

The Policy of The International.

by Michael Bakunin

[The Policy was published in Egalite In 1869. It was translated by K. L. from a German version, in 1911, and was published in the Herald of Revolt, for October of that year under the title of "The Issue." It is now republished under its original title.-ED.]

"Up to now we believed," says a reactionary paper, "that the political and religious opinions of a man depended upon the fact of his being a member of the International or not."

At first sight, one might think that this paper was correct in its altered opinion. For the International does not ask any new member if he is of a religious or atheistic turn of mind. She does not ask if he belongs to this or that or no political party. She simply says: Are you a worker? If not, do you feel the necessity of devoting yourself wholly to the interests of the working class, and of avoiding all movements that are opposed to it? Do you feel at one with the workers? And have you the strength in you that is requisite if you would be loyal to their cause? Are you aware that the workers --- who create all wealth, who have made civilization and fought for liberty --- are doomed to live in misery, ignorance, and slavery? Do you understand that the main root of all the evils that the workers experience, is poverty? And that poverty --- which is the common lot of the worker --- in all parts of the world --- is a consequence of the present economic organization of society, and especially of the enslavement of labour --- i.e. the proletariat --- under the yoke of capitalism --- i.e. the bourgeoisie?

Do you know that between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie there exists a deadly antagonism which is the logical consequence of the economic positions of the two classes? Do you know that the wealth of the bourgeoisie is incompatible with the comfort and liberty of the workers, because their excessive wealth is, and can only be, built upon the robbing and enslavement of the workers? Do you understand that for the same reason, the prosperity and dignity of the labouring masses inevitably demands the entire abolition of the bourgeoisie? Do you realise that no single worker, however intelligent and energetic he may be, can fight successfully against the excellently organized forces of the bourgeoisie --- a force which is upheld mainly by the organization of the State --- all States?

Do you not see that, in order to become a power, you must unite --- not with the bourgeoisie, which would be a folly and a crime, since all the bourgeoisie, so far as they belong to their class) are our deadly enemies? Nor with such workers as have deserted their own cause and have lowered themselves to beg for the benevolence of the governing class? But with honest men, who are moving, in all sincerity, towards the same goal as, you? Do you understand that, against the powerful combinations formed by the privileged classes, the capitalists or possessors of the means and instruments of production and distribution, and all the states on earth --- a local or national association --- even if it belonged to one of the biggest countries in Europe --- can never triumph? Do you not realise that, in order to fight and to vanquish this Capitalist combination, nothing less than an amalgamation of all local and national labour associations --- i.e. The International Association of the Workers of all Lands --- is required?

If you know and comprehend all this, come into our camp whatever else your political or religious convictions are. But if you are at one with us, and so long as you are at one with us, you will wish to pledge the whole of your being, by your every action as well as by your words, to the common cause, as a spontaneous and whole-hearted expression of that fervour of loyalty that will inevitably take possession of you. You will have to promise:

(1) To subordinate your personal and even your family

interest, as well as political and religious bias and would-be activities, to the highest interest of our association, namely the struggle of Labour against Capital, the economic fight of the Proletariat against the Bourgeoisie.

- (2) Never, in your personal interests, to compromise with the bourgeoisie.
- (3) Never to attempt to secure a position above your fellow workers, whereby you would become at once a bourgeois and all enemy of the proletariat; for the only difference between capitalist's and workers is this: the former seek their welfare outside, and at the expense of, the welfare of the community whilst the welfare of the latter is dependent on the solidarity of those who are robbed in the industrial field.
- (4) To remain ever and always loyal to this, principle of the solidarity of labour: for the smallest betrayal of this principle, the slightest deviation from this solidarity, is, in the eyes of the International, the greatest crime and shame with which a worker can soil himself.

II.

The founders of the International acted wisely in refusing to make philosophic or political principles the basis of their association, and preferring to have the exclusively economic struggle of Labour against Capital as the sole foundation. They were convinced that the moment a worker realised the class-struggle, the moment he --- trusting to his right and the numerical strength of his class --- enters the arena against capitalist robbery: that very moment, the force of circumstances and the evolution of the struggle, will oblige him to recognise all the political, socialistic, and philosophic principles of the International. These principles are nothing more or less than the real expressions of the aims and objects of the working-class. The necessary and inevitable conclusion of these aims, their one underlying and supreme purpose, is the abolition --- from the political as well as from the social viewpoint --- of: ---

- (1) The class-divisions existent in society, especially of those divisions imposed on society by, and in, the economic interests of the bourgeoisie.
- (2) All Territorial States, Political Fatherlands, and Nations, and on the top of the historic ruins of this old world order, the establishment of the great international federation of all local and national productive groups.

From the philosophic point of view, the aims of the International are nothing less than the realisation of the eternal ideals of humanity, the welfare of man, the reign of equality, justice, and liberty on earth, making unnecessary all belief in heaven and all hopes for a better hereafter.

The great mass of the workers, crushed by their daily toil, live in ignorance and misery. Whatever the political and religious prejudices that have been forced into their heads may be, this mass is unconsciously Socialistic: instinctively, and, through the pinch of hunger and their position, more earnestly and truly Socialistic than all the "scientific" and "bourgeois Socialists" put together. They (the mass) are Socialists through all the circumstances of their material existence, whereas the latter (the bourgeois Socialists") are only Socialistic through the circumstances of reasoning; and, in reality, the necessities of life have a greater influence over those of pure reasoning, because reasoning (or thought) is only the reflex of the continually developing life-force and not its basis.

The workers do not lack reality, the real longing for Socialist endeavour, but only the Socialist idea. Every worker, from the bottom of his heart, is longing for a really human existence, i.e., material comfort and mental development founded on justice, i.e., equality and liberty for each and every man in work. This cannot be realised in the existing political and social organization, which is founded on and bare-faced robbery of the labouring masses. Consequently, every reflective worker becomes a revolutionary Socialist, since he is forced to realise that his emancipation can only be accomplished by the complete overthrow of present-day society. Either this organisation of injustice with its entire machine of oppressive laws and privileged institutions, must disappear, or else the

proletariat is condemned to eternal slavery.

This is the quintessence of the Socialist idea, whose germs can be found in the instinct of every serious thinking worker. Our object, therefore, is to make him conscious, of what he wants, to awaken in him a clear idea that corresponds to his instincts: for the moment the class consciousness of the proletariat has lifted itself up to the level of their instinctive feeling, their intention will have developed into determination, and their power will be irresistible.

What prevents the quicker development of this idea of salvation amongst the Proletariat? Its ignorance; and, to a great extent, the political and religious prejudices with which the governing class are trying to befog the consciousness and the natural intelligence of the people. How can you disperse this ignorance and destroy these strange prejudices? "The liberation of the Proletariat must be the work of the Proletariat itself," says the preface to our general statute (The International). And it is a thousand times true! This is the main foundation of our great association. But the working class is still very ignorant. It lacks completely every theory. There is only one way out therefore, namely --- Proletarian liberation through action. And what will this action be that will bring the masses to Socialism? It is the economic struggle of the Proletariat against the governing class carried out in solidarity. It is the Industrial Organisation of the workers of the world.

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The Two Camps.

[The two Camps, which is here included, was translated by "Crastinus" from Bakunin's preface to his pamphlet refuting Mazini's theistic idealism. This work was published in the year 1871. At this time Italy witnessed the breaking-up of the workers' associations, guided by the patriotic spirit, and saw the spreading of the ideals of International Socialism, as well as the conflict between the capitalist and the working class conceptions of life. After nearly fifty years, the vibrating audacity of Bakunin's thought, their penetrating inwardness, their generosity are as alive as ever. ---ED.]

You taunt us with disbelieving in God. We charge you with believing in him. We do not condemn you for this. We do not even indict you. We pity you. For the time of illusions is past. We cannot be deceived any longer.

Whom do we find under God's banner? Emperors, kings, the official and the officious world; our lords and our nobles; all the privileged persons of Europe whose names are recorded in the Almanac de Gotha; all the guinea pigs of the industrial, commercial and banking world; the patented professors of our universities; the civil service servants; the low and high police officers; the gendarmes; the gaolers; the headsmen or hangmen; not forgetting the priests, who are now the black police enslaving our souls to the State; the glorious generals, defenders of the public order; and lastly, the writers of the reptile Press.

This is God's army!

Whom do we find in the camp opposite? The army of revolt the audacious deniers of God and repudiators of all divine and authoritarian principles! Those who are therefore, the believers in humanity, the asserters of human liberty.

You reproach us with being Atheists. We do not complain of this. We have no apology to offer, We admit we are. With what pride is allowed to frail individuals --- who, like passing waves, rise only to disappear again in the universal ocean of the collective life --- we pride ourselves on being

Atheists. Atheism is Truth --- or, rather, the real basis of all Truths.

We do not stoop to consider practical consequences. We want Truth above everything. Truth for all!

We believe in spite of all the apparent contradictions --- in spite of the wavering political wisdom of the Parliamentarians --- and of the scepticism of the times --- that truth only can make for the practical happiness of the people. This is our first article of faith.

It appears as if you were not satisfied in recording our Atheism. You jump to the conclusion that we can have neither love nor respect for mankind, inferring that all those great ideas or emotions which, in all ages, have set hearts throbbing are dead letters to us. Trailing at hazard our miserable existences --- crawling, rather than walking, as you wish to imagine us --- you assume that we cannot know of other feelings than the satisfaction of our coarse and sensual desires.

Do you want to know to what an extent we love the beautiful things that you revere? Know then that we love them so much that we are both angry and tired at seeing them hanging, out of reach, from your idealistic sky. We sorrow to see them stolen from our mother earth, transmuted into symbols without life, or into distant promises never to be realised. No longer are we satisfied with the fiction of things. We want them in their full reality. This is our second article of faith.

By hurling at us the epithet of materialists, you believe you have driven us to the wall. But you are greatly mistaken. Do you know the origin of your error?

What you and we call matter are two things totally different. Your matter is a fiction. In this it resembles your God, your Satan, and your immortal soul. Your matter is nothing beyond coarse lowness, brutal lifelessness. It Is, in impossible entity, as impossible as your pure spirit --- "immaterial," "absolute"!

The first thinkers of mankind were necessarily theologians and metaphysicians. Our earthly mind is so constituted that it begins to rise slowly-through a maze of ignorance-by errors and mistakes-to the possession of a minute parcel of Truth. This fact does not recommend "the glorious conditions of the past." But our theologian, and meta physicians, owing to their ignorance, took all that to them appeared to constitute-power, movement, life, Intelligence; and, by a sweeping generalisation, called it, spirit! To the lifeless and shapeless residue they thought remained after such preliminary selection --- uncsciously evolved from the whole world of reality --- they gave the name of matter! They were then surprised to see that this matter --- which, like their spirit existed only in their imagination --- appeared to be so lifeless and stupid when compared to their god, the eternal spirit! To be candid, we do not know this God. We do not recognise this matter.

By the words matter and material, we understand the totality of things, the whole gradation of phenomenal reality as we know it, from the most simple inorganic bodies to the complex functions of the mind of a man of genius; the most beautiful sentiments, the highest thoughts; the most heroic deeds; the actions of sacrifice and devotion; the duties and the rights, the abnegation and the egoism of our social life. The manifestations of organic life, the properties and qualities of simple bodies: electricity, light, heat, and molecular attraction, are all to our mind but so many different evolutions of that totality of things that we call matter. These evolutions, are characterised by a close solidarity, a unity of motive power.

We do not look upon this totality of being and of forms as an eternal and absolute substance, as Pantheists do. But we look upon it as the result, always changed and always changing, of a variety of actions, and reactions, and of the continuous working of real beings that are born and live in its very midst. Against the creed of the theologians I set these propositions:-

1. That if there were I God who created it the world could never have existed.
2. That if God were, or ever had been, the ruler of nature, natural, physical, and social law could never have existed. It would have presented a spectacle of complete

chaos, Ruled from above, downwards, it would have resembled the calculated and designed disorder of the political State,

3. That moral law is a moral, logical, and real law, only in so far as it emanates from the needs of human society.
4. That the idea of God is not necessary to the existence and working of the moral law. Far from this, 'It is a disturbing and socially demoralising factor.
5. That all gods, past and present, have owed their existence to a human imagination unfreed from the fetters of its primordial animality.
6. That any and every god, once established on his throne becomes the curse of humanity, and the natural ally of all tyrants, social charlatans, and exploiters of humanity.
7. That the routing of God will be a necessary consequence of the triumph of mankind. The abolition of the idea of God will be a fatal result of the proletarian emancipation. From the moral point of view, Socialism is the advent of self respect to mankind. It will mean the passing of degradation and Divinity.

From the practical viewpoint, Socialism is the final acceptance of a great principle that is leavening society more and more every day. It is making itself felt more and more by the public conscience. It has become the basis of scientific investigations and progress, and of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. It is making its way everywhere. Briefly, this principle is as follows:

As in what we call the material world, the inorganic matter- mechanical, physical, and chemical- is the determinant basis of the organic matter-vegetable, animal, Intellectual-in like manner in the social world, the development of economical questions has been and is, the, basis that determines our religious, philosophical, political, and social developments.

This principle audaciously destroys all religious ideas and metaphysical beliefs. It is a rebellion far greater than that which, born during the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, levelled down all scholastic doctrine-once the powerful rampart of the Church, of the absolute monarchy, and of the feudal nobility-and brought about the dogmatic culture of the so-called pure reason, so favourable to our latter-day rulers the bourgeois classes. We therefore, say, through the International: The economical enslavement of the workers-to those who control the necessities of life and the instruments of labour, tools and machinery-is the sole and original cause of the present slavery- in all its forms. To it are attributable mental degeneration and political, submission. The economic emancipation of the workers, therefore, is the aim to which any political movement must subordinate its being, merely as a means to that end. This briefly is the central idea, of the International.