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## HOW TO ASK REVOLUTIONARY QUESTIONS

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### FIRST ARTICLE

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## SCIENCE AND THE PEOPLE

What are we seeking? What do we want? What the living being of all times and all regions have wanted and sought: TRUTH, JUSTICE AND LIBERTY.

But will the reader not fear that we will get lost in nebulous considerations about the meaning of LIBERTY? We know that we won't find it beyond the clouds. By this term, we mean the simple and natural logic, specific to everything that is real, or the universal order of phenomena, marked by human reason, both in the material world and in the social world.

Of course, we most resolutely reject the arbitrary and inept division of the world of reality into the physical and spiritual worlds; but we consider it useful to say a few words about the way in which this division took place, undoubtedly natural and necessary from a historical perspective, but which nevertheless has had the most lamentable effect on the destiny of humanity. It was brought about, at the beginning of history, by a sort of misunderstanding of reason, which had only just awakened, which was not aware of itself and therefore did not suspect that it was more or less of the normal fruits of nature. Deprived thus of the possibility of acting consciously and lucidly, reason first manifested itself in poetic reveries and in religious representations, then later, in the form of a metaphysical self-deepening and an abstract self-structuring, until finally it began to seek

in its unique self the causes of everything. But once it had opposed itself as something separate and autonomous, not only in relation to the entire external world, but even to its immediate producer, the human organism, it must inevitably split the human world of reality in “physical” world and “spiritual” worlds.

Since we have come to know the physiological origin of all our intellectual activity, we have just as necessary managed to become aware of the ineptitude of such a duplication.

The unique world is also the unique means of knowing the destination of its laws or its rules, of obtaining the Truth that is *Science*; it is not metaphysics nor abstract intellectual constructions, but science which bases its reasoning on experience, which uses the deductive method and the inductive method equally, and which constantly verifies its hypotheses by means of observation and the most rigorous analysis of the facts.

It is in this way that everything that is supernatural, everything that is not rational is expelled from science: the notion of God and all the other notions that result from it, or has contacts with it. The uniqueness and the very possibility of a rational science are posed for the first time. It remains to restore the same uniqueness and reason in life. The life of man, collective and individual, from the beginning of history to the present day, is shared, as we know, between two opposing worlds, which mutually deny each other, which mutually destroy each other: the spiritual world and the material, the terrestrial world and the celestial. All religious thoughts and feelings, all ideal movements of the soul aspire to the celestial element; all earthly interests, all material desires and longings of the living man aspire to the earthly element. Everything that is called truth and good is attributed to the first world; all the sins and all the lies to the second. The historical destiny of man, which crosses the multiple paths and phases of his development, has until now been the result of this irreconcilable struggle between the two worlds, the reunion of which in a single world, in a single unanimous life, after the numerous and serious attempts made at various periods by art, by religion, by politics and finally by metaphysics, has proven decidedly impossible. Man has not been able to free himself in his life from the disastrous split, and as long as the two worlds exist in his consciousness, he will never succeed: one part of his being will be in incessant conflict with the other, and the result of this conflict can only be either “criminal anarchy.” the revolt of matter, or the triumph of the spirit, the submission of matter, the establishment of order, slavery virtuous.

And thus, in order to definitively free man, we must put an end to his interior splitting, we must expel God not only from science but also from life itself; man's positive knowledge and rational thought, as well as his imagination and feeling, must be freed from celestial specters. Whoever believes in God, whoever recognizes the existence of a separate, spiritual celestial world, whoever admits to the smallest extent a supernatural

order of things, inaccessible to reason, is doomed to inevitable and hopeless slavery. Men of science free themselves from God by means of science and *only in the domain of this science*, but not in reality nor in life. Because the life of each human being, however learned and wise he may be, is, by virtue of the law of social solidarity, under direct and inevitable dependence on the life of all, on the life of the people; as for the latter, he is doomed to slavery because of his faith. Whoever, for this reason, wants to be truly free himself, in life and in deeds, must use all his efforts to destroy popular religion.

This is the main point on which we differ from the positivists, from the followers of Auguste Comte.

He, exactly like Proudhon, Schopenhauer and some of the very recent English thinkers, based his positivist philosophical system on the known theory of Immanuel Kant which supposes that human intelligence is incapable of penetrating the essence of things.

Our reason, says the philosopher of Koenigsberg,<sup>1</sup> only embraces the phenomena, both external and physical, as much of the interior world as of the spiritual and moral world, and both of the life of nature and of the historical development of social life; it only embraces the mutual relationships of phenomena, the multiple aspects of their contact and the link between them, as well as their order of succession, their origin and their disappearance in space and in time, in short, everything we call laws of nature. But the essence of things, their existence for themselves, independent of our consciousness and outside of any relationship with it, the *thing*, to the extent that it is *for itself* (Ding an sich) *and the real cause that has generated it* are inaccessible to us. We have neither the organs nor the means to reach it.

The means do not exist because everything that manifests itself to us in a necessary way is enveloped in forms, or categories, which do not belong to it but to us, to our consciousness, which are specific to our reason, before any experience, etc. before any collision with any objects. These forms, or laws of our pure intuition, of our pure representation, of reasoning and syllogism, Kant gives the name of *categories of pure and aprioristic reason*. These are for example: the category of space and time, magnitude and number, qualities, measurements, essences, relationships, phenomena, causes and actions, interactions, chances and necessities.

All of Kant's misfortune was his idealism, due to which he approached the critique of pure reason without worrying about knowing its physiological origin; he studied it as an absolute element, which exists independently of all things. Having thus found the forms, or laws, of thought, which the centuries have developed in us, but which he took for forms

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<sup>1</sup> It is not his own words that are cited, but their meaning stated in his work known under the title of *Critique of Pure Reason*.

specific to reason itself and, therefore, supposedly independent of all experience, Kant naturally concluded that, given that everything can only appear to us through those forms which do not belong to the object but to us, we can only know this thing as it appears to us and not as it actually exists in itself.

If Kant had given credence to Hume, his contemporary, who maintained, against the truth or in total conformity with it, that the supposedly aprioristic forms of consciousness are nothing other than the products of the innumerable multiplicity of unconscious or forgotten impressions and experiences; if, above all, Kant had known the time when all the best minds would clearly see that reason is not a spark falling from the sky, but nothing more than the activity of the brain itself, and consequently, the product of our corporeal organism, he would not have opposed the ideal world of consciousness to the real world of things, he would not have separated them by an artificial abyss, and he would of course have guessed that between the *phenomena* and the *thing in itself* there is not and cannot be any difference.

Whatever the case, once Kant established the theory of pure reason in his own way, he subjected all theological and metaphysical ideas to implacable criticism: the idea of infinitude, of the original cause, of the essential and final goal of the creation of the world, of God, of the immortality of the soul, etc. and he concluded that all these ideas, even assuming that they actually correspond to reality, are, by their very essence, inaccessible to our consciousness, that they cannot be thoroughly known, justified or proven by our reason. It should also be noted that Kant himself doubted so little of the real existence of an ideal or infinite world, of God, of the immortality of the soul and of its free will that in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he established them as postulates, or presupposed requirements of the rational will.

German speculative philosophy did not stop there. Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, in their capacity as the last metaphysicians, once again attempted to deduce objectivity, or the reality of infinite ideas, from reason itself. But at the same time, it is precisely to Hegel that the great and indisputable honor of having led the metaphysical method to suicide belongs; he thus dealt a final decisive blow to these ideas, by showing their natural historical, psychological and sociological origin; in his *Phenomenology*, in the Philosophy of History, in Aesthetics, in the Philosophy of Religion and the Philosophy of the History of philosophical systems, he presented them in an obvious way, with brilliant insight and audacity as the necessary historical stages of progressive self-development, self-manifestation and self-understanding of human reason; so that all these so-called infinite ideas that man has recognized, for several millennia, as autonomous and supreme essences, are not only independent of him, but also dominate him and the world, and that

they currently constitute the works of his own mind although unconscious, or more simply, the necessary product of natural historical stupidity. In this way, God, the immortality of the soul, the mysterious world of infinite substances were explained, in the simplest way, as a deceptive reflection, as a mirage of our still infantile reason which was intuited in outside of itself and transferred its own essence into an imaginary sky, which it imaginarily expanded to infinity.

This is the last word of Hegel's entire system, which seems to be in opposition to itself. It is true that he stated this word in such a confusing way that the vast majority of Hegelians, as the poet Heine noted, did not understand it. However, Hegel understood it and stated it with superb simplicity and sincerity, at the very beginning of his forties. The only great mind of this school, after Hegel, the last Hegelian and, one might say in general, the executor of metaphysics condemned to death, is the famous LUDWIG FEUERBACH, whom young Russians read so much.

After Feuerbach, the need to address the world of reality, to study it in fact and to understand it in a rational and no longer metaphysical way, that of founding an entire scientific system, including of course the complete psychology and all of sociology, on the natural sciences, have become evident in Germany to every healthy mind, to every living soul. But now a whole series of men of science appeared; these founded the new natural school and are, if we are permitted to express ourselves in these terms, the apostles of revolutionary science. The names of BRUCKNER, KARL FOGT, MOLESCHOTT and a few other philosophers are as well known in Russia as that of Feuerbach.

We rightly call them the apostles of the revolution. They are not only men of science; no, they have stood up as fighters against all the phantoms, generated by religious and metaphysical idealism, which block man's path to freedom. They have given themselves the name of ATHEISTS and MATERIALISTS in public language, having understood that the vocation of science is to liberate all minds without exception and thus to prepare for the liberation of society itself.

Recognition in the world, outside it and above it, of the infinite supreme being; recognition of God and of all ways of worshiping him; the doctrine of the immortal soul and rewards or punishments beyond the grave; and the existence of churches, priests who intercede with God and who reconcile believers with him, miracle workers, prophets, *legislators and tsars anointed of the Lord*; as well as the necessary existence that arises from it of *States* established by God, with all their historical bric-a-brac, state, criminal and civic right; hereditary property and family despotism; political power and military violence; all these dark offspring of religion were undoubtedly the product of the primitive slavery in which our kind wallowed at the beginning of its history, when it began to

distinguish itself from the kind of gorillas and other primates. Man has dragged along all these incontestable traces of our primitive animality, gradually diminishing them, as he became aware of his human nature and fulfilled it throughout history; he dragged them as Spartacus dragged his chain when he freed himself. And it is obvious that the excessive weight of this historical chain was and continues to be the main cause of the unbearable slowness with which man frees himself and develops. But, on the other hand, it is also obvious that all these products of our prehistoric *natural slavery* must have necessarily become in turn the new source of the *historical slavery* that continues to overwhelm us and from which we will only be able to free ourselves by means of rational science.

Therefore, without even asking to what extent the above-mentioned founders of the new natural school of Germany themselves desired or understood the PRACTICAL consequences of the doctrine they had created, we have every right to give them the name of apostles of the revolution. By destroying *in the people* the faith in the celestial world, they prepared for earthly freedom. Between this school and that of Auguste Comte, an immense difference exists PRECISELY ON THIS POINT.

Auguste Comte, undoubtedly one of the most remarkable minds of our time, evolved on purely French soil, and one could say, in absolute independence from any influence of German philosophy, of which he only partially knew Kant. In his youth he was a Saint-Simonian, and it was in 1830 that the first part of his famous *Cours de philosophie positive* appeared. His great superiority over German philosophers was his close knowledge of the positive sciences. He was one of the last most gifted representatives of the glorious schools of mathematics and physics which, since the revolution, had flourished in France until the beginning of the fifties and including the famous Arago, who had also risen against Kant, was, one could say, the last eminent representative. Auguste Comte was *positivist* by his nature, by his tradition, by the character of his nation, by his entire social situation. German idealism could have no place in his mind.

The order of succession of sciences in his system resembles that established in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*; but Comte presents over the latter the immense advantage that, at the time when Hegel strove to found nature on logic, on reason and on spirit, he founded, on the contrary and very correctly, reason and what we call spirit on nature, he bases the entire spiritual and moral development of man solely on psychology and sociology, on cosmic, physiological and anthropological foundations. Therein lies his merited immortality, whatever his errors may have been in the solution of particular problems. Thus, with his point of view, as with that of the new German naturalists, he dealt a heavy blow to idealism by definitively and *systematically* expelling it from science.

But it is precisely because Comte did not know the very recent history of the consequent self-destruction of the metaphysical principle in Germany that he was unable to deal the death blow to idealism. He just went around it. Having expelled it from science, he authorized it to reign unchallenged in the vast domain of imagination and feeling. By guiding himself on the criticism of Kant, and taking in some way as a credo his conclusions, which ensure that reason cannot know the infinite nor penetrate into the essence of things, he placed at the basis of his system the idea that all French men of science had long since adopted as an axiom; you will find this idea in the prefaces or introductions of numerous French manuals of mechanics, physics, chemistry or another positive science: man is only capable of knowing phenomena and the relationships of phenomena between them, that is to say the laws of nature and society; but the primitive cause of phenomena, their true essence remains for him a mystery that he will never be able to pierce. In doing so, imagination and feeling are endowed with the possibility of looking into them as much as they wish, they are even allowed to restore for their daily use immortality and God, which positive theory does not deny in no way, but that it only expelled from science. By doing so, it spares both the goat and the cabbage.

It is on this principal point that we differ not only from our primary positivists, but also from the serious representatives of European "Positive Philosophy." Despite their high scientific level and many other qualities, they are either hypocrites or poor thinkers.

We are neither atheists nor materialists, they proclaim, we are only positivists. We in no way deny the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, but we only say and prove that there can be no place in science for all these infinite essences, if they exist at all, for all those ideas that cross the border of the known world of phenomena; that these are inaccessible to reason.

Isn't that what theologians of all churches and religions say?...

The number of poor thinkers, and undoubtedly also hypocrites, is extremely high among English positivists. We know that within the privileged English classes, bourgeois and aristocratic, where political liberty is widespread, there exists an exceptional social slavery that manifests itself essentially in the inquisitorial power of the "saints"<sup>2</sup> and in the half-believing, half-hypocritical turn of mind of the society that truly trembles before them. We know that almost every decent Englishman, however intelligent, however educated he may be, must listen to the most unbearable sermons every Sunday, because

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<sup>2</sup> It frequently happens that this name is given to members of biblical societies and others who engage in unbridled religious propaganda.

that is what his status as a gentleman demands and because he is required to serve as an example to the people, who, if they no longer follow religion, will risk starting to satisfy their *earthly appetites* and will thereby disrupt the tranquility and comfort in which the gentlemen live. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were still sincere and daring thinkers in England. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, apart from the poet Shelley, no one has yet had the courage to loudly proclaim themselves an atheist and materialist.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that, given this frame of mind, English philosophers and naturalists seized with great joy the possibility offered by Comte's system of going all the way to the end in scientific research without at the same time incurring the reputation of atheists and materialists. You will find this practical duplicity in all the works of *Böckel, Darwin, Lewis, Herbert Spencer and Stuart Mill*. As they are not revolutionaries, they fear, do not desire and do not consider it useful to attack the popular faith. But if bourgeois instinct and the practical considerations that result from it had not obscured their logic, they would have long ago understood, sincerely admitted out loud that the mere fact that science recognizes the possibility of the existence of a god who is real, although inaccessible to science itself, is sufficient, on the one hand, to anchor in the hearts of uneducated people the reign of this idea, and consequently human slavery, and on the other hand, to make science itself impossible. Because where the supernatural and all-powerful force interferes, there can be no order, no sense, no logic, nor can there be liberty; omnipotence which does not interfere in anything, which interrupts nothing and which does not hinder anything is equal to nothing.

It must be recognized that the French positivists are, if not slightly more sincere, at least much more consistent than the English. The most intelligent among them are atheists and materialists. But very few of them agree to acknowledge it publicly. They are philosophers and not combatants, and they do not intend to submit excessively to official persecution. And today, everyone knows, it is the most touching Catholic mentality that predominates in the highest levels of French government; the Senate, the House of Representatives of the People, the entire bureaucracy, the entire judiciary and the entire army, even the Academy of Sciences itself, are imbued with Christianity. In this environment, it is not wise to take atheist and materialist positions.

Furthermore, French positivists feel no need to share their disbelief with the ignorant masses. They are *aristocrats of the intelligentsia*, priests of science.

“It is wrong,” they say, “that governments would begin to persecute us. We do not bother them, and although the truth does not keep away from us a single one of the few elected officials who come to us to ask that we initiate them into the secrets of the *scientific*



*method*, we do not call anyone to come to us; not only do we not engage in propaganda against social metaphysics and against popular religion, but on the contrary we consider that the one is as *necessary* as the other for the classes among whom they continue to reign today; they are necessary for all those who, due either to their intellectual incapacity or to the lack of means and time to study, cannot rise to the level of pure science.”

The positivists who have adopted a conservative point of view are undoubtedly right: the ignorant people need religion. *Since up to this point all those who HAVE GOVERNED THE PEOPLE HAVE HAD THE CONSTANT AND UNFAILING AIM OF REDUCING THE FORCE OF POPULAR PRODUCTION TO SLAVERY for the benefit of the privileged and more or less idle minority — this is precisely what the whole essence of the State consists in —* therefore, all governments must have in their hands the means of persuading *the ignorant crowd that this SACRIFICE is necessary*, and this means can only be twofold: *either religious convictions or violence; either the fear of God or the fear of the rod*. But it is impossible to keep the most humble, most self-effacing people in slavery by violence alone. Every creature that lives in the world, whatever its relative weakness, is capable of fighting back in the most forceful way when deprived of the means it needs to live; and the material strength of the people is always stronger than that which oppresses and exploits its minority. Therefore, to achieve a total and lasting victory over the people, it is necessary to weaken their natural energy, to weaken and pervert their power of response. This is the role of religion.

On the other hand, the sole action of religion is not enough to enslave the people. The logic of the interests, needs and necessities of life is in itself so clear, so powerful that if we only granted it freedom and if we did not prevent it, by means of permanent violence, from asking practical questions, it would be capable of breaking all the idols in the imagination and in the hearts of the people; which would again have the inevitable consequence of destroying all the privileges of the minority in power today and everywhere. Therefore, to preserve order, the two powers — that of the church and that of the State, the two fears — that of the earth and that of the sky, must complement each other. This is why, since history has existed, government by the stick and by religion have been inseparable blood brothers in all States.

PARTISANS OF THE REVOLUTION, WE ARE ENEMIES NOT ONLY OF ALL THE PRIESTS OF RELIGION BUT ALSO OF THOSE OF SCIENCE; enemies of all those who assert that *the people need religion*, this vile and repulsive phrase, which in reality has the following meaning: "*We need the ignorance of the people, we, their exploiters and oppressors.*"

WE WANT TO DESTROY ALL POPULAR RELIGION AND REPLACE IT WITH POPULAR KNOWLEDGE. YES, WE WANT THE PEOPLE TO HAVE RATIONAL, RIGOROUSLY SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE.

We want it because we WANT THE DEFINITIVE LIBERTY OF THE PEOPLE FROM ALL GOVERNMENT TUTELAGE; but we do not want it to be subject to the new tutelage of the revolutionary doctrinaires. THE TRUE REVOLUTION MUST PRECISELY CONSIST OF COMPLETELY DESTROYING ALL TUTELAGE, OF RADICALLY ELIMINATING ANY ROLE FOR THE STATE. We want THE PEOPLE TO ATTAIN THE AGE OF MAJORITY, and to really reach that age, they need science.

Does this mean, we will be asked, that you strictly recognize that it is legal and necessary, albeit temporarily, to put the people under tutelage, precisely as long as science has not instructed them? No, it is not that. Not only do we not recognize that it is necessary, but on the contrary, we are convinced that however low the level of education of the people and however educated, however sincere and honest those who love the people and who strive at the ambitious task of ensuring tutelage over the people, the latter could not fail to pervert them themselves and would become for the people an inevitable source of slavery, impoverishment, intellectual and moral stagnation. *The logic of all power means that at the same time it unspeakably corrupts those who hold tutelage in their hands and causes the ruin of those who are subject to it.*

THEREFORE, WE IN NO WAY RECOGNIZE EITHER THE TRUTH OR THE USEFULNESS OF THIS TUTELAGE, AT WHATEVER STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT THIS PEOPLE FINDS ITSELF.

All we can recognize is *the natural character of the very fact of the people's submission, their patience and their obedience when superstition prevails, when they are still intoxicated by religious beliefs and hopes, when the lucid voice of science has not yet explained the meaning of things and when a prolonged absence of liberty has prevented their characters from developing and deprived them of the awareness of their own strength.* And those who take advantage of the ignorance of the people will not become better for it.

OUR TASK THEREFORE CONSISTS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, OF OVERCOMING THE IGNORANCE OF THE PEOPLE. And it can only be definitively removed by science. Is this within the reach of the people? And why wouldn't it be? It is well within our reach, and there are among the ranks of the people many, many individuals who are undoubtedly more intelligent than you, dear reader, and than me. Furthermore, you know that our people have not been disgraced by nature, that their spirit is fresh, powerful, and above all free. All their prejudices are superficial; none of them has yet been able to embed themselves in them, like a heavy and clumsy stone. However, they have neither the leisure

nor the means to study. Furthermore, the government, still all-powerful for the moment, will undoubtedly use all its immense means to obstruct true popular education.

Yes, that is the whole question, the whole SOCIAL QUESTION. It is in it that THE NECESSITY OF THE REVOLUTION ITSELF resides.

Look, then, at how strangely this question is asked! it resembles a vicious circle: *to liberate the people, they must be educated*; and to educate them, we must give them the means, the desire and the time, that is to say, *we must free them from the political and social yoke that is now suffocating them*. So what should we do, where should we start, and from what point should we begin?

Many people say: *we must set up popular schools throughout Russia*. This is assured, especially now, by all those who are weary, weakened by fatigue or by fear. Yes, popular schools are, without a doubt, a beautiful work. But who will give the people the time, the desire, the opportunity to frequent them or to send their children there? They are crushed by work that barely protects them from hunger. And who will organize the schools? The government? The nobility? The rich? The priests? That is to say, the very people against whom the popular schools must be pitted? This is nonsense.

And, strangely enough, this ineptitude has almost been produced here, in Russia, to a certain extent. Among the nobility, who have been, from the very founding of the Muscovite Kingdom to this day, at the side of the government, who have been among the most bitter enemies, plunderers and executioners of the people, there have been people sincerely devoted to the cause of the education of the people and their liberation. All the Decembrists, all the supporters of Petraevskij belonged to the nobility; a significant portion of the political convicts deported to Siberia, sent into exile and prisons by the magnanimous emperor who happily reigns today come from this same social stratum. Those we call NIHILISTS, and a part of the immense majority of NIHILIST WOMEN come from this same social stratum, as well as certain personalities who currently militate in favor of the people, of course, *against the immense majority of the nobility*, within the courts and zemstvo assemblies. The nobles who represented an entire government demanded in 1862 the abolition of social strata and the convening of a zemstvo assembly extended to all the people. Finally, there were nobles who wanted to become peasants. The government, which understood better than them the dignity of the nobility, its duty and its interests, did not consent, of course, to either.

This bizarre phenomenon can be explained, moreover, in an extremely natural way. The nobility, as we know, was among us the first, and for many decades, the only social stratum, touched by the light of Western education; an education endowed with such fruitful force that, despite all the abject political and economic conditions (which to this

day doom our nobility to servility and savagery), it was able to form even in the noble environment, and especially among its youth, individuals who hate slavery, love justice and demand that more humane relations be established with the people, on whose sweat and blood they have based their own education. There were very few, of course, who understood that the first condition for actually achieving what they considered just and desirable to liberate the people had to be the *total abolition* of the economic conditions, according to which they — the privileged social stratum — had been able to educate themselves, while the people who worked in their place *their own* land of which they had despoiled them were condemned to ignorance. However, their aspirations, — though sterile and devoid of power, since they were based on privileged and hereditary property, that is to say the exploitation of the labor of the people of Russia, of Europe and everywhere, — today as always, contained the internal contradiction that must, sooner or later, crush under its growing force the selfish interests or those of their class, the first and disinterested aspiration of young people for justice and the general good.

And indeed, the *logic of the interests of social strata* has recently begun to visibly dominate the consciousness and even the orientation of Russian social categories which, moreover, had neither value nor strength outside the government. The fraction of the nobility that the first reforms had not definitively ruined and which had retained, by virtue of ancient custom, the possibility of retaining its domains by stealing the tax is truly beginning to understand that, to preserve its advantages and to ensure its own salvation, as a social layer, it must stand alongside the government, the State and the Tsar against the people. Moreover, the revolutionary question is now posed among us in a much more precise and clearer manner, it emerges more and more from this bizarre, and in our opinion extremely harmful, confusion of concepts and aspirations which has authorized, even recently, characters foreign to any revolutionary instinct, who take themselves seriously for revolutionaries. They deceived themselves and others and positively ruined the matter. But since everyone sees that there can be, neither in Russia nor in all of Europe, nor elsewhere, any other revolution than the social revolution, and knowing that this cannot stop halfway, the majority of the rich who wish to preserve and bequeath to their children the property which they have inherited or which *they have favorably acquired* have understood that their place is not in the ranks of the revolution, that their own interests dictate that they conclude an indissoluble alliance with the government, with the State. As a result, the number of wealthy nobles and non-nobles has considerably diminished among our ranks, they have been replaced by people more apt to love, understand and represent the popular cause, such as the descendants of the totally nobles.

ruined people, commoners, seminarians and peasant children. It is they who today essentially and almost exclusively form our popular and anti-government phalanx, they who serve as intermediaries between revolutionary thought and the people.

At the beginning of the present reign, this dissension did not yet exist or it was not very noticeable. Educated youth from all social strata seemed to merge into the movement's party; and when, following the virtuous Crimean pogrom, after the war, infamous *for the State*, which worthily crowned the reign of Emperor Nicholas, at the moment when all of Russia shuddered and, as it were, resurrected, the idea of the liberation of the people has become universal; and as no one doubted the fact that science was the surest way to achieve this goal, most young people from various social strata threw themselves into founding popular schools, on Sundays or non-holidays. In a short period of time, a large number of these schools arose in Russia, and all of them worked well: the people, stimulated by bright hope, began to study intelligently and cheerfully. graciously. Some ten years of this teaching and he would have gone far... But the wise government abruptly interrupted all this.

Yes, the government has demonstrated undeniable wisdom in this case. He understood that educating the people would be disastrous for themselves, for the state power, for the entire empire. Catherine II, who was undoubtedly the most intelligent of the descendants of Peter the Great, wrote to one of her governors who, having given credence to one of her usual sentences on the necessity of popular education, had submitted to her a project aimed at establishing schools for the people: "Idiot! all these phrases are good for mystifying the chattering people of the West; you must know that *as soon as our people are educated, neither you nor I will stay in our place.*" And indeed, the people who will have learned, in the light of science, what is their strength and their true usefulness will no longer want to pay several hundred million rubles every day nor shed their blood to keep the empire alive, the whole of which existence and all prosperity have been, since its foundation, and always will necessarily be based on its plunder and slavery.

Our people who, in a fortunate formula, have stated in two words their centuries-old demands, need above all the LAND and LIBERTY. Our empire in particular and any military and bureaucratic state in general are organized in such a way that, even if they wanted to, they absolutely could not give one or the other to the people. THE DAY OUR PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THIS, THE EMPIRE WILL NO LONGER EXIST, WHICH MEANS THAT ITS ENTIRE EXISTENCE IS BASED ON THE IGNORANCE OF THE PEOPLE. After this, how can we hope that the government will seriously want to spread education among the people? And isn't it right, *from its own point of view*, when it opposes in every possible way the creation of rational schools for the people?

There is no doubt that the empire treats all sincere defenders of popular science in an inhuman and cruel manner. But we need not be surprised by its cruelty or even reproach it for it. It accomplishes its mission. THE MISSION OF ANY STATE IS TO STIFLE THE PEOPLE IN ORDER TO SUBSIST; in exactly the same way that THE MISSION OF THE FOLLOWERS OF THE REVOLUTION is *to destroy the State in order to deliver the people*.

“Who will prevail in the unequal combat?” The strength of the present belongs, without a doubt, to the State. But on the other hand, the strength of the future will belong, we hope, to the people, and this in the not too distant future.

We are astonished by those who dare to assert that the government *could not close* the Sunday schools and other schools founded by men of progress for the benefit of the people; that it *could tolerate* the formation and prosperity of workers' cooperatives; that it *could not bathe in Polish blood, not deport* to forced labor, send to prison and *not kill* the hundreds of young Russians who devoted themselves to the cause of the education of the people and their liberation; that it *could tolerate* freedom of criticism and *even profit for itself* from the uncensored printed word; that it *could not call to its aid* the best representative of state thought and profit, our state patriot Michail Nikolaevi Murav'ev, the hangman, that it *might not whip and shoot the peasants* who did not know to immediately succumb to the comedy of so-called emancipation; that it could, in a word, *reconcile the interests of the Empire with those of the Russian and non-Russian populations who work for it like slaves and who are reclusive there as in the penal colony*. Let us admit that such faith in the capacity of the government not to do evil and to do good, to accomplish *miracles not only in less but even in more*, always seemed to us to be a surprising naivety.

We do not subscribe to this naivety: WE EXPECT FROM THE GOVERNMENT, OR MORE PRECISELY FROM THE STATE, WHOSE INTERESTS IT REPRESENTS, ALL SORTS OF EVILS; AND WE PROMISE IN ADVANCE THAT WHATEVER NEFARIOUS MANNER IN WHICH IT MAY ACT IN THE FUTURE, WE WILL NOT ONLY NOT BE SURPRISED, BUT WE WILL REGARD ITS MOST ABJECT ACTIONS AS THE NATURAL AND NECESSARY MANIFESTATIONS OF ITS ESSENCE. WE WILL BE SURPRISED, ON THE CONTRARY, AND WE WILL HARDLY REJOICE WHEN IT MANAGES TO DO THE MOST MINIMAL THING FOR THE REAL BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLE; BECAUSE THIS DROP OF GOOD DONE BY CHANCE, THE AWAKENING OF A NEW, INFALLIBLY STUPID CONFIDENCE COULD PRODUCE A LOT OF EVIL.

We hasten to end this article with a practical conclusion. It is certain, we say, that the government will oppose with all its might the organization of a sufficient number of rational schools for the people. Should we stop there? Not at all. We will organize and help organize schools, possibly government schools, there as much as possible. But we will not deceive ourselves and tell ourselves that, given the poverty of our means and the

immensity of the government's resistance, WE WILL EVER OBTAIN POSITIVE RESULTS THROUGH SCHOOLS.

THE PATH TO THE LIBERATION OF THE PEOPLE THROUGH SCIENCE IS BARRED TO US; WE THEREFORE ONLY HAVE ONE PATH LEFT, THAT OF REVOLUTION. Let our people begin by liberating themselves, and when they are free, they will want and know how to learn everything themselves. OUR TASK IS TO PREPARE THE UPRISING OF THE WHOLE PEOPLE, BY MEANS OF PROPAGANDA. As for knowing in the name of what and how propaganda should be carried out, we will talk about it another time. For now, we will say a few more words ABOUT OUR ATTITUDE TO POPULAR RELIGION.

*We unconditionally respect the liberty of everyone, provided that it is not that of oppressing and exercising the infamous arbitrariness of the exploiter and oppressor.* So we respect the freedom of any faith; we do not respect faith itself, if it is stupid (it is impossible to respect stupidity), but only the incontestable right of each man to believe in any stupidity, if he finds consolation and satisfaction in it. *This in no way prevents us not only from saying, but from writing, from publishing, from carrying out the most virulent propaganda against everything that appears to us to be nonsense, a lie, even if millions of people believe it.* IT IS OUR DUTY, OUR RIGHT. A duty because all lies and all stupidity have an irremediable harmful influence on a society that takes them for good and for the truth. A right, because every man being dependent on society, the harm of the latter is our harm; his loss is our loss. And since OUR RIGHT AND OUR DUTY CONSIST IN CARRYING OUT INCESSANT PROPAGANDA AGAINST POPULAR RELIGION, THIS RIGHT AND THIS DUTY CANNOT BE DOUBTED. Another question: How should this propaganda be carried out so that it really achieves its goal?

We advise all our friends: ACT PRUDENTLY WITH REGARD TO POPULAR FAITH. DO NOT BE INDULGENT TOWARDS IT, DO NOT PRETEND IN FRONT OF IT, BUT DO NOT INSULT IT EITHER. Otherwise you will distance the people from you *before they have had the opportunity to convince themselves of our sincere devotion to their cause*, and you yourself will help the government, which is already using all its efforts to create a gulf between you and them. Fight against popular superstition in all cases where it is possible to wage this fight without fear of losing the trust of the people. But where anti-religious propaganda could turn them against you, you must absolutely refrain from fighting. The very success of anti-religious propaganda among the people requires this caution.

Once we are convinced that it is not possible to move towards liberty through education and that we must arrive at popular science through revolution, WE WILL HAVE TO DIRECT ALL OUR PROPAGANDA ESSENTIALLY AGAINST THE TSAR; ABOVE ALL, WE WILL HAVE TO DESTROY IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE THE VESTIGES OF THIS

UNFORTUNATE CONFIDENCE IN THE TSAR WHICH, FOR SO MANY CENTURIES, CONDEMNED THEM TO A DISASTROUS SLAVERY; WE WILL HAVE TO CONVINCING THEM ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT THE LANDOWNERS AND THE CIVIL SERVANTS, THE TWO MAIN OBJECTS OF THEIR HISTORICAL HATRED, HAVE NEVER HAD ANY STRENGTH OF THEIR OWN, BUT THAT THEY HAVE ALWAYS MAINTAINED THEMSELVES AND CONTINUE TO DO SO ONLY BY THE WILL AND STRENGTH OF THE TSAR. FINALLY, WE MUST AWAKEN IN THE PEOPLE THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THEIR OWN STRENGTH, WHICH HAS BEEN DORMANT AGAIN SINCE THE TIME OF PUGAEV; WE WILL HAVE TO SHOW THEM HOW, BY UNITING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL ALL THEIR EFFORTS, HITHERTO DISPERSED, IN A UNANIMOUS POPULAR MOVEMENT, THEY WILL HAVE TO TRIUMPH OVER ALL OPPRESSORS AND ALL ENEMIES.

Let us accomplish this task, let us only be the honest and vigilant preparers and midwives of the revolution. The revolution will do everything else itself.

And until that day, let us serve as endorsement of the incontestable fact, which we have also mentioned above, *that the religion of our people*, although it is for the most part cloaked in crude forms and contains, like all Christianity, dogmas that generate not only their own ineptitude, but also amorality, that this religion, within our people, *is only a superficial disease, which has in no way penetrated to the depths of their life*.

The religious faith of the people has its roots not only in their ignorance, but also essentially in the lack of fullness and in the artificial narrowness of their life, devoured by the owners and oppressed by the State; it is in a way the protest of every living popular heart, eager to live, against the abject reality. IT IS VAIN TO EXPECT THE PEOPLE TO BE LIBERATED BY THE MADNESS OR INTOXICATION OF RELIGION, as long as their condition *has not changed* radically. You will never get the *path of intellectual propaganda* alone to restore their lucidity. ONLY THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION WILL LIBERATE THEM FROM ALL RELIGION.

SOURCE: *Narodnoe Delo*, September 1, 1868, Genève

Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur (last revised May 30, 2024)