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Statism and Anarchy

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Critique of the Marxist Theory of the State

There is no road leading from metaphysics to the realities of life. Theory and fact are separated by an abyss. It is impossible to leap across this abyss by what Hegel called a “qualitative jump” from the world of logic to the world of nature and of real life.

The road leading from concrete fact to theory and vice versa is the method of science and is the true road. In the practical world, it is the movement of society toward forms of organization that will to the greatest possible extent reflect life itself in all its aspects and complexity.

Such is the people’s way to complete emancipation, accessible to all – the way of the anarchist social revolution, which will come from the people themselves, an elemental force sweeping away all obstacles. Later, from the depths of the popular soul, there will spontaneously emerge the new creative forms of social life.

The way of the gentlemen metaphysicians is completely different. Metaphysician is the term we use for the disciples of Hegel and for the positivists, and in general, for all the worshippers of science as a goddess, all those modern Procrustean who, in one way or another, have created an ideal of social organization, a narrow mold into which they would force future generations, all those who, instead of seeing science as only one of the essential manifestations of natural and social life, insist that all of life is encompassed in their necessarily tentative scientific theories. Metaphysicians and positivists, all these gentlemen who consider it their mission to prescribe the laws of life in the name of science, are consciously or unconsciously reactionaries.

This is very easy to demonstrate.

Science in the true sense of that word, real science, is at this time within reach of only an insignificant minority. For example, among us in Russia, how many accomplished savants are there in a population of eighty million? Probably a thousand are engaged in science, but hardly more than a few hundred could be considered first-rate, serious scientists. If science were to dictate the laws, the overwhelming majority, many millions of men, would be ruled by one or two hundred experts. Actually it would be even fewer than that, because not all of science is concerned with the administration of society. This would be the task of sociology – the science of sciences – which presupposes in the case of a well-trained sociologist that he have an adequate knowledge of all the other sciences. How many such people are there in Russia – in all Europe? Twenty or thirty – and these twenty or thirty would rule the world? Can anyone imagine a more absurd and abject despotism?

It is almost certain that these twenty or thirty experts would quarrel among themselves, and if they did agree on common policies, it would be at the expense of mankind. The principal vice of the average specialist is his inclination to exaggerate his own knowledge and deprecate everyone else's. Give him control and he will become an insufferable tyrant. To be the slave of pedants — what a destiny for humanity! Give them full power and they will begin by performing on human beings the same experiments that the scientists are now performing on rabbits and dogs.

We must respect the scientists for their merits and achievements, but in order to prevent them from corrupting their own high moral and intellectual standards, they should be granted no special privileges and no rights other than those possessed by everyone — for example, the liberty to express their convictions, thought, and knowledge. Neither they nor any other special group should be given power over others. He who is given power will inevitably become an oppressor and exploiter of society.

But we are told: "Science will not always be the patrimony of a few. There will come a time when it will be accessible to all." Such a time is still far away and there will be many social upheavals before this dream will come true, and even then, who would want to put his fate in the hands of the priests of science?

It seems to us that anyone who thinks that after a social revolution everybody will be equally educated is very much mistaken. Science, then as now, will remain one of the many specialized fields, though it will cease to be accessible only to a very few of the privileged class. With the elimination of class distinctions, education will be within the reach of all those who will have the ability and the desire to pursue it, but not to the detriment of manual labor, which will be compulsory for all.

Available to everyone will be a general scientific education, especially the learning of the scientific method, the habit of correct thinking, the ability to generalize from facts and make more or less correct deductions. But of encyclopedic minds and advanced sociologists there will be very few. It would be sad for mankind if at any time theoretical speculation became the only source of guidance for society, if science alone were in charge of all social administration. Life would wither, and human society would turn into a voiceless and servile herd. The domination of life by science can have no other result than the brutalization of mankind.

We, the revolutionary anarchists, are the advocates of education for all the people, of the emancipation and the widest possible expansion of social life. Therefore we are the enemies of the State and all forms of the statist principle. In opposition to the metaphysicians, the positivists, and all the worshippers of science, we declare that natural and social life always comes before theory, which is only one of its manifestations but never its creator. From out of its own inexhaustible depths,

society develops through a series of events, but not by thought alone. Theory is always created by life, but never creates it; like mile-posts and road signs, it only indicates the direction and the different stages of life's independent and unique development.

In accordance with this belief, we neither intend nor desire to thrust upon our own or any other people any scheme of social organization taken from books or concocted by ourselves. We are convinced that the masses of the people carry in themselves, in their instincts (more or less developed by history), in their daily necessities, and, in their conscious or unconscious aspirations, all the elements of the future social organization. We seek this ideal in the people themselves. Every state power, every government, by its very nature places itself outside and over the people and inevitably subordinates them to an organization and to aims which are foreign to and opposed to the real needs and aspirations of the people. We declare ourselves the enemies of every government and every state power, and of governmental organization in general. We think that people can be free and happy only when organized from the bottom up in completely free and independent associations, without governmental paternalism though not without the influence of a variety of free individuals and parties.

Such are our ideas as social revolutionaries, and we are therefore called anarchists. We do not protest this name, for we are indeed the enemies of any governmental power, since we know that such a power depraves those who wear its mantle equally with those who are forced to submit to it. Under its pernicious influence the former become ambitious and greedy despots, exploiters of society in favor of their personal or class interests, while the latter become slaves.

Idealists of all kinds — metaphysicians, positivists, those who support the rule of science over life, doctrinaire revolutionists — all defend the idea of state and state power with equal eloquence, because they see in it, as a consequence of their own systems, the only salvation for society. Quite logically, since they have accepted the basic premise (which we consider completely mistaken) that thought precedes life, that theory is prior to social experience, and, therefore, that social science has to be the starting point for all social upheavals and reconstructions. They then arrive unavoidably at the conclusion that because thought, theory, and science, at least in our times, are in the possession of very few, these few ought to be the leaders of social life, not only the initiators, but also the leaders of all popular movements. On the day following the revolution the new social order should not be organized by the free association of people's organizations or unions, local and regional, from the bottom up, in accordance with the demands and instincts of the people, but only by the dictatorial power of this learned minority, which presumes to express the will of the people.

This fiction of a pseudo-representative government serves to conceal the domination of the masses by a handful of privileged elite; an elite elected by hordes of people who are rounded up and do not know for whom or for what they vote. Upon this artificial and abstract expression of what they falsely imagine to be the will of the people and of which the real living people have not the least idea, they construct both the theory of statism as well as the theory of so-called revolutionary dictatorship.

The differences between revolutionary dictatorship and statism are superficial. Fundamentally they both represent the same principle of minority rule over the majority in the name of the alleged “stupidity” of the latter and the alleged “intelligence” of the former. Therefore they are both equally reactionary since both directly and inevitably must preserve and perpetuate the political and economic privileges of the ruling minority and the political and economic subjugation of the masses of the people.

Now it is clear why the dictatorial revolutionists, who aim to overthrow the existing powers and social structures in order to erect upon their ruins their own dictatorships, never were or will be the enemies of government, but, to the contrary, always will be the most ardent promoters of the government idea. They are the enemies only of contemporary governments, because they wish to replace them. They are the enemies of the present governmental structure, because it excludes the possibility of their dictatorship. At the same time they are the most devoted friends of governmental power. For if the revolution destroyed this power by actually freeing the masses, it would deprive this pseudo-revolutionary minority of any hope to harness the masses in order to make them the beneficiaries of their own government policy.

We have already expressed several times our deep aversion to the theory of Lassalle and Marx, which recommends to the workers, if not as a final ideal at least as the next immediate goal, the *founding of a people's state*, which according to their interpretation will be nothing but “the proletariat elevated to the status of the governing class.”

Let us ask, if the proletariat is to be the ruling class, over whom is it to rule? In short, there will remain another proletariat which will be subdued to this new rule, to this new state. For instance, the peasant “rabble” who, as it is known, does not enjoy the sympathy of the Marxists who consider it to represent a lower level of culture, will probably be ruled by the factory proletariat of the cities. Or, if this problem is to be approached nationalistically, the Slavs will be placed in the same subordinate relationship to the victorious German proletariat in which the latter now stands to the German bourgeoisie.

If there is a State, there must be domination of one class by another and, as a result, slavery; the State without slavery is unthinkable — and this is why we are the enemies of the State.

What does it mean that the proletariat will be elevated to a ruling class? Is it possible for the whole proletariat to stand at the head of the government? There are nearly forty million Germans. Can all forty million be members of the government? In such a case, there will be no government, no state, but, if there is to be a state there will be those who are ruled and those who are slaves.

The Marxist theory solves this dilemma very simply. By the people's rule, they mean the rule of a small number of representatives elected by the people. The general, and every man's, right to elect the representatives of the people and the rulers of the State is the latest word of the Marxists, as well as of the democrats. This is a lie, behind which lurks the despotism of the ruling minority, a lie all the more dangerous in that it appears to express the so-called will of the people.

Ultimately, from whatever point of view we look at this question, we come always to the same sad conclusion, the rule of the great masses of the people by a privileged minority. The Marxists say that this minority will consist of workers. Yes, possibly of former workers, who, as soon as they become the rulers of the representatives of the people, will cease to be workers and will look down at the plain working masses from the governing heights of the State; they will no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their claims to rulership over the people. Those who doubt this know very little about human nature.

These elected representatives, say the Marxists, will be dedicated and learned socialists. The expressions "learned socialist," "scientific socialism," etc., which continuously appear in the speeches and writings of the followers of Lassalle and Marx, prove that the pseudo-People's State will be nothing but a despotic control of the populace by a new and not at all numerous aristocracy of real and pseudo-scientists. The "uneducated" people will be totally relieved of the cares of administration, and will be treated as a regimented herd. A beautiful liberation, indeed!

The Marxists are aware of this contradiction and realize that a government of scientists will be a real dictatorship regardless of its democratic form. They console themselves with the idea that this rule will be temporary. They say that the only care and objective will be to educate and elevate the people economically and politically to such a degree that such a government will soon become unnecessary, and the State, after losing its political or coercive character, will automatically develop into a completely free organization of economic interests and communes.

There is a flagrant contradiction in this theory. If their state would be really of the people, why eliminate it? And if the State is needed to emancipate the workers, then the workers are not yet free, so why call it a People's State? By our polemic

against them we have brought them to the realization that freedom or anarchism, which means a free organization of the working masses from the bottom up, is the final objective of social development, and that every state, not excepting their People's State, is a yoke, on the one hand giving rise to despotism and on the other to slavery. They say that such a yoke — dictatorship is a transitional step towards achieving full freedom for the people: anarchism or freedom is the aim, while state and dictatorship is the means, and so, in order to free the masses of people, they have first to be enslaved!

Upon this contradiction our polemic has come to a halt. They insist that only dictatorship (of course their own) can create freedom for the people. We reply that all dictatorship has no objective other than self-perpetuation, and that slavery is all it can generate and instill in the people who suffer it. Freedom can be created only by freedom, by a total rebellion of the people, and by a voluntary organization of the people from the bottom up.

The social theory of the anti-state socialists or anarchists leads them directly and inevitably towards a break with all forms of the State, with all varieties of bourgeois politics, and leaves no choice except a social revolution. The opposite theory, state communism and the authority of the scientists, attracts and confuses its followers and, under the pretext of political tactics, makes continuous deals with the governments and various bourgeois political parties, and is directly pushed towards reaction.

The cardinal point of this program is that the State alone is to liberate the (pseudo-) proletariat. To achieve this, the State must agree to liberate the proletariat from the oppression of bourgeois capitalism. How is it possible to impart such a will to the State? The proletariat must take possession of the State by a revolution — an heroic undertaking. But once the proletariat seizes the State, it must move at once to abolish immediately this eternal prison of the people. But according to Mr. Marx, the people not only should not abolish the State, but, on the contrary, they must strengthen and enlarge it. and turn it over to the full disposition of their benefactors, guardians, and teachers — the leaders of the Communist party, meaning Mr. Marx and his friends — who will then liberate them in their own way. They will concentrate all administrative power in their own strong hands, because the ignorant people are in need of a strong guardianship; and they will create a central state bank, which will also control all the commerce, industry, agriculture, and even science. The mass of the people will be divided into two armies, the agricultural and the industrial, under the direct command of the state engineers, who will constitute the new privileged political-scientific class.

Some Preconditions for a Social Revolution

The propaganda and organization of the International is directed exclusively to the working class, which in Italy, as in the rest of Europe, embodies all the life, power, and aspirations of the future society. The International attracted only a handful of adherents from the bourgeois world who, having learned to passionately hate the existing social order and all its false values, renounced their class and dedicated themselves body and soul to the cause of the people.

If they can root out the last vestiges of subjective loyalty to the bourgeois world, and those of personal vanity, these men, though few in number, could render priceless services to the revolutionary movement. They draw their inspiration from the movement of the people. But in exchange they can contribute expert knowledge, the capacity for abstract thought and generalization, and the ability to organize and coordinate — qualities which constitute the creative force without which any victory is impossible. In Italy and Russia there are more such young men than there are in other countries. But what is a much more important asset for the Revolution is that there is in Italy an enormous proletariat, unusually intelligent by nature but very often lacking education and living in great poverty. This proletariat comprises two or three million urban workers, mainly in factories and small workshops, and approximately twenty million totally deprived peasants. This huge class has been reduced to such desperation that even the defenders of this terrible society are beginning to speak out openly in parliament and in the official press, admitting that things have reached the breaking point, and that something must immediately be done to avoid a popular holocaust which will destroy everything in its path.

Nowhere are there more favorable conditions for the Social Revolution than in Italy. There does not exist in Italy, as in most other European nations, a special category of relatively affluent workers, earning higher wages, boasting of their literary capacities, and so impregnated by a variety of bourgeois prejudices that, excepting income, they differ in no way from the bourgeoisie. This class of bourgeois workers is numerous in Germany and in Switzerland; but in Italy, on the contrary, they are insignificant in number and influence, a mere drop in the ocean. In Italy it is the extremely poor proletariat that predominates. Marx speaks disdainfully, but quite unjustly, of this *Lumpenproletariat*. For in them, and only in them, and not in the bourgeois strata of workers, are there crystallized the entire intelligence and power of the coming Social Revolution.

A popular insurrection, by its very nature, is instinctive, chaotic, and destructive, and always entails great personal sacrifice and an enormous loss of public and private property. The masses are always ready to sacrifice themselves; and

this is what turns them into a brutal and savage horde, capable of performing heroic and apparently impossible exploits, and since they possess little or nothing, they are not demoralized by the responsibilities of property ownership. And in moments of crisis, for the sake of self-defense or victory, they will not hesitate to burn down their own houses and neighborhoods, and property being no deterrent, since it belongs to their oppressors, they develop a passion for destruction. This negative passion, it is true, is far from being sufficient to attain the heights of the revolutionary cause; but without it, revolution would be impossible. Revolution requires extensive and widespread destruction, a fecund and renovating destruction, since in this way and only this way are new worlds born . . .

Not even the most terrible misery affecting millions of workers is in itself enough to spur them to revolution. Man is by nature endowed (or cursed) by marvelous patience, and only the devil knows how he can patiently endure unimaginable misery and even slow death by starvation; and even the impulse to give way to despair is smothered by a complete insensibility toward his own rights, and an imperturbable obedience . . .

People in this condition are hopeless. They would rather die than rebel. But when a man can be driven to desperation, he is then more likely to rebel. Despair is a bitter, passionate feeling capable of rousing men from their semiconscious resignation if they already have an idea of a more desirable situation, even without much hope of achieving it. But it is impossible to remain too long in a state of absolute despair: one must give in, die, or do something about it — fight for a cause, but what cause? Obviously, to free oneself, to fight for a better life . . .

But poverty and desperation are still not sufficient to generate the Social Revolution. They may be able to call forth intermittent local rebellions, but not great and widespread mass uprisings. To do this it is indispensable that the people be inspired by a universal ideal, historically developed from the instinctual depths of popular sentiments, amplified and clarified by a series of significant events and severe and bitter experiences. It is necessary that the populace have a general idea of their rights and a deep, passionate, quasi-religious belief in the validity of these rights. When this idea and this popular faith are joined to the kind of misery that leads to desperation, then the Social Revolution is near and inevitable, and no force on earth will be able to resist it.

This is exactly the situation of the Italian proletariat. The sufferings they are forced to endure are scarcely less terrible than the poverty and misery that overwhelm the Russian people. But the Italian proletariat is imbued with a greater degree of passionate revolutionary consciousness than are the Russian masses, a consciousness which daily becomes stronger and clearer. By nature intelligent and passionate, the Italian proletariat is at last beginning to understand what it wants and what must be done to achieve its complete emancipation. In this sense

the propaganda of the International, energetically and widely diffused during the last two years, has been of great value. This profound sentiment, this universal ideal, without which (as we have already said) every mass insurrection, however great the sacrifices made, is absolutely impossible, has been stimulated by the International, which at the same time pointed out the road to emancipation and the means for the organization of the people's power.

At first this ideal naturally manifests itself in the passionate desire of the people to put an end to their poverty and misery and to satisfy all their material needs by collective labor, equally obligatory for all. Later it will come to include the abolition of all domination, and the free organization of the life of the country in accord with the needs of the people. This will mean the rejection of the State's form of control from the top in favor of organization from the bottom up, created by the people themselves, without governments and parliaments. This would be organization achieved by the free participation of associations, of the agricultural and industrial workers, of the communes and the provinces. Ultimately, in the more distant future, it would erect on the ruins of all states the fraternity of peoples.

It is worth noting that in Italy, as in Spain, the program of Marxist state communism has had absolutely no effect, while the program of the famous Alliance of revolutionary socialists [anarchist vanguard organization], which proclaimed uncompromising war against all domination, all tutelage and governmental authority, was overwhelmingly and enthusiastically accepted by the workers.

A people inspired with such ideas can always win its own freedom and ground its own life on the most ample freedom for everyone, while in no way threatening or infringing on the freedom of other nations. This is why neither Italy nor Spain will embark on a career of conquest but will, on the contrary, help all peoples to accomplish their own social revolutions. . . .

Modern capitalist production and bank speculation inexorably demand enormous centralization of the State, which alone can subject millions of workers to capitalist exploitation. Federalist organization from the bottom upward, of workers' associations, groups, communes, cantons [counties], regions, and finally whole peoples, is the sole condition for true, non-fictitious freedom, but such freedom violates the interests and convictions of the ruling classes, just as economic self-determination is incompatible with their methods of organization. *Representative democracy*, however, harmonizes marvelously with the capitalist economic system. This new statist system, basing itself on the alleged *sovereignty of the so-called will of the people*, as supposedly expressed by their alleged representatives in mock popular assemblies, incorporates the two principal and necessary conditions for the progress of capitalism: state centralization, and the actual

submission of the sovereign people to the intellectual governing minority, who, while claiming to represent the people, unfailingly exploits them.

The exploitation of human labor cannot be sugar-coated even by the most democratic form of government . . . for the worker it will always be a bitter pill. It follows from this that no government, however paternalistic, however bent on avoiding friction, will tolerate any threat to its exploitative economic institutions or its political hegemony: unable to instill habitual obedience to its authority by cajolery and other peaceful methods, the government will then resort to unceasing coercion, to violence, i.e., to political control, and the ultimate weapon of political control is military power.

The modern State is by its very nature a military State; and every military State must of necessity become a conquering, invasive State; to survive it must conquer or be conquered, for the simple reason that accumulated military power will suffocate if it does not find an outlet. Therefore the modern State must strive to be a huge and powerful State: this is the indispensable precondition for its survival.

And just as capitalist production must, to avoid bankruptcy, continually expand by absorbing its weaker competitors and drive to monopolize all the other capitalist enterprises all over the world, so must the modern State inevitably drive to become the only universal State, since the coexistence of two universal states is by definition absolutely impossible. Sovereignty, the drive toward absolute domination, is inherent in every State; and the first prerequisite for this sovereignty is the comparative weakness, or at least the submission of neighboring states . . .

A strong State can have only one solid foundation: military and bureaucratic centralization. The fundamental difference between a monarchy and even the most democratic republic is that in the monarchy, the bureaucrats oppress and rob the people for the benefit of the privileged in the name of the King, and to fill their own coffers; while in the republic the people are robbed and oppressed in the same way for the benefit of the same classes, in the name of “the will of the people” (and to fill the coffers of the democratic bureaucrats). In the republic the State, which is supposed to be the people, legally organized, stifles and will continue to stifle the real people. But the people will feel no better if the stick with which they are being beaten is labeled “the people’s stick.”

. . . No state, however democratic — not even the reddest republic — can ever give the people what they really want, i.e., the free self-organization and administration of their own affairs from the bottom upward, without any interference or violence from above, because every state, even the pseudo-People’s State concocted by Mr. Marx, is in essence only a machine ruling the masses from above, through a privileged minority of conceited intellectuals, who imagine that they know what the people need and want better than do the people themselves . . .

We are as unalterably opposed to any form of pan-Slavism as we are to any form of pan-Germanism. It is the sacred and urgent duty of the Russian revolutionary youth to counteract in every possible way the pan-Slavic propaganda inside Russia itself, and particularly that spread in other Slavic lands, officially and unofficially by government agents, and voluntarily by fanatical Slavophiles, which strives to convince the unfortunate Slavs that the Slavic Tsar deeply loves his Slavic brothers, and that the dastardly pan-Russian Empire, which throttled Poland and Little Russia [Ukrainia?] can, if only the Tsar wishes, free the Slavic lands from the German yoke. [Bakunin includes as Slavs those in the now defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire — Hungary, Austria, Bulgaria, Serbia, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, etc.]

This illusion is widespread among Austrian Slavs. Their fanatical though understandable hatred of their oppressor has driven them to such a state of madness that, forgetting or ignoring the atrocities committed against Lithuania, Poland, Little Russia and even Great Russia by Tsarist despotism, they still await deliverance by our pan-Russian slave driver.

One should not be surprised that the Slavic masses harbor such illusions. They do not know history or the internal situation in Russia: all they are told is that an all-Slavic empire has been created to defy the Germans; an empire so mighty that the Germans tremble in fear and what the Germans hate, the Slavs must love.

All this is to be expected. But what is sad, hard to understand, and inexcusable is that people who should know better, the educated Austrian Slavs, experienced, wise, and well informed, have organized a party that openly preaches pan-Slavism. According to some, this would involve the creation of *a great Slavic empire* under the domination of the Tsar, and according to others it would consist in the emancipation of the Slavic peoples by the Russian Empire . . .

But what benefits would the Slavic people derive by the formation of a mighty Slavic empire? — This would indeed be advantageous for the states [composing the empire] but not for the proletariat, only for the privileged minority — the clergy, the nobility, the bourgeoisie — and probably for some intellectuals, who because of their diplomas and their alleged mental superiority feel called upon to lead the masses. In short, there is an advantage for some thousands of oppressors, hangmen, and other exploiters of the proletariat. As far as the great masses of the people are concerned, the vaster the State, the heavier are the chains and the more crowded the prisons.

We have demonstrated that to exist, a state must become an invader of other states. just as the competition which in the economic sphere destroys or absorbs small and even medium-sized enterprises — factories, landholdings. businesses — so does the immense State likewise devour small and medium-sized states. Therefore every state. to exist not on paper but in fact, and not at the mercy

of neighboring states, and to be independent, must inevitably strive to become an invasive, aggressive, conquering state. This means that it must be ready to occupy a foreign country and hold many millions of people in subjection. For this it must exercise massive military power. But wherever military power prevails, it is goodbye to freedom! Farewell to the autonomy and well-being of the working people. It follows from this that the construction of a great Slavic empire means only the enslavement of the Slavic people.

Yet the Slavic statist tell us, “we don’t want a single great Slav state; we want only a number of middle-sized Slavic states, thereby assuring the independence of the Slavic peoples.” But this viewpoint is contrary to logic and historic facts and to the very nature of things; no middle-sized state, in our times, can exist independently. There will therefore be either no state at all, or there will be a single giant state which will devour all the weaker states — a despotic, absolutist Russian state.

Could a smaller Slavic state defend itself against the new pan-Germanic empire, without itself becoming just as great and just as powerful? Could it depend upon the assistance of countries united by self-interest? In both cases the answer is no. In the first place, because an alliance of various smaller heterogeneous powers, even when equal or numerically superior, remains weaker because their enemy is consolidated, homogeneous, responsive to a single command, and therefore much stronger. Secondly, one cannot depend on the friendly cooperation of other states, even when their own interests are involved. Statesmen, like ordinary mortals, are often so preoccupied with momentary interests and passions that they cannot see when their vital interests are threatened. . .

But could not the centralized pan-Germanic state be neutralized by a pan-Slavic federation, i.e., a union of independent Slavic nations patterned after Switzerland or North America? We reply in the negative. Because to form such a federation, it will first be absolutely necessary to break up the pan-Russian Empire into a number of separate, independent states, joined only by voluntary association, and because the coexistence of such independent federated and medium or small states, together with so great a centralized empire, is simply inconceivable. . .

This federation of states could to some extent safeguard bourgeois freedom, but it could never become a military state for the simple reason that it is a federation. State power demands centralization, But it will be contended that the example of Switzerland and the United States refutes this assertion. But Switzerland, in order to increase its military power, tends toward centralization; and federation is possible in the United States only because it is not surrounded by highly centralized, mighty states like Russia, Germany, or France. Switzerland retains federation only because of the indifference of the great international powers, and because

its people are roughly divided into three zones speaking the language of its neighboring states, France, Germany, and Italy. To resist triumphant pan-Germanism on the legalistic and statist field — by founding an equally powerful Slavic state — would be disastrous for the Slavs, because it would inevitably expose them to pan-Russian tyranny . . .

The progressive Slavic people should realize by now that the time for flirting with Slavic ideology is over, and that there is nothing more absurd and harmful than to compress all the aspirations of the people into the narrow mold of a spurious nationalism. Nationality is not a humanitarian principle; it is an historical, local fact which should be generally tolerated along with other real and inoffensive facts.

Every people, however tiny, has its own specific character, style of life, speech, way of thinking and working; and precisely this character, this style of life, constitutes its nationality, which is the sum total of its historic life, aspirations, and circumstances. Every people, like every individual, are perforce what they are and have the incontestable right to be themselves. This constitutes the alleged national right. But if a people or an individual lives in a certain way, it does not by any means give them the right, nor would it be beneficial, to regard this nationality and individuality as absolute, exclusive principles, nor should they be obsessed by them. On the contrary, the less preoccupied they are with themselves and the more they are imbued by the general idea of humanity, the more life-giving, the more purposeful, and the more profound becomes the feeling of nationality and that of individuality.

The same applies to the Slavs. They will remain insignificant as long as they are obsessed with their narrow-minded, egotistical . . . Slavism, an obsession which by its very nature is contrary to the problems and the cause of humanity in general. They will attain their rightful place in the free fraternity of nations when, together with all other peoples, they are inspired by a wider, more universal interest . . .

In all historical epochs we find one universal interest which transcends all exclusively national and purely local boundaries, and those nationalities who have sufficient understanding, passion, and strength to identify themselves wholeheartedly with this universal interest become historical peoples [play major historic roles]. The great revolution at the close of the eighteenth century again placed France in a preeminent place among the nations of the world. She created a new objective for all humanity — the ideal of absolute freedom for all men — but only in the exclusively political field. This ideal could never be realized because it was afflicted with an insoluble contradiction: political freedom despite economic servitude. Moreover, political freedom within the State is a fraud.

The French Revolution thus produced two diametrically opposed trends which finally coalesced into one — the systematic exploitation of the proletariat for the benefit of a diminishing and increasingly wealthy minority of monopolists. Upon this exploitation of the laboring masses, one party erects a democratic republic and the other, being more consistent, tries to erect a monarchistic, i.e., openly despotic, centralized, bureaucratic police State. In the latter, a dictatorship is thinly masked by innocuous constitutional forms.

From out of the depths of the proletariat there emerged a new and opposing tendency, a new universal objective: the abolition of all classes and their main base of support, the State, and the self-administration of all property by the workers . . .

Such is the program of the Social Revolution. There is only one main question confronting all nations, one universal problem: how to achieve economic and political emancipation from the yoke of the State. And this problem cannot be solved without a bloody, terrifying struggle . . .

Is it not evident that the Slavs can find their rightful place in the fraternal union of peoples only through the Social Revolution?

But a social revolution cannot be confined to a single isolated country. It is by its very nature international in scope. The Slavs must therefore link their aspirations and forces with the aspirations and forces of all other countries. The Slavic proletariat must join the International Workingmen's Association en masse . . . After joining the International the Slavic proletariat must form factory, crafts, and agricultural sections, uniting these into local federations, and if expedient unite the local federations into an all-Slavic federation. In line with the principles of the International, and freed from the yoke of their respective states, the Slavic workers should and can — without in the least endangering their own independence — establish fraternal relations with the German workers, since an alliance with them on any other basis is entirely out of the question.

Such is the only road to the emancipation of the Slavs. But the path at present followed by the great majority of the young western and southern Slavs, under the influence of their respected and venerable patriots, is a statist path involving the establishment of separate Slavic states and entirely ruinous for the great masses of the people.

The Serbian people shed their blood in torrents and finally freed themselves from Turkish slavery, but no sooner did they become an independent principality than they were again and perhaps even more enslaved by what they thought was their own state, the Serbian nation. As soon as this part of Serbia took on all the features — laws, institutions, etc. — common to all states, the national vitality and heroism which had sustained them in their successful war against the Turks suddenly collapsed. The people, though ignorant and very poor, but passionate,

vigorous, naturally intelligent, and freedom-loving, were suddenly transformed into a meek, apathetic herd, easy victims of bureaucratic plunder and despotism.

There are no nobles, no big landowners, no industrialists, and no very wealthy merchants in Turkish Serbia. Yet in spite of this there emerged a new bureaucratic aristocracy composed of young men educated, partly at state expense, in Odessa, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Paris, Germany, and Switzerland. Before they were corrupted in the service of the State, these young men distinguished themselves by their love for their people, their liberalism, and lately by their democratic and socialistic inclinations. But no sooner did they enter the state's service than the iron logic of their situation, inherent in the exercise of certain hierarchical and politically advantageous prerogatives, took its toll, and the young men became cynical bureaucratic martinets while still mouthing patriotic and liberal slogans. And, as is well known, a liberal bureaucrat is incomparably worse than any dyed-in-the-wool reactionary state official.

Moreover, the demands of certain positions are more compelling than noble sentiments and even the best intentions. Upon returning home from abroad, the young Serbs are bound to pay back the debt owed to the State for their education and maintenance; they feel that they are morally obliged to serve their benefactor, the government. Since there is no other employment for educated young men, they become state functionaries, and become members of the only aristocracy in the country, the bureaucratic class. Once integrated into this class, they inevitably become enemies of the people . . .

And then the most unscrupulous and the shrewdest manage to gain control of the microscopic government of this microscopic state, and immediately begin to sell themselves to all corners, at home to the reigning prince or a pretender to the throne. In Serbia, the overthrow of one prince and the installation of another one is called a "revolution." Or they may peddle their influence to one, several, or even all the great domineering states — Russia, Austria, Turkey, etc.

One can easily imagine how the people live in such a state! Ironically enough, the principality of Serbia is a constitutional state, and all the legislators are elected by the people. It is worth noting that Turkish Serbia differs from other states in this principal respect: there is only one class in control of the government, the bureaucracy. The one and only function of the State, therefore, is to exploit the Serbian people in order to provide the bureaucrats with all the comforts of life.

Preconditions for a Social Revolution in Russia

Ways and means to make the Social Revolution can be of two sorts: one purely revolutionary and leading directly to the organization of a general uprising of the

people; the other, more peaceful, way leads to the emancipation of the people by a gradual, systematic, but at the same time radical transformation of the conditions of existence . . . it is the formation of associations of craftsmen and consumers and, above all, producers' cooperatives, because they lead more directly to the emancipation of labor from the domination of capitalism . . . The experience of the last twenty years in different lands has shown conclusively that this is impossible.

For the last several years the question of cooperative associations has stirred lively debates in the International; based on numerous arguments, the International has come to the following conclusions, formulated at the Congress of Lausanne (1868) and adopted at the Congress of Brussels (1868).

The various forms of cooperation are incontestably one of the most equitable and rational ways of organizing the future system of production. But before it can realize its aim of emancipating the laboring masses so that they will receive the full product of their labor, the land and all forms of capital must be converted into collective property. As long as this is not accomplished, the cooperatives will be overwhelmed by the all-powerful competition of monopoly capital and vast landed property; . . . and even in the unlikely event that a small group of cooperatives should somehow surmount the competition, their success would only beget a new class of prosperous cooperators in the midst of a poverty-stricken mass of proletarians. While cooperatives cannot achieve the emancipation of the laboring masses under the present socioeconomic conditions, it nevertheless has this advantage, that cooperation can habituate the workers to organize themselves to conduct their own affairs (after the overthrow of the old society) . . .

The Russian people possess to a great extent two qualities which are in our opinion indispensable preconditions for the Social Revolution . . . Their sufferings are infinite, but they do not patiently resign themselves to their misery and they react with an intense savage despair which twice in history produced such popular explosions as the revolts of Stenka Razin and Pugachev, and which even today expresses itself in continuous peasant outbreaks.

What then prevents them from making a successful revolution? It is the absence of a conscious common ideal capable of inspiring a genuine popular revolution [Fortunately,] there is no need for a profound analysis of the historic conscience of our people in order to define the fundamental traits which characterize the ideal of our people.

The first of these traits is the conviction, held by all the people, that the land rightfully belongs to them. The second trait is the belief that the right to benefit from the soil belongs not to an individual but to the rural community as a whole, to the *Mir* which assigns the temporary use of the land to the members of the community. The third trait is that even the minimal limitations placed by the

State on the *Mir*'s autonomy arouse hostility on the part of the latter toward the State.

Nevertheless, the ideal of the Russian people is overshadowed by three other traits which denature and retard the realization of this ideal; traits which we must combat with all our energy. . . . These three traits are: 1) paternalism, 2) the absorption of the individual by the *Mir*, 3) confidence in the Tsar. . . . The last two, absorption of the individual by the *Mir* and the cult of the Tsar, are the natural and inevitable effects of the first, i.e., the paternalism ruling the people. This is a great historic evil, the worst of all. . .

This evil deforms all Russian life, and indeed paralyzes it, with its crass family sluggishness, the chronic lying, the avid hypocrisy, and finally, the servility which renders life insupportable. The despotism of the husband, of the father, of the eldest brother over the family (already an immoral institution by virtue of its juridical-economic inequalities), the school of violence and triumphant bestiality, of the cowardice and the daily perversions of the family home. The expression "whitewashed graveyard" is a good description of the Russian family. . .

[The family patriarch] is simultaneously a slave and a despot: a despot exerting his tyranny over all those under his roof and dependent on his will. The only masters he recognizes are the *Mir* and the Tsar. If he is the head of the family, he will behave like an absolute despot, but he will be the servant of the *Mir* and the slave of the Tsar. The rural community is his universe; there is only his family and on a higher level the clan. This explains why the patriarchal principle dominates the *Mir*, an odious tyranny, a cowardly submission, and the absolute negation of all individual and family rights. The decisions of the *Mir*, however arbitrary, are law. "Who would dare defy the *Mir*!" exclaims the *muzhik*. But there are among the Russian people personages who have the courage to defy the *Mir* — the brigands. This is the reason brigandage is an important historical phenomenon in Russia; the first rebels, the first revolutionists in Russia, Pugachev and Stenka Razin, were brigands. . .

One of the greatest misfortunes in Russia is that each community constitutes a closed circle. No community finds it necessary to have the least organic connection with other communities. They are linked by the intermediary of the Tsar, the "little father," and only by the supreme patriarchal power vested in him. It is clear that disunion paralyzes the people, condemns its almost always local revolts to certain defeat and at the same time consolidates the victory of despotism. Therefore, one of the main tasks of revolutionary youth is to establish at all costs and by every possible means a vital line of revolt between the isolated rural communities. This is a difficult, but by no means impossible, task.

The Russian rural community, already sufficiently weakened by patriarchalism, is hopelessly corrupted and crushed by the State. Under its yoke the communal

elections are a mockery, and the persons elected by the people become the tools of the oppressors and the venal servants of the rich landlords. In such circumstances the last vestiges of justice, of truth, and of elemental humanity vanish from the rural community, ruined by the authorities. More than ever brigandage becomes the only way out for the individual, and a mass uprising — the revolution for the populace.

Amid the general confusion of ideas, two diametrically opposed trends emerge. The first, of a more pacific character, inclines toward gradual action; the other, favoring insurrectionary movements, tends directly to prepare the people for revolutionary warfare. The partisans of the first trend do not believe that the revolution is really possible; but as they do not want to remain passive spectators of the misfortunes of the people, they are determined to go to the people, like brothers, suffer with them and at the same time teach and prepare them for action, not theoretically but practically, by example. They will go among the factory workers, and toiling side by side with them awaken in them the desire to organize.

Others try to found rural colonies where all will enjoy the land in common . . . in accordance with the principle that the product of collective labor shall be distributed on the basis of “from each according to his ability; to each according to his need.” The same hope inspired Cabet, who, after the defeat of the 1848 revolution, left with his Icarians for America where he founded the colony of New Icaria, whose existence was brief. If this kind of experiment could not last very long in America, where the chances of success were much greater . . . it follows that it could never succeed in Russia.

But this does not discourage those who want to prepare the people for peaceful social change. By organizing their own domestic life on the basis of full liberty, they hope to combat the shameful patriarchal regime . . . By their example they hope to imbue the people with practical ideas of justice, of liberty, and of the means of emancipating themselves . . . All these plans are very fine, extremely magnanimous and noble, but are they realizable? It will be only a drop in the ocean . . . never sufficient to emancipate our people.

The other tendency is to fight, to revolt. We are confident that this alone will bring satisfactory results. Our people have shown that they need encouragement. Their situation is so desperate that they find themselves ready to revolt in every village. Every revolt, even if it fails, still has its value, yet isolated actions are insufficient. There must be a general uprising embracing the whole countryside. That this is possible has been demonstrated by the vast popular movements led by Stenka Razin and Pugachev.

The struggle against the patriarchal regime is at present raging in almost every village and in every family. In the rural community, the *Mir* has degenerated

to the point where it has become an instrument of the State. The power and the arbitrary bureaucratic will of the State is hated by the people and the revolt against this power and this arbitrary will is at the same time a revolt against the despotism of the rural community and of the *Mir*.

But this is not all. The principal evil which paralyzes the Russian people, and has up till now made a general uprising impossible, is the closed rural community, its isolation and disunity. We must at all costs breach these hitherto impregnable communities and weld them together by the active current of thought, by the will, and by the revolutionary cause. We must contact and connect not only the most enlightened peasants in the villages, the districts, and the regions but also the most forward-looking revolutionary individuals naturally emerging from the rural Russian environment; and above all, wherever possible, we must establish the same vital connections between the factory workers and the peasants. These connections can be only between individuals. The most advanced and active peasants in each village, district, and region must be put in contact with like-minded peasants in other villages, districts, and regions, though obviously this must be done with extreme caution.

Above all, we must convince these advanced elements, and through them all, or at least the majority of, the most energetic people, that . . . all over Russia and outside its frontiers there exists a common evil and a common cause. We must convince the people that they are an invincible force . . . and that if this force has not yet freed the people, it is only because they have not acted in unison to achieve a common aim. . . . In order to achieve unity, the villages, districts, and regions must establish contact and organize according to an agreed and unified plan. . . . We must convince our peasant and our worker that they are not alone, that on the contrary there stand behind them, weighed down by the same yoke but animated by the same enthusiasm, the innumerable mass of proletarians all over the world who are also preparing a universal uprising. . . . Such is the main task of revolutionary propaganda. How this objective should be concretized by our youth will be discussed on another occasion. We may say here only that the Russian people will accept the revolutionary intellectual youth only if they share their life, their poverty, their cause, and their desperate revolt.

Henceforth this youth must be present not as witnesses but as active participants in the front ranks of action and in all popular movements, great or small, anytime, anywhere, and anyplace. The young revolutionist must act according to a plan rigorously and effectively conceived and accept strict discipline in all his acts in order to create that unanimity without which victory is impossible. . . . He must never under any circumstances lie to the people. This would not only be criminal, but also most disastrous for the revolutionary cause. . . . The individual is most eloquent when he defends a cause that he sincerely believes in

and when he speaks according to his most cherished convictions If we try to emancipate the people by lies we will mislead not only them but ourselves as well, deviating from and losing sight of our true objective.

A word in conclusion: The class that we call our “intellectual proletariat,” which in Russia is already in a social-revolutionary situation, i.e., in an impossible and desperate situation, must now be imbued with revolutionary ideas and the passion for the Social Revolution. If the intellectual proletariat does not want to surrender they face certain ruin; they must join and help organize the popular revolution.

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May 21, 2012



Michail Bakunin
Statism and Anarchy
1873

Source: Bakunin on Anarchy, translated and edited by Sam Dolgoff, 1971. Extracts from Statism and Anarchy. Written in Russian, with special emphasis on Slavic problems, this work tremendously influenced Russian revolutionary thought. Retrieved on February 24th, 2009 from www.marxists.org