kropotkin similarly recalled in his autobiography that during his 1872 visit to the Jura Federation,

> in conversations about anarchism, or about the attitude of the federation, I never heard it said, 'Bakunin had said so,' or 'Bakunin thinks so,', as if it clenched the discussion. His writings and his sayings were not a text that one had to obey … In all such matters, in which intellect is the supreme judge, everyone in discussion used his own arguments" (Kropotkin 2014, 104).

This is a position Bakunin himself agreed with. In his 1873 letter of resignation from the Jura Federation he wrote that "the 'Bakuninist label' … was thrown in your face" but "you always knew perfectly well, that your tendencies, opinions and actions arose entirely consciously, in spontaneous independence" (Bakunin 2016, 247–8).

In conclusion, Bakunin should still be read today and there is a great deal of insight within the thousands of pages he wrote. He should, however, be read critically and his antisemitism was wrong, unjustifiable and fundamentally at odds with the principles of anarchism which seeks the abolition of all forms of domination and exploitation, including all forms of racism. The preamble to the 1866 Statutes of the 1st International declared: "this Association, and every individual or society joining it, will acknowledge morality, justice and truth as the basis of their conduct toward all men, without distinction of nationality, creed, or colour" (Berthier 2012, 165). Socialist movements have on too many occasions not lived up to these words and it is essential that socialists today, be they anarchist or not, ensure that they do and oppose all systems of domination in both words and deeds.

One of the main lessons of Bakunin's life is that somebody who thinks they are a genuine advocate of universal human emancipation can still have oppressive beliefs without being aware that they do. None of us are responsible for being socialised to be prejudiced towards others but,

just like Bakunin before us, we are all responsible for noticing and unlearning it. As the Jewish anarchist Landauer wrote in 1913 in response to antisemitism, "socialism means action among human beings; action that must become reality within these human beings as much as in the outside world. When independent peoples propose to create a united humanity, these propositions are worthless when even a single people remains excluded and experiences injustice" (Landaur 2010, 295).

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