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MARX'S LAST BATTLE

Bakunin and the First International

ALVIN W. GOULDNER

Introduction

Marx's encounter with militant artisans and competing intellectuals – his cycle of feuds with Weitling, Gottschalk, and Willich – were the prelude to the culminating conflict of his political life, the prolonged and bitter duel with Mikhail Bakunin. This climactic conflict was largely fought within the organizational framework of the International Workingman's Association (IWA), later known as the First International. Indeed, part of what was at stake was organizational power. The struggle was played out during the organization's lifespan which began in London in 1864 and ended, for all practical purposes, at the IWA's 1872 congress in Den Haag. At this legendary convention Marx succeeded in having his carefully mobilized delegates expel Bakunin and then, to doublelock the organization against the latter's growing influence, packed it off into exile in the United States.

This last protracted combat with Bakunin helps us better understand the earlier ones and to recognize – as Nicolaievsky and Maenchen-Helfen did long ago – that these were all part of a single series, a kind of recurrent bad dream in which Marx found himself inextricably enmeshed. Seen in its entirety, this sequence of conflicts specifies the micro-matrix from which Marxism emerged and clarifies how Marx's theory acquired certain of its defining accents and rigidities and developed its character. This final battle vividly magnifies many features of the previous encounters whose characteristics were at first difficult to see because they were sometimes fleeting and miniaturized. This recurrent (yet evolving) conflict casts light not only on originary Marxism but on later developments in Marxism. Some subsequent episodes may be seen to have been anticipated in embryo by the earlier conflicts. If these early political battles ended in 1872 with Bakunin's expulsion from the IWA, the war of which they were a part continued and, indeed,

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continues still. Lenin's later formulation of the theory of the "vanguard" is an extension of Marx's earlier ambivalence toward intellectuals; just as Mao's antecedents reach back through Bakunin to Weitling.

The Political and Organizational Setting

I shall begin with the briefest sketch of the IWA as the organizational setting for the conflict between Marx and Bakunin, following which I examine Bakunin's doctrines and how they related to Marx's, and what they indicate about the social matrix that helped shape Marxism.

From about 1850 to 1864, that is, from the demise of the Communist League, Marx effectively withdrew from mundane political responsibilities and especially from organizational involvements. For 14 years he confined himself to his work on political economy and *Capital*. His unexpected recall to active political service came when he was visited by Victor Le Lubez, a young French exile, who invited him to participate in a forthcoming meeting of a group that would become the International Workingman's Association. The preliminary organizing work had been completed well before Marx was approached and invited as a representative of the German workers. Marx promptly agreed but then cautiously noted that perhaps a real German worker ought to be added, asking that his friend, the tailor Johann Eccarius, also be included.

In short order, Marx became the chief theorist and grey eminence of the new IWA who, while writing its decisive documents and sitting continuously on its General Council, declined to accept the chairmanship in 1866, and, in fact, rarely attended its congresses.

Marx's new involvement was such a marked shift from his recent practice of insistent unaffiliation that he felt compelled to explain it to Engels. In a letter of 4 November 1864, he wrote that the "reason why I decided to depart from the otherwise inflexible rule to decline such invitations" was that the new organization had a foothold in the trade union movement and had real "forces" mobilized in it. In short, it was the promise of power that tempted Marx from his library studies. By 11 September 1867, Marx could write Engels that "in the next revolution, which is perhaps nearer than it appears, *we* (that is, you and I) will have this powerful engine *in our* hands. . . . We can be very well content."¹ Marx had at last made his rendezvous with the "working class," or what he was pleased enough to consider as such.

In fact, however, the English majority on the General Council represented the skilled trades – "bakers, printers and shoemakers."² Subsequently affil-

iated unions also included masons, pattern drawers, organ builders, cabinet makers, coach trimmers, bookbinders, plasterers, cigar makers, and trunk makers. In short, though the IWA spoke to and on behalf of the working class and proletariat, it was, once again, another organization largely created by artisans. Among the active members of the IWA's General Council were Hermann Jung, a Swiss-German watchmaker, George Odger, a shoemaker, Johann Eccarius and Friedrich Lessner, both tailors, Karl Pfaender, an artist, Eugene Dupont, a maker of musical instruments, and Heinrich Balleter, a tavernkeeper. "The French labour leaders who were to be important figures in the International," writes Paul Thomas, ". . . Tolain, Limousin, Fribourg, Varlin and Dupont were, respectively, a carver, a lace-works machinist, an engraver, a bookbinder, and a maker of musical instruments."³ Thomas endorses the view that the IWA's trade union following came from "backward" industries, defining "backward" as a dissociation from the modern factory technology, in short, defining it "economistically." A more accurate observation is that these artisans were then the most *politically advanced* sectors of the working class.

And Marx once again encountered the artisans' resistance to himself and other intellectuals. Thus in 1866, at the first congress of the IWA in Geneva, the engraver and French communist Henri Tolain demanded that only manual workers be seated as delegates, arguing that "we have to consider as opponents all members of the privileged classes, privileged whether by virtue of capital or a diploma . . . it is therefore necessary that its delegates belong neither to the liberal professions nor to the caste of capitalists."⁴ It was precisely because Marx had expected such exclusionary sentiments that he had kept a low profile, had asked that a "real" worker, Eccarius, be invited to the IWA's first public meeting, and indeed had refused to be a delegate to this first congress, while letting it be known that he opposed Tolain's motion. Despite Marx's opposition to it, however, Tolain's motion was defeated only by a vote of 25 to 20. A shift of three votes to Tolain would have carried his exclusionary resolution. Radical artisans' exclusionary impulse against intellectuals did not cease with the death of the Communist League but reappeared in the IWA.

The International Workingman's Association was also where Marx and Engels made clear that they were fighting a struggle "on two fronts"; once more, they fought with competing intellectuals, against whom they developed their own exclusionary tactics in the name of the "self-emancipation of the proletariat." The IWA's component sections were to consist of workers primarily, while "sections exclusively or principally composed of members not belonging to the working class" were to be denied admittance. Hence

sections consisting primarily of students were excluded, despite the rule declaring that “everybody who acknowledges and defends the principles of the I.W.A. is eligible to become a member.”⁵ Marx’s determination to exclude competing intellectuals is clear from his letter to Engels of 10 December 1864, where he explains how, in order to exclude Louis Blanc from the IWA, he had eliminated the category of “honorary member.”⁶

Although much is made of Bakunin’s pro-peasant ideology, not to speak of his customary Russian peasant’s blouse, Bakunin was himself a revolutionary *intellectual*. What marks him off from Marx’s other foes like Weitling, Gottschalk, or Willich is precisely that he wrote extensively and elaborated his own theoretical critique of the social world and of revolution at great length. What made Marx so implacably opposed to him, however, was not simply that Bakunin was his intellectual competitor for revolutionary leadership in the IWA, but that Bakunin’s doctrine provided a theoretical grounding for the very *anti*-intellectual exclusionary policies so prevalent among the militant artisans. In short, Marx’s fury against Bakunin arose in part because *both* the political competitors Marx opposed in his battle on “two fronts” were combined in and personified by Bakunin.⁷

The Sources of Conflict

In such a confrontation between two great polemicists, it is easy to overemphasize their differences and to gloss over their similarities and convergences. Paul Thomas is thus quite right to insist that we note the things on which Marx and Bakunin agreed: “Both believed in the primacy of the economic ‘base’ over the political ‘superstructure’; both wished to overthrow capitalism and were engaged upon working as active revolutionists to this end; both were socialists and collectivists, opposed to bourgeois individualism; both were bitterly at odds with religion; and both had a veneration for natural science.”⁸ One could add that both began as Hegelians.

One’s evenhandedness thus displayed, there is still the task of accounting for the conflict. In what follows, I shall focus on their doctrinal differences and, therefore, run the risk of being misunderstood. For I do not at all mean that this (or any) conflict is solely attributable to prior differences of theory and ideology. My own view is considerably more complex: that the conflict was furthered partly by their doctrinal differences but, in their turn, these are also partly due to the conflict. As emphasized in the previous discussion, each party is certainly struggling for power for himself and his group. Yet this struggle is not generated only by the comforts, privileges, or powers to be achieved by victory but is, in part, pursued also because each wants to be in a

position to implement his *ideas*. Power is sought, in part, so that the “right ideas” – commonly assumed to be one’s own – may acquire the influence they are thought rightly to deserve. The passionate protagonist believes he and his enemy are profoundly different. He sees *himself* as seeking to defend intelligent and decent principles, and regards his *adversary* either as misguided by erroneous principles or as unscrupulously using principles as a disguise for selfish interests. From my own standpoint, however, it seems more prudent (and more parsimonious) to assume that both protagonists are alike, each pursuing both material and spiritual interests. What they take to be their principles, doctrines, ideologies, or theories are, in some part, anterior convictions that genuinely generate the contention; but in some part they are also *post bellum* rationalizations of an involvement fueled by other forces.

Apart from resting on a mistaken rationalist view of the relation between human conduct and theory, any account of the conflict between Marx and Bakunin that reduces it to their doctrinal differences overlooks the distinctive character of the dispute and how it differs from those earlier ones in which Marx was involved. Marx’s previous adversaries had been German or French. That Bakunin was a Russian (and Marx a German) made a difference. Each was steeped in his own different culture and ethnocentrism that were an abiding source of mutual irritation and suspicion. Marx *thought* of Bakunin as a Russian and Bakunin *thought* of Marx as a German, and neither thought the other better for it. Marx saw Bakunin’s efforts as the forward edge of a kind of Russian bid to “take over” the working-class movement. Bakunin saw in Marx and his socialism a typically German worship of officialdom and authority.

“On the Pan-German Banner is written,” declared Bakunin, “Retention and strengthening of the State at any cost”; indeed, Bakunin wrote a book titled, “The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution.” Marx returned the favor, declaring the Russians a backward nation and the keystone of European reaction. As Nicolaievsky and Maenchen-Helfen note, “Marx was pro-Polish because he was anti-Russian.”⁹ Moreover, “ever since 1848, he had been preaching war with Russia.”¹⁰ Bakunin, however,

regarded Germany and not Russia as the chief bulwark of reaction; and Bakunin did not just mean contemporary Germany; in his eyes Germany had been the hub and pattern of despotism for centuries. . . . Bakunin liked quoting the saying of Ludwig Borne that ‘other people are often slaves, but we Germans always lackeys.’¹¹

“If the Prussians win,” wrote Marx to Engels at the beginning of the Franco-Prussian War, “the centralisation of the state power will be useful for the centralisation of the working class”¹² – again confirming Bakunin’s worst

suspicious about Marx's policies concerning both the state and Germany. Marx, in turn, contemptuously denounced Bakunin's followers as *Kosaken*. The theoretical differences between Marx and Bakunin, then, are in some part grounded in their national differences, Bakunin being convinced of the *power* and revolutionary potential of the peasantry, Marx viewing them as a petty bourgeoisie with no revolutionary promise and doomed for the historical dustbin.

For those capable of reading the signs, it was plain that social revolution would not spell the end of national rivalries. That the conflict between Marx and Bakunin was embedded in virulent national antipathies, indicates, in one part, that their duel was not merely grounded in *doctrinal* differences and, in another, how it differed – despite the continuities – from Marx's earlier conflicts with Weitling, Willich, and Gottschalk (or even with Proudhon). There were, of course, other important differences between these earlier conflicts and the later ones. Bakunin, for example, differed importantly from Marx's earlier artisan foes in that he was the leader of a viable and growing movement of international scope. More than that, though Marx's previous artisan adversaries had all been persons of substance, Bakunin overshadowed them as revolutionary, theorist, and person. He was an outsized charismatic figure, the veritable embodiment of the romantic revolutionary hero, a giant of a man whose passionate, multilingual oratory could launch audiences to their feet in a paroxysm of thunderous enthusiasm.

In short, it was not an ordinary foe but a veritable nemesis that Marx began to feel was stalking him. To make matters worse, Bakunin's credentials, as theorist and as practical revolutionary, were substantial. Seen from an academic standpoint, however, Bakunin's written work would not look like "real" theory to Marx who – in an egregiously mistaken judgement – denounced him, like he had Weitling, as a theoretical ignoramus. Thus Marx wrote Paul LaFargue on 19 April 1870 that Bakunin was an "ass" who could not understand that every class movement is always a political movement. Again, on 23 November 1871, Marx wrote Bolte from London that as "for Mr. Bakunin the theory (the assembled rubbish mishmash he has scraped together from Proudhon, Saint Simon, et al.) is a secondary affair – merely a means to his self-assertion. If he is a nonentity as a theorist he is in his element as an intriguer."¹³

For his part, however, Bakunin was considerably more careful and decent in giving Marx his full due, admitting that he had learned much from him. Indeed, Bakunin wrote Marx, "You see . . . , my dear friend, that I am your disciple, and I am proud of it."¹⁴ In a letter of October 1869 to Herzen,

Bakunin lauded Marx's "enormous services to the cause of socialism, which he has served ably, energetically and faithfully throughout the twenty-five years I have known him, and in which he has undoubtedly out stripped us all."¹⁵ Bakunin also modestly acknowledged that "as far as learning is concerned, Marx was, and still is, incomparably more advanced than I. . . . I greatly respected him for his learning and for his passionate devotion to the cause of the proletariat."¹⁶ Bakunin had a sense of justice and generosity of spirit toward his adversaries; in this, if in nothing else, he easily vanquished Marx.

Doctrinal Differences

As Paul Thomas relates, both Marx and Bakunin believed in the primacy of the economic "base" (Thomas uses quotation marks, apparently queasy about imputing this crude distinction to Marx). Marx certainly did not think so, however; he accused Bakunin of being a political alchemist who fantasized he could produce the gold of revolution out of any social base or condition without realizing that a specific economic development was requisite for socialism. Far from agreeing that Bakunin accepted the primacy of the economic, Marx held that his adversary substituted "will" for a knowledge of economics and a reliance upon natural economic development. At the same time, when Bakunin affirmed the power of the "economic" he did not mean quite the same thing that Marx did. Looked at closely, it is often difficult, here as elsewhere, to be sure whether their theoretical differences produced their contention, or their contention shaped and sharpened their differences in theory.

Both wished to overthrow capitalism, says Thomas. Perhaps, though it would be more accurate to say Marx wanted to eliminate the bourgeoisie and *proprietary* capitalism. As for Bakunin, he clearly did not limit his target to what Marx called the bourgeoisie but aimed his revolution at the *state*, as well as at the proprietary class. Bakunin was quite emphatic in arguing that moneyed proprietors could be eliminated but that remaining differences in education and knowledge would soon produce differences in power and reproduce class privileges. If both were, as Thomas says, socialists and collectivists, they had very different conceptions of how and when the new society could be created and how it would be organized once established. Marx's position, as Bakunin elaborated at length, entailed an imposed centralization culminating in the state's ownership of the means of production, while his own was a voluntarily federated set of groups.

The Comtean Connection

Finally, if both had a “veneration for natural science,” Marx saw science as crucial to alleviating scarcity, thus making socialism possible. Bakunin, however, saw natural science as providing the cultural base for a “new class” of intelligentsia who would corrupt socialism, make themselves a new elite, and impose their rule on the majority. Indeed, Bakunin’s view of natural science was greatly influenced by Auguste Comte, who Marx thought was rubbish. To view Bakunin and Marx simply as converging or diverging theorists overlooks that Bakunin was a *post*-Marxist. Bakuninism was a Hegelian synthesis of Marxism, Positivism, and Anarchism, each doctrine altered as it was joined with the others.

Although usually termed an “anarchist,” Bakunin often preferred to call himself an anti-authoritarian communist; and, unlike Proudhon who was antirevolutionary and individualistic, Bakunin was a collectivist and passionately revolutionary. He is thus linked more closely to Weitling (who had taken Bakunin to his first workers’ meeting), Gottschalk, and Willich. In a Comtean vein, Bakunin had once remarked of Proudhon that “his great misfortune was that he had never studied the natural sciences or appropriated their method.”¹⁷ Bakunin, then, is not to be understood simply by labelling him an “anarchist,” and reducing his doctrine to that single system. Bakunin interpreted Comtean Positivism as having in part an emancipatory role because it opposed conventional religion and ancient metaphysics. Bakunin thus spoke of Positivism as “the heir and at the same time the absolute negation of religion and metaphysics, this philosophy, which had been anticipated and prepared a long time ago by the noblest minds, was first conceived by the great French thinker, August Comte, who boldly and skillfully traced its original outline.”¹⁸ In a similar Comtean vein, Bakunin also lauded Positivism which, “having dethroned in the minds of men the religious fable and the day-dreams of metaphysics, enables us to catch a glimpse of scientific education in the future. It will have as its basis the study of Nature and sociology as its completion.”¹⁹ Bakunin viewed Comte as a materialist precisely because he was opposed to metaphysics, regarding metaphysicians as those who spiritualized matter and derived it from Spirit, adding that “August Comte, on the contrary, materialized the spirit, grounding it solely in matter.”²⁰ Bakunin was also one of the first to understand the convergences between Comte’s change-oriented evolutionism and Hegel’s philosophy.

There are at least three other important convergences between Bakunin and Comte. One is that Bakunin, like the Comteans, had a great passion for

“organization,” and was continually proliferating revolutionary groups. “Organization,” of the new economy and of the new Europe, was a central dedication of the Comteans and the Saint-Simonians, of whom they were essentially a variant. “Organizing” or pulling things together was regarded by Saint-Simon, the father of Positivism, as a central device of social reformation.

Like Comte, Bakunin stressed the importance of voluntary as against imposed social organization. Indeed, Comte’s emphasis on science and knowledge rested partly on the expectation that science – producing “positive” (in the sense of *certain*) knowledge – would freely win the consent of persons who, then voluntarily sharing the same science-sanctioned beliefs, develop a common culture that would spontaneously yield consensus and social solidarity. Bakunin’s libertarian insistence on voluntary rather than imposed organization and change is one source of his violent antipathy to the state and his preference for a decentralized society federated by mutual choice. (The convergence between this Bakunian federalism and the Comtean preference may be seen in the former’s convergence with Emile Durkheim’s version of corporative syndicalism, which also had a clear Comtean heritage.) Finally, Comte’s Positivism provided Bakunin with a clear view of the emerging importance of knowledge and science as the basis of modern social organization and production, as well as of a voluntary social consensus.

Bakunin rejected the Comtean reliance upon men of science, however, seeing this as a new priestly elitism, and thus appropriated a positivist appreciation of science only selectively and critically. He extended this to a critique of Marxism as the ideology, not of the working class, but of a new class of scientific intelligentsia. Marx’s focus on the revolution as an expropriation of the bourgeoisie is thus seen as necessary but insufficient, for there remain those forms of domination grounded in educational privilege. Clearly, then, Bakunin’s view of Proudhonian Anarchism and Marxist socialism was shaped by his critical appropriation of Comtean Positivism, while his acceptance of Marxist socialism and revolution gave him critical distance from both Comteanism and Proudhon’s anarchism. Bakunin wrought a distinctively new synthesis whose originality still seems not to have won the appreciation it deserves. Indeed, my own conclusion is that, on three of the main points where Marx and Bakunin differed – the oppressive role of the state even under socialism, the elitist role of the new class, and whether it was Germany or Russia that would be the most reactionary force later in nineteenth century Europe – it was Bakunin’s analysis that was more nearly correct.

Bakunin on Power

To elaborate on some of the differences between Bakunin and Marx, Bakunin held that Marx was a political utopian, not because he did not see the need to mobilize “political” power, but because he did not see the *dangers* of doing so. Bakunin accused Marx of ignoring the capacity of political power to become a distinct and separate basis of class privilege. Bakunin’s conception of emancipation, then, was not simply the removal of the proprietary classes or of inequities based on their ownership of the economy, but, *additionally*, Bakunin opposed all forms of domination, including those grounded in the political system and on educational differences.²¹

Bakunin’s views resonate the Hegelian dialectic and especially the master-bondsman struggle, the Marxist theory of a struggle between owning and laboring classes, the Darwinian struggle for existence, and a Nietzschean conception of human nature centered on the will to power: “All men possess a natural instinct for power,” declares Bakunin, that

has its origin in the basic law of life enjoining every individual to wage a ceaseless struggle in order to insure his existence or assert his rights. . . . If there is a devil in history, it is this power principle . . . this cursed element is to be found, as a natural instinct, in every man, the best of them not excepted. Everyone carries within himself the germs of this lust for power. . . .²²

In Bakunin’s view, power contaminates everyone, even (he says with acute reflexivity) “sincere socialists and revolutionaries.” No one can be trusted with it.

The point, then, is that power itself is one of the things people seek; that power is desired in and of itself, although it has the most intimate connection with wealth, providing a basis for its accumulation. Power and wealth thus have a mutual connection, each providing a means and a motive for seeking the other:

Political power and wealth are inseparable. Those who have power have the means to gain wealth and must center all their efforts upon acquiring it, for without it they will not be able to retain their power. Those who are wealthy must become strong, for, lacking power, they run the risk of being deprived of their wealth.²³

Now this differs importantly from Marx, whose “historical materialism” i.e., the paradigm of analysis he had crystallized by 1848 – is a form of universal synchronic economic determinism. In this, the mode of production, including the forces and relations of production and the contradictions between them, determine the superstructure of ideological and political systems – at least, as Engels added, in the “last instance.”

In Marx's view, then, power and the political are not governing but governed. Having committed himself to stressing the ultimate primacy of the mode of production, and to a conception in which the state and the political are determined by this, Marx's *articulate theory* – as distinct from the tacit, background assumptions he employs in his inner organizational struggles and politics – diminishes the significance of power and even of politics. Having located them in the social superstructure, Marx now theoretizes power as a means to other ends, rather than as also an end in itself. Bakunin, however, accents the ways in which power can be *both*. Fully accepting the critical importance of the economic, Bakunin nonetheless views Marxism as a kind of *vulgar* materialism that had missed the manner in which wealth itself depends on power, as much as power depends on wealth. For Bakunin, the human species and its revolutionary project are not simply constrained by necessity but are also bent on procuring human "rights" and achieving "justice."

Although regarding power with acute distrust, Bakunin does not reject all authority: "When it is a question of houses, canals, or railroads, I consult the authority of the architect or engineer. For each special type of knowledge I apply to the scientist of that respective branch." Here, as in Positivism, it is science that has authority. Yet perhaps precisely because power runs the risk of corrupting anyone possessing it, they must serve only as consultants whose advice can be compared and appraised but must never be imposed. "I listen to them freely, and with all the respect merited by their intelligence, their character, and their knowledge," says Bakunin, carefully

reserving my indisputable right of criticism and control. I do not content myself with consulting a single specialist who is an authority in a given field; I might consult several of them. I compare their opinions and I choose the one which seems to me the soundest.²⁴

For Bakunin, possession of the means of production is only one path to power and is itself dependent on "domination, which is the necessary condition of and guarantee for the possession and enjoyment of wealth."²⁵ In Bakunin's view, the struggle against the main concentration of power in society, the state, was *no less necessary* than the struggle against capital. Engels, however, puts the matter somewhat differently, arguing that for Bakunin the state was the main enemy, as if Bakunin had not held that capital, too, was an enemy and that its expropriation was a necessary even if not sufficient condition for the social revolution. Acknowledging that Bakunin's theory was really unique, and not just a repetition of earlier anarchism, Engels remarks that "Bakunin had a peculiar theory of his own, a medley of Proudhonism and communism."²⁶ Engels then goes on to state that the chief point of Bakunin's theory "is, in the first place, that he does not

regard capital – and therefore the class antagonism between capitalists and wage-workers which has arisen through social development – but the state as the main evil to be abolished.” Half true, this formulation still distorts Bakunin’s argument, which also held capital to be an evil necessary to abolish. “[O]ur view,” adds Engels, is “that the state power is nothing more [*sic*] than the organisation with which the ruling classes – landlords and capitalists – have provided themselves in order to protect their social privileges. Bakunin maintains that it is the state which has created capital, therefore, that the capitalist has his capital *only by the grace of the state.*” As noted, however, Bakunin’s position was much more complex and sophisticated, seeing power and wealth each as allowing and constraining its possessor to acquire the other, so that the ruling economic classes were not simply dependent on the state but also required its support and actively provided the state with resources. The state’s power, while partly and importantly independent, was thus also partly derivative from the ruling class’s support. Engels’s partisanship led him to accuse Bakunin of maintaining that the “state is the chief evil,” as if Bakunin had ignored its dependence on and support by capital. What Bakunin said was that property depended on the state, that the “juridical idea of property . . . could arise only in the state.”²⁷ For Bakunin, capital and property meant the right to something for nothing, the “right, guaranteed by the State, to live without working”²⁸ which was totally incompatible with a society where equality and fraternity were possible.²⁹ Thus Bakunin asked, “Can the emancipation of labor signify any other thing but its deliverance from the yoke of property and capital? . . . so long as property and capital exist . . . the worker will be the slave and the bourgeois the master.”³⁰

Fearing that Marx’s solution simply meant the expropriation of capital and its transfer to the state holding the new monopoly of power, while the bureaucracy became the new ruling class, Bakunin did not want the state to control the economy, which should pass to small, local communes and groups. Bakunin also believed that one way to undermine the inequality based on the power of capital was to abolish the right of inheritance, which measure Bakunin did not separate from revolution but saw as made possible by it. Since the state was the ultimate guarantor of inheritance, the social revolution ought to aim at the destruction of the state. Engels, however, read Bakunin as saying that above all it is the “state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes of itself.”

The State and Revolution

The fundamental pivot of their difference, however, was whether the state

could be relied on as the heir of the bourgeoisie to take over the means of production and administer them in the interest of the majority, as Marx and Engels supposed in speaking of the new socialist state and the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” or whether the state would administer its new property primarily to enhance its own interests and that of its bureaucracy, as Bakunin feared. The difficulty with Bakunin’s conception was that, in its fear of politics and the corrupting influence of power, which led it to policies of decentralized voluntary federation, the revolution might never mobilize power enough to succeed or, if it did, to hold onto what it had won. The difficulty with Marx’s conception was, indeed, precisely as Bakunin had foreseen, that with a socialism where the centralized state owned the means of production, a new privileged class of bureaucrats and educated would arise, the state would grow more powerful than ever, and the mass of society would simply have exchanged one master for another. Thus Bakunin could only think that Engels’s formulation – “Do away with capital . . . and the state will fall of itself” – was a fairy tale of which German intellectuals were mindlessly fond.

For Engels, the “abolition of capital *is* precisely the social revolution,” whereas for Bakunin it was only one necessary condition which could not even begin so long as the state, on which capital depended, was not first destroyed. Though Marx and Engels also came to seek a destruction of the old state, as necessary for the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” they objected to Bakunin’s hostility (as Engels put it) “to any state.” They wanted a new workers’ state, first, to terrorize the bourgeoisie and smash the counterrevolution and, second, to administer the capital expropriated from the bourgeoisie. Above all, they wanted to invest, even if only temporarily, all power, military *and* economic, in the state, a prospect which horrified Bakunin, who thought that such a state would never belong to the workers. “What does it mean,” asked Bakunin incredulously in 1873, “for the proletariat to be ‘organized as the ruling class,’”³¹ in the *Communist Manifesto*’s view of successful proletarian revolution. “Can it really be,” he continued, “that the entire proletariat will stand at the head of the [new socialist] administration?”³²

In his marginal notes (1874–75) on Bakunin’s *Statehood and Anarchy* (where the above questions were asked), Marx replied, “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 differences of function stemming from it?”³³ To which a Robert Michels would later reply, in a manner congenial to Bakunin, Yes, the trade union executive committee is a self-perpetuating elite, a small oligarchy who looks

after its own interests first of all and only after the workers' interests when it must.³⁴

If there is a state, said Bakunin, "there will be governors and slaves . . . government of the great majority of popular masses by a privileged minority . . . former workers perhaps, but just as soon as they become representatives of rulers of the people *they will cease to be workers*."³⁵ To which Marx's marginal notes reply, "No more than a factory-owner ceases to be a capitalist nowadays because he has become a member of the town council."³⁶ If by "capitalist" here Marx simply means those, like shareholders, owning the means of production but not engaged in managing them actively, he is correct; but the point, as Bakunin would reply, is that capitalists have a right to something for nothing. They are thus, on the one hand, able to participate in politics and, even if spending no time at the enterprise, continue to derive incomes from it. This, however, is not true of workers who left their jobs for politics. Indeed, proprietors are often constrained to forgo political involvement precisely insofar as their enterprises demand their constant attention. When capitalists can participate in full-time politics, they continue to receive a share of the profits of firms which are then largely directed by professional managers. They do this, however, at the cost of surrendering effective management of the enterprise to others. In short, capitalists in active politics may remain owners, but not managers: the property remains "theirs" in an elusive sense, a share of it being actually accessible to them only when it is distributed or liquidated, and they increasingly lose *possession* of it.

Bakunin's conception of the Marxist state he saw waiting in the wings of history was disturbing but correct:

. . . 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 is 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. . . . They [the Marxists] 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 slavery in the people that tolerates it.³⁷

Once again, history seems to have been on Bakunin's, not Marx's, side, this passage accurately portraying the states of Eastern Europe today which arose under the provenance of Marxism.

Enter the New Class

Bakunin saw the transition from capitalism to Marxist socialism as a circulation of elites in which the old bourgeoisie would be supplanted not by a new democracy but by a new elite of the educated, those with cultural capital, a New Class. The revolutionary dictatorship envisaged by the Marxists, said Bakunin, means the “ruling of the majority by the minority in the name of the alleged superior intelligence of the second.”³⁸ The new society will be “nothing else but despotic rule over the toiling masses by a new, numerically small aristocracy of sham or genuine scientists,”³⁹ said Bakunin, not that even genuine scientists had any right to impose their rule. The Marxists will then divide the society into “two armies – industrial and agricultural armies under the direct command of the state engineers who will constitute the new privileged scientific-political class.”⁴⁰ The kind of state that Marx envisaged, which controls and plans the entire economy, requires vast knowledge.

It will be the reign of the scientific mind, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant and contemptuous of all regimes. There will be a new class, a new hierarchy of real and bogus learning, and the world will be divided into a dominant, science-based minority and a vast ignorant majority. And let the masses beware.⁴¹

Since almost any socially reproduced inequality could constitute the basis for a system in which one class exploits and dominates the other, Bakunin considered knowledge as a form of human capital acquired largely through education. Those who possessed it would constitute a New Class, the elite in the kind of society that Marxist socialism was seen as preparing. “Is it not evident,” asks Bakunin,

that out of two persons endowed with a nearly equal natural intelligence, the one who knows more, whose mind has been broadened to a greater extent by science and who, having a better understanding of the interlinking system of natural and social facts . . . will grasp more readily and in a broader light the character of the environment in which he finds himself . . . that in practice he will prove the cleverer and the stronger of the two? It stands to reason that the one who knows more will dominate the one who knows less. If there were to begin with, only this difference in upbringing and education between the two classes, it would in itself produce in a comparatively short time all the other differences and human society . . . would be split up again into a mass of slaves and a small number of masters. . . . So long as there exists two or several degrees of education for various layers of society, there inevitably will be classes in existence. . . .⁴²

Bakunin thus saw class privilege deriving as much from cultural capital acquired through education as from moneyed capital: “What is education, if not mental capital, the sum of the mental labor of all past generations?”⁴³ As Henri Tolain had also said, those having the capital of the “diploma” ought to be excluded no less than the moneyed capitalists as delegates from the congresses of the IWA.

If class is generated by knowledge differences reproduced by institutionalized education, then clearly the mere expropriation of capital would not suffice to usher in a classless society. Nor could the revolution be a revolution against capital, as Engels described the Marxist position, or a revolution against the state, as Engels described Bakunin's position. A truly equitable, classless society required a "cultural revolution," to use a term employed only much later by Mao, but intimately connected with the logic of Bakunin's position. Thus, the revolution would have to be directed against not only the bourgeoisie or the state, but educational institutions and even science itself. It had to be, as Bakunin put it, a "liquidation" of bourgeois culture and civilization itself, not simply a destruction of the state apparatus or the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. A new integral education was necessary for a new moral and rational man. And new controls over the educated and the scientist were also urgently necessary if class privileges were not soon to creep back in. What was needed, in short, was a cultural revolution. (Whereas Bakunin's suspicion of science and scientists was unrelenting, he once assured Wagner that he had no animus against music, or, at least, would not burn *his* music.) Though Bakunin rejected the destruction of science⁴⁴ as a "high crime against humanity," he insisted that the scientific intelligentsia, like the priesthood, "form a separate caste" and that "it would be better for those masses to dispense with science altogether than to allow themselves to be governed with men of science."⁴⁵

So if Bakunin denied that he sought to destroy science, he did not shrink from a kind of moratorium or stasis of science, as necessary for his cultural revolution. "It is possible and even probable," he admitted, "that in the more or less prolonged transitional period, which will naturally follow in the wake of the great social crisis, sciences of the highest standing will sink to a level much below that held by each at present. . . ." Nor was this "eclipse of the higher sciences . . . a great misfortune [for] what science loses in sublime loftiness, will it not regain by broadening its base . . . there will be no demi-gods, but neither will there be slaves."⁴⁶

Bakunin's revolution thus was not to be limited to a war against the state and bourgeois domination of the economy, but involved the most radical rupture with bourgeois culture. To this, there is absolutely no counterpart in Marx and Engels. However much they detested other intellectuals as "lackeys" and ideologues of the bourgeoisie – especially if they were competitors seeking influence among the working class – Marx and Engels commonly thought of socialism as carrying forward and embodying the best of bourgeois culture. Bakunin, however, saw culture and education as a grounding of privilege and domination and the nucleus of an exploitative new class, so that domination

could not be extirpated from society except by the literal levelling of culture itself – at least for a long period of transition.

Marx, by contrast, took delight in the highest achievements of European culture. He read two or three novels at a time, absorbed his Aeschylus in the original Greek, was devoted to Shakespeare, enjoyed Balzac and Cervantes, took refuge in algebra, and wrote an infinitesimal calculus. I am, as he wrote his daughter Laura in 1868, “a machine condemned to devour books.” A product of the German University system, a member of the “Doctor’s Club,” and himself a Doctor, Marx, when he thundered against the intelligentsia, commonly complained about their intellectual *incompetence*. Rather than seeking a levelling of any kind, he demanded superior levels of intellectual performance from them. He complained, as Babeuf had, about the high value placed on intellectuals’ work but, in fact, held forth the prospect of a society in which rewards would be distributed (at least for awhile) on a meritocratic principle that would favor the learned: From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.

Class and Revolution

While Marx insisted on the development of certain social requisites before socialism could be achieved, most especially the heightening of productivity through modern industrial technology, Bakunin did not believe that the revolution needed to wait for this maturation of industrial power. Marx was a modernizer who relied on technology and science to overcome scarcity so that history could take its next step forward to socialism. Bakunin, however, never saw large-scale industry as emancipatory. To the contrary – and in the anarchist tradition being congenial to artisans – he wanted small-scale groups for work and residential purposes, federated with one another on the basis of voluntary mutual collaboration, rather than being hierarchically organized in large-scale units that were centrally planned and administered. Marx relied on bourgeois societies, then (unwittingly) to lay the foundations of socialism, where Bakunin saw traditionalist societies as having a greater potential for revolution and socialism. Correspondingly, Marx accented the revolutionary role of the urban proletariat and tended to deprecate the peasantry, while Bakunin, although *accepting* the vanguard role of the proletariat in the revolution, felt that the peasantry, too, approached correctly, also had great potential for revolution.

A popular stereotype of Bakunin – more distorted by its decisive omissions than in what it says – mistakenly emphasizes that Bakunin like Weitling relied heavily on brigands and the *Lumpen proletariat* for his revolutionary cadres, on the peasantry, and on student intellectuals. In this familiar vein,

Paul Thomas writes that Bakunin was attracted to the peasantry as a revolutionary force because of their propensity “to unorganized, indiscriminate violence.” Thomas also cites Bakunin’s florid encomiums to brigandage where, in a path-breaking work that Eric Hobsbawm would later elaborate as a theory of “primitive rebellion,” Bakunin held that brigands “represented the desperate protest of the people against the horrible social order of the time. . . . The brigand in Russia, is the true and only revolutionary.” “Bakunin believed that the socially outcast, the marginal, the outlaw and the criminal,” says Thomas, “shared with the oppressed an exemplary victimization and an exemplary desire for vengeance and propensity for violence,” also adding that Bakunin “assigned a major role to disaffected students and marginal intellectuals.”⁴⁸

The truth is substantially different, not because Bakunin was unattracted to brigands, students, or the peasantry, but because Thomas fails to see that Bakunin was more of a Marxist than he, Thomas, intimates. Not restricting the revolution to those societies in which an advanced industrialism had produced a massive urban proletariat, Bakunin observed sensibly that the class composition of the revolution was bound to differ in industrially advanced Western Europe and in Eastern Europe where the economy was still largely agricultural. “The initiative in the new movement will belong to the people . . . in Western Europe, to the city and factory workers – in Russia, Poland, and most of the slavic countries, to the peasants.”⁴⁹ Yet even in Eastern Europe, insisted Bakunin, “It is absolutely necessary that the initiative in this revolutionary movement be taken by the city workers, for it is the latter who combine in themselves the instincts, ideas, and conscious will of the Social Revolution.”⁵⁰ Even in Eastern Europe, then, both peasantry and proletariat were necessary for the social revolution. “An uprising by the proletariat alone would not be enough,” and this would send the peasantry either into open opposition or passive resistance, and they would then “strangle the revolution in the cities.”⁵¹ This foreshadowed what the Russian peasantry indeed attempted after the October Revolution and to which Stalinism was a brutal and bloody response. “Only a wide-sweeping revolution embracing both the city workers and peasants would be sufficiently strong to overthrow and break the organised power of the state, backed as it is by all the resources of the possessing classes.”⁵²

This is a far cry, then, from the Marxist stereotype of Bakunin-the-anarchist who relied exclusively on the backward peasantry and ignored the proletariat. Bakunin, moreover, took realistic note of the mutual suspicions between urban proletariat and rural peasantry, believing that, in Eastern Europe at any rate, successful revolution required that these be faced and dealt with

appropriately. “[T]he peasants will join the cause of the city workers,” Bakunin held, “as soon as they become convinced that the latter do not intend to impose upon them their will or some political and social order invented by the cities.” He adds that they will join the revolution “as soon as they are assured that the industrial workers will not take their lands away. It is altogether necessary at the present moment that the city workers really renounce this claim.”⁵³ In a thrust at the Marxists, Bakunin declared that

To the Communists, or Social Democrats of Germany, the peasantry, any peasantry stands for reaction And in this hatred for the peasant rebellion, The Marxists join in touching unanimity all the layers and parties of the bourgeois society of Germany.⁵⁴

Throughout their lives, Marx and Engels had steadfastly adhered to just such views. Condemning peasantry as a reactionary “sack of potatoes,” they planned to nationalize all land and to turn it over to the state which would then mobilize large agricultural armies in the countryside. “The proletariat will use its political supremacy,” declared the *Communist Manifesto*,

to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State . . . in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by despotic inroads on the rights of property . . . in the most advanced countries the following will be pretty generally applicable: 1. Abolition of property in land Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.⁵⁵

Since Marx and Engels never repudiated their policy of nationalizing the peasants’ land but reiterated it, their policy for worker-peasant alliance, under the former’s leadership, could never effectively be achieved.

For Bakunin, it seemed self-evident that the revolution, even in Eastern Europe, required the unity of peasantry and city workers because of the latter’s more advanced consciousness. At the same time, however, this very superiority might induce city workers to impose themselves arrogantly on the countryside. The socialism of the city worker not only has an elitist potential but is, suggests Bakunin, an effete and decadent impulse in comparison with villagers’ natural, even savage impulse toward rebellion:

The more enlightened, more civilized Socialism of the city workers, a socialism which because of this very circumstance takes on a somewhat bourgeois character, slights and scorns the primitive natural and much more savage Socialism of the villages, and since it distrusts the latter, it always tries to restrain it, to oppress it in the name of equality and freedom, which naturally makes for dense ignorance about city Socialism on the part of the peasants, who confound this socialism with the bourgeois spirit of the cities. The peasant regards the industrial workers as a bourgeois lackey or as a soldier of the bourgeoisie . . . so much that he himself becomes the servant and blind tool of reaction.⁵⁶

Bakunin thus regarded Marx’s socialism as a bourgeois socialism – not because Marxism sought to secure the future of the bourgeois economy or its

bourgeois proprietors, but because Bakunin felt Marxism was imbued with bourgeois *sentiments* and *culture* and expressed the elite ambitions of a New Class of intellectuals that had grown out of the old moneyed capitalists. To grasp what Bakunin regarded as Marx's bourgeois sentiments one need only recall the florid encomiums to progressive capitalism expressed in the *Communist Manifesto* and compare them with Bakunin's own somber judgement of the bourgeoisie. Despite its final condemnation of the bourgeoisie, when it reached (and for *having* reached) its moribund state, *The Manifesto's* praise of the bourgeoisie's emancipatory historical role is barely less than a celebration:

The bourgeoisie . . . has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades . . . The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground – what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?⁵⁷

In contrast to Marx's memorialization of the bourgeoisie for having revolutionized productivity, Bakunin's more tempered appreciation praised them for having engendered *revolutions* against the crown, the aristocracy, and the church, and for having once been the embodiment of hope for fraternity and union – at least before 1794. In those days of its vigor, the bourgeoisie are praised for having supported “the great principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, reason, and human justice.”⁵⁸ Such technical progress as the bourgeoisie brought, says Bakunin, briefly benefitted “only the privileged classes and the power of the states . . . they have never benefitted the masses of the people.”⁵⁹

While Bakunin had no Marxist contempt either for brigands as a *Lumpen proletariat* or a suspicion of peasants as a doomed and reactionary class, Bakunin's position is *convergent* with Marx's. He views the revolution as grounded in an alliance between both the peasantry and the proletariat, the latter providing the more “conscious” element and the former, having retained their folk integrity, are the more natural, instinctive and necessarily “savage” in their rebellion. Far from ignoring the proletariat, then, or subordinating them to the peasantry in the revolution, Bakunin insisted that “in order that the peasants rise in rebellion, it is absolutely necessary that the city workers take upon themselves the initiative in this revolutionary movement,”⁶⁰ but rejected any doctrinaire assumption that the revolutionary alliance and leadership would be identical everywhere in the world. Bakunin,

then, was a post-Marxist Marxist, who readily took what he thought valid from Marx's *oeuvre* but felt no impulse to canonize it. Unlike Marx, who knew only Western Europe, Bakunin knew both Western and Eastern Europe at first-hand, and he understood at once that Marx's theory had been limited by the special conditions of its origin and development.

Making the Revolution

Having conceived the revolution as a radical break with the past and as the extirpation of previous inequities, Bakunin envisaged it as a kind of destructive "liquidation," akin to the *philosophes'* conception of *écraser l'infâme*. Bakunin believed that before there could be substantial forward movement, the iniquitous past had first to be liquidated and that this itself was the decisive prerequisite of subsequent progress. So revolution was not viewed as something that had a requisite, but as clearing the ground for the subsequent liberation.

This is quite different from Marx, of course, whose decisive characteristic as a scientific socialist is – as he admonishes Bakunin – the idea that economic conditions, the maturation of the industrial economy, and not "will," are the foundation of the social revolution. In his notes about Bakunin's *Statehood and Anarchy*, Marx fulminates:

Schoolboy drivell! A radical social revolution is connected with certain historical conditions of economic development; the latter are its presuppositions. 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 Herr Bakunin . . . understands absolutely nothing about social revolution; all he knows are its political phrases. For him its economic requisities 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 or pastoral peoples and not to overstep that level *Willpower* and not economic is the basis of his social revolution.⁶¹

For Marx, then, social revolution was not a destructive but a *constructive* action, a kind of deliverance from a moribund social system. The communist served as a mid-wife to the new system that had been gestating, and had finally matured, in the womb of the old regime. Marx basically believed that this revolution consisted in destroying the old state apparatus, then taking over the technologically advanced industrial basis developed under capitalism and placing it under the direction of the new state, the dictatorship of the proletariat. This, for him, was the decisive act from which all else would follow. The old division of labor and the old culture with its distinction

between mental and manual labor – ultimately to be scrapped – would survive for a long while. There was to be no cultural revolution concomitant with the political; the industrial plant and equipment developed by the bourgeoisie were in effect to be placed under a new management, with the smashing of the old state and the bourgeoisie's expropriation. For "Herr Bakunin," however, the object was not a limited excision of bourgeois proprietorship, but the veritable "annihilation of bourgeois civilization" where revolution-in-permanence would pursue unending civil strife through permanent "cultural revolution."

Bakunin expected that the revolution would usher in at once a "full and complete social liquidation," and opposed any revolution that allowed the political to precede the social and economic transformation. Both "have to be made at the same time," he insisted.⁶² "It is necessary to overthrow that which is," said Bakunin, "in order to be able to establish that which should be."⁶³ Against Marx's stress on the importance of the revolution's economic requisites, Bakunin observed that

even poverty and despondency are not sufficient to provoke a social revolution That can take place only when the people have a general idea of their rights and a deep, passionate, one might even say religious, faith in these rights.⁶⁴

Which is precisely why, for Bakunin, the revolution must "have economic equality as its immediate and direct aim"⁶⁵ and not the mobilization of power, conquest of the old state, or expropriation of the bourgeoisie. Here is the authentic anticipation of later western "critical Marxism," of Georg Lukács's self-styled "revolutionary messianism," of Gramsci's and the Council Communists' Marxism, which also insisted that economic conditions do not suffice for social revolution and that a change of *consciousness* is necessary. Bakunin then, was the first articulate critical Marxist and critical Marxism derives from what scientific Marxists simplistically condemned as "anarchism" in the entire tradition going back from Bakunin to Weitling. Put otherwise, Critical Marxism is repressed (not "by" but *in* Marxism because it is identified with, and historically embedded in, this continuous sequence of political adversaries whom Marx faced and fought.

The revolution for Bakunin was thus first of all to be an act of thoroughgoing destruction; going well beyond a political or even economic change, it would level the ground for a new beginning: "In order to humanize society as a whole, it is necessary ruthlessly to destroy *all* the causes, and *all* the economic, political, and social conditions which produce within individuals that tradition of evil."⁶⁶ If Marxism is a paean to productivity, Bakuninism was a hymn to destruction.

On the Pan-German banner [Bakunin's code-name for Marxism] is written: Retention and Strengthening of the State at any cost. On our banner, on the contrary, are inscribed in fiery and bloody letters: the destruction of all states, the annihilation of bourgeois civilization, free and spontaneous organization from below upward, by means of free associations, the organization of the unbridled rabble of toilers⁶⁷

With the revolution there will come, says Bakunin, “first the terrible day of justice, and later, much later, the era of fraternity.”⁶⁸ It is only through this bloody “animal struggle for life” that the revolution can arrive at a human society. Bakunin was not about to have his revolution without this “salutary and fruitful destruction,” in which the people would give vent to a pent-up savagery born of their centuries-long suffering. The concentrated justice of the revolution was in its terror.

A revolutionary with such a conception of revolution could only view with revulsion Marx's cautious edging forward to his own revolution, each step strategically paced out and measured; coalitions and organizations diligently knitted and used for as long as they produced increments of power, and then discarded when better targets and opportunities appeared; the sordid bargaining and negotiating for political handholds; the concern with how things looked so that allies in other classes would not bolt – all this struck Bakunin as a very respectable “bourgeois” socialism indeed. And it was. Marx was proceeding toward his revolution with the same instrumental rationality and impersonal energy that the bourgeoisie planned and built, bought and sold, all that it needed. If at first the bourgeoisie would attempt to conflate Marxists and Bakuninists, portraying both as wild-eyed fanatics, when need be, however, the bourgeoisie could do business with the Marxists; and indeed they have in numerous domestic coalitions with social democratic parties and in international *detentes*.

Much of the struggle between Marx and Bakunin in the IWA focused on the question of participation in politics, and this commonly came down to whether or not to participate in various elections. For Bakuninists, political struggle must lead on directly to social and cultural revolution without long pauses or delays, and they could even countenance electoral participation if they believed that it might spill over immediately into the social revolution. The differences, then, were not that the Marxists allowed “politics” while the Bakuninists did not, but lay in the amount of autonomy that each was prepared to allow to political activity and hence how each conceived it.

If Bakunin demanded a politics of direct action that had direct and immediate social effects, Marx saw the whole process as a longer and more protracted one, with many historical layovers and side trips. Marx saw the

process as dependent on complicated, slow-working mediations. He saw it also as requiring difficult and delicate preparations, as requiring the disciplined deferring of any quest for emotional gratifications by the workers, as the preparation and planning for a kind of social war that could not tolerate a surrender to impulses, including those for “passionate destruction.” For Marx, it was not only necessary to change the society by excising the proprietary class, but what was also needed was a change in the workers themselves, to make them competent for and worthy of emancipation. The revolution, for Marx, then, proceeds within the framework of a system of instrumental or utilitarian action aimed at the mobilization and control of increasing increments of power. It is power that was being garnered and anything that impairs, slows, or threatens the cumulation of this power is a manifestation of the class enemy. Anything, therefore, that impairs the forces of production or their efficiency, once these are in the hands of the revolution – and, indeed, even before then – is dangerous to the revolution, undermining its ability to make war against the counter-revolution or to satisfy its material needs. Thus a “cultural revolution” that involved proceeding *immediately* from the political to the social revolution, that weakened experts’ support for the revolution, or which undermined industry’s infrastructure in science and the university, was hazardous and ought to be tabled.

For Marx, the ultimate culmination of power was the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” The anarchists, for their part, did not actually accuse Marxism of preparing a dictatorship *of* the proletariat but, rather, *over* the proletariat. Indeed, Bakunin thought that the whole idea of the proletariat as itself a ruling class was ludicrous, and he believed that what Marxism implied was the culmination of power in the hands of a new state dominated by a new class of bureaucrats and technocrats.

Something of the difference between Marx and Bakunin’s idea of politics may be stated, in first approximation, by suggesting that Marx concentrated his politics on the *means* he took to be necessary for achieving the social revolution, while Bakunin sought to protect the *ends* for which that struggle was undertaken, the social revolution itself. Marx thought that once power was achieved and the dictatorship of the proletariat installed, there would be nothing to prevent the gradual achievement of the social revolution, especially the development of the forces of production. Bakunin thought that if this produced a concentration of power in a newly centralized state that in itself would resist the development of the egalitarian, free society he believed the real essence of the social revolution. Marx was, we might say, a realist – a *Realpolitiker* – about the importance of mobilizing power – i.e., pursuing a “politics” – within the framework of the *status quo*; he was a utopian,

however, when he expected the voluntary self-dissolution of the new socialist society's power center and its new class elite. Bakunin, while far more realistic about the role of power in Marx's *future* socialism, was utopian in his inclination to avoid politics and the mobilization of power in *present* bourgeois society, and to treat it as quickly dispensable by moving on immediately to the social revolution. He was utopian, too, in his belief that the costs of cultural revolution could be paid without risking the revolution itself. Marx's basic attitude was that everything is achievable in time if only we come to power in a maturely industrialized society; the main task of politics, then, was to come to power, and to choose the right moment for doing so. Bakunin's basic attitude was that in politics all depends on using instruments compatible with your ends and that, if coming to power means the concentration of power in a new state and elite, they would surely never surrender it and allow a classless society to come into existence. Marxist politics, then, was instrumental; Bakunin's was a prefigurative politics that placed him in the camp of those Marx stigmatized as "utopians."

Politics for Marx was a long and protracted struggle that aims at the capture of power at the national and state centers, rather than a practice limited to the factory plant level and concerned with local wages or working conditions. Centered as it was on mobilizing and capturing power, Marx's politics was, presumably, not an end in itself but only a means to other ends, especially a broader emancipation that is the "social" revolution. Thus the first statute of the International Workingman's Association formulated by Marx in 1864 expressly stated that "the economic emancipation of the workers is the great aim to which all political action must be subordinated as a means." Each was focusing then on a different danger: Marx sought to avoid a dependence on the good will and voluntary consent of the class that was to lose out in the revolution, by creating specialized standing centers of coercion that could be used against them; he sought to protect the revolution's capacity to act against the certain and intransigent resistance of a powerful class that felt itself threatened with the loss of its essential privileges and position. Bakunin, however, expected that this old class could be totally smashed by mass terror, and that, therefore, the problem was not to create specialized centers of coercion that fought the old class from above, but to prevent the emergence of a new class by ruthlessly and promptly extinguishing every social difference, privilege, or institution that might become the locus of a new hierarchy. Marx expected that the struggle for power would continue even after the old state was smashed and the dictatorship of the proletariat installed, and believed that the way to proceed was to create and institutionalize power instruments available to the revolution. Bakunin assumed that the revolution could be defended by letting mass terror paralyze the old class's opposition, by eliminating all institutions that permitted it cultural and ideological

hegemony, by activating the masses and maintaining them in a state of high mobilization. Whatever his own anti-statist predilections, then, Marx was impelled inescapably toward state-building both by his realistic conception of the need for centralized power available against the old class and its remnant influence, as well as by the need for an apparatus to administer and plan the newly expropriated means of production. Bakunin, however, believed, no less realistically, that it was precisely this that made Marxism continuous with bourgeois society and which would lead it to give birth to a new system of privilege.

Class Interest and Political Strategy

What, then, did the struggle about the “political” mean? Which is another way of asking, what did the contest between Bakunin and Marx mean? Part of the answer can be discerned if we compare the ambitions of disaffected artisans and intellectuals during the 1848 revolution. Artisans sought (a) a kind of Luddite direct action against the emerging factory system and owners, ruining them economically and declassing them socially. Artisans also (b) wanted something of a restoration to the guild system, but for many journeymen, this was to be a modified return that would not restore the hereditary privileges the guild masters had acquired.

What, however, did disaffected intellectuals want? Part of what they sought was improved market opportunities, whether in the private sector or the state bureaucracy. The new technical intelligentsia would, however, be the prime beneficiaries of an expanding private sector. Those with older forms of training could be aided primarily by state programs that would require bureaucratic expansion. For one thing, certain more “traditional” intellectuals had a vested interest in expanding the state apparatus. This, in turn, meant that they wanted institutions that could pursue such state-expanding policies, essentially the political process and parties. What traditional intellectuals were directed toward, therefore, was an expansion of the entire framework of politics through which, firstly, state-expanding policies could be furthered and, secondly, within which a whole host of new “political” careers could be directly pursued by them.

Elsewhere I have discussed how the exclusionary policies of worker-artisans and intellectuals differ, arguing that each prefers different policies; worker-artisans seeking to exclude intellectuals by limiting memberships to those employed in certain manual occupations, while intellectuals reject such an occupational test and prefer ideological and organizational commitments as membership tests. Intellectuals thus reject purely “economistic” or trade

union principles of exclusion and foster organizations to which they have access because these are not linked to manual labor in the work place but are “political” in character.

The struggle between Marx and Bakunin about politics, then, did not just represent a purely theoretical difference concerning the most effective ways of making the revolution or transforming the world. For in some ways, each strategy had a different elective affinity for different groups, Bakunin’s being more attractive to artisan groups, Marx’s to intellectuals. Support of the “political,” then, was a demand especially congenial to intellectuals whose own social origins, educational background, and communication skills allowed them to profit from the institutional changes implicit in the new politics. They could now have expanded career opportunities as deputies and ministers in the new parliamentary politics, and as experts or lawyers, in the newly expanding bureaucracies of the state apparatus. Artisans could at most hope for an improvement in their conditions through changes in the laws. Intellectuals, however, could hope to participate in the very management of the new politics rather than simply being its clients.

Hal Draper and other Marxologists have commonly seen this in a one-sided way, noting that *anti*-political Bakuninism was supported by a specific social stratum, the artisans. Though there was a strong tendency in this direction, it is wrong to assume that Marx’ *pro*-political line in opposition to Bakuninism’s policy of direct action was simply a cerebral decision that had no corresponding grounding in the interests of a social stratum or distinct class. Our point here, then, is that *both* sides in the struggle – Marx’s *pro*-political position and Bakunin’s *anti*-politics – had a class grounding.

For Marx and Marxism, however, this represented something of a problem. For the *pro*-political interests of the intelligentsia as a social stratum were fundamentally dissonant with Marxism’s deprecation of politics and its impulse toward certain forms of economic determinism. In other words, the class interests of the intellectuals’ supporting Marxism were not fully expressed in Marxism as *articulate* theory and were indeed inhibited by it. In some part, these interests could be pursued more openly and are given fuller expression in Bernstein’s revisionism with its genteel voluntarism. Revisionism represents in part the growing influence of intellectuals in the German Social Democratic movement, especially after the repeal of Bismarck’s anti-socialist laws. Leninism, however, operating under Tsarist repression, which allowed intellectuals far fewer opportunities for career fulfillment within its public institutions, represents the ideology of intellectuals whose political ambitions in the public life are more sharply thwarted; who are thus

more severely alienated from the *status quo*; and who have relinquished hope for normal political influence in society. On the other hand, Leninism also represents the repression of just such political ambitions for public careers within the *status quo*, offering intellectuals instead compensatory “careers” *against* it, as “professional revolutionaries,” and fostering the vanguard party itself as the decisive site for the revolutionary’s political career, a kind of substitute sphere for the pursuit of political ambitions.

Thus, even before the socialist movement wins power, it provides opportunities for intellectuals to secure editorships in movement journalism, to attain parliamentary offices, and to win jobs in the movement’s own technical bureaucracy. State and nation building is a proclivity of intellectuals, as is political contest; for in this “open struggle,” argument counts. In open political struggle, the everyday life of the movement cadre can be more or less normal and its sacrifices limited. Far from going underground, it publicizes itself as candidates for parliamentary selection. Open political struggle is thus more compatible with the life style of middle-class professionals and intellectuals. Revolutionary politics becomes another “profession.” Indeed, Lenin will later promise that the communist revolutionary vanguard will be led by professional revolutionaries – a rhetoric serving to normalize revolutionary life for middle-class intellectuals. Both the political life of revolutionaries during the struggle for power – which requires planning, persuasion, and negotiation – as well as the state they construct after seizing power, become preserves in which intellectuals have a privileged place. Indeed, the state becomes the preempted career ground of intellectuals, where positions are allocated on meritocratic and educational bases, and where merit is commonly measured by educational certification.

Conclusion

Marxism developed increasingly from a scientific to a Critical Marxism that was much more voluntaristic and stressed consciousness and conscious organization – rather than emphasizing a spontaneous economic evolution that first develops the forces of production. This long-term shift in Marxism is visible in Leninism: Leninism formulates a conception of a “vanguard” revolutionary organization more nearly akin to Bakuninism than to Marxism and adapts the old conspiratorial secret society to a Marxist rhetoric of theory and science by speaking of the vanguard cadres as “professional” revolutionaries. It also devoted increasing attention to the peasantry as an ally of the proletariat with a revolutionary potential. This increasing world drift of Marxism, toward a less economic and more voluntaristic theory, has more usually been called a “critical” Marxism, when found in Western

Europe. Critical Marxism has, therefore, seemed to some, such as Merleau-Ponty or Perry Anderson, a distinctively “Western Marxism.” This, however, misses the point of the greater political success of Critical Marxism in the Third World. In less industrially advanced countries, Critical Marxism’s reliance upon the peasantry has been even greater and its convergence with Bakuninism even more obvious. In Asia – including Tsarist Russia – and other less developed regions, Scientific Marxism’s insistence upon a prior industrialization made it seem irrelevant and generated apathy and passivity among revolutionaries who did not want to spend their lives making a bourgeois revolution. This shift suggests that there was a potential mutual transformability of Marxism into Bakuninism. Each might, under certain conditions, become the other.

My point, then, is that Bakuninism and Marxism cannot be understood as two adversaries, each external to the other. Rather, they were doctrines which had certain communalities and overlapped at important points. Each had a living part of his enemy *in* himself. I have already indicated that, in one part, Bakunin was a Marxist, and ready to acknowledge this debt generously. Indeed, the authoritarianism of some of Bakunin’s organizational schemes sometimes “went far beyond the most extreme ambitions of the dogmatic and dictatorial Marx.”⁶⁹

The war between Marx and Bakunin was so bitter because it was something of a civil war within the soul of each. The enemy was all the more dangerous and had to be squashed without qualm because he was already within the fortress of the self. Marxism and Bakuninism, then, each had an interface with the other. Each – to its own horror – could become the other under certain conditions.

To characterize the development of Marxism as an “evolution,” is to imply that its earlier and originary forms – no less than later, more recent forms – were partly an adaptation to the changing circumstances in which it found itself, including the competitive situation of its leadership. Marxism was thus never simply the outgrowth of earlier theories. The forms it took were never simply the result of an intellectual borrowing from the past but were also and always a response to a larger practice in the present. The problem of the forces that shaped Marxism’s character thus never reduces itself to the theories it borrows or adapts, or to their truth. Anything that enabled Marxism to survive repeated failures and changed conditions, and thereby to move on, edged its way into Marxism’s doctrine and political rules. To characterize Critical Marxism in particular as the product of an evolution in which it is a successor to Bakuninism is surely not to define it as identical to

Bakuninism; for that, of course, would not be an evolution but mere reproduction. Finally on this point, to characterize the development of Marxism as an evolution is not at all to define it merely as responding to the “force of circumstances.” It was also a process entailing a selective response mediated by human consciousness and theoretical commitment. Yet the presence of consciousness did not preclude a good measure of blindness and false consciousness in the evolutionary process through which Marxism developed. Indeed, it is the very nature of consciousness which, in part, allows and requires that very unconsciousness.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence, 1846-1895*, trans. Dona Torr (New York: International Publishers, 1942), 277. Italics in original.
2. Saul Padover, *Karl Marx on Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 380.
3. Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 255.
4. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution. Part I: The State and Bureaucracy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), Vol. 2, 558.
5. *Ibid.*, 562-3.
6. Marx and Engels, *Werke, Vol. 31* (Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Dietz, 1956-69), 39 ff.
7. “Marx in the course of his dispute with the Bakuninists came perilously close to making the International homogenous and doctrinally monolithic, doing much in this way to ensure that future Internationals would be monolithic where the first were not” (Thomas, 252). Thomas’s view of Marx’s authoritarianism is that it was simply a response to Bakunin’s provocation, a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in which each made the other what he feared most, thereby confirming his own worst suspicions. Thomas writes that “each protagonist acted out the other’s nightmare” (253). The difficulty with this would seem plain: Marx’s “authoritarianism” hardly appeared for the first time in his duel with Bakunin, and hence cannot be explained as due simply to Bakunin’s provocation. Marx’s assault on Weitling and his following in 1846 made that plain enough. At the same time, however, I do not believe that Marx’s authoritarianism is simply a trait of character that Marx lugged around unchanged, like a walking stick under his arm, beating stray enemies with it whenever they came within reach. Annenkov and Marx’s associates on the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* lauded his dictatorial manner. Thus it was not simply Marx’s enemies, or the nature of his character structure, but the admiration and implicit invitation of his admirers, that also reinforced Marx’s authoritarianism. A “dictator” is not simply fashioned by his foes, but is also groomed by his friends. The failure to grapple with such obvious considerations brings Thomas’s work uncomfortably close to apologetics.
8. *Ibid.*, 297.
9. Boris Nicolaievsky and Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *Karl Marx: Man and Fighter*, trans. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 298.
10. *Ibid.*, 300.
11. *Ibid.*, 307-8.
12. *Ibid.*, 304.
13. Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 317.
14. Nicolaievsky and Maenchen-Helfen, 289.
15. E.H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (1937; New York: Vintage, 1961), 385.
16. Sam Dolgoff, ed., *Bakunin on Anarchy* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 25.
17. Cited *ibid.*, 26.
18. G.P. Maximoff, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* (New York: Free Press, 1953), 73.
19. *Ibid.*, 332.
20. *Ibid.*, 74.
21. The link between the Frankfurt School and Bakunin is thus much more direct and intimate than that between it and Marx, whatever that school’s self-understanding.
22. Maximoff, 249.
23. *Ibid.*, 358.
24. *Ibid.*, 253.

25. *Ibid.*, 169.
26. This is a misstatement in no less than three respects: first, that Bakunin's theory was not just "communist" but in part specifically Marxist; second, that it was critical as well as appreciative of Proudhon, rejecting his individualism and his repugnance of violence; and third, ignoring Bakunin's Comtean and Positivist component. This and the subsequent Engels quotations are from "Versus the Anarchists," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978), 728-9.
27. Maximoff, 179.
28. *Ibid.*, 180.
29. *Ibid.*, 181.
30. *Ibid.*
31. From "After the Revolution: Marx Debates Bakunin," in Tucker, 544.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. For this literature see, Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (1911), trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Free Press, 1966).
35. Tucker, 545-6.
36. *Ibid.*, 546.
37. *Ibid.*, 546-8.
38. Maximoff, 284.
39. *Ibid.*, 286.
40. *Ibid.*, 288.
41. Arthur Lehning, ed., *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* (New York: 1971), 266.
42. Maximoff, 328.
43. *Ibid.*, 355.
44. *Ibid.*, 77.
45. *Ibid.*, 78.
46. *Ibid.*, 329.
47. Though Marx and Engels were emphatic in contrasting their own scientific socialism to that of the "utopians," precisely by their emphasis on its industrial requisites, it is frequently unclear whether these requisites were the requisites for (a) a social revolution that could *seize* power from the dominant class, or for (b) a revolution that could serve as the instrument of a transformation toward socialism - that is a socialist revolution - or (c) whether these industrial requisites were needed only for the *full* and *final* achievement of a *mature* socialism, but which might not be requisite for a social revolution that only *began* to work toward a socialist society. The ambiguities were rife and emerged fully during the conflict over "socialism in one country" in the USSR. See Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (New York: Seabury, 1980), especially Ch. 8, "Economic Determinisms in Marxism."
48. Thomas, 290-2.
49. Maximoff, 375.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, 378.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*, 401.
54. *Ibid.*, 204.
55. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Co., 1888). English edition translated by Samuel Moore supervised and revised by Engels. In the *Manifesto*, Marx places both artisan and peasant together with small merchants and manufacturers, as a middle class who "are, therefore not revolutionary, but conservative." Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history (26-7). Most research on artisan politics during Marx's lifetime, and especially during the revolutions of 1848, sharply repudiates Marx's judgment of them, and the major revolutions of the twentieth century have relied as much, indeed far more, on the peasantry than on the proletariat. It is Bakunin's carefully formulated judgment of the peasantry's revolutionary potential, rather than Marx's runaway rhetoric, that has been substantiated historically.
56. Maximoff, 394.
57. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 16, 19.
58. Maximoff, 194.
59. *Ibid.*, 196. Although lauding the bourgeoisie's vast transformation of productivity, Marx would not have disagreed with this. His theory of "increasing misery" claimed that as wealth accumulated at one pole, misery and poverty accumulated at the other among the workers, while the application of science to industry only increased the reserve army of the unemployed. The main difference, then, was not so much with respect to the implications that technical progress had in the *present* but (1) in Marx's emphasis on the *future* that technical progress permitted. It provided, he held, the foundation for socialism in which

the benefits of technical advance would then be enjoyed by the masses, and (2) that Bakunin placed far less stress than Marx on the importance of economic development.

60. *Ibid.*, 204.
61. Tucker, 543–4.
62. Maximoff, 198.
63. *Ibid.*, 301.
64. *Ibid.*, 370.
65. *Ibid.*, 372.
66. *Ibid.*, 369. Italics added.
67. *Ibid.*, 300.
68. *Ibid.*, 409.
69. Cited in Thomas, 299.

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