

## Comments on “The First International and the Development of Anarchism and Marxism” by Wayne Price

René Berthier

This text is a commentary of the contribution of Wayne Price recently published on anarkismo.net, « The First International and the Development of Anarchism and Marxism » (<http://www.anarkismo.net/article/30330>)

Wayne made a review of my book (among others) : *Social Democracy and Anarchism in the International Workers' Association 1864-1877* (Trans. A.W. Zurbrug.) London: Anarres Editions.

**WAYNE PRICE: Years after the final split in the International, Errico Malatesta, a colleague of Bakunin's, stated that both the anarchists and the Marxists “sought to make use of the International for our own party aims....We, as anarchists, relied chiefly on propaganda...while the Marxists...wanted to impose their ideas by majority strength—which was more or less fictitious....**

The Italians belatedly joined the IWA as a federation (1872), even though there were sections before. Their participation in the great debates before Saint-Imier did not, it seems to me, leave an unforgettable memory.

When Malatesta speaks of “we anarchists” in the International, he alludes to the “anti-authoritarian” International after St. Imier, whose working-class base had disintegrated. By saying that “We, as anarchists, relied chiefly on propaganda”, he reveals the nature of the activity they were engaged in. Bakunin did not intend to engage only in “propaganda”, he advocated that workers should organize themselves into trade unions (“sections of crafts”), local unions (“central sections”), etc.

(See René Berthier, “Bakounine: une thorie de l’organisation”, <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article583>)

He regarded as a priority the daily struggle for increasing wages and reducing working hours (Bakunin, “Politique de l’Internationale” [Policy of the International] <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article501>).

Malatesta sees the International only as a propaganda tool because since the Verviers Congress (1877) it is no longer a class organization but an affinity organization.

This must be borne in mind when Malatesta speaks of “we, anarchists.”

Moreover, the examination of the texts of Bakunin reveals that he used the reference to "anarchism" only with great reluctance. (See René Berthier: "L'usage du mot anarchiste chez Bakounine" <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article185>)

**WAYNE PRICE: But actually, there was little direct discussion of theoretical disagreements between Marxism and anarchism.**

There was little substantive debate between the "Marxists" and the "Bakuninians" simply because Marx refused the debate. All the texts in which Marx speaks of the tendency of Bakunin are contemptuous caricatures of refutation. On the other hand Bakunin exposes his divergences at length, even if he is wrong to assimilate Lassalle's positions with those of Marx, especially on statism – much of what Bakunin says of the statism of Marx actually concerns Lassalle. But in the absence of Marx's public distance from Lassalle, Bakunin had no way of making a difference.

In their correspondence, Marx and Engels show that they fully understood Bakunin's approach, but they did everything to avoid public debate.

**WAYNE PRICE: Marx and his friends accused Bakunin of organizing a secret conspiracy behind the scenes.**

That Bakunin created clandestine organizations is indisputable, but it was largely for security reasons: democratic organizations were banned almost everywhere. We must also distinguish the clandestine organizations created before he was an anarchist, whose programs had some "pre-anarchist" character but which cannot be called anarchist. One forgets that Bakunin was an "anarchist" only during the last six years of his life. Many so-called savvy authors develop a critique of Bakunin as if he had always been an anarchist.

It is true that before being an anarchist he had a mania : writing statutes of secret organizations. I wrote somewhere that this corresponded to periods of inactivity or depression (an inactive Bakunin = a depressive Bakunin). I also wrote that one of these statutes is so long and detailed that it is, in my opinion, practically the sketch of a "pre-anarchist civil code" (1866. The Revolutionary Catechism.–Principles and Organization of Revolutionary International Society).

We can say that the longer these statutes, the less credible and effective they are. By way of illustration, the statutes of the Alliance are two pages long.

The famous "Alliance" has caused a lot of... black ink to flow, but it has also made many anarchists fantasize.

But there was also an informal clandestine structure, made up of close friends, which some anarchists of today want to transform into a kind of prefiguration of the Platformist organization, which is totally anachronical. The group around Bakunin did nothing more than what the group around Marx did – defend a political orientation – except that the group around Marx controlled the apparatus of the International without being supported by any federation. Marx and his relatives were generals without troops.

(See: L' "Alliance bakouninienne", mythes et réalités  
<http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article639>)

**WAYNE PRICE: Instead they proposed that each section be able to decide for itself whether to run in elections (which was how the International had been**

**operating from its inception).**

The autonomy of the federations advocated by Bakunin meant that they could decide their own path to emancipation (including by elections), which obviously goes against the thesis of those, like Hal Draper, who say that Bakunin intended to take control of the General Council – *which he wanted to suppress!* The idea that the IWA should be a party organization has spread rapidly in the German-speaking world (see my commentary on the Olten Congress in *The End of the First International*). Iuri Steklov writes in his *History of the First International* that the IWA operated according to the principles of "democratic centralism"! ! ! A beautiful anachronism !!!

**WAYNE PRICE: Yet Marx and Engels continued to push for workers' electoral parties, and even argued that they might get elected to state power in some countries, such as Britain and the U.S.**

Marx and Engels justified their electoral strategy because they were convinced that the working class was a majority, and that it would ultimately vote for the Socialist Party. For Bakunin, the working class being a majority or not has never been decisive. This is where lies the divide between taking political power (through elections or not) and taking social power through the class organizations of the proletariat. Bakunin says very clearly that if an elected socialist government implements a policy contrary to the interests of the bourgeoisie, the latter will manage to overthrow the government, in all ways.

The facts have widely proved he was right.

Moreover, Marx and Engels neglected the fact that within the complex social structures of an industrial society, the socialist parties would be forced to do what Bakunin called "unnatural alliances". Marx-Engels had a very schematic vision: they believed that by the concentration of capital the bourgeoisie would diminish numerically, the petty bourgeoisie would proletarianize, and the working class would represent the great majority of the population, which is obviously false. Proudhon, who had a much more pertinent sociological view than that of Marx, had perfectly understood that the middle classes would weigh heavily in politics.

The *Civil War in France* is, according to Bakunin's terms, a "clown travesty" of Marx's thought. In this book Marx says the opposite of what he had said before, and immediately after the event, he returns to his original point of view. Those who think they can build an alternative policy on the basis of this book, and who want to find there another "Marxism", are mistaken. It's a hoax. Bakunin has very well analyzed this, as well as Mehring, the biographer of Marx. Mehring being the only honest Marxist historian of the time explains why Hal Draper hated him.

**WAYNE PRICE: The Marxist David Fernbach writes ... "the remaining condition for the transformation into a more centralized and disciplined body was a certain degree of ideological homogeneity"**

What Fernbach says is interesting because he points to one of the main divergences between Marx and Bakunin. Bakunin insisted on the need not to impose a particular program on the IWA (that is, not to transform it into a political party) because its power resided in the fact that it brought together the mass of the proletariat, on the basis of solidarity.

He said that if a program were imposed on the IWA, it would create splits and there

would be “as many internationals as there are programs” .

Bakunin had perfectly understood that the more “ideological homogeneity” was in the organization, the fewer people there were ... Franz Mehring, a perfectly orthodox Marxist, recounts in his biography of Marx that when the Social-Democratic Party developed in Germany, the earlier organization of the AIT declined.

I think most of Marx's anarchist commentators would benefit from following Fernbach’s advice: read the very texts of Marx and Engels, starting with their correspondence. The "collected works" (Lawrence & Wishart) are an essential tool.

**WAYNE PRICE: Marx denounced Bakunin as being a “pan-Slavist” reactionary**

Marx and his followers focused all their attacks on Bakunin on the fact that he was a “pan-Slavist”, which was of course false. (See: Bakunin panslaviste? [Http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article629](http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article629))

For Bakunin, pan-Slavism, that is to say, the idea that the emancipation of the Slavs was conditioned by their submission to the Russian Tsar, was absolute horror. To be accused of "Pan-Slavism" was for him the worst of insults. A real conspiracy was organized against him by Marx and his entourage, starting in 1869, operating in the mode of : "slander, there will always remain something". These slanders provoked in him a real trauma.

**WAYNE PRICE: In general, it was a network of Bakunin’s fellow-thinkers and friends, spread throughout Europe. At times it had a mass membership,**

The case of Spanish “Alianza” is particular and complicated. The choice of the name is obviously not a matter of chance. (See “About the Spanish ‘Alianza’”, <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article649>). Even Lafargue, who was particularly ill-intentioned, had clearly explained that the Spanish “Alianza” was a strictly Spanish affair in which Bakunin had nothing to do. This organization had quite a large number of members, but it developed on the margins of the Bakuninian Alliance, and when James Guillaume and Arman Ross, for instance, speak of the “Alliance”, they have in mind the small group of followers and friends who are directly around Bakunin.

The Alliance never had a "mass membership". Its strength has never exceeded at best a few dozen contacts. There is a tendency today in the "especificistas" circles to make it a prefiguration of a platformist organization but it is an anachronism. The Alliance has indeed existed as an official section of the IWA in Switzerland. It also existed as a more or less clandestine group whose function was to develop the International, as Wayne Price says very well. But Bakunin and his close friends did nothing but what Marx and his friends were doing on their side. Reading the correspondence of Marx and Engels reveals a large mass of acts of conspiracy to which they have devoted themselves.

The testimony of the close relatives of Bakunin (Guillaume, Ross, etc.) confirms what Wayne Price says, "they ... saw the Alliance as a loose association of comrades" and did not take seriously his delusions about the "invisible dictatorship."

**WAYNE PRICE: Especially this included his writings (many not published at the time) which denounced Marx for being a German Jew, and denounced both Germans and Jews in vicious racist terms.**

Bakunin's anti-Semitism has not been really studied, if I'm not wrong. I have a large manuscript on this subject, which I wrote a long time ago, but the more I dug into the question the more obvious appeared to me the dialectical relationship between Bakunin's antisemitism and Marx & Engel's virulent antislavism. I'll certainly never publish this text which does not fit with the present-day « political-correctness » and which is bound to raise endless polemics.

However, here are some indications. Using the CDROM of his works published by the IHS of Amsterdam, I made a thematic research on the terms "Jewish" and associated. I discovered roughly this: there is no anti-Semitic allusion until 1869 (a violent anti-slav and anti-Bakunin article by Hess, followed by many others) and there is no longer any after 1872-1873 (after Bakunin's expulsion of the IWA). I conclude that if a researcher were to study Bakunin's anti-Semitism, he or she should wonder what can push a guy to be an anti-Semit for three years of his life.

Bakunin's antisemitic argument lacks originality, but remains faithful to his cultural and linguistic explanation of the peculiarities of each people: the oppression suffered by the Jews shaped their history and shaped their collective behavior. The Jews constitute a "formidable power," says Bakunin, the usual stupid cliché characterizing anti-Semitism – as if there were no Jewish workers... Bakunin's "solution" to the "Jewish question" is surprising, and ultimately in conformity with the nature of the personage: "This power was created by more than twenty-five centuries of persecution, the broadest liberty alone can dissolve it." ("To the Companions of the Federation of the International Sections of the Jura", February-March 1872.)

Of course, there is no question of relativizing his anti-Semitism, which remains inexcusable.

However, the question to be asked is: does his anti-Semitism invalidate his whole thought, on the assumption that it reveals flaws in his way of defining values ; and these flaws could inevitably have implications in the rest of his thinking.

**WAYNE PRICE: The anti-Jewish sentiments [of] Bakunin's...were often a byproduct of his anti-German attitude.**

I think it is more complicated than that.

First of all, Bakunin was not "anti-German" by principle. He clearly distinguished the German people, and especially the proletariat, for whom he had great esteem, on the one hand; and the ruling classes and the state on the other, for whom he was very critical. Moreover, he had too much admiration for German culture, especially philosophy, of which he was impregnated, to reject it totally. Not mentioning music, especially opera.

But if you say that is anti-German a person who is against the politics of the **German State**, or against the **German ruling classes**, the **German military**, so then Bakunin *was* anti-German. However he insisted on the fact that despite his opposition to Marx, if there was a strike in Germany and the German workers needed support, they had to be supported without hesitation. The policy advocated by Marx was naturally assimilated by Bakunin to a state policy.

I am quite surprised to see so many anarchists take over the typically Marxist argument of Bakunin being an anti-German whereas he *never* incorporated the German working class into his criticisms of the dominant classes of Germany.

Despite his disagreements with the German Socialists, he declared unambiguously

to the Slav workers in Austria: If you have no choice, join the German-speaking Social Democratic Party, alongside your fellow workers, rather than a Slavic nationalist party! Bakunin told the Slavic workers in Austria that they were confronted with the following choice:

1. Following the example of the German workers, "their brothers by social condition, by the community of condition", they adhere to a party which promises them a German state, certainly, but which is "fundamentally popular, with all the possible economic advantages to the detriment of the capitalists and the possessors and to the benefit of the proletariat".

2. Or, driven by the Slavic patriotic propaganda, they can join the party "at the head of which are their daily exploiters and oppressors, bourgeois, manufacturers, merchants, speculators, Jesuits in cassocks and owners of immense estates." Such a party promises them "national prison, that is, a Slavic state". Without hesitation, Bakunin says that if there is no other solution, the Slav workers must choose the first solution: "even if they are wrong, they share the common fate of their brothers of work, of convictions, of existence, German or not, it does not matter". (*Etatisme et Anarchie*, éditions Champ libre, IV, 247-248.)

I wouldn't say that this is an « anti-German » attitude.

But there is more to it. Between joining the German-speaking socialist party and a Slav nationalist party, there is a third issue: "the formation and the federal organization of associations of industrial and agricultural workers based on the program of the International".

Bakunin's point of view on the question of the multinationality of the workers of the Austrian Empire is interesting because it shows once again the priority given by the Russian revolutionary to the class criterion on the national criterion

It is true that Bakunin assimilated Jews and Germans. His point of view was as follows: all of Eastern Germany consists of ancient Slav lands conquered and occupied by the Germans since the Middle Ages. Prussia, for example, is an ancient Slavonic land. The Slav peasants were dominated by the German nobility, by the bourgeoisie. The Jews accompanied this conquest and were a decisive factor in the Germanization of the Slavs. Bakunin simply mentions the fact.

When he makes a sort of monograph of the nationalities which make up the population of the different countries of Central and Eastern Europe, he does not distinguish between Jews and Germans. For instance, when he quotes the demographic statistics of the different regions of Central Europe, Germans and Jews are mentioned together. "In Cisleithania, there are 20,500,000 inhabitants, including 7,200,000 Germans and Jews". Citing statistics on the Grand Duchy of Posen, he counts Germans and Jews together.

In the kingdom of Hungary, there are "1,800,000 Jews and Germans". In Austria, there are "9,000,000 Germans and Jews". The "subcategory" constituted by the Jews does not even benefit from a particular quantification: among these 9 million Germans, one will not know how many Jews there are: for Bakunin this does not seem important. This indistinction still appears when Bakunin blames the Germans of Austria for wanting political supremacy in the empire, "although with the Jews they constitute only a quarter of the population."

In *Statism and Anarchy*, which I refer to, the Jews are considered only from the

point of view of their historical function – germanizing the Slavs. They were, thought Bakunin, an element in the process of Germanization of Slavic regions.

Engels does not contradict Bakunin's approach to this question: he writes about Central Europe that Jews, "insofar as they belong to any nationality, are in those countries certainly more German than Slavic" (*Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany*). So he too considers that there is a sort of fusion between Germans and Jews and it does not seem to bother him more than it bothers Bakunin: the process of denationalization of the Slavs by the Germans is described in a surprisingly identical manner by Bakunin and Engels, although they do not give this process the same meaning: according to Engels it is a positive fact because the Germans brought civilization to the Slavs.

When Bakunin remains in the field of historical reflection, as is the case with *Statism and Anarchy*, there is no anti-Semitic remark. Besides, *Statism and Anarchy* was written in 1873, so after the "deadline" of Bakunin's anti-Semitic period... (See : *Engels and the "Nonhistoric" Peoples. The National Question in the Revolution of 1848*, Roman Rosdolsky (1898-1967), Critique Books, UK, 1986.)

**WAYNE PRICE: « Mr. Marx is a [German] patriot no less ardent than Bismarck....He desires the establishment of a great Germanic state » (Bakunin)**

There is no possible doubt that Marx and Engels were passionately in favor of a unified German State: the reading of their correspondence removes all doubt on this point. And their correspondance shows with no possible doubt that a German victory would mean the victory of their positions over those of Proudhon. For them, the creation of a great unified national State was the indispensable condition for the constitution of the German proletariat as a class adopting a parliamentary strategy. Parliamentary strategy had no sense in a Germany divided into 49 different States.

When the Franco-Prussian war broke out, Marx and Engels hoped for the defeat of France because that way Germany could realize its unity. Their correspondence reveals their aims very clearly, Engels goes so far as to write "Bismack works for us". Marx advised the French not to move and to do their duty by going to vote, for the German victory had offered them a republic ! All this is known (but often forgotten). Marx even went so far as to blame the Socialists of Brunshwig because they had signed an internationalist appeal, which he qualified as « ridiculous » !

It was only when the insurrection of the Commune broke out that he changed his mind, because of course he could no longer do otherwise. That was when he wrote *The Civil War in France*, in which he took up the theme of federalism when he hated federalism, which he assimilated to an archaic political form of the Middle Ages responsible for the division of Germany : "The conflict between centralization and federalism in Germany is a conflict between modern culture and feudalism", says Marx ("The Programmes of the Radical-Democratic Party and of the Left at Frankfurt", *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 7 June 1848, MECW vol. 7). – Which does not speak in favor of its approval of federalism after the Commune of Paris...

**WAYNE PRICE: He [Bakunin] claimed that the Slavs and Latin "races" were naturally libertarian, while the Germanic people were invariably authoritarian**

Wayne writes "races" in quotation marks, as if to distance himself from the word. In the 19th century the word did not have the same meaning as today.

Bakunin says somewhere that the unity of the "Western world of Europe" must be attributed to the "natural unity of the Germanic race". This thesis is interesting in that it gives Bakunin the opportunity to define what he means by "race": it is the "identity of the natural temperament, customs, manners, sentiments, ideas, and primitive organization brought by the Germanic peoples into the different countries of Europe" (*Œuvres*, Champ libre, I, 133). We then see that the concept of "race" is exclusively limited to the cultural field; It does not include any "ethnic" or "genetic" characteristics. In fact, it is synonym to "people".

By saying that the Slavs and the Latins were "naturally" libertarian but not the Germanic (and Northern) peoples, Bakunin was clearly mistaken, but he nevertheless perceived a real problem. Of course the Latin and the Slavonic peoples are not "genetically" revolutionary and the northern peoples "genetically" reformist. What creates the fracture is the use of mediations. In France, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Russia the slightest popular claim comes up against the army and the police who shoot the workers. There is no negotiation, no mediation structures like trade unions and Parliaments (and public opinion). There is therefore no place for reformism: the smallest claim necessarily turns into a revolutionary act. In Northern Europe it is quite different. Political power itself encourages the establishment of mediation structures, even if it occasionally uses repression.

However, France and Belgium were in intermediate positions. When the Belgians had obtained the universal suffrage after two very violent general strikes, the revolutionary tendency of the IWA disappeared. In France the massacres of workers ceased gradually after the unification of the Socialist party which appeared an alternative to the direct action strategy and permanent confrontation with the power.

There is a funny remark by Bakunin in an article he wrote in 1864 when he was in Sweden. He was amazed at this happy people who had no habit of class struggle because the State went ahead of their claims! He found it quite shocking!

Bakunin thus had the intuition of a real situation, but without understanding its causes.

**WAYNE PRICE: This anti-Germanism was not unique to Bakunin. His closest comrade, James Guillaume, wrote a book, *Karl Marx, Pan-Germanist*. This racist anti-Germanism later played a part in persuading a minority of prominent anarchists to support the imperialist Allies against the imperialist Germans in World War I—including Kropotkin and Guillaume.**

*Karl Marx pangermaniste et l'Association internationale des travailleurs de 1864 à 1870* (the complete title) was published in 1915 during the First World War. To qualify this brochure as "anti-German racist" does not seem to me right. I re-read it for the occasion, it contains nothing different from what Guillaume already wrote in *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs*. Vigorously Anti-Marxist, it certainly is, but how can one be surprised? But the accusations of J. Guillaume are supported by precise references to texts, which are perfectly verifiable. Guillaume provides numerous quotations from Marx and Engels which confirm his thesis concerning Marx being "pan-German" (although the matter is much more complicated if you take the time to weigh things). But in the 1870's and even more in 1915, James Guillaume was in no mood for subtleties.

It would be interesting for Wayne Price to explain in what way *Karl Marx*



*pangermaniste* is racist.

Moreover, Kropotkin did not need James Guillaume to determine his opinion on the conduct to be held in case of war between France and Germany: he had long made his choice. It is worth pointing out that Kropotkin's arguments in favor of France are exactly the same as those of Bakunin forty years earlier: France was the repository of cultural values which were considered as being progressive in relation to German militarism.

Bakunin did not pass to posterity with the same negative image as Kropotkin because there was the Commune insurrection, and the war turned out into a revolution! But from the beginning of the war Bakunin had taken sides for France, without hesitation.

But Bakunin *and Kropotkin* had expected a reaction from the people against the invaders to turn the war into a revolution. This eventuality occurred in 1870 but not in 1914. What would Bakunin have done if there had not been the Commune?

Kropotkin made three incredible mistakes, which in my opinion stem from a certain form of intellectual arrogance: first he imagined that signing the « Manifesto of the Sixteen » could have changed something; Then he neglected to consider whether there were any other means of getting his message across than by signing such a compromising document; But most of all he did not see that when one is not able to change events, it is essential to remain firm on principles. This is what the overwhelming majority of the anarchist movement has done.

(Concerning Kropotkin and the war, see: René Berthier *Kropotkine et la Grande guerre. Les anarchistes, la CGT et la social-démocratie face à la guerre*, éditions du Monde Libertaire)

**WAYNE PRICE: This issue was somewhat confused, in my opinion, due to the anarchist approach to “power.” Anarchists often declare that they are not in favor of the workers “taking power.”**

I have always been irritated by the scruples of anarchists before the use of the word "power". "Power" is also "to be able to achieve something". For a long time I have settled this question by saying that anarchists are opposed to the exercise of political power but favorable to the exercise of social power. It obviously satisfies most comrades when I make conferences.

**WAYNE PRICE: Up until World War I, the anarchists still were the mainstream of the far left within the movement.**

Before WWI the anarchists were the *only* revolutionary current. The few small socialist opposition groups who made incursions alongside the anarchists quickly went back home to their social-democratic parties. Rosa Luxemburg was accused by her social-democrat comrades of being an anarchist, which infuriated her because she *hated* the anarchists. We must not forget the syndicalist movement, which had close relations with anarchism but can not be confused with it. This is a very complicated question, involving many determinations. I have been working on this for several years. I would simply say this (provisionally): I think that the anarchist movement would have survived as a movement with real visibility (in France at least) if the anarchists had been able to find realistic modalities for defining their relations with the syndicalist movement (I speak for France, at least). The anarchist movement and

those syndicalists who were closest to the anarchist movement have been unable to counter the unprecedented methods used by the Bolsheviks to control mass organizations. This is valid at the international level.

I think Wayne Price perfectly understood my thinking on these issues if I judge from the comments he makes on the weaknesses of anarchism. If one wants to “learn from our mistakes and our successes”, as Wayne rightly says, we must begin by defining where our errors lie – something many anarchists are probably not ready to do.