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Mikhail Bakunin, *[On the Question of Landed Property]*⁴⁴

Bakunin said that the absence of agricultural delegates is no reason to dispute the right of Congress to take a decision on the issue of ownership. Congress is only a minority, but in every historical epoch it is minorities that have represented the interests of humanity as a whole. In 1789 the minority of the middle class represented the interests of France and the world; it brought about the reign of the middle class. In the name of the proletariat, Babeuf and his friends protested against the domination of capital. We are only their continuators; our minority, which will soon be a majority, represents the entire working population of Europe.

Contrary to what has been said, the collective is the basis of the individual. It is society that shapes individuals; isolated men would not have learned to speak or think. Men of genius – the Galileos, Newtons, and so on – would have invented nothing, discovered nothing, without the acquisitions of previous generations. There is someone smarter than Voltaire, and that is everyone. Even the greatest genius would have produced nothing at all if he had lived in a desert from the age of 5. Private property has never been, nor is it now, anything but individual appropriation of the labour of the collective.

He is for collective ownership of the land in particular, and more generally for collective wealth by means of social liquidation. By social liquidation, he means abolition of the political and juridical state, which is the sanction and guarantee whereby a small number of men appropriate for themselves the products of everyone else's labour. All productive labour is first and foremost

⁴⁴ This text partially reproduces an intervention by Mikhail Bakunin (see note 39) during a session of 10 September 1869, at the Basel Congress. It was included in B1869 and its full version is also found in PI, II: 67.

social labour: since production is possible only by combining the labour of past generations with that of the present generation, there has never been labour that can be called individual labour. [...]

The speaker calls for the destruction of all national and territorial states, and the construction on their ruins of the international state of millions of workers. It will be the role of the International to build that state.