

The Organization of the International (1869)

by Michael Bakunin

The masses are the social power, or, at least, the essence of that power. But they lack two things in order to free themselves from the hateful conditions which oppress them: education, and organization. These two things represent: today, the real foundations of power of all government.

To abolish the military and governing power of the State, the proletariat must organize. But since organization cannot exist without knowledge, it is necessary to spread among the masses real social education.

To spread this real social education is the aim of the International. Consequently, the day on which the international succeeds in uniting in its ranks a half, a fourth, or even a tenth part of the workers of Europe, the State or States will cease to exist. The organization of the International will be altogether different from the organization of the State, since its aim is not to create new States but to destroy all existing government systems. The more artificial, brutal, and authoritarian is the power of the State, the more indifferent and hostile it is to the natural developments, interests and desires of the people, the freer and more natural must be the organization of the International. It must try all the more to accommodate itself to the natural instincts and ideals of the people.

But what do we mean by the natural organization of the masses? We mean the organization which is founded upon the experience and results of their everyday life and the difference of their occupations, i.e., their industrial organization. The moment all branches of industry are represented in their International, the organization of the masses will be complete.

But it might be said that, since we exist, the International, organized influence over the masses: we are aiming at new power equally with the politicians of the old State systems. This change is a great mistake. The influences of the International over the masses differs from all government power in that, it is no more than a natural, unofficial influence of ordinary ideas, without authority.

The State is the authority, the rule, and organized power of the possessing class, and the make-believe experts over the life and liberty of masses. The State does not want anything other than the servility of the masses. At once it demands their submission.

The International, on the other hand, has no other object than the absolute freedom of the masses. Consequently, it appeals to the rebel instinct. In order that this rebel instinct should be strong and powerful enough to overthrow the rule of the State and the privileged class, the International must organize.

To realize this goal, it has to employ two quite just weapons:

1. The propagation of its ideas.
2. The natural organization of its power or authority, through the influence of its adherents on the masses.

A person who can assert that, organized activity is an attack on the freedom of the masses, or an attempt to create a new rule, is either a sophist or a fool. It is sad enough for these who don't know the rules of human solidarity, to think that complete individual independence is possible, or desirable. Such a condition would mean the dissolution of all human society, since the entire social existence of man depends on the interdependence of individuals and the masses. Every person, even the cleverest and strongest--nay, especially the clever and strong--are at all times, the creatures as also the creators of this influence. The freedom of each individual is the direct outcome of these

material mental and moral influences, of all individuals surrounding him in that society in which he lives, develops, and dies. A person who seeks to free himself from that influence in the name of a metaphysical, superhuman, and perfectly egotistical "freedom" aims at his own extermination as a human being. And these who refuse to use that influence on others, withdraw from all activity of social life, and by not passing on their thoughts and feelings, work for their own destruction. Therefore, this so-called "independence," which is preached so often by the idealists and metaphysicians: this so-called individual liberty is only the destruction of existence.

In nature, as well as in human society, which is never anything else than part of that same nature, every creature exists on condition that he tries, as much as his individuality will permit, to influence the lives of others. The destruction of that indirect influence would mean death. And when we desire the freedom of the masses, we by no means want to destroy this natural influence, which individuals or groups of individuals, create through their own contract.

What we seek is the abolition of the artificial, privileged, lawful, and official influence. If the Church and State were private institutions, we should be, even then, I suppose their opponents. We should not have protested against their right to exist. True, in a sense, they are, today, private institutions, as they exist exclusively to conserve the interests of the privileged classes. Still, we oppose them, because they use all the power of the masses to force their rule upon the latter in an authoritarian, official, and brutal manner. If the International could have organized itself in the State manner, we, its most enthusiastic friends, would have become its bitterest enemies. But it cannot possibly organize itself in such a form. The International cannot recognize limits to human fellowship and, whilst the State cannot exist unless it limits, by territorial pretensions, such fellowship and equality, History has shown us that the realization of a league of all the States of the world, about which all the despots have dreamt, is impossible. Hence these who speak of the State, necessarily think and speak of a world divided into different States, who are internally oppressors and outwardly despoilers, i.e., enemies to each other. The State, since it involves this division, oppression, and despoliation of humanity, must represent the negation of humanity and the destruction of human society.

There would not have been any sense in the organization of the workers at all, if they had not aimed at the overthrow of the State. The International organizes the masses with this object in view, to the end that they might recall this goal. And how does it organize them?

Not from the top to the bottom, by imposing a seeming unity and order on human society, as the state attempts, without regards to the differences of interest arising from differences of occupation. On the contrary, the International organizes the masses from the bottom up wards, taking the social life of the masses, their real aspirations as a starting point, and encouraging them to unite in groups according to their real interests in society. The International evolves a unity of purpose and creates a real equilibrium of aim and well-being out of their natural difference in life and occupation.

Just because the International is organized in this way, it develops a real power. Hence it is essential that every member of every group should be acquainted thoroughly with all its principles. Only by these means will he make a good propagandist in time of peace and real revolutionist in time of war.

We all know that our program is just. It expresses in a few noble words the just and humane demands of the proletariat. Just because it is an absolutely humane program, it contains all the symptoms of the social revolution. It proclaims the destruction of the old and the creation of the new world.

This is the main point which we must explain to all members of the International. This program substitutes a new science, a new philosophy for the old religion. And it defines a new international policy, in place of the old diplomacy. It has no other object than the overthrow of the States.

In order that the members of the International scientifically fill their posts, as revolutionary propagandists, it is necessary for every one to be imbued with the new science, philosophy, and

policy: the new spirit of the International. It is not enough to declare that we want the economic freedom of the workers, a full return for our labor, the abolition of classes, the end of political slavery, the realization of all human rights, equal duties and justice for all: in a phrase, the unity of humanity. All this, is, without a doubt, very good and just. But when the workers of the International simply go on repeating these phrases, without grasping their truth and meaning, they have to face the danger of reducing their just claims to empty words, cant which is nothing without understanding.

It might be answered that not all workers, even when they are members of the International, can be educated. It is not enough, then, that there are in the organization, a group of people, who--as far as possible--are acquainted with the science, philosophy, and policy of Socialism? Cannot the wide mass follow their "brotherly advice" not to turn from the right path, that leads ultimately to the freedom of the proletariat?

The authoritarian Communists in the International often make use of these arguments, although they have wanted the courage to state them so freely and so clearly. They have sought to hide their real opinion under demagogic compliments about the cleverness and all powerfulness of the people. We were always the bitterest enemies of this opinion. And we are convinced, that, if the International split into two groups--a big majority, and small minority of ten, twenty or more people--in such a way, that the majority were convinced blindly of the theoretical and practical sense of the minority, the result would be the reduction of the International to an oligarchy--the worst form of State. The educated and capable minority would, together with its responsibilities, demand the rights of a governing body. And this governing body would prove more despotic than an avowed autocracy, because it would be hidden beneath a show of servile respect for the will of the people. The minority would rule through the medium of resolutions, imposed upon the people, and afterwards called "the will, of the people." In this way, the educated minority would develop into a government, which, like all other governments, would grow every day more despotic and reactionary.

The International only then can become a weapon for liberating the people, when it frees itself; when it does not permit itself to be divided into two groups--a big majority, the blind tool of an educated minority. That is why its first duty is to imprint upon the minds of its members the science, philosophy, and policy of Socialism.