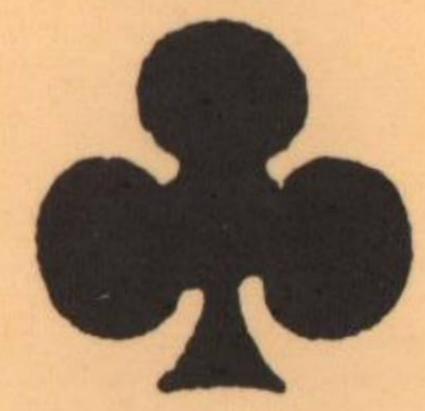


60p

# BASIC BAKUNIN



**ACE**

Anarchist Communist Editions

ACE pamphlets are available from c/o 84b Whitechapel  
High Street, London E1 7QX.

ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FEDERATION

# BASIC BAKUNIN



# ACE

# Anarchist Communist Editions

**ACE pamphlets are available from c/o 84b Whitechapel  
High Street, London E1 7QX.**

## Preface.

The aim of this pamphlet is to do little more than present an outline of what the author thinks are the key features of Michael Bakunin's anarchist ideas.

Bakunin was extremely influential in the nineteenth century socialist movement, yet his ideas have for decades been reviled, distorted or ignored. On reading this pamphlet, it will become apparent that Bakunin has a lot to offer and that his ideas are not at all confused (as some writers would have us think) but make up a fully coherent and well argued body of thought. For a detailed but difficult analysis of Bakunin's revolutionary ideas, Richard B. Saltman's book, "The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin" is strongly recommended. Ask your local library to obtain a copy.

## Class

Bakunin saw revolution in terms of the overthrow of one oppressing class by another oppressed class and the destruction of political power as expressed as the state and social hierarchy. According to Bakunin, society is divided into two main classes which are fundamentally opposed to each other. The oppressed class, which he variously described as commoners, the people, the masses or the workers, makes up the great majority of the population. It is in "normal" times not conscious of itself as a class, though it has a "instinct" for revolt and whilst unorganised, is full of vitality. The numerically much smaller oppressing class, however, is conscious of its role and maintains its ascendancy by acting in a purposeful, concerted and united manner. The basic difference between the two classes, Bakunin maintained, rests upon the ownership and control of property, which is disproportionately in the hands of the minority class of capitalists. The masses, on the other hand, have little to call their own beyond the ability to work.

Bakunin was astute enough to understand that the differences between the two main classes is not always clear cut. He pointed out that it is not possible to draw a hard line between the two classes, though as in most things, the differences are most apparent at the extremes. Between these extremes of wealth and power there is a hierarchy of social strata which can be assessed according to the degree to which they exploit others or are exploited themselves. The further away a given group is from the workers, the more likely it is to be part of the exploiting category and the less it suffers from exploitation. Between the two major classes exists a middle class or middle classes which are both exploiting and exploited, depending on their position on the social hierarchy.

The masses, who are the most exploited, form in Bakunin's view, the great revolutionary class which alone can sweep away the present economic system. Unfortunately, the fact of exploitation and its resultant poverty are in themselves no guarantee of revolution. Extreme poverty is, Bakunin thought, likely to lead to resignation if the people can see no possible alternative to the existing order. Perhaps, if driven to great depths of despair, the poor will rise up in revolt. Revolts however, tend to be local and

therefore, easy to put down. In Bakunin's view, therefore, three conditions are necessary to bring about a popular revolution. They are, sheer hatred for the conditions in which the masses find themselves, the belief that change is a possible alternative, and a clear vision of the society that has to be created to bring about human emancipation. Without these three factors being present, plus united and efficient self organisation, no liberatory revolution can possibly succeed.

The point should be made, that unlike the Marxists, Bakunin never felt any hostility towards the rural working class or poor peasants. In pursuit of their own interests against the local bourgeoisie or in alliance with the industrial workers, the peasants were viewed as a vital revolutionary force.

Bakunin had no doubts that revolution must necessarily involve destruction to create the basis of the new society. He stated that, quite simply, revolution means nothing less than war, that is the physical destruction of people and property. Spontaneous revolutions involve, often, the vast destruction of property. Bakunin noted that when circumstances demand it, the workers will destroy even their own houses, which more often than not, do not belong to them. The negative, destructive urge is absolutely necessary, he argued, to sweep away the past. Destruction is closely linked to construction, since the "more vividly that the future is visualised, the more powerful is the force of destruction".

Given the close relationship between the concentration of wealth and power in capitalist societies, it is not surprising that Bakunin considered economic questions to be of paramount importance. It is in the context of the struggle between labour and capital that Bakunin gave great significance to strikes by workers. Strikes, he believed, have a number of important functions in the struggle against capitalism. Firstly, they are necessary as catalysts to wrench the workers away from their ready acceptance of capitalism, they jolt them out of their condition of resignation. Strikes, as a form of economic and political warfare, require unity in order to succeed, thus welding the workers together. During strikes, there is a polarisation between employers and workers. This makes the latter more receptive to revolutionary propaganda and destroys the urge to compromise and seek deals. Bakunin thought that as the struggle between labour and capital increases, so will the intensity and number of strikes. A revolutionary general strike, in which class conscious workers are infused with anarchist ideas, will lead thought Bakunin, to the final explosion which will bring about anarchist society.

However, Bakunin was not tied to any deterministic schemes. He threw himself into revolutions whenever he could, injecting a libertarian character and pushing forward their goals. Insurrection remained a valid means of carrying out revolution.

Bakunin's ideas are revolutionary in a very full sense, being concerned with the destruction of economic exploitation and social/political domination and their replacement by a system of social organisation which is in harmony with human nature. Bakunin offered a critique of capitalism, in which authority and economic inequality went hand in

hand, and state socialism (e.g. Marxism) which is one sided in its concentration on economic factors whilst, grossly underestimating the dangers of social authority.

### The State

This consistent and unified theory upon three interdependent platforms, namely, that human beings are naturally social (and therefore desire social solidarity), are more or less equal, and want to be free. His Anarchism is consequently concerned with the problem of creating a society of freedom within the context of an egalitarian system of mutual interaction. The problem with existing societies, he argued, is that they are dominated by states which are necessarily violent, anti-social and artificial constructs which deny the fulfilment of humanity.

Whilst there are, in Bakunin's view, many objectionable features within capitalism, apart from the state (e.g. the oppression of women, wage slavery), it is the state which nurtures, maintains and protects the oppressive system as a whole. The state is defined as an anti-social machine which controls society for the benefit of an exploiting class or elite. It is essentially an institution based upon violence and is concerned with the maintenance of inequality through political repression. In addition the state relies upon a permanent bureaucracy to help carry out its aims. This bureaucratic element, incidentally, is not simply the tool of a ruling class, but has interests and ambitions of its own which it promotes. All states, Bakunin believed, have inertial tendencies towards self perpetuation, whether they be capitalist or socialist and are thus to be opposed as obstacles to human freedom.

It might be objected that states are not primarily concerned with political repression and violence and indeed that liberal democratic states, in particular, are as much interested in social welfare. Bakunin argues that such aspects are only a disguise, and that when threatened, all states reveal their essentially violent natures. In Britain and Northern Ireland this repressive feature of state activity has come increasingly to the fore, when the state has been challenged to any significant degree, it has responded with brutal firmness.

And developments within Britain over the last couple of decades tend to substantiate another feature of the state which Bakunin drew attention to, their tendency towards ever increasing authoritarianism and absolutism. He believed that there were strong pressures in all states, whether they be liberal, socialist, capitalist or whatever, towards military dictatorship but that the rate of such development will, however vary according to factors such as demography, culture and politics.

Finally, Bakunin noted that states tend towards warfare against other states. Since there is no internationally accepted moral code or arbiter between states, then rivalries between them will be expressed in terms of military conflict. "So long as states exist, there will be no peace. There will only be more or less prolonged respites, armistices concluded by the perpetually belligerent states; but as soon as a state feels sufficiently strong to destroy this equilibrium to its advantage, it will never fail to do so."

### Bourgeois Democracy

Political commentators and the media are constantly singing the praises of the system of representative democracy in which every few years or so the electorate is asked to put a cross on a piece of paper to determine who will control them. This system works well insofar as the capitalist system has found a way of gaining legitimacy through the illusion that somehow the voters are in charge of the working of the system. Bakunin's writings on the issue of representative democracy were made at a time when it barely existed in the world. Yet he could see on the basis of a couple of examples (the U.S.A, and Switzerland) that the widening of the franchise does little to improve the lot of the great mass of the population. True, as Bakunin noted, middle class politicians are prepared to humble themselves before the electorate issuing all sorts of promises. But this levelling of candidates before the populace disappears the day after the election, once they are transformed into Members of Parliament. The workers continue to go to work and the bourgeoisie takes up once again the problems of business and political intrigue.

Today, in the United States and Western Europe the predominant political system is that of liberal democracy. In Britain the electoral system is patently unfair in its distribution of parliamentary seats, insofar as some parties with substantial support get negligible representation. However, even where strict proportional representation applies, the Bakuninist critique remains scathing. For the representative system requires that only a small section of the population concern itself directly with legislation and governing (in Britain a majority out of 650 MP's).

Bakunin's objections to representative democracy rests basically on the fact that it is an expression of the inequality of power which exists in society. Despite constitutions guaranteeing the rights of citizens and equality before the law, the reality is that the capitalist class is in permanent control. So long as the great mass of the population has to sell its labour power in order to survive, there cannot be democratic government. So long as people are economically exploited by capitalism and there are gross inequalities of wealth, there cannot be real democracy. As Bakunin made clear, economic facts are much stronger than political rights. So long as there is economic privilege, there will be political domination by the rich over the poor. The result of this relationship is that representatives of capitalism (bourgeois politicians) "possess in fact, if not by right, the exclusive privilege of governing."

A common fiction which is expounded in liberal democracies is that the people rule. However, the reality is that minorities necessarily do the governing. A privileged few, who have access to wealth, education and leisure time, clearly are better equipped to govern than ordinary people, who generally have little free time and only a basic education.

But, as Bakunin made clear, should by some quirk, a socialist government be elected, in real terms things would not improve much. When people gain power and place themselves "above" society, he argued, their way of looking at the world changes. From

the exalted position of high office the perspective on life becomes distorted and seems very different to those on the bottom. The history of socialist representation in parliament is primarily that of renegeing on promises and becoming absorbed into the manners, morality and attitudes of the ruling class. Bakunin suggests that such backsliding from socialist ideals is not due to treachery but because participation in parliament makes representatives see the world through a distorting mirror. A workers' parliament, engaged in the tasks of governing, would said Bakunin, end up as a chamber of "determined aristocrats, bold or timid worshippers of the principle of authority who will also become exploiters and oppressors".

The point which Bakunin makes time and time again in his writings is that no one can govern for the people in their interests. Only personal and direct control over our lives will ensure that justice and freedom will prevail. To abdicate direct control is to deny freedom. To grant political sovereignty to others, whether under the mantle of democracy, republicanism, the peoples' state or whatever, is to give to others control and therefore domination over our lives.

It might be thought that the referendum, in which people directly make laws, would be an advance upon the idea of representative democracy. This is not the case according to Bakunin, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the people are not in a position to make decisions on the basis of full knowledge of all the issues involved. Also, laws may be of a complex, abstract and specialised nature and that in order to vote for them in a serious way the people need to be fully educated and have available the time and facilities to reflect upon and discuss the implications involved. The reality of referenda is that they are used by full time politicians to gain legitimacy for essentially bourgeois issues. It is no coincidence that Switzerland, which has used the referendum frequently, remains one of the most conservative countries in Europe. With referenda, the people are guided by politicians who set the terms of the debate. Thus, despite direct popular input, the people still remain under bourgeois control.

Finally, Bakunin questions the whole concept of the possibility of the democratic state. For him the democratic state is a contradiction in terms since the state is essentially about force, authority and domination and is necessarily based upon an inequality of wealth and power. Democracy, in the sense of self rule for all, means that no one is ruled. If no one is ruled, there can be no state. If there is a state there can be no self rule.

## Marxism

Bakunin's opposition to Marxism involves several separate but related criticisms. Though he thought that Marx was a sincere revolutionary, Bakunin believed that the application of the Marxist system would necessarily lead to the replacement of one system of repression (capitalist) by another (state socialist).

Firstly, Bakunin opposed what he considered to be the economic determinist element in Marx's thought, most simply stated that "Being determines consciousness". Put in another way, Bakunin was against the idea that the whole range of "superstructural" factors of society, its laws, moralities science, religions etc. were "but the necessary after effects of the development of economic facts". Rather than history and society being primarily determined by economic factors (e.g. the "mode of production"), Bakunin allowed much more for the active intervention of human beings in the realisation of their destiny.

More fundamental was Bakunin's opposition to the Marxist idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat which was, in effect, a transitional state on the way to stateless communism. Marx and Engels, in the Communist manifesto of 1848, had written of the need for labour armies under state supervision, the backwardness of the rural workers, the need for a centralised and directed economy and for widespread nationalisation. Later, Marx also made clear that he felt that a workers' government could come into being through universal franchise. Bakunin questioned each of these propositions.

The state, whatever its basis, whether it be proletarian or bourgeois, inevitably contains several objectional features. States are based upon coercion and domination. This domination would, Bakunin stated, very soon cease to be that of the proletariat over its enemies, but would become a state over the proletariat. This would arise, Bakunin believed, because of the impossibility of a whole class, numbering millions of people, governing on its own behalf. Necessarily, the workers would have to wield power by proxy by entrusting the tasks of governing to a small group of politicians.

Once the role of government was taken out of the hands of the masses, a new class of experts, scientists and professional politicians, would arise. This new elite would, Bakunin believed, be far more secure in its domination over the workers by means of the mystification and legitimacy granted by the claim to be acting in accordance with scientific laws (a major claim by Marxists). Furthermore, given that the new state could masquerade as the true expression of the people's will. The institutionalising of political power gives rise to a new group of governors with the same self seeking interests and the same cover-ups of its dubious dealings.

Another problem posed by the statist system, that of the centralised statist economy, would argued Bakunin, further strengthen the process of domination. The state as owner, organiser, director, financer, and distributor of labour and the economy, would necessarily have to act in an authoritarian manner in its operations. As can be seen by the Soviet system, a command economy must act with decisions flowing from the top to the bottom;

it cannot meet the complex and various needs of individuals and, in the final analysis, is a hopelessly inefficient giant. Marx believed that centralism, from whatever quarter, was a move towards the final, statist solution of revolution. Bakunin, in contrast, opposed centralism by federalism i.e. the voluntary associations of communes.

Bakunin's predictions as to the operation of Marxist states has been borne out by reality. The Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, talked incessantly of proletarian dictatorship and soviet power, yet inevitably, without wanting to, created a vast bureaucratic police state.

### The Unions

Most of the left in Britain view the present structures of the trade unions in a generally positive light. This is true for members of the Labour Party, both left and right, what remains of the Communist Party, the Militant group and many other Marxist organisations. These bodies wish to capture or retain control of the unions, pretty much as they stand, in order to use them for their own purposes. As a result, there are frequently bitter conflicts and manoeuvrings within the unions for control. This happens in many unions where stridently right wing groups alternate with the left organisations for control of union executives and full-time posts. The major exception to this is the Socialist Workers Party which advocates rank and file organisation, so long as the S.W.P. can control it.

Bakunin laid the foundations of the anarchist approach to union organisation and the general tendency of non-anarchist unions to decay into personal fiefdoms and bureaucracy over a century ago. Arguing in the context of union organisation within the International Working Mens Association, he gave examples of how unions can be stolen from the membership whose will they are supposed to be an expression of. He identified several inter-related features which lead to the usurpation of power by union leaders.

Firstly, he indicated a psychological factor which plays a key part. Honest, hardworking, intelligent and well meaning militants win, through hard work, the respect and admiration of their fellow members and are elected to union office. They display self sacrifice, initiative and ability. Unfortunately, once in positions of leadership, these people soon imagine themselves to be indispensable and their focus of attention centres more and more on the machinations within the various union committees. The one time militant thus becomes removed from the every day problems of the rank and file members and assumes the self delusion which afflicts all leaders, namely, a sense of superiority.

Given the existence of union bureaucracies and secret debating chambers in which leaders decide union actions and policies, a "governmental aristocracy" arises within the union structures, no matter how democratic those structures may formally be. With the growing authority of the union committees etc., the workers become indifferent to union affairs, with the exception Bakunin asserts, of issues which directly affect them e.g. dues payments, strikes etc. Unions have always had great problems in getting subscriptions

from alienated memberships, a solution which has been found in the "check-off" system by which unions and employers collaborate to remove the required sum at source, i.e. from the pay packet.

Where workers do not *directly* control their union and delegate authority to committees and full-time agents, several things happen. Firstly, so long as the union subscriptions are not too high and back dues are not pressed too hard for, the substituting bodies can act with virtual impunity. This is good for the committees but brings almost to an end the democratic life of the union. Power gravitates increasingly to the committees and these bodies, like all governments substitute their will for that of the membership. This in turn allows expression for personal intrigues, vanity, ambition and self-interest. Many intra-union battles, which are ostensibly fought on ideological grounds, are in fact merely struggles for control by ambitious self seekers who have chosen the union for their career structure. This careerism occasionally surfaces in battles between rival leftists, for example where no political reasons for conflict exist. In the past the Communist Party offered a union career route within certain unions and such conflicts constantly arose. Presumably, within the Militant group, which also wishes to capture unions, the same problem exists.

Within the various union committees, which are arranged on a hierarchical basis (mirroring capitalism), one or two individuals come to dominate on the basis of superior intelligence or aggressiveness. Ultimately, the unions become dominated by bosses who hold great power in their organisations, despite the safeguards of democratic procedures and constitutions. Over the last few decades, many such union bosses have become national figures, especially in periods of Labour government.

Bakunin thought that such union degeneration is not inevitable but only arises in the absence of rank and file control, lack of opposition to undemocratic trends and the accession to union power by those who allow themselves to be corrupted. Those individuals who genuinely wish to safeguard their personal integrity should, Bakunin argued, not stay in office too long and should encourage strong rank and file opposition. Union militants have a duty to remain faithful to their revolutionary ideals.

Bakunin argued that personal integrity, however, is an insufficient safeguard. Other, institutional and organisational factors must also be brought into play. These include regular reporting to the membership the proposals made by the officials and how they voted, in other words frequent and direct accountability. Secondly, such union delegates must draw their mandates from the membership being subject to rank and file instructions. Thirdly, Bakunin suggests the instant recall of unsatisfactory delegates. Finally, and most importantly, he urged the calling of mass meetings and other expressions of grass roots activity to circumvent those leaders who acted in undemocratic ways. Mass meetings inspire passive members to action, creating a camaraderie which would tend to repudiate the so-called leaders.

There is little doubt that Bakunin had in mind a type of union organisation which has since become known as anarcho-syndicalism. Anarcho-syndicalism spread throughout the world labour movement in the early decades of the twentieth century and found its expressions in bitter strikes from Peru to Russia.

However, these unions too eventually succumbed to capitalist state repression, leaderships or absorption into the communist movement of the Bolsheviks. Furthermore, despite heroic attempts at social revolution, as in Spain in 1936, most syndicalist unions succumbed to the pressures of collective bargaining, routinism and bureaucratic control from above.

### Revolutionary Organisation

Above all else, Bakunin the revolutionary, believed in the necessity of collective action to achieve anarchy. After his death there was a strong tendency within the anarchist movement towards the abandonment of organisation in favour of small group and individual activity. This development, which reached its culmination in individual acts of terror in late nineteenth century France, isolated Anarchism from the very source of the revolution, namely the workers.

Bakunin, being consistent with other aspects of his thought, saw organisation not in terms of a centralised and disciplined army (though he believed that self-discipline was vital), but as the result of decentralised federalism in which revolutionaries could channel their energies through mutual agreement within a collective. It is necessary, Bakunin argued, to have a co-ordinated revolutionary movement for a number of reasons. Firstly, if anarchists acted alone, without direction they would inevitably end up moving in different directions and would, as a result, tend to neutralise each other. Organisation is not necessary for its own sake but is necessary to maximise the strength of the revolutionary classes, in the face of the great resources commanded by the capitalist state.

However, from Bakunin's standpoint, it was the spontaneous revolt against authority by the people which is of the greatest importance. The nature of purely spontaneous uprisings is that they are uneven and vary in intensity from time to time and place to place. The anarchist revolutionary organisation must not attempt to take over and lead the uprising, but has the responsibility of clarifying goals, putting forward revolutionary propaganda, and working out ideas in correspondence with the revolutionary instincts of the masses. To go beyond this would be to undermine the whole *self-liberatory* purpose of the revolution. Putschism has no place in Bakunin's thought.

Bakunin then, was revolutionary organisation in terms of offering assistance to the revolution, not as a substitute. It is in this context that we should interpret Bakunin's call for a "secret revolutionary vanguard" and "invisible dictatorship" of that vanguard. The vanguard it should be said, has nothing in common with that of the Leninist model which seeks actual, direct leadership over the working class. Bakunin was strongly opposed to

such approaches and informed his followers that "No member is permitted, even in the midst of full revolution, to take public office of any kind, nor is the (revolutionary) organisation permitted to do so .... it will at all times be on the alert, making it impossible for authorities, governments and states to be established". The vanguard was, however, to influence the revolutionary movement on an informal basis, relying on the talents of its members to achieve results. Bakunin thought that it was the institutionalisation of authority, not natural inequalities, that posed a threat to the revolution. The vanguard would act as a catalyst to the working classes' own revolutionary activity and was expected to fully immerse itself in the movement. Bakunin's vanguard then, was concerned with education and propaganda, and unlike the leninist vanguard party, was not to be a body separate from the class, but an active agent within it.

The other major task of the Bakuninist organisation was that it would act as the watchdog for the working class. Then, as now, authoritarian groupings posed as leaders of the revolution and supplied their own members as "governments in waiting". The anarchist vanguard has to expose such movements in order that the revolution should not replace one repressive state by another "revolutionary" one. After the initial victory, the political revolutionaries, those advocates of so-called workers' governments and the dictatorship of the proletariat, would according to Bakunin try "to squelch the popular passions. The appeal for *order*, for trust in, for submission to those who, in the course and in the name of the revolution, seized and legalised their own dictatorial power; this is how such political revolutionaries reconstitute the state. We on the other hand, must awaken and foment all the dynamic passions of the people".

### Anarchy

Throughout Bakunin's criticisms of capitalism and state socialism he constantly argues for freedom. It is not surprising, then, to find that in his sketches of future anarchist society that the principle of freedom takes precedence. In a number of revolutionary programmes he outlined what he considered to be the essential features of societies which would promote the maximum possible individual and collective freedom. The societies envisaged in Bakunin's programmes are not Utopias, in the sense of being detailed fictional communities, free of troubles, but rather, suggest the basic minimum skeletal structures which would guarantee freedom. The character of future anarchist societies will vary, said Bakunin depending on a whole range of historical, cultural, economic and geographical factors.

The basic problem was to lay down the minimum necessary conditions which would bring about a society based upon justice and social welfare for all and would also generate freedom. The negative, that is, destructive features of the programmes are all concerned with the abolition of those institutions which lead to domination and exploitation. The state, including the established church, the judiciary, state banks bureaucracy, the armed

forces and the police are all to be swept away. Also, all ranks, privileges, classes and the monarchy are to be abolished.

The positive, constructive features of the new society all interlink to promote freedom and justice. For a society to be free, Bakunin argued, it is not sufficient to simply impose equality. No, freedom can only be achieved and maintained throughout the full participation in society of a highly educated and healthy population, free from social and economic worries. Such an enlightened population can then be truly free and able to act rationally on the basis of a popularly controlled science and a thorough knowledge of the issues involved.

Bakunin advocated complete freedom of movement, opinion, morality where people would not be accountable to anyone for their beliefs and acts. There must be, he argued, complete and unlimited freedom of speech, press and assembly. Freedom, he believed, must be defended by freedom, for to "advocate the restriction of freedom on the pretext that it is being defended is a dangerous delusion". A truly free and enlightened society, Bakunin said, would create a climate of public opinion which would adequately preserve liberty. An ordered society, he thought, stems not from the suppression of ideas, which only breeds opposition and factionalism, but from the fullest freedom for all.

This is not to say that Bakunin did not think that a society has the right to protect itself. He firmly believed that freedom was to be found *within* society, not through its destruction. Those people who acted in ways that lessen freedom for others have no place; these include all parasites who live off the labour of others. Work, the contribution of one's labour for the creation of wealth, forms the basis of political rights in the proposed anarchist society. Those who live by exploiting others do not deserve political rights. Others, who steal, violate voluntary agreements within and by society, inflict bodily harm etc. can expect to be punished by the laws which have been created by that society. The condemned criminal, on the other hand, can escape punishment by society by removing himself / herself from society and the benefits it confers. Society can also expel the criminal if it so wishes. Basically though, Bakunin set great store on the power of enlightened public opinion to minimise anti-social activity.

Bakunin proposed the equalisation of wealth, though natural inequalities which are reflected in different levels of skill, energy and thrift, should he argued, be tolerated. The purpose of equality is to allow individuals to find full expression of their humanity within society. Bakunin was strongly opposed to the idea of hired labour which, if introduced into an anarchist society, would lead to the reintroduction of inequality and wage slavery. He proposed instead collective effort because it would, he thought, tend to be more efficient. However, so long as individuals did not employ others, he had no objection to them working alone.

Through the creation of associations of labour which could co-ordinate workers' activities, Bakunin proposed the setting up of an industrial assembly in order to harmonise

production with the demand for products. Such an assembly would be necessary in the absence of the market. Supplied with statistical information from the various voluntary associations who would be federated, production could be specialised on an international basis so that those countries with inbuilt economic advantages would produce most efficiently for the general good. Then, according to Bakunin, waste, economic crises and stagnation "will no longer plague mankind; the emancipation of human labour will regenerate the world".

After Bakunin's death in 1876 there was a period of development of Anarchism involving notable revolutionaries such as Malatesta and Kropotkin which revised a key aspect of Bakunin's thought.

Bakunin was a "collectivist" in the sense that he believed that every worker was entitled to the full value of his (sic) labour as measured in money. The revisers of collectivism argued that the continuance of money would allow for the restoration of inequality and ultimately the state. Instead, they argued for the abolition of money, since the fruits of humanity are the result of everyone's labour, past and present. Each and everyone must be in a position to share in the world's abundance on the basis of free access.

This anarchist-communist position which is most eloquently expressed in Kropotkin's "The Conquest of Bread" became the main expression of revolutionary Anarchism and remains so.

Turning to the question of the political organisation of society, Bakunin stressed that they should all be built in such a way as to achieve order through the realisation of freedom on the basis of the federation of voluntary organisations. In all such political bodies power is to flow "from the base to the summit" and from "the circumference to the centre". In other words, such organisations should be the expressions of individual and group opinions, not directing centres which control people.

On the basis of federalism, Bakunin proposed a multi-tier system of responsibility for decision making which would be binding on all participants, so long as they supported the system. Those individuals, groups or political institutions which made up the total structure would have the right to secede. Each participating unit would have an absolute right to self-determination, to associate with the larger bodies, or not. Starting at the local level, Bakunin suggested as the basic political unit, the completely autonomous commune. The commune, on the basis of universal suffrage, would elect all of its functionaries, law makers, judges, and administrators of communal property.

The commune would decide its own affairs but, if voluntarily federated to the next tier of administration, the provincial assembly, its constitutions must conform to the provincial assembly. Similarly, the constitution of the province must be accepted by the participating communes. The provincial assembly would define the rights and obligations existing

between communes and pass laws affecting the provinces as a whole. The composition of the provincial assembly would be decided on the basis of universal suffrage.

Further levels of political organisation would be the national body and, ultimately, the international assembly. As regards international organisation, Bakunin proposed that there should be no permanent armed forces, preferring instead, the creation of local citizens' defence militias. Disputes between nationals and their provinces would be settled by an international tribunals and disputes between nations would be settled by an international assembly. This assembly, if required, could wage war against outside aggressors but should a member nation of the international federation attack another member, then it faces expulsion and the opposition of the federation as a whole.

Thus, from root to branch, Bakunin's outline for Anarchism is based upon the free federation of participants in order to maximise individual and collective well being.

#### Bakunin's Relevance Today.

Throughout most of this pamphlet Bakunin has been allowed to speak for himself and any views by the writer of the pamphlet are obvious. In this final section it might be valuable to make an assessment of Bakunin's ideas and actions.

With the dominance of Marxism in the world labour and revolutionary movements in the twentieth century, it became the norm to dismiss Bakunin as muddle-headed or irrelevant. However, during his lifetime he was a major figure who gained much serious support. Marx was so pressurised by Bakunin and his supporters that he had to destroy the First International by dispatching it to New York. In order that it should not succumb to Anarchism, Marx killed it off through a bureaucratic manoeuvre.

Now that Marxism has been seriously weakened following the collapse of the USSR and the ever increasingly obvious corruption in China, Bakunin's ideas and revolutionary Anarchism have new possibilities. If authoritarian, state socialism has proved to be a child devouring monster, then libertarian communist ideas once again offer a credible alternative.

The enduring qualities of Bakunin and his successors are many, but serious commitment to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the state must rank high. Bakunin was much more of a doer than a writer, he threw himself into actual insurrections, much to the trepidation of European heads of state. This militant tradition was continued by Malatesta, Makhno, Durruti and many other anonymous militants. Those so-called anarchists who adopt a gradualist approach are an insult to Anarchism. Either we are revolutionaries or we degenerate into ineffective passivism.

Bakunin forecast the dangers of statist socialism. His predictions of a militarised, enslaved society dominated by a Marxist ruling class came to pass in a way that even Bakunin could not have fully envisaged. Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin outstripped even the

Tsars in their arrogance and brutality. And, after decades of reformist socialism which have frequently formed governments, Bakunin's evaluations have been proved correct. In Britain we have the ultimate insult to working people in the form of "socialist Lords". For services to capitalism, Labour MP's are ultimately granted promotion to the aristocracy.

Bakunin fought for a society based upon justice, equality and freedom. Unlike political leaders of the left he had great faith in the spontaneous, creative and revolutionary potential of working people. His beliefs and actions reflect this approach. So, revolutionaries can learn much of value from his federalism, his militancy and his contempt for the state, which, in the twentieth century, has assumed gigantic and dangerous proportions, Bakunin has much to teach us but we too must develop our ideas in the face of new challenges and opportunities. We must retain the revolutionary core of his thought yet move forward. Such is the legacy of Bakunin.

With this in mind, the Anarchist Communist Federation is developing a revolutionary anarchist doctrine, which whilst being ultimately based on Bakunin's ideas, goes much further to suit the demands of present-day capitalism. Ecological issues, questions of imperialist domination of the world, the massive oppression of women, the automation of industry, computerised technology etc are all issues that have to be tackled. We welcome the challenge!

Unions by their very nature transform society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trade unions divide the working class and maintain capitalist relations of exploitation. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different to ours. The boss class is our enemy, and nothing can be done to alter this. The bosses will always press for more profits, or better conditions, from us. If we have to realise real reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never negotiate better conditions, they are team working and violates the requirements of revolutionaries. No point of view can be accepted as a means to an end. It is the struggle itself that gives us the strength to continue. Bakunin's vision of a classless society is the battle for anarchist-communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control strike committees, giving no place to leaders, bigwigs and their swells. The strength of the working class lies in its collectivity, its ability to work together, to share, to support each other, to help and encourage each other. Bakunin proposed the setting up of an industrial assembly in order to harmonise

## FURTHER READING

There are two main compilations of Bakunin's works which are quite readily available through public libraries. They are "Bakunin on Anarchy" edited by Sam Dolgov and "The Political Philosophy of Bakunin" edited by G.P Maximov. Also worth looking at, if you can get hold of them are "The basic Bakunin - Writings 1869-1871" edited by Robert M. Cutler and "Mikhail Bakunin - From Out of the Dustbin", edited by the same person.

For an understanding of the full profundity of Bakunin's ideas, there is nothing to match "The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin" by Richard B. Saltman. This American publication should be available through your local library.

### Bakunin's works currently available

- "God and the State"
- "Marxism, Freedom and the State" (edited by K.J. Kenafik)
- "The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State"
- "Statism and Anarchy" (heavy going) ed. Marshall Shatz.

## ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FEDERATION

### Aims and Principles

1. Anarchist Communist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.
2. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class.

Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as political level.

3. We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class women and black people as cross-class movements hide real class

differences and achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4. We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.
5. As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.
6. It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.
7. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part on its overthrow. Trade unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation for the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different to ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist-communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.
8. Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and

struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9. As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation.

We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method.

We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise of a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

# **WANT TO JOIN THE ACF? WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?**

I agree with the ACF's Aims and Principles and I would like to join the organisation. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

I would like more information about the Anarchist Communist Federation

I am particularly interested in the Anarchist Communist Federation's views on . . . . .

Name: .....

Please tick/fill in as appropriate and return to:

**ACF, PO BOX 4, BUCKFASTLEIGH, DEVON TQ11 0YZ**

# SUBSCRIBE-

# What they said about *Organise!*

“Many thanks! *Organise!* continues to be brilliant”

## *Brighton subscriber*

Name: .....

Address: .....

I enclose £4 for a four-issue sub, or £8 for a four-issue supporting sub). Add 25% for overseas subs or institutions. Return form to:

**ACF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.**