

Dzerzhinsky Felix

1877-1926



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Founder of the Polish Social Democratic Party, was active in the Polish and Russian revolutionary movements. After the Russian Revolution he headed the Cheka from its formation in December 1917, and the Supreme Council of National Economy from 1924. He later became a supporter of Stalin. Died of a heart attack.

The sitting opened with a report by Dzerzhinsky, that strange ascetic who, when in prison in Warsaw, insisted on doing the dirty work of emptying the slops and cleaning other people's cells besides his own, on a theory that one man should where possible take upon himself the evil which would otherwise have to be shared by all; and in the dangerous beginning of the revolution had taken upon himself the most unpopular of all posts, that of President of the Extraordinary Commission. His personal uprightness is the complement of an absolute personal courage, shown again and again during the last eighteen months. At the time of the Left Social Revolutionary mutiny he went without a guard to the headquarters of the mutineers, believing that he could bring them to reason, and when arrested by them dared them to shoot him and showed so bold a front that in the end the soldiers set to watch him set him free and returned to their allegiance. This thin, tallish man, with a fanatic face not unlike some of the traditional portraits of St. Francis, the terror of counter-revolutionaries and criminals alike, is a very bad speaker. He looks into the air over the heads of his audience and talks as if he were not addressing them at all but some one else unseen. He talks even of a subject which he knows perfectly with curious inability to form his sentences; stops, changes words, and often, recognizing that he cannot finish his sentence, ends where he is, in the middle of it, with a little odd, deprecating emphasis, as if to say: "At this point there is a full stop. At least so it seems."

Inhoud:

From a Prison Diary

From Letters to Relatives

From the Article 'Citizens! Railwaymen!', December 6 1921

From a Circular Letter to the Managements of Syndicates and Trusts, June 19, 1924

From the Article "Waifs and the Vecheka", July 22, 1926

From a Prison Diary

April 30, 1908

...Where lies the way out of the hell of present-day life, in which the wolfish law of exploitation, oppression and violence holds sway? The way out lies in the idea of a life which is based on harmony, a full life enjoyed by the whole of society, by all mankind; the way out is in the idea of socialism, the idea of solidarity of the working people. This idea is already approaching realisation, the people are ready to receive it with open arms. The time for it has already arrived. The ranks of the advocates of this idea must be united and the banner carried aloft so that the people see it and follow it. And today this is the most urgent of the tasks of Social-Democracy, of the tasks of the small handful that survives.

Socialism should cease to be only the scientific prevision of the future. It should become the torch that kindles indomitable faith and energy in the hearts of people....

May 10, 1908

... It would not be worthwhile living if the star of socialism, the star of the future were not shining down on mankind. For the "ego" cannot live if in itself it does not contain the rest of the world and the people. Such is the nature of this "ego."...

May 21, 1908

... It is necessary to instil in the masses our own confidence in the inevitable bankruptcy of evil, so that they will be left with no doubt, so that they will come through this moment in serried ranks, prepared for battle. This is the task of the theoreticians. But the tasks of the others are to lay bare and show up this evil, to lay bare the sufferings and torments of the masses and of the individual fighters torn from their midst by the enemy, to give them the meaning they actually have and which gives them the strength to bear everything courageously, without wavering. Only in this way is it possible to instil in the masses courage and understanding of the need for struggle. Those who influence the mind and those who put confidence in victory into the heart and mind are both needed. Scientists and poets, teachers and propagandists are needed. I recall the booklet "From the Battlefield" published by the "Proletariat"[1] Party, which described the sufferings of the people, the steadfastness and courage they displayed in the struggle, and the tremendous influence it had. How I would wish such a booklet to appear now! But now it is more difficult to collect and compare facts, because they cover so much ground and there are so many of them. But, on the other hand, there are greater opportunities and possibilities now. If someone would undertake this work, or at least only the guidance of this work, then in a year or two such book could appear. It would reflect not only our sufferings and our doctrine, but also that longing for a full and real life for the sake of which man would readily endure suffering and sacrifice....

December 31, 1908

... I have matured in prison in torments of solitude, in torments of longing for the world and for life. And, in spite of this, doubt in the justness of our cause has never risen in my heart. And now, when perhaps for many years all hope is buried in torrents of blood, when they have been crucified on the gallows, when many thousands of fighters for freedom are languishing in dungeons or thrown out into snowbound Siberia – I feel proud. Already I see tremendous masses set in motion shattering the old system, masses among whom new forces are being trained for fresh struggles. I feel proud that I am with them, that I see, feel and understand them, and that I, too, have suffered much together with them. It is sometimes hard, at times even terrible, here in prison.... Yet, if I had to begin life all over again, I would begin

it in the same way. And not out of a sense of duty, not because I had to. For me, it is an organic necessity.

...I curse neither my fate nor the many years in prison, for I know that all this is necessary in order to destroy the other vast prison which lies outside the walls of this horrible "pavilion." This is not idle philosophising, not cold calculation, but the result of an indomitable desire for freedom, for a full life. Out there, comrades and | friends are drinking our health, and I, alone in my cell, am thinking of them: may they live on, may they forge the weapons and be worthy of the cause for which the struggle is being waged....

June 3, 1909

... To live – does it not mean to have indomitable faith in victory?

August 8, 1909

... In this connection[2] I am filled with apprehension. I shall go away, but this terrible life here will continue as before. This is strange and incomprehensible. It is not the horrors of this gloomy place that draw one to it, but the feeling for all the comrades, friends and unknown neighbours – strangers, yet at the same time near ones. Here we came to feel and realise how necessary is man to man, what man means to man. Here we learned to feel love not for women alone, we learned to be unashamed of our feelings and of our desire to give people happiness.

...And if here we long for flowers, we have also here learned to love people as we love flowers; and precisely here, where there is no desperate struggle for a crust of bread, and where there floats to the surface that which out there was of necessity concealed in the depths of the human heart. And for this reason we love this place of our execution, for here we made clear to ourselves that the struggle which brought us here is also the struggle for our personal happiness, for emancipation from the violence imposed on us, from the chains that drag us down.

From Letters to Relatives[3]

To A. E. Bulhak[4]

January 25 (13), 1898

... How is your little Rudolph? He must have grown a lot – does he walk or talk? See that you bring him up so that he values honesty above all else; such a person feels happy in all circumstances of life!

September 19 (7), 1898

... And we, in exile, must now gain in strength, physically, mentally and morally, in order to be prepared when the time comes. True, there are few who envy us our lot, but we who see the bright future of our cause, who see and realise its might, realise that life has chosen us to be the fighters, we who are fighting for that better future would never, never exchange our position for philistine vegetating. We are least of all made despondent by unpleasant side of life, since our life consists in work for the cause which is above everyday trifles. Our cause was born not so long ago, but it will develop beyond bounds, it is immortal.

November 17 (5), 1898

... You say that our feelings seem to relate in greater measure to mankind as a whole than to individuals. Never believe that this is possible. People who say so are hypocrites: they are simply deceiving themselves and others. It is not possible only to feel for people in general, people in general is an abstraction, for what is concrete is the sum-total of individuals. In actual fact, feelings can only be aroused in relation to the concrete phenomenon and never in relation to an abstraction. A man can feel sympathy towards social misfortune only if he feels sympathy towards the misfortune of every individual...

October 21 (8), 1901

... I do not know how to hate by halves or to love by halves. I do not know how to give only half of my heart. I can give all my heart or I give nothing. I have drunk from the cup of life not only all the bitterness, but all the sweetness as well, and if anyone says to me: take a look at the wrinkles on your brow, at your emaciated body, at the life you now lead, take a look and recognise that life has broken you, then I would reply: life has not broken me but I have broken life, it has not taken everything from me, but I have taken everything from it with my whole being and spirit! Yes, indeed!

...I came to loathe wealth because I learned to love people, because with all the fibres of my being I see and feel that today ... people worship the golden calf which has turned human souls into the souls of beasts and driven love out of people's hearts. Remember that there is a sacred spark in the soul of people like me ... a spark which gives a glow of happiness even at the stake.

...I love children passionately...When I think that terrible want, on the one hand, and excessive wealth, on the other, lead to the degeneration of these little ones ... I am glad for your children, that you are neither rich nor poor, that from childhood they will realise the need to work in order to live and this means that they will grow up into real people. For the children are the future! They must be strong in spirit and know from childhood how to face up to life....

But I have spirit enough for another thousand years or more.... Even here in prison I see how the undying flame burns: the flame is my heart and the hearts of my comrades suffering torments here

To A. E. and G. A. Bulhak[5]

Beginning of November 1901

...No!! I am the same as I was before; what embittered me before, embitters me now; what I loved before, I love now; what gladdened me before, gladdens me now; as I acted before, so I act now; as I thought before, so I think now; as misfortunes and trials have not passed me by, so in the future they will not pass me by; my path remains the same; as I loathed evil before, so I loathe it now; as before, I am striving heart and soul so that there will be no injustice, crime, drunkenness, depravity, excessive | luxury, brothels where people sell body or soul or both together; so that there will be no oppression, fratricidal wars, national strife.... I would like my love to envelop all mankind, to warm it and cleanse it of the dirt of modern life....

... A tremendous task faces you: to' educate and shape the minds of your children. Be vigilant! For parents are to a large extent morally responsible for whether their children are good or bad. I would like to write a great deal more about children, but I do not know how you will accept my advice, whether you might not regard this interference in your affairs as out of place. In any case, rest assured that I am guided here only by my love for your children. Kiss them heartily for me.... May they grow up healthy and cheerful, full of love for their parents and other people; may they grow up courageous and strong in spirit and body; may they never barter their conscience; may they be happier than we are and live to see the triumph of freedom, brotherhood and love....

To A. E. Bulhak

October 6 (September 23), 1902

...I do not know why I love children more than anything else. When I meet them my ill humour immediately vanishes. I could never love a woman as I love them and I think I could never love my own children more than those that were not my own.... In particularly hard moments I dream that I have taken some child, a foundling, and am caring for it and we are both happy. I live for it, feel it near me, it loves me with the childish love in which there is nothing false; I feel the warmth of this love and I terribly want it near me. But these are only dreams. I cannot allow myself this, I have to be moving about all the time, and with a child I could not. Often, very often, it seems to me that even a mother does not love children as ardently as I do....

October 22 (9), 1905

...I should like so much to perceive the beauty in nature, in people, in what they create, to delight in them, to perfect myself, because beauty and goodness are like two sisters. The asceticism that has fallen to my lot is so alien to me. I would like to be a father and put into the soul of a young creature everything good that is on the earth, to see how the rays of my love for it would produce a luxuriant blossom of the human soul....

June 16 (3), 1913

... Like a flower, the human soul unconsciously imbibes the rays of the sun and longs eternally for it, for its light; it fades and shrivels when evil shades off the light Our vigour and faith in a better future for mankind is built on this striving of every human soul towards the sunlight, and so there should never be hopelessness.... The evil genius of mankind today is hypocrisy: love in words, but in practice – a merciless struggle to exist, to achieve so-called “happiness,” to make a career.... To be a ray of light for others, to irradiate light, is the greatest happiness a man can achieve. Then a man does not fear suffering or death, misfortune or need. Then a man ceases to fear death, although only then he does really learn to love life. Only then will he walk on the earth with his eyes open, seeing, hearing and understanding

everything, only then will he emerge from his narrow shell into the light and feel the joys and sufferings of all mankind; only then will he be a real man.

To S. S. Dzerzhinskaya[6]

December 15 (2), 1913

... Love for a child, like all great love, becomes creative and can give the child true and lasting happiness when it broadens the scope of life of the one who loves, makes him a more valuable person, and when it does not transform the person loved into an idol. Love which is showered on only one person and which derives from him alone all joy in life, making everything else a burden and torture, such love carries with it hell for both persons....

In order to save and enrich his soul, he must be taught to see and hear all he is already capable of seeing and hearing, so that his love for you becomes deep friendship and infinite trust....

January 19 (6), 1914

...Where there is love there should be trust...

...The man who believes in an idea and is alive cannot be useless if he does not himself renounce his idea. Only death, when it comes, will have its word to say about uselessness. But as long as there is a glimmer of life and the idea itself is alive, I shall dig the earth, do the roughest work, give everything I can. And the thought is soothing, makes it possible to endure the torment. A man must do his duty, follow his path to the end. And even when the eyes no longer see and are blind to the beauty of the world, the soul knows of this beauty and remains its servant. The torment of blindness remains, but there is something above this torment – there is faith in life, in people, there is freedom and the realisation of one's constant duty....

To A. E. Bulhak

March 16 (3), 1914

...When I think of all the misfortunes in life that lie in wait for a man, of the fact that a man is so often deprived of all he is most attached to, my thoughts again tell me that in life one has to love with all one's heart and soul that which is not transitory, that which cannot be taken away from a man and thanks to which his attachment to individuals and things becomes possible....

Love for suffering, oppressed mankind, the eternal longing in the heart of everyone for beauty and happiness, strength and harmony, urges us to seek a way out and to find salvation here, in life itself, and shows us the way out. It opens a man's heart not only to his near ones, it opens his eyes and ears and gives him gigantic strength and confidence in victory. Then misfortune becomes a source of happiness and strength, for then comes clear thought throwing light on a hitherto gloomy life. From that time onwards, each new misfortune is no longer a reason for withdrawal from life, a source of apathy and despondency, but again and again inspires a man to go on living, to struggle and to love. And when the time comes and a man's own life comes to an end, he can go calmly, without despair, and not be afraid of death....

To S. S. Dzerzhinskaya

June 24 (11), 1914

... I want to be worthy of the ideas you and I share. And it seems to me that every sign of weakness on my part, of longing for the end and peace, every hint of "I can't go on" would be a betrayal and the renunciation of my feelings towards you and of that song of life that has always been and is still in me....

Yan[7] must not be a hot-house flower. He should have the whole dialectics of feelings, so as to be capable in life to fight for the truth and ideas. In his heart he should have something sacred that is broader and stronger than the sacred feeling for his mother or other people near and dear to him. He should know how to love the idea, that which links him with the masses, which will be a shining light in his life. He should understand that you and all who surround him, to whom he is attached, whom he loves, have something more sacred than the love for a child, the love for him, something sacred from which he and the love and affection for him derive. This sacred feeling is stronger than all other feelings, stronger because of its moral injunction: "This is how you should live, this is what you should be." Awareness of this duty, as of every other connected with feelings, cannot be instilled by influencing the reason alone....

... To renounce the good things of life in order to fight for them together with those who are deprived of them, and to instil now a kind of asceticism in oneself. But my thoughts never leave me and I am sharing them with you. I am not an ascetic. It is just the dialectics of feelings, which springs from life itself and, it seems to me, from the life of the proletariat. And the point is that this dialectics should complete its cycle, so that it should contain the synthesis – the solution of contradictions. And so that this synthesis, being proletarian, should at the same time be "my" truth, the truth of "my" soul. One has to have the inner consciousness of the need to go to one's death for the sake of life, to go to prison for the sake of freedom and to have the strength to go through all the hell of life with open eyes, feeling in one's heart the great and exalted, paean of beauty, truth and happiness derived from that life....

February 17 (4), 1916

I love life as it really is, in its eternal movement, in its harmony, and in its terrible contradictions. And my eyes still see, my ears hear, my soul is receptive and my heart has not yet hardened. And the song of life sings in my heart.... And it seems to me that whoever hears this song in his heart will never curse his life, no matter what torments he has endured, will never exchange it for the other, peaceful, normal life. For this song is everything, this song of the love of life alone remains. Both here in prison, and out there in liberty, where there are now so many horrors, it lives and is eternal as the stars: the stars and all the beauty of nature give birth to it and carry it to human hearts, and these hearts sing out and strive eternally for resurrection....

To V. E. Dzerzhinsky[8]

September 11 (August 29), 1916

... But in social life? I am entirely at one not only with my thoughts but with the masses, and together with them I must experience the struggle, the torment and the hopes. I have never lived with closed eyes, turned in on my own thoughts alone. I was never an idealist. I learned to know human hearts and it seemed to me that I felt every beat of those hearts.... I have lived in order to fulfil my mission and to be myself....

I must endure to the end all that I am destined to endure. It cannot be otherwise. And I am at peace. And although I do not know what awaits me ... my mind continues to draw pictures of the future which crown it all. I am, besides all else, an optimist

To S. S. Dzerzhinskaya
May 21, 1918
My dear!

I am in the very thick of the struggle. The life of a soldier who knows no rest, for it is necessary to save our home. There is no time to think of my own people and myself. The work and the struggle are hellish. But in this struggle my heart remains alive, the same as before. All my time is one continual round of activity....

My thoughts force me to be merciless, and I have the firm will to follow my thoughts to the end...

The ring of enemies presses harder and harder round us, approaching the heart.... Each day forces us to resort to increasingly resolute measures. Now our greatest enemy faces us – stark famine. In order to get bread, it must be taken from those who have it and given to those who have none. The civil war must flare up on an unprecedented scale. I have been moved up to a position in the front line of fire and my will is to fight and to look with open eyes on all the danger of the grave situation and to be merciless myself....

August 29, 1918

...We are soldiers on active service. And I live by what stands ahead of me, for this demands the greatest attention and vigilance in order to win victory. My will is to win through and, although a smile is very rarely seen on my face, I am confident in the victory of the idea and the movement in which I live and work....

Here we have a dance of life and death – a moment of truly sanguinary struggle, titanic effort....

To A. E. Bulihak
April 15, 1919

Today as before, love is everything for me. I hear and feel its song in my heart. This song calls to the struggle unbending will, to tireless work. And today my actions are determined only by the idea – the striving for justice. I am finding it difficult to write.... As a perpetual wanderer, I am always in motion, in the thick of the changes and of the creation of a new life.... I see the future, and I want and must take part in its creation – to be in the movement, like a stone hurled from a sling, until I reach the end – eternal rest. Have you ever thought what war in actual pictures is like? You have pushed aside pictures of human bodies torn by shells, of the wounded lying on the battlefield and the crows pecking out the eyes of men still living. You have pushed aside these terrible pictures which daily meet the eyes. You cannot understand A soldier of the revolution fighting so that there will be no more injustice on the earth, so that this war will not put millions upon millions of people at the mercy of the conquering rich. War is a horrible thing. The whole world of the rich has moved against us. The most unhappy, most ignorant people are the first to have risen up in defence of their rights – and they are repulsing the entire world....

From the Article
'Citizens! Railwaymen!'
December 6 1921

...Wherever the scoundrel plants himself – in an office behind a green-baize desk or in a watchman's hut – he will be discovered and brought before the court of the R[evolution]

Tribunal, whose punitive hammer will fall with all the devastating might and anger of which it is capable, for there is no mercy for the deadly enemies of our revival. No circumstances will be taken into account when sentence is passed on people who take bribes. The sternest punishment awaits them.

At the same time, the Soviet Government calls on all honest citizens, in whom painful consciousness of the indelible shame and corrupting influence of bribes is alive, to give their aid in the seeking out and discovering bribe-taking scoundrels.

Be keen-eyed and vigilant! Proletarian hands should not and cannot be sullied by bribes!

From the Article

"Waifs and the Vecheka"[9]

July 22, 1926

I want to throw part of my own efforts and primarily the forces of the Vecheka to combat the problem of homeless children... Two considerations have prompted me to this conclusion. Firstly, this is a terrible calamity! For when you look at the children, you cannot fail to think – everything is for them! The fruits of the revolution are not for us, but for them. And yet, how many of them are crippled by the struggle and by want! It is necessary to rush at once to their rescue, as we would if we saw children drowning. The People's Commissariat for Education cannot cope with the situation alone. Extensive assistance from the Soviet public is needed. A large committee must be set up under the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, with the immediate participation of the People's Commissariat for Education, and including representatives from all departments and all organisations that can be useful in this work. I have already spoken to a few people. I would like to head the commission myself; I want the

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apparatus of the Vecheka to be actually included in the work. Here I am prompted by the second consideration: I think our apparatus is one of those that work most efficiently; it has branches everywhere. People reckon with it. They are rather afraid of it. And yet, even in such a thing as the salvation and provisioning of children, one meets with negligence and even pilfering! We are steadily going over to peace-time construction, and so the thought has struck me, why not use our militant apparatus to combat such a calamity as homelessness among children?...

From a Circular Letter to the Managements of Syndicates and Trusts and to Red Directors
June 19, 1924

... One must not fear criticism, or gloss over shortcomings; on the contrary, it is necessary to help to make them known and to see nothing discreditable in doing so. Only he can be discredited who conceals his shortcomings, who is unwilling to fight against evils, that is, precisely the man who ought to be discredited. It is necessary to be able to see the truth and to imbibe it from the masses and from all who are taking part in production. There is nothing worse than self-praise and self-satisfaction. It is possible to go forward only when, step by step, evils are sought out and overcome. At the same time, an end must be put to our established practice of humouring the masses – the workers. It should be remembered that in our country the workers, like ourselves, are not yet cultured, that often their group interests outweigh the interests of the working class as a whole; often they do not sufficiently realise that only their own useful labour, the productivity of their labour, can create the communist state, maintain their Soviet power. Every economic manager should wage a struggle to win prestige, to win the confidence of the working masses, but the struggle for this confidence should on no account employ the instrument of demagoguery, of humouring the

masses, satisfying them to the detriment and at the expense of the state, of the interests of the alliance with the peasants, of parochial requirements. The path of demagogy is perhaps the most harmful path, lulling the masses, deflecting them from the main tasks of the working class in production, diminishing the sacrifices the working class has made and, in the final analysis, one which is harmful for our industry....

Notes

1. "Proletariat" – the first revolutionary workers' party in Poland formed in the eighties of last century.
2. The reference here is to the thoughts aroused in F. E. Dzerzhinsky by the confirmation of the sentence to exile him, which meant that he had to leave the prison.
3. Letters written between 1898 and 1916 in prison and exile, except for the letter dated October 6 (September 23), 1902.
4. Edmundovna Bulhak – F. E. Dzerzhinsky's sister.
5. G. A. Bulhak – A. E. Bulhak's husband.
6. Sofia Sigizmundovna Dzerzhinskaya – F. E. Dzerzhinsky's wife.
7. F. E. Dzerzhinsky's son.
8. Vladislav Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky – F. E. Dzerzhinsky's brother.
9. The Vecheka (Cheka) – the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission to combat counter-revolution and sabotage. It was set up on the initiative of V.I. Lenin in December 1917, as an organ of the workers' and peasants power, to defend the state security of the Soviet Republic.

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To A. E. Bulhak[4]
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...I do not know why I love children more than anything else. When I meet them my ill humour immediately vanishes. I could never love a woman as I love them and I think I could never love my own children more than those that were not my own.... In particularly hard moments I dream that I have taken some child, a foundling, and am caring for it and we are both happy. I live for it, feel it near me, it loves me with the childish love in which there is nothing false; I feel the warmth of this love and I terribly want it near me. But these are only dreams. I cannot allow myself this, I have to be moving about all the time, and with a child I could not. Often, very often, it seems to me that even a mother does not love children as ardently as I do....

October 22 (9), 1905

...I should like so much to perceive the beauty in nature, in people, in what they create, to delight in them, to perfect myself, because beauty and goodness are like two sisters. The asceticism that has fallen to my lot is so alien to me. I would like to be a father and put into the soul of a young creature everything good that is on the earth, to see how the rays of my love for it would produce a luxuriant blossom of the human soul....

June 16 (3), 1913

... Like a flower, the human soul unconsciously imbibes the rays of the sun and longs eternally for it, for its light; it fades and shrivels when evil shades off the light Our vigour and faith in a better future for mankind is built on this striving of every human soul towards the sunlight, and so there should never be hopelessness.... The evil genius of mankind today is hypocrisy: love in words, but in practice – a merciless struggle to exist, to achieve so-called “happiness,” to make a career.... To be a ray of light for others, to irradiate light, is the greatest happiness a man can achieve. Then a man does not fear suffering or death, misfortune or need. Then a man ceases to fear death, although only then he does really learn to love life. Only then will he walk on the earth with his eyes open, seeing, hearing and understanding

everything, only then will he emerge from his narrow shell into the light and feel the joys and sufferings of all mankind; only then will he be a real man.

To S. S. Dzerzhinskaya[6]

December 15 (2), 1913

... Love for a child, like all great love, becomes creative and can give the child true and lasting happiness when it broadens the scope of life of the one who loves, makes him a more valuable person, and when it does not transform the person loved into an idol. Love which is showered on only one person and which derives from him alone all joy in life, making everything else a burden and torture, such love carries with it hell for both persons....

In order to save and enrich his soul, he must be taught to see and hear all he is already capable of seeing and hearing, so that his love for you becomes deep friendship and infinite trust....

January 19 (6), 1914

...Where there is love there should be trust...

...The man who believes in an idea and is alive cannot be useless if he does not himself renounce his idea. Only death, when it comes, will have its word to say about uselessness. But as long as there is a glimmer of life and the idea itself is alive, I shall dig the earth, do the roughest work, give everything I can. And the thought is soothing, makes it possible to endure the torment. A man must do his duty, follow his path to the end. And even when the eyes no longer see and are blind to the beauty of the world, the soul knows of this beauty and remains its servant. The torment of blindness remains, but there is something above this torment – there is faith in life, in people, there is freedom and the realisation of one's constant duty....

To A. E. Bulhak

March 16 (3), 1914

...When I think of all the misfortunes in life that lie in wait for a man, of the fact that a man is so often deprived of all he is most attached to, my thoughts again tell me that in life one has to love with all one's heart and soul that which is not transitory, that which cannot be taken away from a man and thanks to which his attachment to individuals and things becomes possible....

Love for suffering, oppressed mankind, the eternal longing in the heart of everyone for beauty and happiness, strength and harmony, urges us to seek a way out and to find salvation here, in life itself, and shows us the way out. It opens a man's heart not only to his near ones, it opens his eyes and ears and gives him gigantic strength and confidence in victory. Then misfortune becomes a source of happiness and strength, for then comes clear thought throwing light on a hitherto gloomy life. From that time onwards, each new misfortune is no longer a reason for withdrawal from life, a source of apathy and despondency, but again and again inspires a man to go on living, to struggle and to love. And when the time comes and a man's own life comes to an end, he can go calmly, without despair, and not be afraid of death....

To S. S. Dzerzhinskaya

June 24 (11), 1914

... I want to be worthy of the ideas you and I share. And it seems to me that every sign of weakness on my part, of longing for the end and peace, every hint of "I can't go on" would be a betrayal and the renunciation of my feelings towards you and of that song of life that has always been and is still in me....

Yan[7] must not be a hot-house flower. He should have the whole dialectics of feelings, so as to be capable in life to fight for the truth and ideas. In his heart he should have something sacred that is broader and stronger than the sacred feeling for his mother or other people near and dear to him. He should know how to love the idea, that which links him with the masses, which will be a shining light in his life. He should understand that you and all who surround him, to whom he is attached, whom he loves, have something more sacred than the love for a child, the love for him, something sacred from which he and the love and affection for him derive. This sacred feeling is stronger than all other feelings, stronger because of its moral injunction: "This is how you should live, this is what you should be." Awareness of this duty, as of every other connected with feelings, cannot be instilled by influencing the reason alone....

... To renounce the good things of life in order to fight for them together with those who are deprived of them, and to instil now a kind of asceticism in oneself. But my thoughts never leave me and I am sharing them with you. I am not an ascetic. It is just the dialectics of feelings, which springs from life itself and, it seems to me, from the life of the proletariat. And the point is that this dialectics should complete its cycle, so that it should contain the synthesis – the solution of contradictions. And so that this synthesis, being proletarian, should at the same time be "my" truth, the truth of "my" soul. One has to have the inner consciousness of the need to go to one's death for the sake of life, to go to prison for the sake of freedom and to have the strength to go through all the hell of life with open eyes, feeling in one's heart the great and exalted, paean of beauty, truth and happiness derived from that life....

February 17 (4), 1916

I love life as it really is, in its eternal movement, in its harmony, and in its terrible contradictions. And my eyes still see, my ears hear, my soul is receptive and my heart has not yet hardened. And the song of life sings in my heart.... And it seems to me that whoever hears this song in his heart will never curse his life, no matter what torments he has endured, will never exchange it for the other, peaceful, normal life. For this song is everything, this song of the love of life alone remains. Both here in prison, and out there in liberty, where there are now so many horrors, it lives and is eternal as the stars: the stars and all the beauty of nature give birth to it and carry it to human hearts, and these hearts sing out and strive eternally for resurrection....

To V. E. Dzerzhinsky[8]

September 11 (August 29), 1916

... But in social life? I am entirely at one not only with my thoughts but with the masses, and together with them I must experience the struggle, the torment and the hopes. I have never lived with closed eyes, turned in on my own thoughts alone. I was never an idealist. I learned to know human hearts and it seemed to me that I felt every beat of those hearts.... I have lived in order to fulfil my mission and to be myself....

I must endure to the end all that I am destined to endure. It cannot be otherwise. And I am at peace. And although I do not know what awaits me ... my mind continues to draw pictures of the future which crown it all. I am, besides all else, an optimist

To S. S. Dzerzhinskaya

May 21, 1918

My dear!

I am in the very thick of the struggle. The life of a soldier who knows no rest, for it is necessary to save our home. There is no time to think of my own people and myself. The work and the struggle are hellish. But in this struggle my heart remains alive, the same as before. All my time is one continual round of activity....

My thoughts force me to be merciless, and I have the firm will to follow my thoughts to the end...

The ring of enemies presses harder and harder round us, approaching the heart.... Each day forces us to resort to increasingly resolute measures. Now our greatest enemy faces us – stark famine. In order to get bread, it must be taken from those who have it and given to those who have none. The civil war must flare up on an unprecedented scale. I have been moved up to a position in the front line of fire and my will is to fight and to look with open eyes on all the danger of the grave situation and to be merciless myself....

August 29, 1918

...We are soldiers on active service. And I live by what stands ahead of me, for this demands the greatest attention and vigilance in order to win victory. My will is to win through and, although a smile is very rarely seen on my face, I am confident in the victory of the idea and the movement in which I live and work....

Here we have a dance of life and death – a moment of truly sanguinary struggle, titanic effort....

To A. E. Bulihak

April 15, 1919

Today as before, love is everything for me. I hear and feel its song in my heart. This song calls to the struggle unbending will, to tireless work. And today my actions are determined only by the idea – the striving for justice. I am finding it difficult to write.... As a perpetual wanderer, I am always in motion, in the thick of the changes and of the creation of a new life.... I see the future, and I want and must take part in its creation – to be in the movement, like a stone hurled from a sling, until I reach the end – eternal rest. Have you ever thought what war in actual pictures is like? You have pushed aside pictures of human bodies torn by shells, of the wounded lying on the battlefield and the crows pecking out the eyes of men still living. You have pushed aside these terrible pictures which daily meet the eyes. You cannot understand A soldier of the revolution fighting so that there will be no more injustice on the earth, so that this war will not put millions upon millions of people at the mercy of the conquering rich. War is a horrible thing. The whole world of the rich has moved against us. The most unhappy, most ignorant people are the first to have risen up in defence of their rights – and they are repulsing the entire world....

From the Article

'Citizens! Railwaymen!'

December 6 1921

...Wherever the scoundrel plants himself – in an office behind a green-baize desk or in a watchman's hut – he will be discovered and brought before the court of the R[evolution] Tribunal, whose punitive hammer will fall with all the devastating might and anger of which it is capable, for there is no mercy for the deadly enemies of our revival. No circumstances will be taken into account when sentence is passed on people who take bribes. The sternest punishment awaits them.

At the same time, the Soviet Government calls on all honest citizens, in whom painful consciousness of the indelible shame and corrupting influence of bribes is alive, to give their hands to the seeking out and discovering bribe-taking scoundrels.

Be keen-eyed and vigilant! Proletarian hands should not and cannot be sullied by bribes!

From the Article

"Waifs and the Vecheka"[9]

July 22, 1926

I want to throw part of my own efforts and primarily the forces of the Vecheka to combat the problem of homeless children... Two considerations have prompted me to this conclusion. Firstly, this is a terrible calamity! For when you look at the children, you cannot fail to think – everything is for them! The fruits of the revolution are not for us, but for them. And yet, how many of them are crippled by the struggle and by want! It is necessary to rush at once to their rescue, as we would if we saw children drowning. The People's Commissariat for Education cannot cope with the situation alone. Extensive assistance from the Soviet public is needed. A large committee must be set up under the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, with the immediate participation of the People's Commissariat for Education, and including representatives from all departments and all organisations that can be useful in this work. I have already spoken to a few people. I would like to head the commission myself; I want the apparatus of the Vecheka to be actually included in the work. Here I am prompted by the second consideration: I think our apparatus is one of those that work most efficiently; it has branches everywhere. People reckon with it. They are rather afraid of it. And yet, even in such a thing as the salvation and provisioning of children, one meets with negligence and even pilfering! We are steadily going over to peace-time construction, and so the thought has struck me, why not use our militant apparatus to combat such a calamity as homelessness among children?...

From a Circular Letter to the Managements of Syndicates and Trusts and to Red Directors
June 19, 1924

... One must not fear criticism, or gloss over shortcomings; on the contrary, it is necessary to help to make them known and to see nothing discreditable in doing so. Only he can be discredited who conceals his shortcomings, who is unwilling to fight against evils, that is, precisely the man who ought to be discredited. It is necessary to be able to see the truth and to imbibe it from the masses and from all who are taking part in production. There is nothing worse than self-praise and self-satisfaction. It is possible to go forward only when, step by step, evils are sought out and overcome. At the same time, an end must be put to our established practice of humouring the masses – the workers. It should be remembered that in our country the workers, like ourselves, are not yet cultured, that often their group interests outweigh the interests of the working class as a whole; often they do not sufficiently realise that only their own useful labour, the productivity of their labour, can create the communist state, maintain their Soviet power. Every economic manager should wage a struggle to win prestige, to win the confidence of the working masses, but the struggle for this confidence should on no account employ the instrument of demagogy, of humouring the masses, satisfying them to the detriment and at the expense of the state, of the interests of the alliance with the peasants, of parochial requirements. The path of demagogy is perhaps the most harmful path, lulling the masses, deflecting them from the main tasks of the working class in production, diminishing the sacrifices the working class has made and, in the final analysis, one which is harmful for our industry....

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2. The reference here is to the thoughts aroused in F. E. Dzerzhinsky by the confirmation of the sentence to exile him, which meant that he had to leave the prison.
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