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Statism and Anarchy

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Marshall Shatz

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MICHAEL BAKUNIN

Statism and Anarchy

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MICHAEL BAKUNIN

Statism and Anarchy

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Editor's Note

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Introduction

The reign of Nicholas I, it has often been noted, displays a curious paradox: one of the most repressive periods in the history of imperial Russia, it was also a time of remarkable intellectual and cultural creativity. In the 1830s and 1840s, under the very noses of the Third Section (Nicholas's political police), Westernizers, Slavophiles, liberals, and even socialists were discussing and developing their ideas. Some of the greatest classics of Russian literature were also being composed and published. Michael Bakunin's long intellectual journey, which would culminate in *Statism and Anarchy* of 1871, his last major work, had its beginnings in this bracing atmosphere.

Bakunin, as well as Peter Kropotkin, his successor as the foremost theorist of Russian anarchism, were both scions of the landed nobility, the most privileged class in the Russian Empire. They were not exceptional in this respect. Until about the 1860s nearly all of Russia's radicals and revolutionaries were nobles. In autocratic Russia, where no individual had political rights or even secure civil liberties or guarantees of free expression, even nobles could suffer oppression, if not of an economic kind. With the bulk of the Russian population enserfed until 1861 and the country as a whole socially and economically backward in comparison with Western Europe, only nobles had the education and exposure to Western ideas that enabled them to criticize existing conditions in ideological terms and articulate a vision of a freer and more just order of things. Thus, for much of the nineteenth century, the Russian intelligentsia, as such educated critics came to be called, consisted largely of sons (and some daughters) of the nobility. Bakunin stands as an extreme, but not untypical example.

The contradictory social, political, and psychological conditions that generated the intelligentsia collided early in Bakunin's own life. Michael (Mikhail Aleksandrovich, to give him his full Russian name) Bakunin was born on May 18, 1814 – May 30 by the Western calendar, which was twelve days ahead of the Russian calendar then in use – at the family estate of Priamukhino (or Premukhino, as it is sometimes spelled), in Tver province, northwest of Moscow. His father, Alexander, had been sent to Italy at the age of nine and educated there, taking a doctor of philosophy degree at the University of Padua. He subsequently served as a Russian diplomat in Italy. Having retired to his estate, at the age of forty he married the eighteen-year-old Varvara Muraveva, a member of the prominent and flourishing Muravev clan. They proceeded to have ten children, of whom Michael, the first son, was the third oldest. The Bakunins were a well-off and well-established gentry family, but they were neither illustrious nor rich. Though they owned some 500 “souls,” or male serfs, their income was not lavish, especially when it came to providing education and dowries for so many children, and the family correspondence of Michael's early years is filled with references to financial worries.

The elder Bakunin educated his children at home, according to the principles of Rousseau and other Enlightenment figures in whose thought he himself had been steeped. The atmosphere of Priamukhino was idyllic, rich in intellectual stimulation, appreciation of art and nature, and spiritual elevation; it was also fraught with contradictions, for it had little to do with actual Russian life. In an autobiographical fragment composed shortly before his death, Bakunin wrote that he and his brothers and sisters were raised in a Western rather than a Russian spirit. “We lived, so to speak, outside Russian conditions, in a world full of feeling and fantasy but devoid of any reality.”¹

Like most educated Russians of his generation, the elder Bakunin was unperturbed by this contradiction. Having elevated the consciousness and self-consciousness of his sons and daughters, he nevertheless expected them to fulfill uncomplainingly their traditional duty to their family, class, and

tsar. That meant careers as military officers or landowners for the boys, and as wives of military officers or landowners for the girls. Consciousness and reality soon came into sharp conflict for Michael, and to some extent for his sisters as well.

In 1828, at the age of fourteen, Bakunin was sent to St. Petersburg to prepare for entry into the Artillery School. It was not a happy encounter, either for Bakunin or for the Russian army. Although he received his officer's commission he was dismissed from the Artillery School in 1834 for disciplinary reasons and was sent to serve in a provincial garrison. He detested military life, and his letters of the time are filled with expressions of disgust for it. Although he referred on several occasions to the coarseness and crudeness of officer life, which contrasted so painfully with the cultured (and sheltered) upbringing he had had at Priamukhino, it appears to have been the constraints and petty discipline of military service that particularly grated on him. Finally, in 1835, much to his father's consternation, he left the military for good.

Having liberated himself from the shackles of military service, he also sought to liberate his sisters from the shackles of marriages, or prospective marriages, that he considered unworthy of them. As the oldest boy in the family, and the only male of the first five children, Michael became the leader of the older "cohort" of Bakunin offspring. He was possessive of his sisters, and rather domineering in regard to them, but his intention was not to keep them from marrying – on the contrary, he would later try to match them up with some of his Moscow friends. His objection was to the kind of marriage conventional gentry husbands that their parents had in mind, marriages in which neither love nor intellectual compatibility was considered relevant. His sisters, whose sensibilities had been cultivated as much as his, shared these qualms, although with more ambivalence. (In the end, he had only limited success in arranging their marital lives.) His quest for personal autonomy and self-development led him inexorably into rebellion against his father – who, it should be noted, was by no means a tyrant and whom Bakunin genuinely loved and respected.

Bakunin's years at Priamukhino left a lasting mark on him. He was the center of a tight-knit family circle consisting of his four sisters, a few like-minded friends, and himself. It was a close, warm, and highly self-conscious little company, nurtured on the German romantic prose, poetry, and philosophy that was so popular with educated Russians of the 1830s. Bakunin's letters, and those of the other members of the Priamukhino Circle, are filled with lofty philosophical concepts combined with more traditional religious sentiment. The rhetoric is abstract and romanticized, and not untypical of an adolescent in its self-centered introspection. What comes through clearly is the difficulty these young people faced in trying to reconcile their search for self-realization with the traditional patriarchal world in which they lived. Bakunin's solution was to create an alternative, ideal world of love and spiritual harmony, its intimacy and fraternal devotion sanctified by romantic literature and philosophy and intensified by its sense of embattlement against insensitive elders. He refers to the Priamukhino Circle in such terms as "our holy union," "this holy fraternity," "our little circle linked by holy love." The seeds of Bakunin's succession of intimate conspiratorial associations in later life, as well as his vision of the small, fraternal anarchist community, may well have been planted here.²

For all its warmth and emotional support, the world of Priamukhino was too small to contain Bakunin's restless spirit. He now completed the task of scandalizing his father by moving to Moscow and proclaiming his intention to study philosophy while earning his living as a mathematics tutor. Bakunin in fact gave very few lessons, subsisting instead on an allowance from his father and the assistance of friends. He did, however, immerse himself in the study of philosophy.

In Moscow, he became part of a circle of young intellectuals absorbed in the philosophical currents of the day. It was headed by Nicholas Stankevich, whose compelling personality and early death outshone any specific accomplishments, and it included the brilliant literary critic Vissarion Belinsk

In Moscow, Bakunin also made the acquaintance of such future luminaries as Alexander Herzen and Nicholas Ogarev, who were to achieve renown as radical journalists in emigration and remained his lifelong friends. The intellectuals in Moscow were just beginning to divide into the two camps “Westernizers,” who believed Russia should follow the general course of political and social development already laid down by the West, and the “Slavophiles,” who believed Russia should build on her own native culture and institutions, which had best been preserved by the unspoiled peasantry. Both groups would have their impact on Bakunin, for his later thought, like that of many nineteenth-century Russians, was to some degree an amalgam of the two: he would look to the “backward” but uncorrupted Russian peasants, and the Slavs in general, to be the first to put into practice the most advanced Western principles of socialism.³

Most of all, in his Moscow years, he studied Hegel, who now replaced Fichte as the philosopher whom he sought the key to wisdom. As he says in *Statism and Anarchy*, in what is unmistakably an autobiographical remark, one had to have lived in those times to understand the passion with which Hegel’s philosophy was embraced. Bakunin made a very serious study of at least parts of Hegel’s doctrines, and his first original publication, in the journal *Moscow Observer*, was a Preface to his translation of two of Hegel’s five *Gymnasium Lectures*. (He had previously published a translation of Fichte’s lectures *On the Vocation of the Scholar*.)

Hegel’s influence on his young Russian readers was twofold and contradictory. Some drew from Hegel’s dictum “everything that is real is rational, and everything that is rational is real” a conservative, quietistic justification of the status quo. Others, however, drew from it precisely the opposite conclusion: if everything that is rational is real, then those elements of everyday life that are patently irrational, such as repression, or backwardness, are “unreal” and are destined to be swept away by the inexorable unfolding of the dialectic of history. In Herzen’s famous phrase, the latter found in Hegel’s philosophy “the algebra of revolution.” From the perspective of the Anglo-American political tradition, Hegelian philosophy may seem an exceedingly abstract and circuitous way of arriving at a radical critique of the existing order. It must be recalled, however, that in the rigid autocracy of Nicholas I no autonomous political life was allowed, and any attempt to create one was treated as subversion. Lacking the opportunity for political activity or even political expression, those who wished to question the existing system had to find another, indirect approach. Since the young intellectuals of the day had no power other than the power of thought, Hegelianism, and idealist philosophy in general, with the primacy it gave to mind and consciousness, offered the most satisfying possibility, however abstract it may have been.⁴ Thus, in a way that would undoubtedly have astonished its creator, Hegelian philosophy had the capacity to generate, or at least to validate, radicalism.

In general terms, the impact of Hegelianism in Russia was similar to its impact in Germany, where the Young, or Left, Hegelians – including Marx – were beginning to emerge. It has long been thought that it was only after he arrived in Berlin in 1840 and came in contact with Left Hegelian circles that Bakunin was “radicalized,” and that he left Russia still a political conservative, or at most apolitical. In his 1838 Preface he had, after all, called for a “reconciliation with reality.” A closer scrutiny of the article and of his other writings of the period, however, has brought this view into question and has provided evidence that his Hegelianism had already begun to serve as a bridge between knowledge and the criticism of concrete reality, between philosophy and social action.⁵ If so, then his later revolutionary stance was a logical result of a philosophical development that began well before he left Russia, rather than an abrupt, and inexplicable, transformation upon his arrival on German soil. Bakunin, who tended to deprecate his early interest in philosophy, a few years later characterized German philosophy as “the spiritual opium of all those who thirst for action and are condemned

inactivity.”⁶ The fact remains, however, that through such abstractions energetic young men like Bakunin found their way to revolution. This in turn helps to explain why devotion to abstract ideas could sometimes be a punishable offense in Nicholas’s Russia.

In 1840, after a lengthy campaign, Bakunin persuaded his father to help finance a period of study in Berlin. His plan was to familiarize himself with German philosophy at its source, and then return to Russia to pursue a career as a university professor. His father was duly skeptical of his son’s ability to settle down and embrace the pleasures of academic life, but he concluded that he had little choice but to agree. Since his family lacked sufficient funds to subsidize him fully, however, Bakunin arranged for a subvention from the wealthy and generous Herzen. Even in Moscow he had already acquired his lifelong habit of living off the benefactions of others – as did his later rival Marx, it should be noted. Perhaps it was fitting that a sworn enemy of the existing economic order should help to undermine it by observing so little bourgeois punctiliousness in regard to money matters. It was a practice that had unpleasant and sometimes unsavory consequences, however. For the rest of his life Bakunin would be trailed by an ever swelling chorus of unpaid creditors whose “loans” he never repaid. (Herzen, should be emphasized, was not among them and always aided Bakunin unstintingly.) His behavior hardly stemmed from a lust for creature comforts – he never sought more than the bare minimum required to keep body and soul together and at times made do with less – nor can it be attributed simply to childlike fecklessness. Rather, it would seem that Bakunin, again like Marx, had such confidence in his destiny and in his mission that he was willing to endure the humiliation of depending on others to foot the bill.

That sense of mission was to drive him for the rest of his life, but as yet it had no specific content or objective. There is, for example, no indication in his early letters or writings that he gave Russian peasants a thought, even though he had been raised on a serf estate. Like so many educated Russians of his time, he lived side by side with the peasants but in a world apart from them. What he took with him from Russia was a personal and intellectual framework within which concrete political and social ideals would begin to develop as a result of his sojourn in Western Europe. A few years later, in his famous “confession” to Nicholas I, to which we will return below, Bakunin provided an excellent formulation of his lifelong credo: “To look for my happiness in the happiness of others, for my own worth in the worth of all those around me, to be free in the freedom of others – that is my whole faith, the aspiration of my whole life.”⁷ Throughout his life Bakunin would seek to liberate both himself and others from all external constraints on the development of their personalities, just as he had sought to liberate himself, his sisters, and their friends from the narrow conventions of family and caste. This effort, given shape and direction by the myriad experiences and thoughts of subsequent years, would culminate in his anarchist ideology.

Once settled in Berlin, where for a time he shared a flat with the future novelist Ivan Turgenev, he attended only briefly to his philosophical studies. Instead, he was drawn to the Left Hegelians, and in October 1842 the first fruit of his leftward movement appeared. It was an article in the Left Hegelian journal *Deutsche Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst* entitled “The Reaction in Germany: Fragment from a Frenchman.” He signed it with the pseudonym Jules Elysard, so as not to attract the attention of watchful Russian diplomats, and for good reason. Most of the article was cast in the abstract terminology of Hegelian dialectics, but its subject was the contemporary conflict between reaction and revolution. The last few pages were overfly political, with references to Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity and to the “spirit of revolution.” Even in Russia, he asserted, “dark clouds are gathering, heralding storm.” The article ended with the famous statement that became the virtual hallmark of his subsequent career: “Let us therefore trust the eternal Spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unfathomable and eternally creative source of all life. The passion

for destruction is a creative passion, too.”⁸

In this article Bakunin referred briefly to the rights of the poor, and he now began to examine the social question. Moving from Germany to Switzerland, then to Paris, he became acquainted with the various currents of socialism that were making increasing headway in Europe at this time. He met almost everyone who was anyone in European revolutionary and socialist circles of the 1840s, but it was in Paris that he encountered the two men whose views, in different ways, proved most crucial to him. One was Karl Marx, whom Bakunin first met in 1844. For all their bitter personal relations in later years, Bakunin had great respect for Marx’s intellect, and adopted many of his criticisms of capitalism. In fact, he may have been the first Russian to familiarize himself closely with Marx’s ideas.⁹ The other was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, with whom Bakunin became fast friends. Proudhon was the first to combine the critique of capitalism with anarchism’s hostility to the state, and although Bakunin would later reject much of Proudhon’s program he assimilated many of Proudhon’s basic positions into his anarchist ideology. Meanwhile, the Russian government had learned that he was hobnobbing with European radicals and ordered him to return home. When he refused, he was stripped of his noble status and sentenced *in absentia* to hard labor in Siberia. By 1844 he had burned his bridges to his native land, though he still maintained contact with his family at Priamukhino.

The other issue on which he began to focus in the 1840s was the liberation of the Slavs, and particularly the Poles. In 1847, at a banquet in Paris commemorating the seventeenth anniversary of the Polish uprising of 1830–31, he gave an impassioned speech urging reconciliation between Poles and Russians in a joint revolutionary effort against their common enemy, the despotism of Nicholas I. By the time the revolutions of 1848 broke out, the social and national commitments to which he would henceforth adhere were firmly in place. Their precise definition, and the relationship between them, would be refined further in later years, but they continued to form the major axes of his revolutionary outlook.

Poland was a particularly sore spot for the Russian government, and at the instigation of the Russian ambassador Bakunin was expelled from France. The outbreak of the February Revolution in Paris found him in Brussels, but with the overthrow of Louis-Philippe and the installation of the provisional government he immediately returned to Paris. The upheavals of 1848 and 1849 at last gave him the opportunity for action, and he avidly pursued revolutions all over Europe. In Paris he immersed himself in radical circles. To quote his “confession” once again, he found the revolutionary atmosphere there “a feast without beginning and without end.”¹⁰ Equipped with funds and a passport by the provisional government, he soon set off for the Duchy of Poznan, in the Prussian part of Poland, to agitate the Poles, but was prevented from reaching it. In June he participated in the Slav Congress in Prague, which had been called by the Czech leadership in response to the German National Assembly in Frankfurt to defend the interests of the Slavs against German as well as Hungarian expansion. He also participated in the insurrection which brought the congress to an end, although his role seems to have been a small one.

In December of 1848 he published an *Appeal to the Slavs*, the work that first drew the attention of the broad European public. Unlike the Czech leaders of the Slav Congress, who thought in terms of achieving national rights within a restructured Austrian Empire, Bakunin called for the overthrow of the despotic regimes in Prussia and Turkey, Austria and Russia, and their replacement by a free federation of Slavic peoples, or even a federation of European republics. “Our whole salvation lies in revolution, and nowhere else,” he wrote.¹¹ Published in Leipzig as a pamphlet in German and Polish versions, it was also translated into Czech and French and was widely read and debated.¹²

Bakunin’s overall objective in this period was to bring together the democratic forces of the Slavs, Hungarians, and Germans in a concerted revolutionary assault on the existing order throughout

Central and Eastern Europe. After leaving Prague, Bakunin returned to Germany, while retaining contacts among the Czechs. At the beginning of May 1849, while living in Dresden, he was drawn into an insurrection that broke out against the king of Saxony.

The composer Richard Wagner became closely acquainted with Bakunin in Dresden, and although his account is not completely reliable he paints a vivid portrait of him in his autobiography. Wagner captures particularly well the magnetic attraction which this huge and self-assured man exerted on many people who came in contact with him.

I was immediately struck by his singular and altogether imposing personality. He was in the full bloom of manhood, anywhere between thirty and forty years of age. Everything about him was colossal, and he was full of a primitive exuberance and strength. . . . His general mode of discussion was the Socratic method, and he seemed quite at his ease when, stretched on his host's hard sofa, he could argue discursively with a crowd of all sorts of men on the problems of revolution. On these occasions he invariably got the best of the argument. It was impossible to triumph against his opinions, stated as they were with the utmost conviction, and overstepping in every direction even the extremest bounds of radicalism.¹³

According to Wagner, although Bakunin disapproved of the insurrection, which he found ill-conceived and inefficient, once it broke out he committed himself to it fully and behaved with “wonderful sangfroid.” Wagner states that Bakunin proposed bringing all the insurgents’ powder stores to the Town Hall to be blown up at the approach of the attacking troops. (Bakunin confirms this in his “confession,” where he states also that he would not have boggled at setting fire to the city, for he could not understand why one should feel sorrier for houses than for people.¹⁴) Refusing as a matter of honor to flee even when the situation became hopeless, Bakunin was arrested with other leaders of the insurrection. The Saxon authorities tried him and sentenced him to death, then commuted the sentence and turned him over to the Austrians. They in turn tried him for his part in the Prague insurrection and sentenced him to death once again, commuted the sentence and extradited him to Russia. In May 1851 he was conveyed in chains to St. Petersburg and placed in solitary confinement in the Peter-Paul Fortress, the main Russian prison for political offenders.

A few months later, Bakunin wrote one of his most controversial works, his “confession” to Nicholas I. He was informed that Nicholas wanted him to write an account of his transgressions “as a spiritual son writes to his spiritual father.” Bakunin agreed and penned a “letter” ninety-six pages in length. After the Russian Revolution the document was found in the tsarist archives and published. Some have interpreted it as the abject apology of a man who had “cracked” under the strain of more than two years of incarceration. A closer examination of the “confession,” however, reveals that this was far from the case. Nicholas seems to have wanted two things: repentance, and information on Bakunin’s revolutionary accomplices, especially Poles. Bakunin disappointed him on both counts. While conceding that his actions had been criminal from Nicholas’s point of view, and signing the document “a repentant sinner,” Bakunin retracted none of his convictions. Furthermore, he explicitly refused to incriminate others and was careful to divulge only information he was sure Nicholas had from other sources.

Why, then, did Bakunin agree to write such a lengthy and detailed account of his thoughts and activities from the time of his arrival in Western Europe to the time of his arrest? Although we can hardly hope to enter into the state of mind of someone in Bakunin’s position, part of his motivation appears to have been self-scrutiny, a desire to take stock of his life and his goals to date. The “confession” contains a number of introspective passages in which Bakunin seems to be addressing himself as much as Nicholas. In addition, he seems to have been taken with the idea of educating Nicholas. After all, how often did the Emperor of All the Russias have an opportunity to read an authentic revolutionary credo from a direct source? Bakunin probably had few illusions about persuading Nicholas of his views – although this cannot be entirely dismissed, for the idea

“revolution from above” died hard in many Russians, including Bakunin. Primarily, however, Bakunin appears to have wished to enlighten Nicholas, for whatever good it might do, as to the true nature of the progressive forces at large in contemporary Europe. Hence, in the guise of a letter of repentance, we find a detailed account of Bakunin’s education in radicalism and his participation in efforts to topple governments across Europe.

In the course of the narrative, several themes appear that henceforth remain constant in Bakunin’s thought in one form or another. Slav unity is one, coupled with an increasing strain of anti-Germanism, here directed mainly against the Austrian Empire. Anti-parliamentarism is also a prominent feature, for the events of 1848 and 1849 had deeply disillusioned Bakunin, like many other European radicals, as to the value of “bourgeois democracy” and constitutionalism. In turn, his disappointment at the failure of democratic revolution in Germany, which he analyzes at considerable length in *Statism and Anarchy*, may have reinforced his growing anti-German sentiment. In an oft-cited passage that seems to reflect the very accusation he would later hurl against Marx, he told Nicholas that he favored a strong dictatorial government, especially for Russia, whose purpose would be to educate the people to the point that such dictatorship became unnecessary.¹⁵ (He did not specify who was to head such a dictatorship, but this theme would recur several times in the course of his career.) He also admitted to harboring a “passion for destruction,” reiterating the famous phrase from his article of 1842.¹⁶

The “confession,” then, with due account taken of the circumstances in which it was written, stands as a detailed and self-revealing account of a vital period in Bakunin’s life. That it elicited no mitigation of his sentence is not surprising. (In 1854, during the Crimean War, the government, apparently fearing an attack on St. Petersburg, moved him to the more remote Schlüsselburg Fortress.) Bakunin claimed that Alexander II, Nicholas’s son, who came to the throne in 1855, upon reading his “letter” said that he saw no repentance in it at all,¹⁷ and Nicholas seems to have been of the same mind. They were right, for Bakunin emerged from his long confinement with the same political views he held when he began it. This is clearly documented in a letter he smuggled past the prison censors to his family in 1854. Even after five years of solitude and physical deterioration, he declared that his prison, far from altering his previous convictions, had made them “more fiery, more decisive, and more unconditional.”¹⁸ The rest of his life would bear out the truth of those words.

In 1857, fearing for his sanity as well as his physical condition, Bakunin was finally reduced to pleading for mercy, and his entreaties and those of his family succeeded. Alexander II released him from prison and allowed him to settle in Siberian exile for life. After a brief visit to his family’s estate, he arrived in Tomsk. For a man as gregarious and filled with restless energy as Bakunin, the loneliness and the inactivity of solitary confinement must have been unbearable. He now made up for lost time on both counts. In 1858 he met and married Antonia Kwiatkowska, a comely eighteen-year-old of Polish parentage whose father worked for a private gold-mining company in Tomsk. It was a curious marriage in a number of respects. Bakunin was some twenty-six years older than his bride, and although she was educated she had little interest in his political activities. Even physically they seemed mismatched, for the enormous figure of Bakunin dwarfed his diminutive wife – like an elephant and a pony at the circus, as one of their acquaintances put it. Furthermore, in later years Antonia bore three children fathered by one of Bakunin’s Italian political associates, Carlo Gambuzzi, whom she married after Bakunin’s death. Nevertheless, Bakunin loved his wife, and her children tenderly, and the marriage endured for the rest of his life.

The problem of political inactivity was resolved by Bakunin’s bold escape from Siberia. (Not to be outdone, Peter Kropotkin in 1876 made an even more daring escape from a St. Petersburg military hospital.) Having persuaded the tsarist government to allow him to travel freely in Siberia to pursue

commercial career, he boarded a Russian ship on the Pacific coast and then transferred to an American vessel which took him to Yokohama. There he took another American ship to San Francisco, crossed the Isthmus of Panama, and after a stay in New York and a visit to Boston and Cambridge (where he dined with Longfellow), he sailed for England. At the end of 1861 he turned up on Alexander Herzen's doorstep in London.

Bakunin seems to have thought in terms of forming a triumvirate with Herzen and Ogarev, whose newspaper *The Bell*, published in London and smuggled into Russia, had become an influential voice of reform. It soon became clear that Bakunin's views were considerably more radical than those of his friends, and he craved a greater degree of political activism than their journalistic enterprise could offer him. When a new Polish insurrection broke out in January 1863, Bakunin felt impelled to make a personal contribution to the Polish cause, which he had championed so vigorously. He joined a quixotic expedition through the Baltic to land an armed Polish legion on the coast of Lithuania, but neither Bakunin nor the ship got any farther than Sweden. Probably the most gratifying moment of the whole episode was his reunion in May with his wife, Antonia, who, after an arduous journey from Siberia, at last caught up with him in Stockholm.

Bakunin now decided to move to Italy. He arrived there at the beginning of 1864 and remained until 1867, first in Florence and then in Naples. Italy proved to be one of the countries most receptive to Bakunin's views, and he exerted a strong influence on its budding socialist movement. It was in Naples in 1866 that Bakunin founded the International Brotherhood (an effort he had begun earlier in Florence), the first of the long and complex series of secret revolutionary organizations that marked his anarchist years.

Exactly when his views finally crystallized into full-fledged anarchism is difficult to determine. By July 1866, at the latest, he was voicing the categorical rejection of the state that formed the heart of his anarchist ideology.¹⁹ In August 1867, in a series of articles written for an Italian newspaper, he explicitly used the word "anarchist" to characterize his views.²⁰

Bakunin left Italy in the last months of 1867 and spent the rest of his life in Switzerland, where he could conduct his activities in greater safety. He joined the League of Peace and Freedom, a middle-class liberal organization founded in 1867 and based in Geneva. Serving on its central committee, he attempted to "radicalize" it, that is, to persuade it to adopt his anti-state and socialist views. As part of that campaign, he wrote an unfinished work entitled *Federalism, Socialism, and Anti-Theologism*, the first extended exposition of his anarchist principles. Having failed to bend the League to his purpose, he and his followers withdrew from it and created the International Alliance of Social Democracy.

The period from 1867 to 1874 was the most active and productive in Bakunin's life, and it was in these years that he wrote all of his major anarchist works. One element of his activities was an ill-advised attempt to influence revolutionary circles in his homeland through collaboration with Sergei Nechaev.

Nechaev appeared in Switzerland in 1869, claiming to be the head of a vast revolutionary conspiracy in Russia. He made a great impression on Bakunin, who helped produce a series of propaganda pamphlets for Nechaev to circulate in Russia, sought financing for his activities, and in general lent his name to Nechaev's enterprise. It gradually became clear that Nechaev in no way merited his confidence. A man of humble origins, he does seem to have hated the existing order, but he was a warped and unprincipled hatred which he was prepared to direct against his friends as well as his enemies.²¹ Bakunin, for example, had received an advance from a publisher to translate Marx's *Capital* into Russian, and when he failed to deliver the translation Nechaev, without Bakunin's knowledge, wrote a threatening letter to the publisher demanding that he release Bakunin from his obligation. (Marx was to exploit this episode in his campaign against Bakunin in the International

Nechaev also attempted to seduce Herzen's daughter in order to draw her into his schemes, and when he and Bakunin finally parted company he stole some of Bakunin's papers to use for blackmail. Worse of all, it transpired that in Moscow, where he did in fact form a small revolutionary circle, he had persuaded the other members to help him murder one of their number whom he claimed to be an informer. For this deed he was eventually extradited to Russia from Switzerland as a common criminal and spent the rest of his life in prison in particularly brutal conditions.

Bakunin's relationship with Nechaev, which lasted for more than a year, is one of the most closely examined episodes of his life. The greatest controversy has swirled around the authorship of the notorious "Catechism of a Revolutionary." This most famous literary product of the Nechaev affair is a horrifying credo of the revolutionary as nihilist, a cold-blooded individual who has severed all the personal ties and human feelings binding him to conventional society the better to destroy it. The "Catechism" was found by the Russian police and published in the course of prosecuting the Nechaevists. It had long been assumed that Bakunin was primarily, if not wholly, responsible for the composition of the document. Subsequently discovered evidence, however, indicates that Nechaev was the more likely author, though some contribution by Bakunin cannot be precluded.²²

This does not absolve Bakunin of responsibility for entering into a partnership with such a sinister and unscrupulous figure. His initial attraction to Nechaev is not difficult to understand: Nechaev was young and energetic and claimed to be an authentic representative of the rising new generation in Russia and a direct link with the revolutionary movement. Wanting to believe him, Bakunin was too quick to accept Nechaev's claims – and much too slow to perceive their emptiness and Nechaev's ruthlessness.

Interestingly, Bakunin kept his collaboration with Nechaev separate from his other organizational activities both inside and outside the International. Those activities generated a welter of intertwining and overlapping associations, some with both public and secret manifestations, outer and inner circles like the nesting wooden dolls of Russian folk art. Bakunin first joined the International in 1866, though he remained an inactive member. In the summer of 1868, he became a member of the International's Geneva Central Section. In September of the same year he formed the International Alliance of Social Democracy (essentially a successor to the International Brotherhood of 1866) which then asked to be admitted to the International. When the latter refused to admit it as a separate body, the International Alliance was dissolved – officially, at least – and in March 1869 was admitted as the Geneva Section of the International. (To make matters even more confusing, there was also a Russian Section in Geneva, whose members supported Marx against Bakunin.) In September of 1870, with a group of Italian and Spanish associates, Bakunin founded the Alliance of Social Revolutionaries, a sequel to (or possibly a continuation of) the Alliance of Social Democracy. A few months earlier, he had formed a Russian Brotherhood, consisting of himself and a handful of young Russian students in Zurich, and in July of 1872 he created with them and a few others the Slav Section of Zurich, which affiliated with the Jura Federation of the International. Still other secret organizations may have existed, and the attempt to sort them out has bedeviled historians for a hundred years. In most cases, these were nothing more than small circles of like-minded intimates, for whom Bakunin delighted in drawing up elaborate statutes and statements of purpose.

At the same time Bakunin was producing an abundant mass of literature. He was an extraordinary letter-writer: at one point in 1870 he claimed that he had written "twenty-three big letters" in the past three days.²³ His letters are vigorous, direct, and often very revealing. His theoretical writings, on the other hand, consist mostly of unfinished fragments, few of which were published in his lifetime. Nothing could better illustrate the difference in temperament between him and Marx than the sheer messiness of Bakunin's literary output. A good example is a major work entitled *The Knout*

Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution, which he wrote in 1870–71. Like many of his works, seemed to escape the control of its creator and take on a life of its own. He wrote to Ogarev “understand that I started it as a pamphlet but am finishing it as a book. It’s monstrous .. .”²⁴ And monster it was, a great sprawling mass, never completed and bristling with fragments, variant introductions, and addenda. Only part of it appeared in print at the time, but another section, published after Bakunin’s death under the title *God and the State*, became the best known of Bakunin’s works and has appeared in at least sixteen languages.

The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, and the events that followed it, evoked a strong response from Bakunin. His principal work on the subject was *Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis*, published in September of 1870, an abridgment of a larger work. In a striking anticipation of Lenin’s policy in the First World War of “turning the imperialist war into a civil war,” Bakunin urged the French to turn their defensive war against the Germans into a popular revolution to transform the French state into a federation of autonomous communes – even at the risk of annihilating themselves and all their property.²⁵ A few days after the defeat of Louis Napoleon, having been informed of plans for a socialist uprising in Lyons, Bakunin resolved “to take my old bones there and probably to play my last role.”²⁶ This was Bakunin’s first opportunity to participate in a real insurrection since 1848. His influence made itself felt with the appearance in the city of a poster issued by the revolutionary committee calling for abolition of “the administrative and governmental machinery of the state,” but the uprising itself was quickly suppressed. Bakunin conducted himself with resolution and was briefly arrested, but he managed to flee and made his way back to Switzerland in disguise.

He had already begun to connect the stunning victory of Germany over France with the “doctrinal socialism” of the Marxists, and the next momentous event in his life, the schism in the International in 1872, confirmed that connection in his mind. Relations between Marx and Bakunin had never been warm, although it was only in the late 1860s that they erupted into open warfare. When the two met in Paris in 1844, Bakunin had admired Marx’s erudition but not his personality. Then, in July of 1845, Marx, in his Cologne newspaper the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, published a report that the novelist George Sand had proof that Bakunin was a Russian government agent – a rumor that had been dogging Bakunin for some time. The paper subsequently printed Sand’s denial of the story as well as Bakunin’s protest, but the incident could not help but poison their future relations. (They met once again, in London in 1864, an encounter that was cordial but distant.) Furthermore, Marx was scornful and distrustful of Russians as Bakunin was anti-German and anti-Semitic. Even Poland, whose independence both of them supported, drew them apart rather than together: to Marx, freedom for Poland signified a blow against Russia, the bastion of European reaction, whereas to Bakunin it represented the starting-point of Russia’s liberation. Finally, it is hardly surprising that even an international organization was not capacious enough to contain two such domineering as well as divergent personalities. Nevertheless, the personal antagonism between them should not be unduly emphasized – for Bakunin as well as Marx their conflict involved fundamental differences in principle.

The storm which had been gathering for several years finally broke at the congress of the International held at The Hague in September 1872. Marx succeeded in having Bakunin (who was unable to attend the congress) expelled from the International on the grounds, for which no convincing proof was offered, that he had continued to maintain within the International a secret Alliance inimical to the International’s objectives. For good measure, he was also accused of having engaged in fraud and intimidation in regard to his projected translation of Marx’s *Capital*. In order to keep the General Council out of the hands of the Bakuninists (who by now probably constituted a majority of the International), Marx had The Hague Congress agree to transfer it from London to New York. I

terms of the labor movement at the time, this was the equivalent of Siberian exile, and, as Marx well knew, it spelled the death of the old International.²⁸

Statism and Anarchy, written in the following year, summarizes Bakunin's reactions to the tumultuous events of the early 1870s. It was his last major piece of writing. He now attempted to achieve a measure of stability in his life and security for his family. One of his Italian adherents, who had a private fortune, bought an estate called Baronata, near Locarno. The plan was to turn it into a kind of "safe house" for revolutionaries from neighboring Italy and elsewhere, while at the same time providing a home for the Bakunins. Among other benefits, vesting formal ownership in Bakunin's name would have provided him with the safety of Swiss citizenship. Like every other venture in Bakunin's life that involved money, this one ended disastrously. A succession of mishaps led to the near bankruptcy of Bakunin's friend and bitter recriminations between them. Bakunin and his long-suffering wife had to leave the property, and Bakunin's reputation suffered considerable damage. Perhaps in expiation of the fiasco, Bakunin in August of 1874 set off for Bologna to participate in another projected insurrection. It fizzled before it could even begin, and Bakunin returned to Switzerland without injury either to himself or to the established order. It was his last exploit. He spent his remaining days in growing distress from kidney and bladder ailments and on July 1, 1876, he died in Berne, where he had gone to seek medical treatment.

Bakunin's life and his thought are inseparably intertwined, for he drew his ideas from his experiences and personal encounters as well as from his reading – though the breadth of the latter should not be underestimated. Neither his life nor his thought can be understood in isolation from each other, but, on the other hand, neither entirely explains the other. For example, his commitment to popular spontaneity and self-rule was perfectly genuine, yet he was drawn throughout his life to the idea of a revolutionary "dictatorship." His celebration of destruction was not just an abstract vestige of Hegelian philosophy but manifested itself in graphic and concrete terms – yet in his personal behavior he was the kindest and least bloodthirsty of men. There is no ready explanation for such riddles, no neat dialectical resolution of all the inconsistencies and contradictions in Bakunin's personality and ideas. While they continue to puzzle biographers and historians, however, they seem to have left Bakunin himself serenely untroubled.

Though technically incomplete, *Statism and Anarchy*, to a greater degree than most of Bakunin's writings, forms a cohesive whole. In fact, it is quite artfully constructed. Basically, it weaves together three main themes. One is the impact on Europe of the Franco-Prussian War and the rise of the German Empire. The second is Bakunin's criticism of the Marxists in the wake of the schism in the International. The third is a recapitulation of his fundamental anarchist views. The last is what gives the work its significance as a statement of anarchist principles, but in the context of the other two themes those principles take on a concrete, even programmatic character that is absent in most abstract works.

Much of *Statism and Anarchy* is a survey of the condition of Europe in the wake of the German victory over France and the advent of Bismarck. Like so many European radicals, Bakunin was shocked and dismayed at the abrupt eclipse of France, with its revolutionary and socialist traditions, and at the prospect of a Europe dominated by Germany. He feared that the forces of "statism," and hence of European-wide reaction, had been immeasurably strengthened by the rise of German power and the forces of popular social and economic liberation weakened.

Unfortunately, Bakunin's elaboration of this theme is accompanied by a virulent Germanophobia, which may have stemmed in part from the Slavophile current of Russian thought, which regarded the Russian bureaucratic state as a German importation. It seems to have been implanted mainly by his experiences in the 1848 period, however: his adoption of the cause of the Austrian Slavs, his

disillusionment with German liberalism, and, perhaps not least, his treatment at the hands of the Saxon and Austrian authorities after the Dresden insurrection. It emerged full-blown in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, when his alarm at the political and military power of the German Empire coincided with his growing enmity toward Marx.

Bakunin's anti-German sentiments did sensitize him to some of the more ominous implications of Germany's rise. There is a certain prophetic quality to his warnings against unfulfilled German nationalist ambitions, acquiescence to authority, and militarism – just as there is a prophetic quality to his warnings of the possible consequences of Russian expansionism. He goes well beyond objective analysis, however, and his invective against the servility and docility of the Germans verges on a kind of racism.

Equally repellent, though less marked in this work than in some others, is Bakunin's anti-Semitism which often appeared as a corollary to his anti-Germanism. Again, it is in part a weapon in his war against Marx. Not only was Marx himself Jewish as well as German, but some of those who helped him in his campaign against Bakunin were also Jewish. Bakunin's anti-Semitism, however, long antedated his conflict with Marx. It may be argued that such sentiments, however distasteful, do not negate Bakunin's anarchist principles.²⁹ It may also be argued that those principles are somehow deficient if even one so passionately committed to them was unable to surmount crude ethnic prejudices. The most that can be said for Bakunin is that he was hardly unique in this regard. In France, for example, at least until the Dreyfus affair, socialist and anarchist writers and artists frequently employed stereotypical anti-Semitic images of the Jew as capitalist or banker, or simply as a crude synonym for "bourgeois."³⁰ It should be noted also that Bakunin's consistent (though not uncritical) support and defense of the Poles – in regard to whom so many otherwise liberal Russians had a moral blind spot – was a remarkable example of adherence to principle.

The second major theme of *Statism and Anarchy* is its critique of Marxism. To the Marxists, the proletariat's participation in the political life of its respective nations seemed an effective way of pursuing the class struggle and ultimately achieving the supremacy of the proletariat and the elimination of the state. To the anarchists, however, any participation in "bourgeois politics" was inherently corrupting. One could fight the enemy or one could join the enemy, but one could not do both. To expect to use political methods to abolish political domination was a dangerous delusion.

A closely related issue concerned the structure and organization of the International itself. If the components of the International were to engage in contemporary political life, the organization required a certain amount of centralization in order to provide information, support, and coordination and thus, at the very least, an enhanced role for the General Council. To the anarchists, the International must serve as a direct model for the new society, a microcosm of the free future order. Therefore they envisioned it as a true federation, with local sections enjoying the greatest possible degree of autonomy. Thus the debate over the powers of the General Council (and hence of Marx, who dominated it) was really a debate over basic issues of the International's strategy and objectives.

Bakunin contended that if the Marxists attempted to work through the state to achieve their ends there could be only two results: either they would be drawn into the parliamentary system and would become indistinguishable from the bourgeois parties; or, if they ever came to power, they would form a new ruling elite over the masses. In twentieth-century terms, the result would be either Western European Social Democracy or Leninism–Stalinism. Bakunin spelled out the second possibility in the most remarkable passage in *Statism and Anarchy*, his description of what a Marxist "dictatorship of the proletariat" would look like. Brief as it is, it is a chilling picture of Stalin's Russia some six years before the fact, and a prophecy of the rise of the "new class" long before Milovan Djilas made the term famous.

Interestingly enough, Marx, who had learned Russian in order to study Russian economic conditions, carefully read *Statism and Anarchy*. Sometime in 1874–75 he went through the work and made lengthy extracts and notes. His own comments on it are few but revealing. His chief criticism of Bakunin was that he did not pay enough attention to the economic preconditions of revolution. “Will,” Marx complained, “not economic conditions, is the basis of his social revolution.” There was much to be said for this judgment. What Marx did not perceive so clearly was that precisely the opposite criticism might be leveled against him. His only response to Bakunin’s warning that socialism might produce a new ruling elite was to reiterate confidently that once economic conditions were changed and class rule came to an end, the state and all relations of political authority would necessarily disappear.³¹ He would not entertain the possibility that political domination was a product of will, and not solely of economic conditions, and that the former might persist even after the latter had been transformed.

It is in the attack on Marx that the literary artistry of *Statism and Anarchy* reveals itself. The discussion of Marx and his views appears only in the last third of the book. By the time Bakunin gets to Marx, however, he has so identified the Germans with “statism” that Marx’s political outlook takes on a truly sinister cast. In the context which *Statism and Anarchy* has created, Marx becomes a kind of socialist Bismarck, promoting pan-German hegemony by other means. Whatever the fairness or accuracy of such a depiction – and it should be kept in mind that Marx, Lassalle, and the new German Social-Democratic Party, all of whom Bakunin lumps together, actually held different views on many issues – it is the product of a degree of literary skill for which Bakunin is rarely given credit.

In opposition to both statism and Marxism, Bakunin presents in broad outline the principles of “anarchy,” as he calls what we would today term anarchism, and the anarchist society of the future. In the most general terms it can be said that each of the three competing political ideologies of the nineteenth century, liberalism, socialism, and anarchism, took its stand primarily on one element of the French Revolution’s trinity, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Anarchism joined socialism in rejecting nineteenth-century parliamentarism, or “bourgeois democracy,” as a narrow conception of liberty which could be enjoyed only by the propertied classes as long as economic inequality prevailed. The anarchist critique of liberalism added little to that of the socialists, and the pages of *Statism and Anarchy* dealing with this subject are perhaps the least original – and, in retrospect, some of the most short-sighted – in the book. Much more original was anarchism’s critique of Marxism, inherently unable to achieve the true economic equality it claimed to represent. Bakunin was the first to warn that Marxists in power might simply replace the capitalists they had chased out, leaving the position of the workers essentially unchanged, and after him it became a major component of anarchist thought.

Meanwhile, anarchism held that the key to true liberty and true equality was the third term of the revolutionary motto, fraternity. The word fraternity, or brotherhood, recurs throughout Bakunin’s writings and appears in the name of several of his revolutionary organizations as well. Like other anarchists, Bakunin believed that social solidarity, a deep-rooted social and communal instinct, was an innate feature of human nature. If it failed to manifest itself consistently in contemporary society, that was only because it had been suppressed, or distorted, by the artificial structure of the state. To create a new and better society, therefore, did not require the reeducation of its inhabitants or the transformation of human nature, but only the release of the masses’ pent-up natural instincts and social energies by destroying the institutions thwarting them. Hence the refrain that runs throughout *Statism and Anarchy*, the call for a new society organized “from below upward,” composed of small voluntary communities federating into larger associations for larger purposes. This was the structure that was to replace the state, with its hierarchical form of organization “from above downward.” Such

a social vision ultimately rested on an abiding faith in human brotherhood, for in the absence of the state, with its legal, administrative, and police structures, there would be little else to hold the community together.

And yet, in Appendix A of *Statism and Anarchy*, Bakunin sharply criticized the Russian peasant commune for the conformist pressures it exerted on the individual, a criticism he had expressed even more vehemently some years earlier.³² He was unusual among Russian revolutionaries in this period for most of them glorified the commune, believing it fraught with socialist potential. Bakunin seemed to have sensed the possibility of conflict between the autonomy of the community and the freedom of the individual. This issue goes to the core of the anarchist outlook as a whole, for the small, face-to-face community lay at the very center of anarchism's ideals. Unfortunately, Bakunin failed to grapple with it further.

Bakunin's social objectives in turn helped to determine his concept of "social revolution," which occupied a particularly prominent place in *Statism and Anarchy*. The primary purpose of the revolution was to destroy the state and all its appurtenances; consequently, the popular forces most suitable for carrying it out were those segments of the population most alienated from the established order and with the least to lose from its demise. Bakunin often voiced suspicion of the sturdy, "class-conscious," urban proletarians upon whom Marx placed his hopes, for he regarded them as already partially "bourgeoisified," corrupted by middle-class values. Instead, he looked to the most destitute and desperate toilers: peasants, semi-urbanized laborers and artisans – what the Marxists would call the Lumpenproletariat. At times his vivid imagination led him to romanticize such elements as brigands and bandits, whom he chose to see as social rebels rather than social deviants. In *Statism and Anarchy*, as well as in other writings, he celebrates Razin and Pugachev, who led great popular uprisings in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Russia, and at one point, in regard to the revolution of 1848, he even refers to street urchins. Clearly, however, he regarded such individuals as instigators or inspirers, of a popular revolution, not as a substitute for it.

The other force necessary for social revolution was what Bakunin referred to as the "intellectual proletariat," educated individuals who had turned their backs on their class of origin. They alone could provide organization, propaganda, and encouragement to the scattered and downtrodden masses. They must not attempt to direct the masses or to impose their own ideas or values on them, however, but must limit themselves to literary and organizational tasks. Exactly how such dedicated and strong-willed individuals were to be prevented from dominating or even dictating to the masses was unclear, and, as we have seen, Bakunin himself, like so many revolutionaries who came after him, was too impatient, and too domineering, to abide strictly by his own principles.

With his theory of social revolution, Bakunin at last brought together the social and national "tracks" he had been pursuing since the 1840s. For Bakunin believed that the popular forces most likely to demolish the "statist" order, and most capable of creating a new society "from below upward," were to be found in the Latin and Slavic countries. Spain, Italy, and Eastern Europe seemed to him to have retained to the greatest degree the large and destitute peasantry, the semi-peasant urban work force, and the disaffected intelligentsia characteristic of what we would today call an underdeveloped country. There, too, the peasants and even the working classes of the cities most fully retained their traditional character and forms of organization, hence the greatest sense of distance from the state. By contrast, in such countries as Germany and England, with their greater degree of civic development and public consciousness, the workers seemed increasingly drawn into the established structure.

Thus Bakunin looked to the southern and eastern fringes of Europe to initiate the anarchist revolution, and it was in these regions, notably Spain, Italy, and his homeland, Russia, that his ideas

had the greatest impact and anarchism became a significant ideological force. More broadly, Bakunin's theory of revolution identified with remarkable accuracy the social forces and political environments that were to produce some of the most significant revolutions of the twentieth century.

Statism and Anarchy was aimed specifically at a Russian readership, and it is the only major work of Bakunin's anarchist period that he wrote in Russian rather than French. Composed in the summer of 1873, it was printed in Switzerland in an edition of 1,200 copies, almost all of which were destined for Russia. (It was published anonymously, but those interested in the contents had no difficulty learning who the author was.) Emigre revolutionaries had now established efficient networks for smuggling contraband literature across the porous Russian frontier, and most of the copies of the work were shipped safely to St. Petersburg, where they were distributed by revolutionary circles.³³

Thus *Statism and Anarchy* succeeded in reaching its intended audience, and at a time when the audience was particularly receptive to the book's message – on the eve of the famous “to the people” movement of 1874. Bakunin, among others, had long been urging the educated youth to “go to the people,” to immerse themselves in the life of the peasants, and in the “mad summer” of 1874, seven thousand of them attempted to do just that. Leaving their homes, schools, and universities, they fanned out to the countryside to make direct contact with the Russian people. The movement was not a conspiracy, and the “Populists,” as they came to be called, had no organizational center or direction. Some sought primarily to renounce their relative comforts and privileges and thereby give their lives greater meaning. Others, following the precepts of Peter Lavrov, viewed their mission as an educational one, a matter of preaching socialism to the peasants and, as we would term it today, “raising their consciousness.” Still others, however, agreed with Bakunin's criticism of this program and sought to exhort and galvanize the peasants to insurrection on the model of the Razin and Pugachev uprisings. Unsurprisingly, the episode ended badly for its participants, and many hundreds of them were soon rounded up by the tsarist police.

The influence of *Statism and Anarchy* on the “to the people” movement was attested by a number of contemporary Russian activists. It was confirmed by the minister of justice himself, who, in a memorandum on the movement, attributed a particularly nefarious influence to Bakunin's writings and followers – perhaps the highest accolade a Russian revolutionary could receive.³⁴ Just how quickly and widely the book was disseminated can be judged by one curious example recently unearthed from the tsarist archives. In June of 1874, one A. I. Ivanchin-Pisarev, the owner of an estate in Iaroslavl province, northeast of Moscow, was investigated by the police. The investigation established that among other suspicious activities Ivanchin-Pisarev had been circulating a small library of subversive literature – including Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*.³⁵

Although anti-state sentiment had been a marked feature of Russian revolutionary thought long before the appearance of *Statism and Anarchy*, the work helped to lay the foundations of a Russian anarchist movement as a separate current within the revolutionary stream. As in the West, the anarchists in Russia remained a minority voice among the radicals. Lacking any broad opportunity to put their own ideals into practice, one of their most important historical functions was to serve as critics of the more numerous and better organized Marxists. Reiterating and developing Bakunin's insight into the authoritarian proclivities of revolutionary intellectuals, they came to serve as a kind of conscience of the left. This role assumed particular relevance, as well as danger, when the Russian state in 1917 became the first to be ruled by avowed Marxists. Applying to the conditions of Soviet Russia their familiar warnings concerning the rise of a new socialist elite, anarchists were among the first critics of the Bolshevik dictatorship, and they were also among its first victims.³⁶

In a larger perspective, anarchism's foremost contribution to modern political thought has also

perhaps, been its critical voice. Whatever else anarchism might stand for, its defining feature ~~negation of the state and of political relationships~~. Consequently, anarchism has served the useful and provocative purpose of challenging the very validity of politics, the legitimacy of the political sphere of human life. It asks the simple but searching question, *is man by nature made to live in a polis?* One may or may not agree with the answer anarchism itself has given. By persistently and vigorously raising the question, however, anarchism, it might be said, has served as the conscience of political thought.

¹ “Contributions à la Biographie de Michel Bakounine,” *La Société Nouvelle* (September 1896), p. 312.

² A. A. Kornilov, *Molodye gody Mikhaila Bakunina. Iz istorii russkogo romantizma* (Moscow: Izd. M. i S. Sabashnikovyykh, 1915) pp. 195–97, 231–32; Arthur Lehning, “Bakunin’s Conceptions of Revolutionary Organisations and their Role: A Study of his ‘Secret Societies,’” in C. Abramsky, ed., *Essays in Honor of E. H. Carr* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 57–58.

³ The best description of Moscow’s intellectual life in this period appears in parts 1–4 of Alexander Herzen’s memoirs, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. by Constance Garnett, revised by Humphrey Higgens, with an introduction by Isaiah Berlin, 4 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1968). A good introduction to the subject is Isaiah Berlin, “A Marvellous Decade, 1838–48: The Birth of the Russian Intelligentsia,” in Sidney Harcave, ed., *Readings in Russian History*, 2 vols. (New York: Crowell, 1962), 1, pp. 344–62; reprinted in Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (New York: Viking, 1978), pp. 114–35.

⁴ Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812–1855* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), is the best discussion of the role of idealist philosophy in Russia.

⁵ Martine Del Giudice, “Bakunin’s ‘Preface to Hegel’s ‘Gymnasium Lectures’ ‘: The Problem of Alienation and the Reconciliation with Reality,” *Canadian–American Slavic Studies*, 16, 2 (Summer 1982), 161–89.

⁶ M. A. Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem, 1828–1876*, ed. Iu. M. Steklov, 4 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl’no-poseselentsev, 1934–35), 111, p. 415.

⁷ *The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin. With the Marginal Comments of Tsar Nicholas I*, translated by Robert C. Howes, with an introduction and notes by Lawrence D. Orton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 92.

⁸ James M. Edie *et al.*, eds., *Russian Philosophy*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 1, pp. 385,403–06.

⁹ N. Pirumova, *Bakunin* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1970), p. 72.

¹⁰ Bakunin, *Confession*, p. 56.

¹¹ Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 111, p. 357.

¹² For an account of the publication and impact of the Appeal, see Lawrence D. Orton, “The Echo of Bakunin’s Appeal to the Slavs (1848),” *Canadian–American Slavic Studies*, 10, 4 (Winter 1976), 489–501.

¹³ Richard Wagner, *My Life*, authorized translation from the German, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1911), 1, p. 467.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 492; for Wagner’s account of Bakunin’s participation in the insurrection, see *ibid.*, pp. 478–99. Bakunin, *Confession*, pp. 147–48.

¹⁵ Bakunin, *Confession*, p. 91.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁷ M. P. Dragomanov, ed., *Pis’ma M. A. Bakunina k A. I. Gertsenu i N. P. Ogarevu* (Geneva: Georg et Co., 1896), p. 72.

¹⁸ Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, IV, p. 245.

¹⁹ Dragomanov, ed., *Pis’ma*, pp. 172–74.

²⁰ T. R. Ravindranathan, “Bakunin in Naples: An Assessment,” *Journal of Modern History*, 53, 2 (June 1981), 201 n. 42.

²¹ For a biography of Nechaev, see Philip Pomper, *Sergei Nechaev* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1979).

²² The documentation is provided in Arthur Lehning, ed., *Archives Bakounine, IV: Michel Bakounine et ses relations avec Sergej Nečaeu, 1870–1872* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), and Michael Confino, *Violence dans la violence: le débat Bakounine-Nečaeu* (Paris: Maspéro, 1973).

²³ Dragomanov, ed., *Pis’ma*, p. 300.

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