

On the Policy of the International Workingmen's Association

Michail Bakunin

1869

Contents

On the Policy of the International Workingmen’s Association	3
Introduction	3
I. <i>L’Égalité</i> , August 7, 1869	4
II. <i>L’Égalité</i> , August 14, 1869	6
III. <i>L’Égalité</i> , August 21, 1869;	7
IV. <i>L’Égalité</i> , August 28, 1869	9
The Policy of The International – Alternate version	12
I	12
II	13
The Two Camps	15

On the Policy of the International Workingmen's Association

Introduction

The Policy of the International consists of four articles written by Bakunin for *L'Égalité*, the organ of the French-speaking libertarian Romance Federation of the International, August 7–28, 1869. It is written in the popular style suitable for the intelligent workers of the period.

Bakunin begins by outlining in simple language the main principles of the International and then goes on to discuss the nature of the bourgeoisie and its relationship to the International, to parliamentarianism, and to immediate problems. His astute remarks about working-class politicians, bourgeoisified workers, and the bourgeoisie in general are still cogent. Bakunin's practical proposals show how well he understood the mind of the average worker.

Bakunin's references to "the June days" and "the December days" require some elucidation. The revolution of 1848 began with the uprising of the Parisian workers on February 24. When the government fell, King Louis Philippe abdicated and fled to England. The Second Republic was then declared. When the National Workshops program for the unemployed (similar to the WPA program of Franklin Roosevelt) collapsed, a new uprising of hundreds of thousands of starving Parisian workers was crushed by General Cavaignac, who had been invested with dictatorial powers by the republican National Assembly. This slaughter, which took place between the 22nd and the 24th of June, became known as "the June days." "The December days" signify the accession to power of Louis Napoleon (later to become Emperor Napoleon III). In the national plebiscite of December 10, he was elected president of France with the support of the peasants and other reactionary classes. He banished or imprisoned the radicals as well as the liberal democrats and the republican opposition, and established "the reign of Caesarism and militarism" referred to by Bakunin.

I. *L'Égalité*, August 7, 1869

The International, in accepting a new member, does not ask him whether he is an atheist or a believer, whether or not he belongs to any political party. It asks only this: are you a worker, or if not, do you sincerely desire and will you fully embrace the cause of the workers to the exclusion of all causes contrary to its principles?

Do you feel that the workers, the sole producers of all the world's wealth, who have created civilization and won all the liberties the bourgeoisie enjoy, should be themselves condemned to poverty, ignorance and servitude? Do you understand that the principal source of all the evils the workers must now endure is poverty, and that this poverty, the lot of all the workers in the world, is the necessary consequence of the existing economic order of society, and primarily of the submission of labor to the yoke of capital, i.e., to the bourgeoisie?

Do you understand that there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie which is the necessary consequence of their respective economic positions? That the wealth of the bourgeois class is incompatible with the well-being and freedom of the workers, because this excessive wealth can be founded only upon the exploitation and subjugation of labor, and that for this reason, the prosperity and dignity of the working masses demands the abolition of the bourgeoisie as a class ... Do you understand that no worker, however intelligent or energetic, can fight all by himself against the well-organized power of the bourgeoisie, a power sustained by all states?

Do you understand that faced with the formidable coalition of all the privileged classes, all the capitalists, and all the states, an isolated workers' association, local or national, even in one of the greatest European nations, can never triumph, and that faced with this coalition, victory can only be achieved by a union of all the national and international associations into a single universal association which is none other than the great International Workingmen's Association?

If you thoroughly understand and truly want all this, then irrespective of your national loyalties and religious beliefs, come to us and you will be welcomed. But you must first pledge:

- a. to subordinate your personal and family interests as well as your political and religious beliefs to the supreme interests of our association: to the struggle of labor against capital, i.e., the economic struggle of the workers against the bourgeoisie.
- b. never to compromise with the bourgeoisie for your personal gain.
- c. never to satisfy your vanity by displaying your disdain for the rank and file. If you do so, you will be treated as a bourgeois, an enemy of the proletariat, for the bourgeois shuns the collectivity, and the proletarian seeks only the solidarity of all who work and are exploited by capitalism.
- d. to remain always faithful to the solidarity of labor. The least betrayal of this solidarity will be considered by the International as the greatest crime that any worker could commit; in short, you must fully and without reservation accept our general statutes and pledge yourself to conform to them in all the acts of your life.

We think that the founders of the International showed great wisdom in eliminating all religious and national questions from its program. They purposely refrained from injecting their

very definite antireligious and national convictions into the program because their main concern was to unite the oppressed and the exploited workers of the civilized world in one common effort. They had necessarily to find a common basis, and formulate a set of elementary principles acceptable to all workers regardless of the political and economic aberrations still infecting the minds of so many toilers.

The inclusion of the antireligious and political program of any group or party in the program of the International, far from uniting the European workers, would have divided them even more than they are at present... Taking advantage of the ignorance of the workers, the priests, the governments, and all the bourgeois parties, including the most leftwing of them, have succeeded in indoctrinating the workers with all sorts of false ideas whose sole purpose was to brainwash them into voluntarily serving the privileged classes against their own best interests.

Besides, the difference in the degree of industrial, political, and moral development of the working masses in the different countries is still too great for them to unite on the basis of one political and antireligious program. To make such a program an absolute condition for membership would be to establish a sect and not to organize a universal association. It could only destroy the International at the outset.

There is yet another important reason for eliminating all political tendencies, at least formally *and only formally*. Until now there has never been a true politics of the people, and by the "people" we mean the lowly classes, the "rabble," the poorest workers whose toil sustains the world. There has been only the politics of the privileged classes, those who have used the physical prowess of the people to overthrow and replace each other in the never-ending struggle for supremacy. The people have shifted support from one side to the other in the vain hope that in at least one of these political changes ... their century-old poverty and slavery would be lightened. Even the great French Revolution did not basically alter their status. It did away with the nobility only to replace it with the bourgeoisie. The people are no longer *called* serfs. They are proclaimed free men, legally entitled to all the rights of free-born citizens; but they remain poverty-stricken serfs in fact.

And they will remain enslaved as long as the working masses continue to serve as tools of bourgeois politics, whether conservative or liberal, even if those politics pretend to be revolutionary. For all bourgeois politics whatever the label or color have only one purpose: to perpetuate domination by the bourgeoisie, and *bourgeois domination is the slavery of the proletariat*.

What was the International to do? It had to separate the working masses from all bourgeois politics and expunge from its program the political programs of the bourgeoisie. When the International was first organized, the only institutions exerting major pressure were the church, the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie. The latter, particularly the liberal bourgeoisie, were undoubtedly more humane than the others, but they too depended upon the exploitation of the masses, and their sole purpose was also to fight their rivals for the privilege of monopolizing the exploitation. The International had first to clear the ground. Since all politics, as far as the emancipation is concerned, is infected with reactionary elements, the International had first to purge itself of all political systems, and then build upon the ruins of the bourgeois social order the new politics of the International.

II. *L'Égalité*, August 14, 1869

It was for these reasons that the founders of the International based the organization only on the economic struggle of the workers against capitalist exploitation. They reasoned that once the workers, drawing confidence from the justice of their cause as well as from their numerical superiority, become involved with their fellow workers in their common struggle against the employing class, the force of events and the intensification of the struggle will soon impel them to recognize all the political, socialist, and philosophical principles of the International, principles which are in fact only the true reflection of their own experiences and aspirations.

From the political and social angle, the necessary consequences of these principles are the abolition of all territorial states and the erection upon their ruins of the great international confederation of all national and productive groups. Philosophically it means nothing less than the realization of human felicity, equality, liberty, and justice. And these ideals will tend to render superfluous all religious phantasies and vain dreams of a better life in heaven. ...

But to proclaim these two ultimate aims prematurely to ignorant workers whose minds are poisoned by the demoralizing doctrines and propaganda of the State and the priesthood would surely shock and repel them... They would not even suspect that these aims are actually the truest expression of their own interests, that the pursuit of these objectives will lead to the realization of their most cherished yearnings, and that precisely those religious and political prejudices in whose name they spurn these ideas are perhaps the direct cause of their prolonged poverty and slavery.

It is necessary to clearly distinguish the prejudices of the privileged classes. The prejudices of the masses ...militate against their own interests, while those of the bourgeoisie are based precisely on their class interests... The people want, but do not know. The bourgeoisie know, but do not want. Of the two, which is incurable? The bourgeoisie, of course.

General rule: you can convince only those who already feel the need for change by virtue of their instincts and their miserable circumstances, but never those who feel no need for change. Nor can you convince those who may desire to escape from an intolerable situation, but are attracted to ideas totally at variance with yours, owing to the nature of their social, intellectual, and moral habits.

You cannot win over to socialism a money-mad noble or a bourgeois whose sole ambition is to climb into the nobility, or a worker who is heart and soul bent on becoming a bourgeois. Nor can you win over an intellectual snob, or a self-styled "savant" vaunting his scientific knowledge after half-digesting a few books. Such people seethe with contempt and arrogance toward the unlettered masses, and imagine themselves ordained to form a new dominant caste.

No amount of reasoning or agitation will succeed in converting these moral unfortunates. The only effective way to overcome their resistance is through *action*: to close off the avenues for privileged positions, exploitation, and domination. Only the Social Revolution, sweeping away all inequality, can moralize them and bring them to seek their happiness in equality and in solidarity.

Things are different with serious workers. And by serious workers, I mean those who are crushed under the burden of toil; all those whose position is so precarious that they can never (barring extraordinary circumstances) even hope to attain a better station in life... Also in this category are those rare and generous workers who, though they have the opportunity to raise themselves out of the working class, prefer nevertheless to suffer and struggle with their brother

workers against the bourgeoisie. Such workers do not have to be converted; they are already true socialists.

The great mass of workers, exhausted by daily drudgery, are miserable and ignorant. Yet this mass, despite its political and social prejudices, is socialistic without knowing it. Because of its social position, it is more truly socialist than all the scientific and bourgeois socialists combined. It is socialistic by virtue of the material conditions and the needs of its being, while the latter are only intellectually socialist. In real life, the material needs exert a much greater power than the needs of the intellect, which are always and everywhere the expression of the being, the reflection of the successive developments of life, but never its vital principle ...

What the workers lack is not a sense of reality or socialist aspirations but only socialist thought. Deep in his heart, every worker aspires to a full life, to material well-being and intellectual development, based on justice or equality for every human being longing to live and work in an atmosphere of freedom. Obviously this ideal cannot be realized under the present social system, based as it is on the cynical exploitation of the toiling masses. Since his emancipation can be attained only by the overthrow of the existing social order, every earnest worker is potentially a revolutionary socialist.

The seeds of socialist thought are subconsciously planted in the mind of every serious worker. The socialist aim is to make the worker fully conscious of what he wants, to awaken in him an intelligence which will correspond to his inner yearnings. Once the intelligence of the workers is raised to the level of what they instinctively feel, their will is bound to be concentrated and their power irresistible. It is axiomatic that ignorance and religious and political prejudices ... slow up the development of this intelligence among the working masses. How to dissipate this ignorance? How to root out these prejudices? By education? By propaganda?

Propaganda and education are excellent but insufficient means. The isolated worker weighed down by toil and daily cares cannot attend to his education. And who will make this propaganda? Will it be a handful of socialists but lately emerged from their bourgeois environment? They are undoubtedly dedicated and motivated by generous impulses, but far too few in number to adequately propagandize the masses.

Besides, the workers will receive guardedly at best the propaganda of intellectuals who come from a totally different and hostile social background. The preamble of the statutes of the International states: "The emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves." It is absolutely right. This is the fundamental principle of our great association. But the workers know little about theory and are unable to grasp the implications of this principle. The only way for the workers to learn theory is through practice: emancipation through practical action. It requires the full solidarity of the workers in their struggle against their bosses, through the trade unions and the *building up* of resistance [strike funds].

III. *L'Égalité*, August 21, 1869;

If the International from its inception tolerated the reactionary political and religious ideas of the workers who joined it, it was not because it was by any means indifferent toward these ideas. As I have already demonstrated, it could not be indifferent, because all reactionary ideas entertained by the membership undermine the basic principle and with it the very existence of the International itself.

The founders of the International, I repeat, acted wisely in adopting this tolerant policy. They reasoned ... that a worker involving himself in the struggle will necessarily be led to realize that there is an unbridled antagonism between the ... reaction and his most cherished aspirations ... and having realized this, will openly declare himself a revolutionary socialist.

This is not the case with the bourgeoisie. All their interests are contrary to the economic transformation of society. And if their ideas are also contrary to it they are reactionaries, or to use a term much more in vogue today, "moderates"; they will always remain reactionaries and it is necessary to keep them out of the International. A worker can recognize the bourgeois who sincerely seeks membership in the International by the relations he keeps up with the bourgeois world. The great majority of the bourgeois capitalists and landed proprietors, those who have the courage to come out openly and manifest their abhorrence of the labor movement are, at least, resolute and sincere enemies and less dangerous for the International than the hypocrites.

But there is another category of bourgeois socialist who is not so frank or courageous. Enemies of social liquidation (the abolition of authoritarian exploitative institutions), they, like all reactionary bourgeois, defend the institutions responsible for the slavery of the proletariat and still pose as the apostles for the emancipation of the working class.

The radical and liberal bourgeois socialists who founded the League for Peace and Freedom [see selection] belong to this category. In its first year, 1867, the League rejected socialism with horror. Last year, 1868, at the Bern Congress, they again overwhelmingly rejected economic equality. Now, in 1869, seeing that the League is about to expire and wishing to stave off death a little longer, they finally realize that they must deal with the social problem. They now call themselves "socialists," but they are bourgeois socialists because they would resolve all social questions on the basis of *social equality*. They want to preserve interest on capital and land rents and still call for the emancipation of the workers.

What impels them to undertake so hopeless and ridiculous a task? Most of the bourgeoisie are tired of the reign of Caesarism and militarism, which they themselves, out of fear of the proletariat, helped to initiate in the 1848 revolution.

You need only recall the June days, precursors of the December days, when this *National Assembly*, with one voice, cursed the illustrious and heroic socialist Proudhon, the only one who had the courage to defy and expose this rabid herd of bourgeois conservatives, liberals, and radicals; nor should you now forget that among his traducers were a number of citizens still living, and today more militant than ever, who received their revolutionary baptism during the persecutions of the December days, and many who have since become martyrs to liberty. But notwithstanding these honorable exceptions, the whole bourgeoisie, including the radical bourgeois, have themselves created the very Caesarism and militarism whose effects they now deplore. After having used these elements against the proletariat, they now want to get rid of them. Why? Because the regime has humiliated them and encroached upon their interests. But how can they free themselves? *Then*, they were brave and powerful enough to challenge them. *Now*, they are cowardly, senile, and impotent.

Help can come only from the proletariat. But how can they be won over? By promises of liberty and equality? These promises will no longer move the workers. They have learned by bitter experience that these fine-sounding words mean only the perpetuation of an economic slavery no less hard than before. To touch the heart of these millions of wage slaves, you must speak to them about economic emancipation. There is no worker who today does not understand

that economic freedom is the basis for all his other freedoms. This being the case, the bourgeois must now speak to the workers about the economic reform of society.

The bourgeois members of the League for Peace and Freedom say to themselves:

Very well, we must also call ourselves socialists. We must promise the workers social and economic reforms, always on the condition that they respect the civilization and the omnipotence of the bourgeoisie, private and hereditary property, interest on capital and on landed-property, and all the rest of it. We must find some way to convince them that only under these conditions will our domination be assured and (strange as it may seem) the workers be emancipated. We will even convince them that to realize all these social and economic reforms, it is above all necessary to make a good political revolution, exclusively political, as red as they could possibly wish, if necessary even with a great chopping-off of heads, but always with scrupulous respect for the sanctity of property; an entirely Jacobin revolution; in short ... we will make ourselves the masters of the situation and then grant the workers what we think they are entitled to.

There is an infallible sign by which workers can recognize a phoney socialist, a bourgeois socialist; if he says that the political must *precede the* social and economic transformation; if he denies that both must be made at the same time, or shrugs his shoulders when told that the political revolution will be meaningful only when it begins with a full, immediate and direct *social liquidation...*

IV. *L'Égalité*, August 28, 1869

IF the International is to remain true to its principles, it cannot deviate from the only road that can lead it to victory; it must above all counteract the influence of two kinds of bourgeois socialists: the advocates of bourgeois politics, including the revolutionary bourgeois, and the “practical men” with their bourgeois cooperation. The politics of the International is summed up in these words from our preamble:

... that the submission of labor to capital is the source of a political moral and material servitude, and that for this reason the economic emancipation of the workers is the great objective to which every political movement must be subordinated...

It is clear that every political movement whose objective is not the immediate, direct, *definitive, and complete* economic emancipation of the workers, and which does not clearly and unmistakably proclaim the principle of *economic equality*, i.e., *restitution of capital to labor* or *social liquidation* — that every such political movement is a bourgeois movement and must therefore be excluded from the International. The politics of the bourgeois democrats and the bourgeois socialists is based on the idea that political liberty is the preliminary *condition for* economic emancipation. These words can have only one meaning. ... The workers must ally themselves with the radical bourgeois to first make the political revolution; and then, later, fight against their former allies to make the economic revolution.

We emphatically repudiate this disastrous theory which will once again make the workers the instrument of their own enslavement and submit themselves anew to the exploitation of the bourgeoisie. To conquer political liberty first can mean only that the social and economic relations will at least “temporarily” remain untouched. In short, the capitalists keep their wealth and the workers their poverty.

We will be told that once political liberty is won, it will much later serve the workers as the instrument to win *equality* and *economic justice*. Freedom is, of course, a magnificent and powerful force, provided the workers will have the opportunity to make use of it and provided that it is effectively in their possession. But if not, this political freedom will as always remain a transparent fraud, a fiction. One must live in a dream world to imagine that a worker, under the prevailing economic and social conditions, can really and effectively exercise political liberty. He lacks both the time and the material means to do so.

What did we see in France the day after the 1848 revolution, from the political point of view the most radical revolution that can be desired? The French workers were certainly neither indifferent nor unintelligent, yet though they had universal suffrage they left everything to the bourgeois politicians. Why? Because they lacked the material means necessary to make political liberty a reality; ... while the bourgeois radicals and liberals, including the conservatives, the newly minted republicans of the day before yesterday, and other such converts, connived and schemed — the one thanks to income from property or their lucrative positions, the other thanks to their state positions in which they naturally remained and in which they entrenched themselves more solidly than ever...

Let us suppose that the workers, made wiser by experience, instead of electing the bourgeois to constituent or legislative assemblies will send simple workers from their own ranks. Do you know what will happen? The new worker deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, living and soaking up all the bourgeois ideas and acquiring their habits, will cease being workers and statesmen and become converted into bourgeois, even more bourgeois-like than the bourgeois themselves. Because men do not make positions; positions, contrariwise, make men. And we know from experience that worker bourgeois are no less egotistic than exploiter bourgeois, no less disastrous for the International than the bourgeois socialists, no less vain and ridiculous than bourgeois who become nobles...

To urge workers to win political liberty without first dealing with the burning question of socialism, without pronouncing the phrase that makes the bourgeoisie tremble — social *liquidation* — is simply to say: “Conquer political liberty for us, so that we can use it against you later on.”

just as the bourgeois socialists strive to organize a formidable campaign among the workers to win political liberty, using *socialism as the bait* to hook them; so must the working masses, fully aware of their position, clarified and guided by the principles of the International, begin to organize themselves effectively and constitute a true power, not national, but international, to replace the policy of the bourgeoisie with their own policy; and just as the bourgeoisie need a revolution to institute their own ideal of full political liberty under republican institutions, and no revolution can succeed without the people ... it is necessary that the workers' movement cease pulling chestnuts out of the fire for the benefit of the bourgeois gentlemen and make that revolution serve only for the triumph of the people, for the cause of all who toil against the exploiters of labor.

True to its principles, the International Workingmen's Association will never endorse or support any political agitation which does not aim at the immediate, direct, and complete *economic emancipation* of the workers, the abolition of the bourgeoisie as a class economically separate from the great mass of the people. The International will not support any revolution which from the very first day does not inscribe upon its banner ... *social liquidation*.

But revolutions are not improvised or made arbitrarily, neither by individuals nor by the most powerful associations. Independent of all will and of all conspiracies, they are always brought

about by the natural force of events. They can be foreseen, their imminence can sometimes be sensed, but their explosion can never be artificially accelerated. Convinced of this truth, we ask, "What policy should the International pursue during this more or less extended interval separating us from the overwhelming Social Revolution which everyone awaits?"

Ignoring all local and national politics, the International endeavors to imbue the labor agitation of all lands with an *exclusively economic character*. To achieve its immediate aim — reduction of working hours and higher wages — it prepares for strikes, sets up strike funds, and tries to unite the workers into one organization.

[Let us enlarge our association. But at the same time, let us not forget to consolidate and reinforce it so that our solidarity, which is our whole power, grows stronger from day to day. Let us have more of this solidarity in study, in our work, in civic action, in life itself. Let us cooperate in our common enterprise to make our lives a little more supportable and less difficult. Let us, whenever possible, establish producer-consumer cooperatives and mutual credit societies which, though under the present economic conditions they cannot in any real or adequate way free us, are nevertheless important inasmuch as they train the workers in the practice of managing the economy and plant the precious seeds for the organization of the future.]

The International will continue to propagandize its principles, because these principles, being the purest expression of the collective interests of the workers of the whole world, are the soul and living, dynamic power of our association. It will spread its propaganda without regard for the susceptibilities of the bourgeoisie, so that every worker, emerging from the intellectual and moral torpor in which he has been kept, will understand his situation and know what he wants and what to do, and under what conditions he can obtain his rights as a man. The International will have to conduct its propaganda even more energetically, because within the International itself we encounter influences which express disdain for these principles, deprecating them as empty, useless theory and trying to mislead the workers into returning to the economic and religious catechism of the bourgeoisie.

The International will expand and organize itself strongly; so that when the Revolution, ripened by the force of events, breaks out, there will be a real force ready which knows what to do and is therefore capable of guiding the revolution in the direction marked out by the aspirations of the people: a serious international organization of workers' associations of all lands, capable of replacing this departing world of states.

We conclude this faithful exposition of the policy of the International, by quoting the concluding paragraph from the preamble to our general statutes:

The movement brought into being among the industrialized countries of Europe, in giving rise to new hopes, gives a solemn warning not to fall again into old errors.

The Policy of The International — Alternate version

I

[*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 tunder the title of “The Issue.” It is now republished tunder 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 lie 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 be 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 with 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.

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 coarseness, 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 leaving 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.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Michail Bakunin
On the Policy of the International Workingmen's Association
1869

Retrieved on February 24th, 2009 from www.marxists.org and from dwardmac.pitzer.edu
This page includes two version of the *Policy* and the essay *The Two Camps*

theanarchistlibrary.org