

II

PROGRAMME OF THE BLANQUIST COMMUNE
REFUGEES²⁸

After every unsuccessful revolution or counter-revolution, feverish activity develops among the émigrés who escaped abroad. Party groups of various shades are formed, which accuse each other of having driven the cart into the mud, of treason and of all other possible mortal sins. They also maintain close ties with the homeland, organise, conspire, print leaflets and newspapers, swear that it will start over again within the next twenty-four hours, that victory is certain and, in the wake of this expectation, distribute government posts. Naturally, disappointment follows disappointment, and since this is attributed not to inevitable historical conditions, which they do not wish to understand, but to accidental mistakes by individuals, recriminations accumulate and result in general bickering. Such is the history of all refugee societies, from the royalist émigrés of 1792²⁹ to those of today; and those among the émigrés who have common sense and reason give up this fruitless squabbling as soon as this can properly be done, and turn to something more useful.

The French emigration after the Commune has not escaped this inevitable fate either. Owing to the European smear campaign, which attacked all equally, and especially in London, where the French emigration had its common centre in the General Council of the International, for some time it was compelled to conceal its internal squabbles at least from the outside world. In the last two years, however, it was no longer able to hide the process of disintegration that is progressing rapidly in its ranks. An open quarrel flared up everywhere. In Switzerland some of the refugees joined the Bakuninists, notably under the influence of *Malon*, who was one of the founders of the secret Alliance.³⁰ Then, in London,

the so-called Blanquists split off from the International and formed a group that called itself the Revolutionary Commune.³¹ Later, a number of other groups emerged that were, however, constantly fusing and reorganising, and did not produce anything worthwhile even as regards manifestoes, whereas the Blanquists have just issued the proclamation to the "Communeux",³ calling the world's attention to their programme.

They are called Blanquists not because they are a group founded by Blanqui—of the 33 signatories to the programme only a few may ever have spoken to Blanqui—but because they want to act in his spirit and in accordance with his tradition. Blanqui is essentially a political revolutionary, a socialist only in sentiment, because of his sympathy for the sufferings of the people, but he has neither socialist theory nor definite practical proposals for social reforms. In his political activities he was essentially a "man of action", believing that, if a small well-organised minority should attempt to effect a revolutionary uprising at the right moment, it might, after scoring a few initial successes, carry the mass of the people and thus accomplish a victorious revolution. Naturally, under Louis Philippe he was able to organise this nucleus only in the form of a secret society, and it met the fate usually reserved for conspiracies: the people, fed up with the constant proffering of empty promises that it would soon begin, finally lost all patience, became rebellious, and there remained only the alternative of letting the conspiracy collapse or of striking without any external cause. They struck (May 12, 1839), but the insurrection was immediately suppressed.³² This Blanqui conspiracy, by the way, was the only one in which the police never succeeded in gaining a foothold; for the police, the insurrection came like a bolt from the blue.—Since Blanqui regards every revolution as a coup de main by a small revolutionary minority, it automatically follows that its victory must inevitably be succeeded by the establishment of a dictatorship—not, it should be well noted, of the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small number of those who accomplished the coup and who themselves are, at first, organised under the dictatorship of one or several individuals.

Obviously, Blanqui is a revolutionary of the old generation. These views on the course of revolutionary events have long since become obsolete, at least as far as the German workers' party is concerned, and in France, too, they meet the approval only of the less mature or more impatient workers. We shall also find that, in

³ *Aux Communeux*, London, June 1874.—*Ed.*

the programme in question, definite limitations have been imposed on these views. However, our London Blanquists too are guided by the principle that revolutions do not generally occur by themselves, but are made; that they are made by a relatively small minority and according to a plan worked out in advance; and, finally, that at any time it may "soon begin". With such principles people naturally become irretrievable victims of all the self-deceptions of the refugees and plunge from one folly into another. Most of all they want to play the role of Blanqui—the "man of action". But little good can be accomplished here by good will alone; Blanqui's revolutionary instinct, his ability to reach quick decisions are not, however, given to all, and no matter how much Hamlet may speak of action, he still remains Hamlet. Moreover, when our thirty-three men of action find that there is absolutely nothing to be done in the field they call action, our thirty-three Brutuses fall into a contradiction with themselves, which is comical rather than tragic, a contradiction wherein the tragedy is not heightened by the gloomy appearance they assume, as though they are a lot of "Möros, of the cloak and dagger",^a which, by the way, does not even enter their heads. What can they do? They are preparing for the next "outburst", by drawing up proscription lists for the future, to cleanse (*épuré*) the ranks of the people who took part in the Commune, which is why the other refugees call them the *pure* (*les purs*). Whether or not they have themselves assumed that title I do not know; it would ill fit some of them. Their meetings are closed, their decisions are kept secret, but this does not prevent their being echoed throughout the whole French Quarter the following morning. As always happens with such serious men of action, when they have nothing to do—they have picked first a personal, then a literary quarrel with a worthy opponent, one of the most notorious members of the Paris petite press, a certain Vermersch, who under the Commune published the *Père Duchêne*, a miserable caricature of Hébert's newspaper of 1793. In reply to their moral indignation, this gentleman published a pamphlet in which he branded them as "rogues or accomplices of rogues"^b and poured a veritable stream of abusive invectives at them:

Each word a night-pot
and not an empty one at that.^c

^a F. Schiller, *Die Bürgschaft* ("Damon und Phintias"), 1st stanza.—Ed.

^b E. Vermersch, *Un mot au public*, London, April 1874; *Les partageux. Poème*, May 12, 1874.—Ed.

^c H. Heine, "Disputation", Verse 86, *Romanzera. Drittes Buch. Hebräische Melodien*.—Ed.

And our thirty-three Brutuses find it worthwhile to pick a public quarrel with such an opponent!

If one thing is certain it is that, after the exhausting war, after the hunger in Paris and, notably, after the awful blood-letting of the May days in 1871,³³ the Paris proletariat needs a long rest to recuperate, and that every premature attempt at an insurrection can only end in a new, perhaps still more horrible defeat. Our Blanquists hold a different view. In their opinion, the disintegration of the monarchic majority in Versailles³⁴ ushers in

"the fall of Versailles, the revanche for the Commune. This is because we are approaching a great historical moment, one of the great crises when the people, apparently succumbing in wretchedness and condemned to death, resume their revolutionary advance with renewed force".^a

So, it starts all over again, and what is more, immediately. This hope for an immediate "revanche for the Commune" is not merely an émigré illusion; it is an essential article of faith for people who have taken it into their heads to play "men of action" at a time when absolutely nothing can be done in their sense, that is, in the sense of precipitating a revolution. All the same, since it is to begin, they feel that "the time has come for all refugees who still have a spark of life left in them to define their position".^b And thus the thirty-three tell us that they are 1) atheists, 2) Communists, 3) revolutionaries.

Our Blanquists have a basic feature in common with the Bakuninists, in that they want to represent the most far-reaching, most extreme trend. It is for this reason, incidentally, that the Blanquists, while opposing the Bakuninists over aims, often agree with them over means. It is, therefore, a question of being more radical than all others as regards atheism. Luckily, it is easy enough these days to be an atheist. In the European workers' parties atheism is more or less self-understood, even though in some countries it is quite often similar to that of the Spanish Bakuninist who declared: to believe in God is against all socialism, but to believe in the Virgin Mary is something quite different, and every decent Socialist should naturally do so. As regards the German Social-Democratic workers,^c it can be said that atheism has already outlived its usefulness for them; this pure negation does not apply to them, since they no longer stand in theoretical, but only in practical opposition to all belief in God: they are *simply*

^a *Aux Communeux*, p. 2.—*Ed.*

^b *Ibid.*—*Ed.*

^c The 1894 edition has: "As regards the great majority of the German Social-Democratic workers".—*Ed.*

through with God, they live and think in the real world and are, therefore, materialists. The same probably applies to France. If not, there could be nothing simpler than to organise the mass distribution among the workers of the splendid French materialist literature of the last century, of the literature in which the French spirit has attained its sublime expression as regards both form and content, and which, considering the level of science that existed then, even today stands exceedingly high as regards content, and still unexcelled as regards form. This, however, does not suit our Blanquists. To prove that they are the most radical of all, God, as in 1793,³⁵ is decreed out of existence:

"Let the Commune forever deliver mankind from this spectre of past misery" (God). "of this cause" (non-existent God a cause!) "of their present misery.—There is no room for priests in the Commune; every religious service, every religious organisation must be banned."^a

And this demand to transform the people *par ordre du mufti*^b into atheists is signed by two members of the Commune,^c who surely must have had sufficient opportunity to discover, first, that anything can be decreed on paper but that this does not mean that it will be carried out; second, that persecution is the best way of strengthening undesirable convictions! This much is certain: the only service that can still be rendered to God today is to make atheism a compulsory dogma and to surpass Bismarck's anticlerical *Kulturkampf* laws by prohibiting religion in general.

The second point of the programme is communism. Here we find ourselves on more familiar ground for the ship we are sailing here is called the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, published in February 1848. Already in the autumn of 1872 the five Blanquists who had left the International embraced a socialist programme that, in all its essential features, was that of present-day German communism, and based their withdrawal solely on the refusal of the International to play at revolution after the fashion of those five.³⁶ Now the council of the thirty-three has adopted this programme, with all its materialist view of history, even though its translation into Blanquist French leaves much to be desired where the wording of the *Manifesto* was not kept almost verbatim, as for example, in this phrase:

^a *Aux Communeux*, p. 4.—*Ed.*

^b by order of the mufti, by order from above.—*Ed.*

^c A slip of the pen; the proclamation is signed by four members of the Commune: Édouard Vaillant, Émile Eudes, Jean Clement and Frédéric Cournet.—*Ed.*

"The bourgeoisie has removed the mystic veils from the exploitation of labour in which this last expression of all forms of slavery was formerly shrouded: governments, religions, the family, laws, institutions of both the past and present are finally revealed in this society, resting on the simple opposition of capitalists and wage-workers, as the instruments of oppression, with whose help the bourgeoisie upholds its rule and suppresses the proletariat."^a

Let us compare this with the *Communist Manifesto*, Section I: "In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers. The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation," etc.^b

Yet as soon as we leave theory aside and get down to practice, the peculiar stand of the thirty-three becomes evident:

"We are Communists because we want to arrive at our aim without stop-overs at intermediate stations, without entering into compromises, which only put off victory and prolong slavery."^c

The German Communists are Communists because, through all intermediate stations and compromises, created not by them but by historical development, they clearly perceive^d the ultimate aim: the abolition of classes, the establishment of a society in which there will be no private ownership of land and means of production. The thirty-three are Communists because they imagine that, as soon as *they* have only the good will to jump over intermediate stations and compromises, everything is assured, and if, as they firmly believe, it "begins" in a day or two, and they take the helm, "communism will be introduced" the day after tomorrow. And they are not Communists if this cannot be done immediately. What childish naïveté to advance impatience as a convincing theoretical argument!

Finally, our thirty-three are "revolutionaries".^e As regards the bandying of big words, the Bakuninists are known to have done everything humanly possible in this respect. But our Blanquists feel obliged to outdo them. But how? It will be remembered that the whole socialist proletariat, from Lisbon and New York to Budapest and Belgrade, immediately adopted responsibility for

^a *Aux Communeux*, pp. 4.5.—*Ed*

^b See present edition, Vol. 6, p. 487.—*Ed*

^c *Aux Communeux*, p. 5.—*Ed*

^d The 1894 edition has: "they clearly perceive and pursue".—*Ed*

^e *Aux Communeux*, p. 7.—*Ed*

the actions of the Paris Commune *en bloc*. But that is not enough for our Blanquists:

"As far as we are concerned, we claim our share of the responsibility for the executions" (under the Commune) "of the enemies of the people" (a list of the executed is appended), "we claim our share of the responsibility for the arson that destroyed the instruments of monarchic or bourgeois oppression or protected those engaged in struggle."^a

A lot of follies are unavoidably committed in every revolution, as they are indeed at all other times, and when at last people calm down sufficiently to be able to review events critically, they inevitably draw the following conclusion: we have done many things that it would have been better to leave undone, and have failed to do many things that it would have been better to do, and that is why things took a bad turn. But what a lack of critical attitude is needed to declare the Commune impeccable and infallible and to assert that, every time a house was burned down or a hostage shot, this was a case of retributive justice, right down to the dot on the "i". Is this not tantamount to asserting that, during the week in May, the people shot precisely the number of people, and no more, than was necessary, that exactly those buildings were burned down, and no more, than had to be burned down? Is that not tantamount to saying of the first French revolution: each one beheaded got his deserts, first those whom Robespierre beheaded, and then Robespierre himself? Such childish patter results when essentially quite good-natured people give in to the urge to appear savagely brutal.

Enough. In spite of all the foolish actions taken by the refugees and the droll attempts to make boy Karl (or Eduard?)^b appear awe-inspiring, some definite progress can be noted in this programme. It is the first manifesto in which *French workers rally to the cause of present-day German communism*. Moreover, these workers are of a trend that regards the French as the chosen people of the revolution, and Paris the revolutionary Jerusalem. To have brought them this far is to the indisputable credit of *Vaillant*, who is one of the signatories and who, as is widely known, has a good knowledge of the German language and of German socialist writing. The German socialist workers who, in 1870, proved that any national chauvinism is absolutely alien to them, may consider it a favourable omen that the French workers are adopting correct theoretical principles, even though these come from Germany.

^a *Aux Communeux*, pp. 11-12.—Ed.

^b Engels plays on the words of Philipp II from Schiller's drama *Don Carlos* (Act I, Scene 6). In the 1894 edition the words "(or Eduard?)"—an allusion to Edouard Vaillant—are omitted.—Ed.

In London a review entitled *Vperyod!* (Forward)^a is appearing in the Russian language and at irregular intervals. It is edited by a personally most respectable scholar,^b whom the prevailing strict etiquette in Russian refugee literature prevents me from naming. For even those Russians who pose as out-and-out revolutionary ogres, who dub it a betrayal of the revolution to respect anything at all—in their polemics even they respect the appearance of anonymity with a conscientiousness only equalled in the English bourgeois press; they respect it even when it becomes comical, as it does here, because all the Russian refugees and the Russian government know perfectly well what the man's name is. It would never occur to us to let out such a carefully kept secret without good reason; but since the child must have a name, let us hope that the editor of the *Forward* will excuse us if, for the sake of brevity, in this article we call him by the popular Russian name *Peter*.

In his philosophy, Friend Peter is an eclectic who selects the best from all the different systems and theories: try everything and keep the best! He knows that everything has a good side and a bad side, and that the main thing is to appropriate the good side of everything without being saddled with the bad, too. Since every thing, every person, every theory has these two sides, a good and a bad, every thing, every person, every theory is as good and as bad as any other in this respect, hence, from this vantage point, it would be foolish to become impassioned for or against one or the other. From this point of view, the struggles and disputes of the

^a *Впередь! Непериодическое обозрѣніе.*— Ed.

^b P. L. Lavrov.— Ed.

revolutionaries and socialists amongst themselves are bound to appear sheer fatuous absurdities that serve no better purpose than to please their opponents. Moreover, nothing could be more understandable for a man of this opinion than to attempt to bring all of these mutually hostile factions together and earnestly enjoin them no longer to treat reaction to this scandalous spectacle, but exclusively to attack the common adversary. All the more natural, of course, if one comes from Russia, where the labour movement is, as we know, so extremely highly developed.

The *Forward* is, then, full of exhortations urging concord on all socialists or urging them, at least, to avoid all *public* discord. When the Bakuninists' attempts to subjugate the International to their rule under false pretences, by lies and deceit, occasioned the well-known split in the Association, again it was the *Forward* that exhorted us to unity. This unity could, of course, only be attained by immediately letting the Bakuninists have their way and delivering the International up to their secret conspiracies, tied hand and foot. One was not unprincipled enough to do so; one accepted the challenge; the Hague Congress came to its decision, threw out the Bakuninists and resolved to publish the documents justifying this expulsion.³⁸

There was a great deal of lamentation on the editorial board of the *Forward* over the fact that the entire labour movement had not been sacrificed to dear "unity". Yet even greater was the horror when the compromising Bakuninist documents really did appear in the commission's report (see "Ein Komplott gegen die Internationale",³⁹ German edition, Brunswick, Bracke). Let us hear from the *Forward* itself:

"This publication ... has the character of caustic polemics against persons who are in the foremost ranks of the Federalists, ... its contents are topped up with private matters which could only have been collected by hearsay, and the credibility of which could consequently not have been indisputable for the authors."^a

In order to prove to the people who implemented the decision of the Hague Congress what a colossal crime they had committed, the *Forward* refers to a feuilleton in the *Neue Freie Presse* by a certain Karl Thaler,^b which,

"having emerged from the bourgeois camp, merits particular attention because it proves most clearly the importance for the common enemies of the working class,

^a [P. L. Lavrov,] "Лѣтопись рабочаго движенія", *Впередь! Непериодическое обозрѣніе*. Zurich, 1874, Vol. II, Part II, Ch. II, p. 26.—*Ed.*

^b Karl von Thaler, "Rothe Jesuiten", *Neue Freie Presse* (Morgenblatt), Nos. 3284 and 3285, October 14 and 15, 1873 (in the section *Feuilleton*).—*Ed.*

for the bourgeoisie and governments of the mutually accusatory pamphlets of the contenders for supremacy among the ranks of the workers"^a

First let us remark that the Bakuninists are here presented simply as "*Federalists*", as opposed to the alleged *Centralists*, as if the author believed in this non-existent opposition invented by the Bakuninists. That this was not, in fact, the case will become evident. Second, let us remark that from this feuilleton, written to order for such a venal bourgeois sheet as the Vienna *Neue Freie Presse*, the conclusion is drawn that *genuine* revolutionaries should not expose merely *ostensible* revolutionaries because these mutual accusations provide amusement for the bourgeois and governments. I believe that the *Neue Freie Presse* and all this press rabble could write ten thousand articles without having the slightest effect on the stance of the German workers' party. Every struggle has moments when one cannot deny one's opponent a certain satisfaction, if one is not to inflict positive damage on oneself. Fortunately, we have got so far that we can allow our opponents this private pleasure if we thereby achieve real successes.

The main charge, however, is that the report is full of private matters the credibility of which could not have been indisputable for the authors, because they could only have been collected by hearsay. How Friend Peter knows that a society like the International, which has its official organs throughout the civilised world, can only collect such facts by hearsay is not stated. His assertion is, anyway, frivolous in the extreme. The facts in question are attested by authentic evidence, and those concerned took good care not to contest them.

But Friend Peter is of the opinion that private matters, such as private letters, are sacred and should not be published in political debates. To accept the validity of this argument on any terms is to render the writing of all history impossible. The relationship between Louis XV and Du Barry or Pompadour was a private matter, but without it the whole pre-history of the French Revolution is incomprehensible. Or, to take a step towards the present: if an innocent girl called Isabella^b is married to a man^c who, according to experts (assessor Ulrichs, for example) cannot stand women and hence only falls in love with men—if, finding herself neglected, she takes men wherever she finds them, then that is purely a private matter. But if the said innocent Isabella is

^a [P. I. Lavrov.] "Лѣтопись рабочаго движенія", *Впередь!*, Zurich, 1874, Vol. II, Part II, Ch. II, p. 26.—*Ed.*

^b Isabella II—Queen of Spain.—*Ed.*

^c Francisco de Asis.—*Ed.*

Queen of Spain and one of these young men kept by her is a young officer called Serrano^a; if this Serrano is promoted field marshal and prime minister in recognition of the heroic deeds he has performed behind closed doors, is then supplanted and overthrown by another,^b subsequently throws his faithless sweetheart out of the country with the help of other companions in misfortune, and after a variety of adventures eventually himself becomes dictator of Spain and such a great man that Bismarck does his utmost to persuade the Great Powers to recognise him—then this private affair between Isabella and Serrano becomes a piece of Spanish history, and anyone wishing to write about modern Spanish history and knowingly concealing this titbit from his readers would be falsifying history. Again, if one is describing the history of a gang like the Alliance, among whom there is such a large number of tricksters, adventurers, rogues, police spies, swindlers and cowards alongside those they have duped, should one falsify this history by knowingly concealing the individual villainies of these gentlemen as “private matters”? Much as it may horrify Friend Peter, he may rely on it that we are not done with these “private matters” by a long chalk. The material is still mounting up.

When, however, the *Forward* describes the report as a clumsy concoction of essentially private facts, it is committing an act that is hard to characterise. Anyone who could write such a thing had either not read the report in question at all; or he was too limited or prejudiced to understand it; or else he was writing something he knew to be incorrect. Nobody can read the “Komplotz gegen die Internationale” without being convinced that the private matters interspersed in it are the most insignificant part of it, are illustrations meant to provide a more detailed picture of the characters involved, and that they could all be cut without jeopardising the main point of the report. The organisation of a secret society, with the sole aim of subjecting the European labour movement to a hidden dictatorship of a few adventurers, the infamies committed to further this aim, particularly by Nechayev in Russia⁴⁰—this is the central theme of the book, and to maintain that it all revolves around private matters is, to say the least, irresponsible.

To be sure, it may be extremely painful for some Russians suddenly to see the dirty side—and it certainly is very dirty—of

^a Francisco Serrano y Dominguez.—*Ed.*

^b Luis Gonzales Bravo.—*Ed.*

the Russian movement ruthlessly exposed to Western Europe. But who is to blame? Who else but those Russians themselves who represent this dirty side, who, not satisfied with deceiving their own compatriots, attempted to subordinate the whole European labour movement to their personal ends? If Bakunin and company had restricted their heroic deeds to Russia, people in Western Europe would hardly have troubled to train their sights on them. The Russians themselves would have done that. But as soon as those gentlemen, who do not even understand the rudiments of the conditions and development of the West European labour movement, seek to play the dictator with us, it ceases to be amusing: one simply fires at them pointblank.

Anyway, the Russian movement can take such revelations with equanimity. A country that has produced two writers of the stature of Dobrolyubov and Chernyshevsky, two socialist Lessings, will not be destroyed because, all at once, it spawns a humbug like Bakunin and a few immature little students, who inflate themselves with big words like frogs, and finally gobble one another up. Even among the younger Russians we know people of first-class theoretical and practical talents and great energy, people who have the advantage over the French and the English, thanks to their knowledge of languages, in their intimate acquaintance with the movement in different countries, and over the Germans in their cosmopolitan versatility. Those Russians who understand and participate in the labour movement can only regard it as a service rendered to have been relieved of complicity in the Bakuninists' acts of villainy. All this does not, however, prevent the *Forward* from concluding its account with the words:

"We do not know what the authors of this pamphlet think of the results it has achieved. The majority of our readers would probably share the feeling of depression with which we have read it and with which we record these sorry phenomena in our pages, in pursuance of our duty as chroniclers."^a

With this feeling of depression on the part of Friend Peter we conclude the first section of our tale. The second begins with the following paragraph from the same volume of the *Forward*:

"Our readers will be pleased to receive another piece of news in a similar vein. With us, in our ranks, we also have the well-known writer Peter Nikitch Tkachov; after four years' detention he has succeeded in escaping from the place where he was interned and condemned to inactivity, to reinforce our ranks."^b

^a [P. L. Lavrov,] *Op. cit.*, p. 27.—*Ed.*

^b *Впередь! Непериодическое обозрѣние*, Vol. II, Part 2, Zurich, 1874: *Изъ Иркутска*. In the section: *Что дѣлается на Родинѣ?*, p. 115.—*Ed.*

We learn who the well-known writer Tkachov is from a Russian pamphlet, *The Tasks of Revolutionary Propaganda in Russia*, which he himself published in April 1874 and which depicts him as a green grammar-school boy of singular immaturity, the Karlchen Missnick, as it were, of Russian revolutionary youth. He tells us that many people have asked him to collaborate in the *Forward*; he knew the editor was a reactionary; nevertheless, he considered it his duty to take the *Forward* under his wing, although—it should be noted—it had not asked for him. On arriving he finds, to his astonishment, that the editor, Friend Peter, presumes to make the final decision on the acceptance or rejection of articles. *Such* an undemocratic procedure naturally infuriates him; he composes a detailed document claiming, for himself and the other staff (who—it should be noted—had not asked for it), “in the name of justice, on the basis of purely theoretical considerations ... equality of rights and obligations” (with the editor-in-chief) “with regard to everything affecting the literary and economic side of the enterprise”.^a

Here we see straightaway the immaturity that, while it does not dominate the Russian refugee movement, is, nevertheless, more or less endured. A Russian scholar, who has a considerable reputation in his own country, becomes a refugee and acquires the means to found a political journal abroad. Scarcely has he managed to do this, when some more or less enthusiastic youth comes along, unasked, and offers to take part, on the more or less childish condition that he should have an equal voice with the founder of the journal in all literary and financial matters. In Germany he would have been laughed at. But the Russians are not so coarse. Friend Peter goes to great pains to convince him that he is wrong, both “in the name of justice and on the basis of purely theoretical considerations”—naturally in vain. Tkachov, offended, withdraws like Achilles to his tent⁴¹ and fires off his pamphlet against Friend Peter, whom he calls a “philistine philosopher”.^b

With a stifling heap of eternally repeated Bakunist phrases about the nature of true revolution, he accuses Friend Peter of the crime of *preparing* the people for revolution, of seeking to bring them to a “clear understanding and awareness of their needs”. Anyone, however, who wishes to do that is no revolutionary, but a man of peaceful progress, i.e., a reactionary, a supporter of

^a П. Н. Ткачѣвъ, *Задачи революціонной пропаганды въ Россіи*, [London,] 1874, p. VIII.—Ed

^b *Ibid.*, p. 10.—Ed

"bloodless revolution in the German taste".^a The true revolutionary "knows that the people are always ready for revolution"^b; anyone who does not believe this does not believe in the people, and faith in the people "constitutes our strength". To anyone who does not realise this, the writer quotes a pronouncement by Nechayev, this "typical representative of our modern youth". Friend Peter says we must wait until the people are ready for revolution—"but we cannot and will not wait"^c; the true revolutionary differs from the philistine philosopher in that he "assumes the right to summon the people to revolution at any time".^d And so on.

Here in Western Europe we would simply dismiss all this childish nonsense with the answer: "If your people are ready for revolution at any time, if you assume the right to summon them to revolution at any time, and if you simply cannot wait, why do you go on boring us with your prattle, why, for goodness sake, don't you go ahead and strike now?"

But our Russians do not view matters quite so simply. Friend Peter thinks that Mr. Tkachov's childish, tedious and contradictory observations, which revolve in an eternal circle, may exert the seductive attraction of a *mons veneris*⁴² on Russian youth, and, as the faithful Eckart of this youth, he issues an admonitory exhortation of sixty closely printed pages against them.^e In this he sets out his own views on the nature of revolution, investigating in deadly earnest whether or not the people are ready for revolution and in what circumstances revolutionaries have the right to summon them to revolution or not and similar niceties, which at this level of generality have about as much value as the scholastics' studies of the Virgin Mary. In the process, "the Revolution" itself becomes a sort of Virgin Mary, theory becomes faith, activity in the movement becomes a religion, and the whole debate takes place not on *terra firma*, but in a cloudy sky of generalities.

Here, however, Friend Peter becomes involved in a tragic contradiction with himself. He, the preacher of unity, the opponent of all polemics, of all "mutually accusatory pamphlets" within the revolutionary party, cannot, of course, do his duty as Eckart, without also engaging in polemics; he cannot reply to his opponent's accusations without similarly accusing him. Friend

^a Ibid., p. 8.—Ed

^b Ibid., p. 10.—Ed

^c Ibid., p. 34.—Ed

^d Ibid., p. 10.—Ed

^e [P. L. Lavrov,] *Русской социально-революционной молодежи*, [London,] 1874.—Ed

Peter will himself testify to the "feeling of depression" that accompanies this "sorry phenomenon".

His pamphlet begins as follows:

"Of two evils, one must choose the lesser.

"I know full well that all this refugee literature of mutually accusatory pamphlets, of polemics about who is the genuine friend of the people and who is not, who is honest and who is not, and, in particular, who is genuine representative of Russian youth, of the true revolutionary party—that all this literature about the personal dirt of the Russian emigration is as repugnant to the reader as it is insignificant for the revolutionary struggle, and can only gratify our enemies—this I know, and yet I find it *necessary* to pen these lines, necessary with my own hand to swell the number of these wretched writings by one more, to the tedium of our readers and the delight of our enemies—necessary, because of two evils, one must choose the lesser."^a

Splendid. But why is it that Friend Peter, who evinces so much Christian tolerance in the *Forward* and demands the same of us towards the tricksters we have exposed—tricksters whom, as we shall see, he knows as well as we do,—that he did not even have the modicum of tolerance towards the writers of the report to ask himself whether they, too, were obliged to choose the lesser of two evils? Why must the fire first burn his own fingers before he realises that there might be even greater evils than a little harsh polemics against people who, in the guise of ostensibly revolutionary activity, were endeavouring to debase and destroy the entire European labour movement?

Let us, however, be indulgent towards Friend Peter; fate has been rather hard on him. No sooner has he done, in full consciousness of his own guilt, what he reproaches us with doing, than Nemesis drives him on and forces him to supply Mr. Karl Thaler with new material for several more articles in the *Neue Freie Presse*.

"Or," he asks the ever-ready madcap Tkachov, "has your agitation already done its work? Is your organisation perhaps ready? Ready? Really ready? Or have we here that notorious secret committee of 'typical' revolutionaries, the committee that consists of two men and circulates decrees?⁴⁵ Our young people have been told so many lies, they have been so often deceived, their trust so shamefully abused, that they will not, all at once, believe in the readiness of the revolutionary organisation."^b

For the Russian reader it is, of course, unnecessary to add that the "two men" are Bakunin and Nechayev. Further:

"But there are those who claim to be friends of the people, supporters of the social revolution, and who, at the same time, bring to their activity that mendaciousness and dishonesty that I have described above as a belch of the old

^a Ibid., p. 3.—Ed.

^b Ibid., p. 17.—Ed.

society.... These people used the bitterness of the supporters of the new social order against the injustice of the old society, asserting the principle that, in war, every means is allowable. Among these *allowable* means they included the deception of their collaborators, the deception of the people whom they, nevertheless, claimed to serve. They were prepared to lie to everyone and anyone solely in order to organise a sufficiently strong party, just as if a strong social-revolutionary party could be produced without the honest solidarity of its members! They were ready to arouse in the people the old passions of banditry and enjoyment without work.... They were ready to exploit their friends and comrades, to make them tools of their plans; they were ready verbally to defend the most complete independence and autonomy of persons and sections, while at the same time organising the most pronounced secret dictatorship and training their supporters in the most sheep-like and thoughtless obedience, as if the social revolution could be carried out by a union of exploiters and exploited, by a group of people whose actions are, at every turn, a slap in the face for everything their words preach!"^a

It is incredible, but true: these lines, which resemble an extract from the "Komplott gegen die Internationale" as closely as one egg does another, were written by the very man who, a few months before, had described that pamphlet as a crime against the common cause, because of its attacks on the very same people, attacks that were in complete agreement with the above lines. Well, let us be satisfied with this.

If, however, we now look back on Mr. Tkachov, with his great pretensions and utterly insignificant achievements, and at the little *malheur* that befell our Friend Peter on this occasion, we might well consider it our turn to say:

"We do not know what the authors think of the results achieved. The majority of our readers would probably share the feeling of 'amusement' with which we have read it and with which we record these 'strange' phenomena in our pages, in pursuance of our duty as chroniclers."

Joking aside, however. Many peculiar phenomena in the Russian movement to date are explained by the fact that, for a long time, every Russian publication was a closed book to the West, and that it was, therefore, easy for Bakunin and his consorts to conceal from it their goings-on, which had long been known to the Russians. They zealously spread the assertion that even the dirty sides of the Russian movement should—in the interests of the movement itself—be kept secret from the West; anyone who communicated Russian matters to the rest of Europe, in so far as they were of an unpleasant nature, was a traitor. That has now ceased. Knowledge of the Russian language—a language that, both for its own sake, as one of the richest and most powerful living languages, and on account of the literature thereby made

^a *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 45.—*Ed.*

accessible, richly deserves study—is no longer a great rarity, at any rate among the German Social-Democrats. The Russians will have to bow to the inevitable international fate: their movement will henceforth develop in full view and under the surveillance of the rest of Europe. Nobody has had to pay so dearly for their earlier isolation than they themselves. But for this isolation, it would never have been possible to cheat them so disgracefully for years on end, as Bakunin and his consorts did. Those who will derive the greatest benefit from the West's criticism, from the international interaction of the various West European movements on the Russian movement and vice versa, from the eventual fusion of the Russian movement with the all-European movement, are the Russians themselves.