

NUNZIO PERNICONE

Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892



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1864–1892

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Nunzio Pernicone

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*To my wife, M. Christine Zervos,
and to the memory of my parents,
Salvatore and Rose Pernicone*

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ABBREVIATIONS

BOOKS

- FI: Atti* = Masini, Pier Carlo, ed. *La Federazione Italiana dell'Associazione Internazionale dei Lavoratori: Atti ufficiali, 1871–1880*. Milan: Edizioni Avanti!, 1964.

REPOSITORIES

- ACS = Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome
ASF = Archivio di Stato, Florence

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

- AP* = *Atti Parlamentari: Discussioni della Camera dei Deputati*.

ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome

- ACS, Carteggi di Personalità* = *Carteggi di Personalità*
ACS, Min. Giust., Miscellanea = Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia. Direzione Generale Affari Penali. *Miscellanea*.
ACS, Min. Int., CPC = Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, *Casellario Politico Centrale*.
ACS, Min. Int., Rapporti dei Prefetti = Ministero dell'Interno, Gabinetto, *Rapporti Semestrali dei Prefetti*.
ACS, Min. Int., UR = Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, *Ufficio Riservato (1879–1919)*.

Archivio di Stato, Florence

ASF, Questura,
Atti di Polizia = Questura della Provincia di Firenze (1864–
1919). *Atti di Polizia*.

FILING NOMENCLATURE

b. = Busta
f. = Fascio (used in ASF)
fs. = Fascicolo
scat. = Scatola
sf. = Sottofascicolo

Italian Anarchism,
1864–1892

Introduction

THIS BOOK is based on a simple premise—the Italian anarchists were a fascinating and important group of revolutionaries who during the half-century between the *Risorgimento* and the advent of fascism represented a major component of the Italian left. Anarchism, not Marxism, was the ideological current that dominated and largely defined the Italian socialist movement during its first fifteen years of development. During their heyday in the 1870s, the Italian anarchists, together with their Spanish comrades, were the most active revolutionaries in all western Europe. No other anarchist movement at that time produced leaders with the militant dynamism and intellectual vitality of Carlo Cafiero, Andrea Costa, and Errico Malatesta. Malatesta, whose sixty-year career is little known outside of Italy, stands with Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin as one of the great revolutionaries of international anarchism. Malatesta, in fact, exemplified the unique role played by Italians as missionaries of the anarchist ideal. Political refugees and emigrants, they established libertarian enclaves among Italian communities in France, Switzerland, England, Spain, the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, and Tunisia. They contributed to the rise of radical labor movements in several host countries, especially Argentina. Even after ideological primacy and organizational initiative had passed to legalitarian socialism in the 1880s and 1890s, anarchism in its communist, syndicalist, and individualist varieties continued to attract a sizable and militant following among the Italian working classes until the late 1920s. Always considered the most dangerous subversives, the anarchists were persecuted by every Italian government, from the Cavourian liberals to the Fascists.

This book does not cover the entire history of Italian anarchism. Instead, it provides a comprehensive study of the movement's ascendancy, transformation, and decline in the nineteenth century. The story begins with the arrival of the Russian revolutionary Michael Bakunin in 1864 and ends with the exclusion of the anarchists from the Italian Socialist Party founded in 1892. A sympathetic but critical treatment, this study seeks to probe beneath the misconceptions associated with this unique breed of revolutionary; to present the anarchists as accurately as possible, without filtering them through the lense of ideological preconception; and to achieve a better understanding and appreciation of the Italian anarchist movement as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon.

Bakunin played a decisive role in the Italian anarchist movement, and its first phase of development dates from his sojourn of 1864–1867. During

these years in Italy, Bakunin developed the essentials of his anarchist philosophy, attracted a devoted coterie of Italian disciples, and laid the foundations for the international anarchist movement. After leaving Italy and taking refuge in Switzerland, Bakunin became locked in a bitter struggle with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels for control of the International Workingmen's Association. Even before the International officially split into "authoritarian socialist" and "antiauthoritarian socialist" wings in 1872, Italian internationalists sided with Bakunin against Marx and Engels, a choice traditionally attributed by Marxist historians to Italy's socio-economic backwardness and political immaturity. The interpretation offered here argues that several factors other than Italy's belated industrial development accounted for the Italian internationalists' adoption of Bakunin's anarchist collectivism rather than Marx and Engels's state communism: the Russian was far more popular in Italy than his German rivals; his ideas were more compatible with Italian revolutionary traditions and aspirations; and Engels bungled the job of recruitment and public relations.

The movement's next stage of development coincides with the rise and fall of the Italian Federation of the Anti-Authoritarian International. The Italian Federation at its height attracted some twenty-five thousand members and many more sympathizers, making it the second largest anarchist organization in Europe after the Spanish Federation. Although dismissed by Marx and Engels as "a gang of *déclassés*, the refuse of the bourgeoisie," the Italian internationalists were predominantly artisans, workers, and students. Leaders tended to be revolutionaries of bourgeois origin who were declassed by virtue of having broken with the propertied class of their birth. Young chieftains like Carlo Cafiero, Andrea Costa, and Errico Malatesta possessed what Bakunin called a "heroic madness" to challenge and change the world. By any standard, they were stalwart fighters for liberty and social justice. As heirs to the revolutionary tradition of the Italian Risorgimento and in accordance with Bakuninist doctrine, they saw themselves as a revolutionary vanguard whose mission was to lead the masses in the violent overthrow of the state and capitalism. Therefore, they did not organize the Italian Federation as a labor association that would struggle to improve the material conditions of workers and peasants, but rather as a political society whose main function was the pursuit of social revolution.

In their youthful optimism, the anarchist leaders of the Italian Federation presumed the masses to be instinctively revolutionary and libertarian, requiring only an insurrectionary push to rise against their oppressors. In 1874 and 1877 the anarchists took up arms to provide the masses with an example of direct action or "propaganda of the deed." Their insurrectionary endeavors elicited widespread sympathy from workers, peasants, and even middle-class elements hostile to the government, but they failed to stimulate violent repercussions as hoped. The Italian authorities, on the other hand,

were genuinely fearful that a spark from the anarchists might ignite popular revolt, and suppression of the International became a top priority by the late 1870s.

The anarchists underestimated the power of the liberal state just as they overestimated the revolutionary capabilities of the Italian masses. A few leaders like Malatesta, who was undiscourageable in the face of failure, hoped to carry out as many insurrections as necessary to precipitate the revolution, but the movement lacked the means for continuous direct action, especially in the face of government repression. Determined to end once and for all the subversive threat it represented, the governments of the Historical Left branded the International an "association of malefactors" and persecuted its members unrelentingly, using laws and methods devised for common criminals. It was government repression—not the insoluble contradictions so frequently deemed inherent to anarchist ideology—that constituted the primary factor responsible for the International's final collapse around 1880.

Government repression was also the principal cause and catalyst responsible for the metamorphosis of Italian anarchism during the years from 1879 to 1892—the period of crisis, transformation, and decline that represents the final phase of development analyzed in this study. The link between persecution and internal crisis was dramatically evidenced in 1879, when Andrea Costa abandoned anarchism and espoused a form of maximalist socialism that for all its revolutionary rhetoric was essentially legalitarian. Costa's defection not only provided strong impetus to the rise of legalitarian socialism, it precipitated a counterreaction among anarchists that produced new forms of self-defeating extremism—above all, a phobic aversion to organization, now seen as a harbinger of authoritarianism.

Because government persecution and the anarchists' own rejection of organization precluded reconstituting the Italian International or another working-class association devoted to social revolution, the movement by the early 1880s had become atomized into small amorphous groups incapable of coordinating action on a national basis. Save for minor forms of agitation and protest, their preferred activity was propaganda of the word, mainly through the publication of newspapers. More often than not, however, the anarchists were communicating among themselves. The movement's growing insularity and ideological inflexibility ensured that many anarchists—though workers and artisans themselves—would eschew involvement with workers' societies and their struggles for economic improvements. As a result, the anarchists in the 1880s lost their opportunity to establish a broad influence over the nascent labor movement, leaving most of the field to radical democrats and legalitarian socialists. During the 1890s and early twentieth century, the anarchists played a major role in the labor movement only in their traditional strongholds, such as Tuscany,

the Marches, Umbria, and Rome, where they enjoyed strong grassroots support and operated through the Chambers of Labor.

With contraction, isolation, and passivity came new manifestations of ideological extremism. Carlo Cafiero in 1880 argued that the clandestine, underground cell, devoted to “permanent revolt” (terrorism), was a more effective instrument for revolution than large-scale organization committed to collective action. But permanent revolt became a state of mind, not a program of action. Most anarchists by the late 1880s and 1890s rationalized their passivity and ineffectualness with fatalistic theories derived mainly from the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin: the revolution was destined to come, in accordance with natural or historical laws, and nothing the anarchists did or failed to do would hasten the process. The movement that evolved under the heavy weight of self-defeating tendencies and police persecution, therefore, was composed in the main of intractable rebels who had retreated into a sectarian subculture, generally passive but spasmodically violent, that eschewed any form of thought or action not in conformity with its own narrow definition of truth and orthodoxy.

And yet, while the broad picture of Italian anarchism in the 1880s and early 1890s shows a movement in negative transformation and general decline, a sharper focus on specific developments in this period reveals another dimension. Contrary to the impression fostered in many pro-Marxian accounts of Italian socialism, which hasten to erect a tombstone inscribed with *requiescat in pace* for their libertarian rivals, the anarchists were not reduced to sudden and complete insignificance after the collapse of the First International. On the contrary, despite ongoing persecution and internal crisis, the anarchist movement proved itself remarkably tenacious and resilient. In several regions, such as Tuscany and the Marches, anarchism remained the dominant school of socialism throughout the 1880s; in others, such as the Romagna, Piedmont, Liguria, Umbria, and Lazio, the anarchists retained a respectable following among workers even in the face of legalitarian ascendancy. It was only after the founding of the Italian Socialist Party in 1892 that the disparity in strength between the legalitarians and the anarchists became progressively greater throughout most of Italy.

The lingering influence and periodic vitality of anarchism during these years was attributable to the activities of a small number of dedicated revolutionaries who refused to accept defeat by their enemies or eclipse by their rivals. This revolutionary minority was led by former chieftains of the First International, notably Errico Malatesta and Francesco Saverio Merlino, and by young leaders of the new anarchist generation, such as Luigi Galleani and Pietro Gori. However, it was Malatesta who ranked as the movement’s central protagonist—the man who could make things happen.

Malatesta understood by the early 1880s that unless the anarchists char-

ted a new course for themselves, the entire movement would decline into that state of passive isolation and sectarian fanaticism that had become normative in so many circles. He therefore exhorted his comrades to abandon their ideological rigidity, reorganize themselves into a vanguard party, restore intimate ties with workers and peasants, and resume the path toward revolution. Malatesta's efforts to transform the movement on the basis of this program—save during his Argentine sojourn (1885–1889)—were unrelenting. Under his leadership and inspiration, the anarchist movement experienced several periods of resurgence: 1884–1885, 1889–1891, 1892–1894, 1897–1898. Although fleeting, these episodes of renewed militancy and expanding influence constituted significant achievements for the anarchist movement, all the more impressive because the obstacles confronting serious revolutionaries in Italy were so formidable.

Yet Malatesta could not achieve his goal. As if the movement were locked in a vicious cycle of advance and retreat, every anarchist revival triggered or coincided with a new wave of government repression (especially following great popular upheavals, such as the Fasci Siciliani of 1894 and the Fatti di Maggio of 1898) that eradicated all that had been accomplished and stimulated a backlash of censure and obstructionism from recalcitrants within the movement's own ranks. The personal costs to militant activists, who invariably fell victim to the repressive might of the state or suffered the privations of exile, were enormous. Thus the end of the 1890s found the Italian anarchists battered, isolated, and vilified. But their spirit remained unbroken. Most were ready to resume the fight, believing with Malatesta that "it is not a matter of achieving anarchy today or tomorrow or within ten centuries, but of proceeding toward anarchy today, tomorrow, always."¹

¹ "Verso l'anarchia," *La Questione Sociale* (Paterson), December 9, 1899.

PART ONE

Bakunin and the Origins of
Italian Anarchism

Chapter One

BAKUNIN AND THE ITALIANS, 1864–1870

THE SOCIALIST PRECURSOR: CARLO PISACANE

Students of Italian history have debated endlessly whether the Risorgimento, the movement of national resurgence that culminated in political unification, was a genuine success or a failed revolution—a *rivoluzione mancata*. Virtually none, however, dispute the fact that after national unification, “legal Italy” and “real Italy” were separated by an abyss. Millions of peasants, artisans, and laborers, deprived of voting rights and other forms of legal redress, remained desperately poor and exploited, even by mid-nineteenth-century standards. Nor could it have been otherwise. The conservative liberals who supported the House of Savoy were triumphant in their cause and ruled exclusively in the interests of Italy’s economic and social elite. The democratic followers of Mazzini and Garibaldi, on the other hand, decried the results of unification, but their principal grievance was with the monarchy and its initial failure to acquire Rome and Venetia, not the unresolved social question. A transformation of property relations amounting to social revolution was never on Italian democracy’s agenda. A socialist movement did not exist at this time, so a more radical alternative was unavailable. The Risorgimento produced few thinkers and activists whose views were genuinely socialistic: Vincenzo Cuoco, Vincenzo Russo, Giuseppe Montanelli, Giuseppe Ferrari, and Carlo Pisacane, to mention the best known. And perhaps only Pisacane conceived of the Risorgimento as a potential socialist revolution.¹

Carlo Pisacane, former chief-of-staff of Mazzini’s Roman republican army of 1849 and martyr of the Sapri expedition of 1857, is generally considered the precursor to Italian socialism. Influenced chiefly by the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Italian federalists Carlo Cattaneo and Giuseppe Ferrari, Pisacane believed that the national and social questions were inseparable. The struggle had to be waged not only against the Austrians and the Bourbons, but against the rich and propertied classes as well, and success could only be achieved by a mass uprising of Italian peasants spurred by a socialist vanguard. Private property, which he considered the source of all inequality and suffering, would be swept away

¹ Leo Valiani, *Questioni di storia del socialismo* (Turin, 1958), 37–68 *passim*.

together with institutional religion and the state. A federation of free communes would guarantee the individual complete freedom of action as well as the fruits of his labor. Ultimately, all of European society would be organized according to the formula "Liberty and Association."²

These mechanisms and goals—the revolutionary overthrow of private property, religion, and the state—would later constitute the core philosophy espoused by the Italian anarchists and their Russian mentor Michael Bakunin. Because a few of Bakunin's associates—notably Giuseppe Fanelli and Attanasio Dramis—had previously been followers of Pisacane, the two leading historians of early Italian socialism, Aldo Romano and Richard Hostetter, have advanced arguments for Pisacane as the true fountainhead of modern Italian socialism and perhaps the source of Bakunin's doctrines as well.³ More recent scholarship has established that Pisacane's political writings and socialist ideas were unknown even to his closest comrades, and that Bakunin's anarchist philosophy had independent roots.⁴

Pisacane's political theories may not have contributed directly to the development of socialist ideology in Italy, but his conception of how the

² The seminal work on Pisacane is Nello Rosselli's, *Carlo Pisacane nel risorgimento italiano* (Turin, 1932). For a brief discussion of Pisacane's ideas, see Richard Hostetter, *The Italian Socialist Movement I: Origins (1860–1882)* (Princeton, 1958), 18–26; Alfredo Angiolini and Eugenio Ciacchi, *Socialismo e socialisti in Italia: Storia completa del movimento socialista italiano dal 1850 al 1919* (Florence, 1919), 23–43; Roberto Michels, *Storia critica del movimento socialista italiano: Dagli inizi fino al 1911* (Florence, 1926), 7–9.

³ Aldo Romano, a staunch Marxist, ascribes the thinking of the Libertà e Giustizia group—the first socialist group in Naples—to Pisacane's influence. He further argues that Bakunin's antistatist ideas derived from Pisacane, and that the Russian's advocacy of revolution as the solution to the social question developed from exposure and opposition to Mazzinianism. Hostetter contends that the former Mazzinians who composed the Libertà e Giustizia group derived their ideas from Pisacane, not Bakunin, but he does not support Romano's thesis regarding the development of the Russian's theories. Hostetter, *Italian Socialist Movement*, 103–112; Aldo Romano, *Storia del movimento socialista in Italia* (Milan and Rome, 1954), vol. 1, *L'unificazione nazionale e il problema sociale (1861–1870)*, 188–214.

⁴ Alfonso Scirocco, *Democrazia e socialismo a Napoli dopo l'unità (1860–1878)* (Naples, 1973), 178–209; Alfredo Capone, "Carlo Pisacane e il Mezzogiorno," *Il Velcro* 17, nos. 4–6 (August–December 1973): 707–721; T. R. Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians* (Kingston and Montreal, 1988), 57–74. The Bakunin scholar Arthur Lehning, writing before Scirocco's investigation, asserted that Bakunin was probably familiar with Pisacane's theories, but he rejected the notion that Bakunin's philosophy was influenced by Pisacanian ideas supposedly current among his Neapolitan associates. See his introduction to *Archives Bakounine*, ed. A. Lehning et al. (Leiden, 1961), vol. 1, *Bakounine et l'Italie, 1871–1872*, pt. 1, xviii; also Lehning, "Bakunin e la formazione dell'Internazionale in Italia," in Liliano Faenza, ed., *Anarchismo e socialismo in Italia (1872–1892): Atti del convegno di studi "Marxisti e Riministi," Rimini, 19–21 ottobre 1972* (Rome, 1973), 160–162. Modern scholarship therefore supports the early pioneering work of Max Nettlau and Nello Rosselli, both of whom ascribed paramount influence to Bakunin rather than Pisacane. See Max Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale in Italia dal 1864 al 1872* (Geneva, 1928); Nello Rosselli, *Mazzini e Bakounine: 12 anni di movimento operaio in Italia (1860–1872)* (Turin, 1927).

masses must be spurred to revolt was central to the anarchists' revolutionary strategy in the mid and late 1870s, when his works were rediscovered. In the *Testamento politico*, written on the eve of the Sapri expedition, Pisacane advanced the theory of "propaganda of the deed":

Propaganda of the idea is a chimera, the education of the people is an absurdity. Ideas result from deeds, not the latter from the former, and the people will not be free when they are educated, but will be educated when they are free. The only work a citizen can do for the good of the country is that of cooperating with the material revolution: therefore, conspiracies, plots, attempts, etc., are that series of deeds through which Italy proceeds toward her goal.⁵

Pisacane's theory presumed that the Italian masses, especially the peasants of the Mezzogiorno, were instinctively revolutionary and capable of spontaneous rebellion; all they required was a push from an insurrectionary band of elite conspirators.⁶ The Sapri expedition of 1857 was Pisacane's own attempt to use propaganda of the deed to rouse the Calabrian peasantry against the Bourbon monarchy. But the ill-conceived venture resulted only in the slaughter of his small band at the hands of the very peasants he had hoped to liberate. Pisacane himself took his own life rather than be captured, thereby ending any possible linkage between social and national revolution in Italy. Mazzini and Garibaldi, the real chieftains of the nationalist struggle, had no intention of stimulating a wave of peasant rebellion to obliterate private property and the state. It was not until the arrival of Bakunin that Mazzini's ideological domination of the Italian left was seriously challenged and a revolutionary socialist philosophy widely disseminated.

MICHAEL BAKUNIN

Michael Alexander Bakunin was already a renowned revolutionary when he crossed the Italian frontier on January 11, 1864. The aristocrat turned apostle of creative destruction had played impromptu roles as a leader of the Prague uprising in June 1848 and of the Dresden rebellion in May 1849, activities for which he spent more than a year in prison. Handed over to the Russian authorities, Bakunin languished for another six years in the dungeons of the Peter-and-Paul and Schlüsselburg fortresses, his body wracked by scurvy but his defiant spirit unbroken. In 1857, family petitions gained Bakunin's release and exile to Siberia. Four years later he escaped and made his way to the United States and then to London, where he resumed contact with many of Europe's most notable revolutionaries. His last revo-

⁵ Carlo Pisacane, *La rivoluzione*, ed. Augusto Illuminati (Bologna, 1967), 206.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 206–207.

lutionary adventure before visiting Italy was an aborted attempt to join the Polish insurrection of 1863.⁷

The Italian sojourn has been viewed traditionally as a transitional phase bridging the revolutionary nationalism of Bakunin's middle years with the revolutionary anarchism of his maturity. In reality the years spent in Italy represent the critical period during which Bakunin laid the foundation of his anarchist philosophy.⁸ Because of his twelve-year isolation, Bakunin arrived in Italy still espousing many of the ideas he had acquired from various European leftists in the 1840s: the German radicals Arnold Ruge and Georg Herwegh, the German communists Wilhelm Weitling and Karl Marx, the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and an assortment of Slavic nationalists and democrats, such as the Pole Joachim Lelewel.

Bakunin had learned much from Marx at a time when his own socialism, he admitted, was "purely instinctive."⁹ But Marx's authoritarian communism, like Weitling's before him, impressed Bakunin as the negation of freedom, and he rejected it completely. Proudhon's contribution, in contrast, was crucial. Reading one of Proudhon's works, Bakunin exclaimed: "This is the right thing!"—that is, freedom was attainable only through abolition of the state.¹⁰ Proudhon, more than any other political thinker, was responsible for transforming Bakunin's instinctive rebelliousness against authority into a formal anarchist credo.¹¹

The antistatism derived from Proudhon in the 1840s remained latent, however. Revolutionary pan-Slavism was at the heart of Bakunin's political philosophy in this period. Yet he did not consider nationalism intrinsically important; it was a useful vehicle for revolutionary purposes, and by late 1848 social revolution was becoming preeminent for Bakunin, as evident in the drafts of his *Appeal to the Slavs*. The federation of free Slav republics he

⁷ For the literature on Bakunin, see Arthur Lehning, "Michel Bakounine et les historiens: Un aperçu historiographique," in Jacques Catteau, ed., *Bakounine: Combats et débats* (Paris, 1979), 17–43. My account of Bakunin's activities and philosophy up to 1864 is based on the following sources: E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (New York, 1961); Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (New York, 1966), 36–62; Arthur Lehning's introduction to his edition of *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* (London, 1973), 9–29; Pier Carlo Masini, *Storia degli anarchici italiani da Bakunin a Malatesta (1862–1892)* (Milan, 1969), 9–28; Max Nettlau, "Mikhail Bakunin—A Biographical Sketch," in G. P. Maximoff, ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* (New York, 1953), 29–43; H. E. Kaminski, *Bakunin (vita di un rivoluzionario)* 2d ed. (Milan, 1949); Ettore Zoccoli, *L'Anarchia: Gli agitatori-le idee-i fatti* (Milan, Turin, and Rome, 1907), 97–109; Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, 1967), 20–26; Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin: A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism* (New Haven and London, 1987), 112–139.

⁸ The traditional view is best represented by Carr. The importance of the Italian period is emphasized by Lehning, Masini, and Ravindranathan.

⁹ Quoted in Carr, *Bakunin*, 135.

¹⁰ Quoted in Nettlau, "Mikhail Bakunin," 37.

¹¹ Carr, *Bakunin*, 137.

saw arising from the ashes of the Habsburg and Romanov empires would be created through social revolution. By 1864, however, the failure of the Polish insurrection the previous year dispelled his faith in national liberation movements as a social revolutionary force. Thereafter Bakunin believed that socialist revolution had to take place on an international scale.¹²

At no time, however, did Bakunin envisage entrusting the social revolution to the bourgeoisie. The behavior of middle-class liberals during the revolutions of 1848–1849—shifting from instigators of rebellion to supporters of reaction whenever workers threatened to radicalize the situation—had convinced him that the bourgeoisie was a counterrevolutionary class that had to be overthrown along with its political institutions, parliamentarism and constitutional democracy. The destruction of existing society would be carried out instead by the working class. But unlike Marx, who considered the industrial proletariat of advanced nations the only true revolutionary class, Bakunin believed that the landless peasantry of economically backward nations like Russia, Italy, and Spain would constitute the decisive revolutionary force. Joining the peasants in revolt would be city workers and artisans, *déclassé* intellectuals and students, the *Lumpenproletariat* of the urban slums, the unemployed, vagrants, and bandits—virtually every oppressed and disaffected element in society.¹³

During his Italian sojourn, Bakunin would refine his internationalism and federalism, embrace atheism and antistatism, designate a special role for the revolutionary elite, and elevate freedom to the apex of social requirements. These ideas, together with those retained from his revolutionary pan-Slavist period, would constitute the essence of Bakunin's mature anarchism.

BAKUNIN IN FLORENCE AND NAPLES

Bakunin considered the Italians natural allies of the Slavs in their struggle against the Teutons. In 1862 he tried to convince Mazzini to organize an agrarian revolt in Italy, hoping that an Italian rising would incite conflagration throughout the Habsburg realm. But Mazzini conceived of revolution primarily in terms of urban insurrection and had no interest in stirring up the Italian peasants. Bakunin also proposed an Italian-Slavic alliance to Garibaldi that year, but the general's defeat at Aspromonte on August 29, 1862, attempting to seize Rome, dashed Bakunin's immediate hopes. In his dreams of the future, however, Bakunin continued to link the Italian and Russian revolutions.¹⁴

¹² Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 54–56; Lehning's introduction to *Bakunin: Selected Writings*, 19.

¹³ Carr, *Bakunin*, 178–188; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 22–23.

¹⁴ Lehning, "Bakunin et les historiens," 27.

Revolution in Russia was still Bakunin's foremost concern when he settled in Florence in January 1864. The temporary capital of Italy, Florence hosted a sizable colony of political emigrés and an active circle of Tuscan democrats into whose ranks Bakunin gained entry thanks to local Freemasons. Many important Italian democrats, including Garibaldi, were Freemasons, and the Italian Masonic lodges became hotbeds of political discussion when Pope Pius IX promulgated the Syllabus of Errors on December 8, 1864, condemning liberalism and modern learning. A member of the Order of Freemasonry since his days in Paris (1840), Bakunin tried to capitalize on this ferment and, under the guise of Masonic reform, he presented the Florentine lodge with a program that was atheist, federalist, and socialist. Italian Freemasonry, however, was more anticlerical than revolutionary, and Bakunin's formulas were rejected as too radical.¹⁵

Bakunin, meanwhile, had met with Karl Marx in London on November 3, 1864, to discuss what activities he might undertake in Italy on behalf of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), which had been founded two months earlier. Marx did not suspect that Bakunin would one day become his principal ideological opponent and archrival for leadership of the International. At their meeting he was impressed with the ideological progress Bakunin had made since they last met in 1848, and he hoped the Russian could subvert Mazzini and recruit "some live Italians" for the International.¹⁶ Back in Florence, Bakunin reported to Marx that his work was progressing slowly. Potential recruits, "demoralized by the complete fiasco and errors of the political-unitarian-centralist school of democracy, have become excessively skeptical and indifferent. . . . Only passionate, energetic, and coherent socialist propaganda can restore life and will to this country."¹⁷

Bakunin neglected to tell Marx that his recruitment campaign was being conducted not for the International but for the International Revolutionary Brotherhood. Unlike Marx, who sought to build a large-scale organization of workers and socialist intellectuals that would function openly, Bakunin was committed to the idea that serious revolutionary activity must be conducted secretly, by an elite. He had previously organized a handful of exiles and friends in Florence into a secret society called the Florentine Brotherhood. Later, during a short visit to Sweden prior to his meeting with Marx, Bakunin laid plans for a European secret society called the International Revolutionary Brotherhood, which was to be inspired by his own program

¹⁵ Carr, *Bakunin*, 315–320; Lehning's introduction to *Archives Bakounine*, vol. 1, pt. 1, xviii; Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale*, 22–24; Elio Conti, *Le origine del socialismo a Firenze (1860–1880)* (Rome, 1950), 78–81.

¹⁶ Quoted in Carr, *Bakunin*, 323.

¹⁷ Bakunin to Marx, February 7, 1865, quoted in Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale*, 38–39.

of federalist, revolutionary, and antistatist ideas. Because the IWA was still composed mainly of Mazzinians, Proudhonians, and English trade-unionists, Bakunin considered his own organization far more likely to stimulate revolution. Marx would have considered Bakunin's activities a betrayal, and when he eventually discovered the existence of Bakunin's secret society (later metamorphosed into the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy) the rift between the two revolutionaries became unbridgeable.¹⁸

Bakunin tried to vitalize the Florentine Brotherhood after his return to Italy, but Florence proved barren soil for the secret society, and its members became inactive after he moved to Sorrento, near Naples, at the end of May 1865. Bakunin immediately established contact with the local democrats associated with *Il Popolo d'Italia*, a Mazzinian organ. His initial impressions were favorable. "You were not wrong about Naples," he wrote to one of his Florentine followers, "there is infinitely more energy and genuine political and social life than in Florence. At last, I have found some men. . . . There is very much to be done here. It is fertile ground worth cultivating."¹⁹

Naples was the ideal environment for Bakunin's revolutionary schemes. Democrats in the Mezzogiorno were more disillusioned with the outcome of the Risorgimento than their northern comrades. From the southerners' perspective, Italian unification had amounted to little more than the imposition of Piedmontese administration, law, and taxation, which antagonized virtually every class. The introduction of Piedmont's free-trade policies, moreover, wreaked havoc upon formerly protected industries and caused severe economic dislocation and depression throughout the south.

Southern democrats, like all who rejected the "royal conquest" by the House of Savoy, still looked to Mazzini for direction. But Mazzini had nothing new to offer. Inflexibly committed to his mystical formula of "Dio e Popolo," he saw the social question as completely subordinate to political revolution and the establishment of a "Third Rome." The problems oppressing the Italian masses would be resolved in the fullness of time—perhaps centuries. Meanwhile, Mazzini would do nothing to risk antagonizing the middle classes from which he drew his main support.²⁰

¹⁸ Carr, *Bakunin*, 323–326; Arthur Lehning, "Bakunin's Conceptions of Revolutionary Organizations and Their Role: A Study of His 'Secret Societies,'" in Chimen Abramsky, ed., *Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr* (London, 1974), 57–81; Silvio Furlani, "Bakunine e la sua associazione segreta dei fratelli scandinavi del 1864," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 89, nos. 3–4 (September–December 1977): 610–651.

¹⁹ Bakunin to Angelo De Gubernatis, August 8, 1865, in Elio Conti, "Alcuni documenti relativi al soggiorno fiorentino di Michele Bakunin (1864–1865)," *Monumento Operaio* 2, nos. 5–6 (February–March 1950): 128.

²⁰ Hostetter, *Italian Socialist Movement*, 38–67; Gino Cerrito, "L'ideologia di Bakunin e gli internazionalisti italiani fino a Saint-Imier," in Faenza, *Anarchismo e socialismo in Italia*, 28–33; Rosselli, *Mazzini e Bakunine*, 161–191.

Militant democrats still remained faithful to the nationalist objectives of the Risorgimento and were ready to fight for Venetia and Rome whenever Garibaldi gave the call to arms. Mazzini's obstinate refusal to adopt a social program, however, was beginning to create dissension, especially in the south, where federalist, egalitarian, and libertarian tendencies were gaining support. The dissident democrats were typified by Attanasio Dramis of the *Il Popolo d'Italia* group, who refused to head Mazzini's movement in the south because he believed the Prophet's program could no longer win the support of the masses.²¹ Nevertheless, before Bakunin's arrival in Naples, none of the dissident democrats had formulated their ideas into a coherent alternative program. Nor had they dared defy Mazzini openly. Their influence on the mainstream of Italian democracy was negligible and their following among Mazzinian worker societies virtually nonexistent. Consequently, as of 1865, Mazzini's tired formulas and shibboleths continued to represent the only comprehensive challenge to both the liberal (Cavourian) monarchist government known as the Historical Right and the former republicans who composed the parliamentary opposition known as the Historical Left.²²

Bakunin was the only man in Italy who possessed the intellect, charisma, and audacity necessary to challenge Mazzini and convert his disenchanted disciples to the cause of social revolution. Bakunin's first attempt came in the fall of 1865, when he wrote five letters to *Il Popolo d'Italia*, warning democrats against the deceptions of Mazzini and Garibaldi, who one day might follow the example of Crispi and other ex-republicans and betray Italian democracy by supporting the monarchy in the name of political expediency. These letters, published under the pseudonym "A Frenchman," articulated for the first time the themes that were central to Bakunin's emerging anarchism: exaltation of liberty, federalism, antistatism, social revolution, democratic propaganda among the people, the inherently democratic and revolutionary instincts of the masses, and the concept of the heroic revolutionary elite.²³

Bakunin declared that "the liberty of each necessarily assumes the liberty of all, and the liberty of all can only become possible with the liberty of each."²⁴ To ensure respect for liberty, every organization of human society must be organized along federalist lines: "Not from top to bottom, nor

²¹ Dramis's unpublished autobiography, quoted in Antonio Lucarelli, "Attanasio Dramis," *Movimento Operaio* 2, nos. 7-8 (April-May 1950): 184.

²² Cerrito, "L'ideologia di Bakunin," 32-33; Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 73-74; Franco Damiani, *Bakunin nell'Italia post-unitaria, 1864-1867: Anticlericalismo, democrazia, questione operaia e contadina negli anni del soggiorno di Bakunin* (Milan, 1977), 202-204.

²³ The articles are reproduced in A. Romano, *Storia*, 1:341-353.

²⁴ *Il Popolo d'Italia* (Naples), September 22, 1865.

from the center to the circumference, but from the bottom to the top and from the circumference to the center."²⁵ Bakunin also called for a radical transformation of society along antiauthoritarian and antistatist lines. To moralize human society, he explained, it was necessary to "emancipate thought from the yoke of authority and our will from the tutelage of the State."²⁶ Bakunin further observed that while the most ardent partisans of democracy had emerged from the people, the few who came from the privileged classes were all the more precious because of their social origin. Their small numbers, he said, were not a true measure of their potential contribution; Christianity had needed only twelve apostles to conquer the world. This revolutionary elite, recruited from the privileged classes and possessed with the "heroic *madness*" of intransigent faith, would constitute the "militant church of democracy." "The power of this militant church is the power of the idea," but a revolutionary elite comprising a few thousand people throughout Europe, he cautioned, lacked the material force to carry out the revolution if isolated from the people. The material force of democracy resided solely in the people, yet the people were still ignorant of their own power and democratic instincts. Once the people possessed the "*idea*," they would become omnipotent: "The single . . . holy mission of the militant church of democracy . . . is to bring the idea to the people." And once the people and enlightened democracy were united, they would become invincible.²⁷

FIRST DISCIPLES AND SECRET SOCIETIES

Although public response to his letters was imperceptible, Bakunin exchanged ideas and developed relationships over the next few months with several militant and dissatisfied representatives of southern democracy, men who would soon constitute the nucleus of his Neapolitan following and the first generation of Bakuninist anarchists in Italy. The group included the Neapolitan architect, engineer, and parliamentary deputy Giuseppe Fanelli; the Sicilian physician and deputy Saverio Friscia; the Neapolitan lawyers Carlo Gambuzzi and Alberto Tucci; the former Calabrian priest Raffaele Mileti; the veteran conspirator from San Giorgio Albanese, Atanasio Dramis; and a Neapolitan writer, Pier Vincenzo De Luca.

Their revolutionary credentials were outstanding. As a youth, Fanelli had been active in the revolutionary enterprises of 1848–1849 in Lombardy and Rome. A close friend of Pisacane, Fanelli had headed the secret revolutionary committee that was to have supported the Sapri expedition with a rising in Naples. He later fought with Garibaldi's Thousand in Sicily, and

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., October 22, 1865.

was elected to parliament in November 1865. Never a participant in parliamentary activities, Fanelli used the railroad pass that came as a perquisite of office to travel about Italy and propagandize on behalf of the movement. Friscia had been a deputy to the Sicilian parliament of 1848 and served on Mazzini's National Committee in Paris during the 1850s. After returning from exile in 1860, he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1861 and again in 1865. A thirty-third degree Freemason, Friscia would use his influence among the Sicilian lodges. Dramis had fought in 1848, collaborated with Pisacane in 1857, and was imprisoned by the Bourbons on suspicion of being an accomplice to Agesilao Milano's assassination attempt against King Ferdinando II in 1858. His revolutionary activities resulted in eight years of imprisonment between 1848 and 1860. He participated in Garibaldi's expedition when released in 1860. Of the others in the group, Raffaele Mileti and his brother Carlo had been coconspirators with Pisacane. Gambuzzi had fought with Garibaldi at Aspromonte in 1862, and De Luca had founded a society of freethinkers in Naples. Tucci's activities before Bakunin's arrival are unknown.²⁸

Several of Bakunin's new friends—Fanelli, Gambuzzi, Dramis, and Mileti—were members of the Masonic lodge Vita Nuova, and the Russian soon tried to convert the lodge to his revolutionary purposes; when this approach failed, he attempted, unsuccessfully, to establish an independent lodge.²⁹ Bakunin later rejected as absurd the idea that he had been won over to Freemasonry, explaining that "Freemasonry might perhaps still serve me as a mask or a passport, but to look to it for serious endeavor would be at least as silly as seeking consolation in wine."³⁰ Flippant disclaimers notwithstanding, Bakunin was very serious about transforming Italian Freemasonry into a revolutionary organization devoted to his program, and infiltration of lodges may have been one of Bakunin's objectives when he organized his southern democratic friends into a new secret society in February or March 1866—the Società dei Legionari della Rivoluzione Sociale Italiana, or the Italian branch of the International Revolutionary Brotherhood founded two years earlier.³¹

²⁸ For biographical information on Bakunin's Neapolitan group, see Hostetter, *Italian Socialist Movement*, 86–87; A. Romano, *Storia*, 1:136–139; Masini, *Storia degli anarchici italiani da Bakunin a Malatesta*, 24–25; Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale*, 55–57; Lucarelli, "Attanasio Dramis," 181–187, and his *Giuseppe Fanelli nella storia del Risorgimento e del socialismo italiano* (Trani, 1952); Errico Malatesta, "Giuseppe Fanelli," *Pensiero e Volontà* (Rome), September 16, 1925, in *Scritti*, 3 vols. (Geneva and Brussels, 1934–1936), 3:187–193.

²⁹ Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale*, 22–24, 58; Gino Cerrito, *Radicalismo e socialismo in Sicilia, 1860–1882* (Messina and Florence, 1958), 96–97.

³⁰ Bakunin to Alexander Herzen and Nicholas Ogarev, March 23, 1866, quoted in Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale*, 22, and M. P. Dragomanov, ed., *Correspondance de Michel Bakounine: Lettres à Herzen et à Ogareff (1860–1874)* (Paris, 1896), 209.

³¹ Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale*, 24.