About Mike Macnair, «Social-Democracy & Anarchism» and hatchets

René Berthier

I would like to say I am very grateful to *Weekly Worker* for publishing David Douglass' review of my book *Social-Democracy & Anarchism* (Merlin Press). Not only because I found David's review very pertinent (although this opinion doesn't seem to be shared by everyone) ; but because I realised I already knew him. Extraordinary coincidence : we had met during the miner's strike in 1984-1985 when me and some of my comrades in France had formed a miner's support committee which had been quite active at that time. We had contacts with miners in Deal, Shirebrook, Doncaster and other places (in Wales) but I'm afraid I don't remember all the names anymore. So David gave me news from people I had known, and very sad news about others.

I have carefully read Mike Macnair's «Bakuninist hatchet job» [1], which I found quite interesting in some way and, of course, perfectly consistent with the point of view of a militant who has not transcended the perspective of Brezhnevian communism. However I often had the impression that Macnair had not read my book, and I have repeatedly found that he attributes to me opinions that are not mine. This impression is increased by the mention Macnair makes, several times, of «fantasy organisations» which I, or David Douglass, are supposed to deal about ; but «fantasy organisations» are nowhere to be found, neither in my book nor in David's review. So I don't know what sort of «fantasy reading» he has done of my book and David's review. It *is* very strange.

This text I'm writing isn't really an *answer* to Mike Macnair ; it is much longer than his review of my book, but Macnair raises interesting points about which I thought necessary to say a few words and which might interest English-speaking anarchists who have read my book.

Perhaps there were misunderstandings in the reading he made of my book, and perhaps there were other misunderstandings in the reading I made of his review, which a face to face conversation would have overcome. One never knows… Anyway, I am always surprised to see how a debate between an anarchist and a communist, discussing the same historical event, gives the impression that the two persons are speaking about two completely different things and live in two completely different worlds. And I sometimes wonder if the gap will ever be filled.

Both the gap and the misunderstanding started with Bakunin and Marx, because the two blokes were not speaking about the same thing : the former had in mind an international organisation of trade-union-like structures ; the latter had in mind an international of social-democratic parties. I think if you don't have this in mind, you completely miss the point.

«Rhetoric and spin against Marx and Engels as individuals» ?

I've been reading Marx for over 40 years and I think I can say I know a few things about communism, not only theoretically but practically, so to speak, because I also have been since 1972 a militant of the French CGT, which was under the tight control of the Communist Party. So when I talk about «Brezhnevian communism», I know what I mean.

I've never had the epidermal rejection of Marx that characterises some anarchists (who generally have not read him). I have always vigorously opposed those of my comrades who see Marx in a caricatural way (such as: «It is the dialectics of Marx that produced Stalinism» and other such nonsense). My disagreements with him concern strategy and organisation – and this is what my

[1] http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1094/bakuninist-hatchet-job/

book is about. I am concerned in commenting Marx on strictly political and historical grounds.

Of course I could laugh at this father who was against private property but who asked the boy courting his daughter if he had a good situation. But having myself a daughter, I think I can understand that. If I wanted to go further in my alleged «spin» against Marx as an individual, I could also turn the knife in the wound and mention the child Marx had with his housekeeper, who happened to be pregnant at the same time as his legitimate wife… THIS is what I would call an attack against Marx as an individual, but I sincerely don't see where in my book I do such a thing. Unless one considers that mentioning a questionable political behaviour in someone is making a personal attack.

It seems to me that it is rather Marx who makes personal attacks on people : «fat Bakunin», «damned Russian», «proudhonist donkeys», etc. (p. 9). Besides I really don't see where I said, or even suggested, that «Marxism leads to Stalinism» for this is *precisely* the attitude I oppose within the anarchist mouvement. I wonder if Macnair doesn't attribute me crazy ideas so as to better refute them. However, I do not believe Engels «*led* to social democracy» (obviously, this is an insult to Macnair) : I think he *was* a social-democrat. Same thing with Marx : they *were* social-democrats, in spite of their criticism against the German socialists.

According to me social-democracy is a socialist movement which advocates division of labour between economic action (trade unions) and political action (parties) ; subordination of the union to the party ; the seizure of power by the party. Within this movement there is reformist social-democracy (power through elections) and radical social-democracy (power through insurrection). But I never said that Engels «led to Stalinism». I don't know where Macnair found that in my book.

I don't either see where I blame, even implicitly, Marx and Engels for wanting to transform the International in a «sect». My opinion is simply based on the idea that there were two political and strategic options which were confronting each other. I don't think this fact can be denied. The problem is that there never was a debate between Bakunin and Marx because Marx systematically avoided it. A well known and respected French historian (Georges Haupt), a specialist of social-democracy, observed that ; I mention him in my preface (p.3). Marx does not want a dialogue with Bakunin, and he systematically tries to discredit him.

You can't either deny Marx wanted the International to organise political parties, while it was a union-type of organisation. This idea is deeply rooted in the minds of Marxists. Marx never considered the German trade unions as belonging, even theoretically, to the IWA. Iuri Steklov, a bolchevik historian, is so much convinced the International was a party that he was convinced that it worked on the basis of «democratic centralism» :

> «At that congress *[The Hague]* there was to be a decisive conflict between the champions of the political struggle of the proletariat, and of democratic centralism in the organisation of the International on the one hand, and the champions of anarchism alike on the political field and in matters of organisation, on the other [2].»

Bakunin disapproved the strategy Marx was forwarding for reasons I have explained in my book. His opposition was not founded on the idea that a «broad front» was necessary, as Macnair says – probably a reference to the Komintern. Speaking of a «broad front» at the time of Bakunin and Marx is an anachronism. He simply thought the international labor movement had not reached a sufficient level of maturity to adopt within the IWA a unique program. He said that if a single programme was imposed on the organisation, there would be «as many

[2] Iuri Steklov, *History of the First International*, Chapter 14, 1st paragraph.

Internationals as there were programmes» – a very pertinent opinion which history has revealed how right he was.

Endnotes

I am surprised that Macnair has so few real arguments against me that he is reduced to dissect the 372 endnotes of my book ! It is true that 25 of them were added by my publisher, with my agreement of course, because he thought it was necessary. This is not really a *tsunami* of translator's notes, contrary to what Macnair suggests ... For information, my publisher had written a fairly copious and extremely interesting preface, but he preferred to withdraw it. This text can be found on one of the websites of the French Anarchist Federation: *Political conflict in the International Workers' Association, 1864-1877.* – A W Zurbrugg. (http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article559).

Macnair says that these endnotes only give the *impression* my arguments are founded on clear evidence supporting my views. I don't see what he means. Of the 372 notes, 283 are specific references which the reader can check. As for the rest, they are commentaries, informations, biographical informations on the mentioned characters, etc.

Macnair blames me for refering too much to James Guillaume. He is mentioned 59 times in the endnotes and 84 times in the text. But Marx is mentioned 264 times in the text and 76 times in the endnotes. Am I to be blamed for that too ? And why on earth do I mention James Guillaume so often ? Simply because his monumental book in 2 volumes on the International [3] is subtitled «Documents and Memories» (my emphasis). Much more than his opinion on the facts of which he was a witness, it contains an exceptional compilation of documents he has collected, many of which would probably no longer be accessible otherwise. But maybe should I remind Macnair that Guillaume was the closest companion of Bakunin. If Macnair wrote a book on Marx, I certainly would not blame him for quoting Engels too much…

As for the idea that «Berthier's most damaging allegations against Marx and Engels are simply unsupported by references», I'm sorry Macnair doesn't give references to support his own allegations.

Franz Mehring

Mike Macnair seems sorry that I mention Franz Mehring. In fact, I think he would object to my mentioning whatever author doesn't fit into his own interpretation of history. Mehring is an honest Marxist historian, although his criticisms of Marx remain very «muffled», and he takes a lot of precautions to expose the most questionable aspects of Marx's political activity. I can say he had, on this point, perfectly assimilated the British understatement the French admire so much. But at least he mentions the contentious issues concerning the «great genius who is always right» about which his disciples remain silent. I do not put Mehring forward to show that his book is an «admission from the Marxist camp», but because for once a Marxist is not uncritical with Marx.

As for Mehring's Lassallean sympathies, Hal Draper, whom Macnair refers to, distorts reality, leaving just enough truth for the distortion to be vaguely credible. Mehring is ruled out as a biographer because of his «adverse comments» concerning Marx. In other words, a biography must not have «adverse comments». Too bad for the biographer of Stalin. Af for the «influence» Lassalle allegedly had on Mehring, what he is blamed for is that he wrote a «History of the German Social-Democracy» in which he gives an important part to the founder of the first socialist party in Germany, a party that owed nothing to Marx – which is properly unbearable. In other words, Mehring is blamed for having done the work of a historian.

[3] *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs*, Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1985.

That Mehring considers Lassalle, Marx and Engels to have an equal right to recognition is not acceptable. And above all, Marxists probably cannot accept Mehring designating Lassalle's «Open Letter to the Central Committee of Leipzig» as the birth certificate of social democracy! However, Mehring does not refrain from criticising Lassalle, but he doesn't refrain either for blaming Marx et Engels for their refusal to acknowledge Lassalle's historical role.

I do not intend to dwell on the issue of the relationship between Marx and Lassalle, which is very largely determined by Marx's resentment towards the founder of the ADAV. This resentment is obviously perceptible in the contrast between his letters to Lassalle («my dear friend») and his letters about Lassalle («Jewish Nigger» – see : letter to Engels 30 July 1862). But anyway I don't see why Mehring's opinions on Lassalle, whatever they were, should disqualify Mehring's opinion on Marx in relation to the IWA, knowing that anyway Lassalleans were completely uninterested in the International.

When Engels boasts that the German proletariat «belongs to the most theoretical people of Europe», he advances a totally unfounded proposal, or whose only foundation is his own phantasm: perhaps then the German proletariat will understand Marxism? Franz Mehring, more realistic, denied this view, writing: «The truth was that both fractions [Lassalleans and Eisenachers] were still a long way from scientific socialism as founded by Marx and Engels [4].»

Those who want to discredit Mehring's judgment should remember that he opposed the war in 1914, was a founder of the Spartacus League in 1916 and of the Communist Party of Germany in 1919.

«… a good deal of his correspondence»

Let's come to Hal Draper's suggestion concerning the destruction of «a good deal of his correspondence» by Bakunin's followers. The fate of the archives Bakunin left after his death is a very complicated story, but there was no deliberate destruction of correspondence for the sordid reasons Macnair suggests. Readers who can read French should refer to the documents cited in note [5].

I shall simply sum up.

• First of all, Bakunin himself regularly destroyed his correspondance, for reasons of security. He also used to ask his correspondents to destroy the letters he sent them – and fortunately some of them didn't, since we have access to them today.

• His private and intimate correspondance has been given to his wife and partly destroyed.

• In 1898 James Guillaume's younger daughter died, causing a deep crisis of despair. Guillaume burned part of his archives, including some of Bakunin's papers.

• Part of Bakunin's archives were in Kropotkin Museum in Moscow and disappeared in 1938.

• Another part of his archives were at the University of Naples and was destroyed in September 1943 by the Germans.

• Bakunin's archives were dispersed among a great number of persons (Mrs. Bakunin, James Guillaume, Reclus, Marie Goldsmith, Bellerio, Charles Perron, Gambuzzim Jules Perrier, etc.). Max Nettlau managed the feat to bring together the largest part of them. Bakunin's archives have been entrusted to the International

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[4] Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx – The Story of his Life*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1939, p. 510.

[5] See :

– «Les papiers de Michel Bakounine à Amsterdam, Jaap Kloosterman»
http://www.iisg.nl/archives/docs/bakarch.pdf

– Arthur Lehning, «Michel Bakounine et les historiens: un aperçu historiographique», dans Bakounine: combats et débats, Paris 1979, p 18.

– Marc Vuilleumier, «Les archives de James Guillaume», le Mouvement social, juillet-septembre 1964, pp 95-108.

Institute of Social History in Amsterdam in 1935, edited by Arthur Lehning between 1961 and 1981.

Yet more than *40 other archival institutions* possess from one to many thousands of pages of his manuscripts.

Suggesting that a good deal of his correspondence has been destroyed with the intention of concealing the truth (what truth ?) to the public is simply stupid. By the way, there is in Macnair's argument something very strange, which incites me to think that he is tripping over the carpet, and may well suggest a certain amount of bad faith on his part.

He says :

1. A good part of Bakunin's archives has been destroyed by his followers ;
2. The part that has survived «proves» that the accusations made by Marx were founded.

I conclude that Bakunin's followers were stupid because if they had wanted to conceal something they would have destroyed precisely the documents that were «sensitive». In addition, his archives were so scattered that it is difficult to imagine a group of «followers» meeting to sort out the documents that were considered as «compromising». I doesn't make sense.

«… running an entry operation in the First International»

Referring to Hal Draper (again !) Macnair accuses Bakunin and his friends of «running an entry operation in the First International and planning a split».

This accusation is totally unfounded for a very simple reason : Bakunin and his followers planned no «entry operation» in the International because *they already were* in the International !!! The federations that supported the federalist option (in contrast with the centralisation advocated by the General Council) were the majority, as was revealed by the Saint-Imier congress of september 1872. Eventually, all the federations of the Internatonal rejected the decisions taken during the phony congress of The Hague organised by the General Council !!!

In fact, this congress very simply revealed that the majority of federations were simply fed up with Marx ! Since Bakunin and his friends never had the slightest intention to «conquer» the General Council (they wanted to abolish it !!!), there was no need for them to attempt an «entry operation» in a place in which they already were.

A bloke sitting in his favorite armchair, his cat purring on his knees, reading the complete works of Hal Draper, smoking his pipe and sipping a glass of old cognac can hardly be accused of making an «entry operation» in the house.

As for planning a split, the same argument can be opposed to Macnair.

What is the need for a group to split from an organization in which it is deeply implanted ? My book shows instead that the «Marxists», that is to say Marx and Engels practically alone, were the splitters. After The Hague, most of their followers had abandoned them (by «followers» I mean individual persons, for no federation supported them).

The German Social-Democratic leaders, who had somehow never made much effort, walked away. Years later only, when the IWA had acquired the status of myth in the labor movement, did they refer to it again, saying : «I was there», when they had done pratically nothing. They were now «coming to the rescue of victory», as we say in French .

Besides, I'd like to suggest that there may be a slight contradiction in accusing somebody of «making an entry operation» and «planning a split». I'm inclined to think that you do one, or the other, *but not both*.

Those who can be accused of «running an entry operation in the First International» are Marx and Engels. I invite Mike Macnair to read again the letter John Hales, a member of the British committee of the International, wrote to

describe the incredible bureaucratic attitude of Engels refusing to transfer to the new secretary of the IWA the address of the Spanish Federal Council (see my book, p. 29).

I might also remind the fractionist work attempted in Spain by Lafargue, on behalf of the General Council who sent him in that country in January 1872 to undermine the positions of the federalists (that is to say Bakuninists). He did so well that he caused a hell of a mess, but was eventually expelled from the Madrid federation on June 9, 1872. (See documents reproducend in James Guillaume, *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs*, Vol. 4, p. 294.)

Lafargue did not give up, he created a rival federation with eight other men (compared to the 30 or 40.000 members of the Spanish federation) and called it «New Madrid Federation» which intended to be integrated in the Spanish regional Federation (the Spanish considered Spain a «region» of the International). Of course, the Federal Council refused, but the General Council in London bureaucratically pronounced the admission of this 9-men federation to the International. It is as a member of this bogus federation that Lafargue was appointed delegate to The Hague Congress where he could vote the exclusion of Bakunin and James Guillaume!!!

The General Council implemented incredible manipulations to prevent the Spanish federation (the *real* one) to send delegates to The Hague, knowing that they would not be docile.

On 24 July 1872, Engels wrote to the Spanish Federal Council a letter saying they had «evidence» of the existence of a secret society «whose center is in Switzerland». Engels demanded the Spaniards to send him «a list of all members of the Alliance in Spain with the designation of their duties in the International» and «an inquiry from you on the character and action of the Alliance, as well as its organization and its ramifications in the interior of Spain...» This irresistibly reminds the «bayonets socialism» Proudhon refers to. And Engels threatens: «Unless I receive a categorical and satisfactory answer by return of post, the General Council will be in the need to denounce you publicly in Spain and abroad as having violated the spirit and letter of the General Statutes and as having betrayed the International in the interest of a secret society that is not only foreign, but hostile.»*(My emphasis.)*

Finally, under the moderating influence of reasonable men like Jung (who eventually abandoned Marx after The Hague Congress, exasperated by his bureaucratic behavior), it was decided not to proceed with Engels' ridiculous threat. Proponents of the General Council in Spain had less scruple or less sense of the ridiculous. Their journal, the *Emancipacion* in its No. 69 (28 July), engaged in the most unheard-of charge: it published, the names of all members of the Alianza they knew about, designating them as traitors to the International. No need to say that the police was delighted.

«This behaviour can only be explaimed by the rage caused by their impression of helplessness, which blinded these pitiful men», comments James Guillaume.

Those members of the Alianza who had not been delivered to the vengeance of the police decided to show solidarity with their comrades, and their names were published in the press. The case was finally turned against the bureaucrats of the General Council who had shot a bullet in their shoe. No need to say that the name of Lafargue was not highly regarded in Spain…

The «New Madrid Federation» promoted by Lafargue's intrigues under the orders of the General Council ended up with 40 members (which contrasted with the 30.000 members of the the legitimate Spanish federation). But from then on, it was this fantasy federation Marx referred to when he mentioned Spain.

Finally, realising they were doing the game of the bourgeoisie, the activists who had been manipulated by Lafargue joined their comrades of the real Spanish Federation. (See: the Spanish Federal Commission report to the General Congress of the International in Geneva, September 1, 1873).

So I ask Mike Macnair: *who are those who organise «entry operations in the First International»? Who are those who organise splits ?*

Majority ? Minority ?

Speaking of the two groups (ADAV-Lasallians and SDAP-Eisenachers), which were to form the SPD, Macnair says that «these groups' lack of commitment to the International are used as evidence that the 'Marxists' did not have a majority». I do not see the connection between the fact that, on the one hand the lasssalleans were totally indifferent to the International and the Eisenachers very mildly interested in it, and on the other hand the «Marxists» were or were not a majority. A majority where ? In the International? In Germany? The Germans in the International had neither majority nor minority, *they were not there*. One of the reasons Marx got crazy about the passive attitude of the German socialist leaders was that his only official function in the General Council was to be the representative for Germany : that is, practically nothing. This is why he amplified all his reports to the General Council concerning Germany.

One of the reasons the German socialists gave for not forming a federation was that the German law forbade German associations from joining an international organisation. This reason was systematically repeated, and it is a phony one : in Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy the International was illegal and repression fell on the activists.

So there was no German federation. The «deal» was that the German workers would join the International individually. But of course practically nobody did. This is why Engels panics at the eve of The Hague congress : «How many membership cards, for how many members; and where roughly have you distributed them? The 208 calculated by Fink can't amount to all of them!» (Engels to Liebknecht, 22 may 1872. See *Social-Democracy & Anarchism*, p. 10.)

The tragic aspect of this story is that the grassroots German workers were very interested in the International. There has been cases when groups of workers tried to directly contact the General council because the socialist leaders had been evasive about their demands. There would have been a very great potential within the German working class had it not been for the stupidity and total lack of strategic vision of the German socialist leaders. Engels wrote to Sorge (3 May 1873) : «The Germans, although they have their own quarrel with the Lassalleans, were very dishearted by the Hague Congress, where they expected nothing but fraternity and harmony in contrast to their own squabbles, and have become apatheric.»

But worse of all, the International had witnessed an incredible expansion at the beginning, under the impulse of J.P. Becker. Becker, who lived in Switzerland and was a sort of «free electron», had taken the initiative of creating German-speaking sections of the International, which knew a *very* important development. Unfortunately, this action was suffering from a double handicap: *a)* it was out of control from Marx; *b)* It was founded on the German language, not on the German territory, so it afforded no basis for a parliamentary strategy – and naturally Marx opposed it.

In fact, as Mehring said, these sections «withered and declined as the Social-Democratic Party began to develop» (*Social-Democracy & Anarchism*, p. 10). But naturally, it is Mehring who says it, not Hal Draper…

In his letter of May 22, 1872, Engels begs Liebknecht to *publicly* announce that the German Socialist Party joined the AIT, and paid dues. He threatened to declare «the Social-democratic Workers Party a stranger to the International.» (*Social-Democracy & Anarchism*, p. 74.) Unfortunately, August Bebel had announced one month earlier in the *Volkstaat* (16 March 1872) that the Germans had never paid dues to the International (see *Social-Democracy & Anarchism*, p. 82 and note 159). Which wasn't a scoop since already, July 22, 1869, Marx had revealed the catastrophic state of the German relations towards the International: «The Germans

have a strange idea of our financial resources [...] They never sent a farthing. The G.C. owes five weeks of rent and has not paid his secretary.» (*My emphasis*.)

I don't know what Macnair means when he says that «the First International at its height was numerically dominated by British trade unionists and French Proudhonists». The First International actually was founded by Proudhonists and British trade unionists : their intention was to organise workers' solidarity in case of conflict. But the importance of Proudhonists declined rapidly, and the trade unionists, who were mostly concerned about electoral reform, were not particularly interested in the International, and even less after the Commune of Paris.

One cannot take pretext of the large membership of the trade unions to say that British workers were the majority in the International, and even less that the « Marxists » were the majority. It's a bit like the Marxists who try artificially to inflate their importance and say that the German Socialist Party was a «member» of the International because it allegedly «supported» it, but never paid dues.

There is no point «proving» that the Marxists were or were not a «majority» in the International. If anyone proved me Marx and Engels had ONE federation supporting them, I'll offer him or her a one-year subscription to the *Monde Libertaire*. The problem is not there. The International was not grouping political parties but union-like organisations confronted directly with class struggle on the workplace. The different federations certainly had not uniform projects, they were crossed by various currents but they were bound by labor solidarity in case of conflict. But the International was also an organisation whose apparatus was controlled by a small minority of uncontrolled people. As a Communist, Mike Macnair must fully understand what I mean.

War credits

Macnair says one thing which I admit irritates me a bit because it is indicative of the distorted way in which the Communists see things, and also the low regard they have for the anarchists whom they think are stupid and ignorant.

He says that «ADAV, unlike Bebel and Liebknecht, voted for war credits for Bismarck's war with France in 1870» This is a very smart formulation to conceal the truth. It suggests that Bebel and Liebknecht, unlike the ADAV, did not vote for the war credits, and it suggests (since no precision is given) that Bebel and Liebknecht made their choice in agreement with their party. Both informations are wrong.

They did not vote *against* the war credits, they *abstained*, which is not the same thing. Besides, the party itself, *as well as Marx*, were *favorable to voting for war credits*. And Macnair refrains from saying that Marx was furious against Bebel and Liebknecht [6], because his opinion (and the party with him) was that the war was *defensive* for Germany, which justified the vote in favour of the war credits!!! This will be the position of Marx and Engels until the Paris Commune. After that, it goes without saying that the «defensive war» thesis falls.

In other words – at least until it was no longer possible to think otherwise – Marx and the General Council were on the same positions as the Lassalleans ... It is not the German socialist party, not even Marx and Engels, but *Liebknecht and Bebel alone*, who abstained, this July 19, 1870.

This case can be summarised in a few letters,
which readers can easily refet to

• July 20, 1870, Marx to Engels.

In this letter written at the beginning of the war, Marx wrote that «the French deserve a good hiding ; if the Prussians win, then the centralisation of the state power will be beneficial for the centralisation of the German working class.

[6] One finds clear indications of their disappoving Liebknecht's choice in their correspondence. See : Engels to Marx : 31 July 1870 ; Engels to Marx, 15 August 1870, etc.

German predominance would then shift the centre of gravity of the West European workers' mouvement from France to Germany, and you need only to compare developments in the two countries from 1866 to the present day to realise that the German working class is superior to the French both in theory and organisation. Its predominance over the French on the international stage would also mean the predominance of *our* theory over Proudhon's, etc.»

So : the relationship between working classes is a relationship of domination.

• 15 August 1870, Engels to Marx.

Engels explains that a German victory is necessary for the future of the German proletariat : «The whole mass of the German people of every class have realised that this is first and foremost a question of national existence and have therefore at once flung themselves into the fray. That in these circumstances a German political party should preach total abstention [7] *à la* Wilhelm [Liebknecht] and place all sorts of secondary considerations before the main one, seems to me impossible.» In this letter Engels denounces the chauvinism of the French workers who should be «knocked good and proprer», otherwise «peace between Germany and France is impossible». Follows a very surprising remark :

> «One might have expected a proletarian revolution to take this work over, but since the war is already on, there is no choice for the Germans but to attend to the job themselves and quickly.»

The «secondary considerations» are the opposition to war in Germany and the internationalist declarations of the workers in Paris and in Saxony. The «main» consideration is the national war which will produce German national unity

• August 17, 1870,

Marx wrote to Engels: «war has become national», which justifies the vote for war credits. Meanwhile, the leaders of the real labor movement of Germany take positions that contrast with the theorists in London. Bebel and Liebknecht voted against Bismarck's policy, abstaining on the war credits.

• 4 September 1870

The French Empire collapsed under the blows of the Prussian army. Immediately the French section of the IWA launches an internationalist appeal asking German workers to abandon the invasion and offering a fraternal alliance that would lay the foundations of the United States of Europe. German social democracy responds favorably, its leaders are arrested. Among them, Liebknecht and Bebel, who in July had abstained from voting for war credits. Bakunin did not hesitate to «bring justice to the leaders of the Socialist Democracy Party» and all those who had the courage to «speak human language amidst all this bourgeois roaring animality» [8].

• 7 september 1870, Engels à Marx

Engels wrote that «now that the German victories have made them a *present* of a republic – *et laquelle !* – these people demand that the Germans should leave the sacred soil of France without delay, for otherwise there will be *guerre à outrance !* It is the same old idea of the superiority of France (…) I hope that they will reflect on the matter once more when the first intoxication is past, for if not it will be damned difficult to have any truck with them at an Internationale level.»

On September 9, the General Council published a manifesto which recommends to the French workers:

1. Not to overthrow the government;
2. To fulfill their civic duty;
3. Not to get sidetracked by memories of 1792 [9].

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[7] In other English editions we have «obstruction».

[8] *L'Empire knoputo-germaniquem* Editions Champ libre, vol. VIII, p. 58.

[9] «Seconde Adresse du Conseil général sur la guerre franco-allemande», in *La guerre civile en France,* Editions sociales, 1968, p. 289.

• September 10, 1870, Marx to Engels

The internationalist appeal by French workers and the favourable response by the Brunschwik workers are qualified as «pieces of imbecility». Marx complains that «the fools in Paris» have sent him «piles of their chauvinistic manifesto which the English workers here greeted with derision and indignation».

Marx was making a big deal of the English workers (or rather their leaders) but made no effort to encourage the creation of an English federation.

After the Paris Commune, the British Union leaders on whom Marx relied withdrew their support, which increased even more his isolation. But having the support of the British Union leaders could not be compared with having the support of a federation actually member of the International.

• 12 september 1870, Engels to Marx

Engels is worried at the prospect of the Parisian workers stirring. He writes : «If anything could be done in Paris, the workers ought to be prevented from letting fly before peace is concluded. Bismark will soon be in a position to make peace, either by taking Paris or because the European situation will oblige him to put an end to the war.» (Marx and Engels had had exactly the same attitude in 1848 : they had been worried because the workers of the textile industry were stirring ; they checked the diffusion of the *Communist Manifesto* and the programme of the Communist League because they didn't want to frighten the liberal bourgeois who financed the publication of the *Neue Rheinische Gazette*.)

Why are they worried in 1870 ?

Because their project is to take advantage of the war to achieve German unity, so if a popular uprising challenged the German victory, the project would fail. They were afraid the French masses would reissue the mass uprising of 1792. At that time, revolutionary France was besieged by the armies of all the monarchies of Europe. The Revolution was in a desperate situation. The Convention decided on February 23, 1792 a levy of 300,000 men who not only beat the allied armies but rang the beginning of the revolutionay wars in Europe to overthrow the monarchies : the South Army entered Savoy and took Chambéry ; another one passed the Rhine and took Spire, Worms, Mainz, Frankfurt. Dumourier's army walked to Belgium and beat the Austrians in Jemmapes, occupied Mons and entered Brussels under the acclamation of the population.

Engels and Marx, as well as the entire French political class knew that resistance to the invader meant arming the proletariat. This is what they feared. So it is easy to understand the panic that hit them in 1870. If the memories of 1792 pushed the masses to a revolutionary uprising in France, it would end the dream of unification of Germany, which was the priority project of Marx at this moment. So, Marx enjoined the French workers not to get carried away by them

Federalism

What David Douglass says about federalism and Marx is perfectly true. Marx hated federalism.

For Marx, federalism was a form inherited from the Middle Ages; it evoked Germany divided into 59 states. In the opposition between Northern Germany – centralised under the aegis of Prussia –, and South Germany allegedly «federalist», Marx was clearly in favour of the first. (See letter to Engels of 22 October 1867 where he says that Liebknecht was «…infected with the South-German-Federalist nonsense» [10].)

The correspondence of Marx and Engels contains permanent remarks against federalism – a political form *totally opposite* to their own designs, which were entirely focused on the formation of a centralised state – whether capitalist or socialist. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx's political project is clearly a

[10] Also : Engels to Marx February 1868 : «Liebknecht's rag *[the Demokratisches Wochenblatt]* displeases me to the highest degree. Nothing but concealed South German federalism.»

centralised state. Marx *never* mentions the possibility of creating a «federal» Communist Party. Centralization is the political norm.

According to Proudhon and Bakunin, federalism is a modern political form, it is the political form of the future. They fully understand that a modern, complex society is impossible to manage and organise in a centralised manner. This remark is valid both for the organization of society and for the labor organization.

The libertarian and federalist flirt of Marx during the Commune period is perfectly opportunistic. There is no indication that Marx advocated federalism before the Commune. And after, these themes disappear, except for perfectly formal and occasional references. Bakunin said that the *Civil War in France* was, a «comic travesty» of his thought (*Social-Democracy & Anarchism*, p. 162.)

The reference to the Commune is very useful to the marxists when they want to give a «libertarian» turn to their doctrine, but it never lasts : as we say in French, kick out the natutal, it comes galloping back (what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh).

Expulsions

I know this is contrary to the genetic code of the basic Marxist, and this goes against all convictions deeply implanted in him, but Marx actually expelled from the First International the organised labor movement of his time – with the exception of Germany, since there was no member federation. (I might add that during the 1848-1849 revolution in Germany, he also dissolved the first Communist Party of history, and was eventually excluded from it, but I feel that it would be too much for the same day [11].)

The skeptical reader who doesn't consider as reliable the documents quoted by James Guillaume in *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs*, can refer to the correspondence between Marx, Engels, Becker and Sorge (the new boss of the International appointed by Marx) published in the Collected Works (L&W). This correspondence gives a fairly precise idea of the situation : first, the different federations condemn the resolutons of The Hague ; second they are excluded.

First : Denouncing

Letter from Engels to Sorge, 4 January 1873 :

• «So the majority of the British Federal Council has seceded – under the leadership of Hales, Mottershead, Roach and – Jung. They have issued a circular and come out against The Hague Congress, etc.» (cf. note 643)

• «The Belgian Congress *s'est bien moqué du Conseil Général* [12]. They have declared that they want nothing to do with you and that The Hague resolutions are nul and void.» (note 653)

• «On 25-26 December 1872 a regular congress of the Belgian Federation was held in Brussels, which refused to recognise the resolutions of the Hague Congress or to maintain contacts with the General Council in New York. It supported the resolutions of the Saint-Imier congress.»

• «The Spanish Congress will come up to the same decision since our people did not send any delegates. (…) *[not surprisingly, considering the mess Lafargue had made there…]*

> «We are now unanimously of the opinion here that there is no case for suspension here, but that the General Council should simply state that such-and-such federations and sections have declared the properly valid rules of the Association to be null and void, that they thereby place *themselves* outside the International and *have ceased to belong to it.* This will rule out any talk of a

[11] See (in French) «Quand Marx liquide le premier parti communiste de l'histoire… et s'en fait exclure», http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article602
(http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article602&var_mode=calcul)

[12] «Laughed at the General Council».

conference, which would still be a possibility in the event of a suspension.» (Engels to Sorge, 4 January 1873.)
Etc.

Obviously, the bureaucrats of the ex-General Council wanted to avoid at all costs a regular conference or congress because they would have been swept away.

In that above-mentioned letter to Sorge, Engels makes a disheartened account of the situation previous to the secessionist («marxist») congress of September 1873 : :

– no news from France, «no French delegate can come».
– The Germans have become «apatheric».
– «From Denmark nothing has been seen or heard».
– «From England only a few delegates can come». *[None will come.]*
– «It is very doubtful whether the Spaniards will send one» (*you bet !*)
– «The Genevans themselves are doing nothing».

Engels was very worried at the prospect that «Bakunin and his gang» should come to the Marxist secessionist Congres, which shows he was ill-informed. Marx too was convinced that «the Alliancist band of rogues is planning to turn up *en masse.* Of course they must not be allowed in.» (Letter to Becker, 7 April 1873.) «Bakunin and his gang» showed a total lack of interest in that congress because they were organising – in Geneva too – the VIth congress of the legitimate Internationl which was to take place the previous week.

But Engels doesn't know that ; so he writes that «to secure a victory for us, the only necessary condition remaining (…) is that, in accordance with the resolution fo 26 January, the General Council should now announce the following *resignations*» : The Belgian federation, the part od the Spanish federation that repudiated the Hague resolutions, the English sections and individuals who repudiated the Hague resolutions, the Jura federation. As for the Italian federation, it should be said that they never were members of the International (but Engels was not so punctilious with the Germans).

Engels thinks that if that resolution is published, «the *mass surge* forward of the Bakuninists will have been forestalled».

All this trouble was useless because none of the delegates Marx and Engels expected showed up. The decline of the secessionists who supported Marx is obvious when one considers who were the delegates at their congress in Geneva in September 1873 : «of the 31 delegates present at the Congress, 28 were representatives of the International's Swiss branches or its émigré sections in Switzerland [13].» No wonder the note 672, p. 671 of vol. 44 of the Selected Works of Marx & Engels declares that «the Geneva Congress of 1873 was the last congress of the International Working Men's association». Marx declared the congress a «fiasco» and the minutes were never published.

Suspending [14]

5 january 1873 : General Council resolution anouncing the suspension of the Jura federation.

Inauguration within the working class of the method declaring that opponents «placed themselves outside» the organisation. This method will have its moment of glory in the worst periods of the history of the labor movement.

> «Under the resolution issued by the New York General Council on 26 January 1873, all organisations and individuals who refused to comply with the

[13] Marx Engels Selected Works, Vol. 44, note 972, p. 671.

[14] For a brief reminder of the measures by which Marx, Engels and some of their friends excluded the IWA federations, and their reactions, see (in French) http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article601

decisions of The Hague Congress thereby placed themselves outside the International Working Men's Association. Later, on 30 May, the General Council passed a new resolution which listed the federations, sections and individuals who had placed themselves outside the International.» (Marx-Engels Collected Works, Vol. 44, p. 672, Note 680.)

The German social-democrat leaders, who never had a real interest in the International, completely withdrew after The Hague congress : on 8 february 1873, Liebknecht wrote to Engels that *Der Volkstaat* was as yet unable «to devote much space to the polemics inside the International» (*Ibid.* p.671, note 674.) Which is a gentle way to say «We're fed up with with your problems».

Macnair presents the «Marxists» as being smarter than the «anti-authoritarians» because, says he, they «were first to give up on what was, on both sides, plainly a dying project». But there is something perverse in saying that you give up a project when you did everything you could to have it die.

«…nasty, sectarian manœuvres by the Germans»

The same way I oppose the grotesque visions some anarchists have about Marxismm, I have always opposed the simplistic vision of the «good» Anarchist on one side, and the «bad» Marxist the other. However, when I describe the repeated attempts of the federalists, after the Saint-Imier Congress, who insistently proposed to establish a rapprochement with the German Social-Democrats, and when I see that these repeated attempts led to failures due to the sectarianism of German social-democrat leaders, you can't expect me to I consider them as «good guys». I must add that the grassroots German socialist activists are not concerned by these accusations. Bakunin despised the German Social-Democratic leaders about whom he said all there was to say 40 years before Lenin. But he had an immense respect for the German workers.

Similarly, when I see Marx complaining to Sorge about the French refugees of the Commune who had not rallied to him, and saying: «This is their gratitude for having spent nearly 5 months working for the refugees and having acted as their vindicator through the Address on the Civil War», you should not be surprised at my wondering about his *real* motivations when he wrote this book. (See Letter, Marx to Sorge, 9 november 1871.)

Strangely, when you refer directly to the original (German) version of the letter, you dont have quite the same thing ; it doesn't speak of acting «as their vindicator» but of «saving the honour» of the refugees, which is not quite the same thing [15]. *Marx saved the honour of the Commune refugees ! (I must add that the French version is perfectly faithfull to the German origina*l.)

But what is really significant in Macnair's review is that he seems to skip :

1. All the passages of my book where I suggest that there *could have been* rapprochements between the two currents of the working class (in spite of the obviously sectarian bad will of the socialist leaders) ;
2. All the passages where I criticise my own camp.

Didn't Marx define sectarianism as the tendency to see only what separates you from others and not what brings you together ?

* * * * *

Bakunin's opposition to parliamentary strategy is, of course, partly motivated by the fact that it leads to «bureaucratic control and corruption by the capitalists», but this is not the main point. Bureaucratic control and corruption can appear in any sort of organisation. The soviets in Russia fell under bureaucratic control and

[15] «Dies der Dank dafür, dass ich fast 5 Monate in Arbeiten für die Flüchtlinge verloren und durch die "Address on the Civil War" als ihr Ehrenretter gewirkt habe.»

became corrupt hardly a few months after the beginning of the Revolution and everybody knows how it ended.

What Bakunin and his comrades were concerned with was that they simply had another model of society which could not be built through parliamentary strategy but through the takeover by the workers of all the workings of society through their class organisations. (And a party is *not* a class organisation.)

His criticism of parliamentary strategy showed that it consisted in bringing to power «interclass» organisations, constituted of citizens, irrespective of their function in the social relations of production (which is the definition of a political party). Bakunin knew that such a strategy inevitably led to political alliances with other social classes or fractions of classes, because in the parliamentary game, the workers anyway *do not constitute a majority* (while Marx end Engels were convinced they did).

There lies the basis of the opposition of the anarchists to parliamentary strategy. (I specify that Bakunin had by no means a principled opposition to universal suffrage. – He clearly takes position in favour of it, all depends in what context it is exercised – see *Social-Democracy & Anarchism*, p.120.)

So *there* is the answer to Mike Macnair's question : «Why does this split in a (fairly short-lived) international workers' organisation 144 years ago still *matter* to us?»

It is extremely simple : because these two strategic options *are still current* : must the proletariat

- be organised as citizens and seize political power through the State, or
- be organised as a class and seize social power through their class organisation ?

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15 March 2016