

Introducing

BAKUNIN

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Hobnail Press 2004

Publishing with Radical Intent

**In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a
revolutionary act**

Hobnail Press: Publishing with Radical Intent

Hobnail Press was founded in 2003. It is an independent, not-for-profit, radical publishing initiative. All labour is freely donated and all proceeds from sales support future publishing ventures, unless otherwise designated.

The primary focus of Hobnail Press is to publish and disseminate information pertaining to small press and alternative publishing, from an anti-authoritarian and libertarian-left perspective. An intrinsic part of this process is the publication of Hobnail Review, a regular review and listings newsletter.

In the tradition of radical pamphleteering, Hobnail Press also publishes a diverse range of low-cost, readily-available and easily-accessible pamphlets; reprinting essays and extracts from the work of 19th and early to mid 20th century freethinkers and radicals; as well as documenting events and scenarios influenced by their message of revolutionary change. A message, largely unchanged by the passage of time, which remains of historical, social, economic and political relevance to working class people today. Hobnail Press believes that reclaiming the past is the key to building the future.

All pamphlets are published in good-faith as an educational medium. As part of this evolutionary process, Hobnail Press endeavours to engender increased awareness, class-consciousness, self-esteem and empowerment. Contemporary analysis and application is at the discretion of the reader.

BAKUNIN.

Bakunin's literary legacy is small. The man had no literary ambitions. He was too much of a social revolutionist, too genuine, to wish to stoop to literature. To play at depicting wrong where one should aim at destroying wrongs; to substitute words for action, art for life: this was no work for a full-grown labourer in the cause of bread and freedom. With Bakunin, writing was but a tool not an achievement. Words were the means to accomplishment itself. His purpose was other than that of writing. He wrote as he studied and observed—in order to answer questions of the day. He wrote under the pressure of some crisis in social struggle. And all his writings originated in the same realistic, direct, useful, unpremeditated way. To this fact they owe much of their unevenness and repetition. Bakunin's vitality, desire for action, and counsel to action, overflowed into writing. In this way, his essays and pamphlets arose.

As a rule, Bakunin sat down to write a letter to a friend dealing with some question of the movement. But the letter quickly grew to the size of a pamphlet, and the pamphlet to that of a book. The greatness of the urge, the impelling idea, caused the author to write so fluently; illustrations flowed so easily from his vast reservoir of contemporary knowledge; and he had so clear and complete a conception of the philosophy of history to illumine his vision, that the pages soon filled themselves. The theme developed easily, embellished with countless digressions, a veritable encyclopedia review. But always incomplete, always unfinished.

Bakunin was acquainted with Herzen, Ogareff, Mazzini, Ledru-Rollin and others. He participated in the uprising of 1848-1849, the Polish insurrection of the early sixties, and the secret Italian movements. He foresaw the fall of the French Empire and an upheaval in Paris. Thoughts, conceptions, facts and arguments borrowed from the realities of a period of struggle, invaded Bakunin's spirit and took possession of his being. His generalisation of historical philosophy, leading to revolutionary negation of class society, was richly adorned with facts and wisdom gathered from contemporary reality. This explains how, with all his errors, Bakunin stands out in working class history as "the fiercest representative of the idea of real revolutionary action."

Bakunin was unquestionably inferior to Marx as a political economist. His economics are Marxist, and he subscribed enthusiastically to Marx's theory of surplus value and dissection of the Capitalist system. Bakunin believed in the materialistic conception of history even more thoroughly than Marx. But when Marx, contrary to the logic of his own writing, began to play

with Parliamentarism; when Marxism was proclaimed as *the only scientific socialism* at a time when it was becoming a theology and a metaphysic rather than a science; when Marxism degraded itself into a dull political class society electioneering, then Bakunin proclaimed his anti-Marxism in opposition to the negation of Socialist thought in action.

To Bakunin, exploitation and oppression were more than economic and political grievances. Hence, a fairer distribution of wealth, even if possible under the system, and a seeming participation in political power (democracy) were "remedies" that did not meet the situation. Democracy was not the cure for poverty but only the perpetuation of the disease. Democracy was the criminal perpetuation of poverty. Bakunin saw clearly that there was one problem only: economic exploitation and submission was connected intimately with all forms of *authority*, religions, political and social; and this *authority* was embodied in the *State*. Hence *Anarchism*, the negation of authority, the negation of priestcraft, was the essential factor in all real Socialism. To Bakunin, *Anarchism* defined *Socialism* as Submission defined Capitalism.

Bakunin did not confound "Government" with "Administration." He did not confuse the "State" with "Society." He did not pretend to believe in "Community" interest in a class society. He opposed class society and all its hypocritical masquerades. He proclaimed the need for freedom and defined Socialism as the proletarian determination to revolt to realise freedom. Thus, Bakunin opposed Anarchism to Parliamentarism. Mental, personal and social freedom are to him inseparable—*Atheism, Anarchism, Socialism*, an organic unit. His Atheism is not that of the ordinary Freethinker, who may be an authoritarian and an anti-Socialist; nor is his Socialism that of a parliamentarian, albeit Marxist, who may be, and very often claims to be, an Authoritarian and a Christian, or speaks as though he were both; but his Atheism and Socialism complete each other. They interpenetrate and constitute a living realisation of freedom, a social condition of happiness. This thoroughness makes Bakunin's Socialist propaganda unique.

If Proudhon's vision was blurred by a kind of bourgeois pacifism, Marx certainly sacrificed his own revolutionary understanding for political and personal dictatorship. He liquidated his great revolutionary work in an unscrupulous vanity and an all-consuming miserable pretension to absolute priesthood that knew no bounds. But for his desire to dominate, Marx would have been the great working class emancipator. His mighty mind descended to petty spleen because his will could brook no qualifying influences. Marx was his world—and his limitation. This self-immolation of a great intellect to a narrow will was nothing less than a terrible disease from which Marx suffered. It reduced a prophet to a priest and a great movement to an

impotence. It made Marx less than a political revolutionist, a mere parliamentary temporiser, where the mind of the man visioned and understood and cried out for the complete social revolution. Not even when one considers the long line of Labour Judas Iscariots M.P.'s, is it possible to discover one person in the history of the workers' struggle who sold his birthright for a more miserable mess of pottage than Karl Marx. For he lived and died in poverty. He shared all the misery of the struggle. Only his semi-disciples, the disciples of his error and not his vision, prospered into defenders of Capitalism. They praised him for his confusion and his name grew to shaded mediocre respectability. Whereas he was intended to be the symbol of proletarian challenge, the enemy of Capitalism.

As early as July, 1848, possibly because Bakunin saw good in Proudhon as well as in Marx, the latter's *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* accused Bakunin of being a paid spy in the employ of the Russian Ambassador. Marx's paper added that George Sand, the novelist, possessed papers that would establish the charge. Bakunin appealed to George Sand to clear his name of this odious accusation, and she wrote to the *Zeitung*:

"The facts related by your correspondent are absolutely false. I never had any documents which contained insinuations against M. Bakunin. I never had any reason, or authority, to express any doubts as to the loyalty of his character and the sincerity of his views. I appeal to your honour and to your conscience to print this letter in your paper immediately."

Marx published this letter with the explanation that, in publishing the charge, the *Zeitung* had given Bakunin an opportunity to dispel a suspicion long current in certain Parisian circles. In September, 1853, Marx had to repudiate this charge against Bakunin in the columns of the London *Morning Post*.

Marx knew that, at the International Congress at Basle, in 1869, Bakunin demanded an investigation of the charge from Wilhelm Liebknecht. He was vindicated completely and Liebknecht publicly apologised.

Yet, in a "confidential communication" sent to the Brunswick Committee, through Kugelmann, Marx wrote of Bakunin:—

"Bakunin . . . found opponents there who not only would not allow him to exercise a dictatorial influence, but also said he was a Russian Spy."

Lafargue bitterly attacked Bakunin and his comrades from 1872 onwards. Yet his enmity was not sufficient to please the concentrated vindictiveness of his father-in-law. On November 11th, 1882, Marx wrote to Engels:—

"Longuet, the last Proudhonist, and Lafargue, the last Bakunist! May the Devil come to fetch them!"

How different was the attitude of Bakunin!

Early in the summer of 1848, Bakunin quarrelled with Marx and Engels over Herwegh's plan to invade Germany with armed legions. Writing of this quarrel in 1871, Bakunin confessed:—

“On this subject, when I think of it now, I must say frankly that Marx and Engels were right. They truly estimated the affairs of those days.”

The International Working Men's Association was founded at St. Martin's Hall, London, on September, 29th, 1864, to unite and weld together all workers who would come together to work for their emancipation from Capitalism, irrespective of the shades of opinion on principles and tactics which divided them. This broad principle was respected for five years. The Congress held at Basle, Switzerland, in September, 1869, was the last conference at which Marxists, Revolutionary Collectivists or Anarchists, Proudhonian Mutualists, Trade Unionists, Co-operators and social reformers met in fair discussion and tried to elaborate lines of common action, useful and acceptable to all. The Congress of 1868-1869 showed that Anti-Parliamentarism was spreading through the sections of the International owing to Bakunin's influence. This was mortifying to Marx, who, despite the Anti-Parliamentary logic of his thought and writings, worked, through the London General Council of the Association, for the development of parliamentarism.

Owing to the Franco-Prussian War, no congress was held in 1870, and in 1871 Marx convened a private congress in London, September 17-23, 1871. At this congress or conference, Marx, although such conduct was contrary to the opinion he had developed in his *Civil War in France*, struck the blow he must have premeditated from some time, namely, the enforcement of parliamentarism. He imposed upon the Association the official doctrine of political action, which meant Labour Parties, electioneering, the practical Administration of Capitalism, and the steady negation of Socialism.

The Marxist Parliamentary London Conference caused the Jurassian Federation to convene an Anti-Parliamentary Conference at Sonvillier, Switzerland, on November the 12th, protesting against the parliamentary doctrine being imposed on the International, and calling for a General Congress. The circular issued by these sections was known as the Sonvillier Circular. Marx replied to this circular in a recriminating document, to which he affixed the names of the members of the General Council, called *On The Pretended Split in the International*. This was dated March 5th, 1872. It was printed and circulated in May, 1872. Bakunin and others replied to it in the *Jura Bulletin* of June 15th, 1872.

It is quite true that the Marxist Congress was convened at the Hague in September, 1872: and that a few days later Bakunin and his comrades convened an Anti-Parliamentary Congress at St. Imier. This Congress met on September 13th, and accepted the rules and principles of the secret society, the Alliance of Revolutionary Socialists, that Bakunin had drawn up at Zurich since August 30th, 1872. It is true also that whilst the Marxist General Council at New York simply abolished the International, the Anti-Parliamentarians and Anarchists reorganised the Association on the basis of St. Imier principles, and convened a Congress at Geneva (September, 1873), and further Congresses at Brussels, Berne and Veniers. But virtually the International was dissolved. One does not identify the Anarchist propaganda that resulted from these conferences with Anti-Parliamentarism, necessarily. Rather this Anarchism merely balanced the Parliamentarism that came into existence. Anti-Parliamentarism regards both as parodies of the real struggle. It does not share the Anarchist objection to abstract authority: it does not make the state the author of economic society: it does believe in the class struggle: it does negate political society: it does stand for the liquidation of political and property society in industrial and useful society.

From this period of activity (1848-1873), Anti-Parliamentarism accepts, not uncritically, but gladly, though critically, all Marx's writings of importance: his *Communist Manifesto* (as he suggested correcting it); *Eighteenth Brumaire*; and the *Civil War in France*; *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*; *The Poverty of Philosophy*. The Anti-Parliamentary movement has not the same interest in Marx's *Eastern Question*. But it grounds its teaching on *Capital and Wage-Labour and Capital*. As a movement, we would say that Anti-Parliamentarism has not much regard for *Value, Price, and Profit*. Personally, we consider this work unsatisfactory and intended to justify palliation and reform. Opinion is divided as to its worth but, personally, the present writer has deemed it, except for an odd paragraph, an elaborate joke, an attempted repudiation of Marxist logic written by Marx in the same spirit, and to the same end, as Lenin wrote his *Infantile Sickness of the Left-Wing*.

Anti-Parliamentarism accepts gratefully most of Bakunin's writings. Unlike the Anarchist disciples of Bakunin, it makes Bakunin's criticism of *The Paris Commune and the State Idea*, in political and working class usefulness, below Marx's *Civil War in France*. Anti-Parliamentarism endorses Bakunin's healthy opposition to the God Idea, the deification of the abstract General Idea.

Whilst agreeing, in the main, with the Marxists in their distinction between Scientific and Utopian Socialism, Anti-Parliamentarism does not believe in the neglect of the Utopian Socialists. Anti-Parliamentarians believe that St. Simon, for

example, clearly understood the trend of Social development towards Industrial Society. It believes that much of the Utopian thought should be embodied in the current literature of the working class movement and not discarded ruthlessly. Nor is Anti-Parliamentarism impressed with the intrigues, the pedantry, the abstractions, the electioneerings, and the capitalist loyalties of "Scientific Socialism." In the main, the practical history of "Scientific Socialism" has been a record, neither of Science nor yet of Socialism.

Anti-Parliamentarism does not endorse Proudhon. But it believes that, on the question of the revolutionary development and the evolution of the revolutionary idea, Proudhon's *Revolutionary Idea* is a wonderful and useful work and ranks with the writings of Marx as a classic. On the subject of the liquidation of military and political society, Proudhon writes usefully and scientifically and holds a place, therefore, in the ranks of pioneers of Anti-Parliamentarism. The Anti-Parliamentarians are opposed to Proudhon being dismissed with contempt under the mistaken idea that such dismissal is an expression of revolutionary thought.

Marx : Proudhon : Bakunin : dead, their private feuds forgotten : their errors noted and over-ruled by time : are the three great founders of Anti-Parliamentary thought and action and the harbringers of the New Social Order of usefulness, wealth, health and freedom.

This pamphlet is a facsimile reproduction of an essay penned by the indomitable Guy Aldred, and published in 1940 by the *Word Library*, as part of a series entitled, *Pioneers of Anti-Parliamentarism*.

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