

Do people still rely on the credibility of Prince Bakunin? If they do, this surely must attest to the incurability of the Western civilization's decline, to its perennial susceptibility to decay through murky and invincible diseases of perception and intelligence. It somehow makes us incline toward a Darwinian concept of justice: a civilization that has become so cerebrally weak deserves to perish. Prince Bakunin, a mid-19th-century Russian aristocrat, was the spiritual father of anarchism; if he lived today, of course, with his upper-upper-class bearings, wealth, and wacky ideas, he would be most welcome to the pages of *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, and *WWD*. The cheapness and triteness now promulgated by those magazines were fully anticipated in his social messages: the new man, unmoored from responsibility and duty, will usher in the freest society in history; in the meantime, before the Eden à la Russe is achieved, let's bomb, mutilate, terrorize, kill; when utopia is finally reached, anyone with a hankering for commitment, obligation, order, and the logic of social priorities, will be dutifully executed. The paltriness of these concepts make them look, from today's perspective, like the goods from an intellectual nickel-and-dime store, shoddy merchandise in view of what we *today* know about man, world, society, and our communitarian instincts. Yet his Woolworth-brand social romanticism is now widely merchandised in the capitalist West, though scorned in communist Russia. When looked upon with an eye unclouded by faddish frenzy, Bakunin's social intuition seems as totally unfit for consideration by the rational consciousness in our times as a kerosene lamp is unfit for illuminating word-processor screens.

But in chi-chi, artsy-artsy, mentally incoherent, morally vicious movies that try to concoct the ethics of modern terrorism, Prince Bakunin's name is melodiously invoked as proof of a protagonist's erudition, or his lofty social emotionalism. He remains apparently a source of mental nourishment for minds

warped by zealotry, for brains whose tissues are eaten away by messy hatreds and devoid of the humility of thinking. One Werner Fassbinder, a West German film director, an idol of the New York premiere crowd, now deceased at the

A Prudent Progressive



Leopold Tyrmand

age of incipient manhood (probably a victim of drugs, obesity, and incongruence of artistic passions), didn't go to his grave before creating a motion picture entitled *Lola*, which, not long ago, put the New York film critics into spasms of rapture. The movie's philosophical texture is a lamely updated Brecht and clumsily imitated Durrenmatt; its abysmally profound message says that life in capitalism, especially in West Germany during the early 50's, was corrupt. To prove the correctness of his vision, the late Mr. Fassbinder portrays those who try to be honest as idiots, and those who see clearly as wimps.

Now, it's not easy to preach any kind of collectivism—Marxian or anarchic—in the West Germany of post-Konrad Adenauer's *Wirtschaftswunder*. In spite of Mr. Fassbinder's exertions, any commonsensical viewer must come to a conclusion that the only decent, humane, and warmhearted character in his movie is the entrepreneur, a type of person that Mr. Fassbinder paints as utterly wicked, ruthless, and swinish because of his efforts to save fools from their foolishness, to be charitable to wimps, and to engineer upward mobility for fallen women without sanctimoniously exorcising their inborn depravity. At a time when one-third of the East German population tried to escape by any possible

means from angelic Marxist-Leninism to the hellish moral morass of a capitalistic democracy—where free enterprise offered such miseries as freedom, dignity, and economic well-being to anyone who wished to escape—to claim simply that communism was a better proposition than capitalism amounted to an insult to human intelligence. It's in providing a radical, ahistorical third option that Prince Bakunin's thought becomes Mr. Fassbinder's moral compass.

Bakunin laid down the gospel of modern anarchism according to which *any* morality is a bourgeois superstition. His final bequest to our time is the drugged, psychotic murderer who takes innocent human lives at random, in fits of ideological epilepsy, propelled by the most repulsive of all modern sins: political fanaticism. As a result, a cult of despicable cruelty flourishes on the left in the entire world. In the late 20th century, Bakunin's ultimate product is Carlos, the KGB hitman, the PLO slayer of children, the Red Brigade's cowardly executioner, the IRA exterminator of hapless passersby. In Germany, his progeny are the Meinhof-Baader humanoids who worship bloody insanity as the higher degree of humanness. Are they the answer Mr. Fassbinder proposes to the "corruption" of entrepreneurship? Do the New York critics pay any attention to the correlation of ideas and impulses in a movie? Does a civilization that bestows success, fame, money, and the title of artist on countless Fassbinders between Sunset Boulevard and Berlin deserve to survive? ☐

MOVING? Don't miss a single issue of *Chronicles of Culture*! Send this form with the label from your latest issue of *Chronicles* to: Subscription Dept., *Chronicles of Culture*, P.O. Box 800, Rockford, IL 61105.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

THE POLICE