

BAKUNIN: GOD AND THE STATE

The great misfortune is that a large number of natural laws, already established as such by science, remain unknown to the masses, thanks to the watchfulness of these tutelary governments that exist, as we know, only for the good of the people. There is another difficulty-namely, that the major portion of the natural laws connected with the development of human society, which are quite as necessary, invariable, fatal, as the laws that govern the physical world, have not been duly established and recognized by science itself.

Once they shall have been recognized by science, and then from science, by means of an extensive system of popular education and instruction, shall have passed into the consciousness of all, the question of liberty will be entirely solved. The most stubborn authorities must admit that then there will be no need either of political organization or direction or legislation, three things which, whether they emanate from the will of the sovereign or from the vote of a parliament elected by universal suffrage, and even should they conform to the system of natural laws-which has never been the case and never will be the case-are always equally fatal and hostile to the liberty of the masses from the very fact that they impose upon them a system of external and therefore despotic laws.

The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has himself recognized them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual...

It is the characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the mind and heart of men. The privileged man, whether politically or economically, is a man deprived in mind and heart. That is a social law which admits of no exception, and is as applicable to entire nations as to classes, corporations, and individuals. It is the law of equality, the supreme condition of liberty and humanity. The principal object of this treatise is precisely to demonstrate this truth in all the manifestations of human life.

A scientific body to which had been confided the government of society would soon end by devoting itself no longer to science at all, but to quite another affair; and that affair, as in the case of all established powers, would be its own eternal perpetuation by rendering the society confided to its care ever more stupid and consequently more in need of its government and direction.

But that which is true of scientific academies is also true of all constituent and legislative assemblies, even those chosen by universal suffrage. In the latter case they may renew their composition, it is true, but this does not prevent the formation in a few years' time of a body of politicians, privileged in fact though not in law, who, devoting themselves exclusively to the direction of the public affairs of a country, finally form a sort of political aristocracy or oligarchy. Witness the United States of America and Switzerland.

Consequently, no external legislation and no authority - one, for that matter, being inseparable from the other, and both tending to the servitude of society and the degradation of the legislators themselves.

Does it follow that I reject all authority? Far from me such a thought. In the matter of boots, I refer to the authority of the bootmaker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or engineer. For such or such special knowledge I apply to such or such a savant. But I allow neither the bootmaker nor the architect nor the savant to impose his authority upon me. I listen to them freely and with all the respect merited by their intelligence, their character, their knowledge, reserving always my incontestable right of criticism censure. I do not content myself with consulting authority in any special branch; I consult several; I compare their opinions, and choose that which seems to me the soundest. But I recognize no infallible authority, even in special questions; consequently, whatever respect I may have for the honesty and the sincerity of such or such an individual, I have no absolute faith in any person. Such a faith would be fatal to my reason, to my liberty, and even to the success of my undertakings; it would immediately transform me into a stupid slave, an instrument of the will and interests of others...

Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination.

This same reason forbids me, then, to recognize a fixed, constant, and universal authority, because there is no universal man, no man capable of grasping in that wealth of detail, without which the application of science to life is impossible, all the sciences, all the branches of social life. And if such universality could ever be realized in a single man, and if he wished to take advantage thereof to impose his authority upon us, it would be necessary to drive this man out of society, because his authority would inevitably reduce all the others to slavery and imbecility. I do not think that society ought to maltreat men of genius as it has done hitherto; but neither do I think it should indulge them too far, still less accord

them any privileges or exclusive rights whatsoever; and that for three reasons: first, because it would often mistake a charlatan for a man of genius; second, because, through such a system of privileges, it might transform into a charlatan even a real man of genius, demoralize him, and degrade him; and, finally, because it would establish a master over itself.

To sum up. We recognize, then, the absolute authority of science, because the sole object of science is the mental reproduction, as well-considered and systematic as possible, of the natural laws inherent in the material, intellectual, and moral life of both the physical and the social worlds, these two worlds constituting, in fact, but one and the same natural world. Outside of this only legitimate authority, legitimate because rational and in harmony with human liberty, we declare all other authorities false, arbitrary and fatal.

We recognize the absolute authority of science, but we reject the infallibility and universality of the savant...

But, while rejecting the absolute, universal, and infallible authority of men of science, we willingly bow before the respectable, although relative, quite temporary, and very restricted authority of the representatives of special sciences, asking nothing better than to consult them by turns, and very grateful for such precious information as they may extend to us...

In a word, we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even though arising from universal suffrage, convinced that it can turn only to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters against the interests of the immense majority in subjection to them.

This is the sense in which we are really Anarchists.

KARL MARX: CONSPECTUS OF BAKUNIN'S "STATISM AND ANARCHY"

[Extracts from Bakunin in italics]

We have already stated our deep opposition to the theory of Lassalle and Marx, which recommends to the workers, if not as final ideal then at least as the next major aim -- the foundation of a people's state, which, as they have expressed it, will be none other than the proletariat organized as ruling class. The question arises, if the proletariat becomes the ruling class, over whom will it rule? It means that there will still remain another proletariat, which will be subject to this new domination, this new state.

It means that so long as the other classes, especially the capitalist class, still exists, so long as the proletariat struggles with it (for when it attains government power its enemies and the old organization of society have not yet vanished), it must employ forcible means, hence governmental means. It is itself still a class and the economic conditions from which the class struggle and the existence of classes derive have still not disappeared and must forcibly be either removed out of the way or transformed, this transformation process being forcibly hastened.

e.g. the krestyanskaya chern, the common peasant folk, the peasant mob, which as is well known does not enjoy the goodwill of the Marxists, and which, being as it is at the lowest level of culture, will apparently be governed by the urban factory proletariat.

i.e. where the peasant exists in the mass as private proprietor, where he even forms a more or less considerable majority, as in all states of the west European continent, where he has not disappeared and been replaced by the agricultural wage-labourer, as in England, the following cases apply: either he hinders each workers' revolution, makes a wreck of it, as he has formerly done in France, or the proletariat (for the peasant proprietor does not belong to the proletariat, and even where his condition is proletarian, he believes himself not to) must as government take measures through which the peasant finds his condition immediately improved, so as to win him for the revolution; measures which will at least provide the possibility of easing the transition from private ownership of land to collective ownership, so that the peasant arrives at this of his own accord, from economic reasons. It must not hit the peasant over the head, as it would e.g. by proclaiming the abolition of the right of inheritance or the abolition of his property. The latter is only possible where the capitalist tenant farmer has forced out the peasants, and where the true cultivator is just as good a proletarian, a wage-labourer, as is the town worker, and so has immediately, not just indirectly, the very same interests as him. Still less should small-holding property be strengthened, by the enlargement of the peasant allotment simply through peasant annexation of the larger estates, as in Bakunin's revolutionary campaign.

Or, if one considers this question from the national angle, we would for the same reason assume that, as far as the Germans are concerned, the Slavs will stand in the same slavish dependence towards the victorious German proletariat as the latter does at present towards its own bourgeoisie.

Schoolboy stupidity! A radical social revolution depends on certain definite historical conditions of economic development as its precondition. It is also only possible where with capitalist production the industrial proletariat occupies at least an important position among the mass of the people. And if it is to have any chance of victory, it must be able to do immediately as much for the peasants as the French bourgeoisie, *mutatis mutandis*, did in its revolution for the French peasants of that time. A fine idea, that the rule of labour involves the subjugation of land labour! But here Mr Bakunin's innermost thoughts emerge. He understands absolutely nothing about the social revolution, only its political phrases. Its economic conditions do not exist for him. As all hitherto existing economic forms, developed or undeveloped, involve the enslavement of the worker (whether in the form of wage-labourer, peasant etc.), he believes that a radical revolution is possible in all such forms alike. Still more! He wants the European social revolution, premised on the economic basis of capitalist production, to take place at the level of the Russian or Slavic agricultural and pastoral peoples, not to surpass this level [...] The will, and not the economic conditions, is the foundation of his social revolution.

If there is a state [gosudarstvo], then there is unavoidably domination [gospodstvo], and consequently slavery. Domination without slavery, open or veiled, is unthinkable -- this is why we are enemies of the state. What does it mean, the proletariat organized as ruling class?

It means that the proletariat, instead of struggling sectionally against the economically privileged class, has attained a sufficient strength and organization to employ general means of coercion in this struggle. It can however only use such economic means as abolish its own character as salariat, hence as class. With its complete victory its own rule thus also ends, as its class character has disappeared.

Will the entire proletariat perhaps stand at the head of the government?

In a trade union, for example, does the whole union form its executive committee? Will all division of labour in the factory, and the various functions that correspond to this, cease? And in Bakunin's constitution, will all 'from bottom to top' be 'at the top'? Then there will certainly be no one 'at the bottom'. Will all members of the commune simultaneously manage the interests of its territory? Then there will be no distinction between commune and territory.

The Germans number around forty million. Will for example all forty million be member of the government?

Certainly! Since the whole thing begins with the self-government of the commune.

The whole people will govern, and there will be no governed.

If a man rules himself, he does not do so on this principle, for he is after all himself and no other.

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

i.e. only if class rule has disappeared, and there is no state in the present political sense.

This dilemma is simply solved in the Marxists' theory. By people's government they understand (i.e. Bakunin) the government of the people by means of a small number of leaders, chosen (elected) by the people.

Asine! This is democratic twaddle, political drivel. Election is a political form present in the smallest Russian commune and artel. The character of the election does not depend on this name, but on the economic foundation, the economic situation of the voters, and as soon as the functions have ceased to be political ones, there exists 1) no government function, 2) the distribution of the general functions has become a business matter, that gives no one domination, 3) election has nothing of its present political character.

The universal suffrage of the whole people...

Such a thing as the whole people in today's sense is a chimera --

... in the election of people's representatives and rulers of the state -- that is the last word of the Marxists, as also of the

democratic school -- [is] a lie, behind which is concealed the despotism of the governing minority, and only the more dangerously in so far as it appears as expression of the so-called people's will.

With collective ownership the so-called people's will vanishes, to make way for the real will of the cooperative.

So the result is: guidance of the great majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, say the Marxists...

Where?

... will consist of workers. Certainly, with your permission, of former workers, who however, as soon as they have become representatives or governors of the people, cease to be workers...

As little as a factory owner today ceases to be a capitalist if he becomes a municipal councillor...

and look down on the whole common workers' world from the height of the state. They will no longer represent the people, but themselves and their pretensions to people's government. Anyone who can doubt this knows nothing of the nature of men.

If Mr Bakunin only knew something about the position of a manager in a workers' cooperative factory, all his dreams of domination would go to the devil. He should have asked himself what form the administrative function can take on the basis of this workers' state, if he wants to call it that.

But those elected will be fervently convinced and therefore educated socialists. The phrase 'educated socialism'...

...never was used.

... 'scientific socialism'...

...was only used in opposition to utopian socialism, which wants to attach the people to new delusions, instead of limiting its science to the knowledge of the social movement made by the people itself; see my text against Proudhon.

...which is unceasingly found in the works and speeches of the Lasalleans and Marxists, itself indicates that the so-called people's state will be nothing else than the very despotic guidance of the mass of the people by a new and numerically very small aristocracy of the genuine or supposedly educated. The people are not scientific, which means that they will be entirely freed from the cares of government, they will be entirely shut up in the stable of the governed. A fine liberation!

The Marxists sense this (!) contradiction and, knowing that the government of the educated (quelle reverie) will be the most oppressive, most detestable, most despised in the world, a real dictatorship despite all democratic forms, console themselves with the thought that this dictatorship will only be transitional and short.

Non, mon cher! -- That the class rule of the workers over the strata of the old world whom they have been fighting can only exist as long as the economic basis of class existence is not destroyed.

They say that their only concern and aim is to educate and uplift the people (saloon-bar politicians!) both economically and politically, to such a level that all government will be quite useless and the state will lose all political character, i.e. character of domination, and will change by itself into a free organization of economic interests and communes. An obvious contradiction. If their state will really be popular, why not destroy it, and if its destruction is necessary for the real liberation of the people, why do they venture to call it popular?

Aside from the harping of Liebknecht's Volksstaat, which is nonsense, counter to the Communist Manifesto etc., it only means that, as the proletariat still acts, during the period of struggle for the overthrow of the old society, on the basis of that old society, and hence also still moves within political forms which more or less belong to it, it has not yet, during this period of struggle, attained its final constitution, and employs means for its liberation which after this liberation fall aside. Mr Bakunin concludes from this that it is better to do nothing at all... just wait for the day of general liquidation -- the last judgement.