

# After the Revolution: Marx

## Debates Bakunin

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After Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin was perhaps the most influential representative of the anarchist current in nineteenth-century socialism. His theoretical tract *Statehood and Anarchy* was published in 1873 and became a programmatic document. Bakunin was then both a sharp critic of Marx and a rival in working-class movements. Marx read and prepared a conspectus of Bakunin's book in 1874-75, including in it the lengthy passages of rebuttal of Bakunin's criticism that are presented here (the indented material consists of passages that Marx copied out in the conspectus, often interspersing his own ironic comments parenthetically). Because Marx and Engels said rather little about the specifics of the predicted "dictatorship of the proletariat" and about how they envisaged developments in the aftermath of the proletarian revolution, Marx's comments in this obscure source are of great interest. The conspectus was first published in the journal *Letopisi marksizma* (Annals of Marxism) in 1926. It appears in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 18 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), pp. 599-642. This English translation is by Robert C. Tucker.

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\* \* \* We have already expressed our deep aversion to the theory of Marx and Lassalle that recommends to the workers, if not as an ultimate ideal then at any rate as the immediate main aim, the founding of a people's state which, as they explain it, will be nothing other than the proletariat "organized as the ruling class." The question arises, if the proletariat is ruling, over whom will it rule? This means that there will remain another proletariat which will be subordinated to this new domination, this new state.<sup>1</sup>

This means that so long as other classes continue to exist, the capitalist class in particular, the proletariat fights it (for with the

1. The term "people's state" was not Marx's but, as he indicates further on, one put into currency by the prominent German Social Democrat Wilhelm Liebknecht and later picked up by Ferdinand

Lassalle. The phrase "organized as the ruling class" appears in the *Communist Manifesto* (see above, p. 490). [R. T.]

coming of the proletariat to power, its enemies will not yet have disappeared, the old organization of society will not yet have disappeared), it must use measures of *force*, hence governmental measures; if it itself still remains a class and the economic conditions on which the class struggle and the existence of classes have not yet disappeared, they must be forcibly removed or transformed, and the process of their transformation must be forcibly accelerated.

For example, the peasant rabble [*das gemeine Bauernvolk, der Bauernröbe*], which, as is well known, does not enjoy favor with the Marxists and which, being on a lower level of culture, will probably be governed by the urban and factory proletariat.

It means that where the peasant exists on a mass scale as a private land proprietor, where he even forms a more or less considerable majority as in all the countries of the West European continent, where he has not disappeared and been replaced by agricultural laborers, as in England—the following will take place: either the peasant will start to create obstacles and bring about the fall of any worker revolution, as he has done heretofore in France, or else the proletariat (for the peasant proprietor does not belong to the proletariat; even when his situation places him in it he thinks that he doesn't belong to it) must, as the government, take steps as a result of which the situation of the peasant will directly improve and which will therefore bring him over to the side of the revolution; steps which embryonically facilitate the transition from private ownership of the land to collective ownership, so that the peasant will himself come to this by economic means; but there should be no stunning of the peasant by, for example, proclaiming the abrogation of the right of inheritance or of his property; that is possible only where the capitalist *rentier* has squeezed the peasant out and the real tiller of the soil has become just as much a proletarian as the hired worker, as the urban worker, and hence has the same interests not indirectly but *directly*; still less should parcelled-out property be strengthened by increasing the parcels through outright turning over of big estates to the peasants, as in the Bakuninist approach to revolution.

Or, if one looks at this question from a national point of view, we may suppose that for the Germans, the Slavs for the same reason will enter into the same slavish subordination to the victorious German proletariat as the latter will now enjoy with respect to its own bourgeoisie.

Schoolboy drivell! A radical social revolution is connected with certain historical conditions of economic development; the latter are

its presupposition. Therefore it is possible only where the industrial proletariat, together with capitalist production, occupies at least a substantial place in the mass of the people. And in order for it to have any chance at all of being victorious, it must be capable, *mutatis mutandis*, of doing at least as much directly for the peasant as the French bourgeoisie did during its revolution for the French peasant of that time. A fine idea, that the rule of the workers includes the enslavement of agricultural labor! But here appears the innermost thought of Herr Bakunin. He understands absolutely nothing about social revolution; all he knows are its political phrases. For him its economic requisites do not exist. Since all hitherto existing economic formations, developed or undeveloped, have included the enslavement of the working person (whether in the form of the wage worker, the peasant, etc.), he thinks that a *radical revolution* is possible under all these formations. Not only that. He wants a European social revolution, resting on the economic foundation of capitalist production, to take place on the level of the Russian or Slavic agricultural and pastoral peoples and not to overstep that level; although he does see that *navigaton* creates a difference between the brothers, but only *navigaton*, for that is a difference all politicians know about! *Will power* and not economic conditions is the basis of his social revolution.

If there exists a state, there is inevitably domination [*Herrschaft*], hence also slavery; domination is unthinkable without open or concealed slavery, that's why we're enemies of the state. What does it mean for the proletariat to be "organized as the ruling class"?

It means that the proletariat, instead of fighting against the economically privileged classes in each individual instance, has acquired sufficient power and organization to use the general means of coercion against them; however, it can use only such economic means as abolish its own character as wage worker, hence as a class; so its complete victory coincides with the end of its domination, for its class character comes to an end.

Can it really be that the entire proletariat will stand at the head of the administration?

Can it really be that in a trade union, for example, the entire union forms its executive committee? Can it be that there will disappear from the factory all division of labor and difference of functions stemming from it? And in the Bakuninist arrangement "from bottom to top," will everyone be at the "top"? In that case there will be no "bottom." Will all the members of the township in

equal measure supervise the general affairs of the "district"? In that event there will be no distinction between township and district.

There are about forty million Germans. Will all forty millions really be members of the government?

Certainly, because the thing starts with self-government of the township.

The entire nation will be governors and there will be no governed ones.

When a person governs himself, then he doesn't—on this principle—govern himself; after all, he's only he himself and nobody else.

Then there will be no government, no state, but if there is a state, there will be governors and slaves.

This means only: when class domination ends, there will be no state in the present political sense of the word.

This dilemma has a simple solution in the Marxists' theory. By popular administration they [that is, Bakunin] understand administration of the people by means of a small number of representatives elected by the people.

The ass! This is democratic nonsense, political windbagery! Elections are a political form, even in the smallest Russian township and *artel*.<sup>2</sup> The character of elections depends not on these designations but on the economic foundations, on the economic ties of the voters amongst one another, and from the moment these functions cease being political (1) no governmental functions any longer exist; (2) the distribution of general functions takes on a business character and involves no domination; (3) elections completely lose their present political character.

The universal right of election of people's representatives and rulers of the state by the whole people—

—such a thing as a whole people in the present sense of the word is a fantasy—

this is the Marxists' final word, as it is of the democratic school, a lie which covers up a despotism of a *governing minority*, all the more dangerous in that it is an expression of a supposed people's will.

2. A cooperative association in agriculture or handicrafts.

Under collective ownership the so-called people's will disappears to make way for the real will of the cooperative.

So, in sum: government of the great majority of popular masses by a privileged minority. But this minority will be composed of workers, say the Marxists.

Where do they say that?

Of former workers, perhaps, but just as soon as they become representatives or rulers of the people *they will cease to be workers*.

No more than a factory-owner ceases to be a capitalist nowadays because he has become a member of the town council.

And they'll start looking down on all ordinary workers from the heights of the state: they will now represent not the people but themselves and their claims to govern the people. He who doubts this simply doesn't know human nature.

If Herr Bakunin knew even one thing about the situation of the manager of a workers' cooperative factory, all his hallucinations about domination would go to the devil. He would have to ask himself what form the functions of administration can assume on the basis of such a worker state, if it pleases him to call it that.

But these chosen ones will be ardent in their conviction, and learned socialists too. The words constantly being used in the works and speeches of the Lassalleans and Marxists . . .

—the words "*learned socialism*," never used before, and "*scientific socialism*," used only in opposition to utopian socialism, which tries to impose new hallucinations and illusions on the people instead of confining the scope of its knowledge to the study of the social movement of the people itself; see my book against Proudhon—

by themselves prove that the so-called people's state will be nothing other than the quite despotic administration of the masses of the people by a new and very non-numerous aristocracy of real and supposed learned ones. The people is not learned, so it will be entirely freed from the cares of governing, wholly incorporated into the governed herd. A fine liberation! The Marxists sense this [!] contradiction and, realizing that the regime of the learned [*quelle reverie!*], the hardest, most offensive, and most contemptuous in the world will in fact be a dictatorship in spite of all the democratic forms, console themselves with the thought that the dictatorship will be temporary and short-lived.

*Non, mon cher!* The *class domination* of the workers over the resisting strata of the old world must last until the economic foundations of the existence of classes are destroyed.

They say that their only care and aim will be to shape and elevate the people [café politicians!] both economically and politically to such a degree that all government will soon be superfluous and the state, having lost all political, i.e., dominating, character, will all by itself turn into a free organization of economic interests and communes. If their state is going to be really a people's one, why should it abolish itself, but if its abolition is necessary for the real liberation of the people, how can they dare to call it a people's state?


Leaving aside the attempt to ride on Liebknecht's *people's state*, which in general is nonsense aimed against the *Communist Manifesto* and so on, this only means: in view of the fact that during the time of struggle to destroy the old society the proletariat still acts on the foundation of the old society and therefore still gives its movement political forms that more or less belong to the old society, in this time of struggle it has not yet attained its final organization and uses means for its liberation which will fall away after the liberation; from this Herr Bakunin deduces that it's best for the proletariat not to undertake any action but to sit and await—the day of *general liquidation*, the Last Judgment.

By our polemic against them which, of course, appeared before my book against Proudhon and before the *Communist Manifesto*, even before Saint-Simon: what a fine *hysteron proteron*<sup>3</sup> we brought them to the *realization* that freedom or anarchy [Herr Bakunin has, quite simply, translated Proudhon's and Stirner's<sup>4</sup> anarchy into a savage Tartar dialect], i.e., the free organization of the worker masses from bottom to top [nonsense!], is the final aim of social development and that any state, not excluding their people's one, is a yoke giving rise to despotism on the one hand and slavery on the other. They say that such a state yoke, a dictatorship, is a necessary transitional means for attaining the most complete popular liberation. So, to liberate the masses of the people they first have to be enslaved. Our polemic rests and is founded on this contradiction. They maintain that only a dictatorship, their own naturally, can create the people's will; we answer: no dictatorship can have any other aim than to perpetuate itself, and it can only give rise to and instill

3. Reversal of the proper order. [R. T.]

4. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–65) and Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825)

were early French socialist thinkers. Max Stirner (1806–56) was a German anarchist philosopher. [R. T.]

slavery in the people that tolerates it; freedom can only be created by freedom [Bakunin's permanent *citoyen*], i.e., by general insurrection and the free organization of the masses from bottom to top. Whereas the politico-social theory of the anti-state socialists, or anarchists, leads them steadily and directly to the fullest break with all governments, with all forms of bourgeois politics, leaving no other outcome but social revolution 

and leaving of social revolution nothing but the phrase,

the contrary theory, the theory of the statist communists and scientific authority, just as steadily, under the pretext of political tactics, draws and entangles them into constant "deals" with governments and various bourgeois political parties, i.e., drives them straight into reaction.

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