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MARXIST STUDY COURSES

Course

HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS

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The First International and the Paris Commune

I. The First International

The development of the labor movement in Britain, France and Germany; formation of the First International and the fight against Proudhonism and Bakuninism; its end.

II. The Paris Commune

The Empire and its collapse; the importance of the Commune; Marx, Lenin and Social-Democrats on the Commune.

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History of the Working Class

LESSON IV.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND THE PARIS COMMUNE

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Note the position of the labour movement in each of the countries in Western Europe, the changes in their respective economic developments during the 'seventies, and the bearing of these upon the decline of the International.

II. On the Paris Commune

Note that in the Franco-German war, the French proletariat advocated defence of the Fatherland, thus establishing an alliance of the working class with the petty-bourgeoisie. Study the different groups within the Commune (Blanquists, Jacobins and Proudhonists).

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Lesson IV

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND THE PARIS COMMUNE

I. The First International

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN THE MOST IMPORTANT COUNTRIES

The defeat of the 1848 revolution was followed by a prolonged period of stagnation in the political life of western Europe, in which Reaction exercised unbounded sway. Economic development, on the other hand, proceeded vigorously. In the eighteen-fifties there began a period of unprecedented industrial advance. Capitalism began to extend from Britain and France into the more backward countries, and break through and destroy pre-capitalist forms of production, thus bringing ruin to the peasantry and the urban petty-bourgeoisie, and so creating a propertyless working class and the conditions for capitalist industry. In her capitalist development Britain far surpassed other countries. By the 'fifties the town dwellers were more than half of the total population. The production of coal increased from 10 million tons in 1800 to 61 million in 1855 ; iron output rose from 1,390,000 tons in 1840 to 3,218,000 tons in 1855 ; the textile industry grew rapidly ; in 1832 the number of spindles employed was 2,000,000 ; by 1858 it had risen to 28,000,000. In the period 1854-64 railway mileage increased from 8,034 to 12,789. Britain in the 'fifties was the undisputed leader of the capitalist world.

In France the epoch of Napoleon III witnessed an uninterrupted development of capitalism. Coal output in 1852 amounted to 4,904,000 tons ; in 1862 to

10,317,000 ; iron output in the same period increased from 522,000 to 1,091,000 tons. In 1840 there were 3,200 undertakings employing steam power ; in 1852, 6,500 ; in 1862, 15,000. Railway mileage in 1840 was 1,832 kilometres ; in 1860, 9,439 kilometres.

In degree of concentration, however, French industry lagged considerably behind British. Small and medium-sized concerns still predominated. Capitalism made great progress also in Germany which, after the revolution of 1848, definitely took the road of capitalist development. The production of coal and iron increased ; the steel and textile industries were extended ; railway and ocean transport grew in extent ; foreign trade increased and, alongside all this, industry became more and more concentrated. Nevertheless, the political fragmentation of Germany offered serious obstacles to successful capitalist development.

This development of capitalism was not confined to western Europe only ; it became a world system, drawing both North America and Russia into its sphere. At the same time a number of national revolutions occurred in western Europe, which resulted in the national unification of Germany and Italy.

The working-class movement, which had stagnated for a time after the defeats of 1848, began slowly to recover after the middle 'fifties. The workers' organisations came on the scene, extremely weak, it is true, disunited and lacking any clear political form.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND

Through the 'fifties the English working class, politically, was still crippled by the defeat of Chartism. The industrial advance of the country, which at that time was really the " workshop of the world," the powerful stream of emigration to the United States and Australia (in the course of a few years about two million workers left the homeland), by which England lost the best and most energetic elements of the

working class, the comparatively high wages and infrequency of unemployment—these conditions did not favour a revival in the English labour movement. Disunity and craft narrowness in the proletarian organisations, fear of political action, the desire to keep within the narrow limits of the industrial struggle —these were the features distinguishing the British labour movement at that time. The organisations which did show signs of growth in that period were socially of the most innocent character—temperance associations, co-operative societies and mutual benefit associations (in 1859 these latter counted a membership of three million). In these organisations the working class was drawn away from political life and from the path of class struggle. The trade unions grew slowly and along lines of craft centralisation. Their attention was wholly taken up with the struggle for incidental economic concessions. From the political point of view they were content to supplement the activity of the bourgeois parties, usually supporting the liberals, or their " Radical " wing.

This situation began to change somewhat towards the end of the 'fifties, when the crisis of 1857 made the class struggle more acute. The capitalist offensive, an attempt to transfer the burdens of the crisis to the shoulders of the workers, was met by a wave of strikes, the most important of which were the building workers' strikes of 1859 and 1861. These strikes excited the English workers, and showed the limitation of the policy of craft exclusiveness. Hence the first London Trades' Council was formed in 1861, to be followed in 1868 by the first Trade Union Congress, and the tendency towards larger, " amalgamated " trade unions received effective impetus.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN FRANCE (PROUDHONISM)

In France the days of June, 1848, and the reprisals and repression which followed, dealt a heavy blow to

the militant workers' movement. The peaceful, petty-bourgeois theories of Proudhon, innocent of any revolutionary spirit, became the dominating ideological tendency.

Proudhon was hostile to capitalism ; but for him the origin of poverty within capitalist society was to be found not in the sphere of production, but in that of exchange—the typical outlook of the petty-bourgeoisie. From this basis he concluded that the methods of struggle against capitalism should be the organisation of mutual credit associations, co-operative and similar societies.

Proudhon was no socialist. Social ownership of the means of production seemed to him " crude tyranny," communist society a society of slaves, of the " herd." He was a passionate advocate for private property, his social ideal being a society of small proprietors acting as independent producers of commodities, wholly free from the social cancer of capitalism. He was opposed to the political struggle of the working class ; even strikes were objectionable and immoral weapons of struggle. As an advocate of a society without masters—of a free association of free communities—he urged his adherents to remain passive as regards the State. Instead of using the forces engendered by the development of capitalist society for the struggle against the bourgeoisie, the Proudhonists tried to solve the social problem by placing it outside bourgeois society, working as it were behind its back.

Proudhonism represented the interests of the artisan small-producer, ruined by capitalism and trying to regain his economic independence. The popularity achieved by this thoroughly petty-bourgeois, reactionary theory among the French workers can be explained only by the political immaturity of the French proletariat as a class. As yet no clear-cut line of demarcation existed between wage workers and handicraftsmen

in a number of important branches of French industry (the production of luxury commodities, apparel, furniture, etc.).

Certain sections of the workers were influenced by the agents of the Napoleonic Empire. In order to keep the workers quiet, small material concessions were made to bribe the workers to renounce political struggle. (This became known as police-socialism.) One section of the workers, small it is true, followed Blanqui. He tried to organise a conspiratorial group of revolutionaries who would, at the favourable moment, bring about a *coup d'état*, establish their own dictatorship and begin to transform society. The Blanquists were irreconcilable enemies of the Napoleonic Empire and conducted a vigorous struggle against it. But they scarcely concerned themselves with social and economic questions, attributing little importance to work among the masses, which explains the scantiness of their numbers.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN GERMANY (LASSALLEANISM)

The German working class had also been profoundly affected by the defeat of 1848. Up to the 'sixties workers' organisations (mainly workers' educational societies) followed the liberal bourgeoisie. But the rapid growth of capitalism in Germany, which in the 'sixties and 'seventies transformed it into a highly developed industrial country, brought with it advance in the workers' movement, made them politically independent. In 1862, on the initiative of the workers of Saxony, a central committee was set up at Leipzig to convene a national labour congress. The Leipzig committee applied to Lassalle (1825-64), well known as a radical politician, requesting him to give his opinion on the tasks of the working class. Lassalle's reply—the famous open letter in which he emphasised the necessity of breaking away from the progressives (the party of the liberal bourgeoisie) and forming an

independent proletarian organisation—was made by the committee the programme of the German labour movement. On May 23rd, 1863, at Leipzig, the Union of German Workers was formed with Lassalle as president, elected for five years, the post being occupied after his death by Schweitzer (1833-75).

There is no doubt that Lassalle rendered a great service in helping to arouse the class consciousness of the proletariat of Germany and to organise them independently. But Lassalle was also the father of opportunism and in this respect exercised a most pernicious influence on the German labour movement.

Lassalle's tactics, as well as his principles, were not Marxist. In his struggle against the liberal bourgeoisie, Lassalle tried to retain the goodwill of the junkers, and, in return for supporting Bismarck, he hoped to gain concessions for the working class. In the long run these tactics transformed the workers' movement into a pillar of Prussian absolutism. Marx, as an unyielding proletarian revolutionary, considered Lassalle's "realism" as treachery to the proletarian cause and condemned it as such.[1]

Nor was Lassalle an historical materialist; his philosophical ideas were of an idealist nature. He had no clear grasp of the class nature of the bourgeois State; in his opinion "the real function of the State, from earliest times, has been the training and development of mankind towards freedom." With this bourgeois idealist conception of the State as starting point, Lassalle attached far too much importance to

[1] The glossing-over of Lassalle's and Schweitzer's political manœuvres is a grave mistake in Mehring's otherwise very important book, *The History of German Social Democracy*. Mehring accuses Marx of being unjustly biased against Lassalle. Some time ago letters were discovered which demonstrate incontestably that Lassalle had concluded an alliance with Bismarck and that Schweitzer had actually received money from Bismarck. Marx was right when, in 1865, he wrote to Kugelmann: "Lassalle has in fact betrayed the party. He has concluded a formal treaty with Bismarck (without, of course, having any guarantees in his hand). At the end of September 1864 he was to go to Hamburg and there (together with the crazy Schramm and the Prussian police spy Marr) force Bismarck to accomplish the incorporation of Schleswig-Holstein; i.e. he was to proclaim this in the name of 'the workers,' in return for which Bismarck promised universal suffrage and a few socialist *charlataneries*." (This letter was for a long time kept secret by Kautsky, who published it only in 1919, during a quarrel with the right wing social democrats.)

universal suffrage and believed that it alone could "guarantee adequate representation of the interests of the German workers and really abolish class contradictions." (Extract from the statutes of the Union of German Workers, 1863.) The German social democrats of to-day fully uphold these ideas, and reassert Lassalle's faith in "pure democracy." Lassalle did not distinguish between the different class bases among the enemies of the proletariat. For him the peasants were nothing but anti-working-class conservatives. Nor was he an internationalist.

"In contrast to the Communist Manifesto, and all earlier forms of socialism, Lassalle treated the labour movement from the narrowest national standpoint." (Marx-Engels, *Programmkritiken*.)

On the most important questions, such as German unity under Prussian leadership, the incorporation of Poland into Germany and Bismarck's plans of forcible annexation, Lassalle adopted a social-patriotic attitude. It was therefore consistent for Konrad Haenisch, a social democrat who turned patriot in 1914, to write:

"Lassalle, though dead, is to-day more alive than ever; he lives not only in his party, but in the entire German people."

Lassalle, despite the fundamentally reformist and anti-revolutionary aspects of his teachings, played a certain positive part in the history of the German working-class movement, for, among other things, he popularised a number of Marx's ideas among the German proletariat, without, it is true, indicating their source.[1]

In regard to the organisation of the First International, the Union of German Workers repeatedly declared that it recognised the principles of the International but did not enter into closer relationship with

[1] "Lassalle knew the Communist Manifesto by heart, as his disciples knew his own sacred writings. When, therefore, he distorted it, he did so only to condone his alliance with the absolutist and feudal enemies of the bourgeoisie." In a letter to Kugelmann Marx speaks even more sharply, mentioning the "shameless plagiarisms" made by Lassalle from his works.

it because such action would have been contrary to Prussian law.

The second organisation of the German proletariat was the Social Democratic Labour Party, which was founded at Eisenach in 1869 at a Congress of the League of Workers' Educational Societies; at first it allied itself with the petty-bourgeois People's Party of Saxony, a radical-democratic organisation. The leaders of the Social Democratic Labour Party were Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826-1900) and August Bebel (1840-1913). The "Eisenachs," though sharing many of Lassalle's erroneous ideas, stood close to Marxism and maintained contact with the International.

2. THE FOUNDATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL

During the 'sixties a revival occurred in the workers' movements in England and France. The American Civil War (1861-5) had meant a cotton famine in Europe, which hit the textile industry severely. Thousands of workers were thrown on to the streets. The employers tried to worsen the conditions of labour, and their measures aroused great resistance. The London Trades Council organised a special assistance committee for the unemployed, and a similar committee was set up in France. The two committees entered into communication and thus the English and French workers had before them a living and convincing example of the solidarity of the workers' interests in different countries.

Another event which aroused the European proletariat was the Polish insurrection against Russia in 1863. To this event the workers responded with passionate sympathy. In England and in France they organised agitations in support of the insurrection; meetings and demonstrations were arranged and the governments were requested to render aid to Poland. In 1863 an international meeting to declare sympathy with the Polish insurgents was held in London at which

there were present English trade unionists and representatives of the French workers. At this meeting the trade unionists suggested a joint discussion on the necessity for maintaining constant contact between the English and continental workers. To the English trade unionists, the problem of the competition of cheap foreign labour brought to England by the British employers from France, Belgium and Germany was of great importance. An attempt had to be made to fight against this by means of association with the workers' organisations of those countries. It was therefore decided that the English workers should appeal to the French workers in this sense. The address, which was written shortly after the discussion took place, contained the following passage:

> "The fraternity of the people is of the utmost importance to the workers, for whenever we try to improve our position by shortening the working day or raising wages, the capitalists threaten to bring in French, Belgian and German workers, who will do our work for lower wages. . . . Unfortunately this threat is often put into execution."

The French workers answered a year later. In the interval their organisations had been giving all their attention to the elections to the Chamber of Deputies, in which, for the first time, their candidates stood independently. The necessity for such independent action was justified in a special programme, called the *Manifesto of the Sixty* (1864). In so far as it criticised the bourgeois order of society, the programme was Proudhonist, but in questions of political tactics it differed sharply from Proudhon's theories. The manifesto urged the formation of a separate political organisation of the workers and the nomination of the workers' own candidates at elections.

The French workers' answer to the English address repeats briefly the Proudhonist criticism of capitalist competition and capitalist monopoly. As against the English workers, who emphasised the trade union struggle, the French attached greater importance to

questions of industrial progress ; the division of labour and free trade.

> " The progress of industry, division of labour, freedom of labour—these are all new things which henceforth must claim our attention, for they will transform entirely the economic structure of society. Corresponding to the needs of the day and under the pressure of facts, capital is being concentrated into the hands of powerful financial and industrial companies. If we do not fight against this, it will meet with no opposition and we shall be exposed to despotic rule. . . . We, workers of all countries, must unite to build up a wall against this pernicious system, for otherwise humanity will be divided into two classes—a mass of ignorant people and a handful of dignitaries and satiated mandarins."

In September 1864, the French delegation came to England with their answer. On the 28th of the same month there was held that historic meeting in London which laid the foundations of the International. The meeting accepted the address of the English and the reply of the French workers and decided to found an International Working-Men's Association. A committee was selected to draw up the programme and statutes of the new organisation.

The committee consisted of representatives of the English and French workers and of the German and Italian emigrants who lived in London. Among those elected was Karl Marx. The committee was extremely heterogeneous in its composition and reflected clearly the variety of organisational forms and ideological tendencies in the working-class movement. In the committee there were trade unionists, Owenites, Chartists, Proudhonists, Blanquists, German Communists, Polish and Italian Nationalist revolutionaries —men with the most varied, and at times the most conflicting ideas on all questions of importance to the working-class movement. When the committee requested Marx to draw up the proposed programme and statutes, he was given an extremely difficult task ; without in any way watering down his own revolutionary ideas, he had to write in a way that would be

acceptable to all the tendencies represented in the committee. The task was brilliantly fulfilled. The Inaugural Address written by him and accepted by the committee, and the statutes of the organisation, which he too drew up, became the ideological foundation of the international proletarian class struggle and a historical document of world communism.

THE PROGRAMME AND STATUTES OF THE INTERNATIONAL

The Inaugural Address is a Manifesto—an introduction to the programme of the International. Sketching the position of the working class, it reached the conclusion that, despite the tremendous growth of industry and trade, the distress of the workers had not diminished and that their conditions could not be radically improved so long as capitalism existed. Two victories gained by the working class in the preceding two years were remarked upon : the passing of the ten-hour bill in England and the development of the co-operatives, whose origins were also to be found in England.

> " The ten-hour act was not merely a great practical victory ; it was also the triumph of a principle. For the first time, in the full light of day, the political economy of the bourgeoisie submitted to the political economy of the working class."

The co-operatives represented a similar victory of principle. For the first time they demonstrated, in deeds instead of arguments, the possibility of large-scale undertakings organised and managed without the bourgeoisie. But, in themselves, the co-operatives could never, in the conditions of capitalist society, stay the development of capitalism or emancipate the working class ; too great importance should not therefore be attached to them.

The emancipation of the proletariat requires the seizure of political power. In the given period that was the most important task of the proletariat. The landlords and capitalists will always try to maintain their political privileges in order to strengthen their

economic domination. Against them the workers have one real chance of success—their numbers. " But the masses only exert their weight when they are organised and when knowledge guides them."

The workers' struggle demands the international unification of all their forces : that was the task of the International Working-Men's Association. The policy of bourgeois states, founded upon the suppression of the workers, leads to criminal wars of spoliation and divides the ranks of the workers. The proletariat must therefore fight energetically against this policy of violence and oppression.

The statutes of the International declared that :

" The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves. . . . Considering :

" That the economical subjection of the man of labour to the monopoliser of the means of labour, that is, the sources of life, lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation and political dependence ;

" That the economical emancipation of the working classes is therefore the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means ;

" That all efforts aiming at that great end have hitherto failed from the want of solidarity between the manifold divisions of labour in each country, and from the absence of a fraternal bond of union between the working classes of different countries ;

" That the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries."

For those reasons the International was founded.

The International was organised in the following fashion :

In every country the members of the International united into a section of the International, managed by the national federative council. International congresses, to be convened periodically, were to discuss the most important questions of the working-class movement and to elect the chief committee for the whole International—the General Council. Although the General Council was given great powers, it could

not actually become the decisive centre from the organisational point of view, and in the main its functions were to give ideological leadership to the International proletarian movement. The basic organisational principles of the International were forgotten by the Second International. The International Socialist Bureau, formed by the latter body, had very small powers and confined itself mostly to circulating information and statistics. The Third International readopted the theories of the First, and developed its principles of organisation. On that basis it created a unified and centralised communist world party.

3. THE FIRST PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST PROUDHONISM

The first Congress of the International was held in September 1866 in Geneva. The majority consisted of Proudhonists from France and Switzerland. Opposed to them were the English, who had come prepared with material provided by Marx.

In the discussion on the ratification of the statutes, the Proudhonists demanded that only those performing manual labour should be admitted into the International. Then, on the same subject, a question arose of mutual international assistance and of the struggle between capital and labour—the Proudhonists declared themselves in opposition to strikes and recommended the establishment of mutual aid societies. On the question of female labour their attitude was particularly reactionary. They opposed the participation of women in public life and in production, even pleading for the " sanctity of the woman at her fireside," trying to force their philistine ideas into the programme of the international proletariat. Most of the Proudhonist proposals were rejected by the Congress.

The theses drawn up by Marx on trade unions were accepted unanimously by the Congress. They treated trade unions as vital centres of working-class organisa-

tion, which the proletariat could use not only in daily economic struggles, but also as a means towards the more important end of abolishing the system of wage-labour altogether. This resolution on trade unions is still to-day a model for a truly revolutionary conception of the role and tasks of trade unions.

The Congress declared its hostility to the imperialist designs of Russia and advocated the restoration of an independent Poland reconstituted on social democratic principles. It established the principle that the working class has to strive for legislation in the interests of labour—the legal limitation of the working day to eight hours, special protection for female and juvenile labour, etc.

The Geneva Congress awakened a lively echo in every country. The resolution of the Sheffield Conference of English trade unionists (in 1866) may serve as an example of the attitude of proletarian organisations towards the International. This resolution expressed their " unqualified appreciation of the efforts of the International to unite the workers of all countries by the common bonds of fraternity," and appealed to all trade union organisations to affiliate to the International.

A number of English trade unionists joined the International. Sections were also formed in France and the International became extremely popular among the workers of Switzerland, Italy, Germany and Belgium. It is interesting to note that, in its early period, the International was quite fairly treated in the bourgeois press. But when the part which it played in strikes, and the decisions of its congresses had opened the eyes of the bourgeoisie, it suddenly became a " gang of incendiaries," " men to whom nothing was sacred," who " aimed at anarchy and the annihilation of civilisation," etc.

The next Congress of the International was held at Lausanne in September 1867. It passed a Proudhonist

resolution on the question of credit and people's banks, and recommended the trade unions to create a " national credit system."

In the discussion on the role of the State, a resolution was moved advocating that land should be made common property. The French delegates were passionately opposed to this suggestion, and it was agreed to refer it to the agenda of the next Congress. Like its predecessor, the Lausanne Congress uttered a protest against the wars that were being prepared by the policy of bourgeois governments. The Congress declared that the social emancipation of the workers was indissolubly bound up with their political struggle and that consequently the winning of political power was their first and most urgent task. The Congress attached such importance to this declaration that it was decided to repeat it every year.

From the time of the Lausanne Congress the influence of the International among the workers grew steadily. The part which it played in several strikes was of great importance. The International supported the strikers, organised collections for them in other countries and obstructed the capitalists when they tried to bring in foreign workers as strike breakers.

In France the victorious strike of the Parisian bronze workers, which had been actively supported by the International, aroused general sympathy for the International among the workers. When, following upon that struggle, Napoleon III's police dissolved the Paris section of the International (1868), its authority in the eyes of the workers grew still greater.

In Belgium and Switzerland the sections advanced rapidly, and sections were also set up in Italy. Finally the influence of the International penetrated into Germany and Austria. The great moral influence which it exercised over the workers generally can be seen from a letter from the General Council to the English trade unions.

" When Bismarck proposed tariff reform in Germany, the Barmen-Elberfeld Chamber of Commerce objected on the ground that Prussian manufacturers could not compete against the English without reducing wages, but that was impossible because of the rapid growth and great influence of the International."

Thus, in the first few years of its existence, the International became a most influential organisation, arousing the warmest sympathy of the proletarian masses and instilling fear into the bourgeoisie.

The third congress was held in Brussels in September 1868. Among the ninety-six delegates there were fifty-five from Belgium, eighteen from France, eleven from England, a few Swiss and Germans, and one Italian. The first item on the agenda was the war danger. The great attention devoted to this question by the International was due to the extreme gravity of the international situation at that time. The war between Austria and Prussia had just come to an end (in 1866) and the Franco-German war loomed clearly ahead. The position was one of extreme insecurity and the outbreak of war could be expected any day. The Congress issued a flaming protest against war and called upon the workers to strike when it should break out.

The Congress recognised strikes as an essential weapon in the class struggle of the proletariat, and the Proudhonists now agreed on this point.

The question of property aroused furious debates. A collectivist resolution was introduced, contested by the Proudhonist delegates. Finally, by thirty votes to four, with fifteen abstentions, a resolution was passed declaring that :

" The economic development of modern society makes the transformation of the land into social property a social necessity, and that the State should lease the land to agricultural communities on the same conditions as mines and railways," that—

" means of communication and transport must become the collective property of society," and that—

" quarries, coal-mines, and other mines, as well as railways, will, in a rational society, belong to society collectively as represented by the State."

This resolution meant that the International frankly declared its adherence to Communist principles.

At the suggestion of the German delegates, the Congress greeted Marx, who had just published the first volume of *Capital* and stated that thereby :

" Karl Marx had rendered an invaluable service in being the first economist to subject capital to scientific analysis."

Although the Brussels Congress marked the decline of Proudhonism, there was no ideological unity in the ranks of the International, for Proudhon's place was taken by Bakunin, against whose ideas a still more vigorous and bitter struggle had to be fought.

4. THE SECOND PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST BAKUNINISM

Michael Bakunin (1814-76), a Russian revolutionary and emigrant, and the greatest leader and theoretician of the anarchists, differed sharply from Marx on all important questions of the labour movement. In his view the most important task of the social revolution was to destroy the State, in which he saw the cause of all social wretchedness and the source of economic inequality. With the abolition of the State, capitalism would automatically go to pieces and on its ruins the new stateless order of society would grow up.

Consequently Bakunin regarded all participation in the day-to-day political struggle as rank opportunism. A revolutionary should only conduct propaganda to enlighten the masses about the aims of the social revolution, and should prepare for insurrection.

Bakunin advocated collective ownership of the land, mines and industrial undertakings. His social ideal was an alliance, without masters, of autonomous agricultural and industrial associations. But he was not really well acquainted with economic problems and consequently his collectivist ideas were mixed up with petty-bourgeois utopian demands for the " political,

economic and social equality of all classes," which was to be ushered in by the abolition of inheritance—an idea borrowed by Bakunin from Saint-Simon.

Bakunin's conception of the driving forces of the social revolution was peculiar. He had no idea of the leading part the proletariat must take in the revolution, and considered that Marx greatly exaggerated the importance of the working class. The revolution had its main strength in those sections of the population whose sufferings were particularly great and whom modern society drove to despair—the pauperised, ruined peasantry, the *lumpenproletariat* and the young intellectuals, who were extremely receptive to revolutionary ideas.

Bakunin's ideas were not those of the industrial proletariat.

> "The peasant ruined by the development of capitalism, the craftsman superseded by the same development, the man in a small way of business . . . always oppressed by capitalism and frequently suffering an incredibly severe and rapid decline in his standard of life, easily falls a prey to extreme revolutionary ideas, but is incapable of displaying endurance, the capacity for organisation, discipline and tenacity." (Lenin.)

The "petty-bourgeois driven wild," by the horrors of capitalism and workers flung down from the ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie and plunged for the first time into the melting-pot of the factory—these were the social classes whose feelings were expressed by Bakunin. Consequently his influence was particularly strong in such countries as Italy, Switzerland, Spain and Belgium, which were at that time still in the early stages of capitalist development.

In the 'sixties Bakunin helped in the work of the League of Peace and Freedom, a bourgeois-pacifist organisation from which he seceded only in 1868. He founded the "International Alliance of Socialist Democracy," whose programme contained all his essential ideas. In a letter to Marx, Bakunin wrote about this time:

> "I am now doing what you began to do twenty years ago. Now that I have taken final leave of the bourgeoisie at the Berlin Congress of the League for Peace and Freedom, I have nothing more to do with bourgeois society, but only with the world of workers. My fatherland is now—the International; you, however, are one of its chief founders. You see, dear friend, that I am your pupil, and I am proud of it."

The Alliance requested to be accepted into the International as a separate organisation. The General Council of the International would not agree to the existence within the International of a separate association, of an international character possessing its own separate programme and statutes. Thereupon the Alliance was (formally) dissolved as such and its sections accepted into the International. In secret, however, the Alliance continued to exist, as the organisational and ideological centre that was to win the International for Bakuninism.

The Fourth Congress, held in Basle in 1869, coincided with the highest point reached in the development of the International. Its influence in England, Belgium, France and Germany was still growing and for the first time representatives of Spain and North America were present at the Congress.

Recognising this growth, the Congress extended the powers of the General Council and gave it the right to exclude sections which deviated from the line of the International.

The first clash with Bakunin occurred when he put forward the demand for the abolition of the right of inheritance which "made political and economic justice impossible and prevented the establishment of social equality."

The members of the General Council who spoke against Bakunin showed that inheritance was not the cause, but the result of the existing economic order and that it was putting the cart before the horse to begin the social revolution with the abolition of the right of inheritance.

The struggle between the Bakuninists and the adherents of the General Council that flared up at the Congress was carried into the sections of the International. It was conducted with peculiar acerbity in Switzerland, in which country a split between the two groups occurred in April 1870.

5. THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR AND THE INTERNATIONAL

Meanwhile, on the international stage, events were taking place which were to have a decisive influence on the fate of the International.

In July 1870 war broke out between France and Prussia, thus preventing the assembly of the International Congress, which was due to be held in Germany. French and German workers—members of the International—protested vigorously against the war. The General Council issued an appeal to all sections, written by Marx (dated July 23rd, 1870), placing the responsibility for the war on the policy of the ruling classes of Bonapartist France and junker Prussia.

> " While official France and official Germany have plunged into fratricidal war, the workers of these two countries send each other messages of peace and friendship."

In another appeal, also written by Marx, issued on September 9th, 1870, after the overwhelming defeats of the French armies had caused the collapse of the empire and led to the proclamation of the republic in France, the General Council protested against the German bourgeoisie's plans of annexation, pointing out that if those plans were carried out France would be driven into the arms of Russia and there would be created a source of further and still more murderous wars.

On their side the German internationalists fought courageously against the war and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. Bebel and Liebknecht—who had refused to vote the war appropriations—were accused

of high treason and condemned to two years' imprisonment. The sections of the International in Switzerland, Belgium and Austria also protested loudly against Germany's annexation plans. In their attitude to the Franco-German war, the International and its sections set the example of a tried and truly international policy, alien to every thought of nationalism.

When the insurrection of March 18th, 1871, gave birth to the Paris Commune, the International declared whole-heartedly for its defence and proclaimed this work as the cause of the world proletariat. The General Council excluded Tolain from the International, because he had gone over to the side of the Versaillese, asserting that the place for French members of the International could not be elsewhere but in the ranks of the Communards.

Before dealing with the Commune, the most tremendous event in the modern working-class movement up to 1917, we will conclude the history of the First International.

6. THE END OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

The defeat of the Commune in May 1871 profoundly affected the subsequent development of the International. The French working - class movement, brutally attacked and persecuted by the bourgeoisie, was crippled for many years to come. The German movement, too, entered upon an era of government persecution, for revenge was being taken on the working-class leaders for their courageous attitude during the war and for their solidarity with the Commune. In the International, therefore, both France and Germany declined in importance.

In Britain, too, the International's influence over the trade unions dwindled considerably after the trade union leaders had (in 1871) wrung a few political concessions from the bourgeoisie (the abolition of a number of legal limitations on the activities of trade

unions). They relapsed further and further under the influence of the liberal bourgeoisie. Some trade unions broke with the International because it had supported the Commune.

The economic advance made by England in the early 'seventies, and the opportunity this gave the bourgeoisie to use part of their super-profits to corrupt the upper ranks of the working class, finally transformed the trade unions into reliable pillars of the existing order of society; thus they became increasingly an obstacle in the way of the development of class consciousness among the English proletariat.

To these causes of decline in Britain must be added the bitter internal strife between the Marxists and the Bakuninists, which flared up with still greater heat after the fall of the Commune.

While, for Marx, the greatest significance of the Commune lay in its "being a government of the working class. . . . The political form, at last discovered, in which the economic emancipation of the working classes could be consummated," for Bakunin "The Commune of 1871—was above all the denial of the State." He considered that the great mistake of the Commune lay in its endeavour to establish a revolutionary dictatorship in Paris.

In September 1871, a Conference of the International, held in London, passed a resolution pointing out that "the organisation of the proletariat in a political party is essential to secure the triumph of the social revolution and its main object, the abolition of classes; it reminds all members of the International that in the working class's plan of struggle, the economic movement is indissolubly bound up with political activity."

Bakunin's idea of the non-interference of the working class in political life was thus rejected decisively.

In Switzerland, where the split had occurred early in 1870, the Bakuninist sections set up a completely separate organisation. Going by the name of the Jura

Federation, it appealed to the other sections of the International and accused the General Council of the International of dictatorial acts and of "packing" the London Conference. The majority of the sections in Italy, Spain and Belgium joined in the Bakuninist campaign against the General Council.

The split thus spread over the entire International.

Then, in September 1872, the Fifth Congress of the International met at the Hague. It rejected the demand put forward by Bakuninist adherents to transform the General Council into a "letter-box" for the sections, possessing no right to intervene in their internal affairs. The Congress emphasised the need for centralisation and discipline in the organisation of the International and gave the Council all the powers necessary to control the sections.

A further resolution dealt with the necessity for the proletariat to form an independent political party, under whose leadership the working class would take part in political life and fight to win political power.

The actions of the Bakuninists in splitting the International were investigated by a special commission which came to the conclusion that Bakunin had only dissolved his "Alliance" in form. Actually he had maintained it in existence secretly, as a centre for sending out instructions and for guiding the struggle against the General Council. The Congress decided therefore to exclude Bakunin from the International.

At the suggestion of Marx and Engels the Congress transferred the seat of the General Council from London to New York. This decision was made as an attempt to remove the General Council from the influence, not only of the Bakuninists, but also of the English trade unionists, who were falling more and more under the influence of the bourgeoisie. The suggestion was accepted by twenty-six votes against twenty-three, with nine abstentions. The French Blanquists thereupon withdrew demonstratively from the Congress,

declaring that the International was taking refuge from the revolution across the Atlantic Ocean.

The decisions of the Hague Congress were unable to delay any longer the decay of the International; in the same year the Bakuninists established their own anarchist international, which was joined by the majority of the sections in Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Belgium, and which lasted until 1877.

Nor was the soil any longer favourable to the International in France and England. The Sixth Congress, held in Geneva in 1873, was a failure. It was the last held.

The working-class movement then entered upon a period of development in which all its forces were spent on setting up and strengthening its national proletarian organisations. Consequently, in July 1876, the Philadelphia Conference of the International decided to dissolve the organisation.

. . . . . .

In 1874, ten years after the foundation of the International, Engels wrote to Sorge:

> "From one point of view—from the point of view of the future—the International has for ten years dominated European history, and may look back upon its work with pride.
>
> "But in its old form it has outlived itself . . . I think that the next international—after Marx's works have had some years to exert their influence—will be directly Communist and will spread our principles."

The First International exercised a great influence over the International working-class movement. It spread wide the ideas of scientific Socialism. Ideologically, it put an end to all sectarian attempts to divert the working class from the broad path of class struggle. It gave the international proletariat excellent examples of truly revolutionary and strictly proletarian, internationalist policy on all the important aspects of the workers' movement. It prepared the ground for the development of a proletarian mass movement, marching under the banner of scientific Socialism or Communism.

> "The First International laid the foundation of the international organisation of the workers for preparing their revolutionary attack on capital, the foundations of the international proletarian struggle for Socialism." (Lenin.)

The Second International (1889-1914) proved incapable of carrying on the work of the First. Its opportunism in practical questions, its disgraceful attitude during the war, its work as the saviour of capitalism during the first revolutionary period after the war and its work to-day, in support of the governments of poverty, of unemployment, of Fascism—all this is diametrically opposed to the policy of the First International. The parties in the Second International have become forces of counter-revolution, pillars of the bourgeoisie and of Fascism. The programme of the Comintern describes the part played by social democracy to-day in the following words (p. 12):

> "The principal function of social democracy at the present time is to disrupt the essential militant unity of the proletariat in its struggle against imperialism. In splitting and disrupting the united front of the proletarian struggle against capital, social democracy serves as the mainstay of imperialism in the working class. International social democracy of all shades, the Second International and its trade union branch, the Amsterdam Federation of Trade Unions, has thus become the last reserve of bourgeois society and its most reliable pillar of support."

The Communist International, founded 1919, whose existence was foreseen by Engels, is the real successor of the First International and the real executor of its legacy.

II. The Paris Commune

1. THE SECOND EMPIRE

The Second Empire (1852-70) was an epoch during which capitalism in France developed very rapidly. Industry and the trading turnover increased greatly and France was covered by a closely-knit net of railways. From 1851 to 1869, French national wealth doubled (from 82 to 162 milliard francs). The financial bourgeoisie, closely connected with the government of the Second Empire, set up an elaborate system of exchanges and speculation and accumulated huge amounts of capital.

This process was accompanied by the decline of small-scale industry and handicraft, which gave way to large-scale capital, large numbers of the urban petty bourgeoisie being ruined.

From the political point of view, the Second Empire was a régime of blackest reaction. The military cliques, the bureaucracy and the clergy ruled unchecked. The schools were completely under the power of the church, the press was subjected to the strictest censorship. The elections to the Legislative Assembly —a sort of Parliament—were held under the watchful eye of the administrative machine, which exercised pressure freely.

In the first years of the Empire, Napoleon III relied on the support of the most powerful sections of the bourgeoisie and of the peasantry. But as the memory of 1848 grew fainter, and the government was revealed more and more clearly as the faithful guardian of the interests of the financial bourgeoisie, Napoleon lost the support of the industrialists.

The failure of his foreign policy, which led to a number of wars each ending in the defeat of France, the government's fiscal policy, which placed the entire burden of taxation on the masses, and the incredible

corruption of officials—all this gave a great impulse to the opposition and to the growth of republican sentiments in the country. Napoleon tried, unsuccessfully, to stem the opposition movement. In the elections of 1869, the opposition, despite administrative pressure, received three million votes against four and a half million for the government. The Empire was approaching its end.

THE FRENCH LABOUR MOVEMENT

Despite the rapid development of capitalism in France, the industrial proletariat was not very numerous in the 'sixties and 'seventies.

Handicraftsmen, domestic workers and workers in small-scale concerns still formed a very large body. Of the 442,000 industrial workers in Paris, not more than 50,000 were engaged in large-scale concerns, or on transport and communications.

There were among the French proletariat many sections not wholly distinct from the petty-bourgeoisie, and not yet free from petty-bourgeois ideas ; this, too, explains the great influence exercised by Proudhonism on the French workers during the Empire. But the facts of the unceasing class struggle convinced the workers of the uselessness of the Proudhonist remedy and gradually led them on to the right road. The collapse of the Proudhonist labour credit bank in 1868 revealed the utopian character of the Proudhonist plan of struggle against capitalism.

The defeats which Proudhonist ideas suffered at the congresses of the First International helped a section of the French workers to discard more rapidly their petty-bourgeois Proudhonist illusions.

In 1864 the Chapelier law, which had made strikes and combinations of workmen illegal, was annulled. That, however, did not deter the government from shooting down strikers. The trade union movement grew stronger.

As the government became aware of the revolutionary sentiments among the working class, it began to persecute bitterly the French section of the International. The trials of 1868 practically destroyed the organisation of the French section of the International, although the part it played in strikes, and the persecution which it suffered at the hands of the Napoleonic Government, greatly increased its prestige among the masses. The amalgamation of a number of workers' organisations into the Paris Federation of the International took place only in 1870. The members of the International, however, possessed neither a clear and unifying programme, nor a resolute leadership.

Before the Franco-German war the French proletariat really had no party on a national scale. The movement included Proudhonists, Blanquists and Bakuninists, whose views on the basic questions of the working-class movement differed fundamentally the one from the other, none of them being prepared for the tasks which confronted the working class.

THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE. THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Aware of the powerful growth of republican sentiments in the country, Napoleon began, on July 19th, 1870, the war on Prussia, in the hope of consolidating the prestige of the Empire by military victories and of checking the growth of the opposition. Bismarck was equally anxious for war, since a victory over France promised to complete German unification under Prussian domination.

The war immediately revealed the inner rottenness of the Empire. The badly equipped troops, under mediocre generalship, suffered defeat after defeat. Two months after the outbreak of war—on September 2nd—Napoleon and the main French army were surrounded by Prussian troops at Sedan and forced to surrender.

On September 4th, the old form of government was abolished at Paris and the republic proclaimed. The workers' organisations were disunited and unprepared for a revolution. Power fell into the lap of the bourgeois opposition, which set up the so-called government of national defence. The Prussian troops continued to advance, and by September 19th had surrounded Paris. Within the besieged city the national guard was increased to 300,000 men, and then the workers had weapons placed in their hands.

The working class and the petty-bourgeoisie were fired with patriotism and considered it their most urgent duty to liberate France from the Prussian troops. In France this patriotic sentiment "had arisen during the great French revolution of the eighteenth century; it dominated the socialists in the Commune, and Blanqui, for example, undoubtedly a revolutionary and an ardent adherent of socialism, found no more suitable name for his paper than the bourgeois cry: *The Fatherland in Danger.*" (Lenin.)

"Faced by the enemy, there can be no parties and no differences of opinion," Blanqui wrote. That he could allow himself to be so swept away by patriotic illusions, indicates the immaturity, from a class aspect, of the French proletariat and the hold petty-bourgeois ideas had upon them.

The Government of National Defence was more afraid of the armed workers inside Paris than of the Prussians outside. It became, consequently, a government of national betrayal, secretly preparing to surrender Paris. The armed proletarian masses would have made excellent soldiers, but it was precisely their victory that the government feared; hence the national guard divisions were thrown into battle in the secret hope that they would be wiped out. "Then," as General Trochu, the military Governor of Paris, a member of the government, said, "if 20,000 were to fall in a great battle, Paris would surrender."

The treachery of the government, its delay in meeting the demands of the Paris workers, who were urging the requisitioning of all food supplies and their distribution by a system of ration-cards, together with the military defeats, led to attempts at insurrection on the part of the Blanquists and Jacobins on October 31st, 1870, and January 23rd, 1871. They failed because of inadequate organisation, and were followed by a flood of reprisals. On January 28th, Paris surrendered. Conditions of peace were to be decided by a national assembly to be elected on February 6th.

The question of " peace or war " was the real question at the elections. The Republicans and Socialists were anxious to continue the war. Consequently the peasants voted for the Monarchists, who advocated peace. Of the 740 members of the national assembly, 450 were monarchists. The assembly hastened to conclude peace with Prussia, agreeing to pay an indemnity of five milliard francs and ceding Alsace and Lorraine to Prussia.

Attention was then given to revolutionary Paris. The Governor of Paris and the commanding officer of the national guard were chosen from among the monarchist generals. The national guards were deprived of their pay (1½ francs a day), which, because of the unemployment in Paris, was the only means of livelihood for great masses of the proletariat, and the suspension of rent payments and debt payments, introduced during the siege, was abrogated. The workers and the petty-bourgeoisie were apparently exposed to complete ruin.

But the most important thing still remained to do. The workers and artisans of Paris had to be disarmed. The head of the government, the monarchist Thiers, ordered that the 250 cannon belonging to the national guard should be seized and removed in military custody. The theft was prevented; on March 18th the government and the regular troops fled to Versailles; control was taken by the Central Committee of the national guard, elected by an overwhelming majority of the battalions.

2. THE COMMUNE

The insurrection of March 18th was a spontaneous affair. The revolutionary organisations were wholly unprepared for it. The Federation of the International could not at first make up its mind to intervene in events. The Central Committee of the national guard, in its composition Socialist and proletarian, sought to evade responsibility for further developments, and ordered the elections of a " Commune," a body to which all power was to be transferred. The entire population was to take part in the elections, so that the new power might be really democratic. The elections, in which 230,000 participated, were completed on March 26th, and on the 28th the Council of the Commune assumed power.

But the Central Committee of the national guard, which remained in existence, understood the revolutionary significance of events as little as it did the necessity for an attack on Versailles. It feared to start civil warfare, occupying itself with the elections to the Commune and thus giving a ten-day breathing-space wherein the Versaillese could rally the forces of the counter-revolution. It made another mistake in handing power over so quickly to the Commune—the Central Committee was a more united and, in its composition, more proletarian body than was the Commune. Counting upon reaching an understanding with Versailles, the Central Committee did not deprive the bourgeoisie of the franchise; but the seventeen representatives elected by the bourgeoisie immediately cut themselves off from the proletariat by declining to exercise their mandates. The Commune (after by-elections) counted seventy-seven members.

The composition of the Commune reflected that

alliance of the proletarian masses with the petty-bourgeoisie which had been formed during the war on the basis of defending the Fatherland: about 32 per cent. were workers, 15 per cent. petty officials, the same proportion of small business men and 39 per cent. members of the liberal professions, lawyers, teachers, etc.

The Commune divided into two groups, the majority composed of Jacobins and Blanquists, and the Proudhonist minority. The Jacobins represented the radical petty bourgeoisie; they were not socialists, but sought to reconcile classes and to establish universal justice. They regarded themselves as carrying on the traditions of the great French revolution; they did not understand the working-class movement and wished to realise in the Commune the democratic ideals of 1793, failing to understand that the new epoch had brought with it new ideals and new tasks.

On many questions the majority and minority were disunited. The minority set their hopes on a stateless alliance of autonomous Communes, opposed the exercise of state power and vigorously fought against dictatorial measures. The struggle within the Commune went so far that at one time the minority made a demonstrative exit, accused the majority of being dictators and published their protest in the newspapers —events which must have given rise to considerable bewilderment among the proletariat of Paris.

The Commune, which had no clear programme of action, no unified leadership, and was torn between its mutually hostile tendencies, was called upon to lead the Paris proletariat at a moment when they were confronted by urgent tasks of the utmost difficulty. The situation was extraordinarily complicated. The state apparatus was not functioning, for the higher and middle officials had fled to Versailles. By the force of events, the Commune had been driven into a position in which it was impossible for the machinery of the

bourgeois state to be simply taken over; rather had it to be destroyed and built anew. The Commune found the correct way of meeting this difficulty, if only slowly and partially; but its experience was of immeasurable service to the Russian proletariat in 1917.

The Commune was organised not as a parliamentary but as a working political body, uniting in its hands both legislative and executive power. Its members were individually responsible and could be recalled at any time. All officials were to be elected, subject to recall and in receipt of a salary not exceeding the average wages of a skilled worker. The Commune replaced the standing army by an armed people and abolished the police force.

The Commune decreed the separation of church and state and liberated the schools from the control of the clergy. Free education was introduced into all educational institutions. Judges, as well as all other official persons, were to be elected, made personally responsible and appointed subject to recall. All these measures, carried through by the Commune, radically changed the character of the state apparatus, transforming it from an instrument of bourgeois class domination into the state of the working class, supported by the great majority of the workers.

The Commune was far from being aware that it had set up the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the conditions of civil warfare in which it was working compelled it to adopt methods of dictatorship and terror against the class enemy. It prohibited the meetings of the Versaillese, closed down their press, searched their houses, made arrests, set up a committee of public welfare, published a decree on the shooting of hostages. Its work in the social-economic sphere was of very modest proportions. The Commune did not raise the question of expropriating the bourgeoisie. The decrees which it published on the abolition of fines in factories, the prohibition of night work for

bakers, the transference of concerns deserted by the employers to bodies of workmen, the establishment of a labour exchange, the provision for the widows and orphans of the members of the national guard who had fallen in the fight against the Versaillese (without distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children) —all these decrees did not touch the foundations of the capitalist order of society. The confusion and indistinctness of the socialist ideas held by the French proletariat at that time were particularly apparent in this aspect of the Commune's activity.

The Bank of France had fallen into the hands of the Commune; its holdings amounted to three milliard francs. The Commune did not appropriate this money, which would have been an excellent card to play against the Versaillese, but on the contrary carefully guarded the property of the bourgeoisie. The petty-bourgeois respect for private property and the desire to achieve "justice for all," induced the Commune to reject a proposal to confiscate the property of the railway companies, and another proposal to annul debt obligations and to impose contributions on the bourgeoisie who had fled to Versailles.

THE MISTAKES AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COMMUNE

It was the misfortune of the French proletariat that it possessed no party capable of grasping the tasks of the moment and of leading the proletariat. Instead of marching against Versailles, on March 18th, without any delay, and of annihilating the enemy, the proletariat hesitated, in the hope of being able to exercise moral pressure. This was a great mistake. The Central Committee of the national guard would have been able to guide events better had it acted independently of the Commune. It is true that the Commune found itself forced to take dictatorial measures and to use terror, but this was done in an unsystematic and irresolute fashion, without steady purpose. Several

mistakes were also made in military matters, as well as in the attitude adopted towards the Bank of France. The Commune's social and economic policy should not have been left a half-and-half affair, but should have proceeded energetically to the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.

Nor was the Commune able to establish contact with the provinces. In a number of towns (Lyons, Marseilles, Saint Etienne, etc.), the news of the events in Paris led to insurrections, which, however, remained isolated and were easily suppressed. Of particular gravity was the Commune's failure to get into touch with the peasants.

All these mistakes were due to the immaturity of the French proletariat as a class and to the influence of the petty-bourgeois (Jacobin) elements in the Commune, which acted as a brake. They introduced into the ranks of the proletariat their lack of political character, their irresoluteness, and their petty-bourgeois respect for private property.

On the part of the Commune there was an inadequate understanding of events, lack of organisation, of system and resolution in action; the state of affairs was quite different in the camp of the counter-revolution. From the very beginning Thiers had decided to crush the Commune absolutely. He was assisted by the Prussian government, which released the French prisoners of war to defend the capitalist order of society against the working class.

The Versaillese and the German troops surrounded Paris from every side. On May 21st, the Versailles troops entered Paris; for a week the Communards put up an heroic resistance, but the superior strength of the enemy decided the day, and on May 28th the Commune fell, having existed seventy-two days. The bourgeoisie took its revenge, and terror reigned unchecked. Within a few days 25,000 had been shot down, and 13,700 condemned, most of them being deported to the

fever hells of New Caledonia. Once again the working class learned to know how the bourgeoisie takes revenge on those who dare to attack the sacred rights of bourgeois society.

MARX, LENIN AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS ON THE COMMUNE

The development of events in France during the Franco-Prussian war was followed by Marx with the most careful attention. Realising the weakness of the proletarian organisations, and their inadequate preparation for struggle, he did not advise the French workers to rise against the government of national defence; he recommended them to use the greater freedom in political life for the purpose, mainly, of strengthening their ranks. But after the Commune had been set up, Marx welcomed it with the greatest enthusiasm.

> " However it may be," he wrote to Kugelmann on April 12th, 1871, " the present rising in Paris—although at the mercy of the wolves, swine and dirty hounds of the old society—is the most glorious act of our party since the June insurrection. Compare with these Titans of Paris, engaged in storming heaven, those cowering pigmies of the German-Prussian-Holy-Roman Empire, with its posthumous masquerades reeking of barracks, churches, junkers and, above all, philistines."

In a later letter to Kugelmann, written April 17th, Marx wrote that, had the Paris proletariat surrendered to Thiers without a struggle—

> " the demoralisation of the working class would have been a much greater misfortune than the downfall of any number of ' leaders.' The struggle of the working class against the capitalist class and its State has entered upon a new phase because of the struggle in Paris. Whatever course the affair may take immediately, a new position of universal historical importance has been won."

Two days after the fall of the Commune Marx wrote *The Civil War in France*, a work of genius, estimating the significance of the Commune and analysing its experience and its mistakes. For him, as for Engels,

the universal significance of the Commune consisted in this—

> " that essentially it was a government of the working class, the outcome of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form, at last discovered, in which the economic emancipation of labour could be consummated."

In the Commune, Marx and Engels saw the dictatorship of the proletariat. They attached particularly great importance to the fact (and this conclusion was the only correction which they made to the *Communist Manifesto*) that " the Commune has shown that the working class cannot simply take over the given state machine and set it going for its own purposes." On the contrary, the workers must " destroy this machine," as Marx wrote to Kugelmann. With the utmost attention, Marx studied the experiences of the Commune, examining every new device which it put in place of machinery that had been destroyed. The abolition of the standing army, the election of all officials and the right to remove them, the reduction of their salaries to the ordinary level of wages, the separation of church and state, the abolition of the police force, etc. These were the new ways, discovered by the Commune, which, in Marx's opinion, transformed it into a republic " which would not only abolish the monarchist form of class rule, but class rule itself."

Marx clearly indicated that the Commune had nothing in common with the bourgeois parliamentary republic.

> " The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time. . . . Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business."

Trying to illuminate still more clearly the gulf that separates the Commune from the bourgeois republic,

Engels wrote in 1891, in his introduction to the third edition of the *Civil War in France*:

> " This destruction of the former state power and the substitution for it of a new and truly democratic power is treated thoroughly in Section 3 of *The Civil War*. But it is necessary to refer briefly to a few features here because, precisely in Germany, irrational belief in the state has passed from philosophy into the general consciousness of the bourgeoisie, and even of many workers . . . and they think they have made a fearfully bold step in getting rid of their belief in the hereditary monarchy and pinning their faith to the democratic republic. Actually, the state is nothing but the machine with which one class oppresses another, in a democratic republic no less than in a monarchy."

Engels concludes the introduction with the well-known challenge to the German philistines: " Would you know, gentlemen, what this dictatorship is like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat."

These were the revolutionary conclusions drawn by Marx and Engels from the experience of the Commune, and forgotten and falsified by the reformist leaders of the Second International. In that brilliant work, *The State and Revolution*, written a few months before October 1917, Lenin was the first to make clear the reformist distortion of Marxism, reaffirming and developing further, in relation to the Commune, the real Marxist conceptions. Under his leadership the proletariat of Russia put Marx's revolutionary conclusions into action. Having learned from the mistakes of the Commune, they avoided these mistakes in the October Revolution.

It is clear that if, before the war, the social democrats ignored or falsified Marx's attitude towards the Commune, to-day they openly oppose it. At the German Social Democratic Congress in 1898 Vollmar, one of the founders of reformism, said in opposing Rosa Luxemburg on this question:

> " The French workers could scarcely have done more harm to their cause had they slept through that whole time. . . ."

However far removed such a notion may be from the enthusiasm with which Marx greeted the Commune, when he called it " the most glorious act of our party," it did not occur even to Vollmar to deny that in the Commune Marx saw, first and foremost, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The social democrats of to-day, on the other hand, who have become faithful pillars of bourgeois society, have thrown the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat right overboard.

In his article, *The Communist Manifesto and Democracy*, Karl Kautsky, the worst renegade of the proletarian revolution, calls the Paris Commune a " brief local episode " and argues that the proletariat, if it wishes radically to transform capitalist society, must give up revolution and civil war.

In his pamphlet, *From Democracy to State Slavery*, inspired by an unbounded hatred of the proletarian dictatorship in the U.S.S.R., Kautsky appeals to the German workers to bury once and for all that hated phrase, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

> " Thus we have every reason to give up using the slogan of proletarian dictatorship, always liable to be misunderstood and, before 1917, used only in the polemical and not in the agitational literature of Marxism."

Why should it not be given up, Kautsky argues, when even with Marx and Engels it was just an accidental slip of the tongue!

> " The Bolsheviks," he goes on, " appeal to Marx and Engels, who spoke of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Unfortunately they never went closely into the meaning of the term, using it only in occasional remarks. For the Bolsheviks, however, it has become a programme."

Thus do the theoreticians of the Second International distort Marx's teachings. Marx himself has left to us the best evidence of the importance which he attached to the proletarian dictatorship in the system of his ideas. In a letter to Weydemeyer he

wrote in 1852 that the service he had rendered did not lie in the discovery of classes and the class struggle :

> " Long before me bourgeois historians described the historical development of this struggle of classes and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of classes. What I did that was new, was to show, first, that the existence of classes is bound up with definite struggles in the development of production, second, that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat ; third, that this dictatorship itself is only the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society." (See Lenin : *State and Revolution.*)

Thus we find that this " occasional remark " was for Marx the central concept in his whole system of ideas.

Some social democratic theoreticians go even further than Kautsky, and not only reject Marx's conception of the state but declare in favour of liberal-anarchist ideas. Cunow in his *Marxian Theory of the State*, discovers that " The modern State is extending the boundaries of its intervention " in economic life and in " the sphere of individual and family rights."

> " The development of the State has consequently taken a direction different from that envisaged by Marx and Engels, who were influenced by the liberal-anarchist tendencies of their time." (*Cunow, Die Marxistische Staatstheorie*, p. 319.)

Obviously the experience of the Commune has no meaning for these renegades, and the dictatorship of the proletariat will never be their programme. They turn their back on the revolutionary actions of the Commune and, together with hating the Bolsheviks, they praise those mistakes made by the Commune which, as Marx continually pointed out, were one of the most important causes of the defeat of the French proletariat—their irresolution in conducting the struggle against the Versaillese, their softness and their hesitation, their disinclination to begin civil war and to carry it through ruthlessly to the end.

In the days of the Commune the predecessors of the social fascists of to-day—Tolain, member of the

International, and Louis Blanc, the petty-bourgeois phraseur—went over to the side of the Versaillese. In our days, with its Noskes, Zoergiebels, Kautskys and Hilferdings, the slaves of Sacred (bourgeois) Democracy have in their turn deserted to the camp of the Versailles of to-day, who would crush the revolutionary proletariat and save capitalism.

Test Questions

1. What were the distinguishing features of the epoch of the First International ?
2. What are the social roots of Proudhonism and Bakuninism ?
3. Compare the First International and the Comintern (having regard to programme and statutes), pointing out in what they differ and what they have in common.
4. What were the chief mistakes of the Paris Commune ?
5. What aspects of the Commune's activities make it the prototype of the proletarian dictatorship ?

Suggested Books

(*a*) *On the First International.*

Steklov : *History of the First International.*

(*b*) *The Paris Commune.*

Marx : *Civil War in France.* This is the best theoretical and historical analysis of the Commune, written immediately after its defeat, and published as an Address of the General Council of the First International, to express its solidarity with the Communards, cursed and derided by the entire bourgeois public. Particularly important are those sections in which Marx analyses the legislative actions of the Commune, and shows that the proletariat, once it has won state power, instinctively resorts to measures tending to abolish the state. In his *Letters to Kugelmann*, Marx deals with the most important tactical errors of the Commune. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin deals expressly with the state theory in the *Civil War in France*, together with other utterances by Marx and Engels on the same questions, and develops that theory further. See *Lenin on the Paris Commune.*

Lissagaray : *The Paris Commune*, gives a detailed description of events, contains many documents with the authentic text, and criticises the military leadership.

Kropotkin : *The Paris Commune*, deals with and condemns the Commune from the Anarchist standpoint.