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[This long letter to La Liberté *(dated October 5, 1872), never completed and never sent, was written about a month after the expulsion of Bakunin from the International Workingmen's Association by the Hague Congress of September 2–7, 1872.]*

To the Editors of *La Liberté*

Gentlemen:

Since you published the sentence of excommunication which the Marxian Congress of the Hague has just pronounced against me, you will surely, in all fairness, publish my reply. Here it is.

The triumph of Mr. Marx and his group has been complete. Being sure of a majority which they had been long preparing and organizing with a great deal of skill and care, if not with much respect for the principles of morality, truth, and justice as often found in their speeches and so seldom in their actions, the Marxists took off their masks. And, as befits men who love power, and always in the name of that sovereignty of the people which will, from now on, serve as a stepping-stone for all those who aspire to govern the masses, they have brazenly decreed their dictatorship over the members of the International.

If the International were less sturdy and deeply rooted, if it had been based, as they imagine, only upon the formally organized official leadership and not on the real solidarity of the effective interests and aspirations of the proletariat of all the countries of the civilized world, on the free and spontaneous federation of workers' sections and associations, independent of any government control, the decrees of this pernicious Hague Congress, a far too indulgent and faithful incarnation of the Marxist theories and practice, would have sufficed to kill it. They would have reduced to ridicule and odium this magnificent association, in the foundation of which, I am pleased to state, Mr. Marx had taken an intelligent and energetic part.

A state, a government, a universal dictatorship! The dreams of Gregory VII, Boniface VII, Charles V, and the Napoleons reappearing in new forms, but ever with the same claims, in the Social Democratic camp! Can one imagine anything more burlesque and at the same time more revolting? To claim that a group of individuals, even the most intelligent and best-intentioned,

would be capable of becoming the mind, the son], the directing and unifying will of the revolutionary movement and the economic organization of the proletariat of all lands — this is such heresy against common sense and historical experience that one wonders how a man as intelligent as Mr. Marx could have conceived it!

The popes at least had the excuse of possessing absolute truth, which they stated they held in their hands by the grace of the Holy Ghost and in which they were supposed to believe. Mr. Marx has no such excuse, and I shall not insult him by suggesting that he imagines he has scientifically invented something that comes close to absolute truth. But from the moment that absolute truth is eliminated, there can be no infallible dogma for the International, and, consequently, no official political or economic theory,, and our congresses should never assume the role. of ecumenical councils which proclaim obligatory principles for all their members and believers to follow.

There is but one law that is really obligatory upon all the members, individuals, sections, and federations of the International, for all of which this law is the true and the only, basis. In its most complete form with all its consequences and applications, this law advocates *the international solidarity of workers of all trades and all countries in their economic struggle against the exploiters of labor.* The living unity of the International resides solely in the real organization of this solidarity by the spontaneous action of the workers' groups and by the absolutely free federation of the masses of workers of all languages and all nations, all the more powerful because it is free; the International cannot be unified by decrees and under the whip of any sort of government whatsoever.

Who can entertain any doubt that out of this ever-growing organization of the militant solidarity of the proletariat against bourgeois exploitation there will issue forth the political struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie? Both the Marxists and ourselves are in unanimous agreement on this point. But here a question comes up which separates us completely from the Marxists.

We believe that the policy of the proletariat, necessarily revolutionary, should have the destruction of the State for its immediate and only goal. We cannot understand how one can speak of international solidarity when there is a wish to preserve the State, unless one dreams of the Universal

bourgeois political freedom so extolled and recommended as the first step in the conquest of full freedom by Marx and bis followers, but a *broad human* freedom, a freedom destroying all the dogmatic, metaphysical, political, and juridical fetters by which everyone today is loaded down, which will give everybody, collectives as well as individuals, full autonomy in their activities and their development, delivered once and for all from inspectors, directors, and guardians.

The second watchword of this emancipation is solidarity, not Marxian solidarity, decreed from the top down by some government, by trickery or force, upon the masses; not that unity of all which is the negation of the liberty of each, and which by that very fact becomes a falsehood, a fiction, hiding the reality of slavery; but that solidarity which is, on the contrary, the confirmation and realization of every freedom, having its origin not in any political law whatsoever but in the inherent social nature of Man, in virtue of which no man is free if all men who surround him and exercise an influence, direct or indirect, on his life, are not equally free. . .

The solidarity which is sought, far from being the product of any artificial authoritarian organization whatsoever, can only be the spontaneous product of social life, economic as well as moral; the result of the free federation of common interests, aspirations, and tendencies. . . It has for its essential basis equality and collective labor — obligatory not by law, but by the force of realities — and collective property; as a guiding light, it has experience, the practice of the collective life, knowledge, and learning; as a final goal, the establishment of a free humanity, beginning with the downfall of all states.

This is the ideal, not divine, not metaphysical, but human and practical, which corresponds to the modern aspirations of the Latin and Slav peoples. They want full freedom, complete solidarity, complete equality; in short, they want a full-scale humanity, and they will not accept less, even on the pretext that limited freedom is only temporary. The Marxists will denounce these aspirations as folly, as they have been doing for a long time . . . but the Latins and Slavs will never exchange these magnificent objectives for the completely bourgeois platitudes of Marxian socialism.

State, that is, of universal slavery, such as the great emperors and popes dreamed of. For the State is, by its very nature, a breach of this solidarity and hence a permanent cause of war. Nor can we understand how anyone could speak of the liberty of the proletariat, or the real emancipation of the masses, within the State and by the State. State means domination, and any domination presupposes the subjugation of the masses and, consequently, their exploitation for the benefit of some ruling minority.

We do not accept, even for the purposes of a revolutionary ,transition, national conventions, constituent assemblies, provisional governments, or so-called revolutionary dictatorships, because we are convinced that revolution is sincere and permanent only within the masses; that when it is concentrated in the hands of a few ruling individuals, it inevitably and immediately turns into reaction. Such is our belief; this is not the proper time for enlarging upon it. The Marxists profess quite contrary ideas. As befits good Germans, they are worshippers of the power of the State, and are necessarily also the prophets of political and social discipline, champions of the social order built from the top down, always in the name of universal suffrage and the sovereignty of the masses upon whom they bestow the honor of obeying their leaders, their elected masters. The Marxists admit of no other emancipation but that which they expect from their so-called People's State (*Volksstaat*).

Between the Marxists and ourselves there is an abyss. They are the governmentalists; we are the anarchists, in spite of it all.

Such are the two principal political tendencies which at present separate the International into two camps. On one side there is nothing, properly speaking, but Germany; on the other we find, in varying degrees, Italy, Spain, the Swiss Jura, a large part of France, Belgium, Holland, and in the very near future, the Slav peoples. These two tendencies came into direct confrontation at the Hague Congress, and, thanks to Mr. Marx's great tactical skill, thanks to the thoroughly artificial organization of his last congress, the Germanic tendency has prevailed.

Does this mean that the obnoxious question has been resolved? It was not even properly discussed; the majority, having voted like a well-drilled regiment, crushed all discussions under its vote. Thus the contradiction still remains, sharper and more alarming than ever, and Mr. Marx himself, intoxicated as he may be by his victory, can hardly imagine that he has

disposed of it at so small a price. And if he did, for a moment, entertain such a foolish hope, he must have been promptly undeceived by the united stand of the delegates from the Jura, Spain, Belgium, and Holland (not to mention Italy, which did not even deign to send delegates to this so blatantly fraudulent congress), a protest quite moderate in tone, yet all the more powerful and deeply significant.

But what is to be done today? Today, since solution and reconciliation in the field of politics are impossible, we should practice mutual toleration, granting to each country the incontestable right to follow whatever political tendencies it may prefer or find most suitable for its own particular situation. Consequently, by rejecting all political questions from the obligatory program of the International, we should seek to strengthen the unity of this great association solely in the field of economic solidarity. Such solidarity unites us while political questions inevitably separate us.

That is where the real Unity of the International lies; in the common economic aspirations and the spontaneous movement of the masses of all the countries — not in any government whatsoever nor in any uniform political theory imposed upon these masses by a general congress. This is so obvious that one would have to be dazzled by the passion for power to fail to understand it.

I could understand how crowned or uncrowned despots might have dreamed of holding the sceptered world in their hands. But what can one say of a friend of the proletariat, a revolutionary who claims he truly desires the emancipation of the masses, when he poses as a director and supreme arbiter of all the revolutionary movements that may arise in different countries and dares to dream of subjecting the proletariat to one single idea hatched in his own brain?

I believe that Mr. Marx is ail earnest revolutionary, though not always a very consistent one, and that he really desires the revolt of the masses. And I wonder how he fails to see how the establishment of a universal dictatorship, collective or individual, a dictatorship that would in one way or another perform the task of chief engineer of the world revolution, regulating and directing ail insurrectionary movement of the masses in all countries pretty much as one would run a machine — that the establishment of such a dictatorship would be enough of itself to kill the revolution, to paralyze and distort all popular movements.

those in which capitalist production has attained greatest development, are the most capable of making social revolution. These civilized countries, to the exclusion of all others, are the only ones destined to initiate and carry through this revolution. This revolution will expropriate either by peaceful, gradual, or by violent means, the present property owners and capitalists. To appropriate all the landed property and capital, and to carry out its extensive economic and political programs, the revolutionary State will have to be very powerful and highly centralized. The State will administer and direct the cultivation of the land, by means of its salaried officials commanding armies of rural workers organized and disciplined for this purpose. At the same time, on the ruins of the existing banks, it will establish a single state bank which will finance all labor and national commerce.

It is readily apparent how such a seemingly simple plan of organization can excite the imagination of the workers, who are as eager for justice as they are for freedom; and who foolishly imagine that the one can exist without the other; as if, in order to conquer and consolidate justice and equality, one could depend on the efforts of others, particularly on governments, regardless of how they may be elected or controlled, to speak and act for the people! For the proletariat this will, in reality, be nothing but a barracks: a regime, where regimented workingmen and women will sleep, wake, work, and live to the beat of a drum; where the shrewd and educated will be granted government privileges; and where the mercenary-minded, attracted by the immensity of the international speculations of the state bank, will find a vast field for lucrative, underhanded dealings.

There will be slavery within this state, and abroad there will be war without truce, at least until the "inferior" races, Latin and Slav, tired of bourgeois civilization, no longer resign themselves to the subjection of a State, which will be even more despotic than the former State, although it calls itself a People's State.

The Social Revolution, as envisioned and hoped for by the Latin and Slav workers, is infinitely broader in scope than that advanced by the German or Marxist program. For them it is not a question of the emancipation of the working class, parsimoniously doled out and realizable only in the remote future, but rather the completed and real emancipation of all workers, not only in some but in all nations, "developed" and "undeveloped." And the first watchword of this emancipation can be none other than freedom. Not the

The report of the General Council of the International [drawn up by Marx] says that the judicial fact being nothing but the consequence of the economic fact, it is therefore necessary to transform the latter in order to eliminate the former. It is incontestable that what has been called juridical or political right in history has always been the expression and the product of an accomplished fact. But it is also incontestable that after having been the effect of acts or facts previously accomplished, this right causes in its turn further effects, becoming itself a very real and powerful fact which must be eliminated if one desires an order of things different from the existing one. It is thus that the right of inheritance, after having been the natural consequence of the violent appropriation of natural and social wealth, becomes later the basis for the political state and the juridical family, which guarantees and sanctions private property. . .

Likewise, Marx completely ignores a most important element in the historic development of humanity, that is, the temperament and particular character of each race and each people, a temperament and a character which are themselves the natural product of a multitude of ethnological, climatological, economic, and historic causes, but which exercise, even apart from and independent of the economic conditions of each country, a considerable influence on its destinies and even on the development of its economic forces. Among these elements, and these so-called natural traits, there is one whose action is completely decisive in the particular history of each people; it is the intensity of the spirit of revolt, and by that I mean the token of liberty with which a people is endowed or which it has conserved. This instinct is a fact which is completely primordial and animalistic; one finds it in different degrees in every living being, and the energy and vital power of each is to he measured by its intensity. In Man this instinct, in addition to the economic needs which urge him on, becomes the most powerful agent of total human emancipation. And since it is a matter of temperament rather than intellectual and moral culture, although these ordinarily complement each other, it sometimes happens that civilized peoples possess it only in a feeble degree, either because they have exhausted it during their previous development, or have been depraved by their civilization, or possibly because they were originally less fully endowed with it than other peoples. . .

The reasoning of Marx ends in absolute contradiction. Taking into account only the economic question, he insists that only the most advanced countries,

Where is the man, where is the group of individuals, however great their genius, who would dare flatter themselves that they alone could encompass and understand the infinite multitude of diverse interests, tendencies, and activities in each country, in each province, in each locality, in each profession and craft, and which in their immense aggregate are united, but not regimented, by certain fundamental principles and by a great common aspiration, the same aspiration [economic equality without loss of autonomy] which, having sunk deep into the conscience of the masses, will constitute the future Social Revolution?

And what can one think of an International Congress which, in the alleged interest of this revolution, imposes on the proletariat of the whole civilized world a government invested with dictatorial power, with the inquisitorial and pontifical right to suspend the regional federations of the International and shut out whole nations in the name of an alleged official principle which is in fact only the idea of Marx, transformed by the vote of a fictitious majority into an absolute truth? What can one think of a Congress which, to render its folly even more glaring, relegates to America this dictatorial government [the General Council of the International] composed of men who, though probably honest, are ignorant, obscure, absolutely unknown even to the Congress itself? Our enemies, the bourgeoisie, would be right if they mocked the Congress and maintained that the International Workingmen's Association combats existing tyranny only to set up a new tyranny over itself; that in rightfully trying to replace old absurdities, it creates new ones!

II

Why men like Messrs. Marx and Engels should be indispensable to the partisans of a program consecrating political power and opening the door to all their ambitions is understandable. Since there will he political power, there will necessarily be subjects, who will be forced to obey, for without obedience there can be no power. One may object that they will obey not men but the laws which they have themselves made. But to that I reply that everybody knows how people make these laws and set up standards of obedience to these laws even in the most democratic and free countries. Anyone not involved in a party which takes fiction for reality will remember

that even in these countries the people obey not the laws made by themselves but the laws made in their name; and that their obedience to these laws can never be anything but obedience to the arbitrary will of some tutelary and governing minority, or, in a word, a voluntary servitude.

We revolutionary anarchists who sincerely want full popular emancipation view with repugnance another expression in this program: it is the designation of the proletariat, the workers, as a *class* and not a mass. Do you know what this signifies? It is no more nor less than the aristocratic rule of the factory workers and of the cities over the millions who constitute the rural proletariat, who, in the anticipations of the German Social Democrats, will in effect become the subjects of their so-called People's State. "Class," "power . . .. state" are three inseparable terms, one of which presupposes the other two, and which boil down to this: *the political subjection and economic exploitation of the masses.*

The Marxists think that just as in the eighteenth century the bourgeoisie dethroned the nobility in order to take its place and gradually absorb and then share with it the domination and exploitation of the workers in the cities as well as in the countryside, so the proletariat in the cities is exhorted to dethrone and absorb the bourgeoisie, and then jointly dominate and exploit the land workers. . .

Though differing with us in this respect, they do not entirely reject our program. They only reproach us for wanting to hasten, to outstrip the slow march of history, and for ignoring the scientific law of successive revolutions in inevitable stages. Having proclaimed in their works of philosophical analysis of the past that the bloody defeat of the insurgent peasants of Germany and the triumph of the despotic states in the sixteenth century constituted a great revolutionary move forward, they now have the nerve to call for the establishment of a new despotism, allegedly for the benefit of the urban workers and to the detriment of the toilers in the countryside.

This same logic leads the Marxists directly and fatally to what we call *bourgeois socialism* and to the conclusion of a new political pact between the bourgeois who are "radicals," or who are forced to become such, and the "intelligent," "respectable" bourgeoisified minority of city workers, to the detriment of the proletarian masses, not only in the country but also in the cities.

Such is the meaning of workers' candidacies to the parliaments of existing states, and of the conquest of political power. Is it not clear that the popular nature of such power will never be anything but a fiction? It will obviously he impossible for hundreds or even tens of thousands or indeed only a few thousand to exercise this power effectively. They will necessarily have to exercise power by proxy, to entrust this power to a group of men elected to represent them and govern them. . . After a few brief moments of freedom or revolutionary euphoria, these new citizens of a new state will awake to find themselves again the pawns and victims of the new power clusters. . .

I am fully confident that in a few years even the German workers will go the way that seems best to them, provided they allow us the same liberty. We even recognize the possibility that their history, their particular nature, their state of civilization, and their whole situation today impel them to follow this path. Let the German, American, and English toilers and those of other nations march with the same energy toward the destruction of all political power, liberty for all, and a natural respect for that liberty; such are the essential conditions of international solidarity.

To support his program for the conquest of political power, Marx has a very special theory, which is but the logical consequence of his whole system. He holds that the political condition of each country is always the product and the faithful expression of its economic situation; to change the former it is necessary only to transform the latter. Therein lies the whole secret of historic evolution according to Marx., He takes no account of other factors in history, such as the ever-present reaction of political, juridical, and religious institutions on the economic situation. He says: "Poverty produces political slavery, the State." But he does not allow this expression to be turned around, to say: "Political slavery, the State, reproduces in its turn, and maintains poverty as a condition for its own existence; so that to destroy poverty, it is necessary to destroy the State!" And strangely enough, Marx, who forbids his disciples to consider political slavery, the State, as a real cause of poverty, commands his disciples in the Social Democratic party to consider the conquest of political power as the absolutely necessary preliminary condition for economic emancipation!

[We insert here a paragraph from Bakunin's speech at the September 1869 Congress of the International following the same line of argument:]