

AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF M.A. BAKUNIN
TO R. SOLGER*

After Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin escaped from Siberian exile in 1861, he circumnavigated the globe en route to London, where he joined his friends A.I. Herzen and N.P. Ogarev. En route Bakunin travelled by boat from Yokohama to San Francisco, traversed the isthmus of Panama, and sojourned in New York and Boston before reembarking for England. Four decades ago Hecht wrote that there "is little record of Bakunin's stay in America",¹ but Avrigh has since established the general contours and many details of that record.²

An unpublished letter of Bakunin to Reinhold Solger, which lies among Solger's papers in the Library of Congress, sheds further light on Bakunin's activities in the United States in late 1861.³ Bakunin met Solger in Zürich in

* I wish to thank Professor Margaret Dorsch for assisting in the decipherment of the manuscript and for suggesting alternative renderings in the translation.

¹ David Hecht, *Russian Radicals Look to America, 1825-1894* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), p. 56.

² Paul Avrigh, "Bakunin and the United States", *International Review of Social History*, XXIV (1979), pp. 320-40, adds new material to Max Nettlau's account of Bakunin's passage through the United States, in *The Life of Michael Bakounine. Michael Bakunin: Eine Biographie*, 3 vols in 2 (London, 1896-99), 1, pp. 139-40. Avrigh also expands upon Hecht's treatment (which is from the standpoint of intellectual history) of the sojourn's influence upon the subsequent development of Bakunin's political thought, and he provides a detailed discussion of the influence of Bakunin's writings upon the development of collectivist socialist movements in the United States towards the end of the nineteenth century. The fullest reminiscence of Bakunin's sojourn in Boston by a contemporary is the memoir of Martin P. Kennard, "A Russian Anarchist Visits Boston in 1861: Text of an Account Written Some Twenty Years After, Edited by O. Handlin", *New England Quarterly*, XV (1942), pp. 104-09. Kennard gave Bakunin, as a parting gift, an autograph of George Washington. Later in the decade Bakunin in turn presented this to a sister who visited him in Italy, and it lies now in a Soviet archive: see B.P. Koz'min (ed.), *Gertsen, Ogarev i ikh okruzhenie: Rukopisi, perepiska i dokumenty*, compiled by L.E. Barsukova et al., *Biulleten' Gosudarstvennogo literaturnogo muzeia* 5 (Moscow, 1940), p. 24.

³ M. Bakunin to R. Solger, 29 November 1861, Reinhold Solger Papers, Box 1, Folder "Correspondence 1854-1867", Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. Reinhold Solger (1817-1866) was born in Stettin, Prussia, and prepared for an academic career through study in Halle and Greifswald. He fled to Switzerland following the defeat of the revolutionary army in Baden in 1848 which he had joined, and went to the United States in 1853. In the United States, Solger won prizes for a poem in honor of Schiller at the 1859 centenary and for a novel on German-American life; he delivered the Lowell Lectures at

1843, and a letter from Bakunin to Solger dated 14 October 1844 has already been published.⁴ After a short stay in Philadelphia upon arrival in the United States, Solger moved to Boston for several years before settling finally in New York. He was therefore able to put Bakunin in touch with progressive circles in Boston, which is the city of the letter's origin.

We learn from the present letter that in Boston Bakunin met the elder Josiah Quincy, a former president of Harvard whose grandson Josiah P. Quincy was one of the Boston *literati* who sponsored Solger's lecture series on contemporary European affairs. Also we learn that in Boston Bakunin saw Karol Forster, another old acquaintance from the early 1840s in Paris. Although Forster's name does not appear in Bakunin's correspondence from that time, Forster's published writings show that he moved in the same *émigré* community centered on the neighborhood of the Palais-Royal.⁵ It is

Harvard in both 1857 and 1859. Much of his income was derived from public lecture series and international-affairs journalism. Thus a journalist, novelist, poet, and gifted public speaker, Solger devoted his considerable talents to the cause of the Union against the Confederacy and on behalf of Abraham Lincoln's party. In recognition of this, the latter appointed him Assistant Registrar of the U.S. Treasury.

⁴ The 1844 letter first appeared in Russian translation, in M. A. Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, edited by Iu. M. Steklov, 4 vols (Moscow, 1934-36), 3, pp. 236-38. (Steklov planned to publish a complete twelve-volume edition of Bakunin's *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem* but was prevented from this by enthusiasts of the Stalin school of historiography, who exiled him to the West Siberian labor camp where he died. Volumes 5 and 6, which had been prepared for the printer in Moscow in the mid-1930s, were suppressed before publication, and work in progress on subsequent volumes halted. According to an archivist formerly employed at a major Moscow library, all these materials should lie in the currently closed archive of the Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, which is conversed in the Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii and for which an index exists in the form of an unpublished *diplomnaia rabota* defended by a certain Aleksandr Iakushkin at the Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi istorik-arkhivnyi institut in or about 1966.) The original German text of Bakunin's 1844 letter to Solger has been published, with a useful commentary, by Edmund Silbner, "Über einige unveröffentlichte Briefe Bakunins", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, VIII (1960), pp. 79-82.

⁵ However, he had little sympathy for its more radical circles. In Charles de Forster, *Du Royaume à l'Empire (1848-1852): Études politiques et philosophiques* (Paris, 1854), pp. 108, 176-78, 264, 285, he criticized Feuerbach's adepts, equated socialism with anarchism, and attacked Proudhon's espousal of atheism. Forster preferred the existence of any authority to its absence, and monarchy to any other form of authority. Acknowledging that "Russia represents the monarchical principle in all its integrity", he counted upon it for the possibility of reconstituting a Polish state consonant with his own political preferences, including first and foremost the guarantee of aristocratic privileges. See *France et Europe: Six lettres tirées du portefeuille d'un homme politique* (Berlin, 1849), pp. 18, 36, 46-48, 55-56, 71-72, and esp. p. 64; quotation at p. 62. This anonymously published brochure is attributed to Forster in Karol Estreicher (ed.), *Bibliografia polska XIX stulecia*, 2nd ed., 12 vols by 1979, (Kraków, 1959-), 7, pp. 173-74; and also at p. iv of "Wydawnictwo polskie w Berlinie", an advertising postface to *Sprawa polska ze stanowiska europejskiego*, compiled with a preface by Karol Forster, Teka Narodowa, Pisma historyczno-polityczne 2 (Berlin, 1872). In this 1872 publication Forster also

not clear whether Solger and Forster met in Paris at this time, but they did encounter one another during the revolutions of 1848-49, when the latter was in the camp of General Mieroslawski, for whom Solger served as translator and interpreter.⁶ We do not know why Forster should have been travelling through Boston at this time, but the remarkable coincidence of Bakunin's meeting with him (no doubt through Snelling, whom Avrich describes as "an avid partisan of Polish emancipation"⁷) must be accounted a simple matter of course in his remarkable life: in Yokohama, after having left Siberia, Bakunin ran into his old comrade Wilhelm Heine from the Dresden insurrection;⁸ and in Boston, an Austrian officer who had conveyed Bakunin to prison from the Prague court house after he had been condemned to death, encountered him on the premises of his friend Kennard's business.⁹

This letter is dated 29 November 1861, a Friday. From New York upon his arrival the following Tuesday, 3 December, Bakunin wrote to London a letter addressed to Herzen and Ogarev that was signed also by Solger, who had known Herzen in Paris the 1840s, and by Friedrich Kapp, Solger's longtime friend and associate then in New York, who had been tutor to Herzen's son and was also himself a German "forty-eighter".¹⁰

reprinted, in Polish translation, Bakunin's long 1862 article "Russkim, Pol'skim i wsiem slawianskim druz'iam", originally published as a Supplement to *Kolokol*, nos 122-23 (15 February 1862), pp. 1021-28, apparently using the French translation of the brochure as the basis for the Polish translation. Compare M.A. Bakounine, *À mes amis russes et polonais* (Leipzig, 1862); and M.A. Bakunin, "Do moich przyjaciół Rosyan i Polaków", in *Sprawa polska ze stanowiska europejskiego*, pp. 138-51. For Forster's criticism of that program, see his "Do czytelnika", in *ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

⁶ Friedrich Kapp, "Reinhold Solger". in Kapp, *Aus und über Amerika: Thatsachen und Erlebnisse*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1876), 1, p. 363.

⁷ Avrich, "Bakunin and the United States", p. 324.

⁸ Nettlau, *The Life of Michael Bakounine*, 1, p. 139; "Bakunin, Ôsugi, and the Yokohama-Paris Connection", *Libero International* (Kobe, Japan), no 5 (1978), pp. 14-15.

⁹ Kennard, "A Russian Anarchist Visits Boston in 1861", pp. 107-08.

¹⁰ Published in M.P. Dragomanov (ed.), *Pis'ma M.A. Bakunina k A.I. Gertsenu i N.P. Ogarevu* (Geneva, 1896), pp. 78-79.

29 November: 1864. Bakunin

Mein Lieber - Ich komme
erst Montag abend, aber sicher,
ist Dienstag werden ich dich besu-
chen Sie zu huy sicher - Ich bin un-
glaublich zufrieden in Bakunin gewesen
zu sein, es ist eine gute Stadt - Nicht
bin ich bei Ihnen alten, sehr alten
Freund Forster gewesen - Hell
blond, ganz Fair, es alle glücken
gelassen, l'Etat es dich so glücklich
Gott beiratsföhrer - Eberle Ausweg
mein Lieber, wenn es möglich ist,
arrangieren so dich ich Bötcher
in New-York irgend wo kaufen könnte -
Du muss intrahant nicht sein, ich
ich höre dich es der Freund ist - the
Butterflieh Stellung ist die Liederwör-
-dixit selbst, es können ist eine
Fächte, die Sie.

Adieu - grüßen Sie Kapp.
M. Bakunin

ORIGINAL TEXT

29 November 1861. Boston^a

Mein Lieber – Ich komme erst Montag abends, aber sicher, und Dienstag werde ich das Vergnügen haben Sie zu begrüßen – Ich bin wirklich zufrieden in Boston gewesen zu sein, es ist eine gute Stadt – Heute bin ich bei Ihrem alten, sehr alten Freunde Forster gewesen – Halb blind, ganz taub, an allen Gliedern gebrochen^b, lässt er doch den tüchtigen Geist herausfühlen – Ebenso Quincy – Mein Liebster, wenn es möglich ist, arrangiren Sie dass ich Bötcher in New-York irgend wo treffen könnte – Der Mann interessirt mich sehr, und ich höre dass er Ihr Freund ist. – The^c Butterflich Snelling ist die Liebenswürdigkeit selbst, und Kennard ist eine tüchtige, edle Seele.

Adieu – Grüßen Sie Kapp.
M. Bakunin

TRANSLATION

29 November 1861. Boston

My dear [friend] – I am coming only on Monday evening, but for sure, and on Tuesday I will have the pleasure of greeting you – I am quite pleased to have been in Boston, it is a good city – Today I have been to see your old, very old friend Forster^d – Half blind, totally deaf, altogether fragile, he still projects a dynamic spirit – Quincy^e likewise – My dearest [friend], if it is possible, arrange for me to see Bötcher^f somewhere in New York – I am very interested in the man, and I hear that he is your friend – The butterfly Snelling^g is kindness personified, and Kennard^h is a dynamic and noble soul.

Adieu – greetings to Kapp.ⁱ
M. Bakunin

^a The original orthography is preserved.

^b *Sic* for: gebrechlich.

^c English in the original.

^d Karol Forster (1800-1879) left Poland after the 1830 Congress, in which he participated, and settled in Paris. There, using the name Charles de Forster, he wrote in French popular histories of Poland and commentaries on contemporary social and political life. In 1848 he moved to Berlin, where he remained active in *belles lettres*. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, still in Berlin, he wrote his memoirs and edited a twenty-volume series of books on social, philosophical, and political themes; in one of these latter, he republished in Polish translation an 1862 pamphlet by Bakunin (see note 5 above).

^e Josiah Quincy (1772-1864), called “the Elder” in distinction from his grandson Josiah P. Quincy, was a pillar of Boston society in his day. A member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1805 until 1813, he spent the decade following in the Massachusetts State Legislature before becoming mayor of Boston, to which post he was reelected

annually for five years. As mayor in the 1820s, Quincy established a reputation as a municipal reformer by renovating waterfront slums, introducing water and power systems throughout the city, and building Quincy Market. After leaving the office of mayor, he spent a decade and a half as president of Harvard University, of which he wrote a history, before retiring to an active literary and social life.

^f According to testimony cited by Nettlau (*The Life of Michael Bakounine*, 1, p. 140), Bakunin saw “many German ‘forty-eighters’” in New York, including refugees from Dresden. A radical republican lawyer from Chemnitz named Carl Theodor Böttcher died on the barricades during the May 1849 revolution in Dresden, in which Bakunin played an important part. The Bötcher in this letter is most likely a brother or other male relative of Carl Theodor Böttcher, whom Bakunin knew during those years. Since Bakunin mentions Bötcher in this letter after saying he had seen Forster – whose own connection with Solger dates from the same period – it is plausible that Forster himself mentioned to Bakunin that Solger knew Bötcher. On C.Th. Böttcher, see Rolf Weber, *Die Revolution in Sachsen 1848/49: Entwicklung und Analyse ihrer Triebkräfte* (Berlin, 1970), pp. 265, 276; and Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 4, p. 527n. On Bakunin’s association with him, see Josef Pfitzner, *Bakuninstudien: Quellen und Forschungen aus dem Gebiete der Geschichte* (Prague, 1932; reprint ed., Berlin, 1977), p. 195.

^g George H. Snelling (1810?-1891) was a member of the Bostonian Society and a political and social reformer active in the city’s affairs. The sobriquet “butterfly” means, in the New England idiom of the time, one who moves from one kind of work to another. One type of work in which Snelling engaged was translation; he rendered into English Józef Hordyński’s account of the 1830-31 Polish insurrection.

^h Martin P. Kennard (1818-1903) was an abolitionist and political reformer in Boston. By profession a jeweler, he later became Assistant Treasurer in charge of the United States Sub-Treasury in Boston.

ⁱ Friedrich Kapp (1824-1884) was born in Hamm, Westphalia, and studied law at Heidelberg and Berlin. A friend of Solger, he fled the reaction to the Frankfurt revolution, in which he participated as a journalist, and arrived in the United States in 1850 via Paris. Founder of a law firm in New York, he was also correspondent for the *Kölnische Zeitung*. As commissioner of immigration for New York State from 1867 to 1870, Kapp gained a reputation as a social reformer. That experience shows in his several historical monographs on the German community in America. (Kapp also published, in both German and English, biographies of the American generals Kalb and von Steuben.) In 1870 Kapp returned to Germany, where he served as member of parliament from 1872 until his death.