

KARL MARX PAN-GERMAN AND THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION FROM 1864 TO 1870 (1915) (Excerpts)

KARL MARX PANGERMANISTE ET L'ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONALE DES TRAVAILLEURS DE 1864 À 1870
(1915) (Extraits)

James Guillaume **INTRODUCTION**

James Guillaume wrote in 1914 a small book, published in 1915, entitled *Karl Marx Pan-German and the International Workers' Association from 1864 to 1870*. In English-speaking anarchist literature, the qualification of “Pan-Germanist” carried by Bakunin and his friends against Marx often seems to be considered a form of anti-German racism. The only mention of “Pan-Germanism” on the title of the book is apparently enough to qualify it as “Germanophobic”, although it has not been translated into English and few English-speaking anarchists have read it.

The opinions concerning the book are often based on second-hand sources hostile to anarchism, or simply on the title of the book without seeking further: the simple mention of Marx as a “pangermanist” is considered a priori a “Germanophobic” attitude – a charge also laid against Bakunin, considered as an “anti-German racist”. Unfortunately, the readers (even anarchist readers) who bear these accusations rarely question Marx and Engels' ferocious Slavophobia, or ignore the slanderous accusations of “Pan-Slavism” carried on by them against the Russian revolutionary.

Pan-Germanism is a movement which aspires to the unification of all Germanic peoples in the same state. To qualify a person as a “Pan-German” is not in itself a Germanophobic attitude. James Guillaume (or Bakunin) might be wrong or right in describing Marx as a “Pan-German”: it is a

question that can be debated. It is merely necessary to consider whether the arguments advanced by him are relevant or not. But this does not transform him into a “germanophobe” or an “anti-German racist”.

Like Bakunin, Guillaume knows how to distinguish between the German people, the German proletariat and the official, noble, bourgeois and state society of Germany – an attitude Marx and Engels did not adopt when writing about Russia or the Slavs. It is only after they read Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*, which revealed them the existence of an oppressed Russian people, that they changed attitude. So the question is to know what James Guillaume based himself on to accuse Marx of being a “Pan-Germanist” and whether he had any reason to make this accusation. But accusing Guillaume of “Germanophobia” is a convenient way to dodge the debate on the question.

If one considers the context of the Franco-Prussian war and the documents already available at the time, one can not help being somewhat puzzled when one reads a text signed by Engels dating from the beginning of the Franco-Prussian war saying that “Bismark works for us”¹, or when Marx qualifies as “absurd” and “chauvinistic”² an internationalist manifesto signed by the French Internationalists – a manifesto that was to be approved by the German socialist leaders, who were immediately arrested. Or when he writes to Engels that “the French deserve a good hiding”³, or when Marx rejoices in the French defeat because it will favor the constitution of German unity and transfer the center of gravity of the European workers' movement from France to Germany, allowing the victory of “our” theory (Marxism) over that of Proudhon⁴. All the passages

1 Engels to Marx, 15 august 1870: “But to magnify anti-Bismarckism into the sole guiding principle on that account would be absurd. In the first place, now, as in 1866, Bismarck is doing a bit of our work, in his own way and without meaning to, but all the same he is doing it...”

Marx answered to Engels two days later that the “war has become a national one”, that is a defensive war for Germany (17 August). On this question, here is what Bebel's opinion was: “It is true that that Napoleon declared war, but the admirable point in Bismarck's policy was that he so shuffled the cards that Napoleon was forced to declare war as though of his own initiative and to appear as the peacemaker. Even men like Marx and Engels shared the common opinion, and gave public expression thereto although although in their position they ought to have known better” (A. Bebel, *My life*, The University of Chicago Press, p. 205.)

2 Marx to Engels 10 september 1870.

3 Marx to Engels, 20 July 1870.

4 *Ibid.*

in which James Guillaume is critical of Marx, Engels or German Social-Democracy are based on excerpts from their correspondence which, the least we can say, support his views.

Initially, Guillaume's text, written in June and July 1914, was to be an introduction to the reprinting of the accounts of the three trials of the Paris International: March-April 1868, May-June 1868, June-July 1870. The idea was to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the International Workers' Association. The execution of this reprint was delayed by the war, but, writes James Guillaume in his Foreword, "we shall print in the meantime the pages that were to form the historical Introduction under a title that links them to the events of the present hour : 'Karl Marx, Pan-Germanist'. They provide the public with very useful information and documents of the highest importance, most of which will be a revelation to readers."

J. Guillaume might shock when he writes: "From its constitution under the inspiration of Marx, the German Social-Democracy was an imperialist party, that is to say aiming at the foundation of a centralized Germany, if only by Prussian militarism, and seeing in Bismarck a collaborator whom one had to resign oneself to put up with." This simple sentence contains errors and approximations: to begin with, it is a very big approximation to say that German social democracy was constituted "under the inspiration" of Marx. But as we will see, it is difficult to blame Guillaume for not relativizing his remarks if we have in mind the texts on which he relied. Guillaume therefore considers that the reader will be able to judge for himself by reading the texts of Marx and Engels whose translation he presents. One may think that it will be the same for anarchist readers.

When he writes that Marx and Engels' attitude, "at that moment, was a true betrayal of the International for the sake of Pan-German interests", he is careful to point out that "the passages of letters of Marx and Engels quoted in the present pamphlet have been translated into French by the author. They are almost all extracts of the Correspondence of Marx and Engels recently published in Stuttgart in four large volumes, by Dietz publisher".

James Guillaume could speak German perfectly well. In 1862 he had studied three semesters in Zurich, at the "philologisches- pedagogisches Seminar". He studied ancient philology with Hermann Koechly, a German who had fled his country because of his participation in the Dresden

uprising in 1849. He also studied aesthetics and history of literature under the direction of Friedrich Theodor Vischer, another German who had been suspended from his chair at Tübingen on account of his ideas. Koechly and Vischer were representatives of the German democratic movement of 1848, called *Vormärz*.

Concerning his stay in Zurich, James Guillaume wrote: “I learned to know German genius, to understand and to know the philosophers of Germany, I also imbued myself with the Greek letters, this is where I reached the age of twenty, the age of fine enthusiasms.” During his studies, Guillaume began to translate works of Gottfried Keller, whom he visited and to whom he submitted his project. But this activity of translator, of diffuser of the German culture in French-speaking Switzerland had no tomorrow. Keller was a German-speaking writer who had remained faithful to the spirit of the *Vormärz* and who had not fallen into the pessimism caused in German culture by the failure of the Revolution of 1848.

Whoever has read Marx and Engels’ correspondence cannot ignore that their main concern in 1848 actually *was* the question of German unity. And it is difficult to deny that a German victory over France in 1870 would have been the means of achieving it.

Their conviction was based on the idea that the Franco-Prussian war was a war of defense for Germany. Their point of view changed only when it became clear to international opinion that it was not the case. In his “Memoirs”, August Bebel, the German socialist leader writes: “It is true that Napoleon ⁵ declared war, but the admirable point in Bismarck’s policy was that he so shuffled the cards that Napoleon was forced to declare war as though of his own initiative and to appear as the peacebreaker. Even men like Marx and Engels shared the common opinion, and gave public expression thereto, although in their position they ought to have known better”⁶.

All this necessarily raises questions even if the reader of today must consider things in retrospect and relativize the question. For example when Marx says, “Bismarck works for us”, that does not mean he has become a supporter of Bismarck, of course. But Marx and Engels themselves have provided arguments to those who consider them “Pan-German”. The documents of the “indictment file” accessible to James Guillaume and

⁵ Napoleon III.

⁶ A. Bebel, *My life*, The University of Chicago Press, p. 205.

Bakunin at the time would largely suffice to substantiate the accusation of pan-Germanism against Marx and Engels. But even Bakunin did not believe one second that Marx's project had anything in common with Bismarck's, that there is a "conscious solidarity between the Prince of Bismarck and the leaders of the socialist workers' democracy of Germany"⁷. They are, on the contrary, he says, fierce enemies. But in spite of the blatant opposition between the Bismarckian program and the socialist program, there is a common trait between them: "both tend towards the formation of a great centralized, unitary and Pan-German state". Bismarck wants to erect this empire by means of the bureaucratic and military nobility and the monopoly of the big financial companies, while the leaders of socialist democracy want to base it on the emancipation of the proletariat. "But one as well as the others are eminently patriotic, and in this political patriotism, unwittingly and without seeking it they meet – the logic of the tendencies and situations being always stronger than the will of the individuals⁸."

Despite the temptation one might have while reading their correspondence, Marx and Engels were not strictly speaking "pan-Germanist" if one studied their point of view in depth. Nevertheless, Marx's disciples have some difficulty in exculpating their master of this accusation and they do so by using dialectical "pirouettes" and explaining his point of view "in the light" of historical materialism

James Guillaume cannot be blamed for not knowing the details of Marx's thought concerning the stakes of the war of 1870-1871. Their correspondence does reveal accesses of chauvinism, but on the whole they were not motivated by German nationalism. They really believed that the supremacy of their theory over that of Proudhon after a German victory would be to the advantage of the European proletariat, a point of view on which the anarchists were very skeptical, of course: It has yet to be demonstrated, ex-post, that the German victory of 1871 has been made to the advantage of the European proletariat. Christian Cornelissen published during the Great War a pamphlet entitled "The Economic Consequences of a German Peace" in which he described how German capitalism supported by a powerful imperialist state had imposed its will throughout the continent

⁷ Bakounine, *Œuvres*, Champ libre, III, p. 30.

⁸ *Ibid.*

between 1870 and 1914⁹.

It is interesting to read Cornelissen's text in parallel with a text written by Herman Gorter a few years earlier, "Imperialism, War and Social Democracy" (1914). Gorter exposes Germany's colonial expansion plans, but as a good Marxist he bases his analysis on a very mechanical interpretation of Marxist theory. He thinks that the more capitalism develops and concentrates, the more class antagonisms are violent, the more it increases the chances of the working class to reach power. And he explains that Germany is where capitalism is most recent, modern and concentrated and where class antagonisms are strongest. Of course Gorter does not *explicitly* say that the working class must support the factors most likely to accelerate this concentration of capital, but the common Marxist reader understands that there is no way to evade historical fatality (or historical determinism, if one prefers).

“Now Germany wants to put an end to its confinement, it wants to break its chains. Now it wants Morocco, much of the rest of French Africa, the French possessions in East Asia, Siam and Cochin China. It wants the Belgian Congo. It wants English colonies; perhaps in southern Africa. It wants to take over the land route to India. It wants economic and political domination in a large part of China. To achieve these goals, Germany wants to conquer Belgium and the Netherlands, or at least reduce these countries to dependencies. Germany wants to attain all these objectives, and it wants to do so by way of this war. And in reality, from the capitalist and economic point of view, German capitalism has every right to do so. In the capitalist world, the strongest deserves the largest share. Viewed from a purely capitalist point of view rather than from the point of view of the evolution of the proletariat and its struggle for power and unity, one could very well hope for the victory of German capitalism¹⁰.”

So here are exposed the expansion plans of Germany. But then Gorter tells us why German imperialism is more competent than other imperialisms:

⁹ Christian Cornelissen, *Les Conséquences économiques d'une Paix Allemande*, Étampes, Imprimerie de la Semeuse.

¹⁰ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/gorter/1914/imperialism.htm>

“Germany, with its organizational acumen, its concentrated banking system, its centralized armaments industries, its trade and its industry, is capable of extracting much greater profits from these territories than are now being extracted by England, Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Portugal! It would make a much greater contribution to the evolution of world capitalism! (*Underline.*)

“German capitalism is perfectly well aware that the moment of truth has arrived. (*...then Gorter explains that if Germany waits too long, “the moment of carving out a world empire will definitely be over”.*)

“In this first imperialist world war, Germany is therefore the driving force, above all by virtue of the expansionist tendencies which transcend the Empire's frontiers, secondly due to the form assumed by its imperialism, third, as a result of its action against the powerful States opposing its expansion from every side, and finally due to its supreme goal, which is also the supreme goal of every contemporary State.

“Germany therefore must serve as the example we shall use to illustrate imperialist policy and its consequences, contrasting them to the position of the proletariat.”

In 1914, many social-democratic leaders really believed that a war would end with the victory of socialism in Germany, therefore in Europe. In 1914, the program of the German socialist party was still that which had been voted in Erfurt in 1891: socialism is described as the result of an inevitable economic development. Convinced of the inevitability of their accession to power, the German socialist leaders did not regard anti-war propaganda as a priority. This is evident in the Stuttgart (1907), Copenhagen (1910) and Basel (1912) congresses: what was decisive was the work of organizing and strengthening the party, which was essential to prepare its accession to power (through elections, of course). Indeed, war, considered as a necessary product of capitalism, would inevitably lead to its fall and to the subsequent advent of socialism. The proletariat – through its governing bodies, of course – was to prepare to govern.

It is the very evolution of capitalist society that makes the fall of capitalism necessary. The working class must be ready for this eventuality. This is how must be understood Karl Kautsky when he says that the duty of social democracy “is not to hasten the inevitable catastrophe, but to delay it as much as possible, that is, to carefully avoid anything that might resemble

a provocation or a semblance of provocation, for time gained increases its chances of success¹¹” – that is to say, of gaining power by elections. Under these circumstances, one can understand that the general strike is categorically rejected, since it would undoubtedly appear in the eyes of the government as a “provocation”.

At the Stuttgart congress in 1907, Bebel had rejected any recourse to the general strike and explained: “I do not know what will happen, but I believe that if this war broke out, it would probably be the last and would bring into play the existence of any bourgeois society. So we can do nothing but enlighten the minds, make propaganda and organize¹².” This remark is terrible because it leads one to wonder whether Bebel – and no doubt the leaders of social democracy – did not wish, implicitly or unconsciously, this war because they had convinced themselves that at the outset capitalism would collapse and the Socialists would take power. The idea seems to be a constant among the leaders of Social-Democracy. This explains why the German Socialists voted exceptional war credits in 1913, and the *Neue Zeit*, the party organ, wrote in November 1914: “The world war divides the socialists of the world into different camps and especially into different national camps. The International cannot prevent this. In other words, the International ceases to be an effective instrument in times of war¹³.”

This opinion of *Neue Zeit* is confirmed by the analysis of Robert Michels :

“We cannot rely on our masses, not even the 300,000 members of our party: these – it is no longer a secret for anyone – would not engage in a big move [...]. everything makes us assert that the German Socialist Party, just as it would suffer patiently a mutilation of political rights, without taking any other measure than to vote a few motions, without publicity, in some suburban cafes –, would also remain impassive before the fait accompli of a war. The military speeches of Bebel and others prove to the point that there is no thought of opposing it on occasion.

11 Karl Kautsky, *Le marxisme et son critique Bernstein*, Préface à l'édition française, Paris, Stock, 1900, p. XII.

(<http://www.archive.org/details/lemarxismeetsonc00kaut>).

12 August Bebel, Stuttgart Congress, 1907 Proceedings, p. 162.

13 *Neue Zeit* No. 23, Sept. 25, 1914. Quoted by Rosa Luxemburg, *The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy*, The Socialist Publication Society, New York, 1919, p. 81.

One would suffer it as a “destiny”, an unavoidable *fatum*. A very revolutionary manifesto would be issued against the government, leaving it the famous “responsibility before history and mankind” mentioned in the first Congress of Paris, and we would march against the enemy¹⁴ !”

The systematic refusal of any debate on the general strike before the war, the introduction of the notion of “war of defense” into the conceptual apparatus of social democracy, despite Kautsky's warnings, the desire to maintain at all costs the gains achieved in the past and the incredible illusion that the war was going to bring the socialists to power naturally led the leadership of the SPD to engage enthusiastically in the war, to vote war credits, to decree the political truce as long as the “fatherland” would be in danger. *Neue Zeit, the theoretical organ* quoted by Rosa Luxemburg declared: “Until the question of victory or defeat has been decided, all doubts must disappear, even as to the causes of the war. Today there can be no difference of party, class and nationality within the army or the population.” Luxemburg comments: “The first thunder of Krupp cannons in Belgium welded Germany into a wonderland of class solidarity and social harmony¹⁵.”

But what *Neue Zeit* writes is consistent with Engels’ letter to Bebel (13 October 1891), in which he considered the possibility of collaborating with the government in case of war, under negotiated conditions: “Should the threat of war increase, we can then tell the government that we should be prepared, if enabled to do so by decent treatment, to support them against a foreign enemy”. Such a collaboration is not only a matter of the nation’s existence, adds Engels, “but also, in our own case, of asserting the positions and the future prospects for which we have fought¹⁶.” What does Engels refer to? The elected representatives of the Reichstag? The immense real estate of the Social Democrat Party?

It is very clearly a desire to negotiate with the government provisions that would make it possible for the Social Democratic Party to support a

14 Robert Michels, *Les dangers du parti socialiste allemand*. Cf. ., <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article655>

15 *Ibid.*

http://ciml.250x.com/archive/luxemburg-liebknecht/english/rosa_luxemburg_the_junius_pamphlet_1915_english.html

16 Engels to Bebel. 13 October 1891, MECW, vol. 49, p. 258.

war. We are far from proletarian internationalism ... Protection of national existence, preservation of the achievements of the party and participation in a national defense government: the ingredients of the war that will soon ravage Europe are there. It is difficult to avoid concluding that the worst fears of Bakunin (and James Guillaume) concerning the "German patriots of the International" were verified.

This is how Rudolf Rocker describes the German socialist party:

"The party became a state in the state. Its strong representation in the Reichstag, in the legislative councils of the twenty-six German federal states, in the municipal administrations and even in the ecclesiastical councils, the numerous institutions it controlled all over the country, its daily press, whose power was unparalleled elsewhere, permanently created a multitude of new jobs, helping to create a vast bureaucracy which, like all bureaucracies, tended to obstruct the spiritual development of the movement¹⁷."

On the eve of the First World War, the German trade union movement had more than two million members, the Socialist Party one million. A well-paid political and trade union bureaucracy ran a whole range of institutions: buildings, relief funds, cooperatives, theaters, etc. Political and union officials had a standard of living that brought them close to the petty bourgeoisie. Activists became managers, administrators. The political and trade union apparatus was in the hands of permanent staff. In 1912, the Workers' International had 3.3 million members but its influence was exerted on 7.3 million co-operators, 10.8 million union members, 11 to 12 million voters and readers of 200 major daily newspapers¹⁸.

There was a very strange contrast between the attitude of the syndicalist leaders and that of the socialist leaders. The former had long since ceased to delude themselves about the German Social-Democrats, while the latter remained blind to the facts. The duplicity of the German socialists was known to the CGT militants, better informed than the general public. In January 1913, the French and German socialist parties signed a manifesto

¹⁷ Rudolf Rocker, *Mémoires*, vol. 1, cité par Freddy Gomez, bulletin bibliographique *À Contretemps*.

¹⁸ Cf. Kostas Papaioannou, *Les Marxistes*, J'ai lu, 1965.

for peace. Yet, in total contradiction to all that they had declared to their credulous French comrades, the German Socialists voted a month later, on 3 February 1913, an extraordinary war tax of one billion and a half marks for the military program proposed by General von Bernhardt¹⁹, which the *Berliner Tageblatt* of April 1, 1913 defined as “properly speaking mobilization in time of peace”.

Hardly two months later (23-24 March), Hermann Molkenbuhr, a German socialist leader, member of the Reichstag, declared at the 1913 congress of the French socialist Party: “We do not believe that there is a people in the world that really intends, as is often said for us in Germany, to attempt the invasion of your country ... We German Socialists will always vote against all armaments projects: contrary assertions are formidable lies²⁰.” These remarks, held shortly after the vote by the German socialists of the exceptional war tax, were immediately reproduced, commented on and amplified by the French socialist press.

Marcel Cachin, who was later to become a prominent communist leader, declared in the tribune of the municipal council of Paris, on March 7, 1913: “The German Socialists have proclaimed to the Imperial government: ‘If you declare war on France, if you throw yourself into this adventure, it is the very throne you will play.’ It is this threat²¹ of the German working class tending to France a fraternal hand which alone prevented the aggressions of German Caesarism against the democracy of France. The International is, in our eyes, the great historical fact of modern times: it is this which secures peace²².”

In 1870, Marx and Engels had hoped that the war and the constitution of German unity would lead to the Germanization of Prussia rather than to the prussification of Germany. They meant that Germany's culture, Germany of the Enlightenment, would take precedence over militarist Germany. They could not have been more wrong. One cannot really describe such an attitude as Pan-Germanist, but James Guillaume, in 1871 or 1914, cannot be blamed for ignoring such details. It is also understandable that the

¹⁹ It corresponds to about 20.700.000.000 US dollars today.

²⁰ *Mouvement socialiste*, mars-avril 1913, p. 229 sqq.

²¹ No need to say that the German socialists *never* made such a threat, which would have been illegal.

²² *L'Humanité*, 8 mars 1913.

problems raised during the French defeat of 1871 and the crushing of the Paris Commune brought renewed uneasiness at the beginning of the war in August 1914.

After the end of the International, James Guillaume abandoned all militant activity. This withdrawal from militant life was aggravated by personal tragedies. But after he had settled down in Paris he gradually became one of the leading syndicalist theorists although he had never been a member of the CGT. He started publishing documents of the Jurassian Federation, but also Bakunin's articles which had been published in *L'Égalité*, and began publishing his famous work, *The International, Documents and Memories*. The memory of the IWA had dissolved a little, but the publication of these documents provoked a shock in the revolutionary syndicalist movement and among many anarchists: what James William was publishing was revolutionary syndicalism before the letter !!!

At first, the anarchists were enthusiastic about the texts published by Guillaume because they found in the deeds and words of the Jura Federation and of Bakunin what they saw happening before their eyes. Revolutionary syndicalism was seen as "anarchism in motion", as Luigi Fabbri wrote. Bakunin's companion considered that the CGT was the worthy continuator of the anti-authoritarian IWA. Indeed, there were many similarities in the themes adopted by both organizations:

- Hostility to political parties claiming to speak on behalf of the working class,
- Opposition to parliamentarism,
- Affirmation of the direct action of the working class without the intermediary of laws,
- Partial struggles seen as the training of the working class to the revolution,
- Class organization considered as the basis for the construction of emancipated society.

All these themes were common to those which were discussed in the IWA and to revolutionary syndicalism. It is therefore not surprising that James Guillaume wrote: "What is the General Confederation of Labor, if

not the continuation of the International?²³”

However, the attitude of the anarchists changed quickly because the CGT knew such a development that many of them perceived it as competing the “specific” organizations. Thus, from 1910, a gap appeared between anarchists and syndicalists²⁴. James Guillaume replied vigorously to the attacks of the anarchists on the CGT.

Guillaume had witnessed the numerous attempts of the CGT leadership to engage in discussions with the German Socialists to consider a general strike on both sides of the border in the event of war. He had seen the German Social-Democratic leaders systematically refuse any discussion on this issue. The influence of James Guillaume on the militants who carried revolutionary syndicalism was very important, although he was never a member of the CGT. He maintained very close relations with the most active members of the Confederation. It was he who gave revolutionary syndicalism its historical legitimacy by the fact that it constituted the link which attached it to the AIT and to Bakunin.

The CGT Congress held in Le Havre in 1912 was the last before the war. The Confederation's positions were confirmed, both on trade union independence and on action “against militarism, patriotism and war”. Following his congress the confederal leadership of the CGT, though in great difficulty with the growing reformist tendency, organized that year a general strike against the war, followed by a terrible repression. There has been no equivalent in Germany.

The International Socialist Bureau had met in Brussels on 28 October 1912 during the Balkan war and had decided to convene an extraordinary congress which took place in Basel on 24 and 25 November 1912. A final

²³ James Guillaume, *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs(1864-1878)*, Tome 4, préface p. VII. Éditions Gérard Lebovici.

²⁴ See : Maurizio Antonioli, *Bakounine entre syndicalisme révolutionnaire et anarchisme*, éditions Noir & Rouge. This text was written in 1976 (centenary of Bakunin's death) and translated and republished in 2014 (centenary of his birth). Maurizio Antonioli discusses the problems facing activists who claimed the legacy of IWA at the beginning of the 20th century. He shows the decisive role played by James Guillaume in this reappropriation of the heritage by anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. At first, both currents seemed to agree that Bakunin was a forerunner of revolutionary syndicalism. There was, says Antonioli, “an ideal political continuity between Bakunin and syndicalism”. However, both currents eventually confronted each other. Revolutionary syndicalism was then in what Antonioli calls a “logic of absorption”, assuming both the function of mass organization and specific organization. The anarchists accused the CGT of “imperialism”.

motion was voted in favor of the unity of movement, but did not say anything concretely, merely entrusting the Bureau with a mission of monitoring and documenting future events. Jaurès, the French socialist leader, acknowledged that “it is not possible to give an answer of a mechanical certainty to this formidable question”: what will the “workers of all countries” and their delegates do in case of war. It is certain that if the Socialist International, whose duty it was to give instructions, did not know what to do, it was unlikely that the “workers of all countries” would know more.

The CGT also attempted in 1912 to organize a simultaneous demonstration against the war in every country. The German and Austrian trade unions shirked on the pretext, once again, that such a political manifestation was the responsibility of the parties and not of the trade unions: an argument that they had regularly used to avoid any substantive debate and any real commitment on these issues. The problem is that the Socialist parties never took any real measure. The French socialists, in view of the electoral power of their German comrades, naively persuaded themselves until the last moment that German Social-Democracy would take decisive action as soon as a war was launched.

The CGT had an incessant activity in favor of international action and solidarity. A congress had been convened in 1893 representing the totality of the workers' organized movement in France and had voted unanimously (with one abstention), the general strike in the event of war with Germany. (The delegate who had abstained explained that he had an imperative mandate to vote in this way, but that when he returned to his trade union he would explain to his comrades that it was necessary to support the principle of a general strike).

In 1896 the “Fédération des Bourses du travail” sent a message to the German organizations in which it affirmed the necessity to fight patriotism and the State. The French socialists did not have the same approach as their German counterpart concerning the attitude to adopt in case of war. They were generally very reluctant about the idea of a general strike but there were fractions within the French socialist movement that were favourable to it. One group of socialists called “Allemanistes”, after their leader Jean Allemane, tempted a rapprochement with the syndicalists which did not last, the temptation of parliamentary activity being too strong.

The French socialists in general could not categorically and definitively

condemn the general strike because in a context where revolutionary syndicalism was hegemonic, it would have cut them off from the working class. The calling into question of the general strike came from *within* the CGT with the rise of the reformist current that eventually dominated when the war broke out.

In 1905 French socialists and syndicalists together published a red poster calling on the soldiers not to turn their weapons against the proletariat but against their officers.

In Germany, Liebknecht said that social democracy has done little specialized work in the direction of conscripts. He complained of the “quietism and fatalism” of the party: “Anti-militarist propaganda in Germany must be very quickly and energetically improved”. He also wrote: “the Party, in spite of all that it has done in the field of anti-militarism, has only begun to fulfill its task. It is, so to speak, at the kindergarten stage as far as anti-militarist propaganda is concerned”²⁵.

At the international trade union conferences held in 1901 (Copenhagen) and 1902 (Stuttgart), the German representatives opposed any initiative which would lead to broadening the scope of the trade union movement to an opposition to the war. In Dublin in 1903, Legien, one of the most right-wing trade union leaders of the German workers' movement, had a mandate to prevent at all costs the Trade Union International from encroaching on the political prerogatives of the Socialist International. Griffuelhes, general secretary of the CGT, was forbidden to defend the point of view of the French syndicalists !!! At the Stuttgart Congress of the Socialist International (1907), the leaders of the CGT had been qualified with contempt as “people acting on workers with small contributions and big words” – a remark that was followed by “enthusiastic cheers”²⁶.

The dispute within the International Trade Union Bureau was the expression of the gap between the French revolutionary syndicalist model and the German model. Indeed, Griffuelhes, the leader of the CGT, observed that “German trade unionism, which has the headquarters of the International Trade Union Bureau, and, in its wake, the other countries, has a conception of trade union action which, quite logically, makes the workers' organizations the vassals of political parties.” The wording of the

25 Karl Liebknecht, “Militarism & Anti-Militarism”,
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/liebkecht-k/works/1907/militarism-antimilitarism/pt2-ch6.htm>

26 Cf. “L’Internationale socialiste au congrès de Stuttgart”, J. Bourdeau *Revue des Deux Mondes*, tome 41, 1907.

sentence is interesting: German trade unionism is *expressly* designated as *the one defining the line to be followed by the Trade Union International*. The CGT asked the International Secretariat of Trade Unions to place three issues on the agenda of the Amsterdam Conference, scheduled for 1905, including antimilitarism and the general strike. The majority expressed its refusal by a resolution, saying that anti-militarism and general strike are questions to be discussed exclusively among socialist parties.

The 15th International Conference was to be held in Christiania (Oslo) on 15-16 September 1907. The confederal committee of the CGT sent a circular (August 28, 1907), signed by Griffuelhes, explaining the positions of the French trade unionists to the participating representations : ““‘‘apart from a formal refusal of the request to include a labor question, the C. G. T. can not, indeed, admit that a Conference should limit by a resolution the field of activity of future Conferences. She thinks that putting a barrier to any discussion is making the Conferences unattractive, if not useless²⁷.”

In the French syndicalists’ view, with whom James Guillaume was very close, the “inclusion of a working-class question” meant the possibility to discuss a common action, including a general strike *on both sides*, in case of war. The regressive Amsterdam resolution was confirmed at the Christina conference: the serious questions were to be discussed (but were *not* actually discussed) only in the International socialist congresses, that is, by socialist parties. Griffuelhes replied that the French trade unionists did not accept that the questions raised by the working class should be “resolved by these assemblies of doctors, lawyers, annuitants, proprietors, traders, etc., that constitute the International Political Congresses ²⁸”!

When a crisis between France and Germany broke out in 1905 on the question of Morocco, provoking a very serious risk of war between the two countries, the French syndicalist leaders had tried to take international action; a delegation led by Griffuelhes visited Berlin in January 1906 to try to convince the International Secretariat and the German trade unions to set up joint actions against the war. The German unions accepted the principle but made it a condition, once again, that the CGT should first agree with the French socialists, which, in the context of the time in France, amounted to imposing an unacceptable condition. At the congress of Amiens of 1906, which followed shortly afterwards, Griffuelhes made a very disillusioned

²⁷ Victor Griffuelhes, *L’Action syndicaliste*, Paris, M. Rivière, 1908. Cf. <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article525>

²⁸ *Ibid.*

report.

The CGT was never able to address political and social issues or international problems in international meetings with the German Social-Democrats, even when the danger of war became obvious. Those things were the sole responsibility of the political parties. The gap between the revolutionary syndicalist vision and the social democratic vision was irremediable.

Undoubtedly, the obstacles encountered only reinforced the CGT in the idea that nothing could come from the socialist parties and especially from the German Social-Democratic Party. This fact is confirmed by Pierre Monatte in his article on “La Fondation de la vie ouvrière”, published in October-December 1959 in *La Révolution prolétarienne*. Monatte evokes the impression reported from Germany by Charles Andler in 1911, at the time of the Moroccan crisis²⁹:

“Andler had stayed in Germany during the autumn of 1911, at the time of the Moroccan negotiation. He had been struck by the scarcity of demonstrations in favor of peace, and by the many sympathies which the Socialists displayed for the ‘coup d’Agadir’. He did not even think that the German Government was seeking war, but he attributed it a certain inclination towards blackmail, a taste for blackmail shared by a large fraction of German socialism. It must be said that this state of mind that was spread in the upper strata of the German trade union movement is to a large extent responsible for the derailment of a certain number of French trade unionists at the beginning of the 1914-1918 war, precisely among those who had maintained relations with the German trade union organizations. I think in particular of Griffuelhes, ulcerated by each of the delegations made in Berlin during the tensions between the two countries³⁰.”

Monatte mentions the “insolent refusals which the CGT had received

29 There were two Moroccan crises, one in 1905, the other in 1911, the impact of which was considerable and which could have led to a war. Germany sent a gunboat to Agadir, a city in southern Morocco, officially to protect its nationals, but England supported France and the Germans abandoned their colonial projects in Morocco. These two crises were the result of competition between France and Germany to control the country, and of Germany's desire to create a colonial empire.

30 <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article468>

from the leaders of the German trade unions since 1905”. Monatte gives also another example, that of Charles Delzant³¹: “The difficult contacts with the German trade union bureaucrats led him to say at the beginning of the war that ‘now the canons will speak’”.

It is known that Pierre Monatte had an exemplary attitude at the beginning of the war since he resigned from his functions at the CGT to protest against the support of the latter to the Sacred Union. Thus, the words spoken some forty years later have only more meaning: he clearly suggests that the support that the leadership of the CGT had given to the Holy Union was in part the consequence of the obstinate and humiliating refusals the German socialist and trade union leaders had given to the French syndicalists who had tried to come to an agreement concerning what to do in the event of war between the two countries. And Monatte slipped a remark which is still extremely suggestive: “We felt that any effort against the war could be carried out in France only if it was done in parallel with the same effort pursued in other countries, first and foremost in Germany.” Undoubtedly, that was the state of mind in which James Guillaume was when the war broke out.

In the midst of the German socialist movement there were some extremely severe critics, such as Robert Michels:

“In no other country, the masses are so compact and make a general strike more feasible. In no other party than German socialism is discipline so strong, nor is the authority of the chiefs so uncontested, nor are the financial resources greater. However, everything makes us assert that the German Socialist Party would also remain impassive before the fait accompli of a war, just as it would patiently suffer a mutilation of political rights without taking any other measure than to vote a few motions, without publicity, in some suburban café. Bebel's and other's military speeches prove to the evidence that we do not think of opposing it. One would suffer it as a 'destiny', an unavoidable fatum. A very revolutionary manifesto would be issued against the government, leaving it the famous 'responsibility before history and mankind' of the

31 Charles Delzant (1874-1943) était un des leaders de l'anarcho-syndicalisme dans le département du Nord. Il était également, depuis sa fondation en 1902, secrétaire général de la fédération nationale des Verriers à partir de 1912. Mobilisé en 1914, il se rallia à la politique d'union sacrée.

first Congress of Paris, and we would march against the enemy³²!”

Taking the opposite view of all the resolutions of the international socialist congresses, the party apparatus now considered that the Socialist International was only an instrument “valid in time of peace”, as appears in *Neue Zeit*, the theoretical organ of the Party: *Neue Zeit* had forgotten that the International had been created to strengthen the principles of transnational solidarity within the working class and help it develop common struggles. Rosa Luxemburg comments: “Social Democracy and the trade unions, in a movement of patriotic magnanimity, have delivered the working class without a fight to the enemy for the duration of the war”³³.

Social-Democratic leaders who refused the logic of war were rare. Rosa Luxemburg spent much of the war in prison. Karl Liebknecht – the son of Wilhelm – voted against war credits; he was sent to the front, then to prison. In August 1914, a minority of the Social Democratic party had been against the vote of war credits, but it yielded to the sacrosanct party discipline. “There was a tendency in the movement, writes Rudolf Rocker, which no militant abnegation could justify³⁴.”

An ambiguity reigns over the vote of war credits by German Social Democrats. It is often said that fourteen socialist deputies (out of 78) opposed the vote. This is true and false. They opposed an internal vote of the party in a preparatory meeting. On the 4th of August, in the Reichstag, that is to say in the Parliament, they aligned themselves by discipline with the majority of the party, including Liebknecht. The vote of war credits was thus obtained with the unanimity of the socialist votes.

Rosa Luxemburg could say: “On 4 August 1914 the German Social-Democracy abdicated and the Socialist International collapsed.”

During the evening of the 4th of August a meeting was held at Rosa Luxemburg’s place; some activists spoke out against the policy of war, and Karl Liebknecht took the lead in this opposition. The decision was made to organize a meeting with the opponents of the war: 300 persons were summoned, only Clara Zetkin replied favorably. Within the party,

32 Robert Michels, « Les dangers du parti socialiste allemand », *Le Mouvement socialiste*, 12 janvier 1904,

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5737099t/texteBrut>

33 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

34 Rudolf Rocker, *Mémoires*, vol. 1, cité par Freddy Gomez, bulletin bibliographique *À Contretemps*.

opponents of war were counted on the fingers of one hand. Even the left of the party had collapsed, whereas at Jena's congress in 1913 it represented one-third of the party.

The repression was organized within the party itself: demonstrations or public meetings were prohibited.. The party papers were muzzled by the double repression of the State and the Party.

A second vote on war credits took place in the Reichstag on 3 December; Liebknecht was then the only Socialist deputy to vote against. A third vote took place on March 20, 1915: the minority opposed to the war did not take part in the vote, but Liebknecht maintained his opposition, then joined by a second deputy, Otto Rühle. The German working class was paralyzed, in shock.

The German party was a model for the international socialist movement, a reference. However, on 4 August 1914 the Social-Democratic parliamentary group voted the war credits in the Reichstag. The militants were struck with astonishment. The victory of Germany in the war was announced as a progress. In particular, it would enable the overthrow the semi-feudal regime in Russia. For the German Social-Democrats, it was above all a war against Russia, this war which Marx and Engels had passionately desired because they thought it would force the King of Prussia to make liberal reforms. But now, Engels, the survivor of the couple has come to fear it.

In 1891 Engels had a surprising reaction :

“Our people have got to realise that a war against Germany in alliance with Russia would first and foremost be a war against the strongest and most efficient socialist party in Europe, and that we should have no option but to fight with all our might against any assailant who went to Russia's aid. For either we should succumb, and that would put paid to the socialist movement in Europe for the next 20 years³⁵ ...”.

The “socialist movement in Europe” Engels refers to is evidently the *German* socialist movement. And Russia is still a scarecrow, but now a war with it is *feared*. This may be the key to the strategy of German social democracy in the face of war. Thus, the framework in which the First World

35 Engels to Bebel, 29 September 1891, MECW, vol. 49, p. 242

War will be triggered is traced, and there had been many warning signs of the party's reaction to the war. The implicitly Pan-German character of Engels' analysis stems from the fact that he made the fate of the European socialist movement dependent on that of the German socialist movement, and that he linked the survival of the German socialist movement with that of the German state. The idea of an uprising of the proletariat organized by the "strongest and most efficient socialist party in Europe"³⁶ against war did not even cross his mind.

All this was basically not surprising, since the German Socialist leaders were in the wake of Marx and Engels' analyzes who, at the beginning of the previous war in 1870, had declared that the victory of Germany on France would have meant the preponderance of the German labor movement in Europe. Marx had strongly criticized Wilhelm Liebknecht who had abstained from voting on war credits. Moreover, the founders of "scientific socialism" had spent their lives hoping for a war against Russia, which they denounced as the center of reaction in Europe. The orientations of the leadership of the Social-Democratic Party in 1914 were consistent with the Marxist doctrine and with everything Marx and Engels had said since 1848. The accusation of "treason" against the German socialist leaders should therefore be reconsidered. That they had "betrayed" the working class is beyond doubt; that they had "betrayed" the fundamental principles of Marx and Engels is quite questionable.

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36 Engels to Bebel, 29 September 1891.

Excerpts from James Guillaume's
**KARL MARX PANGERMANISTE ET
L'ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES
TRAVAILLEURS DE 1864 À 1870 (1915)**

The candidacy of Leopold of Hohenzollern to the throne of Spain would suddenly unleash the war between Germany and France. It was spoken of in the Legislative Body on the 5th of July. Faced with the threat of a bloody conflict, the Parisian International got disturbed; an Address to the German people, bearing many signatures³⁷, was published in *Le Reveil* of July 12; It said:

“Brothers of Germany, in the name of peace, do not listen to the corrupt or servile voices that seek to deceive you on the true spirit of France. Stay deaf to insane provocations, for the war between us would be a fratricidal war. Stay calm, as can do a great, strong and courageous people without compromising its dignity. Our divisions would bring, on both sides of the Rhine, only the complete triumph of despotism.”

At the moment when the formidable duel was about to be undertaken, which led to the invasion of France, to the siege and capitulation of Paris and to the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, it is necessary to know what Karl Marx thought and what were his wishes. Here is what he wrote to Engels on July 20:

“I am sending you *Le Réveil*; You will see there the article of old Delescluze; It is pure chauvinism. France is the only country of the ‘Idea’, writes this republican chauvinist – that is to say, of the idea which she has of herself. The French need to be beaten (*Die Franzosen brauchen Prügel*). If the Prussians were victorious, the centralization of the power of the State would be useful to the centralization of the German working class. The German preponderance, moreover, will carry the center of gravity of the European workers' movement from France to Germany; And it has been sufficient to compare the movement

37 Parmi les noms des signataires, on relève ceux de Tolain, Murat, Avrial, Pindy, Theisz, Camélinat, Chauvière, Langevin, Eugène Pottier, Landrin, Ch. Keller, Malon, Combault, Lucipia, Jules Joffrin, Chausse.

in both countries from 1866 to the present day, to see that the German working class is superior to the French, both from the point of view of theory and of organization. The preponderance in the theater of the world of the German proletariat over the French proletariat would at the same time be the preponderance of *our* theory over that of Proudhon³⁸.”

The triumph of his personal doctrine and the defeat of that of Proudhon was, therefore, the stake of the war in the eyes of the man whom the blind still take for the creator of the International.

Marx added, not forgetting the question of money, which was not indifferent to him: “I am now on such good terms with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, that if we want, during the farce³⁹, to write something political and you something military⁴⁰, we will take it, and, moreover, we will get paid for it...” He also wrote in the name of the General Council of the International, and he added: “The General Council instructed me yesterday to draw up an Address on the war. It is by no means pleasant in my present condition of liver pain and heaviness of mind⁴¹.”

38 Marx to Engels, 20 July 1870. Collected Works, Lawrence & Wishart, Vol. 44, pp. 3-4: “I am also sending you the *Réveil*. You will find in it the first half of the acte d'accusation [*bill of indictment*] presented before the Supreme Court at Blois; what a poor figure the French CONSPIRATORS cut, compared to the Fenians, as they transform themselves into mouchards [*spies*] without the least provocation. The paper is also interesting on account of the leading article by old Delescluze. Although he is opposed to the government, it's just unadulterated chauvinism, *car la France est le seul pays de l'idée* (namely, the idea it has of itself) [*for France is the only nation of the idea*]. These republican chauvinists are only indignant because the actual incarnation of their idol — Louis Bonaparte with his long nose and his stock exchange rigging — does not correspond to their FANCY. The French deserve a good hiding. If the Prussians win, then centralisation of the STATE POWER will be beneficial for the centralisation of the German working class. German predominance would then shift the centre of gravity of the West European workers' movement from France to Germany, and you need only to compare developments in the two countries from 1866 to the present day to realise that the German working class is superior to the French both in theory and organisation. Its predominance over the French on the international stage would also mean the predominance of *our* theory over Proudhon's.”

39 “The farce”: the war.

“I am now SO FAR in contact with the *Pall Mall* that if I want to write SOMETHING political or you SOMETHING military during the farce, it would be accepted and paid for INTO THE BARGAIN.” Marx to Engels, 20 July 1870. MECW, vol. 44, pp. 4-5.

40 Engels thought he was a very great strategist, and always sent military correspondences to the press when there was a war somewhere.

41 “The GENERAL COUNCIL yesterday commissioned me to draw up an address. By no means welcome IN MY PRESENT STATE of liver troubles and DULLNESS.” Lawrence & Wishart, vol., 44, p. 5

The manifesto, drafted by Marx and published on 23 July in the name of the General Council, contains the following sentence:

“On the German side, this war is a defensive war, but ... if the German working class feels that the present war loses its defensive character and degenerates into a war against the French people, victory or defeat will equally be disastrous⁴².”

Marx will not persist long in this opinion; And on August 17 (see above) he will argue against his friend Kugelmann who complains – the innocent! – that the Germans no longer make a defensive war. The convicts of the 8th of July, in Paris, had for the most part constituted prisoners; And fifteen other members of the Paris International (including Landrin, Camelinat, and Tolain) were brought before the investigating judge at the end of July. The Socialists sought the favorable opportunity to overthrow the empire; they wished to proclaim the Social Republic and to make peace to Germany; But if the latter refused, they would make a revolutionary war with the German government – not the people – with the hope of finding a powerful support among the German socialists (a strange illusion!).

The Parisian Federation issued an appeal to the workers of the whole world, in which, at the printing, a few sentences had to be replaced by points, one can easily guess why. It said:

“In the presence of the fratricidal war which has just been declared to satisfy the ambition of our common enemy, this horrible war in which are sacrificed thousands of our brothers; in the presence of misery, tears, threatening famine ... We protest in the name of the brotherhood of peoples against war and its authors, and we invite all friends of Labor and Peace to ..., and thus to ensure the freedom of the world. Long live the peoples! Down with the tyrants!⁴³”.

On August 8, the Marseilles Internationals, together with some Republicans, made an insurrectional attempt and seized the town hall, but the movement was immediately suppressed and its authors were brought before a council of war. In Paris, where an action committee had been set

42 “On the German side, the war is a war of defence ... If the German working class allow the present war to lose its strictly defensive character and to degenerate into a war against the French people, victory or defeat will prove alike disastrous. “ Lawrence & Wishart, vol., vol. 22, p. 6.

43 *La Solidarité*, 6 august 1870.

up, the committee had resolved that the Palais-Bourbon would be invaded on August 9, the day of the re-entry of the Legislative Body: the arrest of the designated leader of the movement, Pindy, which occurred the morning of the day set for the insurrection, aborted the project. On August 14, the attempt of the Blanquists at La Villette failed without finding any echo. Varlin wrote from Antwerp on the 19th of August:

“What becomes of the International in the midst of this double movement of chauvinism, which leads two great nations, upon which we believed we could count, to destroy each other in a horrible manner? I must not conceal from you, in spite of the fact that our peasants have well deserved by their stupid votes the terrible ordeal they are experiencing at this moment, I suffer to see our provinces devastated and France exhausted in a supreme effort, for I hope nothing of the victory of Prussian militarism. And yet, as long as the shadow of the imperial government weighs upon France, the republican socialist party must protest by its abstention against the disastrous policy in which the Empire drags our nation. Why did not the Parisian people, at the first reverses, break the empire, and put revolutionary France in the presence of the King of Prussia? At least, if the war had continued, we would have fought for something ⁴⁴.”

On his part, Bakunin wrote from Locarno, on August 11, to his old friend Ogaref: “You are nothing but a Russian, while I am international; The events which are now taking place in Europe give me a real fever ... I have elaborated a whole plan; Ozerof will show it to you, or, what will be better, he will read you a ‘Letter to a Frenchman’, which I have just written ⁴⁵.”

On 23 August, he wrote to the Lyon Internationals:

“If the French people do not rise up altogether, the Prussians will take Paris... Everywhere the people must take up arms and organize themselves, first against the invaders from Germany, a war of destruction, a war with knives ... The patriotic movement of 1792 is nothing compared to what you must do now, if you want to save France from a fifty-year slavery, from misery and ruin, from invasion and annihilation. So get up, friends, to the singing of the Marseillaise, which

44 *Letter published in la Vie ouvrière*, 5 may 1914.

45 *L’Internationale, Documents et Souvenirs*, t. I, p.79.

is now the legitimate song of France, all palpitating today, the song of freedom, the song of the people, the song of humanity. For the cause of France has once again become that of humanity. By being patriotic, we will save universal freedom... If within ten days there is no popular uprising in France, France is lost. Oh! If I were young, I would not write letters, I would be among you!”⁴⁶.

Engels wrote to Marx on 31 July: “My confidence in the military strength of the Germans is growing every day. We won the first serious battle⁴⁷.”

And on August 15: “It would be absurd to make anti-Bismarckism our only guiding principle. Bismarck at this moment, as in 1866, works for us in his own way; It is unintentionally that he does so, but he does it all the same ... To pretend, like Liebknecht, that we must go back and eliminate all that has been accomplished since 1866, is stupidity⁴⁸.”

Marx replied on August 17:

“Your letter is quite in line with the response plan to the Brunswick Committee that I have in mind⁴⁹; I did not wish to go forward in an affair of this importance – for it is an instruction on the attitude to be observed by the German workers – without having concerted with you. War has become a national one, and this is no longer the moment when the recall of principles was an act of courage, as at the time of Liebknecht’s and Bebel’s declaration in the Reichstag ... Kugelmann does not see that defensive

46 *L’Internationale, Documents et Souvenirs*, t.2, p.81.

47 “My confidence in the military achievements of the Germans grows daily. We really seem to have won the first serious encounter. “Lawrence & Wishart, vol., vol. 44, p. 18.

48 Lawrence & Wishart, vol., vol. 44,p. 46: “But to magnify anti-Bismarckism into the sole guiding principle on that account would be absurd. In the first place, now, as in 1866, Bismarck is doing a bit of our work, in his own way and without meaning to, but all the same he is doing it ... In general it is senseless to try *à la* Liebknecht to set back the clock of history on all that has happened since 1866, just because it is not to his liking. But we know our model South Germans. There is nothing to be done with these fools.”

49 *Note by James Guillaume*. The Central Committee of the German social democratic Party, in Brunswick, had written to Marx to ask for his opinion on the situation, and to have directives in view of the action for the Party. Marx sent them a few days later a letter in which he reproduced, in the same terms, the words he had already written to Engels on 20 July concerning the transfer of the centre of gravity of the working class from France to Germany, and in which he indulged in derogatory assessments on the French workers (still unpublished, unfortunately, perhaps, will M. Goldendach publish them?). We will see later the use the Brunswick Committee made of this letter, and Marx’s anger.

military operations must be regarded as part of the defensive war. According to him, when an individual assaults me in the street, I should have only the right to parry his blows; to carry a blow in my turn, which throws him to the ground, would, according to Kugelmann, transform me into an aggressor. We see that all these people hear nothing of dialectics⁵⁰”⁵¹

Finally, Napoleon III surrendered his sword at Sedan, and on the 4th September the Empire “disappeared in an incomparable collapse” (*Revue des Deux Mondes*), amid the anathemas of all.

That evening, the delegates of the Paris International and those of the Federal Chamber of Workers' Societies, meeting at the Corderie du Temple, wrote an Appeal to the German people, which was published the following day in German and French. Here it is:

“... The man who unleashed this fratricidal struggle, which you hold in your hands, does not exist for us. Republican France invites you, in the name of justice, to withdraw your armies; If not, we must fight to the last man and pour out your blood and ours.

“We repeat what we declared to Europe, united in 1793: ‘The French people does not make peace with an enemy occupying their territory.’ Repass the Rhine. On both banks of the disputed river, Germany and France, let us reach out. Let us forget the military crimes which the despots have caused us to commit against each other. Through our alliance, let us found the United States of Europe. Long live the universal republic! On behalf of the workers' societies and the French

50 Lawrence & Wishart, vol. 44, 50-51:

“your letter tallies completely with the plan of the answer I have already worked out in my head. Nevertheless, in such an important matter,— it is not a question of Wilhelm but of *instructions to the German workers as to their line of conduct* — I did not want to act without first consulting with you. (...) Wilhelm infers his agreement with me :1) from the Address of the International, which he of course first translated into his own, Wilhelminian language; 2) from the fact that I approved his and Bevel’s statement in the Reichstag. That was a ‘moent’ when harping on principles was *un acte de courage*... (...) Kugelmann confuses a defensive war with defensive military operations. So if a fellow falls upon me in the street I may only parry his blow, but not knock him down, because then I should turn into an *aggressor!* The want of dialectic comes out in every word these people utter...”

51 **Note by James Guillaume:** *Marx is now of the opinion that the continuation of the invasion of France by the Germans is a purely defensive measure, and in no way a war of aggression. Kugelmann had ventured to say that the Germans were wrong in their new attitude: so he did not understand the Hegelian-Marxist dialectics!*

sections of the International Workers' Association: Ch. Beslay, Briosne, Bachruch, Camélinat, Ch.-L. Chassin, Chemalé, Dupas, Hervé, Landeck, Leverdays, Longuet, Marchand, Perrachon, Tolain, Vaillant.”

The Central Committee of the Social Democratic Party, in Brunswick, published a manifesto on September 5, hailing the fall of the Empire and demanding peace, saying:

“After twenty years of shameful existence of the Second Empire, the French people rose again, and resumed the course of their destinies. Accept the French Republic! It is the duty of the German people to secure an honorable peace with the French Republic. It is up to the German workers to declare that, in the interests of France and Germany, they are determined not to tolerate an insult to the French people after it has rid itself forever of the infamous who had disturbed peace ... Let us swear to fight loyally and to work with our working class brothers from all civilized countries for the common cause of the proletariat ... Let us raise the cry that will announce, if not for today, at least for a next future, the dawn of freedom in Germany⁵².”

The Brunswick Committee had thought it necessary to reproduce *verbatim* the greater part of the letter sent to them by Marx; On the second page of its manifesto it read:

“One of our most distinguished and old friends and collaborators in London writes to us: ‘The annexation of Alsace and Lorraine would be a cause of ruin for Germany, for France would ally with Russia to make war on Germany.’ So on behalf of the Social Democratic Party, we protest against this annexation ... The present war – continues our friend and collaborator – opens a new era in history: it has proved that even

⁵² *Note by James Guillaume* : “On the 5th of September, too, in a special supplement of *La Solidarité*, of Neuchatel, appeared a manifesto saying almost the same things. It read: “The Republic is proclaimed, the French people have again become master of their destinies... In all countries, let us arm ourselves, let us arm ourselves, and march, volunteers of liberty and equality, fighting next to our brothers in France ... Internationals of Germany, your imperious duty is to reach out to your French brothers, and to help them crush the common enemy ... This is the dawn of a new day, the day of justice that rises over humanity. Long live the universal social republic!” – The Swiss government seized this manifesto, which was reproduced in the French newspapers and displayed in several towns in France, and *La Solidarité* was suppressed.

with the exclusion of Austria, Germany is able to continue its development ... A serious goal is reached, and if the German working class fails to play the historical role assigned to it, it will be their fault. This war has transferred from France to Germany the center of gravity of the continental workers' movement.”

General Vogel von Falkenstein, governor of the region, immediately arrested the courageous signatories of the manifesto, Bracke, Bonhorst, Spier, Kühn, Gralle, etc., and led them chained to the fortress of Boyen.

What was the attitude of Marx and Engels in the presence of these two revolutionary acts, the manifesto of the Parisian International and that of the Brunswick Committee?

On September 6, Marx wrote to Engels:

“I was just going to write to you when Serrailier came in and told me that he would leave for Paris tomorrow, where he would stay only a few days. The purpose of his journey is to concert with the Federal Council of Paris ... I have today received a proclamation from the Federal Council to the German people (which I will send you tomorrow), with the prayer that the General Council addresses to the Germans a special manifesto. I had already the idea of making this proposal tonight. Sunday, Longuet telegraphed me the proclamation of the Republic. I received the telegram at four in the morning [on Monday]. From Brunswick, I was told that my instructions will be strictly adhered to⁵³.” Engels answers Marx the following day, 7 september:

53 Lawrence & Wishart, vol., 44, 64-65:

“I had just 'sat down' to write to you when Serrailier came to tell me that he is leaving London tomorrow for Paris, but only for a few days. His chief purpose is to arrange matters with the International there (Conseil Federal de Paris). This is all the more essential as the entire FRENCH BRANCH is setting off for Paris today to commit all sorts of follies there in the name of the International. 'They' intend to bring down the Provisional Government, establish a *commune de Paris*, nominate Pyat as French ambassador in London, and so forth. I received today a proclamation to the German people from the *Conseil Fédéral* in Paris (I shall send it on to you tomorrow), together with an urgent appeal to the *Conseil Général* to issue a new manifesto specifically for the Germans. I had already planned to propose that this evening. Please could you send me as soon as possible the relevant military notes on Alsace-Lorraine in English for use in the manifesto. I have already sent a detailed answer today to the *Conseil Fédéral*, and have also subjected myself to the unpleasant task of opening their eyes to the true state of affairs. Received a reply from Brunswick to the effect that they will agitate precisely in accordance with my instructions.

“The proclamation of the Parisian International, if the telegraph has summarized it exactly, proves that these people are entirely dominated by rhetoric. These individuals who have borne Badinguet [Napoleon III] for twenty years; Who, six months ago, could not prevent him from receiving six millions votes against a million and a half, and who excited them without reason or pretext against Germany, – these people now claim, because the German victories have made them the gift of a Republic (and what Republic!), that the Germans must immediately leave the sacred soil of France, otherwise ‘War to the uttermost!’ It is quite the old infatuation: the superiority of France, the inviolability of the soil sanctified by 1793, and to which all the French muck committed since then has been unable to deprive it of its character, the sanctity of the word Republic (...)

“I hope that these people will return to common sense once the first intoxication has passed, otherwise it would become devilishly difficult to continue with them international relations (...)

“Dupont comes out here⁵⁴. He came to see me this evening, furious at the beautiful Parisian proclamation. But that reassures him to think that Serrailier goes to Paris and has talked with you beforehand. His opinions on the situation are quite clear and correct: the use of the freedom which the Republic will inevitably have to give for the organization of the party in France; Action, when circumstances permit, once the organization is made; Abstention from the International in France, till peace be made.

“Sacrificing at this moment the workers would be a Bonaparte and MacMahon strategy. Before peace they can do nothing, whatever the circumstances; And then, first of all, they will need some time to organize themselves⁵⁵.”

54 The worker Dupont lived in Manchester.

55 Engels to Marx. 7 September 1870, MECW, vol. 44, pp. 66-67;

“If the telegraphed version of the Parisian International proclamation is anything near accurate, it undoubtedly shows that these people are still entirely dominated by rhetoric. Having endured Badinguet for 20 years, having been unable to prevent him from winning 6 million votes against 1 1/2 only six months ago¹⁰⁴ and from stirring them up against Germany without any rhyme or reason, now that the German victories have made them a present of a republic—et laquelle!³—these people demand that the Germans should leave the sacred soil of France without delay, for otherwise there will be guerre à outrance! It is the same old idea of the superiority of France, of a land consecrated by 1793 which no subsequent French indecencies can profane, of the sanctity of the word: the Republic. (...)

Engels and Marx were not satisfied with the simple expression in their private letters of the desire that the proletariat of France should “refrain from acting until peace was made”⁵⁶: they abused their authority to send to the French workers, in the name of the General Council, official instructions on this subject. Here is what Dupont wrote on September 6th to the correspondent of the General Council in Lyon, Albert Richard:

“My dear Richard, the pitiful end of the Imperial Soulouque ⁵⁶ brings the Favre and Gambetta to power. Nothing has changed. Power is always in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Under these circumstances the role of the workers, or rather their duty, is to allow this bourgeois vermin to make peace with the Prussians (for they will never get rid of the shame of this act), not to reinforce them by riots, but to enjoy the liberties which circumstances will bring, to organize all the forces of the working class. The bourgeoisie, which is at this moment distraught with its triumph, will not at first perceive the progress of the organization, and for the day of the real war the workers will be ready. Use the powers given to you by the General Council to achieve this goal.”

In a second manifesto published in the name of the General Council, on September 9, Marx wrote:

“The French workers must not be carried away by the memories of 1792, as the French peasants have been previously fooled by the memories of the First empire; they do not have to repeat the past, but to build the future⁵⁷.”

“I hope that they will all reflect on the matter once more when the first intoxication is past, for if not, it will be damned difficult to have any truck with them at an International level. (...)

“Dupont has just left. He spent the evening here and was furious about this beautiful Paris proclamation. He was reassured to hear that Serrailier will go there having had prior discussions with you. His views on the case are perfectly clear and accurate: make use of the freedoms inevitably granted by the republic to organise the party in France; act when occasion presents itself, once organisation has been completed; the International to be held on a leash in France until after peace has been concluded. (...)

“To sacrifice the workers now, would be strategy à la Bonaparte and MacMahon; before peace they cannot act under any circumstances, and after that they will first need time to organise.”

⁵⁶ Potentate.

⁵⁷ Lawrence & Wishart, vol., Second Address of the General Council, MECW, vol. 22, p. 269.

“The French workmen must perform their duties as citizens ; but, at the same time, they must not allow themselves to be deluded by the national *souvenirs* of 1792, as the French peasants allowed themselves to be deluded by the national *souvenirs* of the First Empire. They have not to recapitulate the past, but to build up the future.”

Thus, these gentlemen, who usually recommended the participation of the workers in political movements, found it fitting at the time, when the German armies invaded France, to order the French workers, on behalf of the General Council of the International, to disregard “the memories of 1792” (how did Marx dare to assimilate the memories of the great revolutionary uprising against the armies of the monarchical coalition, to the memories of the first empire? Thoughtlessness or perfidy?; and without intervening, allowing a shameful peace be concluded with the king of Prussia under the pretext that this “shame” must be attached to “bourgeois vermin”; They especially ordered them not to “riot”, since the insurrectionary movements, according to them, “would reinforce” the bourgeois rulers! Is it not evident that Marx and Engels, advising the French workers to be what they call “calm” and “wise” (expressions of the 9th of September manifesto), dissuading them from “repeating the past” and to do what their fathers had done in 1792 (that is, to beat the Prussians), merely wished Bismarck to complete his invasion by the capture of Paris (Engels will say so on September 12) without encountering any resistance on the part of the proletariat of France?

Marx wrote again on 10 September :

“I am sending you here two blunders (*Tölpelereien*) coming from two opposite points, Brunswick and Paris. You know that I had sent advice to Brunswick. It is implied, when one writes, that one does not deal with children, but cultivated people, who must know that the brutal language of letters is not intended for advertising, and that besides, in an instruction, one is obliged to give discreet opinions that one should not go shouting it from the rooftops. Well, here are my people who not only print word for word extracts from my letter, but also point out to me, so clearly as one can not be mistaken, as the writer (*sie zeigen auf mich mit der Heugabel als den Briefschreiber*) . They print sentences, such as the one on the transfer of the center of gravity of the continental labor movement from France to Germany, etc., which should serve to stimulate them, but which under no pretext should be published. I must still be glad that they did not at least print my criticism of the French workers. And on top of that my fellows send out, all hot, their compromising factum in Paris! (Nor mentioning Brussels and Geneva).

“I shall wash their heads, but the damage is done! And we have on the other hand, the imbeciles of Paris! (*Die dummen Kerle in Paris!*) They have sent me masses of their ridicule manifest, which has provoked laughter and anger among the English workers, and I had to prevent the English, with great difficulty, from expressing publicly their sentiments on this subject... And these fellows still allow me to send telegraphic instructions to prescribe to me the manner in which I must do Propaganda among the Germans^{58!}”

58 Lawrence & Wishart, vol. 44, 69-70 :

Engels echoes, on the 12th, while seeking to reassure Marx:

“Of our friends in Germany and France, it is really to who will prevail in political awkwardness. They are fellows, these people of Brunswick! They were afraid that you would be displeased with to them, if they allowed themselves to change anything whatever to your opinions; And then they gave them literally. Basically, the only really annoying thing is the passage on the transfer of the center of gravity.

To print this beyond understanding lack of tact! Let us hope that the Parisians will at this moment have something else to do but give themselves up to the study of this manifesto, especially since they do not know German, as the German version of their proclamation proves, which is really something ! And Liebknecht, in his journal, praises this factum! ‘And Longuet, he is very amusing too!’

“Because Guillaume 1st has gratified them with a republic, it would now be necessary to make the revolution in Germany! ... If one could have some influence in Paris, the workers should be prevented from moving, until peace. Bismarck would soon be in a position to do so, either by the capture of Paris, or because the European situation compelled him to put an end to the war. In any way that peace can be achieved, before the workers can do anything, peace must be concluded. Unfortunately, no one in Paris dares to think that any active resistance of France has become impossible, and that consequently any prospect of repelling the invasion by a revolution is excluded in advance⁵⁹.”

“You know that I sent instructions to Brunswick. I assumed— mistakenly—that I was not dealing with uncouth BABIES, but with educated people who must be aware that the brutal language of a letter is not designed 'for printing', and furthermore that instructions have to contain confidential hints that are not intended to be revealed in the glare of publicity. WELL! These jackasses not only print 'word-for-word' extracts from my letter. They point their pitchforks at me, identifying me as the author. And they print sentences, such as the one about 'shifting the centre of gravity of the continental labour movement from France to Germany', etc., which were intended to spur them on, but which were not to be published now under any circumstances. I suppose I must be grateful to them at least for not having published my criticism of the French workers. And to cap it all the fellows even sent their compromising mishmash IN HOT HASTE— to Paris! (To say nothing of Brussels and Geneva.)

“I shall really tell them a few home truths, but the damage is done! On the other hand, there are the fools in Paris! They have sent me piles of their absurd chauvinistic manifesto which the English workers here greeted with derision and indignation that I had the greatest difficulty in preventing from being expressed publicly. And furthermore, instead of writing a rational answer to my letter, the fellows take the liberty of sending me instructions by telegraph (instructions from ex-student Longuet!) on how I must set about agitating in Germany !”

59MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol. 44, p. 72.

On the following day, 13 september, Engels added, “The war, by prolonging itself, is taking an unpleasant turn. The French have not yet been sufficiently beaten, and yet the Germans have already had far too much triumph⁶⁰.”

On the 14th, Marx writes:

“Bismarck is, nevertheless, an ass. Because everything has succeeded, as long as he has been the instrument of German unity, he has now lost his mind so well that he thinks he can, without shame and without damage, make specially Prussian politics Not only on the outside, but also on the inside ... I wrote today to Belgium, Switzerland and the United States, to give detailed instructions⁶¹.”

And finally, on the 10th (last letter of Marx in 1870, Engels had come to live in London in the autumn):

“Our friends over there—both in France and Germany—do indeed surpass each other in political adroitness. Those jackasses in Brunswick! They were afraid you would resent it if they tampered with the guidelines you had given them, so they printed them as they stood. The only awkward thing in reality is the passage about shifting the centre of gravity. To have printed that was an unprecedented piece of tactlessness. However, it is to be hoped that the Parisians have more urgent concerns now than to devote themselves to the study of this manifesto, particularly since they do not understand German. Their German in the proclamation is beautiful. And in his paper Wilhelm is full of praise for this chauvinistic mishmash. Longuet is another fine one. Just because William Ist has presented them with a republic, a revolution should break out without delay in Germany..

“If anything at all could be done in Paris, the workers ought to be prevented from letting fly before peace is concluded. Bismarck will soon be in a position to make peace, either by taking Paris or because the European situation will oblige him to put an end to the war. However the peace may turn out, it must be concluded before the workers can do anything at all..

“It is a damned nuisance that there are so few people in Paris who have the courage to see things as they really are in the present situation. Is there anyone in Paris who dares to admit to himself that the active resistance of France has been broken as far as this war is concerned, and that consequently there is no prospect of successfully repulsing the invasion by means of revolution !”

60 MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol. 44, p. 76.

“As time goes by, the war is altogether taking on an unpleasant face. The French have not yet been thrashed sufficiendy and the German jackasses have already won far too many victories.”

61 MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol.,44, p. 77.

“For all that, Bismarck is nevertheless a jackass. Just because everything went right for him as long as he was the instrumet of the aspirations to German unity he has now lost his head to such an extent that he imagines himself able to throw all scruples to the winds and pursue specific Prussian policies, not merely externally, but internally too.”

“In all haste. Tell Dupont to reply to the *Marseillais* (including their manifesto and their letter), on behalf of the General Council, and to wash their heads. Let him send them at the same time *our* manifesto; I will send it to him, if he needs it ⁶².”

Marx, later, had to undergo new influences and change his language. The heroic resistance of the French workers – who fortunately had not listened to his advice – finally moved him. In a letter to the *Daily News* of January 16, 1871, he wrote, almost in the words Bakunin had used five months earlier: “France – and her cause is fortunately far from desperate – is fighting not only now For its national independence, but for the freedom of Germany and of Europe”⁶³.

After the armistice, Marx wrote to Kugelmann (contrary to what Engels had said to him five months before, see Engels' letter of September 12): “Let France hold fast! Let her use the armistice to reorganize her army, and finally give a truly revolutionary character to the war – and the new Prusso-German Empire might well receive a very unexpected baptism.”⁶⁴,

But can this palinodia erase the words of 1870?

To the intimate effusions of the two great leaders of the German Sozial Democracy, let us oppose, in order to comfort us, the language of a genuine “International”.

Bakunin had written on September 2 (Works, t.II, p.257):

“Ah! If France were invaded by an army of proletarians, Germans, Englishmen, Belgians, Spaniards, Italians, bearing high the flag of revolutionary socialism and announcing to the world the final emancipation of labor, I would have been the first to shout to the workers of France: ‘Open your arms to them, they are your brothers, and unite with them to sweep away the

62 MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol., 44, p. 84:

“In great haste,

“Dear Fred

“Le Dupont reply to the Marseilles people (incl. Their manifesto) and put them in their place – in the name of the General Council. At the same time he can send them *our* manifesto. If he needs them I can send him new copies from here.”

63 MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol., 22, p. 276. “To the editor of the *Daily News*, 16 January 1871.

“France – and her cause is fortunately far from desperate – fights at this moment not only for her own national independence, but for the liberty of Germany and Europe.”

64 “If France holds out, uses the armistice to reorganize her army and finally gives the war a really revolutionary character – and the artful Bismark is doing his best to this end – the new German Borussian Empire may still get a quite unexpected thrashing as its baptism.” Marx to Kugelmann, 4 February 1871. MECW, vol. 44, p. 111.

rotting remains of the bourgeois world!’ But the invasion which dishonours France today is not a democratic and social invasion, it is an aristocratic, monarchical and military invasion. The five or six hundred thousand German soldiers who slaughter France at this hour are the obedient subjects, the slaves of a despot, who is entirely devoted to his divine right; And directed, commanded, pushed like automatons, by officers and generals of the most insolent nobility in the world, they are – ask your brothers the workers of Germany – the most ferocious enemies of the proletariat . By receiving them pacifically, by remaining indifferent or passive in the face of this invasion of German despotism, aristocracy and militarism on the soil of France, French workers would not only betray their own dignity, their own freedom, their own prosperity, with all the hopes of a better future, they would still betray the cause of the proletariat of the whole world, the holy cause of revolutionary socialism.”

Let us add to this quotation these lines written in Marseilles a month later (Works, t.IV, p.153):

“I have not the honor of being a Frenchman, but I confess that I am deeply indignant at all these insults, and profoundly despaired of the misfortune of France. I deplore bitterly the misfortune of this sympathetic and great nature, of that generous national character, and of that luminous intelligence of France, which it would seem to have been formed and developed by history to emancipate the world. I deplore the silence which might be imposed on the great voice of France, which proclaimed freedom, equality, brotherhood and justice to all who oppressed and were oppressed. It seems to me that if this great sun of France were extinguished, there would be an eclipse everywhere, and all the lanterns more or less variegated by the learned reasoners of Germany could not compensate for this great and simple clarity which the spirit of France poured on the world.

“At length I am convinced that the defeat and enslavement of France, and the triumph of Germany subjugated to the Prussians, would bring all Europe back into the darkness, into the misery and slavery of past ages. I am so convinced of this, that I believe that today it is a sacred duty for every man who loves freedom and who wants the triumph of humanity over brutality, to come, whatever his country, whether English, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Russian – even German – to take part in this democratic struggle of the French people against the invasion of Germanic despotism.”

It is on these energetic words that we must leave the reader. On the 9th of September, leaving Locarno, Bakunin had gone to Lyons, “resolved to carry his old bones there and to play his last part” (Letter to Adolphe Vogt).

Varlin had rushed to Paris on 6 September to fight. He was to be shot at

Montmartre by the “Versaillais”, on May 28, 1871. With him fell the Parisian International, struck to death.