

The Program of the International Brotherhood

Michail Bakunin

1869

All the evidence indicates that the secret “International Brotherhood,” also called “Secret Alliance,” was formally dissolved early in 1869. In reply to accusations made by the General Council of the International, both Bakunin and Guillaume denied its existence. There was undoubtedly an informal group of adherents to Bakunin’s ideas, but as a formal organization, says Guillaume, “[the International Brothers] existed only theoretically in Bakunin’s brain as a kind of dream indulged in with delight...” But this does not lessen the importance of the ideas formulated in the program which Bakunin wrote for it.

While the Program does not cover all the subjects discussed in the *Revolutionary Catechism*, it contains a more precise and advanced formulation of Bakunin’s ideas about revolutionary strategy; about the expropriation of private, Church, and State property, and its transfer into the collective property of federated workers’ industrial and agricultural associations; faith in the creative capacity of the masses; revolutionary violence and terrorism; revolution by a centralized “socialist” state; and above all, the tasks of the anarchist vanguard movement (International Brotherhood) in the Social Revolution.

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The association of the International Brothers desires a revolution that shall be at the same time universal, social, philosophical, and economic, so that no stone may remain unturned, in all of Europe first, and then in the rest of the world, to change the present order of things founded on property, on exploitation, domination, and the principle of authority, be it religious, metaphysical, and doctrinaire

in the bourgeois manner or even revolutionary in the Jacobin manner. Calling for peace for the workers and liberty for all, we want to destroy all the states and all the churches, with all their institutions and their religious, political, financial, juridical, police, educational, economic, and social laws, so that all these millions of wretched human beings, deceived, enslaved, tormented, exploited, may be released from all their official and officious directors and benefactors — both associations and individuals — and at last breathe in complete freedom.

Convinced as we are that individual and social evil resides much less in individuals than in the organization of material things and in social conditions, we will be humane in our actions, as much for the sake of justice as for practical considerations, and we will ruthlessly destroy what is in our way without endangering the revolution. We deny society's free will and its alleged right to punish. Justice itself, taken in its widest, most humane sense, is but an idea, so to say, which is not an absolute dogma; it poses the social problem but it does not think it out. It merely indicates the only possible road to human emancipation, that is the humanization of society by liberty in equality. The positive solution can be achieved only by an increasingly rational organization of society. This solution, which is so greatly desired, our ideal for all, is liberty, morality, intelligence, and the welfare of each through the solidarity of all: human fraternity, in short.

Every human individual is the involuntary product of a natural and social environment within which he is born, and to the influence of which he continues to submit as he develops. The three great causes of all human immorality are: political, economic, and social inequality; the ignorance resulting naturally from all this; and the necessary consequence of these, *slavery*.

Since the social organization is always and everywhere the only cause of crimes committed by men, the punishing by society of criminals who can never be guilty is an act of hypocrisy or a patent absurdity. The theory of guilt and punishment is the offspring of theology, that is, of the union of absurdity and religious hypocrisy. The only right one can grant to society in its present transitional state is the natural right to kill in self-defense the criminals it has itself produced. but not the right to judge and condemn them. This cannot, strictly speaking, be a right, it can only be a natural, painful, but inevitable act, itself the indication and outcome of the impotence and stupidity of present-day society. The less society makes use of it, the closer it will come to its real emancipation. All the revolutionaries, the oppressed, the sufferers, victims of the existing social organization, whose hearts are naturally filled with hatred and a desire for vengeance, should bear in mind that the kings, the oppressors, exploiters of all kinds, are as guilty as the criminals who have emerged from the masses; like them, they are evildoers who are not guilty, since they, too, are involuntary products of the present social order. It will not be surprising if the rebellious people kill a great many of them at first. This will be

a misfortune, as unavoidable as the ravages caused by a sudden tempest, and as quickly over; but this natural act will be neither moral nor even useful.

History has much to teach us on this subject. The dreadful guillotine of 1793, which cannot be reproached with having been idle or slow, nevertheless did not succeed in destroying the French aristocracy. The nobility was indeed shaken to its roots, though not completely destroyed, but this was not the work of the guillotine; it was achieved by the confiscation of its properties. In general, we can say that carnage was never an effective means to exterminate political parties; it was proved particularly ineffective against the privileged classes, since power resides less in men themselves than in the circumstances created for men of privilege by the organization of material goods, that is, the institution of the State and its natural basis, *individual property*.

Therefore, to make a successful revolution, it is necessary to attack conditions and material goods; to destroy property and the State. It will then become unnecessary to destroy men and be condemned to suffer the sure and inevitable reaction which no massacre has ever failed and ever will fail to produce in every society.

It is not surprising that the Jacobins and the Blanquists — who became socialists by necessity rather than by conviction, who view socialism as a means and not as the goal of the revolution, since they desire dictatorship and the centralization of the State, hoping that the State will lead them necessarily to the reinstatement of property — dream of a bloody revolution against men, inasmuch as they do not desire the revolution against property. But such a bloody revolution, based on the construction of a powerfully centralized revolutionary State, would inevitably result in military dictatorship and a new master. Hence the triumph of the Jacobins or the Blanquists would be the death of the revolution.

We are the natural enemies of such revolutionaries — the would — be dictators, regulators, and trustees of the revolution — who even before the existing monarchical, aristocratic, and bourgeois states have been destroyed, already dream of creating new revolutionary states, as fully centralized and even more despotic than the states we now have. These men are so accustomed to the order created by an authority, and feel so great a horror of what seems to them to be disorder but is simply the frank and natural expression of the life of the people, that even before a good, salutary disorder has been produced by the revolution they dream of muzzling it by the act of some authority that will be revolutionary in name only, and will only be a new reaction in that it will again condemn the masses to being governed by decrees, to obedience, to immobility, to death; in other words, to slavery and exploitation by a new pseudo-revolutionary aristocracy.

What we mean by revolution is an outburst of what today is called “evil passions” and the destruction of the so-called public order.

We do not fear anarchy, we invoke it. For we are convinced that anarchy, meaning the unrestricted manifestation of the liberated life of the people, must spring from liberty, equality, the new social order, and the force of the revolution itself against the reaction. There is no doubt that this new life — the popular revolution — will in good time organize itself, but it will create its revolutionary organization from the bottom up, from the circumference to the center, in accordance with the principle of liberty, and not from the top down or from the center to the circumference in the manner of all authority. It matters little to us if that authority is called Church, Monarchy, constitutional State, bourgeois Republic, or even revolutionary Dictatorship. We detest and reject all of them equally as the unflinching sources of exploitation and despotism.

The revolution as we understand it will have to destroy the State and all the institutions of the State, radically and completely, from its very first day. The natural and necessary consequences of such destruction will be:

1. the bankruptcy of the State
2. the discontinuance of payments of private debts through the intervention of the State, leaving to each debtor the right to pay his own debts if he so desires
3. the discontinuance of payments of all taxes and of the levy of any contributions, direct or indirect
4. the dissolution of the arms, the judicial system, the bureaucracy, the police, and the clergy
5. the abolition of official justice, the suspension of everything called juridically the law, and the carrying out of these laws; consequently, the abolition and burning of all titles to property, deeds of inheritance, deeds of sale, grants, of all lawsuits — in a word, all the judicial and civil red tape; everywhere and in all things, the revolutionary fact replacing the right created and guaranteed by the State
6. the confiscation of all productive capital and of the tools of production for the benefit of workers' associations, who will have to have them produced collectively
7. the confiscation of all the property owned by the Church and the State as well as the precious metals owned by individuals, for the benefit of the federative Alliance of all the workers' associations, which will constitute the

commune. (In return for the goods which have been confiscated, the commune will give the strict necessities of life to all the individuals so dispossessed, and they will later gain more by their own labor if they can and if they wish.)

8. for the purpose of effecting the organization of the revolutionary commune by permanent barricades, and the office of a council of the revolutionary commune by the delegation of one or two deputies for each barricade, one per street or per district, there will be provided deputies invested with imperative, always responsible, and always revocable mandates. The communal council thus organized will be able to choose, from its own members, executive committees, one for each branch of the revolutionary administration of the commune
9. declaration by the capital city, rebellious and organized as a commune, to the effect that, having destroyed the authoritarian, controlled State, which it had the right to do, having been enslaved just like all the other localities, it therefore renounces the right, or rather any claim, to govern the provinces
10. an appeal to all the provinces, communes, and associations to let everything go and follow the example set by the capital: first, to reorganize themselves on a revolutionary basis, then to delegate their deputies, likewise invested with imperative, responsible, and revocable mandates, to a set meeting place, for the purpose of constituting the federation of associations, communes, and provinces which have rebelled in the name of the same principles, and in order to organize a revolutionary force capable of overcoming the reaction. There will be no dispatching of official revolutionary commissars with ribbons decorating their chests but revolutionary propagandists will be sent to all the provinces and communes, particularly to the peasants, who cannot be excited to rebellion by principles or decrees of a dictatorship but solely by the revolutionary fact itself; that is, by the inevitable consequences in all the communes of the complete cessation of the juridical official life of the State. Also, the abolition of the national state in the sense that any foreign country, province, commune, association, or even an isolated individual, that may have rebelled in the name of the same principles will be received into the revolutionary federation regardless of the present frontiers of the states, although they may belong to different political or national systems; and their own provinces, communes, associations, or individuals who defend the reaction will be excluded. It is through the expansion and organization of the revolution for mutual defense of the rebel countries that the universality of

the revolution, founded upon the abolition of frontiers and on the ruins of the states, will triumph.

No political or national revolution can ever triumph unless it is transformed into a social revolution, and unless the national revolution, precisely because of its radically socialist character, which is destructive of the State, becomes a universal revolution. Since the Revolution must everywhere be achieved by the people, and since its supreme direction must always rest in the people, organized in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations, the new revolutionary State, organized from the bottom up by revolutionary delegations embracing all the rebel countries in the name of the same principles, irrespective of old frontiers and national differences, will have as its chief objective the administration of public services, not the governing of peoples. It will constitute the *new party*, the alliance of the universal revolution, as opposed to the alliance of the reaction.

This revolutionary alliance excludes any idea of dictatorship and of a controlling and directive power. It is, however, necessary for the establishment of this revolutionary alliance and for the triumph of the Revolution over reaction that the unity of ideas and of revolutionary action find an *organ* in the midst of the popular anarchy which will be the life and the energy of the Revolution. This organ should be *the secret and universal association of the International Brothers*.

This association has its origin in the conviction that revolutions are never made by individuals or even by secret societies. They make themselves; they are produced by the force of circumstances, the movement of facts and events. They receive a long preparation in the deep, instinctive consciousness of the masses, then they burst forth, often seemingly triggered by trivial causes. All that a well-organized society can do is, first, to assist at the birth of a revolution by spreading among the masses ideas which give expression to their instincts, and to organize, not the army of the Revolution — the people alone should always be that army — but a sort of revolutionary general staff, composed of dedicated, energetic, intelligent individuals, sincere friends of the people above all, men neither vain nor ambitious, but capable of serving as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the instincts of the people.

There need not be a great number of these men. One hundred revolutionaries, strongly and earnestly allied, would suffice for the international organization of all of Europe. Two or three hundred revolutionaries will be enough for the organization of the largest country.

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