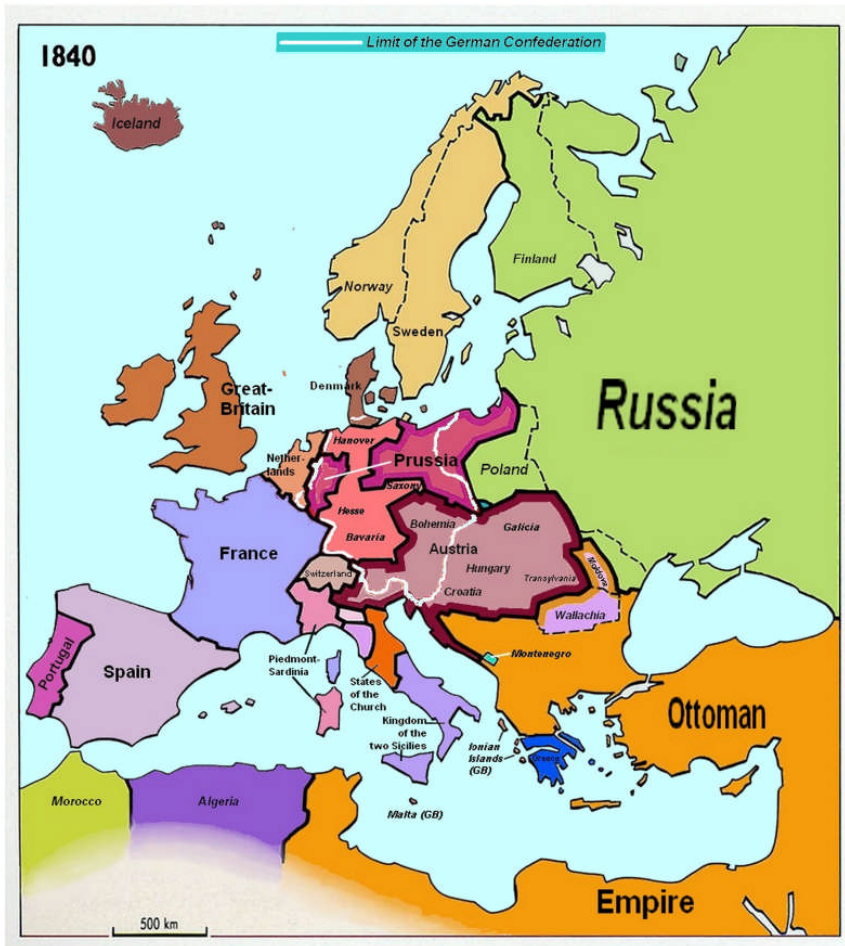


17-01-2018

The text entitled “Germany and Russia” is inspired by Chapter 5 of my *Bakounine Politique, Révolution et contre-révolution en Europe centrale*, published in 1991 at the Éditions du Monde libertaire. However, I did not limit myself to a literal translation of this chapter 5, which simply served as a starting point for developing questions inspired by almost thirty years of reading and reflection.

René Berthier
01/11/2018

“We are the sworn enemy of Pan-Slavism as much as of Pan-Germanism, and in a future pamphlet we shall devote a particular study to this question, which we consider an extremely important one; for the moment, we will simply say that we consider it a sacred and urgent duty for Russian revolutionary youth to oppose with all their might and by all means the slavist propaganda carried out in Russia and the Slav territories by official or willingly Slavophile agents of the Russian Government; they endeavor to convince the unfortunate Slavs that the Tsar of Petersburg, filled with ardent patriotic love for our Slavic brothers, and the infamous Russian empire, hated by the people and destroyer of the nation, executioner of Little Russia and Poland, of which he even alienated a part to the Germans, can and want to liberate the Slavic countries from the German yoke; and that at the very moment when the Petersburg Cabinet sells, by clearly betraying these countries, Bohemia and Moravia to the Prince of Bismarck to reward him for the help that he has promised him in the East.”
(*Statism and Anarchy*, IV, p. 230)



GERMANY AND RUSSIA

“Social revolution cannot be the work of one people, it is by its nature international”, says Bakunin ¹. This justifies the dominant concern of the Russian revolutionary for international issues, which occupy a preponderant place in his work.

Statism and Anarchy (1873) and the *Knouto-Germanic Empire* (1871), the two great works of the anarchist, are essentially composed of reflections on the international balance of power and the history of their evolution. Bakunin tries to find out what were, in the Europe of his time, the driving forces of reaction. This was not an academic question, it was a problem of primary importance because it directly contributed to determining the strategy of the labor movement. This is also one of the most important points of opposition between Bakunin and Marx, but also the least discussed: that of the respective roles of Germany and Russia in the European politics of the time.

The viewpoints of the two men are not opposable point by point. Often, as with other questions, the analysis they have concerning facts is roughly the same, but they diverge in their interpretation. This concordance is due, in my opinion, to the common intellectual formation of the two men; and the oppositions are the result of the different criteria they refer to. To fully appreciate the substance of the “debate” between Bakunin and Marx, this fact must be kept in mind. When Marx says that Russia is a reactionary force, he means that this country, which has remained at a precapitalist and autocratic stage, is a hindrance to the natural development of representative democracy and capitalist forces of production in Central Europe. When Bakunin says that Germany is the center of reaction in Europe, he means that the Bismarckian system is the prototype of the modern state which has developed, under a representative facade, extremely elaborate mechanisms of exploitation of the proletariat. Basically, these analyzes are not in fact incompatible. Where divergences arise is when the two men approach the question of the real influence that Germany and Russia have exerted on each other and when they try to determine the root causes of the political backwardness of Germany.

Marx and Engels regarded Russia as the number one enemy of the revolution in Europe and thought that it was also the main obstacle to the unification of Germany and the development of democracy in that country. This is a permanent pattern in their thought. We know that in 1848 they had advocated a war against Russia to weld national unity against an external enemy and force the King of Prussia to grant liberal reforms ². They had the French revolution in mind, and the “mass levy” of 1792. Sixteen years later, the conclusion of the Address of the IWA resumed the theme of the Russian danger. The Tsar's policy is designated as the most powerful obstacle to the democratic evolution of Europe and to German unity. And in 1894 Engels comes back to the idea once more:

¹ *Étatisme et anarchie*, Éditions Champ libre, vol. IV, p. 240. (From now on: IV, 240).

² “Only a war against Russia would be a war of revolutionary Germany, a war by which she could cleanse herself of her past sins, could take courage, defeat her own autocrats, spread civilisation by the sacrifice of her own sons as becomes a people that is shaking off the chains of long, indolent slavery and make herself free within her borders by bringing liberation to those outside.” (“German Foreign Policy and the Latest Events in Prague”, Marx-Engels Collected Works, Laurence & Wishart [from now on MECW], vol. 7 p. 212, July 1848.)

“The Empire of the Tsar is the mainstay of European reaction, its last fortified position and its great reserve army at once; because its mere passive existence is a standing threat and danger to us.”³

How could this backward mass, which has not gone beyond the precapitalist level of development, have been able to hinder the advance of capitalism and democracy in Europe?

Bakunin, of course, did not deny that the Russian state was a reactionary power, and more than any other he wished to defeat it. Tsarist Russia represents, he says, the triumphant oppression which drowns in blood all popular movement. And if the policy of the Russian state is inherently reactionary, Bakunin does not believe either that Russian society has positive elements in its traditional institutions: even the *Mir*, the rural community, cannot be an element on which revolutionaries could lean. The *Mir* has never had an internal evolution, the only process that emerges from it is disintegration. Bakunin said that “any muzhik who is a little bit more comfortable and a little stronger than the others is now trying his best to get out of the rural community that oppresses and suffocates him.” Apathy and unproductivity, says Bakunin, are the two main characteristics of the Russian rural community.⁴

By the policy of its state as well as well as by its deep social structures, Russia is therefore in Bakunin's eyes an eminently retrograde force. The question then is to determine “what is the real influence of Russia and if this empire occupies, by its intellectual influence, its power and its wealth, a position so preponderant in Europe that its voice is able to decide the questions”⁵. One must therefore look for the material elements which base the effective power of Russia and its possible influence on German policy. Bakunin invites to discern, among the means of pressure attributed to Russia, those who give the German princes a pretext to refuse to satisfy liberal claims and those who give the Liberals an excuse to mask their own political impotence.

According to Bakunin, Russia cannot undertake anything in the West if “it is not called by a great Western power”: on its own initiative it can do nothing⁶. Russia is content to cling to initiatives taken by other powers. Now, since the partition of Poland, “Prussia has been precisely the Western power which has not ceased to render this kind of service to the empire of all the Russias.” If it is true that the Tsars Alexander I and Nicholas interfered in European affairs, they only had the “honorary burden of a bogeyman”. The only action of Russia outside its borders was in 1849, and was made *at the request of Austria*, whose minister Schwarzenberg personally traveled to Moscow to ask the tsar to “save the empire of Austria thrown into turmoil by the uprising of Hungary”⁷. If Russia twice extinguished the Polish revolution during this century, it was with the help of Prussia, “as interested as Russia is in keeping Poland in servitude,” and to defend the joint interests of the two accomplices of the partition.

³ Engels, “The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom” MECW vol. 37, p. 13,

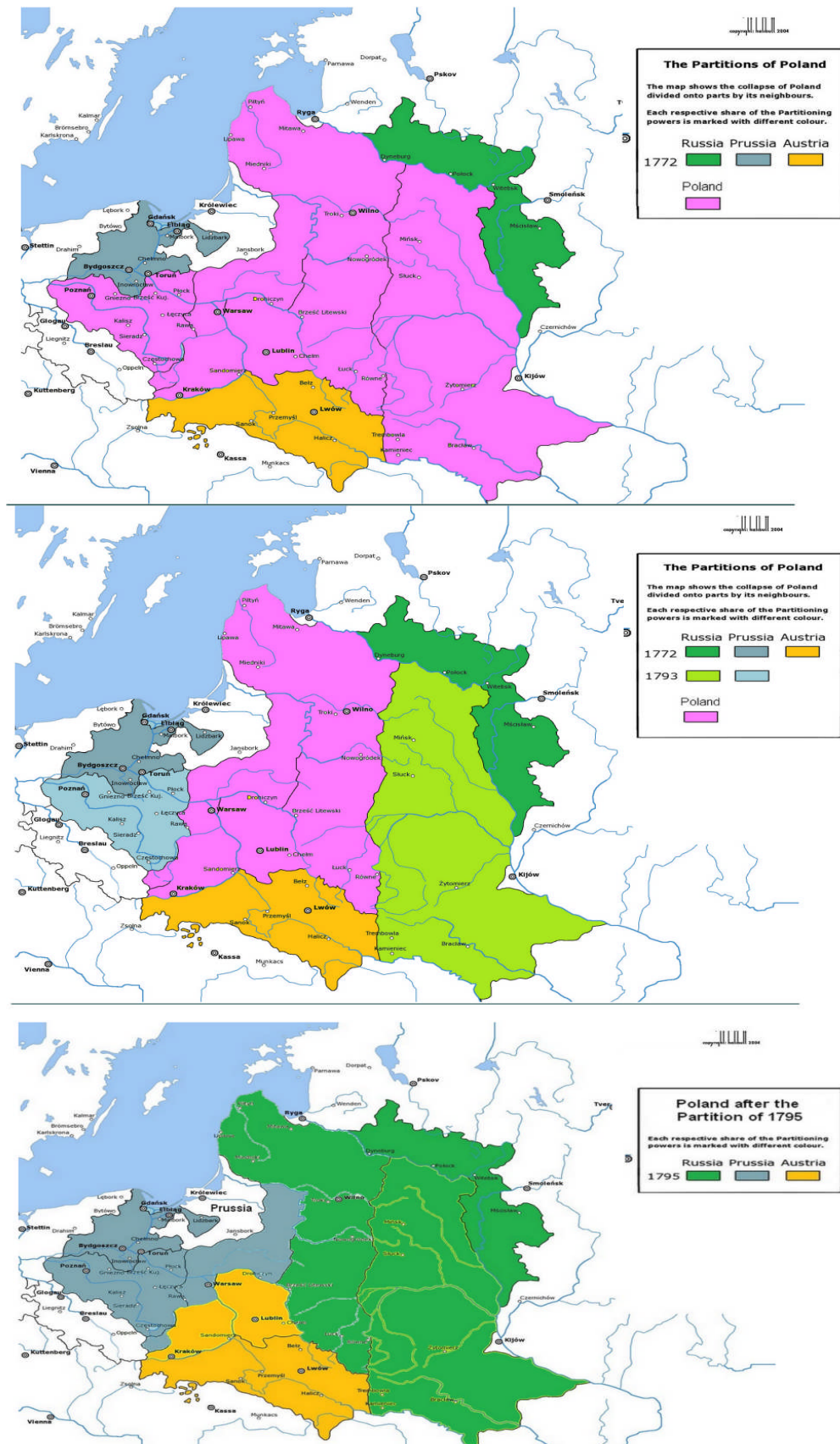
⁴ Quoted par A. Lehning, IV, p. 24, Introduction.

⁵ IV, 209.

⁶ IV, 210.

⁷ IV, 209.

Partitions of Poland



The Russian intervention against the Hungarian revolution was certainly an eminently reactionary, brutal act; but it was a localized intervention in time and space. Miklos Molnar writes that “from here to engage in a real war against Europe, there was a dangerous step that Russia was not able to take”⁸. Molnar suggests that Marx and Engels wanted to dramatize the situation (“The reaction and the Russians knock on the door”, says Engels) not because they *feared* war with Russia, but because they *wanted* it. In this, Molnar agrees with Bakunin's view that the German liberals, democrats and socialists, “foreseeing, and to a certain extent desiring, even calling for, a war against Russia, understood that the uprising of Poland and, *to a certain extent*, its restoration would be the necessary condition for such a war”⁹.

Bakunin's comments in a text dating back to 1872, “Aux compagnons de la Fédération jurassienne” (To the companions of the Jura Federation), perfectly situate the differences of perspectives that he and Marx had of the same fact. The anarchist refers to the inaugural address of the IWA written by Marx, in which, according to Bakunin, Marx makes a “brilliant and truly masterly presentation of the economic situation of the most advanced nations in modern culture.” Bakunin cites this famous passage in which Marx calls the workers to “become acquainted with the mysteries of international politics” – a call to which Bakunin totally subscribed, but in which Marx denounced the sympathy or indifference with which the European upper classes have seen Russia seize the “fortress-mountains” of the Caucasus: this “barbarian power whose head is in St. Petersburg and whose hands are found in all the cabinets of Europe” is violently denounced by Marx.

Bakunin fully recognizes the validity of this condemnation, which seems to be dictated by principles of morality and justice. But, he says, when one examines it more closely, one is struck by “the spirit of partiality, by no means international, but tudesque,” which slips into this homage paid to human morals and justice. Why is Marx concentrating his attacks on Russia, asks Bakunin? The protest would have been more equitable if Marx had condemned, together with the Russian repression in Poland, the conduct of Prussia, who is “the willing accomplice of all the crimes done by the Russian authorities,” and to whom the Poles have given the name of “help-executioner or purveyor of Muscovite gibbets”¹⁰.

“One would have expected a large society created, in appearance at least, by the spontaneous protest of the most advanced countries of Europe against Russian barbarism, to publish a Manifesto in which the sentiment which had provoked it found its place, resounding like an echo of the London meeting.

“But from this Manifesto, announcing to the world the principles of the International and speaking in the name of Mankind, in the name of human morality and human justice, we had the right to expect something more than a sentimental explosion: namely a broad and philosophical appreciation, in conformity with these very principles”¹¹.

In other words, Bakunin blames Marx for letting himself indulge in moods: on this point, he says, Marx has been “far below the mission he had imposed on himself, or rather that had been imposed on him.” For the Russian revolutionary can't believe that Marx really thinks what he says about Russia. “I respect his intelligence too much to admit it”: “He who hates utopias so much and all the

⁸ Miklos Molnar, *Marx, Engels et la politique internationale*, Idées, p. 125.

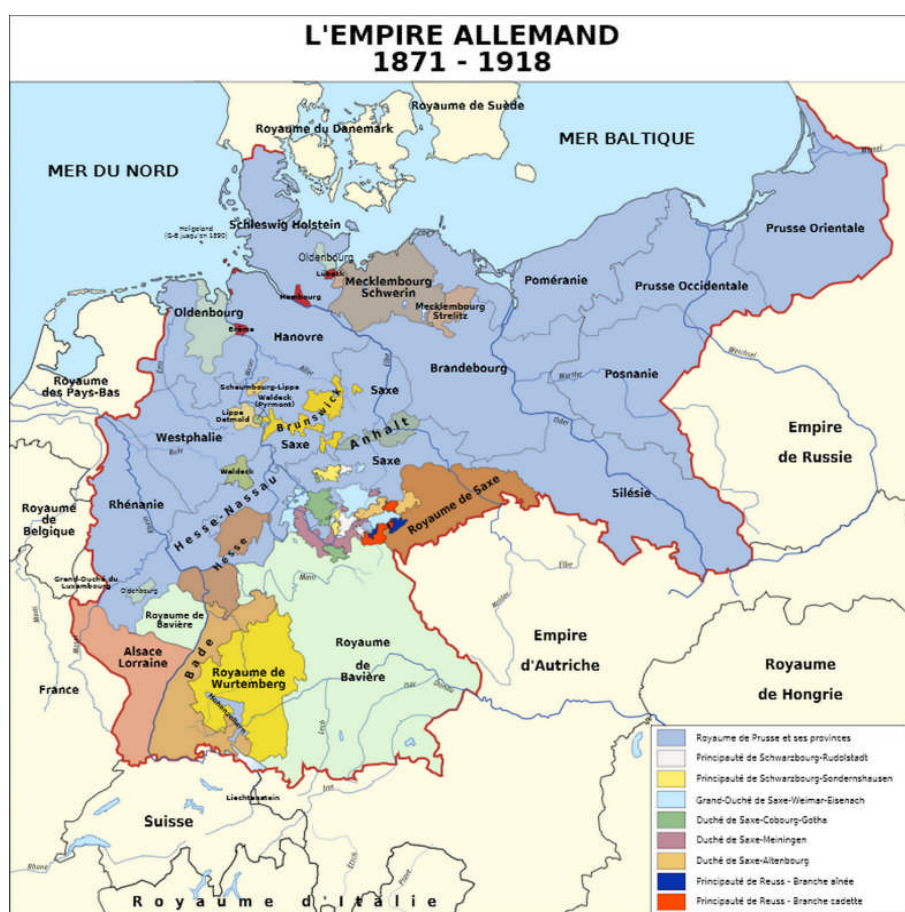
⁹ IV, 270

¹⁰ Bakunin, “Aux compagnons de la Fédération des sections internationales du Jura”, Éditions Champ libre, III, 50.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

arbitrary fantasies of the mind, he would have been the first Utopian in the world, if he could really imagine that, had it not been for the diplomatic influence of the St. Petersburg cabinet on the courts of Europe, Europe would have been quite different”¹². Bakunin reveals that he knows perfectly well Marx’s psychology: the accusation of utopianism is the most poisoned arrow that can be sent to the exile of the British Museum.

Returning to a more realistic register, Bakunin asserts that Marx is too familiar with the “statistics of Europe” to exaggerate, as “ordinary publicists” do, the material power of Russia. If this power is indeed immense, it is on the defensive, because it lacks three essential elements: financial power, good organization and science. This is, from Bakunin, an explicit reminder to Marx of the foundations of his own methodological conceptions¹³.



¹² *Ibid.*, III, 52.

¹³ Bakunin does not resist the pleasure of taunting the mania of the Germans, and of Marx in particular, to impute to the court of St. Petersburg all the reactionary acts accomplished by the governments of Europe. He thus suggests that without the influence of Russia, the Emperor of Germany, that of Austria, all the kings and the princes of Germany would be no longer at this hour but honest workers belonging to different workers' associations; the pope, marrying either Madame Isabelle of Spain or Madame Eugenie of France, would have become a good peasant and an excellent father. The order of the Jesuits would have been admitted as a section of the International, and its leader, whose name I do not know, with Cardinal Antonelli, with the Comte de Cavour and M. Ratazzi, with Napoleon III, with Lord Palmerston, or Mr. Gladstone, with the Count de Beust and the Prince of Bismarck, and finally with some Rothschild as treasurer, would have constituted today the General Council of London, transformed into the central government of the civilized world. (“Aux compagnons de la Fédération des sections internationales du Jura”, III, 52.)

I. – MARX AND THE RUSSIAN INTERVENTION

Marx has always thought that the Russian intervention had slowed down German unification and checked the development of democracy. “When at the end of 1842 the King of Prussia wanted to issue a sort of constitution according to the estates principle, on the most comfortable ‘historical’ basis, which had played such an admirable role with respect to the Patents of 1847, it was, of course, Nicholas who would not tolerate it...”¹⁴

This recall by Marx of a fact which had occurred in 1842, and reinterpreted by him in 1848, refers to a circular – quite insignificant in fact – sent in 1848 by Nesselrode, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, who wished to maintain the “unity of the German Confederation”. Marx and Engels immediately saw a decisive threat to the nascent German democracy.

There is no doubt that Russia was watching very closely any liberal or democratic movement, in Germany and elsewhere. Nesselrode had already written to Palmerston in 1833: “The fundamental principle of our policy obliges us to make every effort to maintain state power wherever it exists, to support it where it is weakened, and finally to save it from ruin where it is exposed to open attacks.” It is obvious that Nesselrode's solicitude is highly selective and that the state power he intended to preserve from ruin was neither liberal nor democratic.

It is, however, doing much honor to the very reactionary Frederik-William IV, King of Prussia, to present him as frustrated by the Tsar with the pleasure of granting his subjects a Constitution. Bakunin rightly explains that the Russian specter very conveniently served the German princes as a scarecrow to justify that they did not grant a Constitution. It is, moreover, doubtful that the Tsar would have declared war on Prussia for a constitution establishing a Corporate type of representation without any power, and of which Bismarck himself thought that a “crazier, more despicable electoral law had never been designed in any country”.

On the eve of the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, Marx wrote to Engels that “There can be no shadow of doubt that Russia is behind the Prussians”¹⁵. He agrees with Bakunin, to a certain point. But Marx means that Russia is the *initiator* of the war, while the anarchist simply says that the Tsar *supports* Prussian politics by forcing Austria to keep part of its army mobilized on the eastern border, thus leaving Bismarck free to move. Bakunin considers quite plausibly that in the struggle between Prussia and Austria for hegemony over Germany, Russia had taken a stand for Prussia because unlike Austria, it was not a rival for Russia's policy in the Middle East and the Balkans.

Marx's obsession about Russia reappears again in 1870 when Engels writes to his friend that Russia had pushed Prussia and Austria to war against France in 1792. To which Marx responded that the Germans were the tools and the dupes of Russia: “Russia set Prussia and Austria at each other's throats and, at the same time, drew them into the 1792 war against France, exploited, cheated and dominated both”¹⁶.

Putting Russia behind all the actions of Prussia, leads Marx and Engels to completely obliterate the fact that under the rule of its successive monarchs, and under that of Bismarck, Prussia had a policy of territorial expansion, although not as much as is usually thought: Bismarck was not much interested in southern Germany. It must be remembered that the chancellor's obsession was the control of Prussia's international policy and that he had for a moment refused the power that the king had offered him because it did not specifically include foreign affairs.

¹⁴ Marx, “The Russian note”, MECW, vol. 7, p. 311.

¹⁵ Marx to Engels, 6 April 1866, MECW, Volume 42, p. 258.

¹⁶ Marx to Kugelmann. 17 February 1870, MECW vol. 43, p. 433.

Marx avoids considering that Russia can serve the interests of Prussia: he thinks on the contrary that Bismarck is “the chief instrument of Russian intrigues”¹⁷. In the same way, the war of 1870 is fomented by Russia “in order to secure Prussia's vassalage still more firmly”¹⁸. Russian diplomacy, of which Marx also states that it is based on bluffing, controls Bismarck: “The man is caught by the Russian Chancellery in a net which only a lion could tear through, and he is no lion”¹⁹.

Because of the reciprocal exhaustion of Germany and France, the War of 1870 transformed the Czar into the arbiter of Europe: “Alexander [II of Russia] flattered himself that the War of 1870, resulting in the common exhaustion of Germany and France, would make him the supreme arbiter of the Western continent”²⁰. However, according to Bakunin's forecasts, the facts showed on the contrary that the war had ensured the total hegemony of Germany on the continent. Bakunin shows that there was a double movement in the relations between Germany and Russia:

1. – Prussia has historically developed “a new type of state system” based on an efficient bureaucracy, a well-run administration, thanks to which it has gradually absorbed all of Northern Germany. Happy economic initiatives, such as the Zollverein (customs union), have been key elements. Bismarck had considerably strengthened the economic, political and military power of Germany by dismissing the Austrian rival. The Reich had become, according to Bakunin, the only truly sovereign State on the continent.

2. – The rise of German political and military power has definitively removed any hope for Russia to develop in Northern Europe. Based on military power alone, on a corrupt and inefficient administration, with no economic power capable of competing with German industrial and financial power, Russia was forced to turn its energies to the East and South-East.

Marx and Engels described in dramatic terms this expansion towards the East²¹ which, in their eyes, confirmed their analysis of the Russian danger. But they did not perceive that it was the consequence of the halt brought by the rise of German power: the strengthening and development of the capitalist relations of production in Northern Europe under the leadership of Germany drove the precapitalist Russia to more underdeveloped areas, the only ones it could annex. This was a process that Bakunin had perfectly perceived.

II. – THE POLISH QUESTION

The Polish question is of paramount importance for our purpose, because it is in their common oppression of this country that Russia and Prussia were linked. It is therefore necessary to highlight the essence of the arguments of Bakunin and Marx on the question of the respective responsibilities of these two countries in the partition of Poland.

Marx seems very anxious to minimize the responsibility of Prussia. He explains in the *Northern Star* of March 6, 1847 that Austria and Russia are the “main looters of Poland”: Prussia does not appear in the eyes of Marx among the members of this closed club of oppressors. Let us recall that it was the question of Polish independence that gave Bakunin his first opportunity to express himself in public

¹⁷ Marx to Engels. 2 November 1867, MECW, vol. 42, p. 460.

¹⁸ Marx, Letter to Kugelmann, 4 februaryr 1871. MECW, vol 44 p. 110.

¹⁹ Marx to Kugelmann. 4 February 1871 vol. 44 p. 109.

²⁰ *Civil war in France*, MECW, vol 22 p. 267.

²¹ See Engels: “Russian Progress in Central Asia”, 1858, MECW, p. 59.

in 1847, and his first subject of disagreement with Marx who in 1848 considered the Polish question from the only point of view of German unity: the restoration of Poland, according to Marx, meant the ruin of Russian hegemony in Germany.

The reconstitution of Poland was to drive Russia back into the heart of Europe, creating between Germany and Russia a bulwark of “twenty million heroes”, as Marx said ²². Geostrategic considerations motivated Marx more than the concern to make “justice” to the Polish people. This kind of ethical concern will earn Bakunin sarcastic taunts on the part of Engels, very reluctant to return to these twenty million “heroes” the Polish territories annexed by Prussia. In the war he calls for, the Poles will find a compensation by recovering large territories in East, to the detriment of Russia. Marx further states in 1870 that the “main task of the Russian branch [of the IWA] is to work for Poland, in other words to rid Europe of the Russian neighborhood”. To a large extent, Marx's main concern about the IWA, at least initially, was motivated by the Polish question, *that is*, the question of protecting Germany from a Russian invasion

Like Bakunin, Marx thinks that Prussia arose out of the dissolution of Poland, that the dismemberment of Poland binds Prussia to Russia and constitutes Prussia as State: “Russia was born of the dissolution of Poland, and the progress of Russia is the fundamental law of the development of Prussia. No Prussia without Russia, although the Russian danger persists even without Russia²³.”

Bakunin's point of view does not really diverge from Marx's, except that instead of seeing a situation of *dependence* of Prussia on Russia because of their common oppression of Poland, he notes the *interdependence* of the two states, which forbids them precisely to make war (which Poland would profit from); Like Marx, Bakunin thinks that Prussia as a European power was born of the partition of Poland, but unlike Marx he thinks that this is where the process of empowerment of Prussian foreign policy begins, which would lead to the elimination of Russian influence from North West Europe. It is an important difference of approach.

According to Bakunin, the first partition of Poland gave both Prussia and Russia the “complexion of a great European power” ²⁴ and as such they are accomplices on an equal footing. Marx wants to give credence to the idea that Prussia was somehow led in spite of herself to participate in the dismantling of Poland. Bakunin stresses that since this division, the two states “cannot wage war unless they emancipate the Polish provinces that have fallen to them, which is as impossible for one as for the other, because the possession of these provinces constitutes for each of them the essential condition of its power as a state”²⁵.

This is why the Tsar cannot really use against the Western States the weapon of Pan-Slavism, whose specter is frequently brandished by Marx and Engels: it is indeed a weapon which would forcefully turn against the power in Moscow. Pan-Slavism leads to the uprising of the Slav peoples against their legitimate Austrian and Prussian rulers, and inevitably leads to the liberation of Poland. But the Russian empire is literally founded, says Bakunin, on the ruins of the Poland: without the Polish provinces acquired during the partition of 1772, the Russian empire would collapse, because these are the richest, the most fertile and the most populated regions. Without them, the wealth of the empire, “which is not already considerable, and its strength will diminish by half”. Mikhail Katkov, a Slavophile

²² “There is only one alternative left for Europe. Asiatic barbarism under Muscovite leadership will burst over her head like a lawine, or she must restore Poland, thus placing between herself and Asia 20 millions of heroes, and gaining breathing time for the accomplishment of her social regeneration.” (Speech at the Polish meeting, delivered in London, to a meeting of the International's General Council and the Polish Workers Society on 22 January 1867. MECW, vol. 20, p. 197.)

²³ “La Pologne, la Prusse et la Russie”, *Marx, Engels, La Russie*, Union générale d'éditions, pp. 60-61. [unfinished manuscript]

²⁴ *Étatisme et anarchie*, IV, 254.

²⁵ *L'Empire knouto-germanique et la révolution sociale*, VIII, 52.

energetically opposed to Polish national aspirations, declared: "Our fight against Poland is a fight of two peoples; to yield to the demands of the Polish patriots is to sign a death warrant for the Russian people ²⁶."

Moreover, the loss of these provinces, adds Bakunin, would inevitably be followed by that of the Baltic States, and then of Little Russia, which would become a Polish province or a sovereign state. Russia would lose access to the shores of the Black Sea, be cut off from Europe and be forced back into Asia. It is paradoxical that what Bakunin presents as an indirect but inevitable consequence of the Pan-Slavist policy that terrorizes both the liberals and the German socialists is exactly what these liberals and socialists want: pushing Russia back to Asia.

Joint responsibility of Russia and Prussia

A Panslav movement launched in 1848 at the initiative of Russia could possibly have found allies in Italy and Hungary, because it would have given the nationalists of these two countries grounds to rise up against Austria. So Russia still had a small capacity for intervention, but Bakunin is considering this possibility without really believing it. In 1873, when he wrote *Statism and anarchy*, Italy would have remained neutral and Hungary would have taken sides with the Germans because the Magyars were themselves dominating millions of Slavs. A war against Germany would not bring any effective support of the Austrian Slavs to Russia: the uprising of the Slavs of Turkey would meet the opposition of England. As for Galicia, the Ruthenians would be paralyzed by the hostile Poles of Russia. Which leaves a dozen million scattered Slavs, with different dialects, mixed with Germans, Magyars, Romanians, Italians. In reality, concludes Bakunin, Pan-Slavism has never been a serious threat, it is used to keep the Germans in fear, but it is not sufficient to bring a serious support to the Russian troops. The Panslav agitation served only to destabilize the Austrian government.

In spite of Marx's obsession, Bakunin believes that the threat of Russia's direct military intervention against Germany in 1848 was *unrealistic*. In 1870, it is *inconceivable*. "No offensive war," said Bakunin, "will ever be a national war in Russia" ²⁷. To this there are reasons which are related to the international equilibrium considered from the point of view of the Russian Government, but which are also related to the internal dissolution of the the Russian society, which makes the latter incapable of supporting a war against more developed countries.

While Marx considers that Prussia is Russia's instrument in the dismantling of Poland, Bakunin insists on the joint responsibility of the two states. But he also tries to show the specific characteristics of the respective occupation exercised by Russia and Prussia, which he considers to be of a different nature. Russia, he says, has never succeeded in Russifying the part of Poland which has fallen to it, while Prussia, on the contrary, is "germanizing at all costs the province of Danzig and the Duchy of Poznan. not to mention the province of Koenigsberg which she seized well before".

This is a peculiarity of the Germanic expansion which Bakunin has long endeavored to highlight. If the Germanic occupation of the Slav territories is first accomplished in military form, it is soon followed by the introduction of an effective administration and bureaucracy, the establishment and development of a bourgeoisie of German origin, which constitutes the armature of the Germanization of the occupied territories. Russia, on the other hand, is an exclusively military state with only one objective: the conquest and the furious exploitation of

²⁶ Quoted by A. Michnik, "La Pologne sous le regard russe", in *Penser la Pologne*, Éditions Maspéro.

²⁷ IV, 260.

conquered territories²⁸. Russia is unable maintain a deep implantation. If from Bakunin's point of view the political responsibility for the dismantling of Poland is equally shared, the nature of the dismantling is fundamentally different. Germany seems indeed a much greater danger insofar as it succeeds in destroying the Polish identity in the territories it occupies; it effectively practices the "denationalization of Slavic populations"²⁹, which Russia cannot do.

An examination of Bakunin's numerous passages on the question of nationalities in Central Europe reveals an interesting fact. When he reports population statistics, he always says: so many millions of Germans and Jews. Germans and Jews are not differentiated, they are, in his view, systematically assimilated as members of the same national community for they assume the same function. The Jews, through trade and because they are scattered throughout Central Europe, are considered as one of the factors of the Germanization of the Slavic nations in the same way as the military occupation in a first step, the establishment of an effective administration in a second.

Engels does not contradict Bakunin's approach to this question: "The consequence was, that with the increase of population and the origin of cities, in these regions, the production of all articles of manufacture fell into the hands of German immigrants, and the exchange of these commodities against agricultural produce became the exclusive monopoly of the Jews, who, if they belong to any nationality, *are in these countries rather Germans than Slavonians*"³⁰. The process of denationalization of the Slavs by the Germans is described in a surprisingly identical way by Bakunin and Engels although they do not give the process the same meaning: for Engels, it is a positive fact.

Bakunin has fully understood that the German liberals wanted war against Russia, and that this war implied the restoration of Poland. He also saw that it was out of question for them to restitute the part of Poland which had been annexed by Prussia. According to Engels, in the event of the restoration of Poland, the war with Russia would have settled the question of Polish claims on its Germanized western territories: "The Poles, by receiving extended territories in the east, would have become more tractable and reasonable in the west"³¹. In other words: what belongs to me is mine, what belongs to you is negotiable³².

Better than the Germans, however, Bakunin perceived that this war was for the moment impossible, because of the occupation of Poland by the two countries. The main guarantee against Russian aggression is the risk that Bismarck should provoke a Polish uprising against Russia³³. If the interests of Germany required it, Bakunin thinks, Bismarck would call the Poles to rise against Russia, which would create a chain reaction with disastrous consequences. Bakunin recalls that during the insurrection of January 1863 against Russia, Prussia collaborated in the repression. He did not know, however, that in the face of the indignation of the European powers, Bismarck withdrew his agreement with Russia as early as

²⁸ See IV, 255.

²⁹ Bakunin, *L'Empire knouto-germanique*, VIII, 405.

³⁰ Engels, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, MECW, vol. 11, p. 44.

³¹ Engels, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, MECW, vol. 11, p. 45.

³² "In 1852, then, in order to preserve the German character of Gdansk (Danzig) and Elblag (Elbing), Engels was ready to make a deal and compensate the Poles with "extended [*nota bene*: non-Polish] territories in the east" as well as with the non-Polish cities of Riga and Klaipeda (Memel). (...) the territories Poland would receive as compensation for the loss of parts of Poznan and Silesia as well as Gdansk and Elblag were inhabited by Ukrainians, Belorussians, Lithuanians and Latvians." (Roman Rosdolsky, *Engels and the "Nonhistoric" Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848*)

³³ See IV, 270.

March, and let Russia alone suppress the revolt. However, Bakunin's intuition was founded, in the sense that, if Russia had been unable to quell the revolt, in other words if Germany had been in turn threatened by a resurrected Poland, Bismarck had considered taking the initiative uniting Prussian and Russian Poland under the sovereignty of the Hohenzollerns, thus creating a dualistic monarchy on the model of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy created in 1867.³⁴

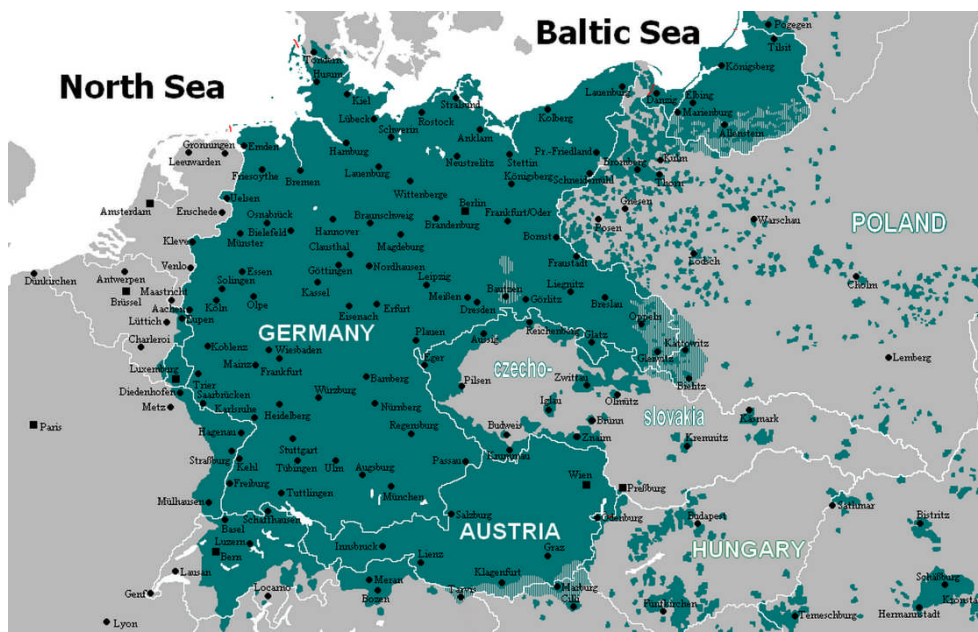
Historians rarely see that Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and Bakunin on the other, frequently analyze situations in the same way, but diverge on the conclusions. All three agree that the small Slavic nationalities of Central Europe are not politically viable entities. But it is after this observation that the disagreements appear. Marx and Engels want to liquidate these small nationalities in order to bring them back to Germany, to Germanise them. Bakunin wants the independence of the South Slavs, but he says: small states are no longer viable, and you will have to find a common way of life in the form of a federation.

In short, Bakunin takes the Slav nationalists “against the grain”. We understand that he did not raise their enthusiasm. Naturally suspicious of the Russians, whoever they may be, the Polish nationalists – often aristocrats – have always been very reserved with regard to Bakunin, to whom they did not forgive the restrictions he placed on their desire for independence.

Actually, the Russian revolutionary supported the liberation of Poland, the reconstitution of a unified Poland, but not on the basis of the pre-1772 Great Poland, which included non-Polish nationalities – Ruthenians and Ukrainians, among others –, which greatly displeased the Polish nationalists. However, he did not exclude the possibility for these non-Polish nationalities to bind their fate to the Poles, but that could only result from a choice on their part. For this reason, the Polish nationalists never ceased to be very reluctant towards this man who supported their cause but not their plans for territorial expansion.

Moreover, Bakunin did not separate the question of national emancipation from that of social emancipation. His “Appeal to the Slavs”, written during the 1848 Revolution, is probably the first document in which national emancipation is subordinated to social emancipation.

Basically, Bakunin's outlook on the emancipation of Poland is rather dreary. According to him, the Poles constitute a separate block within the Slavic world, with which they do not join forces. Largely Germanized in the West, they are also much closer to the Magyars, with whom they are bound by many common historical memories. “What can there be in common,” he says, “between the Slav world, which has no existence yet, and the Polish patriotic world, which is more or less at the end of its career?”³⁵



Slavs. The problem of the 25 million Germans could be solved by moving these populations within the established German borders, but the solution of Pan-Germanism is rather to annex the territories on which there are German speaking populations. This solution, however, raises a problem that Bakunin was perfectly aware of: the German and Slavic populations were often intertwined, to the point that one could speak of a “leopard skin” territorial occupation, as was said during the civil war in Yugoslavia ³⁶. This distribution of populations is a fact of history and it is not possible today to ignore its political consequences: unfortunately the solutions to this problem were mostly limited to ethnic cleansing.

Bakunin considered that “every nation, whether small or large, every province, and even, strictly speaking, every individual, has the absolute and inalienable right to self-determination, to internal organization, and to ally with whoever they want... If they isolate themselves in their independence, they will deprive themselves of all the benefits, all the help, all the production of solidarity.” The idea expressed here is perfectly clear, although it should be pointed out that Bakunin believes that this irredentism runs counter to the historical evolution that makes the small states less and less viable. Nevertheless, the Russian anarchist believes that each community has the right to secede from the whole to which it belongs, to experiment its way, make mistakes and rectify its errors.

“... it must be noted that the real history of individuals, as of peoples, does not proceed only by positive development, but very often by the negation of the past and revolt against it; and it is the right of life, the inalienable right of present generations, the guarantee of their freedom. Provinces that have been united for a long time always have the right to separate from one another: and they can be pushed by various reasons, religious, political, economic. The state claims, on the contrary, to hold them together by force, and in that it is greatly mistaken. The state is forced marriage, and we raise against it the banner of free union.”³⁷

But how to solve this problem in a situation where populations are closely intertwined with other populations? Bakunin makes some suggestions. He mentions the case of Poland, a large part of which was occupied by the Germans and Germanized. In the Grand Duchy of Posen, he says, there are 838,000 Poles and 697,000 Germans. In both Prussias there are 2,178,000 Germans and 1,599,000 Poles, to which must be added the 137,000 Lithuanians of East Prussia. Bakunin discusses the possibility of sticking to the historical fact and leaving to the Germans what they occupied and to the Poles what they managed to preserve, but this approach is not viable, he says, and its execution impossible.

“Geographers once published maps of these Polish provinces, where they marked in different colors the Germanized countries and those which remained Polish. One can not imagine anything more bizarre: it looks like a chessboard. These people are extremely mixed up. Next to a German village, you find a Polish village. No doubt the German color predominates on the side of the German frontier, and the Polish color prevails the more so as one approaches the so-called Russian Poland. But there is no clear line of demarcation. [...] What to do then? How to establish the natural ethnographic limit between the Polish state and the German state?”³⁸

³⁶ See: René Berthier, *Ex-Yougoslavie. Ordre mondial et fascisme local*. Co-édition : Monde libertaire-Atelier de création libertaire-Reflex. 1996

³⁷ Bakunin, “Circulaire à mes amis d’Italie”, *Oeuvres*, II, 296.

³⁸ Bakunin, “Aux compagnons de la Fédération jurassienne”, III, p. 36.

The problem, says Bakunin, is the same in Moravia and Bohemia, where there are 2,530,000 Germans and 4,680,000 Czechs. It becomes “an insoluble question for politicians whenever they try to solve it according to justice, and according to the dominant maxims, based solely on the combination of interests and state power”. What solution does Bakunin propose?

“Let the various communities, associations, municipalities, their complete autonomy. Let them federate freely, according to their natural attractions, their necessities, their interests, their needs; and you will see that all these questions of races, languages, traditions, customs, will fall of their own accord. Abandoning all thought of domination – this thought necessarily having to disappear with the possibility of its realization, that is to say the State –, henceforth freed from any fear of being dominated by others; pushed by the necessity of getting along with each other to organize their economic existence, their work, the exchange of their products, their means of communication, public education, and, if necessary, their defense; and being invincibly led by this omnipotent law of human solidarity, which is not a political law but a natural, fatal law, source and cause of all the historical developments of human society to date, but of which all the political laws were only the systematic negation; delivered finally to their complete spontaneity and their free instincts, developed by history and determined by their current economic situation, the associations and the communes, after a time of transition, of hesitation and struggle, more or less long and more or less painful, will eventually be balanced, not according to arbitrary and abstract laws that any authority would impose on them from above, but in accordance with the real being, the necessities and the living forces of each; and, unanimously inspired by the spirit of fairness, equality and freedom which is beginning to constitute today the dominant passion and so to speak the religion of the masses, they will join hands to organize together a federation largely based on the work of all and on human respect. And in this new society, the practice of human justice will be as natural as that of iniquity today.”³⁹

This long quote may seem to reveal a certain naivety. Not so much, in fact, since Bakunin does not rule out a period of “transition”⁴⁰ and “struggle”. And, in view of the solutions proposed so far for the former Yugoslavia, for example, we can only say that this one is not more utopian or unrealistic than the others. It is interesting to note, by the way, that it is in a text on the question of nationalities that Bakunin gives the clearest definition of a society without a State ... Thus, “those countries where nationalities are mixed, which today make the despair of all the scrupulous statesmen, will on the contrary become precious intermediaries, living links which will connect nations together and slowly prepare the more and more complete unification of the human species, the definitive realization of humanity. But as long as states exist ... let us not talk about justice: let's talk about power, domination, oppression, and always keep the knife in hand to defend our existence and our rights.”⁴¹

Liberal Germany needs Polish emancipation to wage war against Russia. Conservative Germany needs its subjugation to protect itself from Russia. Poland is in both cases a capital issue for the liberal or conservative unity of North Germany. It remains to be determined what part Bakunin attributes to Austria in this game.

³⁹ “Aux compagnons de la Fédération jurassienne”, Œuvres, III, p. 37-38.

⁴⁰ On the “period of transition, see: René Berthier “Esquisse d’une réflexion sur la ‘période de transition’” (<http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article324>).

⁴¹ *Ibid*

III. – AUSTRIA

Bakunin cannot be accused of sympathy for Austria: his project in 1848 was the destruction of the Habsburg empire,⁴² which he regarded as the main obstacle to the liberation of the Slavs of Central Europe and to the extension of the revolution to Russia. Marx shared Bakunin's repulsion for Austria, but not for the same reasons. According to Marx, the Habsburgs had betrayed their historic mission by failing to Germanise the Slavic territories that had been annexed to the empire. Consequently, Austria was to disappear.

“To fail to understand this, one had to have the inveterate stupidity and especially the venality of Maria Theresa’s ministers, and then the arrogant petty-mindedness and spitefully reactionary stubbornness of old Metternich – who, moreover, as everyone knows, was also in the pay of the Petersburg and Berlin courts. One had to have been condemned to death by history⁴³.”

Bakunin attributes to Austria a secondary part in the partition of Poland because he did not think it drew many advantages in it. On the contrary, the Habsburg Empire had an interest in preserving in its North-Eastern borders this “noble state, admittedly not very intelligent, but strictly conservative and not at all eager for conquest” which spared Austria the cumbersome neighborhood of Russia and separated her from Prussia. By participating in the partition, Austria had literally fallen into a trap because it created the conditions for its own dissolution. That Poland was not “eager for conquests” is not entirely accurate, as we have seen, and Bakunin knows it well. Indeed, if he had always supported the Poles' struggle for an independent national existence, this support stopped when the desire for independence was supplemented by the Polish nationalists' desire to recover the non-Polish territories that had been attached to Poland before the partition.

By involving the Austrian empire in the partition of Poland, Russia and Prussia had prepared it to be sacrificed in its turn. This is the main reason for the German-Russian agreement, thinks Bakunin. As long as these two states have not shared Austrian territory, they “are compelled to remain, allies and friends, even though they hate each other wholeheartedly”⁴⁴. It would be surprising, he adds, that the partition of Austria did not succeed in blurring them, but until then “nothing will cause them to fall out”.

Austria is a sick state; since 1848 it “has maintained its decrepit existence by taking heroic measures and a wide variety of restorative tonics”⁴⁵. Bakunin recalls that in 1848 the empire had been saved only by the intervention of the tsar, who suppressed the Hungarian revolution. Since then, Austria has lost what made her a center of gravity, and it is with some reason that “the Prussian Germans bitterly and most earnestly reproach the Germans of Austria – almost going so far as to accuse the Austrian Government of treason – for being unable to Germanize the Slavs. In their view, and in actual fact, this constitutes the greatest crime against the patriotic interests of all Germans, against pan-Germanism⁴⁶.”

⁴² “The defendant Michael Bakunin recognizes that, apart from his other demagogic aspirations and with regard to the Austrian Empire, the destruction of the Austrian state and the autonomy of the nationalities living on its soil were part of his desires. and his plans ...” (Bakunin indictment in : *Michel Bakounine et les autres*, 10/18, p. 178.)

⁴³ IV, 254.

⁴⁴ IV, 254.

⁴⁵ IV, 228.

⁴⁶ IV, 230.

This affirmation of Bakunin only confirms what Engels wrote in 1849, which he repeated in 1882. In the *New Rhine Gazette* he had written the “the Habsburg dynasty, whose power was based on the union of Germans and Magyars in the struggle against the Southern Slavs, is now prolonging the last moments of its existence through the union of the Southern Slavs in the struggle against the Germans and Magyars⁴⁷.” And three decades later, he wrote to Bernstein that “in allowing the Slavs to come to power, Austria has, with true historical irony, itself declared that what has hitherto been its sole *raison d'être* has ceased to exist⁴⁸.”

In his desire to exonerate Prussia from its image of conqueror and oppressor, Engels accuses Austria:

“The fall of Austria has a special significance for us Germans. It is Austria which is responsible for our reputation of being the oppressors of foreign nations, the hirelings of reaction in all countries. Under the Austrian flag Germans have held Poland, Bohemia, Italy in bondage. We have to thank the Austrian monarchy for the Germans being hated as vile mercenaries of despotism from Syracuse to Trento, from Genoa to Venice. Anyone who has seen what deadly hatred, the bloody and completely justified thirst for revenge against the Tedeschi reign in Italy must be moved to an undying hatred of Austria and applaud when this bulwark of barbarism, this scourge of Germany collapses⁴⁹.”

Curiously, Engels held four years later a totally different speech, extolling on the contrary the virtues of Germanic conquest:

“The history of a thousand years ought to have shown them [*the “dying nationalities” of Bohemia, Carinthia, Dalmatia, the Bretons, Basques, Welsh, etc ...*] that if all the territory east of the Elbe and Saale had at one time been occupied by kindred Slavonians, this fact merely proved the *historical tendency* and at the same time the *physical and intellectual power of the German nation* to subdue and assimilate its ancient neighbors, and this tendency of absorption on the part of the Germans had always been, *and still was*, one of the mightiest means by which *the civilisation of Western Europe had been spread in the east of that continent*, and that it could only cease whenever the process of germanisation had reached the frontier of a large, compact, unbroken nation, capable of independent national life, such as the Hungarians, and *in some degree* the Poles, and that therefore the natural and inevitable fate of these dying nations was to allow this process of dissolution and absorption by their stronger neighbors to complete itself⁵⁰ ...”

The monarchical restoration undertaken in 1815 at the Vienna Congress, after the fall of Napoleon, aimed to create a new European order made of “wisdom, reason, justice and politeness” and to restore the institutions destroyed by the French Revolution and the First Empire. The center of gravity of this policy was Austria, a plurinational state governed by police, army and spies; a state that offered little prospect for intellectual as well as material innovation, where there were no public trials, where newspapers and books were censored, schools and universities supervised. In 1873, Bakunin quotes the Emperor's own words in an audience granted to the teachers of Laibach High School: “Fashion is today with

⁴⁷ “The Magyar Struggle“, 13 january 1849, MECW vol. 8, p. 236.

⁴⁸ Engels to Bernstein. 22 and 25 February 1882, MECW, vol. 46, p. 204.

⁴⁹ Engels, “The Beginning of the End in Austria”, 27 january 1848, MECW vol. 6, p. 531.

⁵⁰ Engels, *New York Daily Tribune*, 24 april 1852.

new ideas (...), and I cannot, and can never congratulate myself. Stick to old ideas: they made the happiness of our ancestors, why would not they make ours? I do not need scholarly subjects but obedient subjects. To train them is your duty. Who is in my service must teach what I order; those who cannot or will not, may go away, otherwise I will drive them away..." Bakunin adds that the emperor kept his word. Until 1848 there reigned in Austria unlimited arbitrariness; a system of government was established which "gave itself the essential task of lulling and abetting the subjects of his majesty". All political life had ceased. The literary life had fallen to the level of works of amateurs. The natural sciences, says Bakunin, were fifty years behind the level attained in the rest of Europe. Agriculture and commerce were "in a situation comparable to that of China." Metternich's European project succeeded. The order established in 1815 in Vienna was confirmed and was not questioned until 1848.

The destruction of the Austrian Empire, which subjugated millions of Slavs, was for Bakunin a primary objective. "The Austrian Empire is over (...). If it still retains a semblance of life, it owes it only to the calculated patience of Russia and Prussia, who temporize and do not yet wish to share it, both hoping in secret that a favorable opportunity will enable them to claim the lion's share."⁵¹

Bakunin indicates that until 1815 the initiative of reaction in Europe belonged to the Habsburg empire. From 1815 to 1866, Austria and Prussia shared this role, though with a preponderance for the former. After 1866, Germany dominated by Prussia became the "main focus of all reactionary movements in Europe". In reality, one could question the validity of the last date given by Bakunin, which obviously refers to the Prussian victory over the Austrians at Sadowa. Indeed, during the Polish uprising of 1863, Austria, though a participant of the partition of Poland, had joined the concert of protests against the repression carried out by Russia. This ambiguous attitude had earned Austria reproaches from France and England for not having translated the protests into action, as well as reproaches of Russia, because of these protests. An important change in the balance of power between the three powers of Central Europe followed, for the last vestiges of monarchical solidarity that still existed between Austria and Russia had been definitively swept away.

Bismarck, who had merely proclaimed his neutrality, had withdrawn all the benefits of the insurrection: Russia had increased her isolation in Europe; Austria had broken the few links which still united her with Russia; and, in return, isolated Russia was in a state of increased dependence on Prussia, the only State which would not have disavowed it. Therefore, Prussia was certain that Russia would remain neutral in any venture it will try in the South against Austria and in the West against France. As a result, the end of Austrian hegemony in Germany dates back to 1863, and not from 1866, when it was crushed in Sadowa.

This slight discrepancy, however, does not invalidate the substance of Bakunin's analysis of Bismarck's international policy, based on the assumption that Prussia would not have been able to undertake anything if she had not been absolutely confident in Russian neutrality on its eastern frontier during the wars against Austria in 1866 and against France in 1870. That there had been, as Bakunin thinks, secret agreements formerly established between Bismarck and the Tsar, remains ultimately a secondary question.

1863 is also the date of the implementation by Austria of one of these "restorative tonics" of which Bakunin speaks, in order to unify Germany under the control of the Habsburgs. German princes were invited to a conference in Frankfurt to reform the Federal constitution. This is the last attempt to unify Germany with the consent of the princes who, moreover, owed their legitimacy and sovereignty only to the fact that Germany was not united ... There was to be an Executive

⁵¹ IV, 249.

Directory of five States, consisting of Austria, Prussia and three other States. Princes lost their right of veto; German forces were to be united in an Austrian-controlled army. Bismarck managed – with difficulty – to break this plan. Austria then definitively lost the initiative in Germany. Its defeat at Sadowa by the Prussian army was only the military confirmation of a situation that had been politically settled three years before. Austria then was no longer able to compete with Prussia. It ceased to be what Bakunin calls a “historic nation”.

After the German victory of 1871, Bismarck set himself several objectives:

- a) To prevent the recovery of France, to check its desire for revenge.
- b) To maintain its international isolation and prevent a rapprochement between France and Russia which would encircle Germany.
- c) To maintain good relations between Austria and Russia in order to avoid being entangled in a war between them which could be triggered off by their conflict of interest in the Balkans.
- d) To strengthen the forces of conservatism and anti-revolution in Europe against the challenges of socialism and republicanism.

The first objective failed because France was reconstituted with astounding rapidity, paid in record time the enormous compensation that Bismarck had imposed and became as soon as 1875 a potential threat to Germany. Bismarck had implemented an extremely complex (and fluctuating) alliance system: a double alliance with Austria in 1879, then in 1881 an alliance between the three emperors (Germany, Austria, Russia) which included a strictly secret protocol, which was not revealed until First World War. The three powers assured that they would remain benevolently neutral in a future conflict, except in the case of an unprovoked attack by Germany on France or by Russia on Austria-Hungary. The “Treaty of the Three Emperors” did not resist a crisis in the Balkans (1885-1887) which deteriorated relations between Russia and Austria. Bismarck then drafted a secret treaty between Germany and Russia, called the “Reinsurance Treaty” which was signed in June 1887. It was a defensive alliance: Germany promised to stay neutral if Russia was attacked by Austria; Russia would stay neutral if France attacked Germany. The purpose of this treaty was to reduce the possibility of a Franco-Russian alliance.

Things did not turn in favor of Bismarck because the new emperor, William II, who had once been an enthusiastic advocate of the Russian alliance, was now anti-Russian and pro-English (he was the grandson of Queen Victoria). “He was much in the hands of the military men, particularly of Waldersee, the new chief-of-staff, men who thought exclusively of a war on two fronts and wished to plan a campaign against Russia in Galicia in co-operation with Austria-Hungary. The corollary of this was close alliance with England.”⁵²

When Bismarck was forced to resign as Chancellor in 1890, William II refused to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. Four months later, one of Bismarck's worst fears came true. A rapprochement had taken place between Russia and France, whose economic expansion was helping to finance the industrialization of Russia. As part of this rapprochement, a French naval squadron visited the Russian Naval Base of Kronstadt. Bismarck's nightmare had become a distinct possibility. In 1896 the treaty was exposed by a German newspaper, the *Hamburger Nachrichten*, which caused an outcry in Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Directly or indirectly, Bismarck “was responsible for the network of treaties and agreements from whose restraints no aggressive power could escape without

⁵² A.J.P. Taylor, *The struggle for mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 326.

catastrophic results. Formerly at least, the reinsurance treaty secured Germany against an offensive, though not a defensive French-Russian alliance.”⁵³

It was not so much foreign policy that opposed Bismarck and the emperor but their oppositions on the labor movement. The anti-socialist laws of 1878 had totally failed to break the rise of workers' organizations. On the contrary, these had developed strongly by the very fact of repression. Bismarck had hoped that a confrontational policy would allow him to revise the constitution in a more authoritarian way. “The conflict was primarily on a domestic issue — whether to repudiate the imperial constitution and crush the social democrats by military force.”⁵⁴

For his part, the new emperor wanted to win the favor of the labor movement (at least in a first time, because it did not last) and wanted to get rid of the guardianship of the Chancellor, who did not realize that he was politically isolated, his authoritarian and brittle attitude having cut him off from his peers and his collaborators.

IV. – ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE GERMAN MODEL

Engels considers that the criterion that determines the historical and progressive nature of a nation is its capacity to form a state. Among all the nations of Central Europe, only three of them conveyed progress and intervened positively in history: the Germans, the Poles and Magyars – in other texts Engels adopts another order, he says: Germans, Magyars and “to some extent Poles”. Engels does not hesitate to put himself in contradiction with his own principles. His classification is very strange if we stick to the criteria that should be those of “historical materialism”, for Poland and Hungary were nations characterized by the existence of a very strong aristocratic class ⁵⁵, by the domination of large landed property and the almost total absence of industry: it is surprising that the founders of so-called scientific socialism should recognize in such a context – societies dominated by a large landed aristocracy, without a notable bourgeoisie or working class – the conditions for a progressive historical evolution. Among the criteria for joining the club of historic nations, there is also the capacity to resist invasions: this should be enough to exclude Poland and Hungary. In fact, the criteria defining Poland and Hungary as “historic nations” owe nothing to “historical materialism” but to German *Realpolitik*. We have seen that what gives Poland its historical character is in reality its position as a buffer, as a protective glaze between Russia and Germany. As for Hungary, it derives its status as a historical nation from the fact that although dominated by the Germans, it in turn dominated millions of Slavs.

According to Bakunin, the Germans of Austria realized they had to renounce domination over the Magyars, and finally recognized the latter's right to an independent existence: “of all the nationalities inhabiting the Austrian Empire, the Magyars, after the Germans, are the most state-minded”⁵⁶. Bakunin has a certain sympathy for the Hungarians, who had never ceased to fight against the Austrian

⁵³ Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the development of Germany*, vol III, Princeton University Press Library, 1990, p. 273.

⁵⁴ A.J.P. Taylor, *The struggle for mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 338.

⁵⁵ The Polish Constitution of 1791, in which the principles of constitutional democracy, even if limited, appear for the first time in Central Europe, declares that “in society everything comes from the will of the nation”: but the nation is the *szlachta*, the Polish nobility, that is 10% of the population, who alone enjoys individual rights and political freedoms, while serfdom is maintained. By way of comparison, the French nobility at the same time accounted for 1% of the population.

⁵⁶ Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*.

occupation and who, “despite the most brutal persecutions and the most drastic measures by which the Austrian government in the nine years from 1850 to 1859 tried to break their resistance, they refused to renounce their national independence”.

At the Slav congress in 1848, Bakunin, who was the only Russian present, had fought the pretensions of the Panslavs to reverse the balance of power in Austria, and who in their turn attempted to achieve hegemony of the Slavs over the Germans and the Magyars. He then recommended to the Slavs to align their claims with those of the Hungarians, namely: Slav troops commanded by Slavic generals, and Slavic finances. He asserted the need for the Slavs of Austria to negotiate with the Hungarians because he thought that the former needed allies. He knew that the Magyars dominated millions of Slavs, but he thought that an alliance was necessary to change the balance of power and that a negotiated solution would be possible once the common enemy was defeated. During his second stay in Prague, he was delighted to see the troops, composed mainly of Magyar regiments, sympathize with the population, and he was convinced that these regiments would rally to the revolution, which would, according to him, “prelude to the foundation of a revolutionary army in Bohemia”.

The Bakunin of 1848, who was not yet an anarchist, let us remember, already did not conceive of the revolution as a phenomenon confined within national limits, even if it had first to satisfy the national demands of the oppressed peoples. It should be remembered that the Appeal to the Slavs he wrote at this time was the first text that subordinated the realization of national demands to the solution of the social question. Bakunin’s intention was to constitute, in this center of gravity of Europe that was Bohemia, a “revolutionary camp” from which it would have been possible to develop the democratic revolution, to lead the offensive to the outside, to help the Magyars and to carry democratic propaganda in Russia. Bakunin constantly expresses the feeling of a community of views between the German, Slav and Hungarian democrats who could, after the fall of the despotic forces, make it possible to overcome the remaining antagonisms⁵⁷. The Russian revolutionary, quite clearly, was aware of a kind of democratic Mitteleuropa which went beyond narrowly national barriers, and which contrasted in any case with the division created by Engels and Marx between revolutionary nations and counter-revolutionary nations.

However, neither Austria nor Hungary, says Bakunin, “even in its internal structure, offers any assurance of vigor, current or future”⁵⁸. Hungary is paralyzed by internal national contradictions; the Slavs of Hungary rely on the Slavs of the Turkish territories, the Romanians of Hungary on the Rumanians of Wallachia, Moldavia, Bessarabia and Bukovina. Thus the Magyars are forced to seek support from the Austrians who, in turn, fuels the “internal quarrels that prevent the kingdom from stabilizing.” Imperial Vienna, which “cannot digest the Magyar separatism,” keeps the secret hope of restoring its lost power and “excites the Slavic and Rumanian passions against the Magyars”⁵⁹.

On the other hand, Hungary, which knows nothing of the Austrians’ activities,

⁵⁷ In a general way, Bakunin underestimated the internal contradictions that divided the democrats of Central Europe and Russia. Thus, while for the Russian Democrats the main question was the abolition of serfdom, the Poles claimed above all national independence. This is one of the avatars of the question: national emancipation or social emancipation. This dilemma will appear again in 1920 when the Red Army, led by Tukhachevsky (who will lead the repression of the Kronstadt insurrection), marched on Warsaw to liberate the Poles “socially”: these, preferring their national independence, or perhaps not enjoying Leninian methods of social emancipation, beat the Russians.

⁵⁸ IV, 229.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 15.

has established secret relations with Prussia, whose Chancellor Bismarck, “foreseeing an inevitable war against the vanquished empire of Austria, makes advances to the Magyars”. Thus, despite its liberal constitution and “the indisputable skill of the Magyar leaders,” the kingdom of Hungary is gnawed by the same “chronic disease” as Austria: racial conflict.

The Northern Slavs, the Poles, have never stopped fighting. Unfortunately, the ruling parties, largely noble, do not want to give up their privileges and are forced to seek the support of a Napoleon, sometimes the alliance with the Jesuits or the Austrian feudal lords. In one hundred years of uninterrupted struggle, the Poles have tried everything: “conspiracies of the nobility, plots of the petty bourgeoisie, bands of insurgents operating arms in hand, national uprisings and, finally, all the tricks of diplomacy, even the support of the Church. They tried everything, clung to everything and everything dropped and betrayed them.”

“The Poles, heroes and martyrs, have a great past of glory; the Slavs are still children and all their historical importance lies in the future. The Slavic world, the Slavic question are not real facts, but a hope, and a hope which only social revolution can fulfill. But the Poles, of course, we speak of the patriots, who belong for the most part to the cultivated class and especially to the nobility, have so far shown little desire for this revolution ⁶⁰.”

Bakunin thus distinguishes between Poles and Slavs, suggesting that both are at different stages of historical evolution: he seems to think that the Poles are engaging in a downward slope of their history. Thus, when Bakunin asserts that “the nineteenth century can be called the century of general awakening of the Slav people” ⁶¹, is it necessary to conclude that Poland is not included in this process; it is not a historic nation, an expression that Bakunin also uses on occasion. There is, he says, little in common between the Slavic world, “which has no existence yet,” and the Polish patriotic world “which is more or less at the end of its career.” Also, adds Bakunin, “our century has also seen the awakening of the Slavs of the West and the South”, which are classified by Marx and Engels among the “historical waste” and the “residues of nations”. Bohemia and Turkish Serbia became the home of the emancipation movement of the Western and Southern Slavs. The question is therefore to know under what conditions the Slav renaissance can be accomplished, and that is where the problem of the German model comes into play. The alternative posed by Bakunin is: the hegemony of the state or the liberation of peoples and of the proletariat.

“Must the Slavs, can they free themselves from foreign domination and especially from German yoke, for them the most hateful, by resorting in their turn to the German method of conquest, rapine and coercion to compel the masses of subjugated Slav masses to be what they hate most, formerly faithful German subjects, and henceforth good Slavic subjects? Or should they do so only by rebelling together with the whole European proletariat, by means of social revolution?” ⁶²

To ask the question is to answer it, says Bakunin. The alignment of the Slavs with the German model, the constitution of a bureaucratic, military, police, and centralized state “which necessarily aspires, because of its own nature, to conquer, enslave, stifle everything around it that exists, lives, gravitates and breathes”, would be a disaster. Such a state, which has found “its last expression in the Pan-

⁶⁰ IV, 271.

⁶¹ IV 233.

⁶² IV, 234.

German Empire,” offers an undeniable advantage, but only for “the privileged minority, the clergy, the nobility, the bourgeoisie, even the cultured class, that is to say that class which, in the name of its patent erudition and alleged intellectual superiority, thinks itself destined to rule the masses”⁶³.

But for the proletariat itself, “the bigger the state, the heavier the chains and the more stifling the prisons”. Taking the Hegelian point of view according to which each state, being the natural enemy of all other states, can only assert itself by waging war, Bakunin believes that any state “that does not just exist on the paper (...) but that wants to be a real, sovereign, independent, state must necessarily be a conquering state”⁶⁴. This fact corresponds to an inexorable law, identical to that of competition, which on the economic ground requires that small and medium capitals be absorbed by big capital. In the same way, says Bakunin, the small and middle states are engulfed by empires: “no average state can today have an independent existence”⁶⁵.

Bakunin's attitude differs from that of Marx, and especially that of Engels, in two respects:

- Obviously, Engels is satisfied with the disappearance of the small nations, the “flower-nations” for it is their “natural fate” to be dissolved and absorbed by their stronger neighbors. Bakunin makes the same observation: historical evolution inevitably leads to the absorption of small nations into large state blocks. But he does not consider this as a necessarily positive fact, as a historical progress for he doesn't question the right of nations to exist;

- In Bakunin's view, national unity by the state means state centralization and the creation of greater means of repression against the working class as well as the improvement of the means of domination. Marx and Engels consider that national unity (of Germany in this case) is a prerequisite for effective labor action because: *a*) as long as it is not achieved, it constitutes a claim that diverts the proletariat of the social struggle, and *b*) because it creates the institutional context (parliament, representative system) in which the proletariat can act.

For his part, Bakunin shows that the representative system, by the mystifying consensus that it creates, is the most efficient way of constituting a strong centralized state. The “democratic” state thus constituted can, just as much as the autocratic state – and even more efficiently – trample on the rights of peoples. Marx and Engels missed this point because they were simply convinced that the working class, within the framework of existing institutions, could take power, which Bakunin categorically denied.

Bakunin's approach did not consist of simply taking the opposite of that of Marx and asserting that it was not the German nation, but the Slav peoples who have the historically progressive role in Europe and therefore concluding that the Slavs had to constitute a big Slavic state rallying all the small Slavic nations of Europe. Bakunin clearly states that this solution would be worse than the evil to which he wishes to remedy, because *a*) the constitution of a great Slav state would only enslave the Slavs themselves; *b*) because this would inevitably lead to the attempt to subjugate the Germans to the Panslav yoke.

⁶³ IV, 234.

⁶⁴ IV 235.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

“To hell with all the Slavs and all their military future, if after several centuries of slavery, martyrdom, and gagging, they were to bring new chains to mankind!”⁶⁶

Bakunin believes that the historical moment of the Slavs lies in the future and that their inability to form a state, which has been a handicap in the past, will characterize the particular form of their intervention when their time comes. The Hegelian inspiration in this reasoning is obvious. But Bakunin is unequivocal: the Tsarist state can in no way be an instrument – even an involuntary one – of emancipation of the Slavs: “It is in Moscow that the slavery of all the Slav peoples gathered under the Russian scepter will be broken, and with it at the same time and for all time, all European slavery will be buried in its fall under its own ruins⁶⁷.” Slavs will be able to emancipate themselves, they will be able to destroy the German model of State “not by vain efforts to subjugate in their turn the Germans to their domination and turn them into slaves of their Slavic state”, but by calling for social revolution. “What in the past made their weakness, namely their inability to form a state, is today their strength; it constitutes their right to the future and lends meaning to all their current national movements.”⁶⁸

Nothing is more harmful than making the “pseudo-principle of nationality the ideal of all popular aspirations”. Nationality is not a “universal human principle” but a “historical fact, limited to a region”, which has an unquestionable right to exist, “like all that is real and without danger”. The essence of nationality is the product of a given historical epoch and of given conditions of existence; it is formed by the character of each nation, its way of living, of thinking, of feeling. Every nation, like every individual, has the right to be itself: “In this lies all the so-called national rights. But it does not follow that a nation, an individual, have the right or would benefit by making of its nationality, of his individuality, a question of principle and that they must drag this millstone all their life⁶⁹”:

“On the contrary, the less they think about them, the more they absorb the substance common to all mankind, the more the nationality of the one and the individuality of the other take form and meaning.”⁷⁰

The Slavs will remain in their state of extreme insignificance and misery “as long as they keep on being interested in their narrow, selfish and at the same time abstract panslavism”. Bakunin had observed that at all periods of history an ideal common to all mankind dominated all other ideals of a more particular and exclusively national character: “the nation or nations which discover their vocation, that is to say, sufficient understanding, passion and energy to devote themselves entirely to this common ideal, become *par excellence* historic nations.”⁷¹ The “universal principle” that dominates today, says Bakunin, is the suppression of economic exploitation and political oppression, the social revolution. Certainly, the problem will not be solved without a bloody and terrifying struggle, and “the real situation, indeed the importance of every nation will depend on the direction and

⁶⁶ IV, 234.

⁶⁷ Letter to Herzen quoted by Fernand Rude, *De la guerre à la Commune*, p. 59, éd. Anthropos.

⁶⁸ IV, 237.

⁶⁹ Bakunin's reflections anticipate in many ways those of the Austrian Marxists confronted thirty years later with the problem of nationalities. Otto Bauer wrote in a letter to Pannekoek: “The enemy that must be fought at the moment is not the abusive denial but the abusive assertion of the national fact..” (Otto Bauer, letter 26 April 1912, archives Pannekoek, map 5/14, am.IIHS.)

⁷⁰ IV, 238.

⁷¹ IV, 238.

the part it will take in this struggle, as well as on the nature of its participation".⁷²

The Slavs can conquer their rightful place in history only if they are animated by the universal ideal of social revolution, the destruction of political states by free social organization, from the bottom up, without any government interference, by means of free popular, economic associations, founded, beyond the state frontiers, on productive labor: these are the indications, actually summary, that Bakunin gives to solve at the same time the social question and national antagonisms. The conclusion that he suggests is very pragmatic: "the Slav proletariat must join the International Association of Workers *en masse*"⁷³.

One could say that, in retrospect, Bakunin's anticipations of the Slavs' "historic" anti-state mission proved to be wrong: the Russian revolution did not result in the destruction of the states, in a free social organization, in free economic associations, etc. But this was the project of the Soviet system that began to take shape at the beginning of the revolution. This project was so much in line with Bakunin's expectations that when Lenin succeeded in imposing on the bewildered Bolshevik leaders the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" he was accused of having rallied Bakunin's positions! If Bakunin's expectations did not come true, it was because state socialism eventually prevailed over libertarian socialism in the course of a terrible confrontation. Bakunin's warnings against state socialism turned out to be prophetic.

When one considers the subsequent evolution of the situation in Eastern Europe, should we say that Bakunin was wrong? Let us recall that for him the social revolution is only one term of an alternative the other of which is the constitution of a Panslavic State which would crush the populations under the "Pan-Russian knout"; Let us also recall that he affirmed that, for the Slavs, "the State is a tomb"⁷⁴. He was certainly mistaken in asserting that the Slavs could never equal the "military and administrative organization" that the Germans have "brought to the highest degree of perfection". But Lenin's almost pathological admiration for the state organization and administration of Germany might confirm Bakunin's thesis that the Slavs could only constitute a state in imitation of their German neighbors.

One of Bakunin's two main works is entitled "The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution". The "knout" is a whip that was used to flog the criminals and dissidents in Tsarist Russia. A typically Russian institution, in a way. But why "knouto-Germanic"? The association of the knout and Germany comes from the fact that for Bakunin, the political power as well as the reigning dynasty in Russia were of Germanic inspiration. Marx's positions on the Russia of his day proved embarrassing afterwards for his followers, even if they invoked the historical context to try to temper his analyzes or by cooking them in the "historical materialist" sauce. It is indeed difficult to convince the readers that Russian Tsarism was a new Genghis Khan eager to conquer the world and that it had plotted for centuries to impose on Europe "Eastern barbarism" and "Mongol rule". Even in Marx's time such paranoid exaggerations should have aroused a minimum of critical thinking; yet a large part of German social democrats integrated these ideas. They had assimilated them so well that the Russian threat and Marx's Russophobic views were the main arguments that motivated the German socialists to support the war.

⁷² IV, 240.

⁷³ IV, 238.

⁷⁴ "The Germans seek in the state their life and their liberty; for the Slavs, on the contrary, the state is a tomb." (*Statism and Anarchy*)

There were however some socialist theorists who could be critical. This is the case of David Ryazanov, a Russian social democrat ⁷⁵. In 1909, in the *Neue Zeit*, the theoretical organ of the SPD, he analyzed in detail Marx's theories on the history of Russia and on British foreign policy, which Marx, inspired by a fanatical Russophobe called Urquhart, thought it was totally subservient to Russia. Ryazanov showed that Marx was greatly mistaken. It may even be said that Ryazanov applied historical materialism better than Marx, who, obsessed by his russophobia and by purely political considerations, had neglected the importance of the evolution of economic and social conditions – which Bakunin in the 1870s had perfectly perceived. Marxists of the second generation were able to see that conditions had changed since Marx: Tsarist Russia was no longer able to be the “policeman of Europe” and was on the contrary threatened by its internal social contradictions – on point on which Bakunin, once again, had been insisting for a long time.

V. – GERMANY: NO ORGANIC UNION WITH THE CATHOLICS

During the Crimean War, which brought into conflict France, England, Turkey, and Sardinia against Russia, Prussia had remained neutral. According to Bakunin, this neutrality was explained by a concordance of interests between Prussia and Russia, which later materialized in Russia's indirect aid to Prussia in 1870, during the Franco-Prussian war.

But before continuing, it seems important to us to emphasize a certain number of points of agreement between Bakunin and Marx. Both believe that a state cannot be truly formed if it does not have access to the sea. “The land is enough for a system of limited territorial encroachments,” says Marx, “but the sea is indispensable for universal aggression. Only by transforming Muscovy's purely continental power into an empire bordering on the sea could the traditional limits of Moscow's policy be surpassed”.⁷⁶

Bakunin similarly states that “no state can hoist itself to the rank of a great power if it does not have vast maritime borders which assure it direct communications with the whole world and allow it to participate without intermediary in the evolution of the world”. He recalls that “Greece is nothing but a coastline”, that Rome has become a powerful state only from the moment when she became a maritime power. In modern history, Italy, then Holland and England were maritime powers. On the other hand one of the causes of Germany's backwardness is the lack of a large coastline.

Since the detachment of the Dutch cities from the Hanseatic league, which caused the empire to lose most of its Baltic coast, “the whole progressive movement of Germany, tending to form a new and powerful state, was concentrated in the Brandenburg electorate. And indeed, by their constant efforts to

⁷⁵ See: *Marx and Anglo-Russian Relations and Other Writings*, D.B. Riazanov. Francis Boutle Publishers, 2003.

See also: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Russian Menace to Europe* (A collection of articles, speeches, letters and news dispatches selected and edited by Paul W. Blackstock and Bert F. Hoselitz), *Allen and Unwin*, 1953. Blackstock and Hoselitz's initiative strongly displeases orthodox marxists *who accuse it of being* “a highly arbitrary selection from the works of Marx and Engels, which fails to give a rounded picture of what their views on and connections with Russia were and how these views and connections developed. This selection is accompanied, moreover, by a commentary which, for all its parade of bibliographical learning, adds little to our understanding of the subject and is in places downright misleading.”

(<https://www.marxists.org/archive/pearce/1953/xx/me-russia.html>)

⁷⁶ Marx, quoted by Riazanov, “Le tsarisme russe et la naissance du capitalisme anglais”, in *La Russie*, 10/18, p. 48.

take hold of the Baltic coast, the electors of Brandenburg rendered Germany an eminent service; they created, one may say, the conditions of its present greatness, first of all conquering Königsberg, and then, in the first partition of Poland, getting hold of Danzig. But all that was still not enough ; Kiel and, in general, the whole of Schleswig and Holstein were to be seized.”⁷⁷

Continuing his reasoning, Bakunin declares that the Germans consider that “the whole of the Danube is a German river”, in which he anticipates for ten years a declaration which Engels will make in a letter he wrote to Kautsky on 7-15 february 1882.

During the Crimean War, Prussia had remained indifferent to Russian claims and showed no interest in the Eastern question. Bismarck had no objection to Russian control of the Straits and of the mouth of the Danube, as this posed no threat to his own preoccupations, which were confined to securing the supremacy of Prussia in Northern Germany, that is to say in Protestant Germany. After Sadowa (1866), Bismarck was content to leave the southern German states in their “independent international existence”. He used to repeat that “we have done enough for our generation” and did not care to annex German states dominated by Catholics who could, by universal suffrage, oppose his policy.

European problems seemed to be concentrated elsewhere, particularly in the Middle East, of which Bismarck was not interested. Between 1848 and 1867, Prussia had moved to the West: in 1848 it was an autocratic monarchy still dependent on Russian pressure. In 1867, after the introduction of universal suffrage, it was the leader of a confederation with liberal institutions, with a strong industrial and financial power and able to protect itself. War and aggressive foreign policy in Germany were then the prerogative of the left.

The Luxemburg crisis is exemplary of this trend. The Grand Duchy was an old Empire land, whose inhabitants did not feel German at all, and it was under the sovereignty of the King of Holland. The presence of Prussian troops on its territory was liable to lead into a conflict with France. Bismarck had no intention of annexing Luxembourg, which did not fit into his plan for the union of Northern Germany, and which was of no economic interest – its heavy industry had not developed there yet.

In addition, the chancellor then needed peace outside to carry out his project of national construction inside. Prophetic, he declared at the time: “I shall avoid this war as much as I can; for I know that as soon as it begins, it will never end.” The German liberals and democrats were the ones who protested most against the compromise that was reached, granting sovereignty to the Grand Duchy and guaranteeing its neutrality. The social-democrat Bebel was one of those who protested the strongest. If Bismarck was indeed the architect of German unity, he was not, however, the monster thirsting for conquest described by Bakunin.

At the risk of contradicting the commonly accepted image of Bismarck, there is no evidence that he really had wanted the war with France, and after the victory, he opposed the annexation of Metz: “I do not like the idea of having so many French people in our house who do not want to be there.”⁷⁸

Likewise, he had always been reluctant to the prospect of an organic union with the Catholics of Southern Germany, and when this union was achieved, it created important problems for Bismarck. He did not wish to extend his power south of the

⁷⁷ IV, 276.

⁷⁸ A.J.P. Taylor, *Bismarck*, Hamish Hamilton, p. 133.

Bismarck: “I shall not advise any active involvement in this matter as long as I see no German interest in all of it which would — if you'll pardon the bluntness of the expression — not be worth the healthy bones of a single Pomeranian musketeer.” — Speech in the Reichstag, 5 December, 1876, referring to the Oriental crisis.

Main, which represented the boundary between Protestant Germany and Catholic Germany. His political and religious convictions were against such an extension. Lutheranism was his deepest principle and he regarded the South Germans as corrupted by Catholicism and French liberalism. The Germany he wanted to build was to be exclusively Protestant without interests in the Danube Valley or the Near East. He declared in December 1870 that Germany had no interest in the question of the East which “is worth the skin of a Pomeranian musketeer.”⁷⁹ When he wanted to define Germany, it was Pomerania, on the Baltic, which he thought of, not to Bavaria or Austria. The Eastern question was the affair of Austria, and, above all, of Russia.

VI. – RUSSIA AS REAL POWER

On what material elements did Bakunin and Marx establish their points of view on the respective role of Germany and Russia, and what were the theoretical foundations on which their points of view were based? On March 24, 1870, Marx addressed on behalf of the General Council a letter to the Russian section of Geneva in which he declared that “Russia’s violent conquest of Poland provides a pernicious support and real reason for the existence of a military regime in Germany, and, as a consequence, on the whole Continent”⁸⁰.

Bakunin knew about this letter and was very surprised that the “famous leader of the German Communists” should believe such nonsense. Bakunin comments that Marx “singularly ignores the history of his own country”: “Have we ever seen a nation inferior in civilization impose or inoculate its own principles on a much more civilized country, unless it is by means of conquest? But Germany, as far as I know, has never been conquered by Russia. It is therefore perfectly impossible that she could have adopted any Russian principle”⁸¹. For Germany has an unquestionable preponderance over Russia in terms of political, administrative, legal, industrial, commercial, scientific and social development. And if the Russians never came to Germany as conquerors, they did not come either as teachers or administrators: “whence it follows that if Germany has actually borrowed anything from official Russia, which I formally deny, it could only be by inclination and taste.”⁸²

“The dignity of every nation, as that of every individual [must] consist, according to me, mainly of this that everyone accepts all the responsibility of its actions, without trying pitifully to blame the others”⁸³.

The intellectual influence, the power, the wealth of Russia are, from this point of view, null. It would therefore be more worthy of Marx if, “instead of seeking to console national vanity by falsely attributing the faults, crimes, and shame of Germany to a foreign influence, he was willing to employ his immense erudition to prove, in accordance with justice and historical truth, that Germany has produced, worn and historically developed in itself all the elements of her present slavery”⁸⁴.

In other words, Bakunin sends Marx back to his own historical method, and

⁷⁹ A.J.P. Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 167.

⁸⁰ MECW, Volume 21, p. 110.

⁸¹ Bakunin, VIII, 62.

⁸² VIII, 63.

⁸³ VIII, 61. Bakunin also writes, page 59, that each people is “more or less in solidarity with their state and responsible for the acts committed by it in its name and by its arm, until they have overthrown and destroyed that state.”

⁸⁴ VIII, 63-64.

invites him to take into consideration the respective development of the productive forces of Russia and Germany, the state of their cultural, political, scientific and social development. The question here is: can a relatively underdeveloped society impose its will or influence to another much more developed society. Bakunin does not exclude this possibility – he mentions several cases – and recognizes that it is not always the most civilized peoples who have prevailed over the barbarian peoples – but he says that this is possible only in the case of a direct and military conquest, and besides the conqueror is usually assimilated by the conquered society.

In a letter to Liebknecht, Bakunin had wondered about the reasons why the Germans, “who have so great a reputation for science and conscience, and who became famous especially for their truly remarkable ability to understand men and things, the nations as well as the individuals, in their real and living reality, or, if you will allow me this somewhat metaphysical expression, in their objective reality, how come that when they speak of the Russians and of Russia they lose all these eminent qualities which distinguish their nation? It is because we are too close neighbours,” says Bakunin, “and that for a century and a half we have been constantly exercising over each other a mutual fatal influence”⁸⁵.

In this letter to Liebknecht, Bakunin calls to distinguish in the German civilization several distinct aspects:

1. The ideal world, science, art, “a world which, although created in Germany, has never been achieved in Germany and which glides over your sad governmental and bourgeois reality, as a beautiful dream”.
2. The official world, that of the princes, the clergy, the army, the bureaucracy.
3. Between these two worlds, there is that of the bourgeoisie, who “aspire eternally to the first without reaching it, and continually protests against the second, without ever being able, and, I will even add, without wishing to part from it.”
4. Next to these three worlds, finally, a fourth begins to rise, that of the proletariat, the “world of tomorrow”.⁸⁶

Of all these worlds, only two have influenced Russia: the ideal world and the official world. That of the bourgeoisie is too opposed to the Russian national character and the world of workers is still too recent. The letter to Liebknecht develops only the German cultural influence on Russia: “Germany's science, metaphysics, poetry and music were our refuge and our only consolation”, says Bakunin, who paints an astonishing picture of the Russian intellectual youth (of which he had been an active member), eager to learn, and whose present and future are “condemned by the political, economic and social organization of the Empire”; German science, concludes the Russian revolutionary, “drives our revolutionary youth by position and conviction, beyond theoretical discussions, to action.”

“You can see, Citizen Liebknecht, that far from denying the benefits we owe to German science, we bow before it with a profound respect.”⁸⁷

A second letter was announced which was to develop the negative influence of the German “official world” on Russia. It seems not to have been written, but Bakunin's ideas on the subject are known to have been developed throughout his

⁸⁵ VI, 112-113.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

work: the Russian empire is, according to him, be a German creation. The Slavs, by their nature, are not a “political people, that is to say, capable of forming a state”⁸⁸, an opinion which is also that of Marx and Engels. Apart from a few ephemeral examples – the Moravian kingdom of the Czechs, the Dushan kingdom of the Serbs – “no Slavic nation has on its own created a state”.

Engels himself notes that the Czarina Catherine II was called Sophie-Auguste von Anhalt-Zerbst. The Germans held the administrative and military command posts in the empire; the young nobles were sent to the universities of Goettingen, Jena, Leipzig. The first Russian university, founded in Moscow in 1756, was in the hands of the Germans. Herzen declared that the Germans provided everything to Russia: chamberlains, generals, professors, empresses and midwives. It is therefore not without some reason that Bakunin writes that the Germans brought to Russia the “political, administrative, bureaucratic and military science” and the “Protestant-Germanic worship of the sovereign”. “It is to the Germans,” he says, “that we owe our political, administrative, police, military, and bureaucratic education, and all the completion of our imperial edifice, even our august dynasty”⁸⁹.

An examination of the deep structure of Russian society alone will determine what are the real possibilities for a Russian intervention in the event of a conflict with Germany.

VII. – RUSSIAN SOCIETY

Originally, the Germans’ hatred of Russia was justified, says Bakunin. “It was against our Tartar barbarism, the protest of a civilization which, German as it was, was infinitely more human.”⁹⁰ It was, in the 1820s, the protest of political liberalism against political despotism. The Germans had apparent reasons for rejecting on Russia the responsibility for the Holy Alliance⁹¹. Later, in the 1830s, German opinion sympathized with the Polish revolution drowned in blood, but forgot that Prussia had taken an active part in this repression.

In the second half of the 1830s, the emergence of the Slavic question in Austria and Turkey, the formation of a Slav party, the publication of panslavic pamphlets in German frightened the public. “The idea that Bohemia, an ancient imperial territory in the very heart of Germany, could become an independent Slavic country or, God forbid, a Russian province, made them lose their appetite and sleep.”⁹² We have seen that this perspective also greatly worried Engels and Marx.

Bakunin acknowledges that the direct influence of Russia has, in the past, been able to check the natural development of unity and democracy in Germany, who had lived a “long, long political humiliation”. After the failure of the revolution of 1848, until 1858, Germany suffered a “period of hopeless submission”⁹³. The conference of Olmütz (1850) whose clauses were unfavorable, “humiliated in an

⁸⁸ IV, 231.

⁸⁹ VIII 62-63.

⁹⁰ IV, 252.

⁹¹ The “Holy Alliance” was a coalition created on 26 September 1815 by the monarchist powers of Russia, Austria and Prussia after the defeat of Napoleon at the behest of Tsar Alexander I of Russia. The intention of the Alliance was to restrain liberalism and secularism in Europe in the wake of the French Revolutionary Wars.

⁹² IV, 253.

⁹³ IV, 335.

incredible point the Prussian monarchy to please Austria”⁹⁴. Bakunin points out, however, that the failure of the partisans of German unity did not only result of factors external to Germany, it was also the work of the German conservatives, and it aroused “the greatest joy among the Prussian party within the Court, the aristocracy and the bureaucratic-military camarilla”⁹⁵. Bismarck unreservedly supported the conclusions of this conference, which ratified the final defeat of the 1848 revolution. But, Bakunin comments, the corollary of this defeat is that “Prussia is more than ever the slave of Russia”.

“The devotion to the interests of the court of Petersburg goes so far that the Prussian minister of war and the ambassador of Prussia to the English court, friend of the king, are both replaced for having expressed their sympathies to the Western Powers.”⁹⁶

Bakunin does not deny, therefore, that at one time in its history, the policy of Prussia was largely subject to the interests of Russian diplomacy. The factual finding is, once again, concordant with that of Marx. The difference is that Marx regards German dependence on Russia as something invariable, so much so that he will say that Bismarck, during the war of 1870, was the Tsar's instrument; For Bakunin, Germany's dependence on Russia disappeared with the gradual establishment of the material bases that allowed its emancipation from this tutelage. Marx refuses to see this evolution, first of all because it went against his preconceptions about German unity, and because of his visceral Russophobia.

The essence of Bakunin's argument consists in showing that from the mid 1860s, Germany's superiority over Russia was largely strengthened in industrial, financial, administrative and scientific terms. But Bakunin also indicates the internal causes of Germany's past dependence on Russia: the aristocracy that dominated the Prussian state, as well as all the German princes, were opposed to the unity of the country: the first saw very unfavorably the fusion of Prussia into an entity where the Prussian aristocracy would lose their unity; the latter owed precisely their privileges only to the division of the country.

The situation changed from the regency of William I in 1858, and his accession to the throne in 1861. Then began, according to Bakunin, the irresistible rise of Germany as the first power on the continent, and the no less irresistible fall of Russia. The essence of Bakunin's explanation of the reversal of the balance of power is twofold:

The catastrophic internal political situation of Russia

The Russian state consisted of a huge pyramid at the top of which are the emperor, his house and a few thousand privileged. Underneath was a larger minority of senior officers, civil servants, clerics, wealthy landowners, merchants, capitalists, and parasites: for them, the Tsar was the “easy-going, beneficent, and obliging protector of the very lucrative legal thievery”⁹⁷. Below, the crowd of servants for whom the emperor was an avaricious foster father. At the bottom of

⁹⁴ In the autumn of 1850 the elector of Hesse appealed for help against his rebellious subjects. Prussia, on the one hand, Austria, on the other, sent troops in response, that nearly came to confront each other. The Tsar then sided with Austria, and the Prussian troops withdrew. An agreement was reached at Olmütz, which led Prussia to give up its plans for a union of the German states without Austria. Austria's reconstitution of the German Confederation, a loose grouping of German states, was accepted. The Olmütz conference (“Punctuation of Olmütz”) was a diplomatic reverse for Prussia, although the question of Germany's future organization was settled in April 1851 on terms unfavourable to Austria.

⁹⁵ IV, 336.

⁹⁶ IV, 336.

⁹⁷ **IV, 250.**

the pyramid, the countless millions for whom he was a denatured father, an implacable spoliator and a torturer.

The Russian cultivated society was deeply divided between those who, knowing the situation of the country, “consider that there are too many disadvantages to admit this truth,” and “those who admit it but are afraid to speak”. There was also “those who, for lack of other courage, dare to say it at least” and this minority of men devoted to the cause of the people “who are not content to say what they think”. And, finally, the mass of those who did not see and think anything.

By its very nature, the empire cannot change its attitude towards the people. It is obliged to maintain the internal order, employing a large police force, a large army, a bureaucracy and a clergy. But the internal situation of the empire is catastrophic. It reaches a stage that makes any domestic improvement impossible, “because the evil has now reached the bottom”. What Bakunin is interested in is whether the empire has reached, in terms of international policy, the capacity to “give a political meaning to its existence”: has the Russian empire been able to create “a military force capable of rivaling that of the new German empire”? “At present, the whole Russian political problem is there; as for the domestic problem, we now know that there is only one: the social revolution.”⁹⁸

The inability of the Russian economy to sustain a prolonged effort in case of war in Europe

The only case in which Russia would be in a position of strength in relation to Germany is if Germany made the mistake of invading Russia. This is a statement of the most elementary common sense, and it is absolutely astonishing that Marx, Engels, and the German Social-Democrats may have wished for a war, even “democratic”, against Russia. Bismarck was much wiser than Marx/Engels. On May 9, 1888, he wrote to the future William II: “This indestructible empire, strong in its climate, its solitudes, its lack of needs, would remain, even after its defeat, our adversary thirsting for revenge. On the other hand, an aggression against Russia would have the sole result of fortifying its cohesion.” In his *Thoughts and Memories*, he writes again: “It would be infamous and impious to break with Russia”⁹⁹.

Bakunin totally excludes the possibility of a victory in a war of which Russia would take the initiative. The Russian government would have to lead this war without the support of the people, with its only military, financial and state resources, and in this field, Russia is unable to compete with Germany.

The numerical force ratio, to begin with, is unfavorable. Indeed, Germany has an effective army of one million men who, “in terms of organization, military art, morale and armaments, is the first in the world”. In Russia, on the contrary, there is corruption and falsification of statistics. The command staff of the army exists only on paper: the officers are missing, there are no weapons, no credits.

”It will suffice to give the order to enlist so many hundreds of thousands of men, and you will have your million recruits. But how will they be organized? And who will organize them? Your reserve generals, adjutantgenerals, aides-de-camp, your Tsar's aide-de-camp, your reserve battalion or garrison commanders who only exist on paper (...). Heaven, how many tens and even hundreds of thousands of these recruits will have time to starve to death before they get regimented? (...) No banker will grant you a loan ...”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ IV, 251.

⁹⁹ Quoted by Henry Vallotton, *Bismarck et Hitler*, 117, ed., L'Âge d'homme, p. 117.

¹⁰⁰ IV 268.

Of the million men that Russia is supposed to be able to align, only a part will be regimented and armed. It will then be necessary to disperse them over the immense territory of the empire to “maintain order among this happy people who could be made furious through happiness, if we are not careful!”

In other words, any attempt to take the initiative for a war first requires preventive measures to prevent uprisings in Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and will immobilize a large part of the troops. On the other hand, the organization of the German troops and their armaments are very real. Civil and military administrative control is organized in such a way that any lasting deception is impossible. In Russia, on the contrary, “from bottom to top and from top to bottom, no one cares, so it is almost impossible to know the truth.”

* * * * *

In “The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom”¹⁰¹, written in 1890, Engels repeats point by point Bakunin’s argument fifteen years after his death.

“Strong to impregnability on the defensive side, Russia was correspondingly weak on the offensive. The mustering, organisation, equipment and movements of her armies in the interior, met with the greatest obstacles, and to all material difficulties was added the boundless corruption of the officials and officers. All attempts to make Russia capable of attack on a large scale have, so far, failed, and probably the latest, present attempts to introduce universal compulsory conscription, will fail as completely. One might say that the difficulties grow as the square of the masses to be organised, quite apart from the impossibility, with such a small town population, of finding the enormous number of officers now required.”¹⁰²

Statism and anarchy was published in 1874, and contained broad developments on the social situation of Russia, on its internal dissolution as well as on the prospects of evolution of the revolutionary movement. Marx had read the book, and the notes and commentaries he wrote in the margins of Bakunin’s text are the only – and indeed very superficial – elements of theoretical refutation of the anarchist’s ideas. But from that date onwards, there is a clear change in Marx and Engels’ approach on Russia.

The articles in which Engels deals with the social situation of Russia were written after the publication of Bakunin’s book: “The Social Problems of Russia” (1875); “Elements of a Russian 1789” (1877); “The situation in Russia” (1878), etc. Marx’s letters to Vera Zassoulitch, which reveal a fundamental change in his point of view, date back to 1881. Marx even goes as far as relativizing his own theory of the successive phases of evolution of modes of production: he writes to the Russian activist that “the ‘historical inevitability’ of this process is expressly limited to the countries of Western Europe”¹⁰³ – a point Bakunin had stressed ten years earlier. It does not matter if Bakunin has anything to do with it, but to the extent that they have read the book, it might have had some influence. While Marx and Engels were obsessively concerned with the negative influence of Russia upon Germany, they now discover that there is also a Russian people, and an *oppressed* Russian people.

As soon as he became interested in Russia’s social situation, Engels realized its inability to wage an offensive war of any size in Northern Europe. He is therefore in contradiction with his earlier alarmist statements about the Russian threat, and

¹⁰¹ MECW, vol 27.

¹⁰² MECW, vol27 p 16.

¹⁰³ Marx to Vera Zasulich. 8 March 1881 MECW vol 46, p. 71.

the statistics of the territorial expansion of the Tsarist Empire he quoted in 1858¹⁰⁴ did not take into account that this expansion was done at the expense of less developed countries than Russia. Yet Engels can't refrain from inferring that the conquest of these territories by Russia was nevertheless a relative progress for the "civilization" in these territories. Much later, in 1890¹⁰⁵, he will find that "only against those who are clearly the weaker — Sweden, Turkey, Persia—does Tsardom fight on its own account"¹⁰⁶.

Having shown that the material conditions of a Russian offensive against Germany were far from being fulfilled, Bakunin tackled the question of the political consequences of such an offensive if it actually took place. From the outset, he claims that the Russians would suffer a crushing defeat as soon as they had set foot in Germany, and the offensive war would immediately turn for them into a defensive war. Therefore, he considers two possibilities:

1. – If the Germans invade the Russian provinces and march on Moscow, the whole Russian people will rise up.
2. – If they do not commit this blunder and go north to the Baltic provinces, "they will find not only among the petty bourgeoisie, the Protestant pastors and the Jews, but also among the disgruntled barons and their student sons and through them, among the innumerable generals, officers, high and low-ranking officials from these provinces, who populate Petersburg, or who are scattered throughout Russia, many, many friends; moreover, they will raise Poland and Little Russia against the Russian Empire."¹⁰⁷

Contrary to what Bakunin thought, Bismarck was not interested in the Baltic states. He was totally uninterested in the Baltic barons, of German origin, who had class links with the Junkers. "Although many ties of personal friendship linked him with the Baltic barons, he absolutely refused to raise his voice in St. Petersburg against the policy of Russification conducted by the czarist government in the Baltic provinces. On the contrary, he assured the Russians that Germany was completely disinterested in the fate of the Baltic Germans. His attitude towards the Germans of the Habsburg empire was similar¹⁰⁸."

Concerning the Baltic Barons, Bismarck also said: "they have got into the ogre's cave, and we cannot help them. If I wanted to conduct a purely Machiavellian policy, I should even wish that they would be Russified as soon as possible; for as long as they remain German, they form an element of strength and energy"¹⁰⁹. "They went to the ogre's cavern," he said, "and we cannot help them. If I wanted to pursue a purely Machiavellian policy, I would rather have them Russified as soon as possible; because as long as they remain German, they form an element of strength and energy." These words were pronounced after the Franco-Prussian war, at a time when Bismarck was especially concerned with appeasement.

Bismarck did not forget that the Russian neutrality during the war allowed him to clear the eastern borders of Prussia of its troops: the victory against France was well worth the sacrifice of the Baltic barons. However, the last words about the element of strength and energy that the Germans represented may very well be understood as a potential threat. There is no doubt that in the event of a war against

¹⁰⁴ Cf. "La pénétration russe en Asie centrale" in *Marx Engels, La Russie*, Paris: Union générale d'Édition, 1974, collection 10/18.

¹⁰⁵ Engels, "The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom", MECW, vol. 27,

¹⁰⁶ MECW, vol 27, p 17.

¹⁰⁷ IV, 268.

¹⁰⁸ Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1840-1945*, Princeton University Press, p. 234.

¹⁰⁹ A.J.P. Taylor, *Bismarck, the Man and the Statesman*, New English Library, p. 142.

Russia, Bismarck would not have hesitated to appeal to the support of the German populations of the Baltic States.

The various elements of the balance of power between Germany and Russia lead Bakunin – who was, let us recall, a former artillery officer – to the conclusion that Germany had an overwhelming advantage over Russia. “The northwestern gates are forever closed to the empire,” he writes in *Statism and Anarchy*¹¹⁰.

Horrifying as it may be, the St. Petersburg reaction is, according to the anarchist, devoid of meaning and future. It “still continues its orgies within the borders of the empire,” but it is a declining force. The real living and intelligent reaction is in Berlin, where one can find the “complete realization of the anti-popular concept of the modern state, whose sole objective is the organization, at the largest scale, of the exploitation of labour in favor of concentrated capital in a very small number of hands”. Here lies the reign of the high bank under the protection of the fiscal, administrative and police authorities who take shelter “behind the parliamentary game of a pseudo-constitutional regime”¹¹¹. Thus are characterized the respective regimes of Russia and Germany. The first is a power on the decline, the second is an ascendant power that develops capitalism and has an incomparably greater financial potential: Germany is therefore the *model of the modern state* that capitalist industry and banking speculation need in order to realize the state centralization which alone is capable of subjugating “the millions and millions of proletarians of the mass of the people”¹¹².

Bakunin’s analysis is very close to the one Herman Gorter made in 1914:

“But Germany is superior to England because of its organization of industry, trade, communications and finance. In these sectors it is clearly more powerful. Besides the United States of America, Germany is the only capitalist State organized in the modern manner. Its absolutism, its powerful class of junkers and, consequently, its bureaucracy and its army, in conjunction with its centralized banking system, its concentrated trade, its industry and transport, have made it a model imperialist State, the only perfect imperialist State in the world. Germany unites the powerful means of absolute monarchy with those of the bourgeoisie”¹¹³.

According to Bakunin, concentration of capital and state centralization follow the same logic: they are two aspects of the same phenomenon that results in “constantly expanding their field of activity”. On closer inspection, however, the “debate” about the center of reaction in Europe was approached by Bakunin and Marx from two different perspectives.

- According to Marx and Engels, and not mentioning the utterly irrational and visceral aspect of their anti-Russian racism¹¹⁴, Russia constituted the most important threat to German democracy and German unity, the latter being the

¹¹⁰ IV, 273.

¹¹¹ IV, 210.

¹¹² IV, 211.

¹¹³ Herman Gorter, “Imperialism, the world war and social democracy” (<https://libcom.org/files/Imperialism,%20the%20world%20war%20and%20social%20democracy.pdf>).

¹¹⁴ “To the sentimental phrases about brotherhood which we are being offered here on behalf of the most counter-revolutionary nations of Europe, we reply that hatred of Russians was and still is the primary revolutionary passion among Germans; that since the revolution hatred of Czechs and Croats has been added, and that only by the most determined use of terror against these Slav peoples can we, jointly with the Poles and Magyars, safeguard the revolution.” Engels, “Democratic Pan-Slavism”, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* No. 222, February 1849.

condition for the constitution of the German proletariat as a class. Instead of considering the Russian threat – undeniable at a certain period – from the point of view of its material and historical conditions, Marx affirms it as an absolute: Russia is the driving force of all the initiatives of reaction in Europe. The founder of historical materialism has neglected to analyze the infrastructural foundations of Russian foreign policy, only to observe the political and diplomatic aspects.

- For Bakunin, the reactionary role of the Russian government's policy is undeniable, both internally and externally, but he addresses this question from the point of view of its historical perspectives: it is a considerable military power, but the empire of the Tsars is a declining power because of the internal dissolution society; its influence diminishes in proportion to the rise of German industrial and financial power. But it is precisely this rise that leads Bakunin to assert that the center of reaction in Europe has shifted to Germany.

Germany constitutes now the prototype of the modern capitalist state, which concentrates in its hands. the most powerful instruments of control and repression against the working class, the most sophisticated exploitation techniques, based, among other things, on the illusions aroused by the representative system, that Bakunin – contrary to German Social-Democracy – does not perceive as a means of emancipation, but as a necessary condition for expanding the field of activity of capitalism.

On this point, as on quite some others, Bakunin was a better “ marxist” than Marx.

VIII. – THE “GERMAN PATRIOTS” OF THE INTERNATIONAL AND THE ENCIRCLEMENT OF RUSSIA

“Citizen Marx” cannot ignore that it is an inherent tendency of any great state to expand to the detriment of the small countries that surround it. Germany herself, to reach the Baltic, did absolutely the same thing to the detriment of the Poles and Slavs. But the Germans – including the Socialists – do not seem to condemn the conquest as a “necessary manifestation of the principle of State”: if it were the case, says Bakunin, “I would sign with both hands all the curses and sentences they pronounce. against the conquests of the Russian Empire”¹¹⁵.

The 9th item of the agenda of the Geneva Congress of the IWA (3-8 September 1866) dealt with “the need to destroy the influence of Russia's despotism and absolutism in Europe, by the application of the right of peoples to self-determination and to rebuild a Poland on democratic and social bases”. It should be noted that the right to claim self-determination is granted very selectively by Marx, who drafted the text: we have seen that the Slavic population of Bohemia, for example, cannot claim it.

At that Congress, the General Council and the English delegates had joined forces against Russia. Bakunin rejoiced at the French position which demanded that this congress “be limited to the declaration that it is against all kinds of despotism in all countries”¹¹⁶. The French delegates, he adds, “refused to put all Russia, nation and government, on the ban of Europe, as the German and English delegates had done. They did not think it necessary to identify the Russian empire with the Russian people”¹¹⁷.

During this congress, Borkheim had also mentioned the Russian threat and the

¹¹⁵ Bakunin, “Aux compagnons de la Fédération jurassienne”, III, 56.

¹¹⁶ III, 58.

¹¹⁷ III, 59.

Polish question. Of the latter, he declared that it “particularly interests Germany, and in a certain sense may be called a German question,” because Poland is a barrier against Russia. Borkheim added that it is impossible to suppress permanent armies until Poland is reconstituted.

Borkheim, answered Bakunin, claims the reconstitution of a free and independent Poland “not from the point of view of natural and human right, but from the point of view of a barrier which he believes necessary to raise to safeguard the civilization of the West against the invasions of Russian barbarism”¹¹⁸. But to raise this barrier, Bakunin remarks, we must first pass on the body of Prussia: “I do not dare to believe that he did not know that Prussia cannot consent and that she will never consent freely to the reconstitution of Poland”. Moreover, Borkheim declared that it is not possible to suppress permanent armies in Europe until Poland is reconstituted. But reconstituted by whom? Bakunin asks: by these same permanent armies of Europe which are, with the monopoly of economic exploitation, “the real being of the great despotic states” ...

According to Bakunin, “the illusions and miscalculations”¹¹⁹ are most dangerous for the proletariat's cause. Borkheim should have tried to make it clear to the delegates of the German countries that in order to emancipate Poland, it is necessary, before declaring war on Russia, “to declare war on Prussia, to fight and destroy her formidable army, and at the same time to overthrow the bourgeoisie of Germany, now subservient by her interests and all her passions to Prussia; that in order to deliver Poland it will be necessary, in a word, to make the social revolution. But what means do the Social-Democrats have to force Prussified Germany to turn against Russia? These means are limited, Bakunin says, to legal political agitation which, “in the complex economy of the new empire, (...) fulfills a valuable office, that of a safety valve, but they hope for wonders. So far, they have resulted only in some beautiful but sterile speeches of prophets in the desert, pronounced by two or three socialist deputies drowned in the bourgeois mass of the national parliament. Meanwhile, Panslavist Russia and Pan-German Prussia, united tenderly in a reactionary embrace, speak little and act very much”.¹²⁰

Bakunin unaware of the Marxist argument according to which the extension of capitalism in the colonial countries was a historic advance. This argument was already developed in the *Manifesto*¹²¹. Similarly, Engels had glorified the annexation of California by the Americans in the name of civilization, to the detriment of lazy Mexicans “who could not do anything with it.”¹²² So it is not without reason that Bakunin declares that the “patriotic Germans of the

¹¹⁸ III, 62.

¹¹⁹ III, 62.

¹²⁰ III, 63-64.

¹²¹ Marx: “The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation.” (...).

“Just as [the bourgeoisie] has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.” (*Communist Manifesto*)

Engels: “...the conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilisation. (...) And the conquest of Algeria has already forced the Beys of Tunis and Tripoli, and even the Emperor of Morocco to enter upon the road of civilisation. (...). And if we may regret that the liberty of the Bedouins of the desert has been destroyed, we must not forget that these same Bedouins were a nation of robbers, (...). And after all, the modern bourgeois, with civilisation, industry, order, and at least relative enlightenment following him, is preferable to the feudal lord or to the marauding robber, with the barbarian state of society to which they belong. (Engels, “Extraordinary Revelations”, *The Northern Star* No. 535, January 22, 1848. MECW vol 6 pp.471-472.)

¹²² “...Or is it perhaps unfortunate that splendid California has been taken away from the lazy Mexicans, who could not do anything with it?” Engels, “Democratic Pan-slavism” *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* No. 222. MECW, vol. 8 p. 365

International” do not “absolutely reject the conquest, only they want to attribute it as an exclusive right to the representative nations of modern civilization, that is, to bourgeois civilization”. “The conquest made by civilized nations over barbarous peoples is their principle,” he adds: It is the application of Darwin's law to international politics ¹²³.”

“This is how the North Americans are allowed to exterminate the Indians little by little; the English to exploit the East Indies; the French to conquer Algeria; and finally the Germans to civilize, *nollens vullens*, the Slavs, in the manner that we know. But it must be expressly forbidden for the Russians to ‘seize like a prey the mountain-fortresses of the Caucasus’”.¹²⁴

From Bakunin's point of view, the “third world” countries, or the “South”, “do not constitute a priority issue. India, China, to which he devotes a few pages which it would be interesting to compare with what Marx says. Curiously, Africa is absent from his field of reflection, which is normal because the rush of Western states to share this continent will begin only ten years after his death”¹²⁵.

An examination of the writings of Marx and Engels reveals that their positions on questions of national independence are based on criteria that are totally foreign to the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination. Bakunin certainly did not know the content of the letter that Marx sent to Lassalle on June 2, 1860, but he knew what was in his mind: “Come to that, it goes without saying that, in foreign policy, there's little to be gained by using such catchwords as ‘reactionary’ and ‘revolutionary’¹²⁶.” It is with this principle that Marx and Engels stood alongside British conservatives and British imperialists in defending feudal Turkey against Russian claims to Constantinople. It should be noted that it is not out of sympathy for Turkey or out of love for British imperialism but, as Engels will reveal, because the Russian control of the straits would ultimately be a threat to the extension of German interests in the countries of the Danube. Engels went in fact far beyond Bismarck's claims.

The speech that Borkheim, the “disciple, confident and friend of citizen Charles Marx” made at the Geneva Congress of the AIT (1866) is for Bakunin characteristic of Marxist positions on Russia. Borkheim suggests to “reject the Russians on their own, to tighten them, to force them to devote to themselves”. This, Bakunin says, is the speech of a madman. This attempt to smother Russia, whose execution is otherwise impossible, would inevitably result in a terrible explosion, and this explosion would ignite and spread the fire in all Slav countries still badly civilized or Germanized. For this law of Darwin, which the “German patriots” seek to avail themselves in order to “cover their political ambition,” is a double-edged sword, because in this struggle for life, “it is not always the most civilized peoples who have indeed prevailed over the barbarian peoples”¹²⁷. Bakunin thus suggests that what still is perfectly hypothetical – the phobic fear of

¹²³ III, 57.

¹²⁴ III, 57. An allusion to the Inaugural Address of the IWA, 28 sept. 1864.

“The shameless approval, mock sympathy, or idiotic indifference, with which the upper classes of Europe have witnessed the mountain fortress of the Caucasus falling a prey to, and heroic Poland being assassinated by, Russia; the immense and unresisted encroachments of that barbarous power, whose head is at St. Petersburg, and whose hands are in every Cabinet of Europe, have taught the working classes the duty to master themselves the mysteries of international politics...” (Inaugural Address of the IWA, MECW, vol.20, p. 13.)

¹²⁵ René Berthier, “Bakounine, colonialisme et impérialisme”, http://monde-nouveau.net/ecrire/?exec=article&id_article=642

¹²⁶ Marx to Ferdinand Lassalle, MECW, Volume 41, p. 154.

¹²⁷ III, 57.

Germany being crushed by the Russians – could become reality if the suffocation of Russia proposed by the Radicals and the German Socialists was put into practice. Such a policy would not have Bismarck's approval, who was anxious to avoid at all costs a war with Russia.

About Borkheim's speech, Marx wrote to Engels on 4 October 1867 that "nobody understood him" and that it was "not merely a *tasteless* hotchpotch, but often pure blatherdash"¹²⁸. In a letter to Kugelmann, Marx writes about Borkheim that "banality and sensationalism always get the better of him". Marx adds: "There are in his speech, etc., a number of phrases in which he has fatuously garbled certain views of mine. My enemies (Vogt has already hinted in the *Neue Zürcher-Zeitung* that I am the secret author of the speech) will now have the greatest fun in making me responsible for Mr Borkheim, his follies and eccentricities."

At that time, Marx was finishing Book I of *Capital*, of which he expected a lot to establish his reputation. This explains what he says to Kugelmann:

"Here one is presenting to the public a work that has cost much trouble to write (and perhaps no work of this kind has ever been written in more difficult circumstances), with the purpose of giving the greatest possible lift to the party and of disarming even ill-disposed critics by the very method of its exposition, and at that same moment a member of the party clad in cap, bells and motley insists on standing next to one in the market-place and provokes a barrage of rotten apples and eggs, which may hit one in the head even as a party member!"¹²⁹

In that letter to Kugelmann, Marx writes: "If Borkheim were not a personal friend, I should publicly disown him." How would it have been if Borkheim had not been a friend?

Bakunin knows that the unanimity demanded by Borkheim to achieve this encirclement of Russia did not exist. Bismarck himself, he says, does not care about "attempting a madness that would have the immediate consequence of spilling all Russian forces on Germany." Finally, the Chancellor is "very pleased, on the contrary, to see them occupied far from Europe in the Far East, which leaves him, in fact, the sole master of the destinies of the West"¹³⁰

IX . – THE SEEDS OF THE GERMAN-RUSSIAN WAR

The movement of political and economic consolidation of Germany in the North-West and the military expansion of Russia in the South-East were, from Bakunin's point of view, dialectically linked. "Prussia, which is now the personification, the brain, and at the same time the arm of Germany, is firmly established on the Baltic as well as on the North Sea. The autonomy of Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg and Oldenburg is a simple and innocent joke."¹³¹

Prussia was building two large fleets, one in the Baltic, the other in the North Sea, which would soon supplant the Russian fleet. This was a conclusion drawn from facts and "on a proper analysis of the character and abilities of Germans and Russians, not to mention the financial resources, the relative quantity of conscientious, dedicated and knowledgeable civil servants, not to mention also the science that gives a decisive advantage to all German companies over Russian companies". "In Germany," concludes Bakunin, "the service of the state gives neither beautiful nor attractive results, one might even say execrable, but

¹²⁸ Marx to Engels, MECW, vol. 42, p. 435

¹²⁹ Marx to Kugelmann, 11 October 1867, MECW vol 42, pp. 440-441.

¹³⁰ III, 58-59.

¹³¹ IV, 277.

nevertheless positive and serious”. Thus are defined the constituent elements of German hegemony in the Baltic: financial power, administrative rationality, scientific development and effective state apparatus. Faced with this, Russia had corruption, waste and incompetence. Eventually, the Russian fleet would become unable to defend the Baltic Sea fortresses against the German navy and resist the fire of Germans, “skilled at firing not only cast iron shells, but also gold.”¹³²

Bakunin pointed out that Russia did not oppose the annexation of Schleswig and Holstein, which further strengthened the position of Prussia in the Baltic and therefore threatened the positions of Russia. “The Prince of Gortchakov [the Russian Foreign Minister] was well aware of this when he acquiesced in the dismemberment of the Kingdom of Denmark and the annexation of Schleswig and Holstein to Prussia.” Then Bakunin asks himself: “Either the Prince of Gortchakov betrayed Russia, or to compensate for the supremacy sacrificed by him, of the Russian state in the North-West, he obtained from the Prince of Bismarck the formal commitment to help Russia conquer a new power in the Southeast.”¹³³

Bakunin is convinced of the existence of a pact between Prussia and Russia concluded during the uprising of Poland in 1863, when all the European powers, except Prussia, protested against the repression. Only such an alliance can explain “the quiet assurance, even the carelessness with which the Prince of Bismarck undertook the war against Austria and a large part of Germany, despite the threat of intervention by France.” A simple movement of Russian troops towards the Prussian border would have sufficed to stop hostilities in 1866 and 1870. During the Franco-Prussian war, Bakunin recalls, the north of Germany was totally devoid of troops; Moreover, Austria did not intervene in favor of France because Russia had declared that it would then put its troops in motion: in other words, if Russia “had not declared itself the determined ally of the Prusso-Germanic emperor, the Germans would never have taken Paris”¹³⁴. This hypothesis therefore contradicts that of Marx, according to whom, once more, it was the Tsar who manipulated Bismarck by pushing him to war.

Bismarck, says Bakunin, “was obviously sure that Russia would not betray him.” In fact, Russia had no interest in the formation of a powerful Germanic empire; but having renounced all expansion in the North-West, it had to advance to the South-East. “Having abandoned to Prussia the supremacy in the Baltic, [*the Russian empire*] must impose and establish its domination in the Black Sea. Otherwise it will be cut off from Europe. But for this domination to be real and fruitful, it must seize Constantinople, without which not only the access to the Mediterranean can be forbidden to it at any moment, but the doors of the Black Sea will be open to the fleets of enemy armies”¹³⁵.

Constantinople, thinks Bakunin, is the only objective pursued more than ever by the expansionist policy of Russia; it is the pursuit of this objective which explains, according to him, the whole Russian policy in Central Asia.

The idea of a formally established pact between Russia and Prussia remains of course the realm of the hypothesis, and it is in fact not the most interesting element of Bakunin's analysis. Let us simply remember that he emphasizes a temporary concordance of interests between the two countries or, more precisely, orientations which momentarily are not antagonistic. Indeed, the Russian anarchist often recalls that the formation of a Germanic empire is contrary to the long-term interests of Russia and that this situation, carrying future conflicts, “can only end with the annihilation of one or the other”. The war between the two countries is inevitable,

¹³² IV, 277.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ IV, 278-279.

¹³⁵ IV, 280.

but it can be postponed for some time because the two empires are not yet sufficiently established inside and are not yet sufficiently extended outside. Bakunin only hopes that the social revolution will take place before such extremes are reached.

The German empire forms a “strange conglomeration of small and medium autonomous states, certainly doomed to be engulfed, but which strive at all costs to save the vestiges of a sovereignty that is disappearing”¹³⁶. Outside, it is isolated, without allies. Austria has been humiliated since the defeat of 1866 but not yet completely crushed. France, vanquished, is an irreconcilable enemy. The annexationist aims of the empire, encouraged by “Pan-German patriotism, which has won all German society”¹³⁷, threaten German Austria, Trieste, Bohemia, German Switzerland, part of Belgium, Holland and Denmark, which will push Western and Southern Europe to stand up against the Reich. In these conditions, Bakunin thinks, the Russian alliance, that is the neutrality of the eastern borders, is necessary for Prussia. But this alliance can only hold if the Russian empire itself, which has “renounced all new acquisitions or expansions in the North-West” can advance to the Southeast.

The « pan-German » expansionist project was not that of Bismarck until the rise to power of William II in 1888. For the Chancellor, Trieste falls within the sphere of influence of Austria. Belgium, its French part in any case, could well be integrated to France because it would constitute a coherent linguistic entity. Germany had already annexed the German-speaking part of Denmark and Bismarck was not interested in the rest. But there actually existed in Germany, including in the socialist movement, a nationalist and expansionist current, which Bismarck has tried to contain and which will openly express itself when Wilhelm II, surrounded by military, will dismiss the Chancellor. When one examines the plans for the expansion of this nationalist current, there is a curious concordance with what was implemented by the Third Reich.

While Bismarck was trying to avoid a war with Russia, a Socialist MP, Karl Grillenberger, made a speech to the Reichstag on December 4, 1886, in which he declared on behalf of the Social Democratic group that a war with Russia, this “mortal and hereditary enemy”, was “inevitable”, and in this case the SPD would vote war credits. In 1914, the SPD's Russophobia further incited the Socialists to vote for war credits.

In 1858 Engels had already written an article on Russian penetration in Central Asia, describing the action of Russia towards Khiva. When Bakunin wrote *Statism and Anarchy* (1874), the khanate of Khiva had been annexed the year before. Engels describes the Russian advance towards India and Afghanistan, threatening the British empire. On this Russian movement, Bakunin offers an explanation that deserves being examined.

First of all he dismisses a number of explanations that had been put forward concerning Russian foreign policy: Russian policy responds to military objectives by military means, the only ones it can afford.

• “Russia is not driven by commercial necessities.” Commercial policy is the policy of England; it has never been that of Russia. The Russian state “is above all, it can even be said exclusively, a military state (...) The sovereign, the state, that is what matters; all the rest: the people, even the class interests of the different social classes, the development of industry, trade, and what is called civilization, are simple means to achieve this unique goal. Without a certain degree of civilization,

¹³⁶ IV, 279.

¹³⁷ Bakounine, *Étatisme et anarchie*, 1874.

without industry and trade, no state, and especially no modern state, can exist, because the so-called national wealth is far from that of the nation, while the fortune of the privileged classes is a force. In Russia, the national wealth is entirely absorbed by the State...¹³⁸. If, among the reasons which motivated the expedition on Khiva, there are commercial ones, concludes Bakunin, we can be certain that in the financial report the operation will result in more losses than profits.

- But, above all, Bakunin dismisses the intention of conquering India which Engels attributes to the Russians. This would require displacing a quarter or even half of the Russian population to the East. Bakunin does not believe in such a project for one could reach India only “after having pacified the many warrior tribes of Afghanistan”, which he does not believe the Russians are able to do...

The real reason for the Russian expansion to the Southeast would be the desire to undermine England's domination by “arousing indigenous uprisings against it and supporting these uprisings, backing them up with military intervention if necessary.”¹³⁹ England, the main obstacle to the Russian designs on Constantinople, would thus be weakened by revolts in her Indian empire. The Russian government “thus hopes to make the English admit that Constantinople must become a Russian metropolis and force them to accept this annexation more than ever necessary for official Russia”¹⁴⁰.

The Russian aims on Constantinople obviously did not escape Marx and Engels who had, much more than Bakunin, the leisure to study the question ¹⁴¹. The analyzes of the three men converge on many points, and in particular about the prospects of world war that they drew from the russo-german rivalry. There are many similarities between the article Engels wrote twenty years after Bakunin's death and the positions the Russian revolutionary defended. The essential difference is that according to Bakunin:

1. Russian expansion in the South-East is the consequence of the rise of German power in the North;
2. This expansion (diversion, rather) temporarily favors German interests.

Bakunin provides at least a plausible explanation of the Russian advance to the Southeast. The Russian anarchist cannot believe that the government of St. Petersburg had really set itself the goal of conquering India, a thesis accredited by Engels when he asserts that the cities of Herat, Samarkand, Balch, once taken, “would form a capital base of operations against India”: “And as soon as this base of operations will be in her actual possession, England will have to fight for her Indian empire.” “The Muscovites may be found knocking at the gates of India within ten or fifteen years.”¹⁴²

Retrospectively, there is no doubt that Bakunin's skepticism about Russia's ability to subjugate Afghanistan takes on a curious connotation today.

If we accept the idea that Russia wanted to put pressure on India (and on Great-Britain) to make a diversion while their real objective is Constantinople and access to the Mediterranean, we conclude that the means implemented were out of proportion with the objective sought. But that seemed to be the only ones Russia had: military pressure, while England proceeded otherwise: “England seized India first through her commercial companies; in our country there is no company of this

¹³⁸ IV 281.

¹³⁹ IV, 284.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ During the Crimean War, Bakunin was imprisoned in Russia; he will not escape until 1861.

¹⁴² Engels, “Russian Progress in Central Asia”, vol 16, p. 64.

kind, and admitting that there are some here and there, they are only 'pocket' companies, for the show. In addition, England is engaged in the exploitation of the Indies on a vast scale by means of a vast fleet of merchant ships and warships; but Russia is separated from India by an endless desert. This means that there can be no question of conquering anything in India".¹⁴³

At first sight, the plan Bakunin attributes to Russian diplomacy concerning Constantinople is extremely tortuous. But Marx and Engels themselves recognized that Russian diplomacy was tremendously effective and that Russian foreign policy was working with infinite patience and tenacity. Engels rightly indicates that in Russia many revolutionaries "hold the Government of the Tsar in too great contempt, believing it incapable of anything rational, incapable, partly from stupidity, partly from corruption." But Engels adds that this is right for internal policy, "But we ought to know not only the weakness but the strength too of the enemy. And its foreign policy is unquestionably the side on which Tsardom is strong—very strong. Russian diplomacy forms, to a certain extent, a modern Order of Jesuits, powerful enough, if need be, to overcome even the whims of a Tsar, and to crush corruption within its own body, only to spread it the more plenteously abroad"¹⁴⁴.

How does Russian expansion in the South-East affect German politics? Bakunin thinks that "the Germans have an interest in the Russians sinking deeply to the East", in "directing and pushing Russian troops in Central Asia to Khiva on the pretext that it is the most direct route to Constantinople"¹⁴⁵. Thus diverted from any possibility of intervention in the North-West, Russia gives Germany time to strengthen itself inside. However, says Bakunin, this concordance of interests is fragile and cannot be sustainable on the long term. There is no doubt that the two empires will be brought to term in a confrontation for hegemony on the continent.

In the longer term, says Bakunin, the Germans will be forced to secure outlets in southern Europe for they will not accept to leave "to the arbitrariness of Russia their banks on the Danube and their trade with the Danubian countries"¹⁴⁶. Engels confirmed Bakunin's forecast several times. As early as 1849, in his anti-Bakunin pamphlet, "Democratic Panslavism", he wrote that just as in the North the access to "the Baltic sea coast from Danzig to Riga" was absolutely vital to Poland¹⁴⁷, Germany could not accept to be cut off from the Adriatic Sea in the South. Moreover, an independent Slavic state in southern Europe would cut Austria from its natural outlets in the Mediterranean. In 1882 Engels again pointed out to Kautsky that no Slavic State of the Balkans should be allowed to cross the road or the railroad between Germany and Constantinople: "these tiny [*Slavic*] nations can never be granted the right, which they now assign to themselves in Serbia, Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, to prevent the extension of the European railroad net to Constantinople"¹⁴⁸.

It is therefore without exaggeration that Bakunin attributes to the German Socialists and Democrats expansionist intentions. The Russian revolutionary, however, is mistaken in thinking that Bismarck shared these intentions. The Chancellor's policy was well below the demands of most German Democrats and Socialists.

The German-Russian war was inevitable: it was for the moment only postponed. In the end, the conclusions of Bakunin and Marx converge.

¹⁴³ IV, p. 283.

¹⁴⁴ Engels, "The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom", MECW, vol. 27, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ IV, 285.

¹⁴⁶ IV 285.

¹⁴⁷ Engels, "Democratic Pan-Slavism", MECW, vol. 8, p. 368..

¹⁴⁸ Engels to Kautsky, February 7-15, 1882.

* * * * *

Bakunin died in 1876; the Bismarck he knew was the architect of the crushing of France in 1871, not the Bismarck who desperately tried to avoid a war with Russia because he ended up realizing that a defeat of France would inevitably lead this country to try and form an alliance with Russia, which was the Chancellor's worst fear.

That Marx could rejoice in this crushing because it would ensure the victory of *his* socialism on that of Proudhon easily explains that the Russian revolutionary was tempted to equate the two men in a common project; however Bakunin had enough common sense not to confuse them completely. Indeed, he did not believe that Marx's project had anything in common with Bismarck's: They were, on the contrary, he says, fierce enemies:

“Far from me the thought of establishing a shadow of conscious solidarity between M. Bismarck and the leaders of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany! I do not only think, I know very well, that there is absolutely nothing in common between them, and that they are on the contrary fierce enemies.”¹⁴⁹

So this point is perfectly clear. However, Bakunin wanted to show that “in spite of this patent enmity, and in spite of the flagrant oppositions which separate the Bismarckian program from the party's program, there is a hyphen between them: both tend towards the foundation of a great centralist state, unitary and pan-Germanic.” Bakunin bases his opinion on what he knows about Marx's positions during the war, in particular the letter in which Marx tells Engels that “Bismarck is doing a bit of our work, in his own way and without meaning to, but all the same he is doing it. He is clearing the deck for us better than before.”¹⁵⁰

Bakunin will not have known the German Chancellor in the years after the Franco-Prussian war. It would have been interesting to know what analyzes he would have made of this Bismarck, who, until William II came to power and dismissed him, tried at all costs to avoid the war with Russia and who warned the new Emperor: “A rupture of the peace between Germany and Russia can only be provoked by a systematic excitement in the war or by the ambition of Russian or German military, like Skobelev, who want a war before they retire, only for the purpose of distinguishing themselves.”¹⁵¹ Bismarck refers to General Waldersee, chief of the German General Staff in 1888, who endeavoured, by articles inspired by him in the conservative newspapers of Berlin, to bring the war between Russia and Germany. To the despair of Bismarck, the new Emperor William II was surrounded by civilian and military warmongers who will gradually push Germany to war. WWI¹⁵² was definitively understood by German opinion as a war against Russia¹⁵³.

Bismarck had implemented an extremely complex foreign policy aimed at ensuring that if a war he did not want broke out, it did not take place on the German territory. Bakunin would have had the satisfaction of noting that most of the anticipations he had made had been confirmed – especially on the encirclement of Germany.

¹⁴⁹ Bakounine, *Œuvres*, Champ libre, III, p. 30.

¹⁵⁰ Engels to Marx. 15 August 1870, MECW, vol. 44, p. 47.

¹⁵¹ Bismarck, *Pensées et souvenirs*, t. II, p. 253.

¹⁵² As well as WWII, by the way.

¹⁵³

If Bakunin often evokes Pan-Germanism, it was in his lifetime a diffuse current that traversed German society and touched most political organizations, to varying degrees, including Social Democracy. A structured Pan-German movement did not appear until the 1890s. A “Pangerman League” defended the *Volkstum* (the spirit of the race) and influenced the young Adolf Hitler. This extremist league, however, remained a minority in Germany.

Initially this league was primarily concerned with colonial expansion but it turned mainly to the continental vocation of Germany. Ernest Hasse, its second president, thought that German expansionism was first and foremost territorial, in order to make the borders of the Empire coincide with the areas where German was spoken. In 1905, 25 million German speakers (or related) lived outside the Empire. The idea of linguistically coherent territories might have suggested that Germany had to abandon territories where German was *not* spoken, such as Metz, annexed in 1871, and where French was spoken. Not at all, Germany had to keep Metz for strategic reasons. The Pan-Germans also thought that the annexation of Austria should be postponed until later to preserve the alliance between the two empires. As for the colonial policy, it was mainly intended to control the Ottoman Empire.

Ernst Hassler's viewpoint is significant. He considers that “the German Empire of today, compressed between the powers of the East and those of the West, is obliged to extend if it wants to exist.”¹⁵⁴

The paradox is that the partisans of Pan-Germanism: Ernest Hasse, but also Friedrich Lange, Max Harden, Count Reventlow, considered themselves as the followers of Bismarck, while the Chancellor had declared on April 28, 1890: “We do not want anything, Germany needs neither the three millions of Dutch, who do not wish to be absorbed, nor the Baltic provinces, nor Poland, nor anything. We have enough of annexed peoples”¹⁵⁵. There is, therefore, no connection between the Pan-German project, which aims to establish German hegemony from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, and the point of view of the man who declared on January 11, 1880, in the Reichstag: “How can Bulgaria interest us? We are quite indifferent to who rules in Bulgaria and what is happening to Bulgaria. Russia's friendship is infinitely more important to us than Bulgaria's.”¹⁵⁶ One can doubt, however, the sincerity of this kind of affirmation, pronounced at a time when the German Empire was digesting its recent annexations (Kiel and Slesvig-Holstein in 1864, Hanover and Hesse in 1866, Alsace-Lorraine in 1871) and did not wish this digestion to be disturbed. That Bismarck was not interested in Poland is not credible and does not fit in with what he wrote in a letter to his sister: “Beat the Poles until they despair of life. I have all pity for their situation, but if we want to survive [*bestehen*], we can do nothing else than to exterminate [*ausrotten*] them.”¹⁵⁷

But was Germany “saturated”, as Bismarck declared, while he constantly demanded more military contingents? German foreign policy constantly played on two fronts: the need to expand territorially; the permanent affirmation that Germany was encircled and threatened. For the Pan-Germans (which Bismarck was not, strictly speaking, let us remember, despite what Bakunin thinks), the borders of Germany were not safe, the “buffer” had to be extended in all directions.

¹⁵⁴ Ernst Hasse, *Weltpolitik, Imperialismus und Kolonialpolitik* (1906) cité par Ch. Andler, *Le Pangermanisme continental sous Guillaume II*, Paris, pp. 286.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted by Charles Andler, *Les origines du Pangermanisme*, p. 165.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Letter to his sister Malwine (26/14 March 1861), quoted in Hajo Holborn: *A History of Modern Germany 1840-1945* (1969), *op. cit.* p. 165. Bismarck uses the verbe *ausrotten* which does not only mean “exterminate” but also to wipe out, to destroy, to stamp out, to eradicate.

The strengthening of Germany inevitably led France to conclude an alliance with Russia. This alliance, imposed by the strictly state necessities of containing German expansionism in Europe ¹⁵⁸, was fiercely fought by the French socialists who were encouraged and supported in this by their comrades of the German Social-Democracy who managed to convince them that the German workers would never allow their government to launch a war against France, while at the same time the Socialists voted in 1913 a colossal supplement of war credits.

“In January 1913, the two French and German socialist parties signed a manifesto for peace. However, in complete contradiction with all that they could declare to their credulous French comrades, the German Socialists voted a month later, on February 3rd, 1913, an extraordinary war tax of one and a half billion marks for the military program, proposed by General von Bernhardi. The *Berliner Tageblatt* of 1 April 1913 defined this tax as ‘properly speaking mobilization in peacetime’. Duplicity?”¹⁵⁹

One of the “collateral” effects of this alliance was to confirm and develop a deeply rooted feeling in the German population that their country was being encircled (which the Germans refer to as *Einkreisung*). The Germans were convinced that the other European powers were jealous of the economic development of their country and sought to destroy it. This feeling was not limited to the right but was widely spread on the left.

The Moroccan crisis of 1911-1912 gave the imperialist tendency already present in German social democracy the opportunity to manifest itself fully. It is this feeling of encirclement that undoubtedly explains the deep-rooted conviction of the Germans to wage a defensive war. The German population had been largely conditioned by the idea that the war that was going to break out was a war against Russia, a sentiment shared by the Social Democrats¹⁶⁰ who openly claimed to be in the continuity of the thought of Marx and Engels.

¹⁵⁸ Herman Gorter writes that Germany “was prohibited from reaping the vast profits which German capitalism would have been able to amass thanks to colonial monopolies and monopolistic spheres of influence. Germany’s capitalism thus assumed the characteristics of a steam boiler whose valves are all closed. Germany was unable to employ its capital as it wished. France, England and Russia had striven for years to block German expansion, to the benefit of their own respective capitalists. Germany could not bear this much longer. And that is why it has been preparing for many years for this war to conquer the space it had been denied.” (Herman Gorter, *Imperialism, the world war and social democracy*. <https://libcom.org/files/Imperialism,%20the%20world%20war%20and%20social%20democracy.pdf>)

¹⁵⁹ René Berthier, *Kropotkine et la Grande Guerre. – Les anarchistes, la CGT et la Social-démocratie face à la guerre*, Éditions du Monde libertaire, p. 145.

¹⁶⁰ Germany had been preparing for war as soon as 1897 with the “Schlieffen Plan”, which was based on the idea that the country would face a two-front war with Russia and France. The plan assumed that France was weak and would be beaten quickly, and that Russia, although much stronger, would take more time to mobilize its army. As with all plans, things did not go as planned. Russia mobilized its army in ten days, much more quickly than expected, but the French did not mobilize, which forced the Germans to find a pretext for declaring war on them. Another unforeseen event complicated things. According to the “Schlieffen plan”, the German army was to cross Belgium and carry out a blitz-attack against France by using most of the German forces. But since the Russian army had mobilized very quickly, the Germans were forced to reduce their numbers directed against France to send them on the eastern front. In addition, the Belgians refused to let the German army cross their territory, so it was forced to fight, which slowed them down and caused significant losses. Finally, last unforeseen event: Great Britain decided, to the great surprise of the Germans, to honor a treaty with Belgium dating from 1839 and declared war on Germany. The British expeditionary forces stopped the Germans at the Battle of Mons in August 1914, causing large losses in the German army. The Germans were defeated again by the French at the battle of the Marne in September 1914. General Moltke then declared to the Kaiser: “Sire, we have lost the war.”

CONCLUSION

Probably more than their oppositions on the strategy of the workers' movement, Bakunin and Marx were opposed by a profound divergence of analysis on the relations between Germany and Russia. While Marx and Engels had hoped for a war with Russia when the representative regime was not yet instituted, because they were convinced it would lead the king of Prussia to make political concessions, the German socialists were later haunted by the specter of war with their Russian neighbor. At this prospect, Engels was close to panic and he had an astonishing reaction of withdrawal: "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."¹⁶¹ If Germany is beaten, adds Engels, the socialist movement in Europe would be ruined for twenty years – meaning the *German* socialist movement.

Thus, the framework in which will be triggered the First World War is traced, as are anticipated the reactions of the German Social Democrats to this war. The implicitly Pan-German character of Engels' analysis stems from his solidarization of the survival of the German socialist movement with that of the German state. The idea of a proletarian uprising organized by "the strongest and most combative socialist party in Europe" against the war is not even envisaged. Two weeks later Engels wrote to Bebel:

"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, provided they prosecuted the war ruthlessly and with all available means, including revolutionary ones. Should Germany be attacked from the east and west, all means of defence would be justified. It is a question not only of the nation's existence but also, in our own case, of asserting the position and the future prospects for which we have fought. The more revolutionary the prosecution of the war, the more it will be waged in accordance with our ideas. And it might happen that, in contrast to the cowardice of the bourgeoisie and Junkers, who want to save their property, we should turn out to be the only truly vigorous war party. Of course it might also happen that we should have to take the helm and do a 1794 in order to chuck out the Russians and their allies¹⁶²."

These are strange remarks. What does Engels mean when he conditions his support to the government provided it "prosecuted the war ruthlessly and with all available means, *including revolutionary ones*"? Does he really imagine that the warmongering government that succeeded Bismarck's will implement revolutionary measures? And *what* revolutionary measures? Does Engels simply mean *vigorous* measures, or unlikely, revolutionary measures in the *socialist sense*?

A detail may give us the explanation. Engels makes a reference to 1794 (in fact, 1793), which shows that he lives in a delusion of identification with the French Revolution, and that he equates Germany with revolutionary France attacked by all the European monarchies. The Convention, that is to say the revolutionary government, decreed a mass uprising (*levée en masse*), August 23, 1793, which aimed to mobilize all the population, men, women, children and old persons in order to save the French Republic. The population provided the necessary soldiers,

¹⁶¹ Letter à Bebel, 29 septembre 1891, MECW, Vol. 49, p. 244.

¹⁶² Engels to Bebel. 13 October 1891, MECW Vol 49, p. 258.

supplied the army with arms, food, transport equipment and health services. This general mobilization made it possible to set up and equip a considerable army of nearly 750,000 men. This republican army of a new type succeeded at the fall of 1793 in repelling the foreign invasion. Clearly, Engels identifies a war against Russia as a revolutionary war against absolutism.

Engels' letter to Bebel very clearly shows a desire to negotiate with the state provisions in favor of social democracy that would make it possible for it to support a war. We are far from proletarian internationalism ... These remarks, held twenty years after the Paris Commune, anticipate the attitude of social democracy during the 1914-1918 war: If Germany is attacked, all the defenses are good: "It's about national existence and also preserving intact our position and future prospects, which we owe to our struggles"¹⁶³.

What "positions" and "future prospects" does Engels refer to? To the elected representatives of the Reichstag? The enormous real estate of social democracy?¹⁶⁴ On the eve of WWI, the German trade union movement had more than two million members, the Socialist Party one million. A well-paid political and union bureaucracy managed a whole range of institutions: buildings, relief funds, cooperatives, theaters, etc. The permanent union employees had a standard of living that was similar to the petty bourgeoisie. Activists became managers, administrators. The political and union apparatuses were in the hands of these permanent employees. As Rudolf Rocker wrote:

"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 in every part of the country, its daily mass-circulation press, whose power had no equivalent anywhere else, created a multitude of new jobs, helping to create a vast bureaucracy that, like any bureaucracy, tended to hinder the spiritual development of the movement."¹⁶⁵

Protection of national existence, preservation of achievements and participation in a national defense government: the ingredients of the war that ravaged Europe twenty-three years later were there. The key to all this can be found in the letter Engels wrote to Bebel on 29 September 1891: "If we are victorious our Party will take the helm. The victory of Germany, therefore, will be the victory of the revolution, and, if war comes, we must not only desire that victory but promote it with all available means..."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ "Since 1910, the party and the unions harbored the fear of seeing their organizations destroyed. In July 1914, in particular, they held this eventuality to be perfectly probable. Their main concern was then to save the organization. This was at the meeting of I.S.B. [*International Socialist Bureau*] in Brussels, one of the main concerns, the cause of the irritation of the Austrian and Czech delegates, Victor Adler and Nemec, whom De Man in his memoirs presents in these terms: 'Their conversation curiously revealed as a major reason for their nervousness, the concern they had about the danger threatening the organization. As well-informed socialists of a high intellectual level, they doubtless also thought of other physical and moral misfortunes that could be caused by war; but they spoke mainly of the organization threatened with dissolution, the premises sequestered, the muzzled press, the delivery vehicles of the party newspaper requisitioned by the army'."

(Georges Haupt, "Guerre ou révolution ? L'Internationale et l'Union sacrée en août 1914" (1969). Texte paru dans *Les Temps Modernes*, 1969. Repris dans *L'historien et le mouvement social*, pp. 199-235, Maspero, 1980.

¹⁶⁵ Rudolf Rocker, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, quoted by Freddy Gomez, "Bulletin bibliographique À Contretemps".

¹⁶⁶ Engels to Bebel, 29 September 1891, MECW, vol. 49, p. 246.

In 1916, the US representative of a charity organisation went to Germany and interviewed Kautsky and Liebknecht¹⁶⁷. The American asked Liebknecht what were the causes of the war. The latter declared that “Tsarism was really the reason why the war broke out, and it is on this basis that the Social Democratic bloc voted the war credits on August 5th. Nobody understood the situation. The Socialists had lost their press at once, because the censorship was absolute, so they were like sheep without a shepherd”...

The German Socialists believed that they voted the war against Russia! Which for them did not seem shocking. We are in the direct line of the traditional Russophobia of the German left since the positions developed by Marx and Engels in 1848.

Bakunin's worst fears about the “German patriots of the International” proved true.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *War Bread. A personal narrative of the war and relief in Belgium*, Edward Eyre Hunt, American delegate of the commission for relief in Belgium in charge of the province of Atwerp. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1916.

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